1990

Story board

Rachelle Reese
San Jose State University

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.sjsu.edu/etd_theses

Recommended Citation

Reese, Rachelle, "Story board" (1990). *Master's Theses*. 3289.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31979/etd.xqsc-vn5s>
https://scholarworks.sjsu.edu/etd_theses/3289

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Master's Theses and Graduate Research at SJSU ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master's Theses by an authorized administrator of SJSU ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@sjsu.edu.

INFORMATION TO USERS

The most advanced technology has been used to photograph and reproduce this manuscript from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps. Each original is also photographed in one exposure and is included in reduced form at the back of the book.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6" x 9" black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.

U·M·I

University Microfilms International
A Bell & Howell Information Company
300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346 USA
313 761-4700 800 521-0600

Order Number 1340542

**Story Board: An experiment in literary interactivity. [Original
fictions]**

Reese, Rachelle, M.A.

San Jose State University, 1990

Copyright ©1990 by Reese, Rachelle. All rights reserved.

U·M·I
300 N. Zeeb Rd.
Ann Arbor, MI 48106

Story Board

A Project Report

Presented To

The Faculty of the Department of English

San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

By

Rachelle Reese

May 1990

APPROVED FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

Dr. Rob Swigart

Dr. Aldon Nielsen

Dr. Lou Lewandowski

APPROVED FOR THE UNIVERSITY

Abstract

Story Board An Experiment in Literary Interactivity

by Rachelle Reese

Story Board attempts to defy linearity by adhering to a randomized circular structure, rotating around the image of a computer board, which fills with components as the reader experiences vignettes representing ten stages of life. There are a multitude of ways a reader can explore *Story Board*, offering various insights into the problem of society's quest for conformity. Characters are depersonalized and as readers move from one vignette to another, they may encounter characters who look identical to other characters, but act very differently and vice versa.

Some of the methods *Story Board* employs are influenced by the theories and models developed by members of the Oulipo. A critical essay accompanies the work.

Installation Instructions

Story Board must be installed on your hard drive in order to run properly. Attempting to run it from the floppy drive may cause irreparable damage to the file.

To install:

- 1) Insert the diskette in your floppy drive.
- 2) Drag the *Story Board* icon into the Hypercard Stacks folder on your hard drive.
- 3) Wait while it copies.

To run, simply double-click on the *Story Board* icon inside the Hypercard Stacks folder on your hard drive.

Navigational Hints

In the world you are about to explore, actions may be initiated and halted by clicking once on objects, text fields, and in some cases open air. If you don't see anything which immediately suggests itself as a place to click, explore. You will inevitably find something.

Many actions will continue until you click somewhere on the screen. Most of these are identified by a "clone chip" where the hand should be, but

in some cases the hand remains on the screen. In isolated instances there will be no visible cursor, but clicking may change the action on the screen. It is important to remember that there is no wrong way to click. Each click only makes your experience a little different.

As in the actual world, some actions cannot be altered no matter where you click. In these instances, sit back, relax and be patient. Eventually they will end.

PLEASE NOTE:

The disc is not included in this material.
It is available for consultation at this
author's graduate school library.

UNIVERSITY MICROFILMS INC.

U·M·I

Rehearsal
everybody
ready

as
see

Artists

Introduction

But then you go on and you realize that the book is readable nevertheless, independently of what you expected of the author, it's the book in itself that arouses your curiosity, in fact, on sober reflection, you prefer it this way, confronting something and not quite knowing yet what it is. (Calvino 9)

DO NOT PROCEED. If you have not yet experienced *Story Board* at least once, go no further. I realize that this is supposed to be a critical introduction to the work entitled *Story Board*, but as a critical introduction, it may reveal things to you that are better left for you to discover, as I discovered them, through creating the work itself. In fact, perhaps it would be better titled a critical *mediaduction*--something to be read sometime after your first experience with *Story Board* and some time before your last. *Story Board* was meant to be experienced more than once.

I understand that you may be wary of thrusting yourself into an experience as unfamiliar as *Story Board*. I felt the same way. But you must do what I did my first time. Take a deep breath and dive in. I can only hold your hand for so long. Harry Mathews cautioned writers "to do no more than supply the reader with materials and the space to create an experience" ("Prizewinners" 10). I've done that. It's your turn. Take a deep breath, copy

the diskette onto your hard drive and double-click on the icon. Remember, after the first double-click, only a single click is necessary to initiate or terminate an action. Good luck. And remember, after you've experienced *Story Board* at least once, I'll be willing to discuss your experience as I, the author, perceive it could have been.

