Narractivity and the narrative database

Media-based wikis as interactive fan fiction

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Wikis, websites designed for the communal creation of media content, have previously been theorized using the work of Levy (1997) as knowledge communities. In this conception, wikis are seen as storehouses of data that communities can use to organize and explicate their encyclopedic “communal intelligence.” In this paper, I expand on Levy’s argument to examine the narratological possibilities of wikis. Using as examples fan-created wikis for the cult television shows *Lost* and *Heroes*, I show that these media-based wikis highlight the fan community’s interactive construction of a narratological database. Using the interactivity omnipresent in wikis, fans articulate a new conception of narrative construction, a conception I term “narractivity.”

Keywords: narrative, interactivity, fan, story, discourse

Introduction

Wikis, both as examples of mediated sociality on the Web and as repositories of information, have become important topics for dialogue about the modern Internet. From ongoing debates about the usefulness of Wikipedia\(^1\) to recent forays into the social use of wikis,\(^2\) social scientists and scholars have begun to examine the function of this mediated view of knowledge in society. In this paper, however, I examine wikis instead as new, mediated narrative databases. Jumping off of work on fandom undertaken by Jenkins (2006), Baym (2008) and Hellekson (2008), I examine fan-created wikis about the television shows *Lost* and *Heroes* not solely as portals of information, but also as sites of fans’ narrative construction. Through the interactive potential of these media-based wikis, fans are using the web not
only to collaborate in knowledge production, a practice originally pointed out by Levy (1997) and examined in more depth by Castells (2001), but also to produce new forms of fan fiction online.

Through an addition of narratological content to an interactive environment, fans reveal a shift in the understanding of narrative meaning. This shift illustrates an emphasis in media studies away from Jenkins’s (2006) idea of transmediation and Walker’s (2004) conceptions of new media narrative, both of which highlight the distribution of narrative elements across different media platforms, as well as from a formulation of narrative as a structural whole. Both these conceptions of narrative — as dispersed or as whole — highlight two disparate cultural connotations of narrative: narrative as story and narrative as discourse (see, also, Chatman, 1978). Following digital narrative scholar de Sena Caires (2007), who argues that the creation of an “interactive narrative” will be “essential” for the development of computers, technology and culture, I believe that wikis fundamentally alter the audience’s relation with narrative (p. 801). Further, Ryan (2006) has shown that digital technology has fundamentally altered and increased the discussion of narrative and narrative theory (p. xii). Along these lines, I examine the wiki as a database of narratological content. Further, through the interactivity inherent in a wiki, fans use the capabilities of the wiki to both parse apart and reform back together an already extant media text’s narrative, a process I term “narractivity.” Narractivity can be defined as the process by which communal interactive action constructs and develops a coherent narrative database.

The key to highlighting these changes to narrative online lies in media theorist Derecho’s (2006) concept of Archontic texts. The term “Archontic” comes from Derrida’s (1996) analysis of the archive as an ever-expanding inventory. For Derecho, a text is Archontic if it “allows, or even invites, writers to enter it, select specific items they find useful, make new artifacts using those found objects and deposit the newly made work back into the source text’s archive” (p. 65). For example, while a text like Harry Potter encompasses a series of books of approximately one million words, it is also an archive of material — characters, situations, events — that can be used by fans of the series in other texts. As Derecho writes, “Archontic literature assumes that every text contains a wealth of potentialities that variations of the text can then make actual” (p. 74). Each element produced for an Archontic text becomes part of that massive archive. Thus, wikis based on a narratively complex television show, like Lost or Heroes, are Archontic, and any fan-created elements become part of that Archontic text, part of that “tendency toward enlargement and accretion that all archives possess” (Derecho, 2006, p. 64).

Part of the way fans make sense of these narratological changes is through their own interaction with the serialized narrative form. There are two ways narractivity occurs on narrative databases: through the construction of narrative knowledge
By constructing narrative, fans use narractivity to re-write the story of the extant media object, in order for the fan community to re-read the narrative discourse. By deconstructing narrative meaning on a wiki, fans rewrite the extant media object through an “imaginative discourse” to present a new reading of spoilers (see Carroll, 2005; Gray and Mittell, 2007). A spoiler is a key piece of information that reveals aspects of a text’s narrative before that text is released. Each spoiler represents a form of fan fiction, promoting and proposing elements of the narrative that have not happened, but still might. I conclude this paper with the assertion that narractivity blends community interaction with a new narrative structure. This allows the narrative meaning of the text to visually and externally reflect the community of fans. Thus, wikis are providing a new type of technology that helps fans construct community through narrative, and becomes an important topic of study in an era of participatory culture (Jenkins, 2006).

