♦ Introduction

Hybrid Storyspaces: Redefining the Critical Enterprise in Twenty-First Century Hispanic Literature

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"But is it art?" We have all heard some variation on this plaintive question from audience members when presented with new hybrid forms of literature, a recurring concern that marks their skepticism and tempers our enthusiasm, and we all have varying responses to the question. Imagine, however, Laura Borràs's consternation (as reported in her chapter in this volume) when the question was put to her by Siân Ede, the Art Director of the British branch of the Gulbenkian Foundation in the context of an interdisciplinary symposium on collective intelligence. Her response, wisely, is to interrogate the form of the question itself, both with respect to the canonical literary-historical substratum that underlies presumptions of value about "art," as well as the old-fashioned presumption of single authorship that defines the book as dominant literary form.

In his recent book, *Digital Cultures*, Milad Doueihi addresses another aspect of this question. He comments on the dilemma that faces humanists who find themselves increasingly occupying an odd space as "accidental digiticians" in a discourse "dominated by technologists and lawyers to the exclusion of a humanistic voice" (xiv). Indeed, he argues (perhaps because of the disciplinary investments of such technologists) that questions about the management of the digital environment, or the shape of digital humanities projects, tend to "ignore what I call the cultural bias essential to these new practices For one of the most promising, yet to some, most troubling aspects of the digital environment lies in its immediate impact on the wider culture and its rapid and almost irresistible reshaping of cultural values" (xvi). Contributing to this dilemma is the sense many of us have of being overwhelmed; speed of adaptation to new communication and network

Hybrid Storyspaces: Redefining the Critical Enterprise in Twenty-First Century Hispanic Literature Hispanic Issues On Line 9 (2012) possibilities have left the majority of culture critics and literary scholars struggling to find meaningful technical and theoretical language to engage the relation of new media to print culture.

The goal of *Hybrid Storyspaces* is to contribute to the rethinking of transnational Hispanic literary theory and practice, taking into account the evolving literary forms of our time. We examine the contributions to theory and practice suggested by new, hybrid spaces of storytelling, including the effects on narrative of new televisual and cybernetic media spaces (YouTube, blogs, Google maps, Yahoo Jukebox), new genres (videoclip novels, zapping fiction, docufiction, hypertext), new processes (mashups, mapping, sampling, remixing), and new critical forums (blogs, webpages, videos, open-source publications).

Since the mid 1990s, with McOndo, Crack, and Generation X, writer-intellectuals have begun to explore the forms and implications of this shift to an increasingly digital universe. Likewise, international conferences hosted in the United States, Spain, Great Britain, and various countries in Latin America, along with single authored books (including those by Bonilla, Brown, Cleger, Henseler), edited volumes (like those of Brown; Paz-Soldán and Castillo; Henseler and Pope; Taylor and Pittman; Solomon and Ilika), and journals (such as *Ciberletras* and *The Arizona Journal of Hispanic Cultural Studies*) have provided ongoing forums for discussion.

New technologies are allowing for a host of interactive, participatory and collaborative frameworks. This volume, too, has complementary online volumes of videotaped presentations hosted at the Cornell University Latin American Studies Program's working paper series. The Cornell website continues to welcome new working papers on the theory and practice of *hybrid storyspaces* in twenty-first century Hispanic literature, including the presentation of ideas and interpretations of varying lengths, ranging from full-length essays, to brief comments, to 1–3 page blog-like notes, or brief video interventions. We hope to open up the site, as well, to issues for discussion so as to allow authors and readers to begin collaborating and commenting on each other's work.

