

# **NARRATIVES OF ENFOLDMENT: MULTI-LINEAR AND PARAFICTIONAL STORYTELLING IN MEDIA ART**

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## Abstract

Narratives have been witnessing a state of enfoldment within the virtual world(s) since the proliferation of transmedia story worlds and new media art works. The aesthetics of enfoldment are discussed by Laura U. Marks within different trends in media art. She follows a genealogy of media art that has its roots in premodern Islamic concepts. Enfoldment is therefore situated as the broad framework of this paper's discussion. Since the prevalence of the concept of transmedia storytelling, coined by Henry Jenkins in 2007, different franchises (be it in entertainment and others) have adopted certain narrative tropes to create a transmedia presence or universe. One of these tropes is the usage of multi-linear storytelling. Multi-linearity is one of the forms narrative storytelling that liberates a story from its temporal structure, making the consumption of narrative open to the end user. Parafiction, on the other hand, denotes instances when the lines between fact and fiction become blurry creating contemporary artworks where story worlds are essential for the dissemination of the works themselves. According to Lambert-beatty (2009) "the slew of recent writings trying to describe or explain this condition ranges from philosophical explorations of 'the ethics of the lie', to moralist warnings about our entry into 'the post-truth era'" (Lambert-beatty, 2009). The following article aims at disseminating past scholarship on multi-linear and parafictional storytelling in trans and new media art in an attempt at shaping the theoretical framework of my doctoral thesis project; a podcast series intended for online dissemination that features conversations between a fictional character and non-fictional historical figures.

**Keywords:** Enfoldment, Narrative, Transmedia story world, Multi-linear narrative, Parafiction, Media Art.

## Introduction: narrativity in an expanding storyworld

Narratives are held together by their temporality; a story is intended to be consumed through a particular chronology of its events, otherwise, when this chronology is dismantled, narrative loses its linearity, lending itself to interactive forms of storytelling. According to Pearce (1994), non-linear storytelling is mainly defined by having variable outcomes. Unlike linear fiction, which is set in time and space, non-linear fiction unfolds in uncertain ways, depending on the likings of the end-user. The outcome of a non-linear story is not clear-cut, as Pearce mentions, removing the 'God-like' quality that fiction writers tend to relish in; "Non-linear writing is somewhat of an obscure craft, one by which those with literary inclinations are not easily seduced." (Pearce, 1994. p. 100). Non-linearity, therefore, lies within the realm of the abstract, the uncertain, and perhaps the virtual? Laura U. Marks (2011) attempts to create a genealogy of Islamic discourse by drawing parallels with contemporary forms of media arts. In her book, *Enfoldment and Infinity: An Islamic Genealogy of New Media Art*, Marks discusses the virtual in the light of Deleuze and Guattari's 'plane of immanence', a wide playing-field consisting of an infinite number of multiplying folds. Each fold in the plane can unfold into several different folds, like fractals. "It contains all that has existed, will exist, has never existed, and will never exist, in a virtual state. Sometimes one of these enfolded units unfolds and becomes actual" (Marks, 2011. p. 5). The virtual is the plane in which all things can exist in an infinitely enfolded ebb and flow. Marks links the concept of enfoldment to the main principles of Islamic cosmogony, namely the idea of the Unity of Being<sup>1</sup> or the Oneness of Allāh, the singular point from which everything unfolds and folds back to. I will take this as the departure point of this perhaps unconventional literature review where the concept of enfoldment is used to discuss two concepts in trans/new media art: multi-linear and parafictional storytelling. Both these aspects will be discussed

in the light of the thesis project *Al-Khayyām Quadraints*, part of the *Tawūs* story world.

