Diegesis and Representation: Beyond the Fictional World, on the Margins of Story and Narrative

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Abstract The article raises the question whether the term *diegesis*—despite its rather widespread use among scholars—lacks a coherent definition. When diegesis is interpreted as the "narrated world," the concepts related to hetero- and extradiegesis turn out to be partly inconsistent. This is why the article resorts to the notion of world; it considers defining diegesis as a "limited field" within the narrated world. However, this attempt at defining diegesis reveals certain peculiarities of representation. Their analysis leads to another characterization of diegesis: as—roughly speaking—the information *explicitly* conveyed by a representation. As an effect of processing meaning, diegesis is, then, not a narratological tool but an epistemic phenomenon that requires further examination.

1. Taking a First Look at Diegesis

1.1. Introduction

Gérard Genette's term *diegesis* (French *diégèse*, not *diégésis*)—along with its various compound expressions such as *homodiegetic*, *extradiegetic*, and so on—has become an essential element of narratological terminology. The shortest definition, which Genette (1969: 211) provides in "D'un récit baroque," seems to say all that is necessary to understand what the term refers to: *diegesis* is simply "the spatiotemporal universe" of the story. The term is so practical and lucid and its use so widespread that, at first sight, there is no need for its more accurate characterization. There has been some discus-

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sion about the compound expressions and the concepts of voice and mood promoted by Genette (1980 [1972]: 161–262; 1988 [1983]: 41–43, 79–83), but the idea of world or universe itself has not been scrutinized. The aim of this article is to show that neither Genette's more detailed definitions nor the terminological refinements supplied by other researchers identify an ambiguity that lies at the core of the very idea that the term *diegesis* tries to capture. In particular, I wish to suggest that diegesis is *not* the narrated universe.

In order to demonstrate this argument, it will be necessary to elucidate, in the first part of this article, some of the concepts associated with diegesis and to examine these associations. I will begin by looking at the compound expressions already mentioned, because Genette has never treated diegesis as an issue in itself but has always analyzed it with respect to homo-, hetero-, extra-, and intradiegesis. Genette in turn borrowed the concept from Étienne Souriau (1951: 7), whose original definition will be detailed along with the etymology of the word; the term is derived from the Greek word for *narrative*. It will turn out to be an open question as to what extent diegesis depends on narrating, and we will consider definitions proposed by different scholars. The first part of the article will thus give an overview of current concepts of diegesis and their conceptual difficulties.

The second part of this article, however, endeavors to sharpen our understanding of diegesis. This clarification will depend on a concept of story and discourse that separates "content" and "form" more rigorously than is done in published research by using a new concept of representation. In the end, I will conclude that fundamentally diegesis is to be viewed less as a narratological tool or a theoretical term, amenable to an analytic, "mathematical" definition, than as an epistemic[1] phenomenon that deserves further analysis.

1.2. Genette's Definition of Diegesis

Genette defines *diegesis* indirectly, chiefly employing the term to introduce the notions of homo-, hetero-, extra-, and intradiegesis (1969: 202, 211; 1972: 72n1, 280, 238; 1980 [1972]: 27n2, 228; 1988 [1983]: 105). I am not going to criticize Genette's (1980 [1972]: 161–262; 1988 [1983]: 41–43, 79–83) term or his overall conceptions of voice and mood. My first point is simply that Genette takes his idea of diegesis more or less for granted.

Genette (1969: 211) invokes Souriau's (1951: 7) definition when he speaks

1. In the present article, *epistemic* means *related to the acquired knowledge and actual practice of structuring perception or any kind of experience.* Structuring should be understood in the sense of Niklas Luhmann's (2000 [1995]) concept of observation, which will be detailed in section 2.1.

of "l'univers spatio-temporel auquel se réfère la narration première" (the spatiotemporal universe to which the outer action of telling refers; my translation).[2] In his usage, the French word *narration* refers to the action of telling and not to the story (*histoire*). In another short explication of diegesis, or rather of the adjective *diegetic*, he explains: "diégétique = 'qui se rapporte ou appartient à l'histoire'" (diegetic = what relates, or belongs, to the story; my translation) (Genette 1972: 280; missing in the English translation by Jane E. Lewin [1980]). Genette (1980 [1972]: 27n2) also states: "With the same meaning ('story'), I will also use the term *diegesis*, which comes to us from the theoreticians of cinematographic narrative" (translation of Genette 1972: 72n1). This suggests that diegesis *can* be equated with the story itself or is part of it.

At the same time, the diegesis crucially depends on the *action* of telling and not on the discourse (*récit*). Genette thus implicitly *restricts* the notion of universe (not by tautologically stating that it is spatiotemporal, since any explicit definition of *universe* would include both space and time); the diegesis is the universe, but there must be a certain relationship between the action of telling and the story told, on the one hand, and this universe, on the other hand. This is to be expected, since Genette needs the definition of *diegesis* to analyze some specific features of narratives in general (and not of "universes"). In the book that has had a strong impact on narratology, *Narrative Discourse*, Genette (1980 [1972]: 228) explicitly points to the relevance of the act of telling and of the story in his definition of extradiegesis and of narrative *levels*:

> We will define this difference in level by saying that *every event told by a narrative* [*récit*] *is at a diegetic level immediately superior to the level at which the narrating act* [*l'acte narratif*] *producing this narrative is placed.* M. de Renoncourt's writing of his fictive *Mémoires* is a (literary) act carried out at the first level, which we will call *extradiegetic*; the events told in those *Mémoires* (including Des Grieux's narrating act) are inside this first narrative [récit], so we will describe them as *diegetic*, or *intradiegetic*; the events told in Des Grieux's narrative, a narrative in the second degree, we will call *metadiegetic.* (Genette 1980: 238; Lewin translation)

Extradiegesis means being exterior to the diegesis. It is a topological metaphor. To determine this exteriority is thus to explain diegesis; knowing the limits of a diegesis, then, provides a clear outline of what it consists of.

2. The expression *récit premier* was translated as "action of telling" (Genette 1980 [1972]: 26). The action itself will play an important role for my argument: see section 1.4. I prefer "outer" to "at first level" (ibid.: 228) as a translation for "premier," since it is, as we will see, strongly linked to the idea of exteriority as denoted by the prefix *extra* in *extradiegetic*.

The first, "extradiegetic" level that Genette describes belongs to an "area" that is not part of the "spatiotemporal universe" the narration produces. Outside this universe, we have *at least* the narrator who is telling the actual or primary story and who, as a "voice," following Genette (1980 [1972]: 213), is responsible for the "actual text," for the "narrating act."[3] Instead of using the term *universe* (as in Genette 1969: 211), Genette speaks here of *narrative* (récit): the events told in the *Mémoires* are "inside" the first narrative, while Renoncourt (insofar as he writes the text) stands outside the first narrative.

Seemingly, there is no strict logic to Genette's use of the terms *universe*, *narrative*, *story*, and *act of telling* in the context of diegesis. This is why we will use the expression *narration* to indicate the object of our research, any kind of narrative communication, in order to avoid all conflict with *discourse*, *narrative*, and *story*. (Of course, in quotations *narrative* often simply stands for narration in our sense.) Furthermore, we will not differentiate between *discourse* and *narrative*, which are taken for genuine synonyms. It will turn out that there is a close affinity between narrative/discourse and narration; we will discuss the terms *story* and *narrative/discourse* extensively (section 2.3).

Narration takes place at the outermost ("first") level, producing the primary narration. Aiming at a distinction of levels, Genette classifies actions and "events" that are "told" or, synonymously, "narrated" and assigns them to levels. Each level entails a diegesis of its own. And if one also accepts Genette's definition that *each* diegesis is a spatiotemporal universe, then each level must be conceived of as a universe. The only "anomaly" can be seen in the first level, that is, in the real "spatiotemporal universe," which is *not* a diegesis—because there is no action of telling bringing forth reality itself.

In his example from *Manon Lescaut*, quoted above, Genette discerns three levels. There is a primary universe produced by the "outer" Renoncourt. On the outermost level, there is no diegesis. This is where the *first* action of telling takes place. Renoncourt as narrator is absolutely extradiegetic and not inside any diegesis. Genette (1988 [1983]: 84) would even say that he is "on exactly equal footing with the extradiegetic (real) public" but he is so only fictionally, because the shared "footing" and Renoncourt himself are not real. Only both inner levels are diegetic; one can assume that these are two diegeses nested into each other. Nesting of course means that a diegesis inside another diegesis is not cut off from the diegesis in which it

3. For "responsibility," see Genette 1993 [1991]: 69, with the term *actual* meaning a text and a story that a real reader may encounter.

resides but is a part of it. Can universes be, in this sense, nested? Analyzing how diegeses are put into one another, John Pier (1994: 211) concludes that "extradiegesis—unlike metalanguage—is not 'about' or 'on' diegesis, but rather that it is a narrative level which is *external* to that of the world represented in the primary narrative." However, looking closely at this phrase one feels inclined to ask what "the level of a world"[4] is supposed to be.

In section 2.1, I will therefore elaborate on the meaning of *universe* and *world* in this context. At the present point, however, one could intuitively say without any deeper analysis that a universe includes all entities and events without exception. In Genette's example, Renoncourt lives in a universe (not in the sense of diegesis but in the intuitive sense) and tells about his experiences in this universe. In narrating, however, he creates another universe (now in the sense of diegesis). In the intuitive sense of the term, however, Renoncourt does not produce a new universe but simply *acts* in and *talks* about the universe (in the intuitive sense) he lives in. Since Genette stresses that Renoncourt is "extradiegetic" and thus not a part of this universe (in the sense of diegesis), the question arises how this universe differs from the universe in the intuitive sense of the word.

Another example, one regarding factual narration, will clarify the problem. The concept of extradiegesis has to do with storytelling rather than fictionality. It can therefore be applied to factual narrations without much hesitation (see Genette 1993 [1991]: 68–72, also for hetero- and homodiegesis). If we apply Genette's classification and speak of the "extradiegetic narrator" of a factual narration, such a narrator is a real person in the real universe. While narrating, however, he or she is outside the universe (in the sense of diegesis) of his or her narration. For example, Winston S. Churchill (1948) tells about events that took place. As a homodiegetic narrator, he even recounts situations that he attended. Yet as the one producing the narration, he stays extradiegetic. However, factuality just means that the storytelling is about the real universe and thus about a universe of which the narrator (as a human being) is part. His or her universe is exactly the real one we live in and therefore the universe where factual stories take place. To put it differently, the expression *extradiegetic narrator* refers to a narrator "outside the diegesis" but *not* outside the spatiotemporal universe of the narration if that spatiotemporal universe is understood in terms of physics. Churchill remains a part of the real universe. This is what distinguishes factual from fictional narrations: the fictive "physical" universe is different from the real one. But in both cases, the fictional and the factual,

4. Pier's last "that" apparently refers back to "level." At least, I do not see any other word it could refer to. So Pier speaks in effect of "the level of a world."

one could say, quite correctly, that the narrator is outside the diegesis and base this statement on a good intuitive sense of what "outside the diegesis" denotes.

