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Intermediality and Storytelling

Edited by
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Editors' preface

Like a rock thrown into a quiet pond, the concept of narrative, introduced on the intellectual scene by French structuralists, has generated a series of ripples that expand its relevance from language-based, book-supported literary fiction to other disciplines (discourse analysis, medicine, theology, law, history), to other semiotic modes (visual, aural, kinetic, interactive), and to other technologies (painting, photography, TV, film, the computer). The last two expansions form the object of intermedial storytelling.

The study of the storytelling abilities of different media has not awaited the technological explosion of the 20th century, nor indeed the development of a scholarly concept of medium. Plato's distinction between mimetic and diegetic modes of storytelling and Lessing's reflections on the expressive power of temporal and spatial art forms can be regarded as foundational for the study of narrative mediality. So does, in the 20th century, the work of Walter Ong (1982), a disciple of the media guru Marshall McLuhan, who investigated the impact of orality, writing, and print technology for narrative form. Intermedial narratology still lags behind literary narratology and the study of language-based narrative in various disciplines, but it is fast gaining ground, thanks in large part to the rapid expansion in the past twenty years of digital technology as a new narrative medium. The "digital turn" in the humanities (to adopt a terminology that has also produced the "linguistic turn" of structuralism and the "narrative turn" of interdisciplinary studies) has not only directed attention to what has come to be known as "new media," it has also, just as importantly, led to a reassessment of the configuring impact of older media for thought, narrative and the processing of information (a processing which would be called "reading" in an approach that privileges written language). The digital scholar N. Katherine Hayles (2002:28) has called for instance for a "media-specific analysis" of texts which takes into consideration what she calls the "materiality of the medium"—a term by which she means the physical support of inscription.[1] Thanks to this kind of approach, the

1 The drawback of this focus on "materiality" is that it ignores ephemeral physical manifestations, such as the spoken word. Hayles has been exclusively concerned with print and digital writing.

book, an object long taken for granted, has been rediscovered as a "technology" that affords unique forms of cognitive processing, while writing has emerged as a mode of expression capable of combining the visual and the linguistic, which means, the spatial and the temporal, by turning the disposition of graphemes on a page into a signifying device.

Yet for all its present popularity, the concept of medium remains strangely ill-defined.[2] What for instance is the medium of Jane Austen's novel *Pride and Prejudice*: is it language, is it writing, or is it the book? All three of these conceptions of medium have an impact on what kind of story can be told, though studying the importance of the book or of writing as a medium for *Pride and Prejudice* will not differentiate this particular novel significantly from most other novels. Focusing on its handling of language, by contrast, will result in a much more individuated analysis, since all uses of language are original, unique to the work. It is only when *Pride and Prejudice* is regarded as a member of the homogeneous class of standard novels, and is contrasted to experimental uses of the book or of typography, that its bookishness and graphic appearance become significant features. What this means for the study of narrative mediality is that if we want to capture the specific narrative power of whole media, we must often treat individual works as representative of an entire class. Yet we should not ignore the ability of individual works to expand the expressive potential of their medium by revealing possibilities that had remained so far unexploited. An example of this phenomenon is the creative uses of visual elements, such as photographs, maps, and sketches in recent novels. As we hope to show in this book, the close reading of individual works can be as fruitful for the study of narrative mediality as the general discussion of a type of medium.

Among the seven or eight definitions of medium offered by most dictionaries, the most useful to the study of storytelling media are the technological (a channel for long-distance communication) and the artistic (the material or form used by an artist, composer or writer). If medium is to acquire narratological relevance, it is as a "language" with a specific storytelling power, which means, as a basically semiotic phenomenon. While verbal language, sound and images are inherently semiotic phenomena, technologies are not. This is not to say that they do not affect narrativity: a channel of transmission can be visualized as a conduit of a certain shape that allows only certain objects to pass through. Actually, most media of transmission allows the passage of stories that were configured for other

2 And so does its English form: while the correct Latin form is *medium* (sing.), *media* (plur.), some scholars use the plural *mediums*, and others use *media* in the singular.

media: for instance, a film shown on television or a book on Amazon's Kindle reading machine. But channel-type media can also give rise to a distinct type of narrative that takes advantage of their distinct affordances. When this happens, the distinction between medium as semiotic phenomenon and medium as channel of transmission disappears, and technology acquires genuine narratological significance.