Narrative

For the sake of clarity, I lay out my narrative terminology, as I use some terms traditionally and others non-traditionally. My analysis hinges on these definitions; however, as O’Neill (1994, p. 21) discusses, other definitions for these same terms do exist. I define “narrative” as do Scholes and Kellogg (1968):

> By narrative we mean all those literary works which are distinguished by two characteristics: the presence of a story and a story-teller. …For writing to be narrative no more and no less than a teller and a tale are required (p. 4)

In the case of media-based wikis, however, I argue that the tale is a database of elements and the teller is the community of fans that re-write and re-read it. To that effect, I define the narrative story as the events of the narrative as specifically non-narrated; in other words, the tale that is told. The “story” is an audience’s understanding of the chronological development of the narrative. Further, the narrative “discourse” signifies the way that the story is told, the narration that describes and places an external order on the elements within the tale. The discourse represents the events as told by a narrator. For narrative databases, the audience’s reconstruction of the story elements makes story elements discursive.

The “narrative database” is an archive of narrative elements that fans then re-write (or reconstruct) in their own discursive fashion on wikis. This definition of narrative database does not simply recount narrative events in a particular order, but rather presents those narrative events in and of themselves. In traditional new media research, the database is assumed to be collection of unordered information,
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easily accessible, from which users can pull various entries to assemble a linear narrative (Manovich, 2001, p. 225). In contrast to Manovich, who argues that the “database and narrative are natural enemies,” I take a more cultural view of the database as an organizational principle, and a non-traditional view of narrative in new media as a non-linear structure of narrative events that form a plot.

Traditionally, plot describes the causal relation between narrative events. In other words, the plot is the mechanism by which narrative events connect. Chatman (1978) further refines this discussion of plot, by delineating two types. Kernels are those events that are central to the plot: a kernel “advances the plot by raising and satisfying questions” (p. 53). Satellites, conversely, are “not crucial … [and] can be deleted without disturbing the logic of the plot” (p. 54). I argue that in a narrative database, the plot is hypertextually connected instead. The narrative database and the interactive process by which it is created put the audience squarely in the center of the narrative construction, and the kernels and satellites thus become differentiated from each other through audience involvement.

Interactivity

Wikis, websites for communal webpage creation, revision and linkage, allow complete real-time interaction between users. In 1994, Cunningham invented the wiki as a way of digitally consolidating the knowledge of many computer programmers separated by distance and time (Leuf and Cunningham, 2001). This online webpage allows for complete real-time interaction between users; and, like the software behind blogs, MySpace (see Booth, 2008), and other web technology, is content-less (see O’Reilly, 2004).

By this, I mean that wikis form a metaphorical shell for users to fill with content, and provide the tools necessary for any user, with any level of technical expertise, to input textual and visual content. The wiki functions, as pointed out by digital scholar Oren (2005), in three ways: the authoring potential of the wiki is a means for fast community interaction, the retrieval potential means that anything stored on the wiki is likely recoverable, and the navigation potential means that the information is stored in an easily accessible, easily navigable encyclopedia format. Further, Murray (1997), although not describing wikis specifically, does argue that digital media will produce a new narrative form. She describes viewers being able to log online and watching “a complete digital library” of a series “searchable by content,” which she calls a “hyperserial” (p. 256). Websites like Hulu or Netflix have realized Murray’s hyperserial, as they allow users to stream television programs directly to the computer. The concept of the narrative database combines Murray’s idea of hyperseriality with Oren’s description of the wiki to create a new
form of fan-created narrative. Importantly, the fan-created wiki does not remediate content, as does Murray’s hyperserial, but rather reimagines it in a new space, constructed by the interactions of a fan-community.

Interaction is thus key to the wiki. Benkler (2006) describes this “collaborate authorship” as the creation of elaborate structures of mediation online where groups of disparate individuals come together to create representations of their world (p. 73). Each wiki exists in a form of temporal flux: at any moment the content of a page can be interactively altered, negated, updated or even removed. The different types of interactive potential of wiki texts are key to understanding the narrative construction of the media-based wiki, for “interactivity,” as Ryan (2002) claims, it is the “truly distinctive resource of new media” (pp. 594–595).

