

# **The Viability of Experimental Narratives: A Contextualization of Robert Coover's "The Babysitter" in the Era of Media Streaming**

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## **Abstract**

Robert Coover's "The Babysitter" is a mosaic of changing focalization and realities. It is elucidated by a framework of *markers*, which help readers track the shifts between focalizers as well as realities, fantasies, and hyperrealities. Written before the digital age, the story anticipated the technological advancements that would facilitate reader immersion in multi-branched and interactive narratives. Until recently, the lack of commercial viability of such projects left the likes of "The Babysitter" outside the scope of the mainstream. Today, the advancement of streaming platforms has provided the necessary infrastructure and audience reach to render experimental narratives more viable than before.

**Keywords:** fragmentation, focalization, adaptation, media streaming, interactive narratives

## Abstrakt

„The Babysitter” Roberta Coovera jest mozaiką focalizacji oraz wątków fabularnych. Rozumienie tak skonstruowanej historii umożliwiają znaczniki, które sygnalizują czytelnikom przejścia pomiędzy focalizacjami, jak i zawartymi w nich wariantami: rzeczywistości, fantazji i hiperrzeczywistości. Tworząc opowiadanie przed erą cyfrową, Coover antycypował postęp technologiczny, który upowszechnił dostęp do interaktywnych opowieści. Do niedawna eksperymentalne utwory pozostawały poza sferą zainteresowań głównego nurtu. Dziś infrastruktura oraz zasięg, jakie niosą ze sobą platformy strumieniowe, tworzą nowe szanse na popularyzację narracji eksperymentalnych.

**Słowa kluczowe:** fragmentaryczność, focalizacja, adaptacja, media strumieniowe, media interaktywne

## 1. “The Babysitter’s” Meaning

Robert Coover’s early short story collection *Pricksongs and Descants*, published in 1969, polarized its contemporary critics. Some, along with Robert Scholes, thought the author conveyed a “Platonic viewpoint” (Heckard 1976, 210). Others, like Neil Schmitz, criticized Coover’s “hollow, over-stylized, and sometimes trivial” vision (210). It is possible that *Pricksongs*’ openness to interpretation results from Coover’s endeavour to convey his disillusionment with “religion, art, history, and science” as systems catering to the human compulsion “to organize and give meaning to life’s intrinsic disorder” (Gordon 1983, 87). More likely, is that the collection’s “self-contradictory or self-cancelling fictions (“The Magic Poker,” “The Elevator,” “Quenby and Ola, Swede and Carl,” “The Babysitter”)” anticipated an era where technological advancements would facilitate the reader’s immersion in multi-branched and interactive narratives, such as the hypertext fiction or its motion picture equivalents (McHale 1987, 20).

*Pricksongs*’ best-known story, “The Babysitter,” lacks a narrative definitiveness. The reader can know with certainty only that the babysitter arrives at the Tucker home, that they leave for a party, and that Jack and Mark play pinball (Petitjean 1995, 50). The remainder of the narrative is a patchwork of story variants deprived of any ontological hierarchy markers. Without such indications, it is impossible to decipher whether the forking and converging stories are self-cancelling, or whether they present an infinitude

of co-existing realities (see McHale 1987, 21; Heckard 1976, 220). Nevertheless, the story seems to offer a critique of the "superficialities of lives whose most intense relationships seem to be with the TV" (Evans and Green 2003, 94). Indeed, most of the characters' undertakings are mimicked, even ridiculed, by the televised dramas of the ever-present television. It displays images of a human condition that is limited to its primal urges. Coover's story parodies this simplification. Sex as the source of acceptance, dominance, and self-affirmation is the singular constant objective of his characters. He capitulates his point in the ultimate paragraph. Being faced by the culmination of the story's most tragic variants (her children murdered, husband gone, house wrecked), Mrs. Tucker's reaction is to, "see what's on the late late movie" (Coover 1969, n.p.).

## 2. Adaptability

Coover underscores the subject of his critique by having his text imitate the medium. The story is written in the third-person present tense, favouring visual, auditory and kinaesthetic imagery over the olfactory or tactile. It foregrounds characters' actions and dialogue over their thoughts, thus refusing readers the direct access to the characters' subjectivity. In other words, the narrator tends "to stay on the surface of human behaviour" (Lodge 1992, 118). Such a style facilitates any potential adaptation attempts. In fact, the text reads like a near screenplay (see comparison below). Still, considering the narrative's spectacular intricacies, it is reasonable to question whether Coover's story could function within the bounds of the audiovisual medium.