In our continuing efforts to reach out to wider audiences, this *Hispanic Issues Online* volume includes versions of several of these presentations, expanded and translated into English, and contextualized with additional solicited papers from key scholars. The goal of much of this work continues to be the question of how to rethink transnational Hispanic literary theory and practice through the lens of new media technologies. In line with this theoretical goal, we encouraged a hybrid presentation format for this book, including (to mention just a few) sui generis think-pieces by writers and media artists such as Peruvian Doménico Chiappe, and Spaniards Jorge Carrión and Agustín Fernández Mallo. We highlight paraliterary studies like those of Tori Holmes and Virgina Newall Rademacher, in the former case, the dissemination of online texts from a Brazilian favela while in the latter.

the extension of authorship into social networks and the blogosphere. Taking seriously the importance of blogs as a growing venue for alternative forms of literary scholarship, we encouraged Bolivian writer and scholar Edmundo Paz Soldán to contribute to this volume a blog-like short piece on an even shorter new literary form: twitter narrative. In general, we encouraged interdisciplinary projects—live wires and ideas in motion rather than fixed and finished products.

While the essays in this volume have mostly focused on the importance of new media on print, albeit not exclusively, it can no longer surprise us that some of the most exciting and innovative cultural work will never be found in between the pages of a book; instead, it is available for viewing and downloading, on thousands of sites, to a wide, appreciative (if highly segmented) potential audience. Clearly, "the Internet" serves as shorthand for a series of technologies and artistic forms that have now been mainstreamed in many circles over the last twenty years. Yet, such advances and forms have been relatively unstudied in literary or culture studies programs in Hispanism, despite representing a phenomenon that, in its many different and sometimes problematic forms, engages larger debates not only about the changing shape of technology, but also about comparative access, identity, and national cultural projects. Mexican video artist and scholar Fernando Llanos makes this point clearly. He reflects that his original plan was to meditate on "the net as the only platform for contestatory and independent content The amplification of tools and narrative resources, tied to the scheme of multiple content generators, make a novel contribution to the aesthetic equation, but above all renew the audiovisual universe." However, after judging a Central American video contest, he was forced to think more deeply about the very real differences in the conditions affecting production in Latin America:

since we are peripheral, third world, developing countries, or however we want to denominate (and be dominated)...the questioning of technology requires a more critical posture, and, indeed, I suggest it is NECESSARY. In our latitudes, where we have assembly plants, where we do not produce either software or hardware, where indeed we recycle a great deal of the material exported from patrons from the capital, the understanding of digital and cable art should and ought to be other.

Surprisingly (or perhaps not), Llanos's manifesto-like language in this essay echoes the mid-century activist manifestos of the New Latin American cinema movement in its focus on the way differential access to technology must be taken into account in any fuller discussion of the particular theoretical challenges of a Latin American video practice. In 1962 Fernando Birri wrote: "Our purpose is to create a new person, a new society, a new history and therefore a new art and a new cinema. Urgently" (41). Those

words ring just as presciently today when we think about the reshaping of culture we are undergoing as we fall deeper and deeper into the visually-oriented, technologically-enabled digital age.

A recent *PMLA* special section on the changing profession focused on the future of learning, emphasizing collaborative thinking and writing, research and teaching. According to this analysis, Humanities 1.0 changed how we did research through access to extensive databases. This change coincides with what Brian Rotman considers the human consciousness as still remaining in an analog state of mind, which, nonetheless, is increasingly drawn to metaphors, narratives, and linguistic modes that are conditioning us to behave as if we already inhabited a digital world (Lenoir xi). Likewise, Christopher Kelty in his recent book Two Bits: The Cultural Significance of Free Software argues that we need a new aesthetics to study distributed phenomena, while literary scholars posit that we are already hyperconnected. But "hyperconnection," in its most dynamic, social, and global multiplicity, will remain underdeveloped as long as we do not allow our everyday digital endeavors to infuse and invigorate a new theory of aesthetics. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, then, what questions need to be asked that redefine the way Hispanists approach the study of new literary texts?

