ADAMarts

The 6th International Conference of the European Narratology Network

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Foreword

The 6th gathering of the European Narratology Network (ENN), organized by RISEBA University of Applied Sciences, brought together scholars, artists, and international experts working in the field of narratology, literature, and film, with shifting focus toward new technologies, the archaeology of immersive narrative systems, neurocinematics, and expanding vectors in narrative studies.

Wide in the scope of its topics and complexity, the conference honed in on the fusion of novel applications with unreliable/paradoxical narratives, which draw readers and viewers into a story, geospatially and cognitively, by means of blurring the boundaries between real, virtual and alternative spaces. At the center of the discourse exists the 'Gaslight' structure, which undermines or destroys impartiality in narrative perception because the 'modus operandi' of the emerging technologies, under the guise of various 'immersive' scenarios, whether text-based, film, game design, or Mixed Reality (MR), significantly alters the storytelling apparatus. The residual effect of such interactions is a set of narrative strategies that seek to destabilize the critical faculties of its target audience through misdirection, contradiction, psychological disturbance and cognitive manipulation in both content and at the textual level.

This volume presents a selection of evocative presentations and papers offered to highlight the success of the gaslight narratives model in targeting intended effects. The edition also includes AI illustrations that have been generated from presenters' texts by American artist Sabrina Durling-Jones, who specializes in machine learning and generative AI techniques. Ultimately, this volume is intended to signal an expansion of boundaries in narrative research and contextualize how emerging technologies can support a broader understanding of narrative structures and the different ways they might be perceived by audiences.

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Narrative Motivation

Abstract

This paper offers a brief passage through the history of concepts from Aristotle to Russian formalists, thus tracing powerful conceptions about motivation. Some fundamental distinctions are made such as the one between the motivation of the work (motivation A, *motivirovka, Motivierung*) and the motivation of a character's actions (motivation B, *motivacija, Motivation*). Concepts relevant for the analysis of the work are offered – the final motivation; the motivation from behind; the dichotomies of causal and artistic motivation. Russian formalists did not seek motivation B, and they were not particularly interested in causal motivation A. In contrast to the provocatively "formalistic" concepts of Školvskij (according to which content motivates form, which is considered to be the essential object of aesthetic perception), and the widespread conception of Tomaševskij, which is oriented toward the thematic, the most convincing approach is that of Jurij Tynjanov, who has renounced the fixed assignment of motivating and motivated to content and form, instead assuming an historical dynamic of the assignments.

Keywords

Casual and artistic motivation; motivation from behind; final motivation; Aristotle; Russian formalists

1 Introduction

The concept of motivation is an odd one in literary studies. On the one hand, there are universal judgments as to whether something in a literary opus is or is not motivated. On the other hand, there seems to be a great deal of uncertainty about what motivation really means. The greatest certainties about motivation can be found in statements about its deficiencies.

A successful work of art fulfils the desire for meaning and for a meaningful connection to things, processes and actions.

A lack of motivation triggers disappointment in the recipient – a feeling of emptiness and a lack of meaning. This effect leads to the anthropological function of motivation. A consistently motivated work compensates for the experienced contingency of world affairs and the perceived randomness of individual lives. A successful work of art fulfils the desire for meaning and for a meaningful connection to things, processes and actions.

The meaning of motivations, the components which they cover and the relations of which they consist have rarely been discussed in the relevant literature and in dictionaries, even though indies show that the term is used quite frequently.

Any reflection on the sources of the concept of motivation inevitably leads back to Aristotle, who was the father of narratology. In his *Poetics*, Aristotle reflects upon the "depiction of the action" as "mythos," which is a term that can best be rendered as a "[narrated] story." Myty is defined as a "composition (σύνθεσις) or a "joining together" (σύστασις) of "events" (πράγματα). Aristotle argued that the act of creation places special demands on a poet: "Beginners in poetry are more likely to produce something appropriate in language and character than to put the events together" (*Poetics*, 1450a).

Aristotle presented a rationalist picture of poets and poetry. Poiēsis is not guided by Platonic enthusi-asm or divine inspiration. It is led by a calculating and conscious production of models of the possible, in which the guiding principles are the principles of the *probable* (τὸ ἐικός), the *necessary* (τὸ ἀναγκαῖον), as well as the *appropriate* (τὸ πρέπον or τὸ ἁρμόττον). All of the components of these models must be coordinated with one another. The inner coherence and conclusiveness are a higher value than referential similarity or probability in the real world. Artificial probability can exist in the life-worldly improbable and even impossible, as well as in the absurd and peculiar, provided that this is credible and promotes an artistic effect. Aristotle formulated this as a beautiful paradox: "It is probably that some things will even happen against probability" (εἰκὸς γὰρ καὶ παρὰ τὸ εἰκὸς γίνεσθαι; 1456a and 1461b). Aristotle provided an example of this by offering his basic definition of tragedy and its function:

> "In dramatic mimesis, the action is to evoke horror (φόβος) and emotion (ἔλεος). These effects occur above all when the events occur against expectation (παρὰ τὴν δόξαν) and in interaction (δι᾽ ἄλληλα].). Thus they have more the character of the astonishing (θαυμαστόν) than if they had occurred in mutual independence and by chance (ἀπὸ τοῦ αὐτομάτου καὶ τῆς τύχης). (For even the random events which seem to have taken place according to an intention seem to be the most astonishing ones. This was the case with the statue of Mitys in Argos. It killed Mitys' murderer by collapsing on him when he was looking at it. Such things do not seem to occur at random. It follows, then, that stories of this kind are the better ones.)" (Poetics, 1452a)

Aristotle argues that everything in a work must serve the expression of a plausible story (μῦθος) which evokes the intended effect in the recipient. From this perspective, the Greek philos-

opher had a functionalist concept of the work. All acts of selecting and combing thematic or linguistic materials are subjected to the primary function which shapes the basic motivation of the work of art.

In modern times, the idea of narrative motivation is based on the idea of a coherent, conclusive and plausible depiction. As noted above, a coherent work fulfils the desire for meaning and coherence in the face of the contingencies of world events and individual lives. The conclusiveness which guarantees meaning requires a corresponding selection of thematic units. This faces the problem of occurrences and a story. Original historiographical dichotomy dates back to the philosopher and sociologist Georg Simmel (1858-1918), whose work can be usefully applied to the structure of fictional narrative works.

In his treaties "The Problem of Historical Time," Simmel argued that a historiographer must "draw" an "ideal line" (*ideelle Linie*) through the infinitely decomposable elements of a portion of worldwide occurrences so as to arrive at a historiographical "unit" such as the Seven Years' War or the Battle of Zorndorf [1, pp. 139-140]. The tracing of this "idea line" presupposes that the relevant unit has a "concept" which determine which "atoms" do or do not belong to it. Occurrences are distinguished by an absolute and gapless "continuity," while history that records them is necessarily "discontinuous."

Historians write their own stories about events by bringing together various elements from a continuous reality, using a general term such as "Seven Year's War." Similarly, narrators create their own individual stories under a single title in which the fictive happenings are to be narrated.

Historiographers and literary authors select not just elements from occurrences, but also certain properties related to same. Like all objects in reality, elements of happenings are "determined" by an infinite number of properties in the sense of Roman Ingarden's (1931) category of determinacy [2]. Historians and authors must decide upon which of the properties that belong to the chosen element in the occurrences are relevant to the story that is to be told and should thus be chosen.[1]

No matter how many characteristics a narrator may name, the elements of happenings in the relevant story will inevitably retain great indeterminacy. Only through the reader's concretisation can this incongruity be removed to a greater or lesser degree. Ingarden refers to the elaborations related to the "concretisation of the represented objects" in his seminal treatise *O poznawaniu dzieła literackiego* (1937) (German: *Vom Erkennen des literarischen Kunstwerks*, 1968) [4]. Ingarden's work shows that indeterminacy is not a special literary phenomenon, as Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser argued. Instead, it is the inevitable characteristic of any representation of reality, whether factual or fictional, quite simply because the objects in reality have so many properties that they cannot be reproduced in any linguistic representation.

Let us conduct a thought experiment, assuming that on the morning of August 25, 1758, when the Battle of Zondorf was to be waged as a decisive element in the Seven Year's War, the flute of Frederic the Great was damaged. This idea would not be included in general historical discussions of the Seven Years' War, but a historian could come up with the idea that a commander might be grouchy because the flute was damaged and then conclude that this had a significant influence on the course of the battle. Then the damaged flute would not be an undecisive event in the history of the war, as told by the relevant historian. Even if an historian is not expected to present the damaged flute specifically, it remains undeniable that there are many different possible narrativizations in the form of historiographic stories about events which relate to the term "Seven Years' War." These stories by no means contain the same elements of the happenings. Each historian

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Cinematic narration involves a different task. Faced with the all-around determinacy of the elements that are shown in external properties, screenwriters must use certain techniques to define the properties that are to be seen on screen because they are relevant to their narrative as well as those which do not belong to the story as such [3].

draws an ideal line through the event atoms in a slightly different way. Accentuation and interpretation happen in stories to a considerable extent and through the individual selection of elements of occurrences and the characteristics thereof. An infinite number of historiographical stories can be told about one and the same part of world history, as described by the term "Seven Years' War." Historians will choose different approaches to the various events, and the diversity of stories that are told is the engine behind the movement of historiography.

It is also true in fictional narratives that every detail and property that is chosen from the happenings must or at least should be of certain relevant. If the reader is to find that a book is well-written, then he will have to assume that there was reason to choose certain story elements and properties and not others.

One often refers to Russian theories in the 1920s which relate to the manifold uses of the concept of motivation. The relevant authors systematically reflected this phenomenon. It was discussed most extensively, but not particularly plausibly, in the textbook *Theory of Literature* by Boris Tomaševskij (1925) [5]. An introduction to the book was written by Viktor Školvskij.

Tomaševskij defined motivation as "the system of devices that justify the introduction of individual motifs." The point here is to justify the inclusion of thematic units into a narrated story.

Vladimir Propp took a different approach. In his *Morphology of the Folk Tale* (1928), he provided this definition: "Motivations are both the motives and the goals of characters that cause them to perform certain actions." [6]

We see the difference here. Tomaševskij's "motivation" applies to the author's artistic activity. The author is concerned about the conclusiveness of the actions that are to be portrayed, as well as the aesthetic coherence of his work. Propp, by contrast, uses the same term to refer to a character in the narrative, describing the reasons which motivate the character to do or not do specific things. It seems sensible to distinguish between these two intentions. There is a linguistic problem here. While English has only the word "motivation," German and Russian do not. In German, *Motivierung*, and in Russian, *motivirovka* (A) refer to the activity of an author who, by means of certain devices, seeks to provide his work with coherence and artistic unity. The words Motivation and motivacija (B), in turn, refer to the character, his motives and his psychological and emotional activity.

In German, Motivierung, and in Russian, motivirovka (A) refer to the activity of an author who, by means of certain devices, seeks to provide his work with coherence and artistic unity.

To be sure, *Motivierung*, which is motivation A, may require a certain motivation II of the character that is portrayed. Thus, for instance, Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment* features Raskolnikov, whose motivation B for the murder of an old pawnbroker plays a certain role in shaping the novel's Motivierung (motivation A). The two concepts nevertheless do not coincide. The genesis of the novel shows that Dostoyevsky was seeking a coherent Motivierung for the novel, and thus he has imputed various motives to his hero. Raskolnikov has all kinds of problems, and in a confession before Sonja Marmeladova, he names his motives truthfully and conclusively for the author's Motivierung (motivation A) for the action that is seen in *Crime and Punishment*.

The author will also have had a motivation B in creating his work but it is not the purpose of this paper to discuss it further. After lifting a prohibition against speaking about the author,

however, one may legitimately ask about his motivation B. What could have induced Dostoevsky to provide his hero with the finally chosen motivation B, thus turning over the entire plot of the novel to motivation A, as is seen in the final version of the text? This is not an uninteresting question, and it leads deep into the inner biography and psycho-physical state of the specific author. The relevant issues cannot be addressed with-out psychological speculations, and we will refrain from such in this paper.

In addition to the stated distinction between motivation A and motivation B, I would like to propose a second dichotomy. Motivation A can be both *causal* and *artistic*. Because there are numerous typologies of motivation can be problematic in terms of their systematics. The simple distinction between causal and artistic motivation seems to be sufficient. While artistic motivation encompasses the entire work, and the causal motivation refers to the world that is represented in the work, and this world is mainly part of the narrative world.

The dichotomy of causal and artistic motivation is found in the works of Aristotle. Causal motivation becomes explicit whenever the issue is justification of the action. Causal motivation is meant implicitly wherever "probability" and "necessity" are mentioned a guiding criteria for the "assembling of events into stores." Artistic motivation manifests itself in the "appropriate" (τὸ πρέπον; 1455a) or "adequate" (τὸ πρέπον; 1450b) and the choice of means of expression.

The concept of the "probable" has two facets in the work of Aristotle. On the one hand, it denotes that which is probably in the life-world. On the other hand, it denotes what is demanded by the artistic whole. This means that the demand of the artistically probably is preferable to life-worldly probable that is understood in this way. Aristotle draws a picture of the poet as a "creator" (τὸ πρέπον) of models of the possible. Their inner coherence has a higher value than the life-worldly probability.

Causal motivation also includes particular types of motivation which have been defined for narratives in the pre-modern and mythical mental structure. In his influential approach in 1932, Clemes Lugowski coined the term "motivation from behind." This is about a "motivational gap" that is filled at the end of the story. Events are not motivated "from the front," instead being determined by a goal toward which the events are inexorably moving. Only at the end is the operation of a work that is motivated "from behind" so that it can be understood as being coherent. Those who refuse to adopt this perspective can only recognise "incoherence" or "randomness."

Causal motivation also includes particular types of motivation which have been defined for narratives in the pre-modern and mythical mental structure.

Influenced by Lugowski, the German narratologist Matias Martinez coined another term for pre-modern motivation: "final motivation." The "final motivation" exists when the activities are motivated by the rule of a numinous instance, a deity or a power such as fate [7].

A final motivation is characteristic of cultures that are influenced by mythical thinking and ideas about the history of salvation. This includes not just ancient and religiously influenced cultures such as those which existed in the Christian Middle Ages, but also ideologically founded formations that were established later with secular eschatology such as so-called Socialist realism. The action of the model works in this socio-pedagogical literary formation. It is clearly teleological and motivated by the expected end of a "bright future."

Final motivations also occur in modern narrative works that are far removed from the social pedagogy of Socialist realism. M. Martínez and M. Scheffel demonstrate this as the example of Thomas Mann's novella "Death in Venice." It contains numinous explanation of the events, i.e., the final motivation. This competes in a manner that is difficult to determine with an empirical explanation or a realistic and causal motivation [8, pp.113-114].

An example of this special form of motivation (A) in Russian literature relates to neo-mythological modernism in Evgeny Zamyatin's story "The Flood" (*Navodnenie*) (1930). Here we find an interference between realistic-causal and mythical-final motivation. This is characteristic of modern remythisation, in the heroine's motivation B and motivation. The killing of the rival is, at the realistic level, a crime which the police are investigating. On the mythical level, however, it is a commandment, and its execution makes the murderess' womb fertile [9].

This example demonstrates that the final motivation can definitely coexist with the causal one. Competing coherence formations then occur, and these are typical of the poetics of modernism, which questions realism at the end of the 19th and in early 20th century.

Cultural epochs in which the final motivation dominates have a natural affinity for low levels of event-fulness. In worlds in which the course of stories is determined by the future salvation of the world, no open eventfulness can unfold. Full eventfulness presupposes free thinking, speaking and acting among autonomous subjects. There is also the risk of uncertainty. The "crossing of a semantic boundary," as argued by Jurij Lotman (1970) shapes the model of the event [10]. It must not be predetermined by mythical patterns, metaphysical ideas or political visions. A violation of the norms which the crossing of the boundary implies must not be demanded by religious commandments or expectations of salvation. Freedom from sacred or secular eschatology is necessary for open eventfulness, and that is why problems of eventfulness and motivation only began to emerge with the Renaissance. Global teleological concepts and thinking about terms of the history of salvation begin to fade, and the theocentric model of the work is gradually replaced by the anthropocentric one.

"Motivation from behind" and the "final motivation" are not categorically different than the causal motivation. Although the narrative worlds in which they occur have a different ontology than the worlds which are motivated "from the front," there is no categorical difference between the final and causal motivation in the structure of the work as there is one between causal and artistic motivation. "Motivation from behind" and "final motivation" are to be seen as ideologically, mentally and historically shaped special forms of causal motivation, in which the direction of justification is reversed and which are based in a non-secular and pre-anthropocentric model of the world.

Let us now look at Russian formalists. They were unconcealed Aristotelians. This is evident in the fact that Viktor Školvskij refers the question of motivation to the Greek philosopher who had clarified the way in which an artist could motivate the crime that was needed for the story so as to create the de-sired effects of horror and emotion [11, p. 44]. Aristotle's conception of mimesis as "making" (πόιησις) underlies the formalist view of art as "making (деланье).

Russian formalists developed rather different ideas about the direction of motivation, and they understood that this exclusively relates to meaning A. In essays about Sterne and Cervantes, Školvskij [11] was the most radical and creative one, formulating the provocative idea that artistic devices are the actual object of perception. According to the author, the plot, thus, is not the final purpose of a work of art. Instead, it only serves to motivate certain devices of plot construction. Boris Ejxenbaum agrees in principle with such rigid theses, but he explained these in a relativising way. The formalists directed their efforts during years of struggle so as to demonstrate the importance of "constructive devices" and to push everything else aside as "material." According to Ejxenbaum, the paradoxical honing of these findings made it possible for formalists to reawaken interest in the construction and made-ness of the

works which had been neglected in traditionally content-oriented studies [12, pp. 115-122].

In relation to his *Theory of Literature* (1925), Tomaševskij was considered by international literary scholars to be the most authoritative representative of the formalist theory of motivation. This was not a genuinely formalist contribution which, by his own admission, he did not aim to do. Neither was it convincingly dividing the phenomenon into motivation into types. Numerous systematic objections have rightly been raised against this triad of motivations [14, pp. 21-25]. Tomaševskij's conception of motivation is rather conventional and assumed that devices motivate the thematic material. If it is motivated, then that is the most important part of the work and not vice versa. Šklovskij envisaged his provocation – the material motivates the devices that are to be perceived.