Hollywood's answer to the question seems to be "no" (at least until recently). The story's lack of an ontological hierarchy renders all of the endings equally real or unreal, thus refusing to provide its readers with a definitive resolution. Such narrative outcome stands in contrast to the "emotionally satisfying" ending that has become the film industry's standard; screenwriters are compelled to write denouements that might "sum up and concentrate" the meaning and emotion that they aim to convey (see: Iglesias 2005, 121–122; Mckee 1997, 303–314). "The Babysitter" might prove a thrill to narrative theorists,<sup>1</sup> but as Hillary Dannenberg rightly argues, Coover's "concerted sabotaging of

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<sup>1</sup> Brian Evenson argues that "The Babysitter" "not only forces us to think about fiction, about how stories are put together, but it also gives us all the enjoyment that one—or several—conventional and suspenseful stories might provide" (2003, 94).

narrative immersion has not rendered [the story] sufficiently interesting for many readers” (2008, 216). It is likely, that from the film industry’s perspective “The Babysitter,” in its original form, is commercially unviable.

Figure 1: excerpt “The Babysitter” (Coover 1969, n.p.)

“\*”

Down forbidden alleys. Into secret passageways. Unlocking the world’s terrible secrets. Sudden shocks: a trapdoor! a fall! or the stunning report of a rifle shot, the whaaai-ii-iing! of the bullet biting concrete by your ear! Careful! Then edge forward once more, avoiding the light, inch at a time, now a quick dash for an open doorway – look out! there’s a knife! a struggle! no! the long blade glistens! jerks! thrusts! stabbed! No, no, it missed! The assailant’s down, yes! the spy’s on top, pinning him, a terrific thrashing about, the spy rips off the assailant’s mask: a woman!

“\*”

Figure 2: excerpt *Die Hard* (Stuart 1987, 281)

As GLASS FLIES EVERYWHERE, McClane sees one option, takes it. BLASTING a burst to keep their heads down, he WHIRLS, JUMPS on top of a long counter and RUNS ACROSS THE ROOM. Their BULLETS follow him, six inches behind his moving form! Big CRAY UNITS GROAN with electronic SQUEALS and SPARKS as a million Gigabytes goes to RAM heaven.

Surprisingly, Paramount Pictures did create their version of Coover’s story. Released straight to video in 1995, *The Babysitter* marks Guy Ferland’s directorial debut. Unsurprisingly, the director conventionalized the story’s experimental form, turning it into an erotic thriller. Ferland not only opted to provide the story with an “emotionally satisfying” conclusion,<sup>2</sup> he made sure to delineate the boundaries between reality, fantasy, and nightmare. As a result, Ferland’s film, like the melodramas on Tuckers’ TV, emulates the very “storytelling conventions,” or tropes, that Coover aimed to satirize (Petitjean 1995, 49). This deviation from the original vision most likely did not result from a misunderstanding

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<sup>2</sup> In the film version, Jack’s friend, Mark, is reimagined as the story’s primary antagonist. In the final act, Mr. Tucker runs him over, thus terminating the threat he poses to the babysitter.

of the source material. Considering Ferland's successful directorial career, his debut was most likely intended as a proof of craftsmanship rather than artistry.

Ferland's attempt does little to test the motion picture's capacities for sustaining the likes of Coover's story. On the other hand, experimental films, notably structuralist cinema, have been examining the cinematic potential for expression as far back as the dawn of the medium (see Dixon 2011, 77–82). Likewise, recognized directors, such as Orson Welles, Akira Kurosawa, Alain Resnais, David Lynch, González Iñárritu, Christopher Nolan, etc. have experimented with fragmentation, temporal sequentiality, and alternate realities. Still, it remains difficult to identify a film that has achieved an effect of "The Babysitter"'s narrative overwhelmingness.