Cathy Davidson and her collaborators in The Future of Learning in a Digital Age believe that the same computational changes that have revolutionized the sciences also hold great promise for the transformation of the humanities in the areas of research, writing, and teaching. In "Humanities 2.0: Promise, Perils, Predictions," Davidson states trenchantly that "since the advent of the desktop computer interface (commonly figured as 1983) and the Internet (1991), virtually every mode of expression has been altered" (708). Subsequently, she asks that we "see technology and the humanities not as a binary but as two sides of a necessarily interdependent, conjoined, and mutually constitutive set of intellectual, educational, social, political, and economic practices" (708). "Are internet sites learning institutions?" Davidson and her collaborators ask. "How do collaborative, interdisciplinary, multi-institutional learning spaces help transform traditional learning institutions?" In an effort to respond dramatically to this challenge, the original Future of Learning essay was uploaded on Commentpress, allowing for the online text to be read and marked up by hundreds of commentators, making the authorship of the final printed essay intensively collaborative and participatory, such that the online version continues to evolve in a nonlinear, interactive form, what Davidson and her co-authors call "remix authorship."

Literary scholars today are poised to reap the benefits of the paradigmshifting possibilities of next generation (digital) humanism. Like Davidson, we see the future of the Humanities as intricately interdisciplinary in scope and involving a transformation in methodological and institutional paradigms. This transformation includes us as critics. Nevertheless, although enthusiasm is high, much of current discussion in the Hispanic context often remains at the level of buzzwords. Our goal with this project is to encourage a richer discussion and a practical toolbox for scholars and educators. We are committed to collaborative research and thinking, and to an evaluation of media technologies that provide more powerful modes of critical innovation in Hispanism. The collaborators in this online book are already engaging in this forward-looking scholarship, as well as representing some of the most spirited dialogists in transatlantic Hispanism, engaging "world Spanish" (which we might see as akin to "world English"), including Spanish in the United States, Spain, and many Latin American contexts.

The contributors to this project include authors, scholars and students whose voices slide along a scale of textual hybridities. This means that they focus on the varied effects of media technologies as they reflect upon storytelling in different "containers," so to speak, from the printed book to the various microsystems of the Internet. In those parts of the world in which computer technology is readily available, the everyday use of media technologies undoubtedly influences literary production and criticism. A writer today can hardly escape the use of Word documents, electronic digital library archives, Google's search engines, or the convergence of multiple media. While these digital tools have helped writers and critics gather and communicate information more efficiently, they have not necessarily led to better products. A bad story is no better when it appears as a hypertext, on a blog or in a printed book. It is not technology per say, then, that makes any difference at all in the world of literature, but it is the continued creation of good work as it may or may not reside, communicate, or translate different digital programs and applications into new storyspaces. It is precisely the convergence of the excellence of the "old" and the innovative possibilities of the "new" in a variety of contexts that allows for new critical materializations, something that, for instance, Edmundo Paz Soldán argues succinctly and cogently in his discussion of how Twitter inspires an evolution of narrative form.

There are many ways to read the essays in this volume, including as a series of interlocking reflections, a set of pedagogical challenges, or a kind of literary rave text, with its echoing vocals, its mashups of past and present positions and practices.

With digital expressions abounding in contemporary life and culture, Andrew Brown, in his contribution to this volume, asks one of the central questions of our time: "how can we analyze and theorize a continuing dialogue between traditional forms of narrative expression and the digital engagements growing more prevalent?" (179). The collaborators of this book ask critics to dive head first into what some may call chaos, and what others may call a revolution. Vicent Moreno believes that, "if the invention of the press inaugurated a revolution in the way we accessed and read literary works, among other achievements, a way to 'democratize' literature

and change its mode of circulation, the Internet could now start a new revolution" (93, this volume). The "new revolution"—which is not so new anymore in these exponential times—is not simply based on novelists's use of new media outlets, as Agustín Fernández Mallo reminds us, but more importantly, other languages that infuse and are often separated from the body of the novel itself. In other words, authors may translate microblogging language to print, but they may also use micro-blogs as part of their narrative or in addition to their work. The boundaries between the containers that embody language are now more readily transferrable, they often communicate between each other, and they metamorphose stories depending on the design and technical qualities of their applications. Claire Taylor highlights that media—whether video, audio, or narrative—"are presented beyond their 'normal' boundaries and re-used in new contexts" (194, this volume). These new contexts contribute to a feeling of estrangement among literary critics, which lead to new territories and new questions. For example, Tori Holmes emphasizes that in a globalized and intertextual context, it is hard to see "how one can isolate a purely local economy of textual production" (279, this volume). Similarly, Irene Depetris Chauvin wonders to what degree these changes directly influence, "a critical reconsideration of the mechanism of interchange, the production of value and the flow of desires required by the market economy" (215, this volume).