The distinction between extradiegesis and intradiegesis[5] is only one of the two contrasts in which the idea of diegesis plays a major role. The second is the pair of hetero- versus homodiegesis. Let us compare extradiegesis and heterodiegesis in order to explore what the two concepts have *in common*. Both describe a certain alienation or distance from diegesis, with the prefix *extra-* meaning exteriority and the prefix *hetero-* indicating foreignness and difference. (*Heteronomy* stands for foreign authority, *heterosexuality* for a sexual relationship between partners of opposite sexes, and so on.) While it is clear that Genette accentuates the difference between extradiegesis and heterodiegesis, he indicates by this choice of word components that they share a common ground. Look at an early definition of heterodiegesis:

> From the perspective of the narrative content, this second narrative can, with regard to the first narrative, be either *homodiegetic*, that is, it may concern, for instance, the same characters as the first narrative (example: Ulysses's narratives to Alkinoos), or *heterodiegetic*, that is, referring to characters totally different and thus, in general, to a story without any link of contiguity to the first story (which, of course, does not exclude a link of a different kind, such as analogy, contrast, and so on): an example would be the story of the Curious-Impertinent in *Don Quixote*. (Genette 1969: 202; my translation)[6]

Genette explains that, in the case of heterodiegesis, the two stories in question are not contiguously linked. What does *contiguity* mean in this context? Contiguity belongs to a well-known tradition in structuralist theory, originating in Roman Jakobson's scheme of metaphor and metonymy (Jakobson and Halle 1956: 70, 76–82), which is a denotation that apparently does not relate very much to Genette's conception. Thomas A. Sebeok (1976: 1436) even traces this term *contiguity* back to Charles Sanders Peirce and detects the idea of physical contact there, which can be inter-

5. It is a distinction which can repeat itself on the intradiegetic side, where we then have *metadiegesis*, which is nothing but intradiegesis within intradiegesis (in the logic of narrative levels described above).

6. "Du point de vue du contenu narratif, ce récit second peut être, par rapport au récit premier, soit *homodiégétique*, c'est-à-dire concernant par exemple les mêmes personnages que le récit principal (exemple, les récits d'Ulysse chez Alkinoos), soit *hétérodiégétique*, c'est-à-dire se rapportant à des personnages entièrement différents et donc en général à une histoire sans rapport de contiguïté avec l'histoire première (ce qui, bien entendu, n'exclut pas une relation d'autre ordre, d'analogie, de contraste, etc.): exemple, le récit du *Curieux impertinent* dans *Don Quichotte*."

preted, for instance, in Gestalt psychology as a "Factor of Proximity."[7] For Sebeok, Jakobson's concept of metonymy can therefore be compared to Peirce's indexicality. Indexicality and contiguity rely on simple (spatial or temporal) closeness, and they differ from iconicity and similarity in that they do not entail a structural resemblance (Sternberg 1978: 208 ff.; 1981). Now, homodiegesis is constituted by such contiguity, whereas a lack of contiguity is characteristic of heterodiegesis. The question is: which entities can be in reach of each other and thus contiguously linked?

Genette offers further indications. On the one hand, heterodiegesis and homodiegesis relate the "narrative content" ("contenu narratif") to the "narrative" (récit), as he says (Genette 1969: 202). The narrative transmits a content that can either include or exclude the situation in which the narrative itself transmits the content. Part of the situation is the action of telling as performed by the narrator, who, accordingly, can be either heterodiegetic or homodiegetic. Again, we face the notions of content (which is more or less the histoire, as I will discuss later), narrative (récit), and act of narration without much obvious rigor or caution in the choice of terms. On the other hand, Genette stresses the "characters" about whom the narration informs the reader. They can be "totally different" from those characters who play a role in the narrator's environment, Alkinoos, for instance. (This example is not the best, since Odysseus offers to relate what happened immediately prior to his arrival in Alkinoos's kingdom, and thus Alkinoos's presence is implicitly evoked at the end of Odysseus's narration.)

The narrator's presence demarcates where contiguity starts and ends. It is quite a physical presence, since logical or semantic links do not count (such as "analogy, contrast, and so on"). Whether something is present is not a matter of all or nothing (as we have just noted in the case of Alkinoos). Indeed, in *Narrative Discourse Revisited*, Genette (1988 [1983]: 104) frankly admits a "gradualism" regarding closeness/distance and presence/absence. Reconsidering the concept of homo- and heterodiegesis, he openly asks: "At what *distance* does one begin to be absent?" (ibid.: 105). Let us bring together the idea of contiguity and the concept of universe. Diegesis is then not the narrated universe but certain events and persons

7. He cites Frazer 1951 [1922]: 12–13: "The first is based on the principle that like produces like, or that an effect resembles its cause, and this he called 'the Law of Similarity'; the second, 'that things which have once been in contact with each other continue to act on each other at a distance after the physical contact has been severed,' he called 'the Law of Contact or Contagion,' which he also says is 'founded on the association of ideas by contiguity'" (Sebeok 1976: 1436).

in this universe, with regard to which and whom gradual closeness can be measured.

So the narrator may be in the same universe as his or her story[8] but may be telling in spatiotemporal closeness or distance vis-à-vis the events and persons being told about. Again, the case of factual storytelling may elucidate the point. When I tell how I had dinner with my grandmother yesterday, I am a homodiegetic narrator, because I am temporally and spatially close to her and to the actions I give an account of; but when I relate some events from her youth, I am distant from this episode in time as well as in space and thus a heterodiegetic narrator. In both cases, I speak about the same real universe (in the intuitive sense of the words *real* and *world*). What is included in the diegesis depends on the particular "narrative content." The diegesis is populated with only those characters and contains only those events about which the narration informs. The difficulty is in determining what delimits this "content."[9]

How explicitly does an entity have to be mentioned in order to be part of the "content"? The diegesis, which a narrator can be close to or distant from, seems to be a part of the universe (again in the intuitive sense of the word), but it is still not quite clear *which parts* of this universe are near or remote. When I speak of "parts" of a universe, it can be asked whether this is also a spatiotemporal notion, that is, whether the concept of parts has to be understood in terms of space and time rather than of logical or organizational structure (for instance, a student need not ever be in the building of a university in order to belong to the university after enrollment). But the content of a narration does not usually encompass an entire universe if we understand "encompassing a universe" to mean that a narration tries to mention every single person that has ever existed or will ever exist there. To formulate the problem in such a radical (and maybe at first sight bizarre) way is necessary, because it shows that a narration can inform us about a universe and yet restrict its information to a small set of events and characters populating this universe.[10] It is a matter of "theme" or "topic." We are used to this kind of "thematic restriction" from all the storytelling we know. This is why Genette can sufficiently explain the phenomenon by means of two examples.

8. Note that we could not say *narration* here.

9. The topological metaphor of confining, or delimiting, will prove useful until we find a better terminology. Diegesis is, at the current point of our investigation, something cut out from the universe. The demarcation is the cutting edge. The question is where to cut.

10. The term *information* is used in the broad sense of Luhmann's (2000 [1995]: 16) communicational model, namely, everything "changing the state of the system," the system being a mental system or consciousness in our case. Even the "fascination" aroused by an artwork is a piece of information, as Luhmann (ibid.) stresses.

The only thing that was missing prior to Genette and Souriau was a word for this phenomenon. This is why I put quotation marks around "theme" and "topic"; they do not quite express the idea of diegesis but only offer another hint. Genette mentions the act of narration in the context of diegesis, and it is this thread that I am going to follow now.

1.3. Souriau's Explicit Definition and the Etymology of Diegesis

Why did Genette choose the word *diegesis*? As noted above, he does not introduce the term himself but takes it up from Souriau's early film theory and adjusts it to narratology. It is thus worth returning to Souriau's original definition, all the more so since the term has remained current in film theory. For Souriau (1951: 7), *diegesis* is "tout ce qui appartient, 'dans l'intelligibilité' (comme dit M. Cohen-Séat) à l'histoire racontée, au monde supposé ou proposé par la fiction du film" (all that belongs, "by inference," to the narrated story, to the world supposed or proposed by the film's fiction).[11] This definition is cautious, perhaps even unassertive.

First, we find there a sibling of Genette's *universe*: Souriau speaks of *world*. At the same time, he seems to equate or at least associate the world with the narrated story; at any rate, he does not explicate the relation between the two. I will analyze both expressions, *story* as well as *world*, and the concepts behind them in sections 2.1 and 2.3 of this article.

Second, Souriau wavers between "supposing" and "proposing." This indecision is strongly connected to the effect that fictionality has on story and world; I do not want to plunge deeper into this question, since I would like to leave aside the problem of fictionality as much as possible. Briefly, the peculiarity of fictionality is that almost[12] all fictional representations inform us about a world as if the world existed independently, but at the same time its existence depends entirely on the representation which creates it.

Third and most important, the phrase "dans l'intelligibilité" deserves some attention because it hints at a restriction. As we have seen, diegesis cannot be a universe or world in the intuitive sense of the word. The word *intelligibilité* could help one understand how to grasp the difference between the intuitive and the specific, diegesis-related notion. However, it is not even clear if Souriau's quotation marks around "dans l'intelligibi-

11. Translation by Claudia Gorbman (1980: 195). She also gives the French original wording "dans l'intelligibilité" to suggest that her translation is not the only possible option.

12. The only exceptions are found in radical cases of metalepsis, such as *Sophie's World* by Jostein Gaarder (1995 [1991]). The heroine, Sophie, learns that she is but an author's invention and tries to escape the fictional world to become real; the reader is not told if she eventually succeeds.

lité" indicate metaphorical speech or a quotation, because the expression "dans l'intelligibilité" is not uncommon in French. This is why it seems strange to cite someone having used it. Now, what could "dans l'intelligibilité" mean? Claudia Gorbman's translation, quoted above, reads "by inference," that is, as I would paraphrase it, "by reconstruction using all given information."[13] *Le nouveau petit Robert* (Rey-Debove and Rey 1996: 1192) offers a distinctly different denotation of the word: either the *intelligible* is what can be known without use of the senses, or it is simply what can be understood at all. Neither denotation clarifies the idea of diegesis. It appears that world and story play a certain role in diegesis but that the world must be somehow restricted to what can be understood, what is approximate or intuitive, what can be derived from the information provided by the film.