Having moulded a cubist-like mosaic of the sixties' suburbia out of its narrative chaos, the story stands as one of the most extreme examples of "radical metafiction" (Dannenberg 2008, 216). To adapt such a vision, it is necessary to commit to one of several ways of dissecting the narrative into more comprehensible elements. While the story is split into one hundred and seven paragraphs, each separated by an asterisks sign enclosed inside quotation marks ("\*"), the story's lack of ontological hierarchy markers makes it impossible to assign precedence to the sections "that are, or at least seem to be, real," over those "that appear to be dreams, wishes, fantasies, films, or television shows" (Alber et al. 2010, 118). Narrative theorist, Tom Petitjean, suggests two possible ways of imposing a sense of order onto the narrative. The first is by maintaining the "timeline" as the centre of reference. Petitjean proposes that numeric representation of time such as, "7:40, ten minutes late;" "At 8:30, it is time for recalcitrant Jimmy's bath;" "By 9:00, the babysitter has cleaned up the Tucker kitchen;" represents one of the story's "realities" (Petitjean 2010, 50). In contrast, a spelled-out representation of time, "soon to be nine," represents a different one. The second way, he writes, is to consider the story variants' spatial setting. Consequently, such a reading proposes that "'reality' is grounded in the Tucker home [while] everything outside the home can be considered other, or 'nonreality'" (50). This renders the babysitter as the story's main focalizer.<sup>3</sup> What follows is that all fantasies, including those which seem

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<sup>3</sup> "Focalization," stands for the relationship between the narrator and the character's perspective, or as Bal puts it, "the vision through which the elements are presented and, on the other, the identity of the voice that is verbalizing that vision" (Bal 2009, n.p.). Such a distinction is especially pertinent to prose which, much like "The Babysitter," employs multiple third-person limited narrations, which, with each new section, switch between the characters' perspective limitations. The "focalizer" can be understood as "the point from which the [perceived] elements are viewed," which in the case of the babysitter, are the five characters (Mr. Tucker, Mrs. Tucker, Jack, Jimmy), with the TV set acting as the sixth focalizer (Bal 2009, n.p.).

to objectify her, are in fact the babysitter's own imaginings. Thus her ruminations include a "rape fantasy," the fantasy of being desired by peers or an older man as well as "the fantasy of being more desirable than [Mrs' tucker]" (Petitjean 2010, 50–51).

### 3. Focalization and Story Variant Markers

Though Petitjean makes a compelling argument, his theories do not account for Coover's careful maintenance of separate focalizations. Though conceivably the babysitter fantasies about getting raped, the idea seems inconsequential, considering that such imaginings occur in sections that clearly focalize on either Jack or Mr. Tucker. The same could be said of the remaining fantasies, thus the dichotomy of real and imagined realities forgoes the myriad of mutually exclusive viewpoints.

"The Babysitter" presents the perspectives of five focalizers: the babysitter, Mr. Tucker, Mrs. Tucker, Jack, and Jimmy. Coover uses an internal focalization where the "reality-status of the different objects represented is variable and contingent upon their relation to the focalizer" (Bal 2009, n.p.). This technique allows the narrator to reveal a different perspective while allowing the story variants (which consist of fantasies, realities, hyperrealities and TV broadcasts) to remain character-specific. To illustrate, the story variants in which the babysitter acts as the focalizer begin with the girl's arrival at the Tucker house. From that point, the events and their progressions diverge. Temporal continuity disintegrates, while some plot points persist. Amongst others, the babysitter repeatedly feeds the children (Jimmy and Bitsy), soaks in the Tuckers' bathtub and answers the ringing phone. The endings of this focalization branch off to include: the babysitter getting raped (by various perpetrators), slipping and hitting her head, or (through negligence) causing the death of the Tuckers' youngest child. This focalization, and the variants it includes, is interlaced with the remaining focalizers' storylines, all of which are equally intricate.

All through the narrative, Coover helps identify the given focalizer by means of *focalization markers*. On the other hand, *fantasy arrestors*, *continuity disruption markers*, and *self-aware exaggerations* signpost the change of story variants. Undoubtedly, a successful adaptation of "The Babysitter" would require a translation of the aforementioned into audiovisual cues that would enable a similar narrative comprehension.

The focalization markers include subject pronouns, thought descriptions, displays of characters' subjective interpretations and the blatant gratification of characters' desires. The foremost is used frequently in the opening paragraphs. However, as the story

progresses, character interactions become more convoluted, while the references to their names become rarer, often providing no more than the information of the focalizer's sex. Moreover, many paragraphs blend character thought descriptions with actions. Especially in the later paragraphs, thought descriptions are rarely identified by appropriate tags and therefore become obscured. For example, section twenty-nine begins with the sentence: "*probably* some damn kid over *there* right now. Wrestling around on the couch in front of *his* TV. Maybe *he* should drop back to the house. Just to check" (Coover 1969, n.p.; italics mine). The reference to the previously established "couch" and "TV" and their relation to the subject pronoun point to Mr. Tucker as the focalizer. This is reinforced by the establishment of causality that links Mr. Tucker's premonitions with his decision to leave the party. Together, these elements allow the reader to understand that the description is of Mr. Tucker's decision-making process without the need to identify it as such within the text.