> then other elements, which are obligatorily connected with it, appear as its motivations. By the same token, one can claim that some word in a verse was chosen "to rhyme" – but also the opposite: that the rhyme was made so that the word in question could be introduced." [15, p. 129]

The second argument is that an element which has no intrinsic meaning itself requires a motivation:

> "The concept of motivation is organically foreign to the nature of the object of investigation and the artistic construction. [...] Everything which the formalists attribute to the material has an unconditional constructive meaning. That which they call a device turns out to be an empty scheme, deprived of any content" [15, p. 130].

The artistic motivation which interests us serves as the foundation for aesthetic perception, and it responds to the fact that an artistic organisation integrates all work com-ponents into a cross-layered relationship in terms of what is "adequate" and "appropriate" in the Aristote-lian sense.

A sharp and fundamental criticism of the formalist concept of motivation in the rigid form of Škovskij and the more conventional version of Tomaševskij was formulated by Mikhail Baxtin in his book *The Formal Method in Literary Studies*, published under the name of Pavel Medvedev [15]. Two objections are raised against the formalist concept of motivation. The first one states that there are no criteria in terms of what is motivating and what is motivated in a work. Any element can be regarded as an end to itself, i.e., as the goal of motivation:

> "In the work there are no criteria for distinguishing between what is an end in itself and what is only the motivation for the introduction of a certain element. It is quite possible to consider any element as an end in itself:

This is undoubtedly the sharpest and most fundamental critique of the formalist basic positions that were created in the 1920s and later.

In his critique of the formalist concept of motivation, Baxtin does not take into account the version that Jurij Tynjanov attributed to the motivation phenomenon. His conception of the work of art is characterised by the idea of the dynamical system [16]. He is the most systematic theorist about the formalist movement, and this marks the beginning of structural thinking. The literary evolution, whose principle [16, p. 258] sees in "struggle and replacement (*борьба и смена*). This is made up of a constant recasting and refunctionalisation of the elements of the system. This means that neither a statistic definition of what is literature, nor a fixed idea

of what a genre could be possible. "All fixed static definitions of literature are swept away by the fact of evolution" [16, p. 257].

The one-sided and exaggerated of the early formalist concept of motivation are overcome in Jurij Tynjanov's dynamic and function-based model. Citing Šklovskij and Ejxenbaum, Tynjanov defines motivation as "justification of some factor on the part of all others and its co-ordination with all others" (*оправдание одного какого-либо фактора со стороны всех остальных, его согласованность со всеми остальными*) [17, p. 29]. Tjnanov opposes the uni-directional relationship between device and material provided by the definition of his predecessors, Šklovskij and Ejxenbaum, with a dynamic conception which rejects fixation on form and content, instead working with the categories of "constructive factor" and "material" that can be manifested both in form and content.

Tynjanov did not develop any explicit theory of literary motivation, but some principles an be derived from his basic dynamic model of the evolutionary literal fact. Tynjanov is not interested in the causal motivation of plot, and his functionalist and evolutionary considerations are exclusively in the sphere of what we have called artistic motivation.

1. The roles of motivating and motivated cannot be split into formal or thematic. Themotivated can be something formal ("style"), and the motivating thematic ("fable"):

> "If the so-called prose of plot is "worn out," then the fable has other functions where the prose of plot is not "worn out" in the literary system. A fable can merely be a motivation or style or the way of material unfolding." [18, p. 274].

2. Motivating and motivated can exchange roles in the evolution of a genre. The attribution of dominance and subordination depends on the literary system in which the attribution is made:

> "Roughly speaking, if we move in a certain literary system, we would be inclined to reduce the descriptions of nature in old novels to a serving role and to the role of a connecting or retarding element (i.e., almost passing them over). If we move toward another literary system, we would consider the descriptions of nature to be a decisive and domineering element, because a situation is possible in which the fable is only a motivation or a pretext of unfolding "static descriptions"." [18, p. 274].

3. Motivating leads to a "uniform deformation" of factors. Tjanjanov understands a transformation, smooths out the specific properties of the factors, leads to the equilibrium in the work, and makes art "light and acceptable: "Motivated art is deceptive (мотивированное искусство обманчиво) – Tjnjanov [17, p. 29]. It is precisely this which considerably complicates the study of the function or a factor in art that is made "easy" by motivation.

4. The study of functions of factors succeeds more easily in works in which a particular factor is "high-lighted" and not motivated.

5. Motivating helps to "tune" the harmony of the factors of a work, balancing the inherent weight of factors, bringing about an equilibrium, and homogenising the heterogeneous.

Tynjanov's concept of motivation boils down to a "coordination" of all of the factors that are contained in the work. The ideals of motivated work include conclusiveness, coordination of all parts, as well as plausibility.

If the motivation is to compensate for a lack of meaning in life, as was stated at the outset, then the im-pression of coherence in the whole work that is conveyed by the convincing motivation must be based on a relationship among all formal and thematic components. All of the layers of the work must be captured cognitively and sensually. This holistic perception unifies the heterogeneous layers of a work, and it is characteristic of aesthetic perceptions. The artistic motivation which interests us serves as the foundation for aesthetic perception, and it responds to the fact that an artistic organization integrates all work com-ponents into a cross-layered relationship in terms of what is "adequate" and "appropriate" in the Aristotelian sense.

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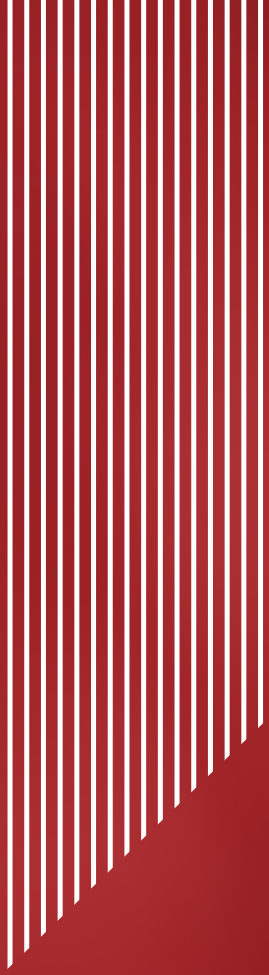

Peter Hühn

Modes of Gaslighting Narratives in Three Genres: Stage Play, Film and Novel

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Abstract

Derived from Hamilton's stage play *Gas Light* (1938), "gaslighting" has become the colloquial term for the strategy of insidiously deranging a person's mental health: a victimizer systematically undermines an unsuspecting victim's sense of reality and self-confidence. Such a strategy can be employed as a narrative schema to structure the plot in a drama, a film or a novel. The presentation of the gaslighting narrative will first be analysed in Hamilton's play and in its two film versions by Dickinson (1940) and Cukor (1944). In all three cases the gaslighting plot can directly be witnessed by the spectator in its practical enactment. These examples are then compared with the rendering of the same plot structure, within different settings and with different characters, in Boileau and Narcejac's mystery novel Celle qui n'état plus (1952) and its film version Les Diaboliques (1955) by Clouzot. Here the gaslighting strategy is presented from the victim's perspective, especially in the novel, but also in the film, making for a more disturbing experience on the part of reader and spectator. Differences in the impact on the recipient are connected with the differing roles detectives play in the final resolution of the gaslighting plots. The analyses will concentrate on motivation and design in the gaslighting strategy as well as on mode and perspective of presenting the plot development. Special attention is devoted to the impact of the disturbing gaslighting strategy on viewers and readers.

Keywords

Gaslighting, plot, narrative schema, script, perspective, narratology, narrative presentation

1 Introduction

Since Derived from the title of the British stage play *Gas Light* by Patrick Hamilton (1938), "gaslighting" has become the colloquial term for the strategy of covertly manipulating a person or persons to disrupt their orientational system, confuse their sense of reality, unsettle their habits of memory and judgement and seriously undermine their self-confidence. The character constellation underlying this strategy is the opposition and interaction between an unsuspecting victim and a malicious victimizer[1], who stealthily strives to intimidate, destabilize and destroy the victim's sanity for some particular – selfish – purpose[2]. Such a strategy can be employed as a basic narrative schema or script to structure the plot in a drama, a film or a novel. In what follows the differences in the employment of the gaslighting script will be analysed in examples from these three genres with respect to the various modes of its narrative presentation.

(1) The stage play *Gas Light*, of 1938, by Patrick Hamilton is set in an old house in London in the late Victorian period, home of Mr (Jack) and Mrs (Bella) Manningham. The play begins with Jack Manningham methodically disorienting and unsettling his wife and driving her mad: misplacing things and accusing her of hiding them, doubting her memory, insinuating that she is going mad and purposefully undermining her self-confidence. As a consequence, she is deranged, feels intimidated and profoundly insecure. Since she loves her husband, she is deeply hurt by his contemptuous, brutal treatment of her and by being humiliated in front of their pretty maid. He then goes out, as is his habit every evening, ordering her to stay in her room and not visit the upper floor. She always hears movements up there and sees the gaslight go down, indication that somewhere in the house a lamp has been turned on. This frightens her even more. She is clearly going out of her mind.

Then, after Manningham has left, suddenly Rough, a retired detective, appears and explains the real situation to Bella Manningham: Twenty years ago, the owner of this house, a rich woman named Alice Barlow, was murdered for her valuable rubies. The murderer was never found nor were the rubies ever discovered. Detective Rough had been involved in the case at the time, questioning a cousin of the victim, whom he had suspected of being the culprit but whose guilt he had not been able to prove. Recently, he had recognized this man in Jack Manningham, acquired information about the situation in the house from the maid and is now privately investigating the case again. He starts to help Bella Manningham regain her self-confident reliance on reason, explaining the background to what is going on and disclosing her husband's malicious intentions. Manningham had bought the house to search the attic for the rubies, making his wife go mad to prevent her from disturbing him in his search. Detective Rough then forces the lock of the drawer in Manningham's desk and finds the rubies hidden in a cheap brooch.

When Manningham discovers the interference and threatens to attack his wife physically, Rough re-appears with the police and arrests him. In a scene under four eyes, Bella Manningham is given the opportunity to revile her husband and accuse him of his crimes thereby mentally freeing herself from his power over her and thus curing herself from the gaslighting effects. The event, the eventful turn, in this story consists in the uncovering of the gaslighting plot and especially in the concluding arrest of the perpetrator, the victimizer.

The spectators witness the gaslighting procedure from the outside and from a safe distance. They are never themselves affected by it, even though they at first do not understand the exact purpose behind it. Then, early on, the detective, as the agent of reason and clarity, appears and starts clearing things up, explaining to Bella

1
Stern (2007) proposes the terms gaslighter and gaslightee [1, p. 3].

2
Lear and Hale (2020) discuss gaslighting as one specific phenomenon within the broader context of narrative presentations depicting the erosion of a stable sense of reality such as brainwashing and ontological crisis. They analyse fictional treatments of this concept especially in novels by Philip K. Dick, also briefly touching on Cukor's film Gaslight [2].

Manningham (and to the spectators) the underlying structure of the situation. This concluding section is basically a detective narrative which first focuses on the perpetrator as he ill-treats the victim and then shows how he is uncovered and arrested.

(2) The British film version of the play, of 1940, likewise titled *Gaslight*[3], directed by Thorold Dickinson, presents basically the same plot, from a similar perspective, with some additions. The couple are here called Paul and Bella Mallen. The plot line is extended into the past, beginning with the actual murder scene twenty years before, then jumps ahead to the present situation of the Mallens living in an old Victorian house in London. Paul Mallen's strategy and procedure of deranging Bella and making her mad is very similar to the play. His perfidy and inhumane brutality, however, are more blatant[4]. Bella is slowly breaking down. Mallen's flirting with the maid, more extensive than in the play, further undermines Bella's mental stability and emotional resilience. Detective Rough is introduced very early on, deliberately seeking the acquaintance of Bella, recalling the murder case and identifying Paul Mallen as the former suspect, whose guilt he then had been unable to prove. The spectator witnesses how Rough plans and executes the uncovering and arrest of Mallen. In the end Bella discovers the rubies in a brooch which her husband had given her (without realising what it was). Suspense is increased by Rough's clever manoeuvres, Mallen's premature return from the attic and a physical scuffle between him and Rough. Mallen is then tied to a chair by Rough but briefly manages to free himself, grab and gloat over the rubies, revealing his insane greed as the motive for gaslighting his wife. The eventfulness of the story in the film, as in the stage play, is constituted by the unmasking and arrest of the gaslighting victimizer.

The spectator can clearly watch what Paul Mallen is doing and is never in doubt as to what is real and what merely manipulated. Here, too, the gaslighting effect is apparent in Bella's deranged behaviour but the spectators themselves are not *cognitively* affected by it. It is significant for both play and film that the spectators are deliberately protected from mental, cognitive confusion by the early appearance and interference of detective Rough, who represents the counterforce to gaslighting: detection, reason and enlightenment.

(3) The American film version of 1944, equally called *Gaslight*, directed by George Cukor, presents the gaslighting script in much the same manner as the British film, again allowing the spectator to witness and see through the manipulative treatment of the victim by the victimizer, here named Paula and Gregory Anton.[5]

Cukor's film[6] also extends the plot (as presented in the stage play) both into the past and into the future and elaborates on the detective plotline. The presentation begins with Paula, the niece of famous singer Alice Asquith (murdered ten years before), taking singing lessons in Italy, then giving up a singing career because she is in love with Gregory, whom she subsequently marries and with whom she moves to London, into the house of her aunt, which she has inherited. The gaslighting of Paula by Gregory then develops much like in the play and the British film leading to serious disorientation and self-doubts on the part of Paula. The detective plot, with police officer Cameron (as the detective is called here), is introduced more

3
Sarris (1976) when later the play and this film came to America, their titles were both changed to Angel Street, a result from the earlier fight in the 1940s between the British and American producers of the Gaslight films [3, p. 23].

4
Sarris (1976) on both the British and the American film the husband is given a foreign (European or continental) origin, apparently meant to explain their brutality [3, p. 24].

5
Santos (2010) describes the gaslighting plot in this film (without any reference to Hamilton's and Dickinson's previous versions) and compares it with other American films noirs of the 1940s and '50s [4].

6
Cavell (1989) interprets the film in various ways as a kind of philosophical allegory. He describes Paula's final emergence of from confusion and "decreation" as "cogito", i.e. enlightenment, clear rational self-consciousness [5, p. 356].

circumstantially, starting before he eventually appears in the house, talks to Paula and begins to help her. It is indicated from the beginning that Cameron had known the aunt personally and that he is now in love with Paula. In the subsequent development there is one brief (unmotivated) shift of perspective (from the focus on Paula to Gregory): Gregory is shown how he searches the aunt's stowed-away belongings in the attic and how he eventually discovers the jewels hidden on her dress. The shift to this scene corroborates the spectator's superior outside perspective. After the arrest of Gregory there is an indication of growing intimacy between Cameron and Paula, a love story in the making which can be expected to develop after the end of the original plot.

her recovery and while Dickinson's film more symbolically visualises her liberation by having her throw open the window in the end[8], Cukor's film version stages her emergence from the ordeal spectacularly as a curative act of revenge, in which Paula turns the tables on her victimizer. She threatens Gregory, bound to a chair, with a knife telling him:

> "Are you suggesting that this is a knife? I don't see any knife. You must have dreamed you put it there [...]. Are you mad, my husband? Or is it I who am made? Yes, I am mad [...]. If I were not mad I could have helped you [...]. But because I am mad I hate you, and because I am mad I have betrayed you, and because I am mad I am rejoicing in my heart without a shred of pity, with glory in my heart." [9]

The novel renders the plot specifically from the victim's point of view, through his consciousness and perception – aiming at the reader's total immersion.

As for the gaslighting technique: the spectators can directly see that and how Paula is being manipulated – they can observe how Gregory deliberately hides and removes things etc[7]. This is fairly obvious – and his facial expressions and gestures betray his cold, perfidious intentions. The spectators are not at all disoriented in the way the victim is. Rather, they are forced to suffer sympathetically with the victim. Gregory's perfidy and sinister intentions are clearly observable.

The victim's eventual recovery from being gaslighted is indicated to differing degrees in all three versions of the plot. While Hamilton's stage-play does not specifically stress

(4) With the stage play and the two films I will now compare a novel by the French mystery fiction writers Pierre Boileau and Thomas Narcejac, *Celle qui n'était plus*,[10] of 1952, translated as *The Woman Who Was No More*. Though not one more adaptation of Hamilton's *Gas Light*, Boileau and Narcejac's *Celle qui n'était plus*, like several others of their books, bears a strong structural resemblance to Hamilton's pre-text and can be read as a novelistic version of the gaslighting plot. The impact of gaslighting on the readers is markedly different here. While in the play and the two films the spectator does view the process only from the outside and cannot look into the characters' minds, the novel renders the plot specifi-

7
Cavell (1989) mistakenly identifies the spectators' perspective with that of Paula: "In viewing the film we know ourselves to be in Paula's condition of victimization, in need of ratification" [5, p. 368]. This is definitely not the case, since we look at Paula from the outside, not with her.

8
Horne and Swaab (2008), [6, p. 153].

9
Cavell (1989), [5, p. 359].

10
Lloyd (2000), [7, pp. 41-45].

cally from the victim's point of view, through his consciousness and perception – aiming at the reader's total immersion.