* * *

The present book is titled *Intermediality and Storytelling*. This choice requires some explanation. While the concept of medium has become very prominent in narratology, there are so many candidates available to refer to the relations between narrative and media that terminology has become a true nightmare: what, if any, are the differences between transmediality, intermediality, plurimediality, and multi-mediality (not to mention multimodality)? This terminological fuzziness extends to the project we are undertaking: should it be called multimedial, transmedial, intermedial, or simply "media-centered" narratology? Our intent in choosing intermediality for the title of this volume is to cast the net of the relations between narrative and media as widely as possible. As Werner Wolf (2008) observes, intermediality can be conceived in a broad and in a narrow sense. In its broad sense, the one we endorse here, it is the medial equivalent of intertextuality and it covers any kind of relation between different media. In a narrow sense, it refers to the participation of more than one medium — or sensory channel — in a given work. The opera, for instance, would be intermedial through its use of gestures, language, music, and visual stage setting. If intermediality is interpreted in a wide sense, other terms must be forged to differentiate its diverse forms, including a new term for the narrow sense. Wolf (2005) suggests "plurimediality" for artistic objects that include many semiotic systems, though "multimodality" has recently become widely used; "transmediality" for phenomena, such as narrative itself, whose manifestation is not bound to a particular medium; "intermedial transposition" for adaptations from one medium to another; and "intermedial reference" for texts that thematize other media (e.g. a novel devoted to the career of a painter or composer), quote them (insertion of text in a painting), describe them (representation of a painting through ekphrasis in a novel), or formally imitate them (a novel structured as a fugue). The importance of Wolf's catalog lies more in its spirit than in its letter: that is, in its distinction of the various types of relations between media and narrative, rather than the exact name given to these relations. In the name of this spirit, we have not tried to impose uniformity on the terminology used by our contributors, as long as they make their usage clear.

The essays collected in the following pages expand the project of the 2004 collection *Narrative Across Media* by covering a wider variety of storytelling media: photography, television, and blogs now receive their due, together with film, literature, musicals, comics, computer games and advertising — a form of discourse (rather than a medium proper) that makes use of multiple media. But *Intermediality and Storytelling* also innovates with respect to the earlier collection through its focus on two phenomena which have received considerable critical attention in the intervening years. The first is multimodality. Though narrative most certainly originated in oral storytelling — verbal language remaining by far the most powerful mode of signification for the representation of what makes a story a story, namely interactions between humans and between humans and the world — it is safe to assume that it has always relied on the many resources of face-to-face communication: sound, gestures, and facial expressions. From its very beginning, then, narrative performance has been a multimodal phenomenon. Later on came images, moving pictures and music. Though monomedial forms are perhaps the most heavily represented in Western cultures, thanks to the importance of language-only books, they are by no means the norm. The other feature that singles out this collection within the growing field of media studies is the focus of several of its chapters on what may be called a generalized form of ekphrasis: namely the representation of media, of types of signs, or of modes of perception within a work of another medium that relies on other types of signs.

* * *

The collection opens with Marie-Laure Ryan's paper "Fiction, Cognition, and Non-Verbal Media." Ryan examines critically the extension of the concept of fiction beyond its literary homeland. She argues that theory of fiction should be more than a taxonomic tool that would help to separate fiction from nonfiction: it should provide an access to the pragmatic and cognitive dimensions of fictionality and tell us something about the nature of fictional experience as well as about the cognitive relevance of fiction. Ryan discusses fictionality in literature, film, painting and other media and introduces the notion of indeterminacy to refer to a suspension of the judgment of fictionality.

Brian McHale and William Kuskin explore narrativity in comics. McHale uses Martin Rowson's parodic graphic-novel adaptation of T.S. Eliot's quasi-narrative poem, *The Waste Land,* as a case study to show how various forms of narrative and poetic segmentivity interact in this complex multimodal text. By integrating comics and graphic novels into twentieth-century literary history, Kuskin presents these genres as part of

a specifically literary reassessment of the book medium. He argues that the importance of comics narrative lies not in its exclusivity but in its generality, in what it can teach about the medium of the literary book in the increasingly crowded field of narrative technologies.

Jason Mittell and Paul Cobley discuss the narrative techniques that storytelling media use to control viewers' cognitive and emotive reactions. Mittell examines television storytelling strategies in the light of contemporary understanding of the mechanics of memory. He does so by identifying the narrative techniques that TV serials exploit to engage viewers and enable long-term comprehension that transcends the division of the show into weekly episodes and annual seasons. The paper describes some of the techniques that television uses to cue previous events while still maintaining the possibilities of suspense and surprise. Cobley analyzes a series of audio-visual narratives from film and television, arguing that, in the wake of 9/11, they have intensified a sense of anxiety that has always been part of narrative. The post-9/11 narratives discussed in the paper articulate this anxiety through themes of surveillance and conspiracy that inspire a 'desire to know' of paranoid proportions.

The next two chapters are devoted to non-standard types of film. Samuel Ben Israel's paper provides a new perspective on films with multiple protagonists by introducing an approach borrowed from social psychology. Ben Israel argues that multi-protagonist films not only diverge from classical narration in various ways, but that in these deviations another kind of narration emerges, a relational narration that corresponds to a new social and philosophical conception of man in Western societies. Per Krogh Hansen examines the narrativity of musical films, a genre in which story is told through dialogue and acting, as well as through music, singing and dancing, without privileging any of these modes. By investigating how a story emerges from a simultaneous, interactive process of 'talking, singing and dancing', this paper provides a model of the functioning of narrative in musical films – and in multimodal texts in general.

