

Krizanc & Boje

Tamara Journal Interview with John Krizanc

by John Krizanc¹ Interview with David Boje²

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ABSTRACT

John Krizanc is the author of the Tamara Play, after which the journal is named. The interview explore the relationship between aesthetic and ethics, how the artist makes compromises to get a project like Tamara to appeal to an audience more interested in entertainment spectacle than socioeconomic or political commentary.

INTRODUCTION

ABOUT TAMARA Tamara de Lempicka (1898-1980) was a Polish portrait painter who lived in Russia until the Bolsheviks arrested her husband during the Russian revolution. In 1918 she emigrated to Paris, and in the 1920s and 1930s became the darling of the European aristocracy (de Lempicka Portrait Galleries on WWW: 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th, 8th, 9th, 10th, 11th, 12th; Bios 1st, 2nd; 3rd, 4th, 5th; De Lempicka portraits 1st, 2nd, 3rd,)). She is recognized as the most important Art Deco painter.

TAMARA, is also a play by John Krizanc (1981/1989), first performed May 8, 1981 in Toronto. It is Los Angeles' longest-running play, a dozen characters unfold their stories before a walking, sometimes running, audience. Tamara enacts a true story taken from the diary of Aelis Mazoyer. It is Italy, January 10, 1927, in the era of Mussolini. Gabriele d'Annunzio, a poet, patriot, womanizer, and revolutionary who is exceedingly popular with the people, is under virtual house arrest. Tamara, an expatriate Polish beauty, aristocrat, and aspiring artist, is summoned from Paris to paint d'Annunzio's portrait. Instead of remaining stationary, viewing a single stage, the audience fragments into small groups that chase characters from one room to the next, from one floor to the next, even going into bedrooms, kitchens, and other chambers

to chase and co-create the stories that interest them the most. If there are a dozen stages and a dozen storytellers, the number of story lines an audience could trace as it chases the wandering discourses of Tamara is 12 factorial (479,001,600). I applied this critical postmodern perspective by looking at Disney corporate narratives, contrasting official (hegemonic) and more (corporately) marginalized stories (See Boje, 1995 AMJ).

With that introduction, I want to start the interview.

David: Okay, John, well, we wanted to ask you about the play, *Tamara*.

John: Sure

David: And what gave you the idea for the play?

John: What do you want? The long or the short version.

David: Okay. Oh, give me the longer version.

John: The genesis of it was the Toronto World Stage theater festival in 1981. Our company, Necessary Angels felt that it was important, to do a play, for this international festival. At the time, I was the buyer for the BookCellar an independent book store-now defunct.,

thanks to to the big box chains. Anyway, the Oxford University Press rep gave me a book on Tamara's art. I didn't like her art but to pad out the book the publisher Franco Maria Ricci incorporated the some of the diaries written by D'Annunzio's housekeeper Aelis Mazoyer. Her diary entries documented the the poet Gabrielle D'Annunzio's attempts to seduce the painter Tamara de Lempicka, over a period of ten days, commencing January 10th 1927. Reading about D'Annunzio's extravagant and decadent lifestyle I wasn't sure if I saw him as a role model or a cautionary tale for a young writer just starting out. While I was handicapped by not speaking Italian I certainly read everything I could about him. Richard Rose who would direct the play originally agreed with me that it would make an interesting movie- sort of Visconti film that we might just be able to finance when we were old and famous. Since that was a long way off (still is) Richard suggested I start thinking of it as a play. But I felt D'Annunzio bizarre world which included a pet tortoise and functioning battleship moored in his back yard - would be impossible to capture on stage.

David: Um, um.

John: Then Richard had an idea- why not set the play in a real house? Why not use CasaLoma a castle build by Sir Henry Pellat at the turn of the century- Well it was a Sunday and we'd been drinking vodka tonics all afternoon but feeling inspired we went to the castle and arrived just before closing time.. Seeing the Great Hall we thought we'd found our set- Then, we saw the billiards room and found the secret passage to the stables-Suddenly, the whole house became a set. Our first idea was to move from room to room - to create an environmental play- we'd heard about plays done that way in Poland, and I believe Richard Foreman in New York had done something like that with the Ridiculous Theatre Company, and so had Marie Irene Forness. Now it may have

been the drink or youthful exuberance- but we were so excited by the architecture that we wanted to use it to shape the narrative. The very lay out of castle suggested this would be a play about masters and servants...Now, once you start thinking about Upstairs/Downstairs you're into a long long story - or else you end up giving the servants short shrift as Checkov did.....Then it occurred to me that in a space this big you could tell many stories, and tell them simultaneously.