The novel is told by a covert extra-diegetic narrator mediating the story exclusively through the protagonist's perspective, his internal focalization. The protagonist, Fernand Ravinel, a traveling salesman, is married to Mireille and has an affair with physician Lucienne Mogard. He had taken out a life-insurance policy for himself and also one for his wife. Together with his mistress Lucienne, Ravinel then proceeds to murder his wife, intending to make her death appear as an accident or as suicide and eventually collect the insurance money. With this money he plans to open a practice for Lucienne in Antibes and marry her. Mireille is given an over-dose of sleeping-pills, submerged in a bath tub and afterwards thrown into a dead stream behind his house. When Ravinel later attempts to recover the dead body from the water and report Mireille's death to the police, it has disappeared, which is inexplicable, because the stream actually has no outflow. Ravinel then looks in vain for the corpse in the morgue. There he meets a retired police detective, Désiré Merlin, who offers to help him – but proves totally incompetent and achieves nothing[11]. What then occurs is a chain of confusing and increasingly unsettling happenings: Ravinel receives a letter from Mireille, dated after her murder, in which she announces her imminent return. When he visits her brother he is told that Mireille had been in his flat but had just left. On his return home Ravinel finds another message from her in his letter-box; and when he visits the hotel whose address he had found on the paper of her message, he is told that she had indeed checked in some time ago but had later gone out again. In his panic Ravinel helplessly summons Lucienne from Antibes to his aid, but she is not at all supportive, instead telling him that he is mentally ill and treating him accordingly. He increasingly loses his hold on reality, starting to believe that the dead return to life as spectres threatening the living. Coming home he finds the lights turned on in all rooms and the table set for dinner with another message from Mireille. All this increases Ravinel's cognitive confusion and mental instability, inducing in him forms of schizophrenia, paranoia and wild hallucinations. It becomes increasingly clear that Ravinel has a very unstable personality to begin with – in his memories he recalls his precarious childhood under an oppressive father. Consumed with guilt and in fear of Mireille's vengeful ghost he is unable to bear the threatening and unsettling situation any longer and shoots himself.
In an epilogue, the real situation is then retrospectively disclosed to the reader: Lucienne and Mireille had together conspired to drive Ravinel mad, make him kill himself, collect the insurance money on his death and lead a comfortable life together in Antibes, possibly in a lesbian relationship. However, this positive achievement is considerably qualified: Mireille has caught a severe cold from her faked drowning in the bath tub and in the stream. Though she receives expert medical care from Lucienne, it is indicated that she is in fact seriously ill. And she has doubts about Lucienne's motives – whether love or greed. And there is even a vague implication that Lucienne may now turn her homicidal impulses on Mireille.

The readers of the novel are mentally in exactly the same position as the victim – they know no more than him and they are equally confused.

This is a veritable gaslighting narrative – with Ravinel the victim and the two women the colluding victimizers and manipulators. By contrast to the *Gaslight* drama and films the victim here is not a woman but a man and the victimizers are women. Another important special feature

11
Lloyd (2000), the ineffectiveness and irrelevance of the detective is part of Boileau and Narcejac's concept of mystery fiction [7, p 38].

is that the victim himself had been a perpetrator in the beginning. He is not innocent as are Mrs Manningham, Bella and Paula in the *Gaslight* examples. In Boileau and Narcejac's novel the victim himself thus contributes to his increasingly threatening predicament, which in the end leads to his downfall. In fact, here the gaslighting plot is only made possible *because* the victim himself had originally been guilty of a criminal plot.

The essential difference of the novel from the drama and both films concerns the narrative *mediation* of the gaslighting plot: The readers of the novel are mentally in exactly the same position as the victim – they know no more than him and they are equally confused. The narrative technique consists in the application of internal focalization for the protagonist-cum-victim – everything is mediated as he perceives it: through the extensive use of thought report and of free indirect discourse the reader is immersed in the victim's consciousness – in a condition of total immersion. It is only at the very end, in the epilogue, that the true situation is suddenly revealed by a complete reversal of perspective, switching from the victim's point of view to that of one of the two victimizers, namely Mireille's. It is impossible for readers to see through the true plot beforehand. They are forced to experience the disorientation of the protagonist's mind.

This is a genuine gaslighting plot in that the manipulations are conducted by clandestine agents, victimizers, whose express aim is the victim's progressive derangement and destruction for a particular purpose, namely the collection of life insurance money.

Events occur on two levels. In one respect, from the point of view of the readers, the event consists in the sudden revelation, in the epilogue, of the true state of affairs– a mental event. In a second respect, regarding the characters, the event consists in the successful achievement of the two women to realize their desires as a result of conducting a gaslighting plot against husband / lover. In this respect the novel differs markedly from the play and the two films, where the event is the uncovering and arrest of the culprit.

(5) Interestingly, this novel in its turn was made into a film, directed by Henri-Georges Clouzot, *Les Diaboliques* (1955), translated into English as *The Devils* or *The Fiends*[12], and thus allows for a specific comparison, with respect to the inducement of immersion on the recipient's part with respect to the gaslighting plot. The film roughly preserves the constellation of the novel but transposes it into a different setting, a boarding-school in the Paris area.[13] The protagonist – and "victim" – is Christina, a devoutly religious woman with a heart condition, who is the owner of the school and also works there as a teacher. She is married to Michel Delasalle, who functions as the school's headmaster. Michel has an affair with Nicole Horner, another teacher at the school. Nevertheless, the two women have a close relationship based on their mutual hatred of Michel, who is emotionally and physically abusive to both of them as well as repressive to the pupils. Unwilling to tolerate his abusive and humiliating behaviour any longer, Nicole suggests to Christina an elaborate plan to kill him and thus get rid of him for ever. On account of her Christian belief, Christina is reluctant at first, but finally agrees. They lure Michel to Nicole's apartment in another town, sedate him, drown him in a bath tub and throw his dead body into the disused swimming pool of the school. The intention is to present his death as an accident. But when the pool is drained, his body is not found. Later, Nicole reads in the paper that the police have discovered a dead body. However, when Christina goes to the morgue to identify it, it turns out not to be Michel's body after all. There she meets Alfred Fichet, a retired police detective, who offers to help her find the corpse. Mysterious things start to happen. A boy, Moinet, claims to have been punished by Michel for breaking a window with a slingshot. When a

12
There is a later American remake of Clouzot's film: Diabolique, directed by Jeremiah Chechik (1996).

13
Moon (2012) analyses the intertextual relations between Clouzot's film and Boileau and Narcejac's novel on the one hand and the story "Le Bonheur dans le crime" by the nineteenth-century writer Jules Barbey d'Aurevilly (from his collection Les Diaboliques) on the other, without touching on the gaslighting plot at all [9].

school photograph is taken, the print shows Michel's face at a window behind the group. Christina is increasingly overcome by fear and tells Fichet about the murder plot, but he does not believe her. The following night she hears noises when walking through the house and has the impression that someone is following her. She flees to her flat, where she discovers Michel submerged in her bath tub. When he rises from the water, she has a heart attack and dies.

It is now disclosed that Michel and Nicole had colluded from the beginning to fake Michel's drowning in order to scare Christina to death. But Fichet overhears them celebrating the successful achievement of their plan, unravels their plot and tells them that they will be punished for their crime.

Some time later the boy Moinet, who had earlier broken a window, breaks another. When asked where he got his slingshot, he claims that Christina gave it to him. In contrast to the novel on which the film is based the gaslighting manoeuvres are not strictly perceived from the victim's, i.e. Christina's, mental point of view, her consciousness. As in the two gaslight films the spectator sees (and hears) everything and everyone from the outside. The victim's thoughts are not (and cannot be) presented directly. What the film does, however, is closely accompany Christina most of the time, suggesting that the spectator is seeing and hearing what Christina sees and hears – more suggestively than in the other two films. The effect is that the spectator is induced to identify with her emotionally and imagine the impact of the happenings on her mind in the form of an unspecified fear. But this technique is not pursued consistently – there are scenes (for instance, in Nicole's apartment in her home town) where only Nicole is present. Thus the spectator sees more than Christina and may gather more information to enable him to see through the manoeuvres. There is no total immersion. The visual impact is, however, so strong that the spectator is also affected by the victim's growing confusion and fear, especially in the night scene in the house towards the end.

In a way this confusion is extended even beyond the final disclosure of Michel and Nicole's plot (as overheard by Fichet), when the boy Moinet claims to have received a new slingshot from Christina, a mystery which is never cleared up at all. However, this mysterious occurrence is not part of any gaslight device but launched as a means of mystifying the spectator.
Again, as in the novel, the victim, Christina, is guilty of wrongdoing, which is the reason why she becomes the victim of a gaslighting plot in the first place. But she is only partly, and only reluctantly, guilty. Her religious attitude, her suffering from Michel's brutal behaviour and from being pressured by Nicole to participate in the plot as well as her kind treatment of the pupils make her appear more of a (partly at least) guiltless victim than a cold-hearted perpetrator.

So, Clouzot's film abandons the high degree of immersion which had been achieved in Boileau and Narcejac's novel. Interestingly, in all these versions of the gaslighting narrative a detective appears and acts as a rational counterforce to confusion and derangement, if with differing degrees of effectiveness. This is a sign of the desire on the part of the authors to contain the disruption of the sense of reality (for the victim but also for the spectators or readers), as a reassurance of the ultimate re-establishment of a reliable view of reality, of finally setting things straight again. In the gaslight stage-play and films this setting things straight goes both for the rational clarification of reality as well as for the rescue of the victim and the punishment of the victimizer. The resulting state of affairs is different in Boileau and Narcejac's novel und in Clouzot's film. In the novel the final clarification is comprehensive but is given only to the reader, for the victim it comes too late (since he has died before) – the victimizers profit from their plot and will never be caught. But there may be a future danger for one of them (as mentioned above). The detective has proved completely ineffective. In the film, too, clarification comes too late for the victim, who has died as a result of the gaslighting plot; but, on account of the detective's interference, the perpetrators will be caught and punished. But

14
Maghit (1996) [10].

though retrospective clarification is achieved, it is not complete – one mystery occurs at the very end and is never cleared up.

To sum up the main difference in the narrative presentation of the gaslighting plot: In all five cases the gaslighting effect, the derangement of orientation und understanding, the inducement of insanity is disclosed at one point. But while in the stage play and the two films this occurs early on, Boileau and Narcejac's novel and Clouzot's film deny clarification to the protagonist-cum-victim altogether and postpone it for the readers and spectators until the very end [11], [12]. Only then can they finally recover from confusion and disorientation, but in Boileau and Narcejac's novel some new danger persists and in Clouzot's film some new mystery occurs.

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From Metalepsis to Performance

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Abstract

This study deals with the issue of metalepsis, which is explored from the point of view of literary performance. The focus is on the narrative figure of addressing the addressee (i.e., a specific type of metalepsis) and its performative effect. In the study, the author demonstrates that addressing the addressee as part of a textual strategy does not only instruct the reader on how to read, understand and interpret a certain narrative text but can also motivate the reader to begin specific activities and performances. The author distinguishes three types of addressing the addressee in a narrative text: addressing in the introduction of the book or in the narrative; addressing as part of the narrative and the game of fiction; addressing as a call to action/performance. These different types of addressing are illustrated with examples and characterised regarding their performative effect.

Keywords

metalepsis, literary performance, narrative theory, Czech literature, interpretation

1 Literature and Performance

The concepts of performance and performativity became familiar in literary studies many years ago. However, they have experienced a great boom in recent decades, when they have acquired several new meanings and contexts thanks to the development of performance art and performance studies, e.g. [1], [6]. Using the basic model of literary communication, we can consider the existence of specific performative activities of the individual agents of literary communication: the author, the text itself and the reader. With regard to their different positions and functions in the course of literary communication, we can differentiate between three types of performance: author's performance, textual performance and reader's performance [7].

Defining an author's performance is not difficult, although it takes many different forms. It is always the activity of a particular author (performer, poet, writer) who creates and presents his work to an audience, i.e., to viewers, to readers, to listeners.

The work itself (precisely the work of art) takes the form of a textual performance. By means of language, the author constructs a text, namely literary statements that do something: they create specific (fictional) worlds, things, events, ideas, characters, stories, etc.

The reader is then the one who, in the course of the act of reading, mentally processes the text, reacts to it, 'animates' it and 'completes' it. The reader's activity (in other words, the reader's performance) is as important as the author's activity. Thus, the *performer* is not only the author who creates and presents the literary text to the audience but also the one to whom the text is primarily addressed.

The key term *literary performance* can be seen in this context as a general, umbrella term for all such performative activities (author's, textual, reader's) that have to do with literary texts. However, separate they are, they are also complementary. We usually use the term performance primarily in the sense of to create, to imagine, to perform, to realise, to use. In this paper, I want to pay more attention to the notion of performance as such, as a specific activity, as an action performed by the reader – and not only in the sense of reading texts.

The initial reflection is as follows: Using the basic model of literary communication (author – text – reader), it is clear that the space where author and reader 'meet' and where their performances are also 'performed' is literary texts themselves. And it is in these literary texts that we can find ample proof that authors count on the audience, on the readers of their texts. They not only assume them but even address them. In a certain way, they manipulate them, project them and guide them in how to proceed in their reading, understanding and interpretation of a literary work. They therefore fix certain instructions and clues in the text, to which they expect specific reactions from the readers.

Using the basic model of literary communication (author – text – reader), it is clear that the space where author and reader 'meet' and where their performances are also 'performed' is literary texts themselves.

In models of literary communication, the empirical author and the empirical reader do not usually figure; instead, they are 'represented' by surrogate abstract entities. Among the best known of these are the concepts of the implied reader (Wayne C. Booth), the implicit reader (Wolfgang Iser), the model reader (Umberto Eco), and the abstract reader (Wolf Schmid) on the part of the

recipient [8], [9]. Although they have much in common, they differ in certain aspects [10]. I do not want to analyse the differences between the concepts in detail here and now.

Let us work with the concepts of the 'ideal' author and 'ideal' reader who responds (in the actual world) to the literary texts. One piece of evidence of the poet's or writer's concern for the reader that we can find in literary texts across the centuries is the rhetorical figure of addressing. The author addresses the addressee of his speech, just as we usually do in ordinary speech.

The classical form of this figure is addressing the addressee as "dear reader", "gentle reader", or simply "reader". In one of the earliest surviving late antique novels, Apuleius's *Metamorphoses* (2004) from the 2nd century AD, one can read the following address in the introduction: "Give me your ear, reader: you will enjoy yourself" [11, p. 1]. The intention to arouse interest, to give the impression of mutual closeness between narrator and reader, has lost none of its effect even after eighteen centuries. Apuleius used the word 'reader' in his text, while of course, he could have had no idea of the number, opinions or experience of the readers of his text. He directed his address to the addressee, which was part of his specific textual strategy [12],[14].

2 Metalepsis

The situation in which the author is addressing the addressee of his narrative, in which he communicates with him and deliberately makes contact with him, is described by Gérard Genette as a specific type of so-called metalepsis. Gérard Genette first discussed the notion of metalepsis in his book *Discours du récit* (Narrative Discourse) (1980 [1972]), and in detail in a book entitled *Métalepsis. De la figure à la fiction* (Metalepsis. From Figure to Fiction) from 2004 [15], [16].

In this book [16], Genette focused on how the author's narratives transcend their own boundaries. He analysed specific types of transgression and its forms in the context of literature and other fields of art: in film, television, theatre, and painting. Genette distinguished between several types of metalepsis: rhetorical, narrative, authorial, and reader's. In this book, Genette shifts his understanding of metalepsis towards fiction. He presents the figure metalepsis itself as a special kind of fiction. He argues that the same is true of all the other tropes (i.e., metaphor, metonymy, hyperbole). In his own words, "the figure [metalepsis] is inception or, if you like, a sketch of fiction" [16, p. 17].

After the publication of Genette's book, a discussion was initiated that continues to this day. Many literary theorists have accepted Genette's notion of metalepsis as a concept that captures the phenomenon of the intersection of narrative levels. In its occurrence and application, this phenomenon is not limited to the sphere of literary narrative but can also be found in many other fields: linguistics, semiotics, cognitive psychology, or logic, e.g. [17], [20].

Of the many different types and forms of metalepsis, let us limit ourselves to the type that uses the rhetorical figure of addressing the addressee. This is a rhetorical figure (it can also take the form of an apostrophe) that has activated the reader since the earliest times in literature.

3 Types of addressing the addressee (**the reader**)

Let us now try to look at the issue of metalepsis using the terminology and approach of literary performance. Let us assume that a mental comparison of metalepsis and performance can give us some information about the addressee's position, activity, and further performance in relation to the narrative text addressed to him. The figure of addressing the addressee has a long and rich history in Czech and international literature. Its use is not an end in itself. Every addressing of the addressee of a narrative presupposes a result – its concrete *(re)action*. From a functional point of view, three types of addressing the addressee in a narrative text can be distinguished.

3.1 Addressing in the introduction of the book or in the narrative

Addressing the addressee in introducing a literary work is one of its most common uses. However, it is also often used in the conclusion

or afterword. It thus forms a kind of framework for the literary work: the 'entrance' and the 'exit'. Introductions provide readers with background information about the work, encouragement and a seemingly personal invitation to read, which has a metaleptic effect: the distance between the author/authorial voice and the addressee is minimised. Apuleius offers an example of such an address [11], [14]. In this context, it should be noted that addressing the reader (in prose or even in poetry) on the book's title page or before the narrative proper began was a common publishing practice until the 17th century. Addressing the addressee thus had an important promotional (PR) function for a long time.

But let us turn our attention to the addressee of these addresses, to the readers. The question is, what is the author of the text actually asking of the reader? What kind of activity, what kind of performance does he expect from him? I have mentioned the reasons and functions of the addressing. Primarily it is about communication. It is certainly possible to also consider the psychological aspects of addressing: activating the reader, increasing his attention and motivation to read. The aim of addressing him is clear: to encourage him to read, or in other words, to encourage him to perform the act of reading. No other performance is required of him in the introduction. In terms of the reader's activity, this is the basic manifestation of the reader's performance.

3.2 Addressing as part of the narrative and the game of fiction

There are a number of narrative texts in which addressing the addressee takes the form of a textual strategy that is part of the narrative and the game of fiction, i.e. metalepsis as such [16]. The author's metaleptic communication with the addressee can be a dialogue in which the addressee acquires the status of one of the narrative characters. The narrator involves him/her in the plot, playing a game of fiction that they create together. Laurence Sterne was the master of this involvement of the addressee in the narrative. In his *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (1760) [21], Sterne used a full range of narrative devices to disrupt established ideas about the novel and the forms of novel-writing that had been used up to that point. He developed techniques that did not become widespread in literature until much later (e.g., the stream-of-consciousness method), and he also innovated the use of the rhetorical figure of addressing addressees.