Critical Mediaduction

The question of writers' authority versus readers' autonomy is essential to the development of interactive literature. In an essay on Italo Calvino's *If on a winter's night, a traveler*, Mariolina Salvatori suggests that writers "expect of their readers the response they have themselves envisioned" (210) and therefore that by reading the text in the way that the author intended, readers are "most sensitive to the author's authority" (186) and consequently relinquish their own autonomy. It would seem from this analysis that the only way to retain autonomy as a reader would be to read the text in a way that the author did not intend, thereby missing the point of the work entirely.

Roland Barthes, however, differentiates between a "writerly" text and a "readerly" text in terms of productivity versus idleness and emphasizes that "the goal of literary work . . . is to make the reader no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text" (4). Harry Mathews suggests that a writer's authority extends only to the space he provides to the reader. "The nothingness the writer offers the reader opens up space--a space that acknowledges that the reader, not the writer, is the sole creator" ("Prizewinners" 13).

Mathews is associated with a group of experimentalists called the *Ouvroir de Litterature Potentielle* (Workshop of Potential Literature)-- Oulipo for short. Calvino was also a member of the group. Members of the Oulipo place great emphasis on the reader's role in creating the work. "Calvino continually calls upon his readers to recognize their role in constructing the text by making his novel exceedingly fragmentary, with abundant and wide gaps for the reader to fill" (Sorapure 705), and in the Preamble to his novel *Life, A User's Manual*, Georges Perec, another member of Oulipo, uses a jigsaw puzzle as a metaphor for the writer/reader relationship.

From this, one can make a deduction which is quite certainly the ultimate truth of jigsaw puzzles: despite appearances, puzzling is not a solitary game: every move the puzzler makes, the puzzlemaker has made before; every piece the puzzler picks up, and picks up again, and studies and strokes, every combination he tries, and tries a second time, every blunder and every insight, each hope and each discouragement have all been designed, calculated, and decided by the other. (iii)

I would like to suggest that, while writers may not have the privilege to "expect of their readers the response they have themselves envisioned," they have, instead, the responsibility to envision as many of their readers' poten-

tial responses as possible and to provide the materials and spaces for those responses to work with.

"A multiplicity of readings is possible and desirable, because there are as many paths winding through Calvino's work as there are readers making the journey" (Sorapure 705). This statement could have been made about any interactive work of literature, because if there was only one possible reading, there would be no need for readers to interact. Raymond Queneau's *Cent Mille Millions de poemes*, heralded by Jaques Bens as the "first (concerted) work of potential literature" (Motte, Oulipo 66), has one hundred different readings. The work is composed of ten sonnets, each sliced into fourteen lines, to be permuted at the readers' wills. Marguerite Duras' *Destroy, She Said* is composed of a series of overheard bits of conversation. Readers must participate in the writing by piecing together fragments of conversations they overhear. By the same token, the characters in the novel are working to piece together their own selves through voyeuristically perceiving the other characters, often from a distance. The actual works the readers create depend on their own identification (or lack thereof) with any particular character. Milorad Pavic's *Dictionary of the Khazars* is composed of

cross-referenced dictionary entries which readers may follow in any direction they choose, each one creating an individual version of the story. Julio Cortazar's novel *Hopscotch* actually consists of two novels--one traditional novel which is read linearly from chapter one through chapter fifty-six, and one extended novel which begins with chapter seventy-three and skips back and forth between "expendable" chapters and the core chapters of the traditional novel. The "expendable" chapters provide readers with additional insights into the philosophic and intellectual interests of the characters in the core novel, as well as some thoughts on the process of writing itself.

In discussing Raymond Queneau's novel *Les Derniers Jours*, Florence Rechsteiner points to its "scriptural display of formal iridescence" and defines iridescence as "those forms which undergo multiple transitions, mutate as they enter into new contexts" (3). In this light "iridescence" could also describe Perec's *Life, A User's Manual*. In both of these novels, the authors rely on the reader to piece together the shapes scattered throughout the chapters in order to form a whole. And each reader will piece these shapes together differently.

