

Social Media Narrative:

Issues in Contemporary Practice

hosted by The Rutgers Camden Digital Studies Center and Judy Malloy  
and the Rutgers Camden DSC Class in Social Media Narrative:

Lineage and Contemporary Practice

Facebook, November 16 - 21, 2016

## Transcript: Dene Grigar



### Dene Grigar

November 16 at 9:07am · Vancouver, WA

The 24-Hour Micro-E-Lit Project was greatly influenced by the work of Jay Bushman, who is also participating in this event. In the summer of 2008 he attended the conference I chaired for the Electronic Literature Organization in Vancouver, WA and exhibited/performed “The Good Captain” (<http://jaybushman.com/The-Good-Captain>). It was the first work of Twitterature I had experienced, and as a lover of constrained writing, I was hooked.

Constrained writing offers a unique challenge in that it forces us to express ourselves within a tight structure. As a form of constrained writing, flash fiction requires us to express ourselves in a brief and pithy way. But Twitterature is flash fiction on steroids: We only get 140 characters to convey a story containing conflict, characters, setting, mood, and other narrative elements—hence, the term “micro” in the title of my project. Even my favorite work of flash fiction, Richard Brautigan’s “Scarletti Tilt” is 34 words and over 175 characters in length. How could anyone do better than this masterpiece of brevity?

Also important to storytelling on a social media channel like Twitter is its participatory quality. Unlike Brautigan, who was writing a story in a one-to-many approach, my work had the distinct opportunity to involve others in making the narrative come to life. With that idea in mind, I developed an overarching theme of “metro life” and channeled experiences I had had and people I had met from when I lived in Dallas, TX. Unforgiving traffic, ubiquitous fast food joints, the desperation to find one’s individuality and humanity all reflect what it was like to live in the fourth largest city in the country at the beginning of the 21st century. Then I invited people from all over the Twittersphere to join me in a 24-hour storytelling extravaganza where I would post one of my 24 stories each hour at the beginning of the hour. Participants were encouraged to post theirs as well. And I captured all of our stories on my website. At the heart of my enterprise was to collect stories about “life in the 21st century” from all over the world.

As mentioned on the project website, over 85 stories were posted beyond the 24 that I produced. We experienced no trolling; folks were encouraging and afforded participants a wide berth to play with language and social interactions. I chalk this up to the fact that Twitter was just starting to see massive growth (over 700% in 2008 alone!); those people who hung out on it were, like me, experimenting with it and testing its limits as a social site and a channel of communication and creative expression.

My next project will be to tweet the American Constitution and the Bill of Rights on Inauguration Day (Friday January 20, 2017) to remind ourselves the principles we, as a people living in a democracy, hold dear. I ask for participation by having Followers retweet these important words so that we can all read them together and recommit to their ideals. I hope you will join me.

#### Comments



**Judy Malloy** Welcome to the always awesome Dene Grigar, President of the Electronic Literature Organization!

More information about Dene is at

<http://www.narrabase.net/socmedianarrative.html#dene>



November 16 at 9:29am



**Dene Grigar** Thanks, Judy. But it's the ELO that's awesome:) Thank you to you and Jim for inviting me to this wonderful event.

November 16 at 9:30am



**Victoria Pagan-Perez** Hello it is a pleasure to meet you. My name isn't **Alphanumu Ptk Vicky**, it's Victoria Pagan-Perez and I just wanted to say it's a pleasure to meet you!

November 16 at 1:38pm



**Jay Bushman** Wow, thank you Dene. I'm honored that The Good Captain was such an inspiration. I remember that when I first launched it in 2007, I was thrilled with the few dozen people saw it. That it had any life beyond that is continually gratifying.