He calls the addressees of his narrative in various ways: "reader", "gentle reader", "yours truly", "folks", "dear sir", etc. At the same time, he provokes them, invites them to collaborate, thus revealing his way of writing and possible perception of the text: "[...] anyone is welcome to take my pen, and go on with the story for me that will – I see the difficulties of the descriptions I'm going to give – and feel my want of powers" [21, p. 443].

One piece of evidence of the poet's or writer's concern for the reader that we can find in literary texts across the centuries is the rhetorical figure of addressing.

The above-mentioned addresses to the reader (in Genette's words: intradiegetic and extradiegetic fictive addressees) are part of the narrative. They participate in the overall structure of the narrative text and the creation of a particular fictional world.

In terms of the performative effect of this type of address involved in fiction, it cannot be said to require any special performance on the part of the reader. Perhaps only attention while reading. The text establishes all the tasks and rules that the reader performs and observes

within the game of fiction. As far as his activity after being addressed is concerned, it is, therefore, as in the first point, a classic form of reader's performance [7, pp. 56–60].

3.3 Addressing as a call to action/ performance

Although this way of addressing the addressee has much in common with the previous type (it participates significantly in the game of fiction), with regard to its form and function, it can be defined as a separate type. Although the form of address is a textual element, its performative effect is often not limited to the narrative text. Readers are invited and motivated to take action that is not directly related to the narrative, or in some cases, rather distracts from it. This type of call to further action by the addressee (the reader) is not very common in world literature. In Czech literature, on the contrary, a number of suitable examples can be found as early as the first half of the 20th century, particularly in literature for children and youth.

I refer to, for example, a book by Czech writer Jaroslav Foglar (1907–1999). His literary work has a strong educational and pedagogical focus. He is known in the Czech environment as one of the promoters of scouting [22]–[24]. Although his stories and novels are not very complex in structure, and the literary characters are often schematic, they have always been very popular with readers (i.e. mainly children aged 10–15). The reason is that Foglar often addresses his readers directly in his novels, e.g. [25]–[27]. He comments on the narrative and prepares various tasks for readers.

I'll give an example from Foglar's book *Hoši od Bobří řeky* (Boys from the Beaver River, 2019 [1937]) [28]. The book tells the story of a group of boys who form a community and spend the summer holidays together at a summer camp. The author comments on an event that happens in the story with these words:

> "What would you do if you saw a fire or witnessed an accident? Would your legs go numb and your chin shake? Or would you be able to arrange help manfully? Think about it!" [28, p. 97] [1]

This note instructing the addressee does not necessarily mean that the reader will stop reading. The game of fiction can continue completely uninterrupted.

If the reader cooperates with the text, if he follows and fulfils the instructions given by the author, the game of fiction is not just a matter of the reader's performance.

However, the novel *Boys from the Beaver River* includes tasks that require the reader to do more than just cooperate in the normal reader's performance. On the contrary. They suggest interrupting this activity and engaging in a different activity altogether.

Another example:

> "Do you have a strong will? Are you a master of yourself? Can you command yourself?
> You can't!! YOU CAN'T!!!
> Just see for yourself!
> Stop reading now – right at the most exciting part – and write your homework

1
In Czech: "Co bys dělal, kdybys zpozoroval požár nebo kdybys byl svědkem nějakého úrazu? Zdřevěněly by Ti nohy a rozklepala by se Ti brada? Nebo bys dovedl mužně zjednati pomoc? Přemýšlej o tom?" [28, p. 97].

2
In Czech: "Máš pevnou vůli? Jsi pánem sama sebe? Dovedeš si poručit? Nedovedeš! Nedovedeš!! NEDOVEDEŠ!!! Přesvědč se jen! Přestaň teď čísti – právě v nejnapínavějším místě – a jdi si napsati úkoly na zítřek do školy nebo vyčistiti boty. Z toho nejlépe poznáš, jsi-li pánem své vůle" [28, p. 192].

> for school tomorrow or clean your shoes. That is the best way to know if you are the master of your will." [28, p. 192][2]

What does the author think the ideal reader should do? Stop reading and start to do another activity.

This is exactly the moment that is very interesting. The moment when the author tells or literally commands the reader: stop reading, start doing something else. In doing so, this command is part of his textual strategy.

The performative effect of this type of addressing the reader is crucial. If the reader cooperates with the text, if he follows and fulfils the instructions given by the author, the game of fiction is not just a matter of the reader's performance. It is augmented or even (in the extreme case) replaced by an activity (performance) of another kind. The performance that the author demands of his reader is no small one. Nor is every reader willing to agree to the established rules of the game of fiction.

This is the conclusion of the issue and reflection on when addressing (as a particular form of metalepsis) takes the form of specific action – a performance. If we follow the author's instructions, we should stop reading and start doing something else.

4 Conclusion

These three types of addressing of readers are not exhaustive. They are only ideal-typical examples that we can see most often in narrative texts. Underlying the consideration of their performative effect is the assumption that we respond to each address in a certain way. And of course, it is also true that if we do nothing at all, if we do not follow the author's instruction, this is, of course, a form of response, too. But it is evident that there are narrative texts that directly require specific reader's performances.

In this context (in the case of the novels of Jaroslav Foglar mentioned above), the question that arises is whether the shift away 'from' the text 'outside' the text affects or does not affect its genre characteristics. Are they still children's novels? Aren't they more like manuals for scouts and guides on what to do in certain life situations? This question is certainly valid.[3]

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3
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"Big Brother is Watching You": The Hunger Games Trilogy as a Post-Apocalyptic Tale on the Destructiveness of All Forms of Totalitarianism

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Abstract

This chapter investigates some similarities between Suzanne Collins's *The Hunger Games* trilogy and George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, as it argues that the trilogy is a futuristic dystopia of naked punishment masquerading as live entertainment compatible with Orwell's treatment of totalitarianism and the trope of Big Brother. The chapter also explores the first-person narrative voice used in the trilogy as a self-directed rhetoric of emotional detachment which is compatible with the female narrator's traumatic story and her life in a totalitarian regime. Finally, the chapter analyses the protagonist's inner voice in the context of trauma theory.

Keywords

he Hunger Games, Big Brother, totalitarianism, panem et circenses, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

1 Introduction

The Hunger Games trilogy is a very interesting female bildungsroman narrated by their protagonist, sixteen-year-old Katniss Everdeen, as she is forced once and again to make ethical choices as she is progressively able to make the odds in her favour. The first volume of the trilogy depicts the seventy-fourth edition of the Games, in which she volunteers after her beloved younger sister Prim has been randomly chosen and wins the game by refusing to engage in the Capitol's twisted ethics. Significantly, Katniss is even willing to kill herself so as to deny the Capitol a victor, hence thwarting the whole purpose of the game.

The last volume of the trilogy, *Mockingjay*, tells the story of the united fight of the districts against the Capitol from the undercover District Thirteen. Katniss unwillingly becomes "the actual leader, the face, the voice, the embodiment of the revolution, [t]he person who the districts … can count on to blaze the path to victory" [2, p. 12]. However, she later discovers that after Panem's President Snow has been overthrown, a new form of totalitarianism in which she wants no part is being devised by the very same rebels who defeated him.

A futuristic dystopia of naked punishment masquerading as live entertainment in the context of a totalitarian regime's thwarted gaslighting

In fact, the narrative is "concerned with human-made traumatic situations" and is an implicit critique "of the ways social, economic and political structures can create and perpetuate trauma.

The second volume of the trilogy, *Catching Fire*, traces the aftermath of the games to the seventy-fifth edition of the Games, the Quarter Quell, which marks a significant departure from the previous games. Meanwhile, Katniss is forced to visit all the districts with her fellow victor Peeta, and the first signs of rebellion – as well as her role as the bringer of hope to desperate people – are visible. In fact, although the rules stated that victors would never be considered again for another game, "as a reminder to the rebels that even the strongest among them cannot overcome the power of the Capitol, the male and female tributes will be reaped from their existing pool of victors" [1, p. 208]. This means that Katniss, the only female victor in her district, is forced to re-enter the games. As she has been selected by the undercover rebels as the Mockingjay, "the one that survived despite the Capitol's plans, [t]he symbol of the rebellion" [1, p. 466], she is taken out of the game when the arena collapses after having managed to unite all the tributes – her would-be enemies – in their common rage against the Capitol.

politics, the trilogy as narrated by Katniss can be read as both a post-apocalyptic tale on the destructiveness of all forms of totalitarianism and a fictional trauma narrative. In fact, the narrative is "concerned with human-made traumatic situations" and is an implicit critique "of the ways social, economic and political structures can create and perpetuate trauma, [which] can be a powerful indicator of oppressive cultural institutions and practices" [3, p. 4]. In both cases, the reader is called upon to meditate on individual distress, collective responsibilities, and communal healing. This is mainly achieved by two complementary narrative devices: the striking use of Orwellian tropes which resonate in Collins's narrative; and a dialogic first-person narrative voice which alternates between detachment and emotion, which the author has used to engage the audience in such an intimacy that they feel they are participating in the story as they go along rather than reading it.

Hence, I am particularly interested in drawing similarities between George Orwell's *Nineteen*

Eight-Four and Suzanne Collins's *Hunger Games* trilogy, so as to investigate the ways in which Orwell's novel has shaped the trilogy as well as the ways Collins reverses Orwellian tropes in her treatment of totalitarianism. Therefore, particular attention will be paid to the rhetoric model used in the trilogy, since it intentionally evinces the tendency to maintain the cold gaze and the reduction of emotionality to denounce the irreconcilable gap between oppressors and the oppressed, between the bizarre world of excess in all its multifarious ways the Capitol indulges in and the physical and mental deprivation the people in the districts are forced to endure in their daily lives.

2 The Politics of Dystopia in *The Hunger Games* Trilogy: Orwellian Echoes

Suzanne Collins's *Hunger Games* trilogy bears more than a passing resemblance to George Orwell's last novel, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, with regard to its particular use of dystopian tropes. For Pankowski, "the notion that Orwell himself was a crusader against totalitarianism" informs the novel, [4, p. 5]. In fact, Pankowski notably draws on Abbott Gleason's 2010 book chapter "Puritanism and Power Politics during the Cold War: George Orwell and Historical Objectivity" – which discusses Orwell's "Spanish experience" [5, pp. 73-74] – to argue that "Orwell hardened his views against fascism and totalitarianism when he fought for that 'crusading spirit' in the Spanish Civil War between 1936 and 1937, when he served as a Corporal for the Republican government, only exiting the conflict when he was declared medically unfit to continue following an attack in which Orwell was shot in the throat" [4, p. 5].

Published in 1949, Orwell's novel "arrived at the birth of the cold war between the Soviet and American blocs, soon after Winston Churchill fixed the phrase 'the Iron Curtain' in the language and as a 'Red Scare' gripped American society" [6, n. p.]. Therefore, Roger Luckhurst argues, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* "remained one of the most significant and contested cultural products of that era of ideological struggle between capitalism and communism, its influence surviving long beyond the actual year 1984" [6, n. p.]. Edward Pankowski agrees that "[o]ne compelling argument for Orwell's influence over time is that Orwell outlined a society that contained, if not the details of what a totalitarian society taken to the extreme might look like, then at least the logic of what such a world would resemble" [4, p. 8]. In addition, Luckhurst selects a key factor to explain the novel's enduring popularity, namely the fact that it "managed to embed key abstract notions about 'totalitarianism' – a political term that emerged in the late 1930s – in striking concrete images, visceral and easy to grasp: the Thought Police; thought crimes and 'doublethink'; permanent 'telescreen' surveillance and the notion that 'Big Brother is Watching You'; and ending with the terrors of Room 101 as a vision of the dissolution of the self" [6, n. p.].

Suzanne Collins's Hunger Games trilogy bears more than a passing resemblance to George Orwell's last novel, Nineteen Eighty-Four, with regard to its particular use of dystopian tropes.

This enmeshing of theoretical perceptions into compellingly solid representations of totalitarianism, I would argue, is also a staple of Suzanne Collins's trilogy: the Peacekeepers, armed forces at the service of the Capitol who keep the peace by smashing any hint of rebellion in the bud; the active encouragement of enmity and suspicion among the districts by the Capitol so as to prevent a joint uprising; and its most striking expression, the Hunger Games – televised games designed to keep the once rebellious districts in check by making their children kill each other in gladiator-like style – in which Orwell's slogan "Big Brother is

watching you" acquires a disturbing new level of changing the private and personal into a degrading public spectacle open to the voyeuristic gaze of the privileged few who will never experience first-hand the horrors of the games. In fact, Collins acknowledges a reversed form of Orwell's "doublethink" – which Malcolm Thorp accurately sums up as "the process of holding two contrary opinions as truth simultaneously, in spite of contradictions" [7, p. 11] – in the *Hunger Games* as a device for rationalising and validating false premises posing as the truth for both unwilling players and eager audience.

Hence, both novels can be argued to present instances of gaslighting narratives, consubstantiated in the fact that totalitarian regimes offer false narratives to the oppressed masses, deliberately making people doubt their perceptions and therefore anxious and distressed. Such a political regime does, in fact, draw from the inequality of the power balance that is made to tip in favour of the regime by making people feel vulnerable and afraid of a brutal backlash if they so much as question the regime. The most extreme example of the ability of totalitarian regimes to reinforce their power by annihilating any form of resistance is the graphic scene of Winston's torture, in which he is asked to agree that the torturer's hand shows five extended fingers – even though the thumb is hidden – if that is what the Party says. After all, O'Brien tells a disoriented Winston, "[w]hatever the Party holds to be truth, is truth" as "[i]t is impossible to see reality except by looking through the eyes of the Party" [8, p. 261]. Therefore, Utku Gürel's argument that in Orwell's novel "reality is in the hands of government, which has the power to influence every concept and discourse" since "[t]he main aim of the totalitarianism is that it undermines the individuals' right to lead their own life in which they possess autonomous thoughts free from the absolute truths imposed by the main ideology of the state" as it "aims to dictate what you think and how you behave" [9, p. 55], can also be extended to *The Hunger Games.*

In this light, Gürel's contention that Orwell's Oceania is "a stereotype of the despotic nation states of the 20th century so its authority depends on political indoctrination by the state institutions and the surveillance of the law enforcement agencies" [9, p. 47] is equally valid in the different context of Collins's *Hunger Games.* Likewise, Gürel's argument that "[w]ar is an apparatus of the Party assigned to stabilize the current established regime" [9, p. 47] can be transposed into the inception of the Hunger Games, as described by its female protagonist, Katniss Everdeen. In fact, Katniss clearly emphasises the power balance wholly favouring the Capitol to the detriment of the districts, which have been dearly paying for their joint insurrection for the past seventy-four years via the random sacrifice of two children per district who are forced to fight to the death as a forceful reminder of their inability to ever throw off the all-powerful Capitol [10, pp. 20-21]. Therefore, Gürel's discussion of the devious maintenance of power through physical and mental deprivation in Orwell's Oceania is particularly apt in the context of *The Hunger Games*:

> In order to keep the wheels of the machine turning, the production capacity of the industry is maintained to fulfill the vital needs of the Inner and Outer Party members, military inventory and intelligence organization, instead of providing a standardized form of living for healthy and educated individuals. Industrial potential is not channeled to supply food, clothing, medicine and practical tools for the masses in order to improve their living conditions, health care and food diet. Winston, for example, constantly suffers from 'a varicose ulcer above his right ankle' but never mentions a social insurance or any medical institution for treatment. A high level of living triggers higher expectations and awakens the liberal senses of people by drawing them off the dullness and desperate struggle of survival in which proles and the Outer Party members strive for bare subsistence. Well-fed, both mentally and physically contented citizens are negative subjects for the oligarchical state. [9, p. 50]

The same can be said of *The Hunger Games*, in which the wealthy, extravagantly clad dwellers of the Capitol – the elite ruling class equivalent to Orwell's Inner Party members – sharply

contrast with the food- and medicine-deprived inhabitants of the districts – Orwell's masses. Food, in particular, is the object of minute observation: for instance, in District 12 – Katniss's home – something as usual as plain bread is a commodity which must be traded for poached game, as not every citizen can afford it otherwise. There is a particularly harrowing scene in chapter six of *Catching Fire*, in which the new victors of the 74th Hunger Games, Katniss Everdeen and Peeta Mellark, are the guest stars at President Snow's food-stuffed party. A newcomer to the Capitol, Katniss is not used to its lavish displays of multifarious plates stuffed with exotic delicacies and wants to sample everything until she is too full to eat anything else. When she announces that out loud, two guests reveal the secret for being able to fulfil her wish to taste all the food available: by making themselves puke with the help of some unknown liquid, they can keep on eating and having fun, and they proffer the wineglasses filled with the liquid [1, pp. 76-79].

Like Oceania, which "deliberately has difficulties in managing its economy and industrial capacity in order not to distribute enough food and products of everyday use to the market" [9, p. 55], so is scarceness in the districts "not derived from miscalculation or from lack of economics, rather economy is directed to deficiency by deliberate mismanagement" [9, p. 55]. The Capitol, in the footsteps of Orwell's Ministry of Plenty, "pushes scarcity and starvation forward", deliberately ensuring that "[t]he diet of the proles and the Outer Party members are below the required standards for sustaining a healthy body" [9, p. 55]. In fact, "[w]hile the Party elites" – and the Capitol – "have access to gather white bread, sugar, chocolate and wine", Winston "can scarcely buy dark-colored bread, saccharine tablets, bad coffee and Victory Gin" [9, p. 55], which "gave off a sickly, oily smell, as of a Chinese rice spirit", since "the stuff was like nitric acid, and moreover, in swallowing it one had the sensation of being hit on the back of the head with a rubber club" [8, p. 7].

In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, "[t]he distribution of quality foodstuff takes place in the black markets where Julia illegally purchases them" [9, p. 55]; in *The Hunger Games*, it is in the Hob, the black market in District 12 known as the one and only place to trade in forbidden items, such as liquor or poached game. In both Orwell's and Collins's novels, these banned goods are costly, but although black marketing and distribution of quality items are illegal, both the Party and the Capitol "tolerate black marketers, smugglers and bootleggers" [9, p. 55]. Yet, their perhaps surprising leniency can be accounted for by the fact that, since the masses "are regarded as cogwheels in the machine used for maintaining necessary labor for keeping the wheels of the economy turning in order to fulfill the luxurious necessities of the ruling class and financial expenses of the Thought Police, intelligence units and military" [9, pp. 61-62], they should be given a minimum of contentedness by being made to feel they can get away with minor transgressions – and, whenever possible, stupefied by strong liquor into submission – so they will not think of major offences against the regime.