Discussing narrative in the virtual is commonplace in today's new media spaces as social media platforms and others have harnessed the power of storytelling to create a multiverse of narrative, both linear, non-linear, and multi-linear (Sterne et al., 2008). The first section of this paper investigates different discussions on narrativity in its myriad forms, from the linear to the non-linear with the specific focus on multi-linear narratives in relation to the transmedia story world. An attempt will be made to bridge a philosophical discourse on virtual spaces (based on Marks's discussions) with convergence culture and storytelling, detailed in the works of Henry Jenkins (2009) and others. Jenkin's theories tackle the participatory nature of new media through enfolded transmedial story worlds (Jenkins, 2009) as they have become a staple of multi-linear narrativity. The second section moves on to the concept of parafictional storytelling and its relationship with biographical stories from a historical (specifically oral) standpoint. Lambert-beatty (2009) defines parafiction as "fiction presented as fact", but a more elaborate discussion will draw on different examples of parafictional works in contemporary art and their relation to fake news media, parafictional personae, and skepticism in the post-truth of unfolding narratives in the virtual.

Finally, a conclusion aims both to offer a synthesis between multilinear and parafictional storytelling within the framework of enfoldment, and to disseminate the theoretical framework of my doctoral thesis project entitled *Al-Khayyām Quadraints* (AKQ). AKQ is a visual podcast series and practice-based research intended for online publication that combines both multi-linear and parafictional storytelling in a dramatic dialogue or dialectic of transdisciplinary theoretical topics (more on this towards the end of the paper). The conclusion opens a door to future research on the use of trans/new media art as a 'plane of immanence' for new forms of educational.

<sup>1</sup> Unity of Being (or *Wahdat al Wujūd*), see *Ibn Arabi*.

### Virtual storytelling: non-linear / meta-linear / multi-linear.

Marks (2011) renders new media art as one of the forms in which the virtual is brought to the actual. She discusses virtuality as the endless number of possibilities that could be, positing it vis-à-vis the philosophies of 11<sup>th</sup> century Muslim philosopher Ibn Sīna who postulated the existence of a 'non-thing' to every 'thing' in the cosmos (Marks, 2011). The idea of an entire unseen world existing parallel to the materially perceived world is a concept not uncommon in Islamic cosmogeny. The 'jinn' or demonic beings made of smokeless fire are believed to live unseen to us mere creatures made of clay, whereas they can see and interact with us at their whim (Koca, 2017). This concept highlights how the virtual, from an Islamic perspective, is the realm of possibility that when materialized becomes actual. Taking an Islamic approach to the virtual, Marks argues, reinforces Deleuze and Guattari's business of philosophy for "in the history of Islamic theology, philosophy, and science, thinkers wrestled with such limits to thought and arrived at new concepts" (Marks, 2011, p. 11). The same could be done to narrative spaces; it is the non-linear approach that sets out to work through the limitations of narrative storytelling to create new concepts. Virtuality, on the other hand, becomes a playing field and, as we shall see further on, it is convergence and participatory technologies that have given rise to the re-establishment of virtual reality. Interactive art and storytelling are examples of participatory culture technologies. Interactive stories are those that are left open for the end-user (the reader, watcher, or listener) to pick the outcome (Plowman, 1996; Sanders et al., 2005). There are countless examples of interactive art in literature, cinema, and TV that I will not detail here. My concern with interactivity is relevant in as much as it liberates the author and passes the reigns over to the consumer of the fiction. Interactivity unfolds subjectively, based on whoever is consuming the story. It opens up the authorship of the fiction, making a story unfold endlessly into infinity (in one way or another). If any myth (or metafiction) is in its core the endless unfolding of events over time, the

choice of picking one or more possibilities culminates in a linear narrative (Sanders et al., 2005). But what of narratives that do not rely on interactivity in their unfoldment? Arva (2015) argues that readers of magical realist works should look beyond the realist intricacies of the works but rather into the co-existence of oppositions in the text, such as "the natural and the supernatural, the explainable and the miraculous". She argues that these contradictions coexist in a fractal-like reality, whose sudden randomness calls for the readers' discretion and engagement (Arva, 2008). Magical realism therefore is a genre that lends itself to this ebb and flow of enfoldment using the fabulous and fantastical; one of the main traits of the unseen world(s) in the Islamic cosmogeny.