Neither Souriau nor Genette seems to bear in mind the word's Greek etymology—at first sight at least. Genette even explicitly warns his readers not to consider the etymology (1983: 13; 1988 [1983]: 18). The word *diegesis* comes from Greek *διήγησις*, which is the Latin *narratio* and means *narration*. More precisely, Plato's use of the word must be distinguished from its usage in classical rhetoric. The distinction diegesis/mimesis is made in the third book of the *Republic*: in mimesis ("imitation" [Plato 1953: 393c] p. 239) the events and figures are staged, shown, while in diegesis ("simple narration" [ibid.] p. 239) "the poet is speaking in his own person; he never even tries to distract us by assuming another character" (ibid.: 393a p. 239). In this sense, a drama is mimetic because it presents what the figures say without a mediating instance, while a novel is diegetic as long as the narrator, as the mediating instance, speaks. This distinction was taken up by Genette (1976 [1969]: 1–4), but in one of his texts he practically reduced it to the dichotomy *dramatic/narrative*. In Platonic diegesis, some kind of mediation takes place, and such a mediation is not "mimetic" insofar as the object is conveyed rather indirectly through it (ibid.: 2). Hence diegesis creates a sense of distance. Classical rhetoric, however, considerably differs from Plato's use. Mostly used in forensic speech, the term means either "the exposition of the Cause" or "the exposition of matters relevant to the Cause" (Quintilian 2001: 4.2.11 vol. 2, p. 223–24); merely to state "I did not kill the man" is no narration, which requires that the circumstances be detailed (ibid.: 4.2.12 vol. 2, p. 225). Roland Barthes (1994 [1970]: 80), in contrast, expresses a slightly different opinion in his overview of ancient rhetoric. According to him, the rhetorical diegesis merely serves the oration and therefore must not be confused with "romantic" storytelling; it

13. Gorbman (1980: 196) herself puts it similarly: "We infer, re-construct, the diegesis."

details relevant events but only for the sake of developing an argument. If one insists on finding a characteristic trait among the ancient approaches to diegesis, it only consists in the action of telling.

1.4. The Action of Telling

As in the classical concept of diegesis, the action of telling plays a major role in Genette's reintroduction of the term. Genette does not fully expound the etymology of *diegesis*; yet despite his reflections on the Greek term (see Genette 1976 [1969]: 1–5; 1988 [1983]: 17–18), one can assume that Genette (1980 [1972]: 26) did have in mind the ancient meaning, and with it the *action* of telling, when he adopted Souriau's expression:

> And if it goes without saying that the existence of those adventures in no way depends on the action of telling (supposing that, like Ulysses, we look on them as real), it is just as evident that the narrative discourse ("narrative of Ulysses" in the first meaning of the term) depends absolutely on that action of telling.

Thus the action of telling does not condition the existence of a fictional universe; at least this is a perspective one can choose to take, and then the fictional universe is, from an ontological point of view, only incidentally associated with the narration. At the same time, the action of telling (or rather the author) deliberately creates the universe even if, after creation, it must be considered ontologically independent of the narration. We will return to this point later because, again, the meaning of *universe* here and the "ontology" just mentioned require much elucidation. Yet the link between the action of telling and diegesis remains obvious. The notion of diegesis is needed to differentiate among narrative levels, but a level exists only due to an *act* of storytelling. If there is no one who is narrating, there is no level. The following statement shows to what extent Genette (1988 [1983]: 84) is aware of this fact:

> Just as the theory of focalizations was only a general presentation of the standard idea of "point of view," so the theory of narrative levels simply systematized the traditional notion of "embedding," whose main drawback is that it does not sufficiently mark the *threshold* between one diegesis and another—a threshold symbolized by the fact that the second diegesis is taken charge of by a narrative fashioned within the first diegesis. The weakness of that section . . . no doubt lies in the confusion that often develops between the attribute *extradiegetic*, which is a phenomenon [*fait*] of level, and the attribute *heterodiegetic*, which is a phenomenon [fait] of relation (of "person"). Gil Blas is an extradiegetic narrator because, albeit fictitious, he is included (*as narrator*) in no diegesis but is on exactly equal footing with the extradiegetic (real) public; but since he tells his own story, he is at the same time a homodiegetic narrator. (Translation of Genette 1983: 55–56)

We now learn that Gil Blas is "included . . . in no diegesis," although he himself is telling "his own story," that is, the story of which he is a part. The "confusion," which Genette exposes in this quotation, protesting against some misunderstandings, results from a core distinction provided by his theory; we are told that the difference between hetero-/homo- and extra-/intradiegesis is crucial to understanding the concept of diegesis. They define two distinct types of exteriority to diegesis. First, Gil Blas is "outside of the diegesis" (Genette 1988 [1983]: 85), because it is he who is telling (extradiegesis). Second, he is inside the diegesis, because the narration is about himself (homodiegesis). In this example, Genette relates and compares a form of exteriority (extradiegesis) to a form of interiority (homodiegesis).

Let us, then, look at the example of James Joyce's *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, which Genette (see 1988 [1983]: 128) gives in a later chapter, in order to see better how he compares two different *kinds* of exteriority with respect to diegesis. Here the narrator is both extradiegetic and heterodiegetic and thus indeed combines two forms of diegesis-related exteriority. On the one hand, the narrator is responsible for the action of telling (extradiegesis) and is therefore exterior to the diegesis.[14] On the other hand, he does not say anything about himself and thus performs this telling in a spatiotemporal distance from the events being narrated, so he is again exterior to the diegesis. In the passage just quoted, Genette claims that someone has to speak "(*as narrator*)" in order that a diegesis may emerge. In doing so, he restricts the range of diegesis to what the action of telling demarcates.[15] In a strange way, this restriction is simultaneously highlighted and downplayed, as Genette uses a typographic emphasis (italics) and yet diminishes the importance of the restriction by means of parentheses. The existence of the narrator is what allows us to delimit the diegesis, but to imagine the diegesis, he or she is no longer necessary.

This becomes even more obvious when we consider media of representation other than verbal. In film, there is no narrator as there is in literature and no action of telling, at least not in the proper sense of the word (see Chatman 1990: 113). But some scholars who reject a notion like "impersonal enunciation" (Metz 1991) point out that film does not much differ from literature in having a certain slant (see Bordwell 1985: 4–7). In any case, a film does delimit a certain range of information through the action of being presented. No anthropomorphic or "linguistically based" descrip-

14. In the same way, an intradiegetic narrator is responsible for his or her action of telling on the next level and hence exterior to this inner diegesis (which Genette calls *metadiegesis*).
15. For the topological metaphor, see note 9.

tion of the way this slant emerges is necessary to explain the slant itself.[16] This is why filmic diegesis can be described regardless of the issue of whether film has a narrator. A notion of action, however, is essential, but it suffices to know that the presentation of the film (as action) defines the *scope* of information; we can certainly speak of an action of narrating when the pictures are being projected on the cinema screen, and this action indicates the operative limits (to reuse the topological metaphor). Thus it is clear—no matter which particular means the film employs—what is "inside" and "outside" the diegesis.

Even in this light, however, the role played by the action of telling in constituting the diegesis still remains opaque. Certainly, to discriminate homo- from heterodiegesis the critic must conjecture where and when in the spatiotemporal universe the narrator performs the telling; otherwise it is impossible to measure any distance. The important thing, however, is that, given a narration, it or its narrator can be located *in* a spatiotemporal universe, not simply vis-à-vis the universe. When Genette places the narrator in the nearer or remoter neighborhood of the "universe," he shows that he bears in mind that the action of telling is necessary in order to constitute a diegesis. Yet the action of telling by itself is not enough to characterize the diegesis; it only indicates how a particular diegesis is demarcated and thus establishes the scope of relevant information. In all attempts to outline the concept, however, we encounter *story* (histoire) and *narrative* (récit). Before turning to this crucial distinction, I am going to look at some attempts to define or to explain diegesis that have drawn on Genette's or Souriau's work. They will also give valuable hints for a better understanding of the story/narrative pair.

1.5. Further Approaches to Diegesis

Not many scholars have tried to give a clearer definition of diegesis. In an influential German introduction to narratology, diegesis is equated with the narrated world (Martínez and Scheffel 2003 [1999]: 123, 187).[17] This is also the definition given by Pier (1994: 209) and Marco Kunz (1997: 66).[18] David Bordwell (1985: 16) holds that *diegesis* "has come to be the accepted term for the fictional world of the story." For Gorbman (1980: 195), it is

16. This is to say that our concept of slant or perspective is much wider than the Genettian (Genette 1980); it is possible (and in fact usual) to "defocus or authorize the transmission, via a subject's ontology, culture, ideology, idiolect, emotivity, self-consciousness, artistic values and competence" (Sternberg 2007: 714). My conception of taking a perspective is founded on Luhmann's (2000 [1995]) model of observation; see section 2.1.

17. The German term is *erzählte Welt*.

18. Kunz opposes "la diégesis . . . al mundo real."

"the *narratively implied spatiotemporal world of the actions and characters*." Gerald Prince's (1987: 20) *Dictionary of Narratology* defines *diegesis* as the "(fictional) world in which the situations and events narrated occur (in French, *diégèse*)" and makes a sharp distinction between this term and Platonic diegesis "(in French, *diégésis*)" (see also Pier 1994: 209). Prince's explanation of *diegetic*, however, offers only a little further refinement compared with his definition of the noun; the adjective is described as "pertaining to or part of a given diegesis (*diégèse*) and, more particularly, that diegesis represented by the (primary) narrative" (Prince 1987: 20). Some examples follow. Prince bases the definition on the concept of *world*, which can apparently be taken for an equivalent of *universe* (as in Genette 1969: 211).[19] As we have seen, it would be necessary to explicate what a "diegetic level" is, because the level determines the shape of a single diegesis and the diegesis may be understood as a demarcated part of the world being narrated. Prince (1987: 20), however, does not see the need for any greater specificity but simply states that entities are "situated with regard to a given diegesis (*diégèse*)." The desirable restriction of the narrated world is concealed behind the word *given* (and likewise in his definition of *diegetic* as "pertaining to or part of a given diegesis"). It is as though the meaning of *given* were self-evident.