In their contribution on photo narratives, Jan Baetens and Mieke Bleyen take issue with the essentialist view of the photographic medium as anti-narrative or a-narrative, and sketch a method for a narrative reading of photography, both in single and multiple images. In their analysis of the photonovel — a genre characterized by the presence of fictionality, sequentiality, and words, Baetens and Bleyen highlight its management of the blank areas of the photographic image as spaces where text can be inserted. They also present a close narrative reading of a wordless sequence of photographs: *Aujourd'hui*, a work by the Belgian photographer Marie-Françoise Plissart. Meanwhile, Markku Lehtimäki focuses on the American documentary *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (1941), a work

that combines prose by James Agee and photographs by Walker Evans, as an example of a narrative that calls into question its own representational practices. Lehtimäki shows how the work shakes the readers' preconceptions by problematizing the relationship between the multimodal text and the harsh realities of the actual world.

Ruth Page's and David Ciccoricco's papers deal with new media. Page argues for a paradigm shift in the study of digital narratives that incorporate not only literary texts, but also online storytelling from 'everyday' domains. Her analysis integrates methods used for conversational stories (sociolinguistics and discourse analysis) with literary-theoretical considerations, two approaches often kept separate in narrative studies. Given its dual focus on text and talk, the essay revisits the central concept of *interactivity* in the light of the computer mediated user interactions that typically accompany web 2.0 platforms. Analysis of particular examples is taken from personal blogs, social networking sites, discussion forums and fanfiction. Ciccoricco's paper examines the narrative mechanics of the video game *God of War* (2005). Drawing on theoretical concepts from literature, film, and game studies, Ciccoricco demonstrates how gameplay influences narrative mechanics and how narrative complexity can be created in an interactive environment, despite the limitation of the player's choice of actions to what can be easily simulated by the game controls: mostly moving, fighting and collecting objects. His paper demonstrates that a narrative-theoretical framework can be applied to video games without losing sight of the specificity of gaming experience.

Elsa Simões Lucas Freitas analyzes a multimodal advertising campaign whose aim is to promote a public service television channel. When this campaign uses television, the medium that divulges the advertising message is, simultaneously, (1) the channel used for conveying it and (2) the object of the advertising message. Due to the effective conflation of narrative functions, the medium becomes the story. The analysis of the multimedia campaign provides new insights into the phenomena of intermediality, narrative and storytelling.

Alison Gibbons' case study is Mark Z. Danielewski's (2000) *House of Leaves*, a graphically complex novel whose multimodal design demands intense reader activity. Using a cognitive-poetic and text-world approach, the article suggests that such active participation creates what the author calls a *figured trans-world*, a textual world that not only invites readers to identify with the characters, but, in addition, dramatizes their role as readers by inviting them to play a corporeal role. According to Gibbons, the figured trans-world crucially accounts for both the readers' self-awareness of the book as object and their heightened involvement with the narrative in a literary experience that might itself be termed intermedial.

Marina Grishakova's paper draws on W. J. T. Mitchell's concept of "metapicture" and on W. Nöth's distinction between "metapictures" and "self-referential pictures". Grishakova introduces the concept of "intermedial metarepresentation" to refer to the intermedial and intersemiotic transfer within verbal and visual media. Intermedial metarepresentation combines self-referentiality with metadescription and reflects the semiotically mixed character of media. In verbal narratives, tension between the iconic and symbolic components of the medium arises from the dissociation of the "performative" (telling) and "cognitive" (showing) aspects of narration; in visual narratives, it becomes manifest due to discrepancy between images and verbal elements.

While maintaining a bi-focal attention to intra-textual multimodality and to transtextual relations between media, the papers demonstrate how intermedial and narrative studies may be mutually enriching and how the very process of semiotic mediation simultaneously imposes constraints and engenders growing complexity in the domain of storytelling practices.

Marina Grishakova, Marie-Laure Ryan

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Fiction, Cognition, and Non-Verbal Media

The concept of fiction is as difficult to define technically as it is easy to grasp intuitively. The layman's interpretation is easily captured by the definition of the online encyclopedia Wikipedia: "Fiction (from the Latin *fingere*, 'to form, create') is storytelling of imagined events and stands in contrast to non-fiction, which makes factual claims about reality." This is followed by a list of all the genres of fiction: novels, short stories, fables, fairy tales, and beyond literature: films, comics and video games. If it is that simple to define fiction, this is very bad news for the philosophers and literary theorists who have sweated over the problem for the past 20 years. Aren't they trying to reinvent the wheel?

Fortunately for the theorists and philosophers, Wikipedia's definition leaves many questions unanswered. A truly meaningful theory of fiction should be more than an instrument by which to sort out all texts into fiction and non-fiction: it should also tell us something about how we experience these texts, what we do with them, why we consume them, and why it is important to make a distinction between fiction and non-fiction. It should, in other words, have a phenomenological and a cognitive dimension.