What is at stake are the notions of dynamism, of change and perceptual relativity. The integration within a single, architectonically ordered whole of a number of ways of combining and expressing the objects of experience highlights the mediacy of any representational effort and the very arbitrariness of linguistic, literary or visual images. (Rechsteiner 8-9)

But how does a writer provide readers with the ability to create their own works and still assure that the works each reader creates will be within the scope of the writer's vision? The key seems to lie in the structure the work is built upon. Italo Calvino placed great emphasis on the "geometry of storytelling" (Motte, "Permutational" 94). And Calvino's work, in keeping with his words, is geometric. *If on a winter's night, a traveler* is composed of ten beginnings of stories, positioned within a frame made up of twelve narrative chapters so that each story is sandwiched between a furtherance of the narrative action, a structure which resembles water pouring through a sieve, as each story is erased and another appears in its place. The only stable force in the work is the frame of two readers on the journey to find the endings to the beginnings of their stories.

In an article entitled "Georges Perec on the Grid," Warren F. Motte, Jr. recounts Perec's explanation of the structure of *Life, A User's Manual*

He conceived the apartment building which he describes in the text as a grid of ten squares by ten (ten stories high by ten units wide). Using an exercise derived from a game of chess, Perec determined the order in which he was to describe the various apartments and their occupants. This is a figure called the "knight's tour," which consists in moving a knight around a chessboard such that he touches each square once and no square twice. (829)

In this case, the geometric form of the novel is that of a game played on a grid. The readers are free to explore the squares of the grid in any pattern they choose and in fact the author encourages readers to follow a pattern other than the "knight's tour" by providing them with an index, a chronology, and a checklist of some of the stories which can be found in the novel, referenced by the chapters in which the story first appears. In addition, Perec scatters, throughout the novel, teasers about stories yet to be encountered and reminders of those you may already have read. Regardless of the route the readers take and how they choose to fill in the gaps left by the author, the space of the novel retains the exact shape envisioned by Perec--a grid of ten stories high by ten units wide, each with a story to tell.

Story Board was first conceived in the image of a computer board. The board was filled with chips and capacitors, each containing a micro-

world. However, as I began to work, I realized that the board was more appropriately empty at the beginning of the piece, to be filled as readers experienced each segment. There are ten segments of life, each represented by at least one "actual" vignette, except the last segment, which relies on memories. In addition, there are television commercials which correspond approximately to each segment. The first nine segments are experienced in various orders, determined by each reader's arbitrary clicking on the board. As each segment is experienced, all of the vignettes relating to it are "erased" and the reader is not allowed access to them during this experience of the work. However, television commercials and games may be accessed at any time with no influence on their corresponding segments.

Some choices the readers make are inconsequential to their experiences. However, some of them influence what text will later be revealed. And unlike a novel, the work will not progress without the reader making a choice. *Story Board* demands a physical action on the reader's part, whether it be informed or blind.

The fact that a reader must make a choice to advance and halt every action along the course of the story magnifies another problem inherent in

interactive fiction. Suppose a reader chooses a path through the work in which a major character is killed. Later that same reader diverts onto a path where that character is alive. How does a writer guard against this sort of disastrous fluke? First of all, as discussed previously, a writer cannot control a reader's reaction, only anticipate it. One method of anticipating the possibility of readers choosing to follow such a route is to alienate them in terms of time. Make it clear that the order they are perceiving things in is not necessarily the order in which things occurred. This is Perec's method in *Life, A User's Manual*. Writers who elect this method must, as Perec did, keep the actual chronology of events clear in their minds and separate from any potentially perceived order of experience.

Another technique, which provides the added benefits of disrupting the reader's sense of balance and adding to the ambiguity of meaning, is to avoid telling the readers very much about the characters or to provide them with conflicting pieces of information. Queneau uses this technique effectively in several of his novels, as does Mathews. In *Zazie* and *The Bark Tree*, several "characters are orphaned with no apparent history or future . . . The usual means of establishing a sense of history for the character is there-

fore missing" (Campbell 726). In *Zazie* the protagonist has no father and the "type" who tries to rescue her is simply that, a type who takes on various identities and names throughout the course of the book. Readers are unable to identify with him because they do not know who he is. Even in *The Bark Tree*, a much earlier novel, the protagonist is not given a name until midway through the book, but is referred to as "a silhouette" by a character who will not tell of his history or relations. Most readers will believe anything of a character they know nothing about and Queneau proves it.