Meta-linearity, according to Brooks (1999) is the telling of a story through fragments. The term 'meta' implies a non-linear aspect to the telling of a story, meaning it does not have one consistent beginning, middle, and end. The metalinear narrative therefore is "a collection of small related story pieces designed to be arranged in many different ways, to tell many different linear stories from different points of view, with the aid of a story engine which sequences the story pieces." (Brooks, 1999). The uniqueness of the metalinear narrative is that it is not one whole, rather is made up of scattered pieces which each follow their own narrative line, but all fold back to the same 'story engine'. As discerned by Pearce (1994), multi-linear narratives are not held together by a chronological framework, thus they can unfold in different ways and lend themselves to different forms of consumptions. For Plowman (1996), "The key features of narrative are temporality, causality and, by implication, linearity." (Plowman, 1996, p. 95). In her study of interactive multimedia (IMM) she discerns the difference between myth (showing) and rhetoric (telling), claiming that the myth gives way to rhetoric which in turn gives way to the different narratives. In a sense, myth becomes the 'story engine' mentioned by Brooks (1999), the metanarrative. But what if the virtual plane itself becomes the myth? In her article, Partridge (2021) discusses the spiritual movements within social media platforms such as Tick Tock

and Instagram. She argues that the post-modern reality of multiplicity of truth together with the 'liquid modernity' established by virtual networks, creates an illusion of metanarrative that is subversive as much as it is affective (Partridge, 2021). It could be argued, therefore, that the interconnectedness of the virtual, coupled with the post-modern multiplicity of truth can bring forth multi-linear narratives that fold back to certain meta-narratives (for Partridge, specifically spiritual ones). Narratives in virtual networks function in a multi-linear structure due to their scattered nature, their quick consumption, as well as their interconnectivity. "Intriguingly, works of Islamic mystical or Sufi<sup>2</sup> literature have adopted the imagery of shadows to represent this relative existence." (Partridge, 2021, para. 16). The relative world of shadows Partridge refers to here is the virtual, a real world represented through an appearance of actuality that operates in an unfolding/enfolding nature when saturated with spiritually unified narratives. Similarly, Brinker (2021) discusses the different disseminations of the Marvel Studios transmedia franchise (ironically also a story world with an air of the mythical). He discerns the different characteristics of the franchise's outputs; "the (multi-)linear serial storytelling typical of comic books and television series, a transmedial serialization of content across different media formats, and the non-linear narrative seriality characteristic of reboots, remakes, and adaptations" (Brinker, 2021, p. 3).

### **Cultures of convergence: a virtual storytelling playground**

The concept of world-building, story world, or fictional universe is discussed by Jenkins (2007) through the lens of transmedia storytelling. According to Jenkins, a transmedia story is one that is told in fragments, in different forms, and using different media. It posits the consumer more as an active participant who needs to stitch together the pieces in order to make sense of the story as a whole (Jenkins &

Deuze, 2008). Ryan (2013) alludes this to the often mental process that is maintained while reading a text (viewing, or playing), where the mind creates a dynamic and shifting story world outside the static assets of the text or story itself (Ryan, 2013). A story-world is then essential for the perpetuation of a transmedia narrative. The Marvel Cinematic Universe (CMU) is an example of such story worlds. According to Brinker (2021), the prime distinguishing factor of the MCU is its relationship to previous disseminations of superheroes that populate the same universe. Each of these disseminations productively shows itself as a cross-medial re-imagining of already existing Marvel assets, and reframes "established characters, themes, stories, and iconographies for the big or the small screen." (Brinker, 2021, p. 2). Ryan further stresses the expanding quality of transfictionality, asserting that one of the key features of the transmedial story world is its ability to forever multiply and regenerate itself across virtual media (Ryan, 2013). This aspect of transmedial fiction connects with Marks's concept of enfolding; as stories manifest themselves in different outputs within the same diegesis or engine, their constant reference to themselves only feeds the universe; making it grow with different multi-linear narratives. This is what Jenkins calls the "allure of transmedia texts in their intertextuality" (Brinker, 2021, p. 8). Another aspect of the transmedia universe is its relation to a market-based franchise which is of no concern to me here. The concept of the story world has been explored in different contemporary media artworks far from their cinematic big brothers.