November 16 at 7:04pm



[Antoinette LaFarge](#) Your comments really underlined for me the extent to which Twitter is a child of the text-based participatory spaces that flourished in the 1990s: the IRCs, the text-messaging channels, LambdaMOO and its ilk. Those of us who spent a lot of time in those spaces loved them for many of the same reasons you mention: the tight constraints (because you lost the flow if you didn't send out your thoughts as single sentences), the mashup of different people's thoughts interwoven with each other, the participatory exploration and reinvention of form, the gnomonic spirit that hovered over it all. I myself favored MOOs because you could custom-program the space with extra affordances. Twitter's big advantage has been to achieve dominance and mass audiences and thus become not just a space people choose to be in but a space people feel they must be in.

November 18 at 1:31pm



[Dene Grigar](#) I defended my dissertation in a MOO, Antoinette. It was a very interesting experience in light of the constraints and affordances. I turned what has become in the US a very closed event to an open one with 50 people participating across the globe. I love MOOS even now.

November 18 at 2:01pm



[Victoria Pagan-Perez](#) Hello! I have a few questions for you that I was hoping you could answer!

1. Did you let everyone else's contributions affect your original narrative?
2. What was one of the many challenges of working on a Twitter narrative and how did you overcome them?
3. How does digital preservation work?

November 22 at 8:36am



[Dene Grigar](#) Thanks for your questions. Here is my response: 1. Actually no. In order to ensure character length, I had prepared my own work in advance so that the tweets would fit the constraints. I did however find myself responding a lot more than I expected to and encouraging others' with their work. 2. I was not convinced that I could maintain one storyline across 24 posts, so I aimed at presenting a cohesive theme throughout the 24 different ones. That way anyone reading anyone of them could enjoy it and did not have to read the others to make sense. This took a lot of planning, as did squeezing in narrative elements into the 140 characters. 3. Your last question I'll answer in a separate post since that is a very different animal all together:)

November 22 at 10:09am



[Victoria Pagan-Perez](#) Ok thank you for your response!

November 22 at 11:03am



[Judy Malloy](#) Thanks [Dene Grigar](#), for bringing The 24-Hr. Micro-Elit Project to this Rutgers Camden Digital Studies Center panel!

There is much potential for literary-initiated collaborative projects on Twitter. But although there are exceptions, recent work by Teju Cole and Neil Gaiman come to mind, the promise of Twitter as a platform for such work is seldom as well realized as it is in The 24-Hr. Micro-Elit Project, for which Dene edited her stories about living in Dallas, Texas into twitter-sized texts and posted one every hour for 24 hours -- inviting readers to contribute.

Distributed participatory narrative has a rich history, including Roy Ascott's ARTTEX-hosted La Plissure du Texte and Fortner Anderson and Henry See's The Odyssey Project, as well as, as Dene notes in her comment | code | process essay --

[http://www.well.com/user/jmalloy/elit/dene\\_grigar.html](http://www.well.com/user/jmalloy/elit/dene_grigar.html) -- Robert Adrian's The World in 24 Hours Project. Indeed, The 24-Hr. Micro-Elit Project holds a special place in collaborative social media narrative because it not only alludes to pre-web social media narrative tradition but also is distinguished by a compelling locative idea, by the performative nature of the project, and by the scale of the response, which resulted in an international anthology of over 85 stories, written by more than 25 participants from five countries.

As I noted in the content | code | process (formerly Authoring Software) introduction to this work:

"The 24-Hr. Micro-Elit Project combines the jazz energy of real-time creation of online art and micro-literature with elements of poetic narrative and locality. And as the author camps by her computer, entering her own narratives, inspiring contributions to the work, The 24-Hr. Micro-Elit Project captures the imagination of the contemporary generation of users of social media."

November 29 at 12:46pm



**Dene Grigar** Thank you for the kind words and the references to other works. As I mentioned I was deeply influenced by **Jay Bushman's** work. I was also tainted by my early work with hypertext literature which stressed chunking text. I studied with Roy, as you know, and have been privileged to see the work you mention when I was last in London. And I make no bones about the fact that I am one of your biggest fans.

November 29 at 1:23pm