Generally, therefore, the more users that contribute to a wiki, the greater the variety of information and the more detailed the entry. The wiki becomes a knowledge space, in which “a human being organizes or reorganizes his [sic] relationship to himself or his peers, to things, signs, or the cosmos” (Levy, 1997, p. 139). Knowledge space does not “exist” as a tangible location, but is rather “embodied nowhere … is not realized … is already virtual” (p. 138). A book may contain in its pages the contents of a particular person’s knowledge, but the space for the understanding and use of that knowledge exists in-between the reader and the writer, in a virtual “space” of communication. Thus, for Levy, we do not produce “true knowledge” in a single location, but rather through the interaction between members of a collective intelligence, which exists in an ethereal knowledge space. In other words, the production of knowledge has moved from a singular conception of human ingenuity to a mass collaboration between members of a community.

Wikis thus illustrate an interactivity that depends not just on the ability to change something onscreen, but also on the ability of users to communicate with each other. However, as pointed out by journalist Ness (2007), to write a narrative on a wiki usually makes that narrative “uncontrollably … incomprehensible” (¶2). He describes a literary wiki — an attempt by Penguin publishers to allow an open source novel — as a mish-mash, an extended series of story arcs that bordered on the unintelligible. Thus, the interactivity inherent in the wiki “would appear to be antithetical” to narrative, “otherwise the plot becomes unclear” (Wand, 2002, pp. 164–167). The dialectic between interactivity and narrative in these studies, however, assumes a traditional linear form of narrative. Importantly for the web, however, wikis offer a new type of narrative, a type alluded to by Riedl and Young (2006): it “can generate stories [and] can adapt narrative to the users’ preferences and abilities” (p. 23). Further, we can see the necessity for this new narrative form by Ryan (2002), who writes, “digital narrative should emancipate itself from [traditional] literary models” (p. 581). This new narrative form sees a database of
narrative elements, each of which requires an interactive narrative exposition, or narractivity.

**Narrative database**

Traditionally, narratology examines narrative boundaries and limitations. As Bal (1997, p. 3) has shown, a narrative necessarily needs to be delimitated in order to set boundaries and define it. In traditional analysis, the boundaries of narrative illustrate how the audience constructs the narrative story from aspects of the narrative discourse. The wiki, however, is a digital archive; which, as Derrida (1996) shows, is “never closed. It opens out of the future” (p. 68). Narratives on wikis are boundless. Thus, the narrative database demonstrates what Ryan (2006) describes about digital narrative form: it comes in a “variety of shapes” (p. xvii). Digital narrative form, in other words, is mutable.

Contemporary analyses of digital narratives need to examine discourse and story as integral components of a third form of narrative, the narrative database. As Ryan (2006) suggests, digital technology calls for the exploration of new forms of narrative: “it is in the domains of textual architecture and user involvement that they [digital texts] open truly new territories for narratological inquiry” (p. xi). The narrative database exists as a form of interactive narrative, as a story and a yet-unwritten discourse. Through narractivity, the communal re-writing of a narrative story through another’s discourse, a community re-reads a narrative together.

To envisage narrative as a database is to grant salience to an understanding of narrative not just as an activity, process, or structure; but also as a place, as an environment upon which meaning can be inlaid. The construction of a spatial, encyclopedic narrative mirrors de Certeau’s (1984) metaphor of the text-as-city (see also Booth, 2008). De Certeau (1984) conceptualizes the production of a text spatially, using the metaphor of the city: although originally created with certain routes laid out, the city presents pedestrians with many paths to walk, many ways to define their own “rhetoric of walking” (p. 100). Unlike the text-as-city, however, the wiki narrative database does not just allow pedestrians to walk, it encourages them to rebuild the roads and repave the sidewalks as they go.

Fans don’t just watch cult television shows and experience it as an alternate world, but they also interact with that world as if it were spatially re-constructed. Gwendllian Jones (2004) illustrates this interaction:

> Every imaginative intervention in the cult fiction is an interaction that transforms the deterritorialized fictional world and thereby reconfigures the fan’s immersive experience. … Fans interact with the narrative world of the cult series by
contributing to its deterritorialized fiction — the fiction in its virtual, rather than its textual, form — their own reformulations. (p. 95)

Gwenllian Jones describes these interactions as “imaginative,” contrasting the fan’s mental interaction with a text with the more traditionally understood “productive” interaction of fan participation in the process of cult television narrative production (c.f. Fiske, 1992). Whereas mental interaction with a text describes the way a fan thinks about or mentally imagines the world, productive interactions describe the way fans reappropriate media texts in order to construct new texts.