As mentioned, in "The Babysitter" several plot points persist throughout the narrative. A more interesting focalization marker can be found in some of these recurrent-event sections. As the episodes are often retold from different perspectives, the manner of their rendition reflects the focalizers' subjective interpretation of reality. The babysitter's bath is one of the most revisited scenarios. It is the sexual "locus" of Mr. Tucker's, Jack's and Jimmy's focalizations. The lattermost, for example, demonstrates Jimmy's prepubescent curiosity. As the boy peeks through the bathroom door keyhole, he sees the babysitter's "big bottom as she bends over to stir in the bubblebath" (Coover 1969, n.p.). Though, much like Mr. Tucker and Jack, Jimmy acts as a voyeur, he is preoccupied with the girl's preponderant strength and size, whereas the other men seem to relish in their exhibiting dominance over the "narrow-shouldered" girl (Coover 1969, n.p.).

Subjective interpretation is likewise evidenced in character dialogue. In one of Jack's focalization his over the phone exchange with the babysitter is suave and eloquent:

`Well, we just sorta thought we'd drop over,' *he* says, and winks broadly at Mark... `Tell her, good thing like her, gotta pass it around,' whispers Mark, dragging on his smoke, then flicking the butt over under the *pinball machine*... `Oh, Mark and I were just saying, like two's company, three's an orgy,' Jack says, and winks again. *She* giggles. `Oh, Jack!' (Coover 1969, n.p.; italics mine)

The same conversation described from the babysitter's perspective reveals Jack to be insecure and inarticulate: `Well, we just called, we just, uh, thought we'd, you know, stop by for a minute, watch television for thirty minutes, or, or something.' `Who's we?' `Well,

Mark's here, I'm with him, and he said he'd like to, you know, like if it's all right, just – 'Well, it's *not* all right. The Tuckers said no'" (Coover 1969, n.p.; italics original). Aside from Jack's incompetence, the babysitter's focalization shows a different outcome of the conversation; Jack fails at his objective. Interestingly, it is not until the babysitter "hangs up" and "returns to the TV" that the reader is made aware that she has been the focalizer of the events. It is her biased interpretation of the same conversation that becomes the most obvious perspective marker.

In a similar vein, the outcome of the fantasy variants is often revealing of the focalizer. The gratifications usually involve the fulfilment of sexual desires and are "blatant" in that they disrupt the expectations created by the previous sections' tone. The reader may begin to sense manipulation as if the story's natural progression was being purposefully altered to satisfy the focalizer's wants. Jack's focalization provides a good example of this. All of his variants convene at the drugstore where Jack and his friend Mark conspire to seduce and/or rape the babysitter. A blatant gratification of Jack's desire occurs when the babysitter not only agrees to a threesome but also seems to favour Jack of her two partners:

Mark is kissing her. Jack is under the blanket, easing her panties down over her squirming hips. Her hand is in his pants, pulling it out, pulling it towards her, pulling it hard. She knew just where it was! Mark is stripping, too. God, it's really happening! he thinks with a kind of pious joy, and notices the open door. 'Hey! What's going on here?' (Coover 1969, n.p.)

A similar scenario had previously commenced in paragraph thirty-three. Only then was the situation disrupted by a fantasy arrestor (discussed below), thus revealing the situation to be Jack's imagining. The line "God, it's really happening!" implies that this variant is an actual fulfilment of Jack's fantasy. However, the babysitter, whose previous curiosity and unfamiliarity of the male body implied her sexual inexperience, now acts with the competence of an adult film actress. Such inconsistency may be emblematic of "bad TV writing," but regardless of whether it was intended as a commentary, the disruption of tone identifies the focalizer.

Within each of the focalizations, Coover introduces story variants that function as renditions of reality, fantasy or hyperreality. Again, readers may find signposts to help them discern between the modes. Those include fantasy arrestors and continuity disruption markers which indicate divisions between reality and fantasy, whereas self-aware

exaggerations help identify a hyperreality. The lattermost, much like the blatant gratification of desire, call attention to themselves by a sudden shift of tone.