By cognitive dimension I do not mean that a theory of fiction should rely on cognitive science in a technical sense. This paper will not deal with how neurons fire in the brain when we experience fiction, nor with the importance of the creation of fictional worlds for the life of the mind, even though it is a topic of prime importance.[1] What I mean with cognitive dimension is that the judgment "is it a fiction" must influence the use of a text or the interpretation of a behavior. Here are three cases where these responses depend crucially on the judgment of fictionality.

The first example comes from a famous fictional character, the comic book hero Tintin, but we can imagine that the events happened in real

1 See Schaeffer 1999, Dutton 2008 and Boyd 2009 on the importance of fiction for the life of the mind.

life, rather than being part of a story. In *Cigars of the Pharaoh*, Tintin hears a woman being savagely beaten in the Sahara desert. A good boy scout that he is, he rushes to her rescue, but instead of being thanked for his chevaleresque behavior, he discovers that he has stumbled upon a movie set, and he must suffer the anger of the entire film crew. The action was feigned, and the participants were actors playing a role.

Whereas the failure to recognize fiction in the Tintin story is due to honest mistake, the 1999 movie *Blair Witch Project* deliberately seeks to produce misidentification. The film was presented on an advertising Web site as the content of the camera of three young people who were investigating reports concerning a witch and who were found dead in a forest in Maryland. Needless to say the advertisement was a hoax: the film was not an authentic document discovered *post-mortem*, but a simulation filmed by the actors themselves. A spectator who believes the Web site will watch the movie with much greater horror than a spectator who knows how the film was made.

In literature, the importance of the judgment of fictionality is demonstrated by a novel titled *Marbot: A Biography* (1981; Engl. trans. 1983) by the German author Wolfgang Hildesheimer. The novel tells the life of Sir Andrew Marbot, a nineteenth century British intellectual who frequented German and English romantic poets and published several books about aesthetics. The seriousness of the scholarship is demonstrated by footnotes and an index, and the authenticity of the hero is attested by illustrations, such as a photograph of Marbot's ancestral castle, his portrait by Eugène Delacroix, and the portrait of his mother by Henry Raeburn. The text makes no use of the narrative techniques typical of the novel, such as representations of the private thoughts of characters, and it uses hypothetical constructions to distinguish speculative interpretations from verifiable reports of facts. All these features fooled some early critics into taking the text for a genuine biography, especially since Hildesheimer had previously penned a Mozart biography. But Sir Andrew Marbot is an invented character, and the text is a fiction. A reader who mistakes the text for a biography may be tempted to look up Sir Andrew Marbot on Wikipedia, to search for his works in the catalog of a library, or even to write a dissertation about him. By contrast, a reader who correctly identifies the work as a novel will be entertained by the author's clever imitation of scholarly writing.

What the case of Marbot demonstrates is that one cannot always tell whether or not a text is a fiction by inspecting the text. There are admittedly what Dorrit Cohn (1999) calls "signposts of fictionality," and these signposts concern form as well as content: a text that makes heavy use of stream of consciousness, or that starts with "once upon a time," or

that tells about a prince being turned into a toad is likely to be a fiction. But these signposts are optional.[2] While a text of non-fiction cannot use fictional devices without losing its credibility, a fictional text can always imitate non-fiction. It follows that fictionality is not a semantic property of texts, nor a stylistic one, but a pragmatic feature: a feature that tells us what to do with the text.

Philosophical approaches to fiction

Modern literary criticism (by this I mean the tradition of academic criticism that started in the twentieth century) was slow to discover the importance of the concept of fiction. It wasn't until the seventies that philosophers of the analytic school discovered fiction as a topic of interest. They were not particularly interested in the experience of literature and in the appreciation of works of art: what mattered to them were the truth conditions of sentences that refer to fictional individuals, such as Anna Karenina and Santa Claus. But this problem could not be divorced from the attempt to capture the nature of fiction through formal definitions.

Theories of fiction can be divided into two classes: those that take language-based storytelling as their starting point, and those that are neutral with respect to medium and narrativity. Among the approaches that treat fiction as a form of verbal storytelling are those of the philosophers John Searle, David Lewis, and Gregory Currie.