Narractivity

Narrative in a database format reforms the “telling” of a narrative — a narrative discourse — from one based on a narrator inside the text to one based on the re-writing and the re-reading of the story by an audience. The reading of a discourse is a way of self-narrating, of constructing a discourse for the self. A narrative database forms from, and on, a wiki. For this to happen, wikis take kernels from another’s discourse and re-write or display that story on the wiki page. For a complex narrative, for example like the television show *Lost*, the “story” is not contained in one episode, but is an on-going practice across the series (see Mittell, 2005; Mittell, 2006). Fans watch the show and then re-write the narrative story, the kernels and satellites of the plot, on the wiki webpage. On *Lostpedia*, for example, each episode and narrative element has its own wiki-page, and users can hypertextually flip across these pages’ kernels in any order. Characters have their own individual pages, as do situations, themes, motifs, and other story information. Any fan, through hypertextual connections, can link any two pieces of information (see Figure 1). These hypertextual connections form not just through the audience’s reconstruction of the story, but also through a reconstruction of the discourse. The fan audience re-writes this narrative (literally re-scribes it), but the connection itself becomes a re-writing of the *Lost* TV show. If any particular connection does not already exist on screen, or appears for the first time in an episode, fans can re-write that connection, re-read that discourse, and re-produce that story, through narractivity.

Thus, there are two processes at work. On the one hand, fans re-write the story of the extant media narrative by splitting the kernels and satellites into their own wiki pages. This re-write forms a narrative database, created through narractivity. On the other hand, and following from this, fans can then re-read the extant media narrative *as written through and by the fan community*, by hypertextually flipping through the kernels like a hypertext narrative. This re-writing of the *Lost* narrative
has taken place at the story level, but the actual re-reading has taken place at the level of the discourse. Both take place within the database.

We can observe two ways this narractivity occurs. First, through the compilation of narrative information, viewers of the narrative construct their own show bible, their own conception of the backstory and history of the characters and narrative elements for the media object. A show’s bible, written by media producers before the show begins production, highlights the different elements that make up the show’s canon: the characters, technologies, back-stories and other essential components. In order to construct this bible, fans connect elements of discourse into a cohesive whole by watching the show, or by encountering the elements of the show in various mediated guises.

Fans also deconstruct the narrative by re-writing elements of the extant media object’s story on the narrative database, and then re-reading that story as a fan-created “imaginative discourse.” To enact this deconstruction of the narrative, fans use spoilers as a form of fan fiction not only to speculate on what is to come, but also to provide details and assertions about the narrative itself (see Figure 2). Spoilers for television narratives are pieces of narrative information that producers reveal or audience members discover before the show airs. They can be as innocuous as the title of an upcoming episode or as narratively important as who will live and who will die. As media scholar Rebecca Williams (2004) states, “spoilers allow fans to sustain a reading formation based on narrative speculation” (¶6). Spoilers exist as communal hypotheses of future events, built through interactivity and centered on narrative exposition: as Gray and Mittell (2007) state, “rather than obsessing over this week’s cliffhanger, spoiler fans can attend to larger narrative issues and work on piecing together the big picture” (¶41). Spoilers present not just a way to build community (see Jenkins, 2006, pp. 26–27) or to elevate the individual status of fans (see Foster, 2004; Williams, 2004, ¶6), but also to create narrative possibilities.

Spoilers are also a way for fans to actively construct meaning by refusing to “accept” the dominant interpretation of the media text. Rather than “reading the text as ‘intended’ by the producers or interpreted by mainstream critics, these fans offer unique, alternative, and sometimes quite elaborate new readings of the text”
Spoilers become a form of what Sconce (2004, p. 108) calls “narrative conjecture” for television shows, elements that audiences imagine could happen in a cult universe. As Derecho (2006) states, “in fan fiction, there is an acknowledgement that every text contains infinite potentialities, any of which could be actualized by any writer interested in doing the job” (p. 76). Perceptually, to recognize a spoiler as a spoiler is to recognize the narrative possibility that that spoiler offers to the community, which often comes in the guise of communal discussion. The spoiler becomes a way of unifying this text, of fans choosing different pathways to tread across the extant media object’s terrain.

Finding narractivity in the database

Narrative construction. Wiki communities interact to construct information about a narrative. One method of narrative construction on a wiki occurs as the community–formed wiki offers fans a non-narrated story in which they can construct their own discourse. By providing narrative elements in a series of hypertextual links, wikis illustrate how all the parts of a narrative seemingly exist without a cohesive order. For example, Figure 1 illustrates the main Lostpedia page and shows how a series of “portals” link to narrative elements and underscore their relevance to the Lost narrative. Listed at the top of the main page, the different portals include “Survivors Camp, Supporting Characters, The Others, Mysterious Happenings, Locations, Themes” and others. For example, clicking on the “The Others” portal leads to a page that details the characters that populate the camp of “the Others,” the particular motifs that are associated by the community with “the Others,” and information about the history of “the Others.” Each portal leads
to different narrative elements seemingly removed from the process of narration. They appear to be pure story, and indicate a shift away from narrative discourse.