While Matías Martínez and Michael Scheffel (2003 [1999]: 23) as well as Prince warn the critic against connecting diegesis with the Platonic difference between diegesis and mimesis (see also Pier 1994: 209), Anton Fuxjäger (2007: 27–30) claims that a diegetic element in a film is essentially "mimetic." *Mimesis*, for Fuxjäger (ibid.: 30), is defined as the *degree* of particularity or precision with which a representation portrays the narrated world: there can be a *more* mimetic and a *less* mimetic strategy of conveying information in narrative. Since the diegesis covers all we have relatively detailed knowledge of, most of the information is conveyed through very mimetic strategies. His major point is that nonmimetic ("nichtmimetisch" [ibid.: 27, 32]) strategies (such as superimposed titles) *also* contribute to the diegesis. However, Fuxjäger's proposal involves a conflation of heterogeneous concepts: if a diegetic element is supposed to be part of the diegesis, it is part of the world being told and thus, with respect to this frame of reference, not mimetic but simply a real entity. Within a fictional world, things are real (except for fiction inside fiction of course). Again, Fuxjäger (ibid.: 32–33) defines *diegesis* as everything belonging to the narrated world *plus* all information that is conveyed about this world by means of more or less mimetic elements. On such a definition, it remains impossible to

19. The two expressions, *world* and *universe*, are used interchangeably in definitions of diegesis and are never defined; instead, their meaning is taken for granted. Genette's French word *univers* is apparently translated as *world* in some cases.

say how it can be that a narrator stands at a distance from the diegesis, as is the case with heterodiegesis. Yet emphasizing mimetic elements helpfully brings an important aspect of diegesis into focus: all that "belongs" to the diegesis must be presented in a way that lets the receiver have sufficiently detailed information to know what is happening in the world being narrated.

Michael Riffaterre, by contrast, realizes that diegesis is a complex phenomenon and gives a detailed definition of it in his book *Fictional Truth*. In the book's glossary, *diegesis* is described as "the concrete actualization of narrative structures, namely, the verbal representation of space and time referred to in the narrative and through which it unfolds, as well as the verbal representation of events and characters" (Riffaterre 1993 [1990]: 127). While the phrase "verbal representation of space and time" directly points back to Genette's (1969: 211) definition, Riffaterre shifts the emphasis away from the idea of a world and offers another means of further delineating the core of the phenomenon. He chooses the phrase "concrete actualization" to describe how diegesis emerges from storytelling. A "concreteness" of narrative structures means that there must be visible or audible tokens or elements that make it possible to construct the diegesis. More precisely, an "actualization" must occur. Riffaterre thus assumes a potentiality of narrative structures, which in themselves do not evoke the diegesis. Only when a recipient actualizes the concretely given narrative structures does a diegesis emerge.

Viewed in this light, some other accounts turn out to point in the same direction as Riffaterre's. Klaus Weimar (1997: 360) thus speaks of a "textual world," a term originating in text linguistics, where it signifies all the *concrete* entities a text mentions (see de Beaugrande and Dressler 1981: 88–89; Anz 2007: 111–12). For Ina Konigsberg (1997 [1987]: 91), diegesis "designates the denotative elements of a narrative," excluding any connotation. So diegesis depends on *concrete* tokens whose denotative dimension alone counts.

Riffaterre's idea and concepts related to it will be further analyzed in section 2.3. The distinction between connotation and denotation, applied to a narration as a whole, also comes into play. As we will see in section 2.4, it is a distinction that cannot be made *systematically*; the difficulty of distinguishing between connotation and denotation is what produces the ambiguity characteristic of diegesis, as hinted at in the introduction to this article.

1.6. A Short Recapitulation

In a first sketch, I retain the vague notion of world and propose, with Riffaterre's help, a provisional characterization of the concept in question:

a diegesis is the narrated world restricted to what the narration concretely evokes.

Rather than having arrived at the perfect definition, we have gathered some open questions. First, diegesis is considered to be the world about which a narration gives information, but we have found some opposing views (especially Gorbman 1980; Riffaterre 1993 [1990]; and Konigsberg 1997 [1987]). In order to clarify further what it means to say that diegesis is a "restricted part" of the world and thus "less" than a world, I will have to explain the modern idea of world in everyday use and in literary theory. This is necessary for the understanding of both the standard definition and the provisional characterization of diegesis just mentioned. Second, we have seen that diegesis depends in some way on the existence of the narration. The term only makes sense *if* there is storytelling. But such a formulation is too vague, since we have seen that neither the action of telling nor the material text "determines" a diegesis. In order to find out the exact relationship between diegesis and narration, the structuralist distinction between story and discourse will undergo a redefinition. This will finally lead to an epistemological characterization of diegesis.

2. Taking a Closer Look at Diegesis

2.1. What Is a World?

In describing diegesis, Genette (1969: 211) uses the word *universe*. Among the approaches presented above, however, the expression *world* preponderates, even when scholars explicitly refer to Genette. Like Pier (1994), I will take the two words as interchangeable, preferring *world* for reasons that will soon become clear. A world is considered a general category, which contains everything that is the case.[20] As long as one assumes that *world* does not make any sense if used in plural form, it means nothing but existence. But if many worlds can be thought of, they can be compared with one another; existence then becomes a matter of reference to a given world, possibly even a counterfactual one.

It was perhaps René Descartes (1637: 44) who first conceived of a plurality of worlds ("plusieurs mondes").[21] In the early eighteenth century, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1991 [1714]: sec. 53) spoke of an "infinity of possible universes," often identified with "possible worlds" by his disciples

20. For example, in a dictionary entry the world is "the earth, together with all of its countries, peoples, and natural features" (Pearsall and Hanks 1998: 2127).

21. See Rentsch 2004: 408. Steven James Dick (1977) discusses some earlier uses of the plural of related (but not identical) terms in ancient Greek philosophy, pointing out the differences from the modern use.

(for example, Christian Wolff [1751: 331–32]), in order to answer certain theological and metaphysical questions. In fact, the idea that there might be different worlds came up earlier still, for instance, in an essay by John Wilkins whose title speaks for itself: *The Discovery of a World in the Moone; or, A Discourse Tending to Prove That 'Tis Probable There May Be Another Habitable World in That Planet* (1638). Leibniz realized the theoretical value of *world*; the concept allowed him to handle *theoretically* the totality of possibilities and actualities in a given system and to discuss the logical or metaphysical implications of "everything." A world has to satisfy certain conditions (as first explicitly formulated in Wolff 1751: 349–50). There must not be any logical contradiction, things must occupy a certain place at a certain time, an event must have a cause, and so on; that is, a world must be consistent. What is understood by consistency will vary from epoch to epoch; for example, Descartes still thought that motion needs a cause, while since Isaac Newton we assume that only a change of velocity has to be causally explained. The great advantage of the concept of world introduced by Descartes, which underlies all modern usages, such as those in narratology, physics, and everyday language, is that it allows the comparison of worlds (as eventually done by Leibniz) and the creation of imaginary worlds simply by changing some properties of the real world.

It is not surprising that the new concept of world became useful to literary theory in the eighteenth century. For instance, the Swiss scholar Johann Jacob Breitinger (1740: 56–57) applied the term to describe the alternative worlds (that is, alternative to the real one or, as one would say today, fictional worlds) that novels create. Modern possible-world theories still benefit from Leibniz's invention, but they have improved on the concept of world by replacing seventeenth-century logic with the formal logic of the early twentieth century. They have thus created an analytic concept of world, assuming that the world can be described by using propositions and that words can clearly refer to entities in the world: "A world said to be real or possible is a logical world, one possessing a propositional structure of the type defined for the discursive universe of science, for example, according to a logical-empirical epistemology" (Ouellet 1996: 80). Internal coherence and ontological separation from all other worlds remain the key characteristics of worlds. Even if a few modern possible-world theories deny the idea of a privileged (usually called *real*) world,[22] they all take

22. See Ryan 2001: 101–5. For Marie-Laure Ryan, there is a real world, but since everyone has his or her own view of it, the individual actual worlds differ. By the way, the concept of a singular real world does not conflict with constructivist approaches such as Luhmann's (2000 [1995]). Seen from these points of view, a singular real world is simply one construction among others (in the strict sense, that is, as a way to observe what is happening).

a world as a frame that is supposed to encompass everything existing.[23] Nothing contradictory may happen within a single world. However, what happens in a fictional world need not be congruent with what is known about the real world. This explains why the concept of world is so convenient for models of fictionality. Coherence (regarding space, time, and matter) is assumed for a world, but worlds do not have to be coherent with one another.[24]

Even though I treat *universe* and *world* as interchangeable terms, they differ in the emphasis they place on particular aspects of their shared denotation and the perspective involved. Etymologically, *universe* derives from the Latin *universum* (Pearsall and Hanks 1998: 2024), that is, the totality of all things in all times, while *world* originally signified "age of man" (ibid.: 2127) and has retained an anthropocentric implication. Thus the "history of the world" would be the history of Earth and of humankind, while the "history of the universe" brings to mind stars and planets and their changes over billions of years. Which of the two expressions one prefers to employ may depend on the degree of importance one assigns to the observer and to suggesting the observer's perspective. While *universe* tends to mask the observer's position and presents a holistic view on "everything," *world* stresses the (human) center of observation and often refers to Earth or to the smaller realm an observer lives in;[25] hence it better fits literary theory. The frequency of an anthropomorphic narrator explains perhaps why, in

23. So there can be no outside of the world, or if there is, it cannot be reached by any means. In this sense, physics uses the term *universe* to this day. Everything we can ever have any knowledge of is part of the universe.

24. Most narrations do not state that there are several parallel worlds, and the reality principle suggests that there is one single world, which the narration represents (since we think that our world is singular). Hence there is no outside where a narrator could stand. Even if a narration speaks of several parallel worlds, none of them must be accessible from any other one. In world semantics, the term *accessibility* denotes the possibility of being observed and known within a world; the separation between different worlds can be also defined as follows: "There are no spatiotemporal relations at all between things that belong to different worlds" (Lewis 1986: 2). One may possibly know about some kind of inaccessible existence, while further information about it remains concealed. For instance, in George Orwell's (1989 [1949]) *Nineteen Eighty-four*, the book *Nineteen Eighty-four*—except Winston's diary entries—is an inaccessible entity in Winston's world, whereas in E. T. A. Hoffmann's *Lebens-Ansichten des Katers Murr* (*The Life and Opinions of the Tomcat Murr*; 1820), the book that the real reader reads is part of the fictional world and thus accessible.

25. An example—from Laurence Sterne's (1995 [1759–67]: 15) *Tristram Shandy*—for this usage: The midwife "had acquired, in her way, no small degree of reputation in the world:—by which word *world*, need I in this place inform your worship, that I would be understood to mean no more of it than a small circle described upon the circle of the great world, of four English miles diameter, or thereabouts, of which the cottage where the good old woman lived, is supposed to be the centre."

the discussion of diegesis, Genette's and Souriau's *universe* has often been tacitly replaced by *world*.