For Searle (1975), fictionality is an operator that affects the speech act of assertion. An assertion is a speech act that commits the speaker to telling the truth. But in fiction, the author only pretends to make assertions, or imitates the making of assertions. This act of pretense relieves the author of the responsibility to fulfill the sincerity conditions that relate to assertion: having evidence for the truth of the asserted proposition p, and believing the truth of p. Searle distinguishes a deceptive from a non-deceptive form of pretense, the first corresponding to lies, and the

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2 In her discussion of the signpost of fictionality, Cohn (1999: 117) shrewdly observes that the example that Searle (1975: 325) chooses, reportedly at random, to show that "[t]here is no textual property, syntactic or semantic, that will identify a text as a work of fiction" flagrantly disproves his case: "Ten more glorious days without horses! So thought Second Lieutenant Andrew Chase-Smith recently commissioned in the regiment of King Edwards Horse, as he pottered contentently in a garden on the outskirts of Dublin on a sunny Sunday after-noon in April nineteen-sixteen." (From Iris Murdoch, *The Red and the Green*). The report of inner life discredits this passage from being non-fiction. But I think that this unfortunate example does not invalidate Searle's claim, because he is speaking of necessary properties.

second to fiction. Though the language of fiction is often indistinguishable from the language of nonfiction, readers are protected from taking the textual statements as genuine information by their recognition of the author's act of pretense. Insofar as fictionality is determined by the author's intent, a text cannot pass from nonfiction to fiction or vice versa. The notion of fiction as pretense has been widely accepted, but Searle's account is problematic in its handling of the statements within fiction that refer to real-world entities. According to Searle, Conan Doyle pretends to make assertions when he refers to Sherlock Holmes, but he makes serious assertions when he refers to London. It is hard to reconcile this patchwork of fiction and nonfiction with the homogenous impression that the world of the Sherlock Holmes stories makes on the reader. Moreover, the "pretended assertion" analysis remains ambiguous as to who is doing the pretense: Searle claims that in the case of a fiction told by a heterodiegetic, invisible narrator (what followers of Ann Banfield would call the no-narrator type of fiction), the author pretends to be a version of himself who believes in the truth of the story, while in the case of homodiegetic narration, the author pretends to be a radically different individual. While it is indeed much more difficult for authors to distanciate themselves from the views of anonymous heterodiegetic narrators than from the judgments of individuated ones — the narrator's personality acting as a shield — this analysis could lead to the questionable view that readers project the individuating features of the author unto heterodiegetic narrators. Finally, the idea of "pretended assertion" should be extended to "pretended speech act" if the theory is to account for the rhetorical questions and mock commands to the reader that pepper fictional discourse.

Another philosopher of the analytic school who addressed the issue of fictionality is David Lewis, the most prominent theorist of the plurality of worlds. For Lewis (1978), fiction is a story told as true about a nonactual possible world by a narrator situated within this other world. A nonfictional story by contrast is told as true about our world by one of its members. The difference between fiction and nonfiction is consequently a matter of reference world.

In Lewis' model, possible worlds stand as various distances from the actual world, depending on how many propositions take a different truth value in each world. The close worlds will contain many individuals who have counterparts in the actual world (for instance, the world of Tolstoy's *War and Peace*), while the remote worlds will have an entirely different population (the world of J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*). Counterparts of the same individual can have different properties in each possible world: for instance, the Napoleon of a historical novel could say things that he never said in reality or even win the battle of Waterloo. This idea of

counterpart relation solves the problem encountered by Searle when the text refers to actual entities. For Lewis, the world of the Sherlock Holmes stories is not created by a mixture of fictional and nonfictional statements, but by a fully fictional discourse that describes a possible world linked to the actual world through many counterpart relations. But since counterparts are not exact copies of each other, the author of the Sherlock Holmes stories is fully free to modify the geography of London or the biography of Napoleon.

While Searle describes fiction as a particular modality of the speech act of assertion — this is to say, as a meta-speech act — Gregory Currie (1990) regards it as an alternative to assertion. His definition of fictionality is formulated through a model inspired by Searle's analysis of the speech acts of assertion, command and promise, and by the philosopher H. Paul Grice's account of meaning in language. According to Currie, a speaker S performs the illocutionary act of uttering fiction if S utters a proposition P to an audience A with the intent that

(1) A would make-believe P
(2) A would recognize S's intention of (1), and
(3) A would have (2) as a reason for doing (1).[3]

The principal merit of this analysis is to open up the definition of fiction from a purely logical to a cognitive and phenomenological account by introducing the important notion of make-believe. But make-believe is not a distinct type of speech act, it is a use of the imagination that manifests itself in a wide variety of human activities: not only in storytelling, but also in dramatic acting, in playing with dolls or toy soldiers, in wearing masks and costumes, in adult role-playing games such as Dungeons and Dragons, and of course in those computer games where players identify with an avatar. Currie regards fictional make-believe as a subset of this larger class of make-believe (1990: 71). For him, storytelling illustrates fictional make-believe, while playing with dolls and toy soldiers would illustrate the nonfictional form.

For Kendall Walton, by contrast, all make-believe is in essence fiction, and all fiction is make-believe. This postulate enables him to propose a truly medium-free theory of fiction. As Walton declares, "not all fiction is linguistic. Any adequate theory of fiction must be able to accommodate pictorial fictions, for instance, as well as literary ones." (1990: 75). Walton's central thesis is that "in order to understand paintings, plays, films,

3 This is a somewhat simplified formulation. I have left out the specifications that are not directly relevant to my presentation of Currie's approach.

and novels, we must look first at dolls, hobbyhorses, toy trucks and teddy bears" (1990: 11). In their games of make-believe, children takes objects and pretend that they are something else: for instance, a doll is taken by the players for a baby, a toy soldier for a real soldier, and a certain tree for the jail in a game of cops and robbers. By standing for something else, the objects manipulated by the players become what Walton calls "props in a game of make-believe." The function of a prop in a game of make-believe is to encourage the play of the imagination.