David: Okay,

And we started really just sorta jamming on that idea. And, you know, later it became much more, cogent, or whatever the word is, where we developed rather pretentious theories about what began as entertainment. In interviews I'd describe the play as a critique of fascism, that gives people more freedom than they've ever had in the theater." I'm not saying that is not the case but really it's just retrospective wanking. You know, I always hated traditional theater. My first play was about a writer named John Krizanc, a poet, who hates the theater. It's a play within a play within a play kinda thing. I guess you'd say it's junior Pirendello. And uh, so I was always interested in form. I suspect now, that's because I was young and didn't have much to say- anyway I looked to other writers, to the process of writing itself, the self reflexive nature of it, and most importantly to role of the writer in society. At the time, I believed that writers made a difference, that they could change the course of history. D'Annunzio was part of that. He was a Byronic figure, who single handedly got Italy into world war one. Granted, that's not something to be proud of - but it is amazing that a writer ever wielded such influence, for good or ill. Recall, D'Annunzio was also the one man who might have stopped Mussolini's rise to power. That he didn't was his tragedy and ours. The question, for me, was, would I sell out to the state as D'annunzio did. The

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play was an attempt to answer that question... I fear I would have remained silent as D'Annunzio did - as Pierrendello did, unlike Pavese, and Italo Svevo.- if I was bought off in the way D'Annunzio was.

Asked how to keep D'Annunzio in his place, Mussolini said famously, "if you have a tooth that hurts, you either pull it out or fill it with gold." Basically he bought D'Annunzio off, paid for his villa on Lago de Garda, allowed him a live-in architect and a live-in string quartet, paid all his expenses, and brought out a definitive edition of his works....though he kept delaying the volume of political writings. In fact when D'Annunzio died, Mussolini flew to his house and spent two days destroying selected papers. What was in them is lost to history.

David: continue

Anyway D'Annunzio's housekeeper Aelis Mazoyer was basically his procuress. She kept him in an endless supply of women and cocaine. So, uh, I sort of thought this was like the ultimate Canada Council Grant, you know. It was the Nobel and McArthur award, and all for saying nothing against the fascists.

It's like a cautionary tale for a writer. The story of a man who allows himself to sell out. Though as Keith Richards reportedly said "It ain't selling out if the price is right." I mean his price was fairly high. And drugs and sex have kept many of us, away from our typewriters. So, I was fascinated by that. I think it was only later as I actually got the script going that Richard (ROSE/ THE DIRECTOR) and I started to see the implications of, what it was that we were doing. Originally it was just a story about art and politics and I think art, sex and politics are always big themes of mine, but what was interesting here was how the form of piece evolved into an idea that's greater than its creators. Certainly the form -style of presentation - is the triumph

of Tamara. It's one of those very simple ideas that in science might be called 'elegant' It's only twenty years after the fact that I look at it- and say with 'shock and awe' -- "Man, that's a pretty good way to tell a tale."

David: about Tamara the artist. Do you feel that she sold out in the same way?

John: I'm sure even she would concede that she did. She did harbor illusions of greatness but she was primarily a society painter- She came to painting as a refugee from the Russian revolution. Arriving in Paris with no money, and no skills, she re-invented herself as an artist. She set out to make money and she did- she made the rich look like mythic figures - Aryan Supermen - and they paid her for it.

Right.

Her politics were I think very conservative. In the screenplay version of Tamara I've tried to put her in the best light - because she was very smart. She knew as soon as she saw the brownshirts in the streets of Vienna that it was time to move to America. She insisted her husband Baron, the Baron Kuffner sell all of his assets in Austria right away and get to America. And when she came to America she did a lot of good work aiding refugees escaping Hitler.

David: I didn't know that,

John: Yeah, she did some of the first fundraisers in both New York and Los Angeles in the 30s for refugee relief.

David: Oh,

John: So she was kind of interesting in that way and then she went off into this religious painting and abstract painting, I think um, but in the end, you know, when she was in Cuernavaca, she started repainting all of her famous paintings, from

the twenties, basically plagiarizing herself . It's sad really.

She was, I think she was had that art for art's sake kind of mentality you know, that she wouldn't be involved in politics.. I think, D'annunzio had that too. Sure, he was political but his politics are hard to read in terms of left and right. For instance, after the first world war he was upset about the treaty of Versaille, he felt that the Americans had gone back on their word and that Italy was not getting the territory it was promised for entering the war. So, he put together a regiment of men, and went and seized the city of Fiume. He held the town for 18 months, and the first thing he did was to write a constitution that gave woman the right to vote - But the same document also declared music the highest civic virtue-Now, where does that fall on the political spectrum. At the time, Lenin declared D'Annunzio the only revolution in Europe - but I think his refined sensibility and aesthetic led him to believe that art is of the highest importance and that is the first step towards believing the artist is better than other people. This leads to elitism and extremist politics.

David: Sad.

John: But oddly, when Tamara moved to Mexico, the maids in her house were really her only friends. She said she liked the peasants, because they were 'real and alive.'

David: Um uh,

John: On the other hand she insisted on being called Baroness Kuffner.

David: Baroness, huh?

John: Yeah, so she was full of these strange contradictions, I suppose.

David: Is that what you meant before by the art being put in the service of an elitist or extreme politics?

John: Well, I mean, you know, you just see that through out history whether it's Ezra Pound or um, D'annunzio or Celine. , I think that once you buy into that notion that art is some how not a functional activity like brick laying, that is more important than other occupations I think that uh, the allure, of the superman has a strong pull

David:Okay,

John: Because I think um, there is a certain narcissism is creating anything to begin with. We all have to believe in the idea that writing/making art is somehow special, because the world could give a shit about it. So in order to sustain yourself you naturally kind of mythologize what you're doing.