Indeed, in a narrative database, the elements are linked not through cause/effect events, but through fan-created hypertextual links. For example, in Figure 3 we can see how fans recreate the narrative of the character named “Sawyer” in *Lost*: by collating information from different episodes of the show, and then re-writing them on the wiki document, fans can then re-read Sawyer’s “story” as a new form of narrative. Each element of narrative information in the wiki-page — “James Ford, better known by the alias ‘Sawyer,’”...“known to the DHARMA Initiative as Jim LaFluer”...“was one of the middle section survivors of Oceanic Flight 815...” — comes from different episodes of the show. But when combined and collated into the archive, the show’s story has been re-read as a new discourse by the community of fans on the wiki.

This shift to a community-written narration represents an alternative to Cobley’s (2001) conceptions of postmodern narrative forms. Cobley (reading Chatman, 1978) asserts that there are two types of postmodern narratives: meta-narratives and *histoire* narratives. Meta narratives “indicate the re-presentative nature of narrative” by making visible and obvious the means of the narration (p. 175). For Cobley, a “meta” narrative, or *discours*, stems from when the narration is obvious and mentioned in the text itself. The opposite of this “meta” narrative, as Cobley describes, is *histoire*, and roughly corresponds to what I have been calling story in this paper. *Histoire* consists of presenting the narrative as if it were not narrated, where “the events seem to narrate themselves” (p. 175, quoting Benveniste, 1971, p. 208).

The difference between these two postmodern conceptions of narrative lies in the style of narration: the “meta” *discours* makes it obvious, the subtle *histoire*

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**Figure 3.** James (Sawyer) Ford (2009), from Lostpedia.
makes it disappear. Wikis, however, confuse this notion. A wiki is written to appear un-narrated. Because there is no discourse, no order of events present, it would appear as through a narrator did not exist. Although this would make a wiki seem more like a histoire than a discours, there does exist, in fact, an obvious discours at the heart of a wiki: the narrator is the fan community itself. By presenting the narrative in a wiki, the community of fan writers does present a “meta” narrative: through interaction with each other by building a wiki narrative database, fans write their own narration through the narrative events of the television show.

We can also see through an examination of Heroeswiki. On 01 Dec, no information existed on the Heroeswiki about the episode “Powerless” (Figure 4). On 04 Dec, after the episode premiered, a minor summary appeared on the page (Figure 5). This summary detailed major plot developments, including “Peter tries to prevent the release of the virus” and “Niki and Micah travel to save Monica.” Following this, the section “character appearances” details all the characters that appeared in the episode: “Mohinder, Sylar, Maya,” etc. Each name is a portal that, like on the Lostpedia page, would take the reader to a page that summarized the character’s place in the narrative and his/her narrative development. On 09 Dec, however, the interactive writing between the communities of wiki writers produced a full textual synopsis of the episode (Figure 6). Fans have here summarized the narrative, previously seen in story form, as a communal discourse. The first paragraph opens:

**Episode: Powerless**

*From Heroes Wiki*

_Spoiler warning: Plot and/or ending details follow._

**This could include unconfirmed material from unaired episodes or previews**

**Powerless**

*Season:* Two  
*Episode number:* 215  
*First aired:* December 3, 2007

Previous episode: *Truth & Consequences*

Categories: Episodes • Season Two Episodes

**Figure 4.** Heroeswiki Episode Powerless (2007, 01 Dec).
When Mohinder returns to his apartment in Brooklyn, he is greeted by Sylar who invites him to have breakfast which Maya made. When Mohinder discovers that Sylar lost his ability, he attempts to use a knife to defend himself, but Sylar pulls a gun on him and questions him about the cure to Shanti virus. Maya gets upset that Sylar lied to her and her ability kicks in, affecting everyone in the apartment. She stops when she sees Molly affected. Mohinder then takes everyone to his lab on Sylar’s orders.

Back in New York, Angela explains to Matt and Nathan that 30 years ago, Adam decided the world needed to be wiped clean, and so the founders locked him away. She tells them they need to put a bullet through Adam’s head to stop him; she also sends a thought to Matt: kill Peter, too, if you must.