A description of the world is generally deemed possible. I use the term *description* in a general sense that includes narration rather than opposes it (as, for example, in Hamon 1993 [1981]). In systems theory, a description is a more or less fixed set of observations, and an observation is the product of a distinction (see Luhmann 2000 [1995]: 59). While the world is considered consistent, any of its descriptions may lack consistency and will never provide *full* information. But the assumption can be made that all matters of fact can be described. In this sense, a *virtual* description of the world is presupposed: nothing can fundamentally resist description.[26] So *world* can be considered a way of considering matters of fact with respect to their possible descriptions.

If the assumption of describability is made, *world* is taken as a semantics; and it will be treated as such in my argument from now on.[27] Here, I use the term *semantics* not in the linguistic sense but in that of Niklas Luhmann's systems theory (which builds on Reinhart Koselleck's [1979] notion of semantics). For Luhmann (2004 [1980]), a semantics is a field of communicational elements that are used to react to observations made in this field; the term thus generalizes the notion of language, behavior, and cognition but narrows its application to a historically produced, specific domain of communication. A semantics has a strong normative dimension, as it defines the acceptable responses. For example, love semantics encompasses not only specific phrases expressing care and tenderness but also holding hands or running into lampposts. Now, world semantics is the semantics helpful for discussing the concept of world. It tells us to expect that, at a particular time, a person can be in only one place, that things do not disappear while no one is looking at them, and that time has neither holes nor loops. Since it groups together all basic assumptions of how one thinks of the way the world works, world semantics is the semantics of

26. As it can in religious or mystic thought.

27. This goes against possible world theories, regardless of individual position (e.g., Lewis 1986; Ouellet 1996; and Ryan 2001). The Luhmannian view allows us to direct our attention to patterns of communication without stating anything about the "world" itself or its properties. I do not believe that the coherence that one assumes after having learned to use the world semantics rests on firm ontic ground (we just cannot know), nor do I believe that language consists of propositions in the analytic sense. Quite the contrary, language cannot be so precise, and mathematics is essential in the sciences because it allows scientists to transcend the fundamental imprecision of language: see Bunia 2009, with further references. There I also argue that Luhmann's (2000 [1995]) model of communication, so important in the present article, is compatible with, even complementary to, cognitive and usage-based linguistics as proposed by Michael Tomasello (2003) and Ronald W. Langacker (2008).

Western metaphysics par excellence. The concept of description, introduced in the preceding paragraph, also helps clarify that of semantics. Every semantics is an extensive repertoire of adequate and approved distinctions in a certain field of communication. Thus *observation*, *description*, and *semantics* are general epistemological concepts that try to capture how an observer deals with the impressions he, or she, or it[28] encounters.

As already indicated, the idea of a world without contradictions does not mean that all *descriptions* of a given world must be so. It could even be claimed that not a single description works without any complication. When one thinks of the real world, historians can be in doubt about what happened within it at a certain time, for example, what the historical Caesar's last words really were; there may be many known facts about his last days and still different theories about his last utterance. Yet all historians will be certain that only *one* of these possibilities is true of the real world. The assumption that there are *facts* about spatiotemporal entities (such as Caesar) is due to the world semantics, which excludes the possibility of an event happening and then being effaced from world history, since it excludes any state beyond existence and nonexistence. Moreover, it is evident that this semantics is well established and contains basic, quite general, and widely accepted notions of how to observe what is around us. Still, there may be, in those many cases of deficient information, no means of producing an accurate description.

Every description of any part of the real world thus lacks consistency, but at the same time the real world is taken to be consistent due to a pattern of description (namely, the world semantics). The "antithetical" relationship between the deficiency of descriptions and the postulated consistency of reality is crucial for our ongoing analysis of diegesis.

These assumptions about the real world extend to fictionality, when one invokes the idea of a fictional world. A novel can leave it open whether something happened or not; this invites readers to perform an interpretation. But every interpretation must assume that only one of these possible interpretations is correct *at a given time*. Again, the world semantics only determines how to deal with *facts*; for example, we need not believe that only one moral judgment on the characters' deeds is acceptable (a moral judgment is an observation too and thus can be a description). In other words, fact-related observations which do not match indicate an imperfection in the process of observation, not an "ontological" inconsistency

28. An observer is not necessarily a human or an animal but can be a computer, for example, since it is also able to make a distinction (such as between the keystrokes *a* and *b*) and use it for further operations.

of the observed reality itself. But whereas, in the factual case, alternative descriptions can be obtained, the (imperfect) fictional description remains the only source of information. Unless one assumes the world semantics, unreliable narration on matters of fact, for instance, is utterly unthinkable; one has to presuppose the existence of a structured world *despite* the given description in order to doubt what it describes. The point is that the concept of world makes us *assume* that a truthful (or, if one denies the idea of truth for epistemological reasons, at least plausible) description of the world is *possible*. And in this sense, world semantics requires not only the real world but every fictional world to be coherent and complete. Coherence and completeness complement each other: coherence excludes contradictory descriptions, while completeness means that nothing fundamentally resists description.

Do fictional worlds really have to be considered coherent and complete? The problem is well known and directly tied to the idea of diegesis; since a narration is not about "everything," why should it be necessary to imagine a world which is complete in the sense of the world semantics? Isn't this feature relevant to the real world only? The reason for approaching fictional worlds too in the light of world semantics is the *reality principle*, which says that the world about which the fictional discourse informs the recipient is identical to the real world "so long as nothing . . . indicates otherwise" (Walton 1990: 145). If something *does* indicate otherwise, the fictional world has to be construed so that it resembles the real world as much as possible, according to "the principle of minimal departure" (Ryan 1980). The reality principle and the principle of minimal departure state what happens when a representation leaves everyday aspects of the fictional world to the reader's imagination. Of course, neither of them says anything about missing information that cannot be inferred from the knowledge about the real world.[29] Yet the most important assumption transferred from the real to the fictional world is the world semantics. As long as nothing other is indicated, the recipient will believe that no essential contradictions with regard to facts will occur within the fiction.

The idea of a complete world is a fundamental part of metaphysics and determines how one deals with both factual and fictional accounts. Any kind of spatiotemporal hole[30] must then be explicitly indicated, as is sometimes done in books or movies, mostly of the science fiction genre, where

29. For example, a reader of Sterne's (1995 [1759–67]: 8) *Tristram Shandy* can infer from real world knowledge what it means to "wind up the clock," but he or she cannot know where Tristram first meets Jenny, a woman he often addresses.

30. That is, a physico-cosmologically missing portion of time or of space: a "real" hole, not just one due to the account given of the cosmos.

we have temporal gaps[31] and loops that count as hard reality in the fictional world. Otherwise, the physics and the metaphysics of the real world apply to the fictional one, and therefore things must either happen or not happen, but there is no indefinite third state between occurrence and nonoccurrence. Again, there can be esoteric exceptions, mainly in literature playing with the strange effects of metalepses. These can present a third state not known in the real reality (as we think of it in the terms of the world semantics), specify this third state, and make it part of the fictive reality. For example, in Jasper Fforde's (2001: 331) *The Eyre Affair*, the hero, Thursday Next, enters the world of Charlotte Brontë's novel *Jane Eyre* and meets Rochester, who explains that he simply "ceases" to exist as soon as the inner narration finishes mentioning him; he neither dies nor continues to live.[32] In customary cases, however, one has to assume that the world in question, whether real or fictional, is complete, even though the account someone gives of the world is incomplete. There are always aspects which *could* be detailed but have not been. If no fact is stated, the point remains ambiguous; this is *not* the case with Rochester's life in *The Eyre Affair*, which clearly asserts that Rochester is in a third state of timeless nonlife and nondeath. Ambiguity would be unthinkable if the world semantics did not make a recipient assume that she or he could "in theory" know what the case "really" is.

Fictions display discontinuities: sometimes these can be attributed to specific characters with limited knowledge and so manifest the radical incompleteness of descriptions. But in many cases, such discontinuities essentially contribute to the work's aesthetic effects in that they trigger the complex mechanisms that relate a discontinuous narration to the images it produces.[33] An aesthetic incompleteness differs from the radical one not in its epistemic structure but in its impact (and thus the difference depends on interpretation).

In a fictional discourse, however, information that the author withholds is not only unknown but, unless inferable, even unknowable. Here lies a difference from the real world, where new inquiries about facts are possible. No such inquiries can be made into a fiction, which the reader can-

31. Here the term is not used in the sense of *gaps* and *blanks* as defined by Sternberg (1978; 2003: 362).

32. Rochester says: "Here, I neither am born, nor die. I come into being at the age of thirty-eight and wink out again soon after, having fallen in love for the first time in my life and then lost the object of my adoration, my being" (ibid.: 332).

33. For example, compare Honoré de Balzac's minute descriptions of furniture to André Gide's sparse information about how places look in the fictional worlds of his novels. The possible effects are countless and are traced in analyses that bring out the singularity of each text. For Balzac, see Sternberg 1978: 210.

not visit (see Bunia 2006: 369–70). But all "unknowable facts" are nonetheless conceived of as potential *facts*. In this sense, any fictional world is complete.

The world semantics disallows even a wholly omniscient narrator that "has no existence within the represented world, not even as an [*sic*] hypothetical construct with any spatiotemporal habitation" (Sternberg 1981: 70). Such a narrator does not belong to the diegesis of course, because he or she is both extradiegetic and heterodiegetic,[34] but must still exist in the same world as the one he or she informs us about. A narrator cannot give any information about a world different from the one he or she inhabits. This conclusion draws on world semantics: one can report only what one knows, and one knows only what is knowable, and knowable are only those events and things existing in the same world as oneself. This is part of the very definition of a world; it consists of all that can be accessed. The only exception to the rule is an omniscient narrator who presents the narrated world as his or her own invention. In this case, the world told appears as isolated—and as a fiction within a fiction.

There is a possible objection against my line of reasoning. Why does even a disembodied and impersonal narrator have to be placed in the world? Would it not be more appropriate to say that an omniscient narrator has no spatiotemporal location whatsoever? Indeed, it would be incorrect to attribute too many human qualities to such a narrator. But an omniscient narrator is, in the sense defined above, an observer of the world being told and, as such, belongs to the world observed. Observers need not be human but must have a position which allows them to know what they know—even if the "exact" position may remain unspecified. This is comparable to the case of film, discussed above. Whether or not one posits a narrator in film, what counts is that there is a certain slant defining a position from which all information is presented. And this position belongs to the world even if it lies above the skies.

To sum up, a narrator belongs to the world being told in so far as he or she occupies a certain position in it that enables him or her to tell about it. Yet the narrator need not be part of the diegesis but can be twice exterior to it (both extradiegetic and heterodiegetic). This suggests that a diegesis may lack certain persons and things, while the world about which the narration informs must be complete. The diegesis would then be a "delimited field" within the world, containing only those entities explicitly mentioned by the narration as against the world's abstract totality. Unfortunately, as we have seen, no sharp line divides explicit from implicit information.