In addition to this insidious way of making the odds always in favour of the Capitol, in a parodic subversion of the Games' motto "May the odds be ever in your favour" – repeatedly directed to the tributes who enter the arena year after year and are perfectly aware that their odds may be predetermined by their ability to gain the spectators' favour as much as by the arbitrary thwarting of the rules by the game-makers – Gürel points out that "[t]he authority mastering the entire social, historical and psychological discourses manifests the truth" [9, p. 55]. In other words, totalitarian regimes have perfected

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Like Orwell's novel, *The Hunger Games* trilogy is also a dystopia, "a distinctly 20th-century extension and inversion of the long tradition of the utopia, the imagined *eu-topos*, or 'good place'" which "typically envisage the relentless forces of a technologised society extending its power over the human race, offering a nightmare of the individual crushed by inhuman state forces" [6, n. p.]. Critics seem to agree that "one of the crucial questions about *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is whether Orwell is interested in the potential for opposition to the totalitarian state, or if his last book offers only despair" [6, n. p.] given its ending. In fact, whether it is regarded as "principally anti-fascist", in the sense that it is "a chilling realisation of the totalitarian imaginings of the German or Italian fascist state", or "a humanist lament that is so despairing that it ends up building a monument to anti-humanism" [6, n. p.], the fact remains that Orwell's protagonist ends up becoming another puppet of the regime, even if such transformation is achieved under unimaginable duress, as specifically highlighted in Malcolm Thorp's careful synopsis:

> The misfortunes of Winston Smith, Orwell's anti-hero, reveal the political system of the ruling state of Oceania in *1984*. Winston's mid-life identity crisis leads him to question the wisdom of, and even to develop hatred for, Big Brother, that enormous face on posters in London. While no one knows if Big Brother even exists, he does personify the reality of power within Oceania. For the slogan 'Big Brother Is Watching You' becomes, as the story progresses, more than a simple platitude. Winston begins his rebellion with the thought that the state might control almost anything, but man still has a few cubic centimeters inside his skull that are his own which the all-pervasive Thought Police cannot penetrate. He discovers that this is not necessarily true. His rather amateurish dabblings into treason, as well as his illicit affair with the Anti-Sex league deviant, Julia, are from the beginning carefully monitored by the Thought Police. Through his ordeal of arrest and internment, Winston learns about the reality of power. After enduring the horrors of psychological rehabilitation, including an experience in the infamous Room 101, Winston emerges as a mindless puppet who in the end, along with the rest of the masses, loves Big Brother. [7, p. 9]

As Philip Rahv pointed out in the same year *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was published, "[i]n the prisons of the M.V.D. or the Ministry of Love suffering has been converted into its opposite – into the ineluctable means of surrender", in which the victim not only "crawls before his torturer" but also "identifies himself with him and grows to love him". In the end, Rahv rightly concludes, "[t]his is the ultimate horror" [11, p. 745]. The final caveat, June Deery surmises, is therefore as follows: "[w]hat is insidious, what Orwell was warning against, is that those who are being thus transformed will not be aware of it", since "[i]f any resistance exists, it will simply be co-opted by the practice of doublethink" [12, p. 123].

In the case of *The Hunger Games* trilogy, there is no such ambivalence. In fact, Collins's novels are clearly interested in the resources of human resistance as embodied in their female protagonist. In this light, the major difference between *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and the trilogy with regard to their treatment of totalitarianism is their very different ending. In fact, whereas all hopeful reminders of personal resistance in Orwell's novel are "systematically dismantled by the Party's reprogramming in the closing chapters of the book" [6, n. p.], Collins's feisty female protagonist is able to literally make the totalitarian regime in which she lives implode by becoming the symbol which unites the districts against their common oppressor while retaining her fundamental integrity – and maintaining her sense of self. In fact, Katniss refuses to be another pawn in the Games and plays by her own rules – which involve a clear-cut distinction between right and wrong:

> [Peeta] 'I don't know how to say it exactly. Only... I want to die as myself. (...) I don't want them to change me in there. Turn me into some kind of monster that I'm not.' [Katniss] 'Do you mean you won't kill anyone?' I ask.

> [Peeta] 'No, when the time comes, I'm sure I'll kill just like everybody else. I can't go down without a fight. Only I keep wishing I could think of a way to … to show the Capitol they don't own me. That I'm more than just a piece in their Games.' [10, pp. 141-142]

This early conversation with fellow district tribute Peeta Mellark, on the eve of their entrance into the arena, voices a sentiment that will reverberate throughout the novels – the wish to retain one's fundamental selfhood – which, characteristically, is clearly articulated by Peeta, the wordsmith who voices fundamental truths that Katniss also lives by, although she is unable to formulate them as such.

When her younger sister Prim is selected the very first time her name is entered at the Reaping, Katniss volunteers as a tribute to save Prim from certain death at the Games due both to her young age (at twelve, she would be among the youngest) and to her physical frailty (which would disallow her from competing against, let alone beating, stronger tributes). That instinctive gesture, which emphasises Katniss's already acknowledged protectiveness of her sister, marks her out from the start as a highly unusual tribute as such selflessness is very seldom seen in selections.

Actually, with the marked exception of the strongest and most dangerous Career tributes in Districts 1 and 2, who train from a very young age and volunteer for the Games as a badge of personal honour, Katniss's volunteering is the first ever in District 12. However, unlike the Careers – who are used to winning the Games through a combination of sheer ruthlessness, significant physical strength and expert combat skills, as well as a total lack of empathy, compassion or moral scruples which is highly revealing of the successful indoctrination they were subjected to from a very young age and proves the extent to which Panem's totalitarian regime has effectively brainwashed the minds of its more vulnerable citizens through its gaslighting narrative – Katniss has neither volunteered for personal glory nor is she willing to compromise her moral values (assuming the Careers still have them) to win at all costs.

The total contrast she poses against the other tributes is enhanced in her extended protection of the youngest female tribute, twelve-year-old Rue, who reminds her of her sister Prim, and is especially present when Rue is fatally wounded by an arrow that Katniss was unable to deflect, and which targeted herself. After all, as Collins reminded her editor in the different context of Prim's almost random death at the end of *Mockingjay*, "This is not a fairy tale; it's a war, and in war, there are tragic losses that must be mourned" [13, p. 15].

In fact, although alliances within the Games are customary, they are a commodity that does not entail either friendship or even any kind of liking: the stronger tributes usually wipe out weaker opponents by working as a pack and will only afterwards turn against each other until the last tribute standing. Conversely, Katniss truly mourns Rue's passing: at Rue's behest, Katniss sings for her the same song she used to sing her sister as life slowly drains from her body. Afterwards, Katniss – who never cries – sobs over Rue's body, and "[s]lowly, one stem at a time", she gathers an armful of wildflowers and "decorate[s] her body in the flowers. Covering the ugly wound. Wreathing her face. Weaving her hair with bright colors" [10, p. 237]. This flowery tribute to a fallen friend will go a long way in the televised Games – especially in Rue's district.

3 *Panem et Circenses*: Televised Violence Posing as Entertainment

The story which Katniss narrates takes place in an imaginary country, Panem, "the country that rose up out of the ashes of a place that was once called North America" [10, p. 21] and which was formed by "a shining Capitol ringed by thirteen districts, which brought peace and prosperity to its citizens" [10, p. 21].

The author of the trilogy, Suzanne Collins, has explained in a 2011 interview that the origin of both this country's peculiar name as well as the barbaric games which take place every year are modelled on Roman culture. In fact, the original Latin phrase *panem et circenses* (bread and circuses), which refers to the simple satisfaction of the most immediate wants of the masses, was

first used by the Roman satirist Juvenal circa A.D. 100 in his *Satire X* to denounce the practice of offering free wheat to Roman citizens, as well as expensive circus games, as a tool to gain political power. Moreover, Juvenal identified bread and circuses as the last enduring cares of a new Roman population which did not care for its historical birth right of political involvement:

> In keeping with the classical roots, I send my tributes into an updated version of the Roman gladiator games, which entails a ruthless government forcing people to fight to the death as popular entertainment. The world of Panem, particularly the Capitol, is loaded with Roman references. Panem itself comes from the expression 'Panem et Circenses' which translates into 'Bread and Circuses.' [14, n. p.]

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Collins has commented on the way the sadistic violence exerted by and against the child tributes in the first games turns into open rebellion in the second games, and finally into a real war that will sweep the Capitol in its wake, hence turning televised spectacle into real life for the Capitol dwellers:

> In *The Hunger Games*, (...) people are oppressed, their children are being taken off and put in gladiator games. They're impoverished, they're starving, they're brutalized. It would for most people be an acceptable situation for rebellion. And then what happens is that it turns back around on itself. If you look at the arenas as individual wars or battles, you start out in the first one and you have a very classic gladiator game. By the second one it has evolved into what is the stage for the rebellion, because the arena is the one place that all the districts that cannot communicate with each other, it's the one place they can all watch together. So it's where the rebellion blows up. And then the third arena is the Capitol, which has now become an actual war. But in the process of becoming an actual war, in the process of becoming a rebellion, they have now replicated the original arena. So it's cyclical, and it's that cycle of violence that seems impossible for us to break out of. [16, n. p.]

In this light, the Hunger Games fulfil two complementary purposes: while they are a yearly reminder of the terrible price of rebellion for the inhabitants of the twelve districts, who are forced to send their children to a gruesome death in the games long after their uprising was smothered, they are also a spectacle meant to desensitise their viewers to the actual violence taking place in the arena and further remove the districts' players from the realm of reality experienced by entitled Capitol dwellers:

> *The Hunger Games* is a reality television program. An extreme one, but that's what it is. And while I think some of those shows can succeed on different levels, there's also the voyeuristic thrill, watching people being humiliated or brought to tears or suffering physically. And that's what I find very disturbing. There's this potential for desensitizing the audience so that when they see real tragedy playing out on the news, it doesn't have the impact it should. It all just blurs into one program. And I think it's very important not just for young people, but for adults to make sure they're making the distinction. Because the young soldiers dying in the war in Iraq, it's not going to end at the commercial break. It's not something fabricated, it's not a game. It's your life. [15, n. p.]

The re-enactment of these games, devised by Game-makers with Roman-inspired names such as Seneca or Plutarch, comes as no surprise in a society which wants to keep on punishing the

districts for their rebellion against the Capitol. Seventy-four years prior to the start of the story, there were the Dark Days, "the uprising of the districts against the Capitol. Twelve were defeated, the thirteenth obliterated" [10, p. 21]. In order that no one from the districts ever forgot they could not win a war against the Capitol, the Treaty of Treason established the Hunger Games as a yearly reminder. This starting premise, as Collins acknowledges, is taken from Greek mythology, namely the myth of Theseus and the Minotaur, which will be re-enacted every year by the tributes who are on their way to a certain death:

> A significant influence would have to be the Greek myth of Theseus and the Minotaur. The myth tells how in punishment for past deeds, Athens periodically had to send seven youths and seven maidens to Crete, where they were thrown in the Labyrinth and devoured by the monstrous Minotaur. Even as a kid, I could appreciate how ruthless this was. Crete was sending a very clear message: 'Mess with us and we'll do something worse than kill you. We'll kill your children.' And the thing is, it was allowed; the parents sat by powerless to stop it. Theseus, who was the son of the king, volunteered to go. I guess in her own way, Katniss is a futuristic Theseus. [14, n.p.]

In fact, Katniss will participate in two games in which her role as a female Theseus is clearly evinced. Before the selection for the Games, Katniss had willingly run the risk of increasing her chances of being selected for the Games by entering the Reaping lottery a few extra times in exchange for food for her family when she was unable to provide it herself using her considerable skills as a huntress in the woods near her home – rather than allowing her sister to do the same. In the first Games, she pairs up with Peeta after Rue's death and is loyal to the point of preferring to die with him rather than killing him so that the Capitol may have a winner. Likewise, in the second Games in which she participates, Katniss is given the pick of the litter regarding her choice of allies, and she chooses the elderly tribute who has volunteered for a sick girl and that, given her age, has no chance whatsoever of competing against stronger, fitter tributes three times younger than herself, as well as the only two tributes who have ever won the games using their brains rather than their strength. She, too, will destroy her personal Minotaur, embodied in the country's hateful ruler President Snow, by reminding herself of who the true enemy is – the Capitol, not her fellow tributes, no matter how much some of them want her dead.

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And, although Collins does not refer to it, a big influence on the whole concept of televised entertainment is of course Orwell's infamous "Big Brother is watching you" and its whole appendage of personal espionage for political purposes:

> The telescreen received and transmitted simultaneously. Any sound that Winston made, above the level of a very low whisper, would be picked up by it; moreover, so long as he remained within the field of vision which the metal plaque commanded, he could be seen as well as heard. There was of course no way of knowing whether you were being watched at any given moment. How often, or on what system, the Thought Police plugged in on any individual wire was guesswork. It was even conceivable that they watched everybody all the time. But at any rate they could plug in your wire whenever they wanted to. You had to live – did live, from habit that becomes instinct – in the assumption that every sound you made was overheard, and, except in darkness, every movement scrutinised. [8, pp. 4-5]

As in the hardly ironical contemporary eponymous reality show, in the Hunger Games the cameras and microphones are ubiquitous and perpetually on. However, unlike contemporary audiences that can of course choose not to watch it, the inhabitants of the twelve districts are forced to watch the Games and impotently witness their loved ones' gruesome deaths from afar. And herein lies a big difference with regard to *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, since Katniss will ultimately use the enemy's most cherished propaganda weapon against himself. By accurately realising the power of the televised content, Katniss does the unthinkable – she mourns her lost friend for all the districts to see that she is not another piece in the Games:

> They'll have to show it. Or, even if they choose to turn the cameras elsewhere at this moment, they'll have to bring them back when they collect the bodies and everyone will see her then and know I did it. [10, p. 237]

Such a rash act of genuine raw feeling mixed with defiance does get quick results. Before it earns her President Snow's wrath for exposing his carefully fabricated narrative of inbred suspicion among the districts for what it truly was, an attempt to coerce the people into submission by preventing them from joining their forces and therefore dividing them, Katniss's gesture marks a change in the Games – for the first time ever, a district helps a tribute who is not their own:

> [A] silver parachute floats down and lands in front of me. A gift from a sponsor. (...) I open the parachute and find a small loaf of bread. It's not the fine white Capitol stuff. It's made of dark ration grain and shaped in a crescent. Sprinkled with seeds. (...) This bread came from District 11. I cautiously lift the still warm loaf. What must it have cost the people of District 11 who can't even feed themselves? How many would've had to do without to scrape up a coin to put in the collection for this one loaf. It had been meant for Rue, surely. But instead of pulling the gift when she died, they'd authorized Haymitch to give it to me. As a thank-you? Or because, like me, they don't like to let debts go unpaid? For whatever reason, this is a first. A district gift to a tribute who's not your own. [10, pp. 237-238]

Once more, as she acknowledges the value of the gift, Katniss uses the cameras to her advantage and directly thanks Rue's district for the bread offer:

> I lift my face and step into the last falling rays of sunlight. 'My thanks to the people of District 11,' I say. I want them to know I know where it came from. That the full value of their gift has been recognized. [10, pp. 237-238]

By doing this, Katniss is effectively disrupting the master narrative that holds districts to be natural enemies in order to win the Games by quietly offering a counternarrative which dispels the gaslighting effects of the propaganda the districts have been fed ever since they joined against the Capitol and lost.

In fact, critics acknowledge a direct link between "lies, gaslighting and propaganda" [17, p. 1037] and tend to agree that "[g]aslighting comes directly from blending modern communications, marketing, and advertising techniques with long-standing methods of propaganda" which were "simply waiting to be discovered by those with sufficient ambition and psychological makeup to use them" [18, p. 131]. In this case, by unleashing the totalitarian regime's weapon of choice against it, Katniss was ultimately able to make audiences understand how far they had been duped – and for what purpose.

4 Totalitarian Regimes and the Double Voice of Outward Conformity vs. Inner Resistance in *The Hunger Games* Trilogy: The Ethics of Detachment, Trauma, and Healing

There are lingering similarities between Nineteen *Eighty-Four* and Collins's trilogy in their treatment of resistance. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Winston dejectedly wonders if it had "always been like this", as he looks around the grimy canteen where he has lunch, and resentfully concludes that "[a]lways in your

stomach and in your skin there was a sort of protest, a feeling that you had been cheated of something that you had a right to" [8, p. 62]. However, unlike the dreamy timeless quality of fairy tales, the sense that it had always been like this brings Winston a feeling of hopeless resignation against the futility of thinking of a time when things might have been different. In *The Hunger Games*, Katniss shares Winston's realization that "he had no memories of anything greatly different" since in any time that "he could accurately remember, there had never been quite enough to eat, one had never had socks or underclothes that were not full of holes, furniture had always been battered and rickety, rooms underheated, … houses falling to pieces" [8, p. 62] as the Games have lasted for seventy-four years and life has always been like this. Yet, unlike Winston, she prefers to take action to improve her life in small ways, such as providing extra food for her family thanks to her skill in hunting, rather than meditate on the living conditions she has known all her life.

Orwell "explores the resistant potential of desire and sexuality, described as 'the force that would tear the Party to shreds'" [6, n. p.]. Likewise, Collins investigates the resilient potential of family ties personified in Katniss's protectiveness towards her little sister Prim – which significantly sets in motion the eventual crumbling down of the regime through Katniss's selfless volunteering to take her sister's place in the games – as well as the bonds of friendship as embodied in the relationship between Katniss and her would-be opponent turned ally, young tribute Rue, in addition to an exploration of the willingly self-sacrificing potential of romantic love which can ultimately destroy totalitarian Panem, as Peeta Mellark amply demonstrates in the first games when he asks Katniss to shoot him down, the last standing tribute, so that she at least can return home. Like Orwell, who "invokes the power of private memory to resist the state's rewriting of history and explores the reserve of the unconscious (Winston is always dreaming, dreams woven out of personal memory)" [6, n. p.], so does Collins conjure the power of the first-person narrator's lucid inner voice to expose Panem's long-lasting ruler President Snow's intellectual rationalisation of the games as a reminder for the districts as a thinly disguised validation of the individual and collective destruction brought about by totalitarianism. Unlike Orwell's anti-hero, however, Collins's heroine's inner voice is a catalyst for change.