Parafictional artworks, for example, also tend to function within a story world (Fallenbuchl, 2020; Warren, 2016). This aspect can be seen in the works of both Damien Hirst and Walid Raad, as the design of the exhibitions, documents, and items presented are held together by an overarching universe, vessel, or 'engine'. The only difference between transmedial usage of story world and the parafictional usage is that in the

2 Sufism, also known as *Tasawwuf*, is mysticism in Islam, "characterized ... [by particular] values, ritual practices, doctrines and institutions". It is variously defined as "Islamic mysticism", "the inward dimension of Islam" or "the phenomenon of mysticism within Islam".

latter, the fictional universe is often presented in a hyperrealistic manner, in other words, presented purely as fact. It intends to trick on purpose, inherently commenting on the nature of hypertextuality in a post-truth era. Smith (2019) discusses the aspect of world-building through the vessel that often carries the artwork, such as the gallery, museum, website, or talk show. She asserts that the parafictional often relies on the medium to create its universe, such as the virtual medium. According to Lambert-beatty (2009), "Unlike historical fiction's fact-based but imagined worlds, in parafiction real and/or imaginary personages and stories intersect with the world as it is being lived." (Lambert-beatty, 2009).

Fallenbuchl (2020) discusses the concept of post-history using Damien Hirst's work *Treasures from the Wreck of the Unbelievable* (2017) as the main object of study. Hirst puts on display relics retrieved from a fictional sunken ship with a caption that pertains to each piece. Fallenbuchl considers the artwork to follow a post-narrative structure, for it links to the popular way in which media information is disseminated to everyday users/consumers. She states "Humans today are not non-narrative, or narrative; I argue that we are engaging in post-narrative history keeping. Social media chats and the world of digital information may offer us a new type of history that can successfully mediate hyperreality and the post-truth era." (Fallenbuchl, 2020, p.19). She posits his work as post-historical for the mere fact that it invokes a historical story that exists nowhere in time. Therefore, post-history can be used to denote parafictional art that is positioned in the real, lived world but does not really exist in history. Walid Raad's Atlas Group also fits into this category. In the project, Raad attempts to create an alternate version of recent Lebanese history, drawing from incidents that happened during the Lebanese war and after. According to Raad, one of the group's aims was to "locate, preserve, study and assist in the production of audio, visual, literary and other artifacts that shed light on some of the unexamined dimensions of the Lebanese civil wars of 1975 to 1991" (Warren, 2016 from Raad, 43). Raad's project also attempts at the same post-historical approach in

representing history and therefore all documents, tapes, archives, research, and lectures become part of an ever-evolving story world. Another example of a parafictional exhibition that had a stark effect in audience expectation/reaction was the fictional character of Safiye Behar, the supposedly Jewish lover and correspondent of Mustafa Kamal Atatürk. The exhibition *A Tribute to Safiye Behar* (2005) was created by artist Michael Blum and presented in a recreation of her apartment in Istanbul. According to Lambert-Beatty (2009), audiences were utterly shocked when the intricately-built world of the fictional character was finally exposed to be completely fake and raised issues ranging "from philosophical explorations of 'the ethics of the lie', to moralist warnings about our entry into 'the post-truth era'; to impassioned calls for renewed personal and public honesty." (Lambert-beatty, 2009). The discussion of post-history through the parafictional posits a question of authenticity and skepticism, a question that is hurdling contemporary media due to the disinformation phenomenon since 2016 (Frau-Meigs, 2019). To what extent has the parafictional become subversive to the nature of storytelling?