Many sections open with descriptions which may confuse the reader as to the variant's type. Fantasies might be made distinct from realities once the narrator arrests them by reintroducing established story elements such as a line of dialogue, a location outside of the Tucker's home, or occurrences such as the phone's ringing. Such fantasy arrestors are most prevalent in Mr. Tucker's focalization. His variants are set primarily at a party, where the intoxicated Mr. Tucker slips between that reality and his fantasies. For example, "he soaps her back... The soap slips, falls between his legs... 'Help me find it,' he whispers in her ear. 'Sure Harry,' says his host, going round behind him. 'What'd you lose?'" (Coover 1969, n.p.; italics mine). The sudden shift is confusing not only to the reader. Mr. Tucker is also lost in what turns out to be a fantasy. The host's line of dialogue acts as the fantasy arrestor.

As the dramatic tension increases, the fantasy intrusions become more prevalent and their arrestors more obtrusive. Section sixty marks the climax of one of Tucker's story variants:

My God, it takes them forever. 'Some party!' 'You said it!' When they're more or less naked, he walks in. 'Hey! What's going on here?' They go white as bleu cheese. Haw haw! 'What's the little thing you got sticking out there, boy?' 'Harry behave yourself!' ... 'What in God's name are you talking about, Harry?' He staggers out of there, drink in hand, and goes to look for his car. (Coover 1969, n.p.; italics mine)

Here, the party's reality and the fantasy supplant one another with nearly every sentence. The remainder of Tucker's story variants occur outside of the party and concern his various pursuits of the babysitter. These storylines become the enactment of his previous fantasies (Mr. Tucker seems to be executing his reveries) and as such, they occur without any arrestors, that is until section one hundred and one. All storylines are then disrupted as Mr. Tucker reemerges at the party. His wife questions his whereabouts, evidencing his absence from the party, while the host notes that he "look[s] like [he has] just seen a ghost," this is a reference to Mr. Tucker's death (or near-death) experience, which also occurs in other characters' focalizations (Coover 1969, n.p.). The suggestion is that Mr. Tucker must have fallen asleep (possibly inside his car). The dialogue exchange, therefore, acts as a subtle fantasy arrestor, reassuring the reader that all of the events that occurred since section sixty, including Mr. Tucker's death, were instalments of an intoxicated dream.

Outside of Mr. Tucker's focalization, the boundaries between fantasy and reality are less delineated. Some story variants are retold and modified in different focalizations; others are discontinued. Nevertheless, certain story points endure unchanged, thus ensuring some plot clarity. Because their recurrence is always situated in a new context, they seem anachronistic to the reader. As such they disrupt the continuity of the storyline and mark the beginning of a new story variant.

Perhaps the most frequent continuity disruption marker is the phone, which rings thirteen times. None of the occurrences are a new plot development, but rather a variant of a similar situation. The reader is made aware of this by recognizing the similarity of the calls' circumstances. The phone interrupts the babysitter's activities that involve playing with the children, taking a bath, watching TV, combing her hair or changing the baby's diapers. On some occasion the girl answers to speak with Jack, Mrs. Tucker or an unidentified caller; on others, the phone simply causes the baby to wake. What remains constant is the freshness of the babysitter's reactions – she does not become increasingly annoyed by each call. Instead, she reacts with exhilaration, annoyance or anxiety befitting each individual situation. The phone call resets the story, forcing the babysitter to relive the episode anew. Similarly, the line, "Hey! What's going on here?" which occurs four times acts as a continuity disruption marker (Coover 1969, n.p.). Each time it marks Mr. Tucker's intrusion on Jack, Mark and the babysitter. Other markers include references to "dreams of Jeannie," Mr. Tucker's underpants and mentions of aspirin (Coover 1969, n.p.). Together they allow some containment to what would otherwise be a chaos of contradicting focalizations and story variants.

Hyperrealities, in contrast to fantasies, are story variants that expose the characters' anxieties. These scenarios are exaggerated and are additionally punctuated by spectators giving the variant a sense of self-awareness. The most notable examples include: Mrs. Tucker being helped by the party-goers to squeeze into her girdle; Mrs. Tucker finding four men in the bath with the babysitter; the community observing Jack's erection; Jack and Mark deciding to kill the Tucker children; the community finding bodies in the Tuckers residence, and Mrs. Tucker deciding to watch a late night movie after learning of her children's deaths. The self-awareness of the presented hyperrealities is mirrored by the TV's programming. The actions occurring on screen are often exaggerated echoes of what occurs in the Tuckers' home. The most obvious example is the babysitter's play-wrestling with the children. The descriptions of this action resemble and are often confused with the fight sequences that unfold in the televised stories. Such juxtaposition seems to pose the question: are the characters' hedonistic dispositions result of

their overexposure to the TV's sex-and-violence saturated imagery? Or is the TV merely a reflection of characters? The answer lies in Coover's use of self-aware exaggerations. Because the instances of hyperreality capsule most of the focalizations, they propose that TV's prevalence causes the storylines to gravitate towards a similar effect. The tragic consequences of life imitating the televised exaggeration of itself becomes the story's underlying message.