The narrative voice in the trilogy is actually split into two very different modes of narration, which actually enhances the horror of what is being told at the same time as it furthers the reader's identification with the narrator. Hence, Katniss's outer voice, which is detachedly factual and collected, concisely states facts without passing any kind of judgment on them and reveals the persona she has adopted to survive in the oppressive political regime she lives in. Conversely, her inner voice is her emotionally charged running commentary on the facts she has previously detailed so coolly, openly questioning and criticizing the *status quo* against which at first Katniss has no intention to challenge.

The first glimpse into the way she reacts under severe pressure is actually apparent early on in the first novel of the trilogy, *The Hunger Games*, when she volunteers for her younger sister Prim. Therefore, when Katniss fiercely determines not to cry for the camera even in the first shock of having been accepted as a replacement for her sister, she is in fact hiding the feelings which would mark her as an easy target and a weakling in the games. This is signalled in the simple sentence "I will give no one that satisfaction", which indicates she will not allow herself to express emotion when that could put her at a disadvantage. However, only the reader is privy to her inner voice as Katniss has learnt "to hold [her] tongue and to turn [her] features into an indifferent mask so that no one could ever read [her] thoughts" [10, p. 7].

In the trilogy, the narrative technique of using a young girl's narrative viewpoint thus strongly increases identification with the protagonist. In fact, the reader will naturally be more sympathetic towards a narrator who has experienced first-hand the horrific situations she is narrating, even more so when that narrator is still so young. Moreover, the narrative technique used in the trilogy masterfully engages the reader as a witness of the moral injustice experienced

by the people in the districts, as Katniss coolly describes the electrical fence that surrounds the district so that people are discouraged from going into the woods to hunt, the reaping of the twelve-to eighteen-year-old girl and boy who will represent their district in the Games, the hurried farewell to their families before they are rushed to the Games, the beatings that take place to terrorise the citizens, the public executions of those who dare defy the Capitol by using an old sign of paying homage common to all the districts... The list goes on and on.

self-contained, unemotional rendering of facts resonates with deeper meanings in the context of the violent political oppression and the ensuing rebellion which the novels depict. This is apparent in Katniss's double voice. In fact, whenever Katniss narrates an event, she invariably starts by briefly stating bare facts, which are followed by an extended commentary of what those facts truly entail. The analysis of the syntax and language functions gives away the split narrative voice from the start. In fact, whereas the outer voice speaks

In fact, whereas the outer voice speaks in concise, neutral sentences, the inner voice is characterised by the use of longer sentences, in which feelings such as anger and resentment are discernible.

By exerting control over the people and preventing free expression, totalitarian regimes are indeed obviously reducing the outlets of rebellion as much as they can, as "the officially proclaimed ideology penetrates into the deepest reaches of societal structure and the totalitarian government seeks to completely control the thoughts and actions of its citizens" [17, p. 272]. This means living in a state of perpetual fear and distrust in which people are unable to vent their inner feelings, sometimes even to themselves, as it is less dangerous not to think and to conform. As Katniss reminds the reader very early on in the narrative, this is even more tragic when it comes to children, who can innocently threaten their families just by saying what they think:

> When I was younger, I scared my mother to death, the things I would blurt out about District 12, about the people who rule our country, Panem, from the far-off city called the Capitol. Eventually I understood this would lead us to more trouble. [10, p. 7]

The narrative voice strikingly hovers between the cold facts of survival which Katniss witnesses every day without disparaging the regime in any way and her perceptive inner voice which turns her into an articulate critic of the country's ruling class. Hence, Katniss's

in concise, neutral sentences, the inner voice is characterised by the use of longer sentences, in which feelings such as anger and resentment are discernible. This strategy may well signal from the start the traumatic nature of the facts described, "which are not so much remembered but experienced or relived" [20, p. 35]. A very striking example is Katniss's depiction of the Hunger Games:

> The rules of the Hunger Games are simple. In punishment for the uprising, each of the twelve districts must provide one girl and one boy, called tributes, to participate. The twenty-four tributes will be imprisoned in a vast outdoor arena that could hold anything from a burning desert to a frozen wasteland. Over a period of several weeks, the competitors must fight to the death. The last tribute standing wins. [10, p. 20]

The rhetoric model used throughout the novels intentionally evinces the tendency to maintain the cold gaze and the reduction of emotionality to denounce the irreconcilable gap between the oppressors and the oppressed, between the bizarre world of excess in all the multifarious ways the Capitol indulges in and the physical and mental deprivation the people in the districts are forced to endure in their daily lives.

In fact, Katniss's use of a self-directed rhetoric of emotional detachment strikingly makes the reader feel the full depressing weight of the implications of the lack of freedom in all its manifestations. In this light, as totalitarian regimes attempt to virtually control all aspects of social life (including the economy, education, art, and science) – and more importantly still, the private life and morals of their citizens – they indeed force people to self-censor their words, as virtually anyone may be a detractor. This factual, unemotional rendering of the genesis and objectives of the Hunger Games could be said out loud anywhere in Panem, as it is not judgmental, inflamed or emotionally charged in any way. However, it significantly exemplifies at a deeper level the flat monochromatic discourse encouraged by the totalitarian regime of Panem. Conversely, the passionate tirade which follows it immediately belies Katniss's neutrality and apparent conformity to the *status quo*:

> Taking the kids from our districts, forcing them to kill one another while we watch – this is the Capitol's way of reminding us how totally we are at their mercy. How little chance we would stand of surviving another rebellion. Whatever words they use, the real message is clear. 'Look how we take your children and sacrifice them and there's nothing you can do. If you lift a finger, we will destroy every last one of you. Just as we did in District Thirteen.' To make it humiliating as well as torturous, the Capitol requires us to treat the Hunger Games as a festivity, a sporting event pitting every district against the others. The last tribute alive receives a life of ease back home, and their district will be showered with prizes, largely consisting of food. All year, the Capitol will show the winning district gifts of grain and oil and even delicacies like sugar while the rest of us battle starvation. [10, pp. 21-22]

This dialogic voice also suggests Katniss's experience of traumatic situations, which she objectifies so as not to feel the inevitable pain which accompanies them, and her posterior reflection on those events and repressed feelings, in which she vents her grief and anger so that she is able to heal.

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The detachment with which Katniss describes her daily life could also be compatible with her own personal traumatic story in the wider background of the oppression she experiences every day. The main provider at home through the hunting skills her father taught her, she had to cope with her father's violent death in a mining accident, and her mother's subsequent depression, when she was eleven. At the same time, Katniss was forced to feed herself and her younger sister Prim while their mother was grieving for their father. Therefore, Katniss has never forgiven her mother for neglecting her beloved sister (and herself, in a lesser degree):

> [My mother] must have really loved [my father] to leave her home for the Seam. I try to remember that when all I can see is the woman who sat by, blank and unreachable, while her children turned to skin and bones. I try to forgive her for my father's sake. But to be honest, I'm not the forgiving type. [10, p. 10]

In addition, Katniss says that "it isn't in my nature to go down without a fight, even when things seem insurmountable" [10, p. 44]. Hence, she evinces the psychological resilience that marks so many trauma survivors, and which will undoubtedly be decisive in her physical and mental survival in the games.

However, in light of the definition of trauma provided by the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, Katniss is not immune to trauma:

> [D]irect personal experience of an event that involves actual or threatened death or serious injury, or other threat to one's physical integrity; or witnessing an event that involves death, injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of another person; or learning about unexpected or violent death, serious harm, or threat of death or injury experienced by a family member or other close associate (Criterion A1). The person's response to the event must involve intense fear, helplessness, or horror (or in children, the response must involve disorganized or agitated behaviour). [21, p. 463]

In Katniss's case, all the above-mentioned definitions apply. In fact, she has survived two extremely violent games; she has witnessed the death of people whom she was very close to, such as her young ally Rue in the first game, or her stylist Cinna, who was bludgeoned to death in front of her seconds before she entered the arena in the second game; finally, she is tormented by the image of her father's death in the mining accident. Katniss's predominant emotion when faced with traumatic events is certainly horror, which is paradoxically expressed in short, unemotional utterances.

In this light, she deals with the accompanying effects of trauma as described by psychiatrist and psychohistorian R. J. Lifton – namely, death anxiety, survivor guilt, psychic numbing, impaired human relationships and the need for new meaning and significance – precisely by carrying out a kind of talking cure, as "[f]or traumatic memory to lose its power as a fragment and symptom and for it to be integrated into memory, a form of narrative reconstruction or re-externalization has to occur" [3, p. 3]. In fact, several trauma theorists and psychiatrists agree that when a survivor is encouraged to narrate their experience while emotionally reliving it in a safe context with the therapist – or, in this case, the reader, who is called upon to bear witness to Katniss's testimony – the abnormal processing of traumatic memories in which past and present intermingle through shifts back in time (even if they are unconscious, such as nightmares) can change.

This healing process is first expressed in Katniss's inner voice, and ultimately translated into writing when she decides to honour all her beloved fallen by writing about them. The facts are thus progressively replaced by the emotions which Katniss felt while experiencing them, and which she had silenced as they could literally kill her:

> Slowly, with many lost days, I come back to life. I try to follow Dr Aurelius's advice, just going through the motions, amazed when one finally has meaning again. I tell him my idea about the book, and a large box of parchment sheets arrives on the next train from the Capitol. I got the idea from our family's plant book. The place where we recorded those things you cannot trust to memory. The page begins with the person's picture. A photo if we can find it. If not, a sketch or painting by Peeta. Then, in my most careful handwriting, come all the details it would be a crime to forget. Lady licking Prim's cheeks. My father's laugh. Peeta's father with the cookies. The colour of Finnick's eyes. What Cinna could do with a length of silk … Rue poised on her toes, arms slightly extended, like a bird about to take flight. On and on. We seal the pages with salt water and promises to live well to make their deaths count. [2, pp. 451- 452]

Her "indifferent mask" can finally be put to rest as she allows herself to feel, to remember, to let herself go – and to cry.

5 Conclusion

The Hunger Games are reminiscent of the Roman gladiator games, both with regard to the arenas and types of fighting that take place among the tributes and with regard to the fascination they exert on the people who live in the Capitol. The novels compellingly depict the voyeuristic allure of the games as a homicidal reality show for the carefree, well-off citizens of Panem, as opposed to a grim performance of ritual murder of the districts' hopes for reunion

in the person of their youngest and most helpless representatives, the child tributes who will be slaughtered year after year.

In addition, Collins convincingly draws on Orwell's figuration of Big Brother as the so-called protector of the people to denounce the pervasive threat that constant surveillance poses to democracy and individual rights. Therefore, Orwell's Big Brother is enacted in the person of President Snow, the ruler who provides free entertainment to the privileged few who will never be tributes and therefore view the televised games with the same gusto with which true reality shows are viewed by many people in our days. By exerting control over the people and preventing free expression, totalitarian regimes are indeed obviously reducing the outlets of rebellion as much as they can, as "the officially proclaimed ideology penetrates into the deepest reaches of societal structure and the totalitarian government seeks to completely control the thoughts and actions of its citizens" [19, p. 243]. This means living in a state of perpetual fear and distrust in which people are unable to vent their inner feelings, sometimes even to themselves, as it is less dangerous not to think and to conform.

In order to survive in the oppressive totalitarian state she lives in, and afterwards in the two Games she is forced to enter, Katniss has adopted an indifferent outer mask (which is however pierced, for instance, in the two Games she enters on account of her young ally's death) which sharply contrasts with the articulate thoughts she voices for herself with regard to the Capitol's politics. This narrative strategy allows only the reader to have access to them so that her unfathomable mask can be preserved. In this light, Katniss's "indifferent mask" – and, by extension, her discursive practices and the effect they have on the reader – is read in the context of trauma theories and reader-response criticism, since "the effects of the inherited latency of trauma can be discerned in the broken or fragmented quality of testimonial narratives which demand new structures of reading or reception" [20, p. 38]. Hence, the reader is in the privileged position of being privy to Katniss's thoughts, in which her resentment towards and anger against the regime which has robbed her of her innocence is well apparent.

Therefore, I would argue, the trilogy is a literary exercise in the art of striking an emotional chord in the reader by deliberately abstaining from expressing emotion while telling a story of repression. In addition, it depicts the quest for personal freedom in the politically correct voice of the oppressed – in the eyes of a totalitarian regime, that is. At the same time, the first-person narrator allows the reader to understand from the start that thinking is her way of not conforming to the daily atrocities she witnesses while she wears the armour of her outward indifferent mask.

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Digital Times: The Present-Tense Novel as a Response to Digitization and Social Acceleration

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Abstract

How does generic change manifest itself in the twenty-first century? Proceeding from the increasing popularity of present-tense narration among contemporary novelists, this article claims that the present-tense novel is a direct response to the cultural changes and challenges of the digital age. The essay unfolds this argument in two steps: It first establishes a link between digitization and our current understanding of time, which is determined by notions of the extended present (Helga Nowotny) and social acceleration (Hartmut Rosa), and then goes on to investigate how present-tense narrative reacts to these developments. Taking Sally Rooney's *Normal People* and Bernadine Evaristo's *Girl, Woman, Other* as examples, the article shows that the present-tense novel negotiates contemporary configurations of time in various ways, as it either imitates the fast and superficial practices of storytelling in the new media environment or functions as a literary corrective to digitization and the acceleration of life.

Keywords

present-tense novel, generic change, configurations of time, digitization, social acceleration, Bernadine Evaristo, Sally Rooney

1 Introduction*

In their introduction to the recent special issue on "Modes of Reading" of *Poetics Today*, the editors claim that "[a]fter a long history of being a privileged form of expression, printed literature is now increasingly in competition with other media, and many consider it an endangered species" [1, p. 132]. The rise of digital media has once more revived the old debate about the allegedly imminent death of the novel.[1] Yet many literary scholars assure us that, at least in the context of anglophone literature, the novel is far from dying. When Vera and Ansgar Nünning begin their introduction to a recent handbook on the British novel in the twenty-first century with a reference to Malcolm Bradbury's ironic proposal to simply write the genre off,[2] they do so only to emphasize that the novel has "continued to flourish by engaging with a host of current issues, generating new forms and sub-genres, and enjoying great popularity and cultural prestige" [5, p. 3]. Likewise, Christoph Bode, in his contribution to De Gruyter's *Handbook of the English Novel of the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries*, describes the novel's fate as an "open-ended story" [6, p. 40]: The genre, he predicts, "can prevail as long as it stays novel," sticking to its traditional "success formula" of "continuity through discontinuity" [6, p. 40]. Even in times of digitization and social media, the novel is far from extinction. On the contrary: the rise in book sales figures in 2020 [7], [8], as well as the flourishing of virtual book clubs during COVID-19 lockdowns [9], [10], leave us in no doubt that the genre is "alive and kicking" [5, p. 3].

Like all genres, however, the novel does not exist in a contextual vacuum, but is rooted within historical, cultural, and political contexts [11, p. 12]. Given that these external influences are permanently in flux, the novel is also constantly subject to change. Some of the most influential theories of generic change suggest that "genres can be conceived of as answers or responses to history or cultural challenges" [11, p. 27]. It is entirely natural, therefore, that changes in the language of our reality should evoke changes in our literary system – the language of its imaginative interpretation. In light of the progressive digitization of all spheres of contemporary life, it seems reasonable to assume that the novel will be strongly influenced by its digital background and its closer competitors, especially the internet and social media. Qualifying as an 'old' print medium, the genre is under increasing pressure to react to the ways in which the contemporary common reader has become used to consuming information via digital devices such as smartphones, tablets, or e-readers.

The rise of digital media has once more revived the old debate about the allegedly imminent death of the novel.

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1
That this article focuses exclusively on the novel is not supposed to imply that Andersen et al.'s argument only pertains to this particular literary genre [1]. The first part of Adam Hammond's Literature in the Digital Age, for example, addresses the question whether literature in general is dying in the digital age [2], and Simone Murray, at the beginning of The Digital Literary Sphere: Reading, Writing and Selling Books in the Internet Era, revisits previous speculation over the "death of [the medium of] the book" [3, p. 1] in the wake of advancing digital communication technologies.

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After showing, in his preface to The Modern British Novel, that the genre was declared dead in every decade of the twentieth century [4, pp. xii–xiv], Bradbury concludes with a wink that it may probably be best to "agree that the novel [...] is dead," while at the same time accepting that a considerable number of authors carry on "writing something peculiarly like it" [4, p. xiv]

But how exactly does the contemporary novel respond to the rapidly changing conditions of the "digital literary sphere" [3]? Bode's success formula implies that one reason for the novel's survival in the digital age is that it continuously reinvents and adapts itself to new media environments. And one of the genre's striking adaptation strategies is arguably an aesthetic feature: the use of the present tense. Indeed, the last two decades have seen an unprecedented surge in present-tense narration. While in the middle of the twentieth century, the present tense was still considered an unconventional characteristic of the French *nouveau roman*, it qualifies today as a common narrative feature that is no longer restricted to literary experiments. As previous work on the present-tense novel has shown [12], [13], this multifaceted strategy appears in various genres, ranging from the historical novel to science fiction, from romance to thriller, from children's books to young adult fiction; in bestsellers like Suzanne Collins's *Hunger Games* series or E. L. James's *Fifty Shades of Grey* trilogy; and in the work of critically acclaimed novelists like Margaret Atwood, J. M. Coetzee, Ian McEwan, Hilary Mantel, and Ali Smith. Over the last ten years, the fictional present[3] has continually caused literary critics to argue about the pros and cons of its functions and effects;[4] besides, present-tense narration has paved its way into guidebooks on creative writing [15, Ch. 4], [16, pp. 49–56] and, most recently, even into one of the popular MasterClasses [17].

