

# A Story about Tourism

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It was almost like I was dreaming, he is saying, my visit to the ruins of the factory that made the first Narrative Machines.

A is sitting next to me at the bar. I call him A to designate him somehow. I do not know him. He looks like someone I've seen around. But I am frequently wrong.

A is saying: It was once a roadside attraction before the interstates. Now it's off a section of highway that connects nowhere to nowhere. The place is a ruin, over-run with vegetation. The windows are all punched out and the interior's stripped bare.

While I imagine an industrial ruin in general over-run with vegetation in general, A is saying:

You know what I'm talking about, yes? Narrative machines make texts work. You turn one on and it starts transcribing the situation. It tells you what's in front of you in the order that the machinery takes it in.

He gestures as if that will help the person he is talking to visualize a machine.

A is saying: The old style machines were huge and clunky with pulleys and belts and cranks and springs. The transcribing mechanisms were crude. That's why so many old stories happen against backgrounds that are rendered like flats on a stage. I think that idea of being on stage explains why characters in stories would act as though they weren't actually in their situations but sort of floated above them, explaining things. And there were other problems too. Mechanism speeds were irregular so time was funny.

I look into my beer. A is saying:

And they were expensive. People forget that. The digital emulators everyone uses these days to produce texts are stamped out in invisible supply chains disappeared into marginal commodity

flows. Narrative machines are cheap things that just kind of appear in retail outlets like they don't come from anywhere.

Accompanied by overhead television monitors on which pitchers from different baseball games are moving into their windups, A is saying:

If stories were told as they actually happened during that time, they'd all have included the giant, heavy narrative machinery and the crew required to work it. The machines broke down a lot and there were problems getting replacement parts. That meant long delays during which characters had to sit around in their trailers waiting to get on with the next scene. There were problems with characters gambling and drinking too much. It was a tough life being a character back then.

Overhead in some games there is a ball and in others a strike. In one there is a base hit and in another a runner is stealing second and here, in the sports bar, A is saying:

But everyone acted as if this enormous loud inefficient machine was invisible and as if the pictures it produced were reflections of the world and not simply of the characteristics of the machine that duplicated the world. I mean, everyone knew. There were advertisements for narrative machines in all the papers. Everyone knew, but everyone seemed to prefer the illusion that what is in the present is a complete picture. But that's never true.

I cannot keep track of the divergences in the baseball games and wonder why there are so many televisions in this place while A is saying:

So it follows that there would be no signs at the site of the factory that produced the first Narrative Machines. But still it was surprising to see it.