Walton's notion of "game of make-believe" thus involves two distinct features: taking something as something else; and inspiring the imagination rather than conveying information. Both of these features can be applied to narrative literature as well as to children's games: readers pretend that the text written by the author is the discourse of a fictional narrator, and they use this discourse to construct the mental image of an imaginary world, just as children pretend that a certain stump is a bear, and use the stump to imagine a world where they are being chased by ferocious animals.

My own approach to fiction is a blend of ideas inspired by all these theories. Like Walton, I regard fiction as a mode of representation; this is to say, as an essentially mimetic activity. It is common to talk about an opposition between fiction and reality, and also about an opposition between representation and reality. Some theorists, especially those influenced by post-modern theory, conclude that every representation and every narrative is a fiction. I call this stance the "Doctrine of Panfictionality" (Ryan 1997). But the association of fiction and representation on the basis of their common opposition to reality rests on a fallacious symmetry. If we look at the three examples of fiction that I gave above, namely *Tintin*, *Blair Witch* and *Marbot*, only the *Tintin* example opposes directly fiction and reality. Tintin must decide if the events he is observing are pretended or if they really count. The contrast pits represented actions against real actions, and fiction designates the act of representing actions. But in the other two examples, *Marbot* and *Blair Witch*, fictional representation is not opposed to reality, but rather to another type of representation: we must decide if the author of *Marbot* represents a real or an imaginary person; and if the movie footage of *Blair Witch* captures real or simulated events. The notion of pretense, or make-believe, allows us to bring *Tintin*, *Blair Witch* and *Marbot* under a common denominator. In *Tintin*, fiction consists of pretending to perform actions as opposed to performing these actions for good, while in *Marbot* and *Blair Witch*, fiction consists of pretending to represent reality, as opposed to representing reality. In contrast to the Doctrine of Panfictionality, this account recognizes both a fictional and a non-fictional mode of representation.

Why do people care about "pretending to represent reality"? If fiction matters to us, it is because it evokes a world to the imagination, and the imagination takes pleasure in contemplating this world. But even though fiction represents a foreign world, it represents this world as if it were actual, using in language the indicative rather than the conditional mode. By taking the appearance of factuality, it asks its users to transport themselves in imagination into this foreign world. I call this act of transporting oneself fictional recentering (Ryan 1991: 21–23).

Recentering should not be confused with another phenomenon associated with fiction, namely the phenomenon of immersion. Whereas recentering is a logical operation which we deliberately perform whenever we read (or watch) a work of fiction, immersion is an experience created by artistic devices. The text must be able to bring a world to life, to give it presence and to capture our interest in a story. All fictions require recentering to be properly understood, but only some of them turn recentering into immersion. This lack of immersivity can be a matter of artistic failure, but it can also be a deliberate effect. Many postmodern texts try to block immersion through the use of self-referential devices that remind the reader of the constructed nature of the fictional world. Conversely, immersion is not restricted to fiction. I can be immersed in a true story without having to recenter myself into a foreign world.

When recentering takes place, the text is no longer regarded as making statements about the real world, or at least, not directly,[4] and the fictional world is contemplated for its own sake. It would seem that recentering occurs whenever a text describes an imaginary world, but this is not the case. When I make a counterfactual statement, for instance "If Napoleon had not invaded Russia he would not been exiled on St Helena," I invoke an imaginary state of affairs, but my purpose is to say something about the real world: namely that invading Russia was a critical mistake of Napoleon. By making this statement I remain centered in reality. The same is true of the practitioners of the genre known as counterfactual history (Ferguson 1999). When historians speculate about other directions that history could have taken, they present these alternative histories from the point of view of a member of the real world, and they do so in order to evaluate the decisions of the people who control the course of history. The non-fictional variety of counterfactual history

4 In the equivalent of an indirect speech act, a fictional text can suggest that its moral, or its general statements (of the form: all x) are valid not only in its own world, but in the real world as well. This is a case of double reference. Statements concerning individuals (there is an x, such as…), by contrast, cannot participate in this double reference.

must however be distinguished from its fictional counterpart, the novel of alternate history (Hellekson 2001). A good example of this genre is Philip Roth's novel *The Plot Against America* (2004), which represents an America where Charles Lindbergh is elected President in 1940, supports the Nazi regime, and takes humiliating measures against the Jewish population. In counterfactual fiction there are no formal markers of irreality, and the reader pretends that the imaginary situation really happened.