David: Now, um, let me ask a transition question. Did Tamara, the people who go to the *Tamara* play, did they get it? Do they get it that this pick this thing up as fascism?

[talk over/ inaudible]

John: No no. I certainly don't think that the wealthy folk, who have 125 dollars to pay for a ticket to a show which is limit to only 100 people a night, I don't I think they saw it as much more than a fun night out in the theatre. But that's not a defeat, it's a first step, an introduction to a different way to tell stories. But the piece is unlikely to make anyone say 'ah ha I now understand the inherently fascist nature of narrative or question how impotence political/sexual leads to the emergence of the fascist personality. They are not running out to read Reich. I just hope that it makes people want more from their storytellers. the play,

What has been the most rewarding thing for me is that people who don't usually go to the theatre who don't want to sit in rows and be told that this is good for you, so you will suffer through it, they got hooked on it. Young kids love it because it

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is sort of like TV, you know, running around from room to room is the equivalent of changing channels.

David: Sure, I love that about it.

John: Yeah,

David: Can you tell me, going back to the question, did they get the message on the opposition to fascism, some got it and some didn't ya think, or...

John: I doubt it. Certainly in America I don't think people even got that the fascists were not the same as Nazis. One thing they did seem to grasp immediately was how key the 'intermezzo' is to the experience. Intermission is where people who have been following different threads of the narrative get together over champagne and compare notes. Here, total strangers have no compunction about coming up and asking each other 'who were you following. What happen?' Now, some might say that the audience acts as the secret police, informing on the characters movements and actions....But I see it differently. To me, intermission is counterpoint to fascism. It says, this is how a democracy functions. Here, free people, discuss the choices they made, and create a new unity. It is only by sharing that a sense of the whole emerges. And there is no hierarchy of information. Each piece of the puzzle is necessary, and the bankers information is just as important as the waiters. That excites me, and so does the fact that people are actually talking about the play. Usually, it's been my experience with my straight plays that folks talk about everything but the first act they just sat through. Now, it might be that my writing sucks, and Mamet does not have this problem...but I suspect that it is also because linear narrative offers no way in, for the audience. The playwright tells them what to feel and think, and when. In Tamara, they're made to feel that the choice is theirs, that who they follow has

direct bearing on what they experience. In this sense, straight theatre is a Newtonian narrative, offering a predicable arch, and Tamara is a Quantum narrative- where the observer effects the outcome.

Now, I don't think they audience got any sense that Tamara was a comment on tradition of theater, that it sort of blew up the fourth wall entirely and turned it into this center where you can experience a drama in a 360 degree.. I mean the idea that it was an attempt to give authorship to the spectator, I don't think they saw that. Nor should they. To them it was a fun event. It's for people like yourself to have that kind of insight.

David: Sure,

John: A theoretical thing versus, you know, just wanting to run around the house and have a bloody good time.

David: I think both are possible

John: Yeah, I hope the are. You know, I, I, I think it was funny you know, like when Richard Rose directed it -- he's a very sort of serious guy and to him it was like Chekov. It was the servants and the masters, and he did it very much in that style but, the play, I mean the push of the audience, sort of has a tremendous impact on the actors because I don't care how serious, your classical training is,, if you leave a room and no one follows you as an actor-

David: Oh wow,

John: That's like the worst review in the world, right? So, like, within a couple of performances, the acting is going down hill because the actors begin to do whatever it takes to get an audience to follow them. For actors, the play is a real rush, they don't have to wait for the *Times* review; if they exit the music room with twenty people following them that's a good review. So, actors really start playing to

the audience, pandering in fact. That's depressing, but it's also human nature.

David: Gotcha. Um, okay preceding up to now, what's the responsibility of the artisan in times of Homeland Security or the Iraq war?

John: I think everybody should be struggling with that but I just don't see it happening. Maybe we're too close. Like people say it's too early to be writing about 9-11. I know that I'm just, a workin' stiff trying to who makes my living now mainly in television so I can't claim that what I do rises to the level of art. But, it's next to impossible to speak out in a medium like film and television, where things cost millions and corporations control what gets made.

David: Talk more on that,

John: Sorry?

David: Talk more about that please.

John: Well there's probably church basements where good theatre is being done. But there's we live in kind of a corporate where there's not much room for opposition. I listen to shows like *Crossfire* down and I can't tell the difference between the left and right in America.

David: [laughter] me either, I cannot either.

John: [laughter] Their wardrobe might be different, but if you go by the mass media, you get the sense that there is no opposition in America. I don't see any writers doing much, you know, politically anymore -

David: Gore Vidal, does he...

David: Yeah, I mean I guess...

David: Noam Chomsky.

John: Vidal had sort of a little pamphlet book out on 9-11. But it is so marginalized. It sure wasn't published by Random House. REM puts out a new song, so do the Beastie Boys, but they are on the web. People talk about the web as a force for Democracy, give me a break, it's the new ghetto. We'll let you speak out in a chat room, but can you get on Larry King? No. Will Fox news interview without mocking you? No. They're not on the airwaves, the peoples air waves by the way, that corporations do not own, yet you would never no it. Look at CNN the most 'trusted name in news' according to whom? They're a press release for Don Rumsfeld and company.