It may not be a coincidence that the boom of the present-tense novel set in at the turn of the millennium, almost concurrently with the transformation of the early internet into the participatory and interactive social space of Web 2.0 [18] and with the acceleration of everyday life inaugurated by "digital capitalism" [19]. Proceeding from the observation that generic change is mainly triggered by "cultural dynamics" [11], this essay claims that the present-tense novel is a direct response to the cultural changes and challenges of the digital age. It first revisits possible reasons for the unprecedented vogue of the fictional present documented in previous research, in order to unfold an argument about the relation between digitization and our current understanding of time. My readings of Sally Rooney's *Normal People* [20] and Bernadine Evaristo's *Girl, Woman, Other* [21] then show how present-tense narrative reacts to these new configurations of time in different ways, either imitating the fast and fugacious practices of storytelling in the new media environment or functioning as a literary corrective to social acceleration and digitization.

2 Digitization, Social Acceleration, and Present-Tense Narration

At the end of *Present-Tense Narration in Contemporary Fiction: A Narratological Overview*, Irmtraud Huber investigates the rationales behind the widespread popularity of present-tense usage in contemporary fiction [13, pp. 107–109]. She first argues that the current rise of the present-tense novel is largely the result of the growing influence of creative writing programmes and the long-term consequences of postmodernism. Secondly, she takes perspectives from the social sciences and media studies into consideration, synthesizing hypotheses proposed by sociologists and media critics like Hartmut Rosa, Helga Nowotny, and Douglas Rushkoff, all of whom investigate how recent technological advances and the ongoing process of digitization have changed the Western world's conception of time.

Huber's starting point is Hartmut Rosa's theory of social acceleration. In his programmatic study *Social Acceleration: A New Theory of Modernity*, Rosa proceeds from the assumption "that

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I have introduced the term fictional present [12] to set present-tense narration in fictional contexts apart from uses of the present tense in non-fictional discourses such as the conversational historical present [14].

4
When Mantel's Wolf Hall won the 2009 Man Booker Prize, it sparked a controversial debate among literary critics, with Philip Hensher and Philip Pullman denouncing the use of the present tense as a feature of unsophisticated writing. For a detailed discussion and criticism of this debate, see Gebauer [12, Ch. 1] and Huber [13, Ch. 1].

the manner of our being-in-the-world depends to a great degree on the *temporal structures* (*Zeitstrukturen*) of the society in which we live" [22, p. xxxviii; italics in the original]. The quality of our lives, he argues, depends on how we want to spend our time; yet as individuals we cannot determine or even influence the parameters of time: its horizons, structures, speed, and rhythm. Since temporal structures "have a collective nature and a social character," they "continuously confront acting individuals as a solid fact" [22, p. xxxviii].

The time structures of our age, Rosa argues, mainly manifest themselves in three different processes of "social acceleration": technological acceleration, the acceleration of social change, and an accelerating pace of life. The first category refers to the "intentional, technical, and above all technological (i.e., machine-based) acceleration of goal-directed processes," including transportation, communication, and the production of goods and services [22, p. 71]. While technological acceleration describes the acceleration of phenomena *within* society, Rosa's second category – the acceleration of social change – relates to the time structures of society itself [22, p. 77]: the pace-change in the structures and patterns, practices and actions of social relationships [22, p. 74]. Rosa's third category – the acceleration of the pace of life – introduces a paradox of the twenty-first century. Given that today we are equipped with better and faster technology, it would only be logical to assume that we have more time at our disposal than we did in the past. Yet the opposite is the case, for in modern times "the increase of the quantity of actions exceeds the technical enhancement of the speed of performance" [22, p. 79]. The result is a "shortage of time resources and [...] consequent 'lack of time' (*Zeitnot*)" [22, p. 78]: we are overwhelmed with a growing sense of being "pressed for time and in a stressful compulsion to accelerate as well as in anxiety about 'not keeping up'" [22, p. 79]. And this influences our human sense of time.

In her well-known study on the modern and postmodern experience of time, Helga Nowotny [23, Ch. 2, especially pp. 48–51] contends that contemporary society has lost its belief in the idea of inevitable and steady progress, long fuelled by technological advance. Today, the consequences of progress, both positive and negative, press ever more powerfully on our lives. Hence the future, Nowotny maintains, "no longer offers that projection space into which all desires, hopes and fears could be projected without many inhibitions because it seemed sufficiently remote to be able to absorb everything which had no place or was unwelcome in the present" [23, p. 5]; instead, it has merged with our here-and-now, with the result that the temporal category of the future has been increasingly superseded by what Nowotny refers to as "the extended present" [23, p. 51][5] – a category Rosa [22, p. 21], in his discussion of Nowotny's thesis, suggests should be construed as a direct consequence of modern processes of acceleration.

Proceeding from the observation that generic change is mainly triggered by "cultural dynamics", this essay claims that the present-tense novel is a direct response to the cultural changes and challenges of the digital age.

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Nowotny's understanding of the extended present shares some striking features with Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht's [24] notion of the "broad present." For a more detailed discussion of Gumbrecht's concept in relation to the present-tense novel, see Gebauer [12, pp. 315–317].

With the benefit of hindsight, one can argue that literary scholar Ursula K. Heise already anticipated Rosa's paradigm and its connection to Nowotny's ideas when, in her 1997 study *Chronoschisms: Time, Narrative, and Postmodernism*, she contended that "the most significant changes in the last thirty years have taken place in transportation and communications" – spheres of innovation which "have foregrounded mainly two temporal values: simultaneity and instantaneity" [25, p. 23]. Since these temporal values are, moreover, closely linked to the permanent urge for instant availability [25, p. 25], Heise maintains that the use of new ICT "immerses the individual in a 'hyperpresent' of sorts, a hyper-intensified immediacy that focuses the user's attention on a rapid succession of micro-events and thereby makes it more difficult to envision even the short-term past or future" [25, p. 26].

Heise's notion of the 'hyperpresent' offers a possible explanation for Rosa's time-pressure paradox. Previous analyses of contemporary society that foreground his acceleration thesis have often established a causal link between technological acceleration and the constant time pressure characteristic of our high-speed society [19, p. 16]. The reason for this is that digital communication increasingly relies on real-time technologies which create a "growing sense of time-space compression in everyday life" [19, p. 17]: "Time becomes beyond control as distance disappears in a world of instantaneous and simultaneous events." [19, p. 17] Instant messaging and social media technologies serve as perfect examples of such time-space compression: Status updates in instant messaging apps or timelines on social media sites invite us to constantly report on our current actions and whereabouts, so that the virtual community of our followers can always share in our experiences irrespective of their location. But the 'hyperpresent' generated by real-time technologies has a significant effect on our minds: it puts us in a state of what media theory has identified as "present shock" [13, p. 108]. In his eponymous book, Douglas Rushkoff defines this as a state of anxiety about society's need for constant up-to-dateness that severely impacts the ways in which we make sense of our world [26]. "[O]ur culture," he argues, "becomes an entropic, static hum of everybody trying to capture the slipping moment," a condition in which "[n]arrativity and goals are surrendered to a skewed notion of the real and the immediate" that perfectly fits the short-winded format of Tweets or status updates on Facebook and Instagram [26, p. 6].

How does this analysis of our understanding of time in the digital age relate to the present-tense novel? As I have argued in *Making Time: World Construction in the Present-Tense Novel* [12, pp. 312–313], Huber considers the possibility that the widely observed focus on the here-and-now could be causing the recent surge in present-tense narratives. The use of the present tense, she affirms, might seem to heighten the significance and urgency of a story, thus directly responding to our contemporary obsession with the present moment. However, she also casts doubt on such a view, as she emphasizes that fictional present-tense usage is not confined to simultaneous narration, but may similarly occur in retrospective narratives [13, p. 108]. What is more, she observes that new media and modern ICT do not feature as themes in the forty-three novels she examines in her study, stressing that none of these narratives explicitly deals with topics relating to social acceleration [13, pp. 106, 108].[6] In light of these findings, Huber concludes that "the old medium of the novel seems to remain quite conservative in its resistance to recent technological and social changes" [13, p. 108].

Unlike Huber, I have suggested that the contemporary present-tense novel *can* "be read as a direct response to current trends such as social

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A similar observation has been made by Nünning and Nünning [27, p. 41]: "[T]he predominant role of digital media has up to now been largely conspicuous by its absence in contemporary British fiction. Although some contemporary novels have adapted and integrated, e.g., particular text-types (like emails and text messages) of electronic communication, generating new genres like the email novel, it is still an open question whether other new genres will emerge from a more intense engagement with the rapid developments of digital media, technologies and lifestyles."

acceleration or the increasing digitization of contemporary culture" [12, p. 313] – one of the most important forces driving our accelerated lives [19, p. 6]. My reading is inspired by Heise's contention brought forth in *Chronoschisms* that narrative fiction "is most directly dependent on its deployment in and as time" and thus constitutes the literary genre "where changes in the cultural conception of temporality can be expected to play themselves out most visibly and with the greatest impact on literary form" [25, p. 2]. It may be true that, as Huber notes, few contemporary present-tense novels make social acceleration or new ICT their explicit theme; nevertheless, I would argue (with Heise) that "these texts engage with new configurations of time in the present age" [12, p. 313]. As my readings of Rooney's *Normal People* and Evaristo's *Girl, Woman, Other* will show, these novels negotiate the effects of the extended present on society (e.g. shortage of time, present shock) through their narrative form rather than their themes.

These novels negotiate the effects of the extended present on society (e.g. shortage of time, present shock) through their narrative form rather than their themes.

3 Episodic Narration and the Unnarrated: Sally Rooney's *Normal People*

Sally Rooney's *Normal People*, first published in 2018, revolves around Marianne and Connell, two young adults who grew up together in a small town in the west of Ireland. The novel traces the protagonists' on-off relationship over a span of four years, covering their final year at school and their first years at Trinity College Dublin. In school, Marianne is a loner who becomes a victim of mobbing, whereas Connell is popular and well-liked. However, the character constellation changes as soon as the two lovers enter university: now Marianne is the famous student, while Connell, with his rural and working-class background, remains in the shadows of his girlfriend's popularity among her rich urban friends [28, p. 30].

Mostly written in the present tense, *Normal People* presents the narrative events through the voice of a heterodiegetic narrator who alternately takes Marianne or Connell as focalizer. Although the plot mainly unfolds in the protagonists' present – i.e. the period from January 2011 to February 2015 – every chapter contains internal analepses [29, p. 49] recounting events that take place earlier than the point in time designated in the chapter heading[7] but without exceeding the time-span of the novel. As is typical of present-tense novels that include flashbacks, these analepses are indicated by tense shifts into the preterite [12, p. 65]. Rooney uses the strategy of tense-switching as a means of *temporalization* [12, pp. 69–70] that helps readers grasp the temporal structure of *Normal People*: After reading the first chapters, they will quickly understand that the present tense refers to the diegetic present, whereas the past tense refers to moments in the diegetic past that lie within the scope of the story time covered by the narrative[8]

A closer look, however, reveals that the "formulaic" [30, p. 172] pattern of tense alternation in *Normal People* is more complex than it first seems, for Rooney's tense shifts correlate with changes in style which highlight different

7 Chapters in Normal People are not numbered but headed with a time designation. The first chapter, for example, is titled "January 2011" and the second chapter is titled "Three Weeks Later (February 2011)."

8 For a more detailed linguistic analysis of Rooney's tense-switching scheme, see Miyahara [30, especially pp. 172–174].

modes of narrative representation. To make this clear, I will first focus on the present-tense passages. Thus, the beginning of the second chapter depicts Marianne sitting at her dressing table, getting ready for a date with Connell. The first paragraph informs us that, while contemplating her face in the mirror, she tries to make up her mind whether or not to put on make-up. Without further ado, the second paragraph sends us to the downstairs hallway, where Marianne is surprised by her brother when she is about to leave the house:

> Downstairs, when she takes her coat off the hook, her brother Alan comes out from the living room.
> Where are you going? he says.
> Out.
> Where's out?
> She puts her arms through the sleeves of her coat and adjusts the collar. She's beginning to feel nervous now and hopes her silence is communicating insolence rather than uncertainty.
> Just out for a walk, she says.
> Alan moves to stand in front of the door.
> Well, I know you're not going out to meet friends, he says. Because you don't have any friends, do you?
> No, I don't. [20, p. 9]

The excerpt illustrates that Rooney's use of present-tense narration correlates with the representational mode of showing.[9] Except for a few scattered inquit phrases ("he says," "she says"), which are necessary for readers to keep track of who is saying what, the confrontation between Marianne and Alan is presented without any discernible interference on the part of the narrator. Readers consequently get the feeling of perceiving the narrative action as if they were "somehow near the events of the story" [31, p. 846], while at the same time having immediate access to Marianne's consciousness. The seeming lack of any narratorial mediation, however, leads to important information gaps. At this point of the narrative, readers do not yet know that Marianne has a dysfunctional relationship with her brother, so they can only infer from Alan's domineering questions and bullying remarks and Marianne's reactions (short answers, nervousness, and a wish to appear strong) that there is something odd about the ways in which the siblings interact with each other. But readers will learn only later that Alan abuses Marianne [20, pp. 65, 141–142]; in the given scene she eventually manages to leave the house before the situation escalates [20, p. 10].

Such instances of what Gerald Prince would refer to as "the unnarrated, or nonnarrated" [32, p. 2] are also relevant for the novel's macrostructure. The individual chapters of *Normal People* not only begin *in medias res*, as in the previous example, but also end abruptly, typically in the middle of a conflict or decisive moment in the focalizing character's life. Chapter 9 illustrates this perfectly. When Connell realizes that Marianne always tends to be submissive in relationships (he knows of her family situation) and finds himself contemplating the idea "that he could hit her face, very hard even, and she would just sit there and let him" [20, pp. 105–106], he is shocked about these thoughts and starts feeling sick. Marianne, who notices the sudden change in her boyfriend's behaviour, tries to find out what is going on:

> You look morbidly pale, she says. Are you feeling faint? He says no. She takes his hand and tells him it feels damp. He nods, he's breathing hard. Quietly Marianne says: If I've done something to upset you, I'm really sorry. He forces a laugh and takes his hand away. No, a weird feeling came over me, he says. I don't know what it was. I'm okay now. [20, p. 106]

The scene marks a turning point in Marianne and Connell's relationship: Will he give in to his feelings or will he manage to repress these dangerous thoughts? For the time being, the narrative leaves us in the dark, as the chapter ends with a cliff-hanger. The next chapter is set three months later – now we are presented with a scene in which Marianne is standing in the supermarket and talking on the phone to her friend Joanne [20, p. 107] – and it is only nine

9
For a discussion of the narratological distinction between telling and showing, see Klauk and Köppe [31].

pages into the chapter that a flashback eventually informs us that Connell broke up with Marianne shortly after he detected the first signs of his dubious desire [20, p. 116].

This time-jump is representative of the narrative progression in *Normal People*. Whenever a situation gets complicated, the narrative discourse stops and sets in again only at a later point in time. The resulting gaps in the plot are filled – typically in the following chapter – with a flashback. As already mentioned, these past-tense analepses stress a different mode of presentation, featuring the external perspective of a narrator rather than the internal perspective of a protagonist [33, Ch. 7]. This is especially apparent in the flashback presented in Chapter 8. In the first (present-tense) paragraphs, Marianne apologizes to Connell for her behaviour on the previous evening: they both went to a party where she got drunk and tried to seduce him, even though they are no longer a couple. As is characteristic of Rooney's use of the present tense, which highlights the mode of showing, the conversation between the two friends only alludes to this event, Connell replying to Marianne that "these things happen" [20, p. 83]; yet readers are still ignorant of what this means. But the next paragraph provides clarification: Its first sentence – "This is the thing that happened" [20, p. 83] – not only introduces the flashback, but also establishes a communicative situation between narrator and narratee. The former becomes an overt, commenting voice revealing its influence on the narrative discourse through "hypothetical focalization" [34, p. 303], speculating about how Marianne would have responded to Connell's reactions if she had not been drunk: "He made a kind of frowning expression, which if she had been sober would have induced her to pretend she had only been joking" [20, p. 87]. The past-tense analepses in the novel can thus be seen to favour mediated over immediate forms of presentation.

What is the purpose of this fixed correlation of past and present tenses with the modes of telling and showing? Following Kazunari Miyahara's suggestion to consider Rooney's tense usage as "collectively symbolic" [30, p. 186], I would contend that tense alternation in *Normal People* fulfils a *thematic function* [12, Ch. 5.7] which engages with the notions of both social acceleration and present shock. Rooney's present-tense narrative, it seems, never takes the time to resolve the conflicts between the protagonists or elaborate on their complicated relationships with other characters, but instead jumps from one situation to the next whenever the depiction of a scene would require the intervention of the narrator to explain its complex circumstances to the reader. The temporal leaps thus created result in an episodic mode of presentation which, viewed in isolation, accelerates the overall narrative pace of *Normal People*:

The past-tense analepses in the novel can thus be seen to favour mediated over immediate forms of presentation.

each of the eighteen chapters concentrates on a specific moment in the protagonists' lives; yet these moments do not immediately follow one another, but are unevenly distributed over a time span of four years. According to Miyahara, the novel consequently "endeavors to metaphorically translate the 'pathological need for up-to-dateness' into the use of present-tense narration" [30, p. 187].

One could interpret this as Rooney's attempt to attune literary storytelling to a reading habit strongly influenced by how we process information through new media. In our contemporary media environment, it is increasingly difficult to concentrate on a single topic for a longer period of time. Reading an online article on a tablet or smartphone, for instance, makes it almost impossible to focus exclusively on the topic of the article, as numerous hyperlinks constantly tempt our attention away to other, related subjects. Social media, furthermore, condition their users to prefer short, ephemeral content that can be processed within a few minutes, or even

seconds: tweets and status updates only seem relevant and interesting until other more immediate and more urgent posts come along. Both these examples show that digital media necessitates what N. Katherine Hayles calls "hyper reading," a reading practice which correlates with the cognitive mode of hyper attention and which, therefore, "has a low threshold for boredom, alternates flexibly between different information streams, and prefers a high level of stimulation" [35, p. 12].