Extending concept of fiction to other media

The importance of the judgment of fictionality lies in the fact that it determines with respect to which world the information transmitted by the text should be evaluated. If the judgment says fiction, this information concerns a non-actual possible world, where it is automatically true (unless the narrator is judged unreliable), since the world is created by the text. If the judgment says "non-fiction," the information describes the actual world, but since this world exists independently of the text, it can be either true or false with respect to this world. The judgment of fictionality is most important for language, because language articulates clearly defined propositions that make a truth claim, and truth value is evaluated with respect to a specific world. For instance, "Emma Bovary committed suicide by taking arsenic" is true in the world of Flaubert's novel but false in our world; while "Napoleon died on St Helena" is true in our world, and in many fictional worlds, but false in the novel of Guido Artom *Napoleon is Dead in Russia* (1970).

Images present a much more problematic case for the theory of fictionality because, as Sol Worth observed (1981), they are unable to make propositional acts with unambiguous content. Think of the sentence: "The cat is on the mat." It has a well-defined argument — cat; through the definite article, it picks a specific referent — this cat, no other; and its predicate tells us that it is about a specific property of the cat: being on the mat, not about its color or its breed or how much of the mat the cat's body is covering. The message of a picture representing a cat on a mat is much fuzzier. The spectator will certainly identify the image as representing a cat, but instead of reflecting on the fact that the cat is on the mat he may pay attention to the green eyes of the cat, to its long fur, to the fact that the cat is looking at the photographer, and so on. The picture shows a cat by showing many of its visual features, but unlike language, it does not unambiguously force some of these features to the attention of the spectator at the expense of others. We know what the picture shows,

but we can't tell exactly what it says, because saying requires an articulated language with discrete signs.[5]

If the image is a photograph and not a painting, however, it will say something much more specific. Because photography is a mechanical method of capture, it bears witness to the existence of the cat and to its presence in front of the camera. An image obtained by mechanical means is not only an icon bearing a visual resemblance to an object, but also an index related to its referent through a causal relation: the mark on a sensitive surface of the patterns of light reflected by the object. This is why Roland Barthes wrote: "The photograph is literally an emanation of the referent… Discourse combines signs which have referents, of course, but these referents can be and are most often 'chimeras.' Contrary to these imitations, in Photography I can never deny that *the thing has been there*" (1981: 80).

The same, of course, holds for film and videos. Thanks to their technological objectivity, photos and movies offer a much more convincing testimony of the objects or events they represent than images created by the human hand, or even verbal descriptions. We need only think of the importance of the video tape in the Rodney Clark affair, or of the scandal created by the photos showing prisoners being humiliated at the Abu Ghraib prison in Baghdad. Photo and film may admittedly be manipulated, in which case they will not give a reliable testimony of the existence of their referent or of its presence in a certain place at a certain time. A manipulated photo or film is the equivalent of a lie in language, unless the manipulation is meant to be recognized. But it is precisely the ability to make truth-functional statements that make it possible for a type of signs to either lie, tell the truth….or be used as fiction.

Fiction and film

If there is one medium besides language for which the distinction between fiction and non-fiction is unanimously considered relevant, both by theorists and by the public at large, this medium is film. The relevance of the distinction comes from the fact that film can be used to convey truths about the real world. In a documentary film the camera captures two types of events: first, events that happened in the world independently of their being filmed, for instance rescue efforts after an earthquake, and

5 The expressive — and narrative — power of pictures can however be enhanced by segmenting them into discrete units, as is the case in comics.

second, events staged for the camera, in which people perform real actions, or speak in their own name without playing a role, for instance a basket-weaver demonstrating her trade and talking about her life. Fiction film, by contrast, captures simulated events that do not count in the real world, namely the role-playing of the actors, and it relies on the pretense that the actors really are the characters.

The distinction between make-believe and behavior that counts also affects photography, even though the fictional use of photography is much less widespread than the fictional use of film. But the work of the Victorian photographer Julia Margaret Cameron illustrates the difference: one of her photographs, titled "King Lear and His Daughters," captures actors who impersonate the characters of Shakespeare's drama, while another, "Alfred, Lord Tennyson," represents a historical character. From the portrait of Lord Tennyson we can derive information concerning the real world — how the poet looked like — but the King Lear picture only helps us imagine the non-actual world of Shakespeare's drama.

Virtually every theorist of fiction and every theorist of the cinema will agree that when we watch a film we imagine that the actors are the characters. But this observation does not exhaust the question of what exactly we pretend to be doing when we watch a film. Here we have a choice between two possibilities.