David: Um uh.

John: I think the writers, we all somehow get co-opted. It's a very depressing situation right now. I mean maybe Tony's Kushner is going to have something interesting to say, but, um,, when...somebody, when they can take such offense to Bill Mahr's making his comments, about 9-11, and he's immediately off the air, it's a pretty scary situation. The Dixie Chicks make one comment about the President and their CD'S are being burned, their sales tank. That tells people that the price for principals is high- too high- it is oblivion. And when the networks address the question of whether actors should be allowed to speak out, they are asking the wrong question. Susan Saradon is only speaking out, because she can- she has the TVQ to get on the air- and Joe Public does not.

David: Right

David: Uh, uh. Now your play, *Globalization*, just to talk a little bit more about that, is it, does it have a message that's counter to the corporate culture?

John: Actually, it's a mini-series about globalization and discontents, set around a

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Summit of world leaders. Like Tamara it has an upstairs downstairs...in this case, upstairs is the powers that be, and downstairs, the people in the streets.

I was talking to the network and they were saying, well of course it will have to be balanced, and I said there's no fuckin balance here, okay. You hire me, it is not gonna be balanced. It's going to be a completely one sided take on globalization. I'm not makin' any pretense for balance. I'm sort of sick of that, ...we don't see any balance on the so-called objective news side of the equation.

But will this get made? I doubt it. Certainly, not the way I envision it. What will happen is that the producers will need outside funding to come up with a budget around ten million- then the money people will have some 'problems' and I'll be fired or the project will slowly die. But right now, I'm having fun, ranting to my computer screen.

David: Yeah, I've seen it advertised, but I haven't...I'm going to go look for it today, see if I can find it in the video store. Couple of questions from our board member here that they sent in to me to ask you, if I can turn to that, is that okay?

John: Sure, whatever you want.

David: Um, to you think *Tamara* has had any lasting influences on the way people think about and approach theatre?

John: Well, I'm disappointed to say no, I mean, I think there was Tony and Tina's wedding and a few of these, I guess you could say, the murder mystery weekends have some sort of relation to *Tamara*, but uh, I think the economics of it put people off. So many people have wanted to produce it until they actually run the numbers. This is a show with ten actors and a crew of at least ten. It has the running cost of an off Broadway show but

because it is set in a real house- we can't get five hundred people in per performance. We're limited to 100. That makes the ticket price high, and even with that producers have yet to find a way to make money on it.

I think Tamara has been more influential with game designers and those kinda people who construct dramas with multiple paths. *Tamara* was probably a very early, if not the first example, of that kind of interactivity.

David: That's a good one... that's a good answer. Um, so any other plays other than *Tanya and Tina* or some of the murder mysteries that kind of follow this path?

David: One person asks how did you come up with the title for the play. I mean, you named it after the portrait painter, you could have named it differently.

John: Yeah, you know, but that was one of those...I wish I didn't call it that because in a way she's not the principle character...all ten characters are the stars of their own narrative. ...calling the play Tamara sets up an expectation which is out of whack, because everybody is waiting for Tamara. And, obviously it's named after her, so she must be important so we the audience must follow her. In the first act the most of the people wait around and follow Tamara...then in intermission they'll hear some one say "man you've gotta follow the servants" 'cause there's all sorts of shit going on down there. So it takes until the second act, for the play to balance itself.

The truth is I called the play Tamara because I liked the sound of the name.

David: I'm glad you don't say Tam-ar-a because I never said that.

John: Yeah, yeah some people say Tam-ar-a, certainly a lot of people in LA did, and I thought if that's how it's pronounced,

I would never have used it for a title.

[laughter]

David: Now when I went to the play in Los Angeles, I followed the servants, because I'm from a working class background I just went right to the basement, you know.

John: Yeah. Well, I always do too. When it first ran in Toronto, I, I used to go every night to see this one scene, just before intermission in the kitchen.

David: Oh yeah,

John We call it the Gondolier's scene, because Dante the valet takes Mario the chauffeur on an imaginary gondola ride through the canals of Venice. It's not the best writing in the play but it was always my favorite scene. Don't know why.

David: Um, uh,

John: Uh, um, I would always go down there and, and um...sort of stay down with the servants, I never went upstairs. Even though I think Louisa Baccara, is the best written of the characters. I've never followed her. So, um, it's interesting, I

don't really analyze it but I guess my heart was always downstairs for the same reason yours was.

David: What's your new play?

John: "Globalization" It is, ... -- a four hour mini-series for television-- As predicted I did get fired off the script by the producers but in an odd turn of events they've now rehired me at the insistence of one of the commissioning networks. At the moment, the SUMMIT is slated to go before the cameras in May....My latest work for the small screen airs in November on the CBC network. Written with star and producer Paul Gross the TROJAN HORSE is a political thriller that tells the story of how Canada comes to merge with the United States and how a Canadian linked to European Intelligence becomes the new President and sets about reversing fifty years of American foreign policy--- or will, if they don't kill him first."

David: Maybe one of our readers will see it and write a review. Thanks ever so much for the interview.