I am dead. More precisely: I am a dead man. But naturally, no one suspects it; if they did, innkeepers would refuse to let me a room, and people in the street would say: That fellow stinks, he has a stale musty smell. . . . Then he yawned, thought for a moment about the appearance of a professor of white magic, and then chose his usual appearance. Pierre yawned again, wound up his watch, blew his nose with circumspection, stretched out between two cloths and quickly fell asleep. (208)

Pierre is the character with no history. The reader knows only that he enjoys watching people, he has a nice car and presumably a lot of money since he does nothing for a living. The reader accepts Pierre's announcement that he is dead and even accepts his reappearance several pages later.

Mathews omits certain facts about his protagonists in order to assure readers that they are traveling along a linear patch, solving all the riddles in the process, only to have the very nature of the protagonist they have been identifying with revealed near the end of the novel, casting doubt on the very riddles the readers had believed solved. This is particularly notable in the case of the protagonist of *Tlooth*. Readers are led to believe from the beginning of the novel that the protagonist is male. Not only are they told of a love affair with Yana, who is always referred to by the feminine pronoun, but later in the novel, the protagonist admits that, after seducing the Count, "I had solved the riddle of his marital chastity" (135). Since Mathews has already given his readers numerous indications of the Count's sexual preference, including his embroidered fly, a fashion craze amongst the homosexuals of Venice, they readily believe that his homosexuality is the reason he has not consummated his marriage. When the protagonist is addressed by her first name in the last section of the book, the first thing readers are left to wonder is the nature of the actual solution to the riddle of the Count's chastity. Mary's engagement to Joan, a moment which should be one of consummation is, instead, one of doubt. Mathews has successfully avoided bringing

the protagonist's search to a fulfilling end by obscuring an important aspect of her character throughout the novel.

I use character ambiguity in *Story Board* to avoid a reader's identification with a particular character and to promote a sense of disorientation. Because of the structure of the piece, it also allows characters who look the same to be reusable. Since the antagonists of the piece are the pressures exerted by society to be just like everyone else, it makes sense that characters are indistinguishable from one another. Thus, characters who look alike may not always act alike and characters who look different may act as if they were in the same skin. This effect, combined with the arbitrary order in which readers experience the ten segments of life, allows for many different interpretations of the vignettes and most importantly of how they link together. Because of the interplay of these two techniques, no two readers will experience *Story Board* in the same way, and a reader may experience it a number of times without having an identical experience. *Story Board*, a work which deals with maintaining individuality against the pressures to go mainstream, allows each reader the space to experience the work in an individual way each time it is experienced.

Works Cited

- Barthes, Roland. S/Z. Trans. Richard Miller. New York: Hill and Wang, 1974.
- Calvino, Italo. If on a winter's night, a traveler. Trans. William Weaver. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979.
- Campbell-Sposito, Mary. "Onomastics as a Defamiliarizing Device in Raymond Queneau's Novels." The French Review 61 (1988): 724-33.
- Cortazar, Julio. Hopscotch. Trans. Gregory Rabassa. New York: Pantheon Books, 1966.
- Duras, Marguerita. Destroy, She Said. Trans. Barbara Bray. New York: Grove Press, 1970.
- Mathews, Harry. "For Prizewinners." The Review of Contemporary Fiction 7.3 (1987): 7-20.
- . Tlooth. New York: Carcanet, 1987.
- Motte, Warren F., Jr. "Georges Perec on the Grid." The French Review 57(1984): 820-32.
- . Oulipo, A Primer of Potential Literature. Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1986.

---. "Permutational Mathews." The Review of Contemporary Fiction 7.3

(1987): 91-99.

Pavic, Milorad. Dictionary of the Khazars. Trans. Christina Pribicevic-

Zoric. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1988.

Perec, Georges. Life, A User's Manual. Trans. David Bellos. Boston:

David R. Godine, 1987.

Queneau, Raymond. The Bark Tree. Trans. Barbara Wright. New York:

New Directions, 1971.

---. Cent Mille Millions de poemes. Paris: Gallimard, 1961.

---. Zazie. Trans. Barbara Wright. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1960.

Rechsteiner, Florence. "Formal Iridescence in Raymond Queneau's Les

Dernier Jours." Romance Notes 24 (1983): 3-9.

Salvatori, Mariolina. "Italo Calvino's If on a winter's night, a traveler:

Writer's Authority, Reader's Autonomy." Contemporary Literature

27.2 (1986): 182-212.

Sorapure, Madeleine. "Being in the Midst: Italo Calvino's If on a winter's

night, a traveler." Modern Fiction Studies 31 (1985): 702-10.