#### 4. A Distant Adaptation

A film adaptation of the story would require a similar demarcation of the focalizations. This could be achieved by the use of character-specific colour-grading, framing, camerawork, costume or set design, lighting, focal length or depth of field control, editing pace, acting, etc. (see: Deleyto 1991, 159–177). To illustrate, Coover's use of subject pronouns could be emulated by framing choices that would favour the focalizer over the other characters; flirtatious acting and seductive costume choices could be employed to reflect a focalizer's subjective interpretation of reality. On the other hand, paragraph breaks could be mirrored by punctuating camera movements "or editing devices (cut, dissolve, fade, wipe, etc.)" (167). In a similar fashion, fantasy arrestors could be reinforced by means of sound editing, where one reality's soundtrack would spill over to another's; while self-aware exaggerations could be accentuated by the use of extreme camera angles, wide focal lengths, variations in motion's speed, etc.

Such an arsenal of devices has been compiled by filmmakers who undertook similar experiments with focalizations. One of the most recognized examples is Akira Kurosawa's *Rashomon* (1950). By means of focalization, the story examines the limits of human subjectivity (see: Genette 1972, 207). A similar effect is achieved in the television series *The Affair* (2014–2019), where each episode considers the same timeline from different perspectives. Still, neither of the examples do well to compare with Coover's story, as their narratives are structured in a way that facilitates their comprehension.

Years after the publication of *Pricksongs*, Coover started the Brown University's hypertext program which promotes hypertext and hypermedia fiction. These computer-based compositions allow readers to shape the narrative by selecting the hyperlinked storylines they wish to follow (Evenson 2003, 1). Considering that "The Babysitter" was conceived before the digital age, its multi-branched narrative seems to have been anticipant of the technological capabilities which would allow reader emersion in an

interactive narrative. Netflix's *Black Mirror* series instalment "Bandersnatch" (2018) is a motion picture application of the same concept. Incidentally, the information-overload effect that transpires from the film's multi-branched narrative is comparable to that of Coover's "The Babysitter."

"Bandersnatch" utilizes "click-technology via remote" allowing the audience's input to shape the narrative's "plot, ending, or run time" (Ogle 2019, 18). Written by the *Black Mirror* series creator, Charlie Brooker, "Bandersnatch" forks into several story variants that follow a game-developer's mutually exclusive attempts to create a computer game. With each failure, the story resets, and the viewer is forced to start over (Strause 2018). Interestingly, the interactive aspect of the film acts as an empathy elicitor in that it "prompts the spectator to centrally imagine the experience" of the protagonist (Vaage 2010, 159–160). Much like him, the viewers become disoriented and overwhelmed by the narrative's labyrinth (Sharf 2019).

Streaming media platforms extend their reach to niche audiences. By offering several language versions of the same product they can cater to a worldwide audience. More importantly, their consumer data analysis strategies allow them to identify users' tastes. This enables them to make prognosis as to a more experimental narrative's commercial viability (see Arnold 2016). By increasing their capabilities, the companies are able to begin to market less conventional products. Though Netflix has not released any official data regarding "Bandersnatch," it is possible to gauge from Brooker's comments that the network will attempt similar projects in the future (Sharf 2019). This seems all the more likely, considering that interactive films' experience is bound by the platform's technologies. Such narratives cannot be experienced in a movie theatre, nor can they be broadcasted by traditional means. Additionally, any attempt to pirate their content would require the inclusion of a playback software that would allow the same kind of interactive engagement.

The major difference between "Bandersnatch" and "The Babysitter" lies in the view of the human experience they offer. By allowing viewers to control the protagonist, Brooker's film ironically illustrates the absence of a free will. Coover's story, on the other hand, expresses the insignificance of choice that is lost in the chaos of reality. Still, much like the "The Babysitter," the film assigns no ontological hierarchy to any of its "five main possible endings" (Brooker and Slade 2019). In effect, both narratives leave their audiences feeling bewildered by their lack of definitiveness. Nevertheless, "Bandersnatch" demonstrates that streaming platforms, by providing both the necessary infrastructure and audience reach, grant a new level of viability to experimental narratives.

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