Hyperion

John Kriznac

ABSTRACT

A critique of interactive fiction, argues that instead of providing a window onto the human condition hyperfiction merely provides a mirror of readers desires.

On HYPERFICTION (1993)²

Shortly before he stepped in front of a milk truck, the 'philosophe' (that's French for comedian) Roland Barthe wrote S/Z. The book contained such witty one liners as 'the goal of a literary work is to make the reader no longer a consumer but a producer of the text.' Words like those inspired a new generation of hyperactive authors to use their computers to create "hypertexts". Such works invite the reader to use the cursor on their computers to choose which strand of a chain mail text they wish to follow.

Hyperfiction allows us to read non sequentially, instead of passively following a sequence imposed by an author the way we must in traditional books. In the beginning hypertexts were used by academics as electronic footnotes, offering supplementary information to the main text that the reader could choose to access or not. But by the mid-eighties the drug of interactivity was just too tempting for fiction writers to resist.

Michael Joyce's: *Afternoon a Story* is to the hypertext or interactive novel what the Gutenberg bible is to print publishing. Like a deck of cards that can be shuffled and reshuffled, each time providing subtle variations on just how and when we learn the secret that haunts the narrator. The library at Brown University already stocks more than 300 hypernovels and novelist Robert Coover teaches a creative writing course on interactive fiction. Someone had better put a stop to this before it gets out of hand.

² Article was originally published in the Toronto *GLOBE AND MAIL* Sept 4th 1993

Graham Greene begins *Monsieur Quixote* with the sentence: "It happened this way." The reader understands she will now enter the story in the company of a narrator who will reveal what happened. The reader may doubt the narrator's veracity (Ford Maddox Ford's *The Good Soldier*); she may be told the same story from multiple points of view (Durrell's *Alexandria Quartet*) or in a bizarre sequence (Cortazar's *Hopscotch*) but eventually she will arrive at some sort of satisfactory conclusion. In the interactive novel the reader is left to stumble through the labyrinth, alone. This is the literary equivalent of B.Y.O. B.

At this point I should confess that I may have inadvertently contributed to the birth of this hip Frankenstein by writing a play entitled *Tamara* (1981) long before personal computers made writing the interactive novel a reality.

In *Tamara* the audience chooses and physically follows any one of 10 characters throughout the rooms of a real mansion in which there are between one and nine scenes happening simultaneously. Since they can physically only follow one scene at a time the choice they make determines the play they see. In effect, they write their own play. While each of the ten characters in the play has a story to tell, the two main plots deal with sex and politics. (I leave aside the question of whether or not these are the same thing.) At the end of the play the Italian poet rushes to rape the painter Tamara de Lempicka. Meanwhile the fascist Aldo Finzi has finally discovered that the new chauffeur is in the communist resistance. Both of these

story lines overlap in such a way that the audience has only one final choice: Should they follow the sex or pursue the politics? Most people choose the sex and ironically miss (the shooting of the chauffeur) the climax.

The small cadre of techno-wankers who wax poetic about the interactive novel suggest that allowing the reader to make choices as to the evolution or outcome of a given story democratizes the creative process. For them, interactivity becomes a vehicle for the enfranchisement of the creatively challenged. Finally every Schwarztzenagger can co-write with Shakespeare. But underneath this seductive promise of a new literary Eden, there's some serious hierarchial-patriarcal butt-kicking going on.

Nowadays, the world of the imagination has become the main battleground for issues that should properly be decided in the political arena. For many people, their cries for inclusion go unheard or a met with indifference. Fatigued by the real battle, they've retreated into the marshes of art. Here, confused by the distinction between the world and the word, they attack the hierarchy of art, as if it mirrored some political hierarchy. Ever the flagellants, the arts community has embraced this notion, as they embrace anything that promises a momentary sense of relevance or belonging. Liberated from the chains of talent they begin chanting: We shall have no Gods above us. Now we shall all be Gods! Dizzy with virtue they seem soon arrive at the crack house of interactivity.

In these dark rooms the writer stumbles over the physicist who hand him the pipe and tell him interactivity is the new quantum mechanical paradigm. "Forget all that stuff about stories needing an arc or trajectory with a beginning, middle, and end, that crap went out with Newton. Suck on this, kid, let me tell you about parallel universes, about Heisenberg and Hawkings." And when a multiculturalist brother wakes up from a

nightmare screaming: Linear narrative is fascist." The writer is made to understand it is her duty to surrender to interactivity, to help force pluralism into art, and through this back-door, into society.

From now on the answer to every multiple choice question shall be: All of the above.

The interactivists recount the tragic history of the traditional reader's oppression. This reader is a slave, a victim of a tyrannical author who forces him to follow the plot. "But I don't want Richard to assume the throne!" The tortured reader screams: but does the malevolent author hear his cry? Never. The plot moves on, sometimes ploddingly, sometimes relentlessly, but always, regardless of the reader's entreaties. Richard will be king and there's nothing the reader can do about it, save close the book.