Adam and Peter arrive at Primotch in Odessa in search of the virus. Hiro stops around Peter who looks around and sees Hiro. Both are surprised to see the other. Hiro tells Peter that Adam killed his father, and that Hiro must try to kill Adam. Peter, believing Adam wants to destroy the virus, defends Adam and surprises Hiro by threatening him with a jolt of electricity. Hiro lets out a battle cry and charges at Peter with the sword. Just as Peter shoots lightning, Hiro teleports behind Peter. Peter explains that he and Adam are trying to stop the virus. Hiro disappears and reappears with his sword at Peter’s throat. Peter grabs the sword and zaps Hiro with electricity, which knocks him out. Adam reaches down and retrieves his old sword.

At the Bennet’s home in Cost Verde Sandu begs Claire not to come forward and expose the Company.

In his office, Bob expresses his disappointment to Ellie for failing to handle the Claire situation and leaving it with Claire intending to go public with her abilities.

When Mohinder returns to his apartment in Brooklyn, he is greeted by Sylar who invites him to have breakfast which Maya made. When Mohinder discovers that Sylar lost his ability, he attempts to use a knife to defend himself, but Sylar pulls a gun on him and questions him about the cure to Shanti virus.

The synopsis continues for another few pages of summary. The wiki community thus writes a discourse for the wiki reader, but at the same time, also re-writes all the textual elements with which the reader can re-read the narrative in his/her own discursive fashion. By following any hyperlinks, readers can use the narrative elements enumerated on the wiki in any order and can create his/her own discourse. Although Cobley (2001) establishes that “hypertext in written computer narratives makes explicit the degree of choice involved in the ways in which readers
construct narratives,” media-based wiki do more (p. 205). They do not just “make explicit” the reader’s choices; they leave open the possibility for any reading at all.

Thus, the “collective intelligence” of the fan community becomes the key to this construction as each individual member of the fan community might have different knowledge bases: for example, perhaps one person knows Jack Shepherd’s story on *Lost* (Figure 7), and another intimately knows John Locke’s (Figure 8). Each can contribute his or her own unique information to each component of the narrative database. For example, perhaps Fan One knows that Jack “learned of his relation to Claire and Aaron” while Fan Two knows that Locke “made contact with former castaways.” Together, both sites’ fans use their collaborative interpretation of the extant media object to build a contemporary, fan-made show bible by constructing the information given in the various fragments of a distributed narrative into a whole, hypertextually linked document. Importantly, both Jack and Locke are themselves also linked, as seen through the hyperlinks on each other’s pages (on Jack’s page, it links to “Jeremy Bentham,” who is Locke’s persona in the fifth season; on Locke’s page, it links via “Jack Shephard.”)

**Figure 7.** Jack Shephard (2009), from Lostpedia.

**Figure 8.** John Locke (2009), from Lostpedia.
Narrative deconstruction

A second area of narractivity stems from the deconstruction of the narrative via the spoilers found on each site. Spoiling is a way of continuing the narrative beyond the bounds of what is shown on television. As Gray and Mittell (2007) conclude their argument:

Most importantly, a well-told tale lives and thrives after its telling, and in the gaps within its telling. Any given reader’s path through this story may bring the reader into contact with only a small portion of what it has to offer, and hence textual studies have often been too quick to assume a unitary, unified text, nailing one textual path down as “normal” or even “the text itself,” and marginalizing other paths as extra-textual or abnormal. Instead, we might more properly conceive of the text as an active space with a varied terrain and numerous potential pathways.

Key to this discussion of narractivity on the narrative database is the paradoxical relationship between the archival form of the database and the spoilers on the archive. Archives record and display the past; they inscribe, as Derrida (1996) would say, “on historiography” (p. 5). The archive is documentation of the previously-happened, a record of the has-been. Conversely, a spoiler is a future event: a piece of narrative that hasn’t-yet, or might-not. To record a spoiler on an archive like a narrative database is to historicize the future; to chronicle the forthcoming. It is to make the future the past, and to assert the truth of the may be.

On these media-based wikis, spoilers make future events present, as the narrative database records the interpretation of the events as if they had happened — or, to be more precise, as if they were happening. However, spoilers do not automatically and necessarily delimit the way fans have of looking at a text: although of the archive, Derrida (1996) says that one can “no longer think otherwise,” in truth spoilers are representations of fan thinking otherwise: of thinking outside the paradigm of the traditional narrative (p. 10; see also, Gunkel, 2007). Spoilers represent a break with narrative unity, as the temporal displacement of future narrative information is spatially united with present narrative elements.