34. A homodiegetic omniscient narrator would be embodied and anthropomorphic.

2.2. Demarcating the World

The difficulty of drawing lines within the narrated world arises from the well-known fact that events need not be explicitly evoked to be part of the story.[35] An account of diegesis needs to explain what "being part of the story" means. What happens within a story can be more than what is told explicitly. In *Die Marquise von O . . .* (*The Marquise of O . . .*) by Heinrich von Kleist (1993 [1808]: 106), a mere dash, "—", and a gap in the narrated time indicate the occurrence of an act of rape (see Künzel 2000). Though never articulated, the event is still there in the world that the narration conveys. What is more, it is part of the limited field—even the thematic core—about which the narration offers some information. But if an event is only implicitly told, how can it be "part of the story"? The problem is that an implicitly told event can be utterly irrelevant to the narration. It may be part of the world being told, but it is not "part of the story" in an emphatic sense. It may be evoked without at all being essential. This "essentiality" is even gradual, for quite remote entities or events can be "brought" into the story through a long chain of inferences. Kleist's (1993 [1808]: 104–6) text thus refers to a war between Russian and French armies in North Italy; it can be concluded from various hints that this must be the Napoleonic War of 1799. Can we then say that Napoleon is "part of the story," even though his name is never mentioned? We *could* at least grant that. Is the French Revolution, a necessary antecedent to Napoleon's reign, "part of the story" of *The Marquise of O . . .* ? No, we would probably say it is not. In any case, there cannot be a univocal, definite answer to such questions.

Less extreme cases raise similar uncertainties as to whether an event is "part of the story." Umberto Eco (1994: 2–4) asks if a narrator who tells us that someone gets on a coach at A and gets off that coach at B actually *tells* about a ride from place A to place B. The given narration almost inevitably evokes the idea of a ride and not just as a product of the reality principle. Again, this only holds as long as the narration does not indicate otherwise; in the television series *Star Trek*, for example, people can be "beamed" and thus materialize quite suddenly anywhere. As is well known, leaving things out of the discourse is a basic technique for economical description (in Luhmann's sense of the term); and such omissions are characteristic of fictional as well as of factual discourses, because no description can seriously aim at a "complete" representation. This is again a lesson taught by *Tristram Shandy* (Sterne 1995 [1759–67]).

But would one assert that the ride from place A to place B belongs to

35. Again, we must say *story* here and not *narration*.

the diegesis? The question may at first glance seem a bit academic. But in Kleist's novella, a reader does ask if a rape is "part of the story" or not. Robert Scholes (1980: 210) compares diegesis to the signified (or Peirce's interpretant), defining *diegesis* as the "constructed sequence of events generated by a reading of the text," whereas the referent (or Peirce's object) is, in Scholes's model, "the sequence of events to which it [i.e., the story] refers." What is the difference between the two? Perhaps the diegesis can be understood as the "semiotic" and narration-related counterpart of the events that are thought of as independent from an actual narration. But such an answer again provokes the question of what is independent from the narration, and it interprets diegesis as "semiotically" given information. While in Konigsberg's (1997 [1987]: 91) definition diegesis contains "all the elements of the narrative, whether shown in the film or not," Gorbman's (1980: 198) diegesis touches "the very frontiers that separate *the given* from *the inferred*." I will argue that diegesis fully stays on the side of the given but always defines itself with respect to the inferred.

In my tentative characterization, diegesis has been said to be the narrated world restricted to what the narration concretely evokes.[36] However, we have already discerned that no criteria specify where "concrete evocation" starts and ends. I suspect that this fuzziness is characteristic of diegesis. In order to find out more about this feature, it will prove useful to explore the concepts of story, narrative, and action of telling.

2.3. From Story and Narrative to a Theory of Representation

To avoid misunderstanding, I have so far preferred the neutral expression *narration*, but in some phrases it would have been awkward: we characterize diegesis as "all that is part of the story," and it would sound strange to speak of "all that is part of the narration." It has meanwhile become a familiar insight that the idea of content is quite fuzzy; the effects of narrative gaps as discussed in the previous section provide grounds for reevaluating what the story "contains." In section 1.2, we have already noted that Genette (1969: 202; 1980 [1972]: 27n2) occasionally equates diegesis with "narrative content" (contenu narratif) or with "story" (histoire) in Tzvetan Todorov's sense. Pier (1994: 209), however, disapproves of such "misleading identification" with Todorov's "story." The notion of *story* seems to play a certain role in the analysis of diegesis and has to be elucidated.

In literary theory, the concept of story involves a tradition reaching back to Russian formalism's distinction between *fabula* and *syuzhet*, with

36. Recall that *concreteness* is the term used by Riffaterre (1993 [1990]: 127), who speaks of a "concrete actualization."

the former matching *story* or *histoire*.[37] The story cannot be defined unless seen in opposition to a counterpart, which Genette (1972: 72) calls *narrative* ("récit").[38] The original formalist distinction has a strong focus on chronology: "the *fabula* involves what happens in the work as (re)arranged in the 'objective' order of occurrence, while the *sujet* involves what happens in the order, angle, and patterns of presentation actually encountered by the reader" (Sternberg 1978: 8–9). Todorov (1980 [1966]: 5) generalizes this concept and gives the following definition:

> At the most general level, the literary work has two aspects: it is at the same time a story and a discourse. It is story, in the sense that it evokes a certain reality of events that would have passed, of characters which from this point of view are identical with those of real life. This same story could have been related by other means: by a film, for example. (Translation of Todorov 1966: 126)

Among the different possible meanings included in this definition, I would like to highlight the most general one, which is to see in the story "a plane of narration divorced from the context of utterance" (Sternberg 1990: 919n13). Apparently, story in this sense verges on the idea of world, which similarly assumes a complete dissociation from any of its descriptions. We are going to stick to this notion of story and avoid any special emphasis on the relationship between the chronology in the world being represented and the temporal order of the representation itself.[39]

Todorov (1980: 5) declares that the narrative is arbitrary with respect to the story. A single story can be conveyed by means of quite different discourses. Arbitrariness—a concept adopted from Ferdinand de Saussure (1983 [1916]: 67–69)—means that there need not be a discourse which is privileged over others for a story to exist. If someone recalls the story of the (real) Joan of Arc, the recollection might not include a reference to a specific narrative. This phrasing leads to a major difficulty: the concept of story cannot be easily detached from the notion of narrative or discourse. In all relevant definitions, the two only exist due to their mutual relationship, just as Saussure's (ibid.: 66–67) signified cannot exist without a signifier. A story without a discourse would be a misuse of the term.

37. See also Sternberg 1978: 8–14.

38. Formalism's and Todorov's distinction becomes "story" versus "discourse" in Chatman's (1978: 19) theory.

39. Temporal order and, as a quite different phenomenon, causality have been subject to much simplification, as Sternberg (1978; 1990) points out, and they raise even more questions in terms of world semantics. We might claim that both temporal order and causality are implicitly enforced by the world semantics. Whereas time and causality are multifaceted phenomena, language and thus verbal narration operate under the constraint of being more or less linear (for less linear cases, see Bunia 2007) and have the ability simply to *state* causality by saying *because*, *since*, *for*, *this is why*, and so on.

One might prefer to say that the recollection of Joan of Arc does not inevitably include a reference to a specific *text*. Yet to say that the *text* is arbitrary with respect to the story would be to lose contact with the Saussurian concept of arbitrariness. The distinction between story and discourse conceptually ignores the material text that "contains" both and without which narrating could not happen. Theory does not take into account paper, typography, sound waves, and so on but confines its attention to abstract structures on both sides of the distinction. But these abstractions (temporal order, for instance) are themselves founded on meaning and on structuring the perceptible.

Is there possibly a discourse without a story? Think of a novel read by nobody or a forgotten piece of narrative writing. In this sense, one can preserve the discourse (in a library, for instance) and disregard the story. However, this is not a notion compatible with the semiotic and narratological tradition.

Genette (1980 [1972]: 27) compares the discourse (récit) to the signifier and the story (histoire) to the "signified" (translation of Genette 1972: 72). Seymour Chatman (1978: 19) defines *story* as "the *what*" and discourse as "the *how*." Monica Fludernik (1996: 336) proposes to subsume *story* under "fictional world" and *discourse* under "telling schema." These three are all very broad approaches which try not to reduce the "meaning" of a narration to agents, plot, and temporal order. But in fact, they too restrict their notions of story and discourse, because they do not take into account the material basis of communication. As a result, the discourse remains an abstract concept without any connection to a text or to some material basis; but the information conveyed through a narration cannot be discussed independently of a particular discourse. So there is no story without discourse, no discourse without a story, and after all, no story and no discourse without a material text.

As to the relationship between language and material entities, there have been two major objections to Saussure's (1983 [1916]: 65–70) proposal of how to describe the sign. On the one hand, some linguists or analytic philosophers claim that reference must be taken into account so as to complement the sign (see Benveniste 1966: 45–55; 1974: 226). The referent is considered to exist independently of the question of whether someone points to it by signs or not. On the other hand, many post-structuralists have argued against the notion of referent and suggested that the signifier and the signified can each operate on its own (see de Man 1979: 3, 6; Derrida 1990: 273): a signifier can point to other signifiers without finally reaching the signified. In this view, a signifier can be examined in its material and medial realization (such as a single written word), while

the signified becomes a transcendent and unreachable idea that words can hardly express (see Derrida 1997 [1967]). Both the analytic and the post-structuralist views stress materiality, the former focusing on the material real world and the latter concentrating on the materiality of what produces meaning. But in so doing, both approaches arrive at an explanatory gap between mental states and material entities that either cannot bridge.

The problems we encounter in differentiating between story and discourse have their origins in the distinctions between signified and signifier, on the one hand, and between content and form, on the other hand. Some scholars have expressed discontent with the implications of this semiotic model (Metz 1977; Luhmann 1993). I will hence replace the story/discourse pair with *representation/representational mode*. From now on, we will distinguish between the representation (as the generalization and modification of the concepts of story and of content) and the mode of representation (as the generalization and modification of the concepts of discourse and of form). While the concepts story/discourse only apply to narrations, the distinction between representation and its mode is relevant to all kinds of world imaging (this is also why chronology does not play any crucial role in our analysis). In representational terms, diegesis will turn out to extend its range and importance accordingly, beyond the major case of narrations.