To exponents of interactivity, this choice is akin to telling the political opponent of a regime that her only choice is to flee the country. They demand to know how we as artists can continue to support a system that refuses to give voice to the reader, nay, a system that actively works to keep her disenfranchised. They argue that if the novel was interactive and reader didn't like any aspect of it, she could simply rewrite it. A click of the cursor would render the totalitarian state a democracy. In the interactive world of tomorrow, the reader will be able to decide what happens, to whom it happens, and how often it happens. If the phrase wasn't an oxymoron, I'd call this a deconstructionist plot.

In interactive fiction readers find the power and control which eludes them in real life. These poor saps are so busy scanning texts and making choices they begin to think they are participating in something real. But choice alone is not freedom. They move their cursors with the same junkie determination with which they click the remote control of their television. They are passive participants in a fictional world designed to keep them preoccupied while the powers that be

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continue the business of raping and pillaging.

When the reader actually pushes buttons the writer loses her ability to push the metaphorical buttons that have traditionally given literature its power. When the reader is constantly making choices, the choices themselves override the plot. It is as if the map is more important than the landscape. (In spite of Bateson's injunctions to the contrary.)

The reader cannot enjoy being transported into another world because whenever he is called upon to make a choice he must leave the text and return to his reality. Once outside the text she makes choices based on her own life experience.

Whereas linear narrative anchors us to belief in a common humanity, interactive choice reinforces prejudice; the very thing literature seeks to overcome. When the writer gets the words just right, we pause and say aloud: exactly. We know. We understand. Choice destroys the writers ability to create empathy for characters whose world views do not correspond with our own. If the reader can, with the push of a button, take the character in a direction 180 degrees from the writer's imagining, the reader will only ever himself reflected in the text that appears on the screen.

Defenders of hyperfiction might argue that the writer ultimately writes the whole text. They say the readers task is only to make her way through the labyrinth of multiple readings the author provides. But is right to ask Picasso to provide Purple, Yellow, and Orange renderings of his Blue period? If I write a short story in which the couple live happily ever after, must I now also provide the alternative ending where she turns out to be a psycho with an ice pick under the bed, or he turns out to be an orthodox rabbi suffering a crisis of faith? Interactivity turns fiction into the home shopping network. (You don't like the bracelet then how about this zircon ring?) Quality surrenders to quantity, and Flaubert turns to Danielle Steel. "Wait! Don't go! That's not what happened to Emma Bovary! She never took the arsenic. Honestly. Press 2 to find out. Stay with me."

Perhaps this then is my greatest fear? Interactivity exposes authors as the hucksters we are. Pathetic, self absorbed neurotics whose desperate craving for love find us clinging to every passing reader begging them to stay, begging them to click on just one more link....

Authors update: The New York Times has yet to produce an interactive fiction best seller list.

Hyperion Commentary, Tamara Organizing: Reply to Krizanc

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ABSTRACT

This is a reply to an essay that John Krizanc sent to me. Krizanc (1989) is also the author of the Tamara play. I have applied Tamara to organizing (Boje, 1995). Here I want to look at some of the consequences of interactive organizing that is theorized as a postmodern narrative.

Producers and consumers meet in the narrative space we call 'organizing.' As Roland Barthes (1970) put it, "the goal of a literary work is to make the reader no longer a consumer but a producer of the text" (S/Z). In questioning the position of the narrative in relation to the producer and consumer of organizing, this essay challenges the role of consumer sovereignty that makes consumers the sole authors of organizing.

This is what we have done to organizations; made the consumer the producer of the organizing, which is then consumed in a more pluralistic organization. In Barthe's (1970: 11-12) terms, "plural text." The consequence is that we as producers, must develop a flexible organizing, one that anticipates the options the consumer will choose at each point in the production process. We have made the consumer the author of production. We provide the consumer with a participative experience in the production process. In this way the narrative space of organizing makes the author (producer) subservient to the anticipated choice matrix of each consumer. It also moves us from a linear to a non-linear and polyphonic narrative space that is a "hermaphrodite." A hermaphrodite is a type of perfect beauty because it contains the greatest amount of variety within a unified whole. Producers now facilitate the experience and interaction of consumer with production in a co-evolving narrative, where beauty is defined by choice-complexity.

The consequence of hermaphrodite organizing is that each word of the story, each element of organizing has meaning. The consumer and producer co-generate meaning through each word choice in the

story. The meaning of organizing is not a linear beginning-middle-end linearity, but rises like the mist from each element of choice as the organizing unfolds. Meaning becomes a nimbus, a rain-producing cloud that surrounds organizing, and we assume the bright aura of this cloud is a beautiful halo surrounding the goddess organizing. Meaning is not the story's conclusion, nor its design, but it is how everything signifies something to the consumer who now is a co-producer.

The idea that organizing could move from linear narrative to co-produced consumer narrative inspired the flexible organizing of the last several decades. Instead of the consumer passively following a linear sequence imposed by a producer (author), the way organizing must be in bureaucratic organizing; the consumer began to make supplementary choices, facilitated by the narrator, to the main options (car is black, car is red, car is green). By the 1990s the drug of interactivity was just too tempting a fiction for authors of organizing to resist. The consumer was allowed to mess with the sequence of production without a co-producing narrator. This made organizing like a hypertext novel (choose the color, interior, model, tires, etc. in an order you like).