There is no doubt that many consider high literary values to be in a state of crisis, a crisis that became especially visible with the increase of commercial publishing practices by media conglomerates as of the 1980s. But this "crisis" signals a changing world in which the boundaries of commercial and high art have been converging as much as the authors with their readers. This "crisis of the book"—or, rather, renaissance of the avantgarde, as examined in the work of Eduardo Ledesma—may lead authors such as Doménico Chiappe "to reaffirm their commitment to a poetic," (48, this volume) or to what Fernández Mallo calls a post-poetry. The innovative spaces afforded by these changing engagements with the Word is succinctly expressed by Germán Sierra when he declares that the digital engagements of this literary revolution locate creative and critical practices "at the edge of chaos" [...]

creating new metaphors, new possibilities for narrative innovation, new interdisciplinary border crossings, along with hybrid networks and capacities for establishing new connections, absorbing and processing information from traditional and electronic media, market dynamics, science and technology, philosophy, metacreation, and the avangardist tradition of modernist, postmodernist and avant-pop literature (22, this volume).

The creative possibilities of these hybrid new edges, this chaos, present

critics with an entirely new world of storytelling, of marketing, and of theorizing.

Life at the edge of the Word presents more questions than answers. The essays in this volume suggest theories in motion, perspectives meant to engage the field of Hispanism at not one but many possible crossroads. Of utmost importance in this forward movement is that print, as Brown notes, "has learned from advances in pre-Internet digital artistic production and [shows] the kinds of surprising continuities between storytelling in digital and print media" (189-90, this volume). Despite the apparent newness of experimental techniques in literature related to media technologies, Eduardo Ledesma underlines that the "linking [of] graphics, text, video, and sound, media theorists recognize that the 'new' in 'new media' is part of a continuum with the past and that the digital can be better understood through an archeological perspective" (237, this volume). This scientific field of the cultural study of the past reappears in the work of Fernández Mallo, who defines his task as "a sort of archeology of the present," (59, this volume) as one who digs in a huge "Container of Time." He likens this container to the Internet, a space that can advance a series of topological "relationships, copies, and reinterpretations" made present in the act of storytelling (66). The large database that is the Internet is, on multiple levels, inextricably linked to the production of what Germán Sierra calls the work of "postdigital artists," since they understand, he argues, that a database is "an extra dimension, a new essential variable to define a trajectory in a space that has become unrecoverable solely from the viewpoint of the narration" (26, this volume).

The multi-dimensional, multi-media world of today demands spatial archeologists of literature who can engage with what Pierre Lévy in Collective Intelligence defines as "cosmopedia" or Fernández Mallo has termed "lecturas transversales." Lévy argues for the creation of a new (potentially collective) knowledge space, the result of new computer technologies that provide "a dynamic and interactive multidimensional representational space" (174). Lévy sees this space as containing as many semiotics as exist in the world itself, such as "static images, video, sound, interactive simulation, interactive maps, expert systems, dynamic ideographs, virtual reality, artificial life, etc." (174–75). This space allows for the dematerialization of "the artificial boundaries between disciplines, making knowledge 'a large patchwork' in which virtually any field can be folded onto another" (175).