### Parafiction and contemporary art

The term parafiction is still its most recent usage, as it has only been put into use among academics and researchers since 2009. The parafictional is what lingers between truth and fiction. It is the deception of form that pretends reality. Garcia (2017) puts parafictions in two different categories, those of 'what ifs' and those of 'as ifs'. (Garcia, 2017). According to Smith (2019) "Garcia suggests that *what ifs* 'lead to satirical acts designed to unmask workings of power' and as ifs 'are more utopian, leading to forms of activism that act "as if" change has already occurred.'" (R. G. Smith, 2019). To understand a narrative, performance, or artwork as parafiction it to keep a skeptical distance from the object of consumption. Parafiction seems to occupy the spectrum between fact and fiction and is often agreed upon to be a fiction presented as fact (Warren, 2016). It is inherent in the basic definition of parafiction that the parafictional act often requires using

means of deception; to fool the spectator or consumer that they are witnessing something real. Theorists seem to agree that the deceptive act of the parafictional paints a descriptive image of the reality of the post-truth era in which we live (Lambert-beatty, 2009; R. G. Smith, 2019; Warren, 2016). According to Smith (2019) parafiction provokes us to constantly question and reconsider our assumptions about the truth. Considering the fake news hysteria that was provoked by figures such as Donald Trump, skepticism towards any kind of information became the norm in post-modern societies (C. A. Smith, 2019). Indeed, post-modernity is a staple in the proliferation of parafictions throughout history. Recanati (2018), places parafiction in the domain of the post-modern whereas metafiction lies within the modern. "Parafictional discourse talks about the fiction and says something true or false about it, even if [...] it does not take a metafictional stance towards the fictional characters themselves." (Recanati, 2018). It is therefore understood that trueness and falsehood is a question that is always under debate in the parafictional discourse, however, the metafictional discourse simply does not address this question. According to Lyotard (1984) the post-modern era is characterized by an incredulity towards metanarrative, in other words, a lack of belief in the credibility of grand narratives (Lyotard, 1984). This posits the post-modern in a spectrum of skepticism in which the parafictional functions. In her thesis dissertation about Damien Hirst's *Treasures...*, Fallenbuchl (2020) evokes Jean Baudrillard's concept of Simulacra and Simulation to discuss the hyperreal qualities of parafiction, precisely in Hirst's work. Fallenbuchl sees parafiction to constitute the fifth order of simulacra, the hyperreal, a work that claims to be a copy or representation of something that is "different from the truth" (Fallenbuchl, 2020). "Post-simulacral, parafictional strategies are oriented less toward the disappearance of the real than toward the pragmatics of trust. Simply put, with various degrees of success, for various durations, and for various purposes, these fictions are experienced as fact." (Lambert-beatty, 2009). Baudrillard discusses simulation as the endless repetition of a copy, thus a hyperreality where truth and fiction intertwine and it is this

marriage between truth and lies, fact and fiction, that creates the parafictional. Therefore, the medium becomes the only true and objective reality (Arva, 2008).

Another aspect of the parafictional, which I argue is in more common use both in contemporary art and new media art, is the parafictional persona. The basic definition of the parafictional persona falls in line with the interplay between fact and fiction. However, the parafictional persona is usually derived from a real person or entity. Similar to TV or talk show hosts, a parafictional persona relies on the name of a real person, but the persona itself only functions within the world in which the persona is presented (eg. a TV talk show). Warren (2016) discusses the parafictional persona and its use in contemporary art. According to Warren, "...artists, filmmakers, writers, and gamers have long made creative use of aliases, pseudonyms, and pen names, this contemporary iteration relies on individuals actively appropriating their own proper name—that basic distinguisher of individuality". Marshall and Barbour (2015) mention parafictional personas in their use in social media. They assert that social media have given more and more people the tendency to operate under a fictionalized version of themselves. Someone may behave in a certain way or be known by a certain trait that is exhibited only within the online world. According to the author, "information and identity formation are moving differently and through layers of media and communication. Foundational in this new movement [...] is the interpersonal constitution of identity embedded in very powerful online interconnected social networks". (Marshall & Barbour, 2015). Warren finds that the usage of the parafictional persona has often been deployed by contemporary artists where the artist would envision fictional scenarios that extend from the lived world and in which the artist is the subject of the fiction.