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In the co-producer model, consumers could produce subtle variations, in the company of a helpful narrator. The narrator reveals what will happen if the consumer chooses over-size tires, a small engine, and a sporty frame. The consumer could be told the same story by the narrator, from multiple points of view (Durrell's Alexandria), or be left alone to push the "random sequence" option (Cortazar's Hopscotch). In both the "co-producer with narrator companion" and the "random button" model, the consumer eventually arrives at some satisfactory choice.

In the full interactive model of organizing, the consumer can stumble through the production process, the narrative labyrinth, alone (no narrator). Instead of producer organizing, we come to the postmodern condition of consumer organizing. The organization becomes a "Tamara" where consumers choose which characters to follow, and which rooms to enter in a real mansion. "Since they can physically only follow one scene at a time, the choice they make determines the play they see." In effect, the consumers write their own play.

Consumers may not reflect upon what the choices they make about the production process they write/author indicates about themselves. The consumer can elect to keep the price so low, that the cost of labor turns every factory into a sweatshop, and every ecosystem into a toxic site of waste and pollution. The growing cadre of postmodern organizing gurus who wax poetic about the interactive organization, suggest that consumer involvement democratizes the organizing process. Interactivity is seen as a vehicle for the enfranchisement of the creatively challenged consumer. Finally Valley Bart Simpson can co-produce with Henry Ford. But beneath this seductive promise of a new business Eden there's some serious hierarchical-patriarchal butt-kicking going on (paraphrasing Krizanc).

Consumer sovereignty over the production process means issues that should properly be decided in a political economy arena of stakeholder debate are reduced to consumer choice making. Cries for inclusion in the production process by workers of the Third world are met with indifference; voices go unheard. Fatigued with the real battle of exploitation, organization theorists following the consumer model have retreated into the aesthetics of the art of organizing. We have confused the distinction between the world of production life and the word; they attack the hierarchy of organizing by a producing author, as if it mirrored some political hierarchy. The consequence of the interactive consumer turned producer model is more oppressive work conditions.

Making consumer into hermaphrodite, for the perfect beauty of organizing, increased the variety of choice, but has not improved the quality of work life or ecology. The greatest amount of consumer choice gives a sense of consumer belonging, but chains producing talent to the crack house of interactivity; there shall no organizing Gods above consumer.

In the new quantum mechanics paradigm of organizing, we are told to forget narrative trajectory of Newton with its linear beginning, middle, and end; linearity is fascist organizing. Organizers must surrender to interactivity, and free the consumer from the tyranny of the producer/author. The tyrannical producer forces the consumer to ploddingly follow the plot. Only the consumers' entreaties matter. Since the consumer cares not about wage or ecology, then none shall care. However, it is more complex than that.

Factions of consumers are organizing to plead with producers to earnestly organize in eco-sustainable ways that gives workers living wages. A system that only gives voice to the consumer keeps workers and ecology disenfranchised. The fantasy persists that by giving the consumer more

choice in organizing the production process; there will be more effective organizations, ones with higher quality, lower cost, and more sustainability.

In the interactive consumer model, with a virtual click of the cursor the consumer renders the totalitarian bureaucracy into a democracy. In virtual organizing, each consumer can decide how much is paid to workers, the stock options of executives, where a component is produced, how much quality to incorporate into the final product, when to disobey environmental laws.

In the virtual interactive organizing fiction, the consumer does not encounter real life. Consumers are so busy clicking buttons, making choices about design options; they think they are participating in something real. "But choice alone, is not freedom." You do not get to sustainable ecology, living wage, or control of executive (over) compensation by clicking the remote control. The consumer is still a passive participant in the fictional world of global commerce. The consumer is preoccupied with choices of color, fabric, memory capacity, and has no idea who makes the components, under what conditions, and with what environmental consequences. In this way the consumer model is no better than the producer model of organizing; the business of raping and pillaging continues.

The consumer has adopted the same methods at his oppressor. It is possibly worse. The producer in the interactive-consumer model, is condemned to be the victim of the insatiable choice-appetite of the consumer, who demands options in every aspect of the plot. This means the producers and managers must write not one but a hundred plots, anticipating whatever the consumer made decide. The sheer volume of organizing subroutines necessary to satiate the whims of the interactive consumer

If we move to the next level of virtual organizing, where neither consumer nor

producer controls choices, where both consumer and producers become dead authors and the digital program takes over, the consequences get direr. In Barthe's (1986: 52-53) essay "The Death of the Author", he writes, text "consists not of a line of words, releasing a single 'theological' meaning (a communication from the Author/God), but of a multidimensional space in which are married and contested several writings, none of which is original: the text is a fabric of quotations, resulting from a thousand sources of culture."

It becomes more difficult to trace who is in control of the narrative, who programs the plot twists and turns. The organizing narrative becomes self-designing and self-articulating, divorced from producer, programmer, and consumer. The process has so many choice points, it is so complex, heterogeneous, and convoluted in design options that it is a living organic thing that no map can represent. The narrative plot is divorced from both producer and consumer.