Derrida (1996) provides us with a useful heuristic for examining this narrative deconstruction. He writes that concerning the archive, “we have no concept, only an impression, a series of impressions associated with a word” (p. 29). This impression is a form of a promise, a deferment of desire, a trace of a thing left forever behind. Fan authors leave spoilers on the page even after producers have revealed the spoilt event on the show. A spoiler is this trace, but with one important difference: it is a trace of a future event. What is a spoiler once the spoiled event has occurred? Once the spoiler has been “revealed” as either true or false (that is, as
Fan Theories

- Sylar kills Maya and ends up wacked or is defeated by Elle but shoots her (preview at http://www.heroesrevealed.com).
- Powers may be a reference to an outbreak of the Shanti virus, leading many of the characters to death or stripped of abilities.
- Matt will die because of Peter exploding again.
- Sylar will kill Molly or Maya or lób or Elle.
- Powers could reference that as the people around them die, they are powerless to stop it.
- Peter and Hiro will battle with time frozen and Peter will electrocute Hiro when he puts his sword to Peter's throat.
- Sylar's "defeat" at the hands of Elle doesn't mean she will kill him; she'll take him prisoner and the Company will continue their experiments on him.
- Adam will be killed/incapacitated for good, the two heroes killed will be brought back with Claire's blood.
- The Shanti virus will still be released.
- Sylar will regain his powers.
- Nathan will be killed in an attempt to protect his brother Peter somehow, and Elle will also die trying to grace her father's good books.
- Elle tries to get into her father's good graces by capturing Claire and West dies trying to save her.
- Sylar will have the opportunity to kill Maya, but will spare her.
- Sylar will kill Mohinder Suresh.
- The Shanti virus will be released by someone other than Adam Monroe.
- Caulin will NOT be recovered from the future. There is also a possibility of her never existing due to the time travel.
- Adam Monroe will not be permanently cast off after (Powers) and will return in Volume 3.
- Peter will kill Hiro in the time-stop. Elle will find out more about her past, and Niki will die trying to save Monica.
- Sylar will die at the end of this episode only to be brought back to life again at the beginning of the next season.
- Peter will sacrifice himself to kill Adam, once he discovers Adam's true intentions.
- Peter will not die as he will regenerate.
- Peter will inject Adam with the virus after Hiro tells him what Adam is trying to do with the virus while time is frozen.
- Kingsley will be an evolved human with great strength.
- Niki will get trapped in the fire, but D.L. will somehow be alive (possibly by Claire's blood) and save Niki (and possibly die himself).

Some of these spoilers include general statements, as in "Sylar will kill Molly or Maya or Bob or Elle." Others are much more specific: "Niki will get trapped in the fire, but D.L. [sic] will somehow be alive (possibly by Claire's blood) and save Niki (and possibly die himself)." In total, there are 24 "fan theories" presented on the wiki page, two days before the premiere of the episode. These spoilers did not disappear from the page once the episode has aired. Fans did not adjust them, nor did the community of fans change or delete them.

Although it is possible that fans merely forgot to change the wiki, or ignored this page once the episode aired, I believe the continued existence of the spoilers indicates that these spoilers still exist as narrative discourse possibilities. Fans examine the finale of Heroes, summarized on its own page, as one possible narrative in a galaxy of other possibilities. Each spoiler, each fan theory, becomes a possible...
This page contains a summary of unconfirmed season 4 spoilers from unofficial sources. The source is mentioned for each spoiler. If spoilers repeat or expand upon earlier information, the more reputable or more complete sources are preferred. For season 4 spoilers confirmed by official sources, see Season 4.

Season 4 is confirmed to have a theme with a beginning, a middle and an end. [1] (http://www.tvguide.com/Ask-Ausiello/lost/) A big difference between last season and the new one is that now we are going to see more group interaction. [2] (http://www.gdla.com/consulta_noticias.php?idArticulo=458405) There’s a whole chapter of the story that takes place off the Island. The flashback sequences are essentially a season within-a-season. [3] (http://www.thetvsection.com/lost-news/scan-season-four-details.php#more) .

Note: All of the casting info that is circulated is based on extreme generalities, or in some cases, out and out deceptions by the producers. [4] (http://www.variety.com/article/VR1117974014.html?categoryid=2641&cs=1). *Filmes* is not always taking place in chronological order. [5] (http://sawyer840.blogspot.com/) Figure 10. Lost Spoilers (Lostpedia Seasons 4 Spoilers, 2007).

outcome set in “a universe composed of a plurality of distinct … worlds” (Ryan, 2001, p.99). These distinct worlds, what Ryan references as the “Possible World Theory” of logical semantics, exist as discrete narrative entities in the minds of the audience. For Ryan, there must be a relationship between worlds, but each world, each narrative possibility, exists as its own text (p.100). Applicable here to these narratives, Ryan’s theory describes how two narrative worlds based on Heroes can exist simultaneously in the mind of the viewer: in one, D. L. rescues Niki, and in the other, he does not. Perhaps the discourse presented onscreen in the show Heroes depicts one of these, but the fact that an audience member can imagine this other world, and impart the knowledge of that narrative world to others, indicates that its presence is one in a vast array of possibilities.