The first is to extend to film the analysis that describes our experience of language-based storytelling. In the medium of language, we do not perceive events directly, but rather read or hear a report of events by a narrator. We do not merely imagine that p and q happened, but that a narrator reports p and q to any audience, and sometimes we suspect that p and q were not exactly as reported. If we extend this analysis to film, when we watch a film we do not imagine that we are witnessing events, but rather, that somebody is showing us the events through the medium of film. In other words, when we watch a fiction film, we imagine that it is a kind of documentary film, and that the images on the screen are just that — images captured by a camera. Or less literally, we imagine that the fiction film is a story told by a narrator using certain visual devices, and that this narrator is distinct from the actual filmmaker(s), since he is showing as true what we know to be simulated. In this view, fiction film involves in make-believe a storyteller, just as literary fiction involves a narrator. There is a whole school of film critics who endorse such a view: Seymour Chatman (1990), François Jost and André Gaudreault (1990), and even Christian Metz (1970), who coined the term "Grand Image Maker" to designate the filmic equivalent of the narrator.

The alternative to a narrator-based conception of film is to claim that film presents life unmediated. This is, in its broad lines, the view

defended by David Bordwell (1985) and Gregory Currie (1995). This approach does away with the concept of a filmic narrator, and treats the spectator as an eye, or as a consciousness directly focussed on the scene of the action. In drama, this is known as the missing fourth wall: nobody "shows" the events on the stage to the spectator, the spectator just happens to see them, as if he were looking through a hole in the wall. While the narrator-based approach regards the fiction film as some kind of imaginary equivalent of the documentary film, this approach drives a wedge between the two. When we watch a documentary, we are aware that the events were captured on film by a camera, and this knowledge is what gives the documentary its testimonial value. What we watch is not the events themselves, but the recording of these events by technological means, a recording that brings proof that the events really happened. But when we watch a fiction film, according to the direct perception analysis, the medium disappears from our mind; it is not part of our game of make-believe that somebody filmed the events.

I personally prefer this approach to the idea of a filmic narrator, but the idea that the spectator pretends to observe life unmediated is not free of problems. As Gregory Currie has argued (1995: 170–79), we should not cast the spectator into the role of a hidden observer who witnesses the events, because this would lead to unnatural assumptions. For instance, if the spectator plays the role of an observer, a movie could not suggest that a murderer enters a house without being seen by anybody. When a film shows a close-up of lovers, the spectator certainly does not imagine that he is spying on the characters and that he is located a few inches away from them. And since in film image and sound often come from different sources, for instance in the case of extradiegetic music or voiced-over narration, the observer would have to be split in two in order to apprehend both the image and the soundtrack. I cannot think of an entirely satisfactory solution to this problem; the best answer I can come up with is to say that the spectator does not pretend to be a flesh-and-blood observer located on the scene, but rather sees himself as disembodied consciousness that moves around the fictional world as freely as the camera.

Fiction in painting

I have already stressed the main reason for the questionable status of the concept of fiction in man-made pictures: they lack the ability of language to make precisely identifiable truth claims; and they lack the ability of mechanical methods of capture to bear witness of the existence of what they show. The problematic character of the idea of pictorial fictional-

ity is demonstrated by the variety of responses that the question has generated.

The most radical position is that of Kendall Walton. For Walton, fictionality in the visual domain is synonymous with pictorial representation: "Pictures are fictions by definition" (1990: 351). Why does Walton claim that all pictures are fictional? Let's recall that for him a fiction is a "prop in a game of make-believe." In the case of pictures, the game of make-believe consists of pretending that we are directly seeing the depicted object. For instance, if I see a picture and I identify it as the picture of a ship, I imagine that I am seeing a ship, even though I know that I am facing a canvass covered with paint. My game of make-believe consists of identifying the various features of the ship: this is the hull, this is the mast, this is the sail, etc. As soon as we identify a shape as the shape of an object, we engage in a game of make-believe, since we know that the shape is not the object that it depicts.

Walton's position encounters two problems. First, it may be true of paintings done in a realistic style that we imagine facing the represented object and seeing it directly; but in other cases, for instance with representations done in a very sloppy or schematic style, we will process the image as the sign of an object, rather than directly as an object, because they do not convey a sense of its presence. We may say of a schematic representation "this is a ship," but we really mean "this represents a ship."

Second, this treatment of pictorial fictionality creates a deep asymmetry between visual and language-based representation. In the case of language-based representations, Walton distinguishes fictional ones, which give rise to make-believe, and non-fictional ones, which give rise to belief. In language, "fictional" designates a particular mode of representation. But in the case of the visual arts, "fictional" becomes synonymous with representation itself. Now if all pictorial representations are fictional, the diagnosis of fictionality becomes automatic, and it does not carry cognitive consequences. Why not then admit that fictionality does not matter in painting?

This is the position taken by the Swiss theorist and artist Lorenzo Menoud (2005). For Menoud, fictionality depends not only on the ability to convey truths, but more fundamentally, on the ability to tell stories. Since narrative is about the evolution of a world in time, the only media capable of fictionality are those that present a temporal dimension, namely: language, the theatre (including mime and dance) and the cinema. Pictures cannot be fictional, because their static nature makes them unable to represent changes of state. It is consequently pointless to raise the issue of fictionality in painting and photography. The problem with this interpretation is that pictures are not entirely devoid of narrative ability.