The virtual author of the organizing narrative has been removed from accountability. Producers and consumers meet in organizing spaces where representations of class, gender, and ethnicity, moral, or ecological values have no trace. Consumers and producers read these digital spaces, and make organizing decisions that exclude stakeholders who suffer the consequences of their exclusion. The experience of a teenager in Thailand, making Disney toys will be very different from a gleeful consumer who purchases Big Mac with Mickey Mouse plaything. Stakeholders in the global supply and distribution chain read the virtual spaces differently than the interactive consumer intended. They read them from their socially constructed experience of organizing and producing.

Consumers and producers do not see through the digital façade to what are the material conditions of production. The organizing construct, its mapped representations are always incomplete. The

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maps are simplified to appeal to consumers who live a quick paced life, in a rhythm where speed counts for more than dialogic investigation; who has time to include all the stakeholders? A dialogic investigation would trace the physical conditions and networks beneath the surface of the virtual representation. Globalization would attain a social and ecological context, where overlapping layers are explored using the high-power interactive interface of human and digital world.

The organizing narrative would unfold as a result of multiple stakeholder participation. This would mean that neither consumer nor producer would be sovereign. The programmers would need to address problems of transparency and opacity. The screens would need to illustrate the consequences of choices. Cybermalls and virtual workplaces would need to include the voice of the voiceless. The happy and tidy digital images would need to give way to the reality of city pollution, traffic, and chaos.

This puts an incredible burden on the organizers of production and consumption. The author must now write hundreds, but thousands of plots, anticipate consequences of choices, provide interactive spaces for stakeholders to dialog, and create ports of access to the voiceless. Even if such a system existed, when list serves and chat rooms get larger than a few participants, people quit the process. It is too time consuming; there are too many messages; take me off this list. I have noticed in web-linked-texts the reader does not enjoy being presented with too many alternatives. Yet, in the Barthe model, every word has a multiplicity of meanings, and presents an intertextual transport point to other worlds.

Organizing is caught between the limits of linearity and overload. Ironically, both linearity and complexity (interactive stakeholder dialog) leads us to common humanity, to a view of the real. Too much

choice destroys the author's ability to create empathy for characters whose worldviews do not correspond to their own. With consumer sovereignty, the post-producer clicks a button, and poof, the character is reimagined as compatible in worldview to the consumer. The reader sees himself reflected in the narrative that appears on the screen.

Defenders might argue that the consumer ultimately writes the whole organizing text. The consumer is the market. They say the producer's task is only to design a labyrinth of multiple plots the consumer will enjoy. If the consumer does not like one labyrinth of organizing they will choose another -- the market rules. Starbucks, for example, provides a labyrinth where one choice brings you organic latte, another from the most oppressive plantations of Brazil. Interactivity turns Starbucks into the fiction of a sustainable and responsible corporate citizen (you don't like to oppress the peasant, then choose this type of coffee). Interactivity exposes the producer as huckster. The organization is desperate to cling to the legs of every passing consumer, begging them to stay.

In our battle to purge corporations of their impurities, we have turned first to consumer sovereignty, then expanded interactivity to include all possible stakeholders. The new hybrid firms such as Starbucks offer both exploitation and humane coffee. Consumers struggle to pierce the façade of public image management to find out just how organic and humane that coffee really is. Faced with the proliferation of choices and network options for plot involvement, consumers find the processes overwhelming. Firms are experimenting with new ways consumers and producers can participate in ways that is not overwhelming.

Social construction theories of organizing can no longer be content with a cognitive model. Rather, the maps must include material conditions. New ways of organizing

must evolve to deal with deteriorating ecology, without jettisoning the consumer by overflowing them with choice points and intertext demands. Consumers will need to become more savvy to ways they can deconstruct corporate PR, and find ways to lobby their concerns.

Storytelling is no longer a single author telling stories around the campfire; storytelling in global commerce is a corporate media event, where PR agents are the new tricksters. The cyber-myth is that through greater interactivity in computers space, consumers and producers will access the virtual library of knowledge-texts and be empowered by democratic dialog. Barthe defined myth as depoliticized speech. The information revolution of globalization is more illusion than democratic accomplishment. In the 1970s globalization became the buzz word, the way for Fordist production systems to meet the niche needs of differentiated consumer markets. Never mind national sovereignty or labor organizing, the transnational corporations had figured a way to do mass business while offering consumers product choices. The post-Fordist economy was shored up with NAFTA, WTO, IMF, and World Bank. The Internet revolution of the 1980s and 1990s led to the myth that when the computer married flexible production processes, a virtual utopia was being born. Consumers and producers would utilize virtual communication to bring the utopia organizing into being. Each year we have developed more ways to adapt production to consumer

preference.

It is not utopia. Virtual organizing is not accessible to everyone. When it is accessible, we buy equipment and software that has to be debugged by consumers who are told to make adjustments or install patches to perfect the product. Combining tasks, such as making quality a job of the assembler, eliminates jobs. AT&T owns the largest cable television firm Media One. General Electric owns NBC, Viacom owns CBS, Disney owns ABC, AOL-Time Warner owns Turner Broadcasting. Bertelsmann owns Random House publishing and Vivendi, the French telecommunications firm (merged with Seagram of Canada and Sony movies.

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