The spatial effects afforded to storytelling in contemporary literature identify a shift from "'telling a story' (a technique more proper to the offline world) to 'constructing a story' (a technique more common online)," says Fernández Mallo (60–61, this volume). As writers and critics become *archeologists* of stories, they must increasingly move between storytelling spaces, needing to widen their practical and theoretical net of applications in

the deconstruction of literary texts. Claire Taylor notes that "this spatial organization, which runs conterminously with the chronological one, means that the viewer is forced into new modes of viewing: the viewer has to 'read' the piece not just sequentially, from the beginning of the video to the end, but also spatially, across the four axes" (193–94, this volume). As most of the authors in this volume point out, this means that readers take on expanded roles in the reading of contemporary texts. The reader now plays a fundamental role in the "activation" of the work, as Claire Taylor puts it. To use a contemporary term related to video gaming, we have become *Wii Readers* whose responses to particular works are not only intellectual, but also corporal and emotional (Chiappe, this volume).

The literary game has changed, and with it we have entered the programmatic dimensions and possibilities of game theory and practice. As Virginia Newall Rademacher adds, the "unfolding" of narrative now "shares features with other dynamic games of simulated identities. Correspondingly, [she] examines how these narrative 'games' may be compared to and understood through approaches to digital games, transmedia storytelling, and fanfiction through which individuals play out various identities and narrative possibilities" (98, this volume). This game takes place on various levels that "facilitates a more intimate contact with the reader," (122, this volume) says José Enrique Navarro, and leads to greater interactivity with authors and their works. Subsequently, argues Tori Holmes, "some of the text's readers [become] co-authors and co-creators of the content when they [participate] in commenting, disseminating and re-publishing the text" (281, this volume) thus blurring boundaries, loosening control, breaking tradition, and recreating a complex new world.

This new game play in which authors advertise their own and each other's work online, directly speak and interact with their fans and foes, and allow their stories to jump from the book, magazine and newspaper to the blog, Twitter, Facebook, or YouTube, is regarded by many as an offense to the field's modus operandi as they render 'visible' some of the operations by which a certain author or a work get consecrated (Moreno, this volume). Claire Taylor wisely remarks that this resistance "is never simply oppositional or unproblematic" (206, this volume). In fact, Vicent Moreno believes that in this case, the claims to "rupture" and "novelty," so often expressed in the press, work hand in hand to claim critical mainstream attention from a position of marginality while subverting traditional literary practices. While some systems remain trenchantly in place, others are turned inside out and upside down. A case in point is the role of Spaniard Lucía Etxebarría who, "actively underscores the shift of the biographer's role from external creator or operator of [a] simulation to one knowingly embedded in the game, so that subject and biographer(s) share and compete for control of the narrative" (Rademacher 102, this volume).

This "competition" of narrative direction and value within a convergence of old and new systems of storytelling (of which both literature and criticism take part), is ultimately creating a lot of noise. This noise is audible; it disrupts, it changes and it sustains. Chiappe describes it on a metaphorical level as being white and loud. It "runs parallel to the plot like a rumor" (44, this volume). While it mutates into several audible shapes, perhaps one of the most "noisy" of them all is that of literary blogs, which "have become [...] important players in the publishing world and have begun to transform how we experience literature" (Brown 178, this volume). Blogs have not only shaken up the literary establishment, but they themselves present a shaky and less than predictable or static application of critical and creative ideas. In other words, explains Tori Holmes:

one cannot approach texts published on blogs without considering the endless, unpredictable and uncontrollable ways such texts can be expanded both by their original author and by their readers, via a 'circuito-blogue,' some of which is directly linked to the blog and some of which is unpredictable and difficult to monitor and trace. (283–84, this volume)

One could say that texts have been uprooted as authors, such as Edmundo Paz Soldán, publish stories on blogs and present new ways "to understand intertextuality [and] facilitate artistic expression" (Brown 179, this volume). As texts are "detached from the original site of its publication, or published on multiple sites" they question positions related to "situated authorship" (Holmes 278, this volume). As authors actively use blogs to promote their own and their colleagues' work, they break through the "closed circuits of entrance and legitimation" (Moreno) which are still very much alive in the Hispanic literary field, underlining "the profound breach between the analogic and the digital worlds" (Navarro 124, this volume).