### **Biographical (parafictional) siyar of Arabia**

Cognitively, storytelling encourages social cohesion through the creation of a "shared reality" that upholds social ties and

connectedness between individuals (Freed, 2019). Oral storytelling traditions that arose in Arabia and later seeped into the Islamic world followed the same prescriptions for orality. Though Islamic juridical authorities tried to keep the oral stories known as *siyar* (plural for *sīrah*, or biography) controlled, the tradition still carries on into the coffee-houses of the Middle East till the present day. The *siyar* usually described the lives and labors of notable figures or heroes in Arabian history, such as 'Antara bin Shaddād<sup>3</sup>, and were commonly told by a narrator (or *rawi*) who would transmit the tale in an episodic serial manner (Herzog, 2011). Herzog claims that the truthfulness of the relayed *siyar* was not a subject of question and was oftentimes taken as the truth "Unlike listening to popular fairytales or texts like the Arabian Nights, pre-modern Arab listeners and readers of *siyar* simply could not understand these texts as works of imagination, since they were trapped by the implicit prohibition on invention or the propagation of fictional events and persons." (Herzog, 2011. p.626). In other words, the question of whether any given story (or *sīrah*) was based on fact or not was of little importance to the listener. In a sense, it could be argued that there is a parafictional quality to the shared cognitive understanding of *siyar*. It can be argued that the metaphysical aspect of oral storytelling lingers on in the collective unconscious from generation to generation. Different scholars in the fields of sound and aurality assert that narratives experienced aurally tend to take on different forms within the minds of the listeners for they unfold subjectively due to a lack of a visually represented form (Chan-Olmsted & Wang, 2020; Freed, 2019). Visual stories, especially those that tend to represent characters and events (like the biopic for instance) tend to encapsulate the image within predetermined limitations and thus tend to dictate objectivity. Marks (2011) details aniconism in Islamic art that sought to limit representation but in turn opened up the subjective perception of religious art, such as the ornamental ceilings of domes of the mosques in Isfahan. Aniconic art, therefore, was given

the possibility to perpetuate through favoring sound over image. Religious iconoclasm has tended to refrain from the visual representation of stories due to the simulacral power of the image. The forced aniconism of Islamic art in turn has forced the virtual to enfold within the image, as patterns, lines, and haptic spaces are allowed to run freely both within the artwork itself and within the observation of the viewer. (Marks, 2011). Can it be argued, then, that aural storytelling broadens the mental (or virtual) field of imagination, causing an endless proliferation of the story world within the mind?

One of the lingering questions within this research is that of the use of these virtual non-linear and parafictional forms within the domain of media education, or education through media. Plowman (1996) touches upon this idea in her discussion of the usage of multi-linearity in education. She discerns the disruptive nature of multi-linearity in terms of pedagogical structure claiming that dismantling the narrative into subtle parts may be plausible pedagogically, but risks disrupting the narrative flow. She alludes to Bertolt Brecht who used to devise explicit techniques intended to alienate the audience, making them aware that what they are watching is a mere construction (Plowman, 1996). Podcasts have also been seen to aid as educational resources in classrooms. Scholars seem to agree that the introduction of both visual and aural podcasts seem to aid in cognition and information integration (Drew, 2017; Kay, 2012; Merhi, 2015). It appears then that there seems to be a consensus on the use of media that contain an open virtual form heightens the awareness of the end-user, provoking them to be skeptical and non-passive consumers of narrative. Whether it is using multi-linear or parafictional storytelling, opportunities seem to be arising that might lead the way to a new form of pedagogical use of media art. How can we then make use of this provoked skepticism to create a broader field of cognition in media education? This is a question open here for future research.

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3 Antara bin Shaddad al-Absi, also known as 'Antar, was a pre-Islamic Arab knight and poet, famous for both his poetry and his adventurous life.

## Conclusion: Tawūs transmedia story world

From the literature presented in this article, there is an opportunity for the integration of both non-linear storytelling and parafiction in an attempt to open the storytelling form. Narratives of enfoldment offer both creators and consumers of narrative fiction the tools to liberate the experience of storytelling. Walter Benjamin has famously written of the death of the storytelling experience enforced by the short story. According to Benjamin (1937), the short story form kills experience causing it to boil down to what is akin to a news headlines of bite-sized information (Benjamin, 1937). But if these bite-size pieces of story are linked together within a transmedial engine or story-world, is there a possibility of reviving the experience of storytelling in an ultimately virtual way?

