

21st-Century Media, 21st-Century Fiction

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Abstract:

The application of new media to 21st-century novels is the trigger of emerging narrative genres, which revolutionize the narrative panorama and leave space for innovative conceptual approaches. The influence of popular new media creates original circumstances for the development of new kinds of interaction between the storytelling and the reader/spectator, accentuating the rising need for social, multimedia engagements. The newest concepts and approaches of the emerging, wide fields of transmediality and intermediality in transmedial narratives are objects of the handbook *'Fictions of the Internet'. From Intermediality to Transmedia Storytelling in 21st-Century Novels* (2018) by Anna Weigel-Heller.

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The appearance of 21st-Century media is visible in manifold narrative forms, which are not limited to the traditional monomedial text. The importance of transmedia and intermedia studies lies in the understanding of the interaction between narrative forms and new media, leading to the reconceptualization of the emerging narrative categories. To understand an emerging interdisciplinary field, many questions arise: How do narrative genres interact with media? Can a novel be continued on new media like blogs or Twitter? How do novels involve audio-visual elements? Some of these answers can be found in the publication '*Fictions of the Internet*'. From *Intermediality to Transmedia Storytelling in 21st-Century Novels* (2018) by Anna Weigel-Heller, published by Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, in the series RABE/RAVEN. This study aims to investigate the intermedial and transmedial intersections between the 21st-century fictional novels and new media (p. 13), therefore analyzing the structural changes on present and prominent literary genres in transmedia storytelling. The monograph focuses on the key concepts of 'novel', 'genre', 'fiction', and 'media', articulated by the analysis of story-oriented and discourse-oriented narratology to which the author applies classical, postclassical, and structuralist approaches (p. 87). The volume combines Literary, Cultural, and Media Studies and is divided into two sections.

The first part is dedicated to the conceptualization of the theoretical frameworks of intermediality, reflecting on the concept of media and the categorization of new and old media (Ch. 2.1.1). It submits a set of analytical categories for the study of 'fictions of the Internet', which draws from Wolf's and Schwanecke's intermedial classifications (p. 35). Regarding the transmedial framework (Ch. 2.2), Weigel-Heller formulates a comprehensive guideline of thirteen criteria (pp. 46-62), which can be applied for the analysis of novel-based transmedial storytelling and derives from the author's study of the storyworlds in the proposed 'fictions of

the Internet' and media-related studies (Jenkins, Ryan, Thon, etc.; p. 46). The last part of the theoretical framework (Ch. 2.3) aims to situate the influence of technology and media in the genres of the 21st-century novel and media theory (p. 63), understanding the intermedial and transmedial border-crossing of 'fictions of the Internet' (p. 66). This section reflects on the cognitive and textual conception of 'genre', based on existing argumentations regarding the rise of new genres and the decline of other genres in the 21st-century novel (Nünning/Rupp, Basseler, etc.). At the end of Chapter 2, Weigel-Heller introduces five criteria that define emerging genres related to 'fictions of the Internet' (p. 79), which contribute to grasping the new narrative hybrids of transmedia storytelling and form the basis for the comprehension of the process of generic hybridisation.

The second part regards the analysis of seven selected novel-based transmedia storyworlds, which mirrors the criteria formulated in the first part. Among the different genres, Weigel-Heller observes that the epistolary transmedia mode is characterized by no traditional narrator and no clear distinction between storyworld and discourse-level (p. 145), dominant and non-dominant focalization, and the fragmentary distribution of information (p. 146). In the case of *Juliet, Naked* (2009) by Nick Hornby, the different perspectives of the characters are displayed through the "literary imitations of media" (p. 164). A different transmedia approach is found in *Roadside Crosses* (2009) by Jeffrey Deaver and *Night Film* (2013) by Marisha Pessl, which Weigel-Heller proposes to call "Internet-enhanced" (p. 171), namely inviting their readers to learn more about the plot through the usage of new media. In *Roadside Crosses*, Weigel-Heller observes that the integration of the book with the up-to-date blog influences the reader's perception of the narrative and "contributes to the fictional authentication of the plot" (p. 185), participating to the completion of the story (pp. 185-7). Differently, the autodiegetic, fictional crime *Deathbook* (2013) by Andreas Winkelmann uses audiovisual elements in order to emotionally engage the readers in the plot (p. 213). Here, the transmedia interaction is intensified by the e-book version (p. 215), in which the readers can become part of the novel's plot after leaving their private details (p. 216).

The interdisciplinary study and the reflections regarding the implications of the Internet upon the limits of the transmedia narrative make *Fictions of the Internet* pertinent for the advancement of the current transmedia scholarship and suggest a valuable theoretical framework for academic studies related to narratology and new media. The monograph

presents a reader-friendly and uniform structure but recommends previous knowledge in the field of transmedia narratology. For this reason, this publication is not ideal for beginners due to its highly technical and dynamic analysis. A possible weakness of this research, which the author briefly mentions too (Ch. 6.2), lies in the fact that all case studies are restricted to British and American novels, with the exception of *Deathbook*, therefore limiting this transmedia research to a restricted field of application and, in doing so, influencing Weigel-Heller's choice of analytical criteria in part I. Moreover, the realization of guidelines for analyzing novel-based transmedial storytelling and defining transmedia emerging genres proposes an enclosed study that can be applied only to restricted storyworlds. Besides this minor criticism, this specific selection of narratives benefits the meticulous investigation of transmedia storytelling, which is an emerging field that leaves open an ample range of unsolved research questions and requires practical examples. The most engaging part of this handbook regards the case studies, whose analysis of the content, structure, text-reader relationship, and genres linger on philosophical questions about our internet-commingled lives and its influence over literature. Weigel-Heller's contribution "to the changing media landscape of the 21st-Century" (p. 222) is visible in the creative suggestions of new generic terms such as 'psychological Internet thriller' (p. 94), 'Internet satire' (p. 132), and the umbrella term 'fictions of the Internet' (p. 6), which gives the dissertation its catchy and comprehensive title.

Neue Medien, neuartige Literatur

German Abstract:

Die Auswirkungen neuer Medien auf Romane des 21. Jahrhunderts sind der Auslöser für eine Vielzahl von aufkommenden narrativen Genres, die das narrative Panorama revolutionieren und Raum für innovative konzeptuelle Ansätze lassen. So bereitet der Einfluss populärer neuer Medien fruchtbare Umstände für die Entwicklung neuartiger Interaktionen zwischen „Storytelling“ und Lesern/Zuschauern, wobei der wachsende Bedarf an sozialen, multimedialen Engagements hervorgehoben wird. Der Band *‘Fictions of the Internet’. From Intermediality to Transmedia Storytelling in 21st-Century Novels* (2018) von Anna Weigel-Heller diskutiert die neuesten Konzepte und Ansätze in den weiten Feldern der Transmedialität und Intermedialität in transmedialen Narrativen.