Another example of these spoilers can be seen on Lostpedia. In Figure 10 we can see that fans have written that season 4 (the upcoming season, at that time) was going to take place off the island, and that there is a “season-within-a-season” told through flashforwards. Interestingly, the spoilers on Lostpedia appear to be more researched than those on Heroeswiki, as fans cite the source of their information. In this way, not only do fans attempt to impart new narrative knowledge, but also seem to construct narrative authenticity through research (see Williams, 2006). By not erasing the spoilers once the “revelation” of the episode airs, the community appears to voice a collective appreciation for the narrative possibilities that are not, but could be, aired.

Conclusion: Achieving narractivity

By interactively contributing to a growing enunciation of the meaning of a narrative, members of the wiki community integrate their communal/collective knowledge into a narrative framework. The narrative builds the community, just
as the community builds the narrative. The construction of the narrative story involves fans forming the extant media object's constituent parts in new ways. This paper has examined two ways, but more could exist. On Lostpedia, for instance, the “index” lists 154 separate narrative elements, all of which the fan community has transcribed from the extant media object and amended by others in fan community (Figure 11). Fans construct this knowledge through the distillation of the extant media object narrative story, and the re-writing of that narrative story on a wiki. By then re-reading that story, fans create a new discourse, hypertextually connecting kernels and satellites of the plot into a narrative structure.

These fans, however, also construct individual narrative episodes in their own discursive style. Each wiki page devoted to a particular episode, synopsis, or summary will re-tell the narrative discourse, through hyperlinks, using the story that has already been constructed. Far from negating the story-telling of the wiki, however, this discursive practice instead illustrates the narrative possibilities that exist on a wiki. Because of the interactive elements of a wiki, because anyone can edit and change the elements of that narrative, the discourse is always in flux. One fan’s construction of the narrative discourse might be different from another fan’s construction of the narrative discourse. A wiki allows for this mutability; a narrative database is constructed through it. The narrative elements of the wiki provide the means for this interactive narrative database creation.
This narrative creation also highlights the spoilers on the wiki as separate elements of fan fiction. They are not just guesses as to what *might* happen, but rather indications of what *would* happen in a different possible narrative. Possible World Theory gives us a conceptual framework through which to view spoilers in this manner. For every possible narrative world that exists, there exists every other narrative possibility as well. Thus, what media-based wikis show is the power of narrative to envelop the audience, to provide a possible world that exists within and between the extant media object’s world. These media-based wikis exist to provide details and information about a world; fictional, perhaps, but just as real as our own.

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**Notes**

1. In *Wikinomics*, Tapscott and Williams (2006) describe the creative potential of wikis and argue that wikis, as symbolic of mass interaction between hundreds of thousands of people, can create and produce deep changes in the structure of our economy. However, in *Cult of the Amateur*, Keen (2007) describes wikis in negative terms: when anyone can post, as Keen establishes, it undermines “the authority of experts … [who] go beyond the ‘wisdom’ of the crowd and mainstream public opinion and bestow on us the benefits of hard-earned knowledge” (p. 44). For Keen and other critics of the Wikipedia project, the world is split not between the “haves” and the “have-nots,” but between the “knows” and the “know-nots.”

2. Hellekson (2008), on her blog, has described the use of wikis for communal knowledge about television shows, and Baym’s (2008) blog describes the potential of *Lostpedia* for more scholarly analysis.


4. I use this term in its denotative definition, that of the “destruction” of something, and not in the post-structuralist definition coined by Derrida (1978).

5. The term comes from the comic book industry, in which main characters of comics would have detailed back-stories that required immense background knowledge. Comic books,
however, would often have different writers, all of whom would have to work from the same material. Thus, a few key comic designers, in order to ensure continuity and to keep track of details, would write the "bible." The concept of the story bible evolved into television usage when televised narratives became expansive and serialized. Writers use the show bible to keep track of the expansive back-stories of the characters, and as an extensive reference (see Show Bible, 2008).

6. This parallels Bolter and Grusin (1999), who detail the obvious/disappearance of mediation in contemporary culture.

References