As I mentioned in the introduction of this paper, the main goal was to here disseminate the different theoretical frameworks that contribute to the production and development of *Al-Khayyām Quadrains* (AKQ). The project is a podcast series consisting of 12 episodes. Each episode details a parafictional encounter between Al-Khayyām, a fictional 900-year-old vampire, and a non-fictional historical figure where the former, being a mystical (Sufi) vampire, engages the latter in a dialectical discourse (dramatic dialogue) that aims at synthesizing rational and mystical schools of thought. In each episode, a different historical figure will be featured from the modern age, when Al-Khayyām was roaming Europe in search of the Unseen. The first season will focus on historical figures from the modern age, whereas future seasons will look at different historical epochs. The encounters themselves are disseminated as sound-based dramatic dialogues in which parallels are drawn between Sufi philosophies and rational philosophies from history. The project falls under the Tawūs transmedia story world, which investigates the different representations of evil in media, with a particular focus on eastern mysticism.

Tawūs is itself a work of parafiction, blending different historical happenings with fictional narratives. It can be argued that it is also a form of magical realist writing in the vein of Borges and Lorca. It follows a multi-linear narrative structure within the virtual spaces of new media; episodes are not constructed linearly, both within the episode and the season as a whole. The parafictional persona of Al-Khayyām exists primarily as an Instagram account (@ta.w.us) that shares visual posts revolving around the representations of evil in Islam.

Al-Khayyām is a fictional character and pupil of a 12th century Sufi mystic and jurist, 'Ayn al-Qudhāt Hamadānī who was executed in Hamadan in 1131AD due to his controversial interpretations of the verses of the Qur'an pertaining to the devil. After the death of his teacher and beloved, Al-Khayyām flees the middle east westward where his deep sadness and despair of separation transforms him into a being hovering between life and death. Al-Khayyām becomes somewhat of a vampire who feeds off the essences of the living to regenerate his soul causing him to live on into the years. For more than 900 years, Khayyām roams the European continent witnessing the different changes, wars, revolutions, reformations, births and deaths that influenced the world. Throughout his many years, Al-Khayyām encounters different figures from history; from poets, to sages, to philosophers, politicians and scientists. Being a vampire, his encounters enrich his pluralist and mystical visions. In return, Al-Khayyām inspires all those he meets with their greatest (albeit radically life-changing) achievements that somehow link with Sufi interpretations of the Islamic faith.

This parafiction is the story-world in which the transmedial story of Tawūs<sup>4</sup> will be told. The research is open to contributions and collaborations, following a multi-linear structure that unfolds across virtual spaces (mainly Instagram and Youtube). The goal of the *Al-Khayyām Quadrains* podcast is

4 It is important to note that *tawūs* is the Arabic word for peacock which is one of the believed manifestations (or avatars) of the devil in different eastern religions including Islam.

to introduce a new form of pedagogy through arts-based research, using multi-linear parafiction where the end-user can both learn about the philosophies being disseminated and aid in the production and/or development of different videos within the series. The first 12 videos will be commissioned to 12 different media artists/producers who will develop and create content for the video series until it is eventually disseminated online and opened to a wider range of media producers and content creators. Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari's 'plane of imminence' and Marks's theoretical framework of virtuality, the Tawūs transmedia story world intends to be a space from which stories can unfold in a constant ebb and flow. Like the parafictional contemporary artworks mentioned above, the Tawūs story world is based on the real world, positing itself post-historically. The emancipatory nature of multi-linear and parafictional storytelling – the fact that a story is liberated from a 'God-like' author – is the main motivation for the creation of this story world. It is an opportunity to incorporate different narratives within a binding story engine, metafiction, or diegesis thus creating room for learning and producing. Further research on the use of new media and multi-linearity in education aims at fortifying this argument in the hopes of creating a more diverse audience of media learners, consumers, and producers.

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