The changes afforded to the constantly shifting relationships between the two technology-mediated worlds have not just affected, as author Germán Sierra underlines, "the way new narratives [are] being produced and received. It [has] re-shaped, at the same time, the technical representations of reality" (24, this volume). Fernández Mallo describes his technical approach to the construction of reality beautifully when he says:

I conceive of contemporary reality as a television full of channels that we choose and mix together to find a poetic thread with which to weave our work. Or rather, we might understand History as a supermarket in which we select products one by one to assemble our own shopping carts (59, this volume).

While some authors may object to seeing their trade as an assemblage of material objects placed into a shopping cart, the author's trope of the construction of new narrative history/History emphasizes a perception of the (poetic) product that stresses the process of selecting, mixing, weaving, and assembling. The distinctive feature of the authors of today is not only that they use digital media on a variety of fronts, but that they sample "digitally mediated reality to construct novel fictional structures" (Sierra 31, this volume). For this reason, theories related to the *process* of production—see Andrew Brown's work on mashups and remixing—have become increasingly relevant for their linguistic translation of increasingly userfriendly media applications. A rather marginalized and flat footnote or endnote in a book may now engage in a process of looping, as Brown indicates, to show how "a note's translation into new contexts and situations (provides) a house beat that both reminds one of the original song even as it constructs an entirely new aesthetic experience" (186, this volume). This "translation process" now breathes new life into most literary and cultural theories as the static notion of the printed word is increasingly unsettled, rattling words in their place.

The role of process-oriented narrative techniques related to digital sampling, remixing or mashing is a highly charged process that goes far beyond the mere copying and pasting of bits and pieces of information. Andrew Brown makes clear that, "in the context of mashups and sampling, it is important to draw attention to the kind of bio-technological presence the narrator articulates, one that emphasizes his role as a digital sampling machine" (180, this volume). As most of the contributors in this volume agree, the digital age has not only provided new and more hybrid containers, or applications to tell stories, but they present changing interfaces between authors, critics, and readers. Claire Taylor notes that the potential of a (critically or reflexively) remixed product lies in its ability to talk back, or remix back to "the copy, whilst never standing outside the dominant order; [it] can provide commentaries on that same order, and pick apart its internal logic" (197, this volume).

Tori Holmes succinctly calls contemporary texts "travelling texts" that may be territorially and locally embedded "in a particular context, whether place-based or otherwise, through the author's choice of language, regardless of what happens to its framing, structure and, to a certain extent, content, and regardless of where it is published" (265, this volume). Whether it is individuals or ideas that travel through time and space, the effect of this nomadic hybridity in style has led to an exciting source of new artistic energy that Lev Manovich witnessed when he travelled to Barcelona. While in that city, he wrote the introduction to the Korean edition of his influential book *The Language of New Media*, commenting that it was in that beautiful Cataluynan city that he observed:

the desire to creatively place together old and new in various combinations. It is this logic, for instance, which in many ways made Barcelona [...] such a "hip" and "in" place today. All over the city, architectural styles of many past centuries co-exist with new "cool" spaces of bars, hotels, museums, and so on. Medieval meets multinational, Gaudy meets Dolce and Gabana, Mediterranean time meets Internet time. The result is the incredible sense of energy which one feels physically just walking along the street. It is this hybrid energy, which characterizes in my view the most successful cultural phenomena today.

The sense of energy that a meeting of times commands in the meeting of minds is one that we intend to harvest in this book in the field of Hispanism. If, according to Manovich, "we are to adequately reflect our own times we have to take the next step, generating works larger in size, more complex, more multi-layered, more dense." If the novel in the nineteenth century and feature film in the twentieth centuries were the representative cultural forms for the age, how do we rethink representation when the computer becomes the iconic form? How do literary critics engage with a new medium whose inner workings do not only present a wide-range of new storytelling possibilities, but they inherently redefine the field of literary criticism itself?

Notes

1. The Hybrid Storyspaces working paper volume may be found at: https://www.einaudi.cornell.edu/latinamerica/academics/hybrid storyspaces.asp>.

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