The core idea is to characterize representation as a "presentation of experientiality" (Fludernik 1996: 49). In the terminology of systems theory, representation can be said to *describe* experience, including statements such as "(I've just seen that) the cat lives next door." In this light, Fludernik's theory reflects the semantics of subjectivity prevalent in many (narrative) representations. Yet the subjectivity need not be accentuated. Experience involves much less than experientiality. It is, in short, defined as follows: when an observer classifies an event as independent from the decisions he or she is making in the very same moment, we call the event so observed and classified the observer's experience. We need this seemingly cumbersome phrasing because the classification itself is actually a decision made by the observer when facing the event. Experience involves active structuring on the part of the observer. For a description to be a description of experience, it is, in Luhmann's (1999 [1997]: 335) terms, merely required that the observer present the description such that the observed events are not affected by the observer's presence. This briefly outlines my model of representation (for more, see Bunia 2007: 113–21, 226–39), which can also accommodate an observer describing his or her own actions, as quite common with homodiegetic narrators in fiction. Anyhow, the concept of representation is broad enough to include narrations as a subgroup, one defined

by its accentuating time and possibly (against Fludernik's "natural" narratology) causality as well.

This conceptualization fundamentally differs from approaches to representation (whether fictional or factual) by means of "truth claims," "speech acts," "propositions," and so on (for an overview, see Bunia 2007). These analytic categories do not fully allow for the fuzziness of cognitive operations, which plays a key role in dealing with experience and its representation. By *fuzziness* or *vagueness*, I mean an intrinsic indefiniteness of the processes by which an observer structures the phenomena in the world: we do not just happen not to know them fully (due to contingent circumstances, for instance), but there is no way to gain precise knowledge about them. In this sense, there is no difference between "ontological" or "epistemological" fuzziness: the fuzziness lies at the very point where a phenomenon is identified as such and such (see Merleau-Ponty 1962 [1945]). It is simply impossible to verify if the categories used to describe the world are adequate. But language can produce the illusion of precision. In Western metaphysics, which underlies world semantics, the essential fuzziness is even denied, and concepts such as reference or truth are founded on the assumption that a precise verbal description can be achieved. Of course, language can indicate that observations do not match, that information is missing, or that an expression lacks accuracy. That is, an experience *can* be *explicitly* marked as vague. But such an indication must be detectable, or else coherence will be assumed.

To understand the representation, it is important to focus on the communicational processes it generates. Even if it is a description of experience, it cannot prescribe a *specific* mental reaction, but it allows a recipient to observe what these reactions might look like.[40] Fludernik's (1996) natural narratology helps understand this shift from objectivist to process-oriented approach by analyzing how fiction can induce potential subjective reactions. From a different point of view, Kendall L. Walton (1990) too undertakes a meticulous analysis of representation (which he prefers to call fiction) as working in a way similar to playing games, with a tension between the rules of the game and the freedom left to the player. More specifically, Walton shows that a representation can be compared to props that invite or inhibit a specific action. Louis Marin (1994 [1978]: 307–8) similarly discusses what reactions a painting allows or disallows a viewer. All these quite heterogeneous approaches have in common a focus on pro-

40. For instance, reading about someone who senses extreme heat does not make you feel that heat yourself, but you know that it must be disagreeable or even painful.

cesses and, I believe, will prove more compatible with neuropsychological findings than proposition-based theories.

Both mode and representation are communicational responses to a material basis and, more important, to the *same* material basis. The difference between them lies in the center of attention: the recipient directs his or her attention either toward the representation in order to actually undergo the experience it offers or toward the mode, that is, to how the evocation of experience is achieved.

Thus a representation *is* what it shows, nothing but "the *what*," which is Chatman's (1978: 19) definition of *story*. Conversely, the representational mode refers to all *means* of representation: the use of words, tropes, temporal ordering, point of view, and typography in fictional or factual text; colors, canvas, and frames in painting; or actors, music, frames,[41] cuts, and opening credits in film. Consequently, the mode is "the *how*," the "discourse" (ibid.) not only in a formal but also in a material sense.

As the above list shows, the concept of mode includes quite heterogeneous ingredients. But these ingredients have something essential in common: they indicate a structured scrutiny of the material basis rather than a simple acceptance of an apparently given meaning. The mode depends on whether the recipient has learned to make certain distinctions (such as between typographic characters with and without serifs, between a metaphor and a metonymy, and so on). This is why the heterogeneity of the possible modes does not mean a lack of categorical clarity. Throughout, an active redirection of attention is necessary to go beyond seeing what one sees and to ask what allows one to identify certain things, events, and persons. Compare word perception in a language which one has learned to read: one *first* comprehends the word's meaning and only *then* (possibly) analyzes how this meaning has been produced (Nakayama 2005 [2001]: 742–44). Usually, this analysis only takes place if one feels the need to examine the word (for instance, as a critic) or if one remains puzzled about the meaning. The mode generally draws the recipient's attention *after* he or she has "understood" the representation but wants to know *how* it operates and if his or her comprehension is really adequate to the representation. One then sees behind the representation all the means needed to evoke an experience, always assuming the necessary (acquired) abilities to perceive and distinguish.

The less a material basis can be used as a representation, the more probable is the reverse order of attention to mode first. For example, is *Finnegans Wake* (Joyce 1992 [1939]) a representation? Many readers, I for one, cannot

41. Here *frame* is meant in the technical cinematic sense.

figure out the dreamlike persons, events, and settings that the text evokes without a close look at the words. This novel provokes an effect similar to some of William Turner's Moselle paintings of 1839, which are considered precursors of later abstract art (by our definition, not representational); the caption suggests that we see the Moselle River, but the paintings do not depict any features of the river and give nothing but an impression of colors. These are borderline cases: if they are taken for representations, observing their mode of representation may precede the observation of the representation itself. However, the more easily the "worldly" elements can be discerned, the more clearly one is dealing with a representation.[42]

Although the distinction between representation and representational mode may prompt the concepts of signified and signifier, it is conceptually totally different in that either of the terms connects the material basis to a distinct mental image.[43] We can therefore analyze either without reference to its counterpart, and Todorov's "arbitrariness" can now be helpfully reformulated. A representation can have different modes, but a mode only produces one representation. This is because the representation can always be considered apart from the material basis that enables its reception. In fact, one can look at a picture of a ship without thinking of the fact that it is "merely a picture" or read about a boat without attending to the words that convey the object. One can always imagine another choice of words (in a verbal narration) or other actors and actresses (in a film). In short, there is no need for the shift of attention from the representation to its mode. By contrast, it is practically impossible to focus on a mode without actualizing the representation. If one looks at the words "the cat lives next door" merely in terms of their typography or formal linguistic properties, the sentence does not operate as a representation.

One may now be tempted to equate representation and diegesis as a "delimited part" of the world, the part about which we have *explicit* information. In fact, this is what Genette (1969: 211) perhaps unconsciously did when he referred to diegesis as a "spatiotemporal universe" (my transla-

42. I do not want to consider the question of whether the ability to read a painting depends on acquired knowledge or happens "automatically" owing to "iconic" similarity between the painting and the reality. Nelson Goodman (1997 [1976]) very elaborately argues that it does not happen automatically.

43. In fact, Saussure (1983 [1916]: 66) does not differ so much from my position: "A linguistic sign is not a link between a thing and a name, but between a concept and a sound pattern. The sound pattern is not actually a sound; for a sound is something physical. A sound pattern is the hearer's psychological impression of a sound, as given to him by the evidence of his senses. This sound pattern may be called a 'material' element only in that it is the representation of our sensory impressions." What we call "material basis" is what Saussure calls "something physical."

tion). But for the reasons already given, the two concepts must be kept apart. Indeed, a representation has neither homodiegesis nor heterodiegesis and neither extradiegesis nor intradiegesis, which means that the notion of diegesis does not apply to it directly. We can imagine Alice's Wonderland without having read Lewis Carroll's (1988 [1939]) original *book* if we have information about Wonderland from other sources, but we cannot assess where an observer of this world stands without some particular text, film, or other representational medium. Only if there is such a specific material basis can we distinguish homo- from heterodiegesis. For instance, in telling that "when I was five years old, my nose was severely hurt by an unfastened window when I took a peek outside," I am a homodiegetic narrator. But someone wishing to retell my misadventures would perhaps shift to heterodiegesis and, even though trying to preserve most of my representational mode, say, "When Bunia was five years old, his nose was severely hurt by an unfastened window when he took a peek outside." This simple example shows that, though various other elements recur, the relation to the diegesis easily changes with the shift of perspective: in the first narration the narrator stands close to the diegesis, while in the second he or she does not.

Seemingly, our investigations have encountered a major inconsistency. On the one hand, the representation is considered complete and coherent insofar as it inherits the world's completeness and coherence. Representation, in this sense, never has any "gaps" or "blanks." The represented world is "a logically continuous universe" (Gorbman 1980: 195), even if the coherence is "hypothetical" only (Harshav 2007 [1985]: 131). The representation is thus the inferred. On the other hand, the representation never gives complete information about the world represented but leaves innumerable things undecided and obscure.[44] This amounts to saying that a representation is continuous because the represented world is continuous and at the same time it is discontinuous because it only provides a fraction of the details about the represented world.

However, we have defined representation as the description of experience; and the experience involved is very limited, but the communicational regularities (above all, the world semantics) let the experience be embedded into a possibly fictive and in any case continuous world. So the conveyed experience cannot be detached from the embedding: the given and the inferred merge. Yet the mode can help disentangle the two in a representation. For example, only by looking at the particular words of a narrative text can we try to say what is given there and what is just inferred.

44. Here we have the gaps and blanks theorized by Sternberg (1978; 2003: 362).

Gorbman (1980: 198) defines diegesis as "the very frontiers that separate *the given* from *the inferred*." Using the terms and concepts just introduced, I will explain this "separation" and propose a second, definite characterization of diegesis—as the immediate meaning of the representational mode. The mode lets us establish the small part of the representation that does not leave room for interpretation, because it contains "the facts." Regarding narrative representations, diegesis involves the part of the narrated world which the narration (or, to adhere closer to the concept of mode, the wording) *explicitly* describes. Diegesis is the *interface* between representation and representational mode.[45] Let me now elaborate on this idea and in particular the concept of immediate meaning.

2.4. Diegesis as Immediate Meaning

Recall Riffaterre's definition of diegesis. Although his approach is in no way based on systems theory, his chosen phrase, "concrete actualization of narrative structures," shows a similarity to Luhmann's (2000 [1995]: 107) concept of meaning ("Sinn"), which is characterized as actual potentiality and potential actuality. This needs some explication. Luhmann's aim is to conceptualize a general theory of communication that seeks to explain how meaning operates. Systems theory stresses that meaning is not a matter of language alone but also includes nonverbal communication. A communicational act regularly allows different interpretations. Which are admissible depends on the kind of "semantics" involved, in Luhmann's sense. For example, while a mathematical argument allows only quite narrow interpretations—there is always a clear distinction between a true and a false deduction—a novel may be read in quite different ways. When reacting to this communicational act, a participant must commit himself or herself to one of these possibilities and so *actualizes* one option. The actualized option need not be very specific; it can even consist in a complete negation, or in a simple assent, or in remaining caught in an irresolvable ambiguity. Meaning thus offers a specific variety of possible actualizations (actual potentiality), among which only one can be selected to trigger further acts of communication (potential actuality). An act of communication cannot control which option, if any, the sequels to it will choose.

When related to Luhmann's concept of "Sinn" or meaning, diegesis can be described as the immediate meaning of a representational mode. Riffaterre (1993 [1990]: 127) speaks of "the concrete actualization of narrative structures . . . through which it [the narration] unfolds." The actu-

45. If, as I would propose, we define story as a representation that has temporal order and discourse as the corresponding representational mode with its own temporal order, then we could say that, in the case of narration, diegesis is the interface between story and discourse.

alized structures produce a distinct impression of what is happening in the representation, and this distinctness is the concreteness in question. In Luhmann's terminology, a "concrete actualization" occurs when a communication activates those potentialities that are evident or that immediately emerge. I will thus speak of immediacy or of immediate meaning when an element of a representation is easily, quickly grasped.[46] Of course, there is no *naturally* evident potentiality. Ease and speed of understanding are a matter of experience and training; they can vary from individual to individual and depend on semantics which change in the course of time.

Maybe Souriau also thought of such immediacy when he chose the formula "à l'intellegibilité," which can denote "easy to comprehend." It is important to note that not all literary or other works have this immediacy. An extreme example would be Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* or David Lynch's film *Mulholland Drive* (2001), where it is difficult to assign the various personas to the actors since names and relationships change without any apparent reason. The meaning thus becomes opaque on the level of events and characters.

What we are dealing with here are the structures governing the relationship between mediation and immediacy. On the one hand, a story is mediated by a text, a film, a cartoon, or other appropriate means; a recipient does not obtain any information "directly." On the other hand, in most cases no great effort is required to understand the main points of a narration. Regarding the effortlessness and the immediacy, there is no essential difference between the contact with reality and the contact with representations. According to the psychologist Richard J. Gerrig (1993), a representation (whether factual or fictional) produces very much the same mental effects as nonmediated reality. For example, confronted with a boat in a film, first of all one sees a boat. It would take an analytic effort to say that "there were only some rays of light reflected by the cinema screen," and it can equally be argued that the sight of a real ship is also nothing but the effect of rays of light (this time reflected by the ship). Similarly, the word *boat* in a narration evokes the idea of a boat; only when thinking about the word's use analytically does one pay attention to the difference between the word's graphic or acoustic image and its meaning. Every recognition of "merely" depicted or mentioned entities depends of course on acquired knowledge, but one must also learn to deal with reality itself, to identify a real boat as a boat.

46. Luhmann (2000 [1995]: 8): "This is why consciousness processes perceptions under the impression of their immediacy, while the brain is actually executing operations that are highly selective, quantitatively calculating, recursively operated, and hence always mediated. 'Immediacy' is nothing primordial, but an impression resulting from the differentiation of the autopoietic system of the brain and consciousness."

With diegesis characterized as the immediate meaning of the representational mode, it becomes clear that no attention is usually paid to the diegesis; the mode becomes observable due to a shift of attention, and so a fortiori does diegesis. A recipient need not distinguish the diegesis from the whole of the represented world unless it becomes important to know what the representation *actually* shows. This is why I have called the diegesis the interface between representational mode and representation and why diegesis can also be understood as a specific "part" of the representation. It is what one sees as the representation when one's attention is directed to the mode.

The characterization of diegesis I proposed may seem to have lost contact with the problems discussed by Genette, and to a certain extent this is true. Yet it should still be relevant to Genette's concerns. How, then, do diegesis as "immediate meaning" and Genettian "homodiegesis" or "extradiegesis" interrelate? In particular, how can a narrator stand far away from "the immediate meaning of the representational mode"? The "immediate meaning" may be abstract as a theoretical concept, but its operational results are quite concrete. Let us take the case of a fictional narration. Within its fictional world, there are certain entities and figures that the narration evokes concretely and immediately. They are those "parts" of the world that almost invariably come to mind during the reading process, because they belong to the core of the words' meaning, which does not differ much among language users. In this sense, there are certain entities and persons in the represented world that are "immediately" determined by the mode, and a narrator can be close to these entities and thus homodiegetic.

Now, what would an extradiegetic narrator be? Can such a narrator stand outside the immediate meaning? As we saw in section 1.2, the distinction between extradiegesis and intradiegesis (and its reapplication to the fictional world, which produces a metadiegesis, and so on) involves a model of nested diegeses. Extradiegesis refers to the (immediately comprehensible and concretely given) organization of the meaning, and so an extradiegetic narrator is presented as formally responsible for the mode. A narrator that is humanlike and plays a certain role in the narrated world can be even held mundanely responsible for the mode. In *Tristram Shandy*, the extradiegetic narrator Tristram thus comments on the organization of the novel (chapters, typography, and so forth). There may be a narration within a narration,[47] and a certain part of the mode (whose delimitation

47. There are also many paintings with another painting within the represented scene, which has an inner "slant," an intradiegetic "presenter."

can be concretely and immediately recognized)[48] then produces a representation which has a slant of its own. This can be identified as what is called an intradiegetic narrator. The degree to which such a narrator is anthropomorphic can vary from narration to narration. Intradiegetic narrators can but need not be intradiegetic persons, that is, concretely and immediately evoked characters.

Our characterization of diegesis does not imply that every particular diegesis has a definite, unquestionable delimitation. Some scholars have in fact analyzed diegesis in difficult cases, about which clarity is lacking. Gorbman (1980: 192) asks in what situations film music belongs to the diegesis, and she lists some familiar and nonetheless borderline examples. Music that figures can hear in the scene no doubt belongs to the diegesis, but what happens when the music merely "picks up diegetic associations"? She discusses John Ford's *Stagecoach* (1939) as an example where music gives the sense of tension and imminent danger, and she draws the conclusion that the impression of what is (diegetically) happening depends to a great extent on the music the recipient hears—even if the music has no source in the narrated world and is thus not part of the diegesis. Using the notion of immediate meaning of the mode, I would agree with Gorbman and say that the sense of danger is diegetic but not the sound of the music itself. The music does not have the meaning of music audible within the fictional world.

In a very similar example, Fuxjäger (2007: 25) analyzes the case of film titles and concludes that in general they are nondiegetic (this is also discussed in Stanitzek 2010: 167–68). Then he draws attention to the captions appearing in a film, such as "Los Angeles 2029 A. D." The problem is that they convey some information about what one immediately sees; with the help of the caption, we know that the diegetic entities are situated in Los Angeles. However, the means of giving this information is not diegetic. The caption is on the same representational level as the extradiegetic narrator; it organizes what a recipient can see but is not what the recipient immediately recognizes and so does not belong to the diegesis. Rather, the viewer recognizes as its immediate meaning that he or she sees Los Angeles in a film, and thus the fact that the visible entities and persons are in Los Angeles fully belongs to the diegesis.

Here is another borderline case. In Matt Groening's former television and now straight-to-DVD series *Futurama*, "30th Century Fox" appears as the film studio. Unlike the Los Angeles caption that indicates a place, this

48. For example, through expressions such as "and then she told" in a verbal narration or through a frame within a painting. There can be less obvious cases, such as *La condition humaine* (1933) by René Magritte.

logo has two different immediate meanings: first, regarding the representation, the events take place in the thirtieth century (as the temporal context of the diegesis); second, with respect to what is outside the representation, the studio is apparently 20th Century Fox, at least for all film viewers who are familiar with the original logo. Distinguishing the two references—to the represented world of the thirtieth century and to the present-day production company—stresses that the medium-specific frame of a representation determines how to demarcate the mode (Bunia 2007: 311–20). In literature, typographic marks may belong to the diegesis if the book containing the narration also exists in the narrated world; this is the case in Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* and in E. T. A. Hoffmann's *Lebens-Ansichten des Katers Murr* (*The Life and Opinions of the Tomcat Murr*; 1820), to mention the most famous examples only (see Bunia 2007: 253–55).

2.5. A Phenomenon or a Tool?

Borderline cases such as those discussed at the end of the previous section are difficult to decide but not rare. They stress an important aspect of the pair *explicit* versus *implicit* and of the difference between representation and mode; none of these distinctions possesses a solidity that would allow us to establish some criteria systematically drawing the line. Quite the reverse: these differences are subject to semantic evolution and may change in time; they may even sometimes vary among different recipients.[49] Perhaps this is a trivial conclusion, but I wish to stress it: diegesis too undergoes semantic transformations; it cannot be detached from whatever frame of reference a corresponding semantics provides it with.

This does not at all entail that anything goes. Far from it, only relatively few options are viable at each moment (recall the notion of semantics and the definition of meaning). But no criteria help decide which is the correct interpretation, because communication is founded on the intrinsic fuzziness of observation and subject to change in time. Criteria only exist ex post in a diachronic account of how certain means of communication (e.g., words) have been used. This is why historical knowledge is so important for the interpretation of literary texts. But even a historical analysis does not yield clear criteria, only pointers that themselves are subject to interpretation and negotiation.

How would one try to check whether an idea is immediately expressed by a discourse? One may say, for instance, that a narrator in Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw* (1993 [1898]) clearly asserts that the governess exists (in the fictional world), but the reader cannot decide if the ghosts that the

49. Alexander Böhnke (2007: 103) notes that diegesis relies on negotiations.

governess sees are a mere figment of her imagination (see Sternberg 1978: 52). Whether the ghosts exist is not part of the tale's immediate meaning but an issue to be discussed in interpretation—even if this interpretation finally yields the insight that a definitive answer remains impossible.

This article therefore suggests that diegesis should no longer be considered an analytic tool for narratological research but rather an epistemic phenomenon concerning how observers structure representations. This means that it cannot be fully captured by a definition but must be "empirically" studied. Although the term *diegesis* sounds purely technical, the phenomenon itself operates below the processes involved in watching films and in reading novels or newspaper reports. Its applications range from pictures to verbal narrations; it appears whenever we find a meaningful representation (as a description of experience, not necessarily narrative). Of course, it will still be possible to use it for the examination of narrative structures just as a critic will speak of metaphors in an elucidation of a text's meaning, even if metaphor too is an epistemic phenomenon. And while diegesis may be a phenomenon, the notion of homodiegesis, for instance, remains a useful label for specific textual structures that are linked to a phenomenon of narrations, namely, diegesis. As a core element of processing representations, diegesis helps us distinguish between what is explicitly asserted and what is merely implied. It is one of the driving forces behind any philological effort, since it draws attention to the very words producing the immediate representational impressions.

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