It seems to me, then, that novels like *Normal People*, which primarily feature comparatively fast-paced and episodic sequences of present-tense narration, seek to adjust to the brief attention span of contemporary readers who have grown accustomed to the fast and superficial reading practices associated with the digital age [36, p. 175]. However, Rooney's novel does so with a twist, as it characterizes present-tense narrative as deficient. Were it not for the narrator's explanations in the past-tense flashbacks, readers would not stand a chance of grasping the complex relationships of the protagonists. Viewed in its entirety, then, the novel appears to advocate more profound modes of reading, which are "often undervalued in a contemporary world that is obsessed with time-saving" [30, p. 187]. The example discussed in the following section showcases precisely such practices of slow reading.

Viewed in its entirety, then, the novel appears to advocate more profound modes of reading, which are "often undervalued in a contemporary world that is obsessed with time-saving"

4 Fragmentary Life Stories and "Fusion" Style: Bernadine Evaristo's *Girl, Woman, Other*

First published in 2019, Bernadine Evaristo's award-winning[10] *Girl, Woman, Other* traces the lives of twelve British characters who are mostly women (one character, Megan/Morgan, identifies as non-binary) and who are either black or have black origins (as is the case with Penelope, the only white character in the book). The novel divides into five chapters and an epilogue, with the first four chapters once more dividing into three subchapters, each of which focuses on one of three characters connected by kinship or other social bonds. After relating the main characters' life stories in the form of twelve fragmentary "social portraits" [37, p. 95], Chapter 5 is set at the National Theatre in London, where six of the twelve characters – Amma, Yazz, Dominique, Carole, Shirley, and Morgan – meet to watch the premiere of Amma's *The Last Amazon of Dahomey*, an activist play about eighteenth-century lesbian West African warriors. The last missing (family) link between Penelope and Hattie is revealed in the Epilogue. The structure of the novel illustrates that, despite its lack of an overarching story, *Girl, Woman, Other* establishes a complex network among its characters: "[T]o be racialized as black," Micha Frazer-Carroll argues, "brings with it some level of connectedness" [38, n.p.], for all the characters share the experience of being othered in contemporary British society [Evaristo qtd. in 39, n.p.].

Like *Normal People, Girl, Woman, Other* is characterized by heterogeneous tense usage, combining past and present tenses in a temporalizing scheme. This can be best illustrated with reference to the first two subchapters that focus respectively on Amma and her daughter Yazz. Both sections are – as is typical throughout the novel – told by a heterodiegetic narrator who presents the story from the perspective of the character who takes centre stage in this part

10
The novel was joint winner – together with Margaret Atwood's The Testaments – of the 2019 Booker Prize.

of the novel. The chapters on Amma and Yazz, moreover, each begin as follows with a passage written in the present tense (this is not the rule, but varies from chapter to chapter):

> Amma
> is walking along the promenade of the waterway that bisects her city [...]
> to her left is the nautical-themed footbridge with its deck-like walkway and sailing mast pylons
> to her right is the bend in the river as it heads east past Waterloo Bridge towards the dome of St Paul's
> [...]
> Amma's play, *The Last Amazon of Dahomey*, opens at the National tonight [21, p. 1; italics in the original; my emphasis]
>
> Yazz
> sits on the seat chosen by Mum in the middle of the stalls, one of the best in the house [...]
> Two members of her uni squad, the Unfuckwithables, are seated either side of her, Waris and Courtney, hard workers like her because they're all determined to get good degrees because without it they're stuffed [21, p. 41]

The excerpts show that both sections are set in the same diegetic present: contemporary London on the day of the premiere of Amma's play[11] While the first of these passages depicts Amma on her way to the theatre and, in doing so, provides readers with precise information on the novel's setting (note the geographical markers "Waterloo Bridge," "the dome of St Paul's," and "the National" emphasized above), the second passage presents Yazz – probably a few hours later – at the National, sitting with two of her friends in the audience, waiting for the play to start. As the sections proceed, they uncover Amma's and Yazz's backstories, in both cases indicated with a shift to the past tense: "[Amma] thinks back to when she **started** out in theatre" [21, p. 2; my emphasis]; "it's also probably fair to say that [Yazz] **was** probably *too* young at thirteen to innocently open the drawer under [her father's] bed [...]" [21, pp. 45–46; italics in the original; my emphasis]. In Amma's case, the flashback is furthermore introduced with a *verbum credendi* ("thinks back"), which clarifies that this moment of analepsis resides in the character's consciousness. A comparable marker is missing in the section on Yazz's character; yet readers are likely to see through the pattern, having read this far into the novel. At the end of the flashbacks, both sections return to the here-and-now of the storyworld – again indicated with a return to the present tense. Having access to Amma's current state of mind, we learn that she "**misses** her daughter now she's away at university" [21, p. 39; my emphasis], whereas in Yazz's section, the narrative sends us right back onto the narrative scene, the auditorium of the National: "and so it **begins** / *The Last Amazon of Dahomey* / the play" [21, p. 74; italics in the original; my emphasis]. Although these examples demonstrate that Evaristo's use of the present tense mainly fulfils a *referential function* [12, Ch. 5.2] which enables us to distinguish the characters' current thoughts from their memories, the second passage quoted above already implies that it also serves an *immersive function* [12, Ch. 5.3]. This effect becomes more obvious when the novel depicts a scene in which ninety-three-year-old Hattie hosts a Christmas lunch for her family:

> Hattie
> [...]
> sits at the head of the banqueting table in the Long Room of Greenfields farmhouse built over two hundred years ago
> her ever-growing gene pool crammed all the way down it
> and their spouses
>
> either side of her are her two children, both in their seventies
> [...]
> then there's the grandchildren in their forties and fifties

11
The diegetic here-and-now is not the same for all characters. Although half of them meet at the party following the premiere of Amma's play at the National, others are located somewhere else (e.g. Hattie, who is bound to the Greenfields farmhouse, or Winsome, who lives in Barbados) or have already died by this time (e.g. Grace).

> […]
> a few of the great-grandchildren in their twenties and thirties are here too […] great-great-grandchildren are seated at a separable table […], a couple of adults are acting as minders to stop them using food as missiles instead of fodder for their mouths then there's the newly-borns she's only just met [21, pp. 341–342]

This (considerably shortened) quotation illustrates how Evaristo's narrative occasionally encourages us to mentally project ourselves into the storyworld and perceive the scene through the eyes of the character who currently serves as focalizer (in this case Hattie). Admittedly, the passage would also allow us to adopt Hattie's point of view if it was written in the past tense; yet, as Marie-Laure Ryan rightly contends, "the present is inherently more immersive than the past," purporting a synchronicity between the narrative events and the act of their reporting [40, p. 97]. Evaristo's use of the present tense accordingly suggests that readers witness the event of the Christmas lunch as it is still unfolding. In other words, it sends us into the here-and-now of the scene, where we take Harriet's place at the banqueting table and observe 'our' guests who are "crammed all the way down it.

Evaristo's dominant use of referential and immersive present-tense narration gives rise to the question of how *Girl, Woman, Other* can be read as a response to digitization and social acceleration. To answer this, it is helpful to focus on the distribution of tenses in the novel, where Evaristo uses the present tense primarily to depict each character's here-and-now and the past tense for their backstories – extensive passages written in a non-chronological order. These instances of *hyper-analepsis* [12, pp. 126–127] slow down the narrative pace of the novel, bringing events in the diegetic present almost to a halt. It even seems that does not generate a plot for the diegetic present at all: the two main events that happen within this temporal framework are the reunion of some of the characters at the after-show party and the encounter of Penelope and her biological mother Hattie at Greenfields. Yet these occurrences are not in any way causally linked, so it makes no sense to think of them as an interrelated sequence. The rest of the novel is entirely dedicated to the characters' pasts and the numerous obstacles they had to overcome to become who they are today.[12]

The slow dynamics of *Girl, Woman, Other* is, moreover, reinforced by the novel's form. As the passages quoted above demonstrate, the novel is written in an experimental style which Evaristo herself calls "fusion fiction" [qtd. in 42, §12] – that is, it integrates elements of poetry and prose, with a period only at the end of a (sub)chapter [43, p. 120], and with a line break after every sentence (sometimes even every half sentence), which makes the text resemble poetry rather than prose.[13] According to David S. Miall and Don Kuiken, such unusual linguistic variation, also known as foregrounding or defamiliarization, has a bearing on the reading process in that it deautomatizes our usual perception of written texts, thus prolonging the time we need to read them [47; see also 12, p. 215]. Foregrounding, the authors suggest, "requires cognitive work on the part of the reader" which "is initiated and in part directed by feeling" [47, p. 392]. In other words, novel linguistic features such as the partial lack of punctuation as well as unusual line breaks not only "strike readers as interesting and capture their attention," but they also oblige the audience "to slow down, allowing time for the feelings created by [these linguistic peculiarities] to emerge" as well as an "enriched perspective" on the text to arise [47, p. 392].

Evaristo's novel defies current trends of social acceleration and present shock, as it calls for different practices of slow reading. To make sense of the experimental 'fusion' style of *Girl,*

12
The absence of an overarching plot is probably one of the main reasons why the novel has been associated with genres such as the networked novel [41, p. 305] or the short story cycle [37, p. 94].

13
This formal experiment should not be confused with the style of Evaristo's previous novels Lara [44] and The Emperor's Babe [45]. While these texts qualify as genuine verse novels, Girl, Woman, Other is looser in its use of verse [46, n.p.].

Woman, Other, readers will be well advised to resort to strategies of close reading[14]: Why does the first part of the subchapter on Grace make use of anaphora, beginning every paragraph with the name of Grace's mother, Daisy [21, pp. 373–375]? What effect is created when the narrative discourse inserts a line break after every word to recount Carole's experience of being gang raped as a teenager [21, pp. 125–127]? Why are there line breaks even within words when the novel presents Penelope's feelings after she has learned that her parents are not her biological parents [21, pp. 283–284]? Answering these and other questions certainly requires an act of interpretation.

Similarly, if readers wish to detect all connections between the various characters, they have to pay close attention to small(er) details and motifs. In addition to Chapter 5, in which half of the characters meet at the National, the fragmentary life stories presented in Chapters 1 to 4 contain many subtle references and allusions to one of the other eleven characters, which can easily be overlooked [46]. Dispensing with an overarching plot that explicitly connects all its characters, Evaristo's novel forces readers to concentrate on individual portraits and respective past experiences. The diegetic here-and-now, which is expressed through the referential use of the present tense, does not serve as the site where the narrative events unfold; it rather constitutes a revelatory moment which enables us to realize how the fates of all these black female – or, in the case of Morgan, non-binary – characters converge. And this insightful moment is most rewarding if we allow ourselves the time – and leisure – to explore the character studies of *Girl, Woman, Other* in depth, savouring Evaristo's 'fusion' prose and revisiting previous chapters to detect allusions and motifs that we did not find at a first read. In this respect, *Girl, Woman, Other* can be construed as a corrective to social acceleration: in counteracting any notions of hyper reading typically associated with the digital age, it restores the novel as a perfect means for what Sven Birkerts has called "deep reading" – "the slow and meditative possession of a book" [48, p. 146].

5 Conclusion

To conclude, I would like to reaffirm the claims stated in the introduction to this essay that the anglophone novel continues to thrive and reinvent itself in the twenty-first century. With the increasing popularity of the present-tense novel, the genre, moreover, seems to have geared up for the challenges of the digital age. As my analysis of Rooney's *Normal People* and Evaristo's *Girl, Woman, Other* has sought to show, the contemporary novel uses present-tense narration as an effective means to question the fast and superficial reading habits cultivated in our high-speed information society.

Evaristo's novel defies current trends of social acceleration and present shock, as it calls for different practices of slow reading.

What is striking in this context is that the large functional potential of the fictional present allows the genre to respond to these cultural dynamics in different ways. A thematic use of present-tense narration can adapt to the scarce attention economy of the contemporary common reader by bringing forth fast-paced and episodic narratives like *Normal People*. The parts of Rooney's novel that are written in the present tense draw on a representational mode

14
According to Hayles [35, p. 12], close reading constitutes the opposite of the mode of hyper reading discussed in Section 3 above. Unlike hyper reading, which correlates with hyper attention, close reading "correlates with deep attention, the cognitive mode [...] that prefers a single information stream, focuses on a single cultural object for a relatively long time, and has a high tolerance for boredom" [35, p. 12].

of showing which never takes time to explain complex situations but instead jumps from one scene to the next whenever things get tangled. *Normal People* thus transfers practices of hyper reading, which we usually apply in the digital media environment, into an (analogue) literary context. Only in its past-tense flashbacks can the novel bridge its narrative gaps with narratorial explanations that help readers to understand the characters' dysfunctional relationships. *Girl, Woman, Other*, by contrast, creates a complex network of characters presented through fragmentary life stories that oscillate between present-tense and past-tense usage as well as between poetry and prose. Evaristo's experimental style prompts us in two ways to slow down and focus more consciously on the process of reading: First, its extensive flashbacks decelerate the narrative's pace, causing the action in the diegetic here-and-now to pause and leaving us pondering about how the different character portraits fit together. Second, the novel's defamiliarizing 'fusion' pattern forces us to pay closer attention to the linguistic make-up of the text and reflect on the arrangement of the words on the page.

Both novels thus address different dimensions of our "attention ecology" [49] in the digital age: Rooney's novel feeds on the notions of acceleration, the extended present, and present shock, offering us a reading experience evocative of digital reading habits, while at the same time criticizing the practice of fast and superficial reading. Evaristo's novel, on the other hand, functions as what Ansgar Nünning [50, pp. 166–171] might well characterize as an indispensable literary corrective to these tendencies, allowing readers to (re-)develop a sense of the importance of reflection and mindfulness in life. That Rooney's and Evaristo's texts respond so differently to contemporary cultural dynamics emphasizes the diversity and versatility of present-tense narration, whose multifunctionality is certainly one of the main reasons why the analogue twenty-first century novel can be considered a vital match for its digital competitors.

…

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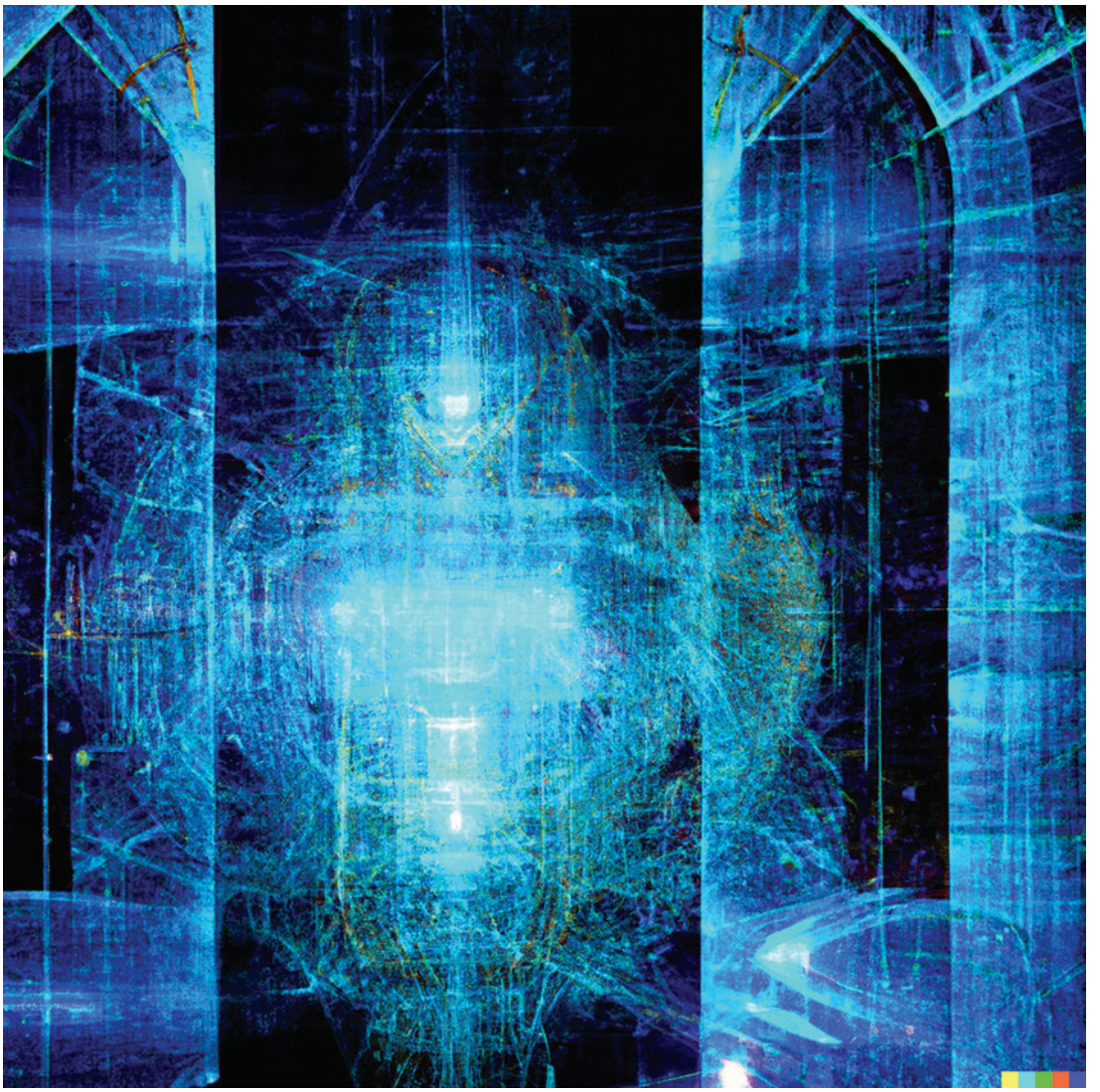

Sabrina Durling-Jones | **AI**

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Literary Experience and Narrative Immersion in the Interactive Digital Game Narrative as The Sense of Being There in The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim

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Abstract

There has been lively debate about digital games in terms of their literary value, especially in terms of whether they do or do not have a narrative. Many narratologists have argued that digital games possess a unique narrative structure known as *interactive narrative*. This provides players of digital games with direct or indirect interactions with various interactive elements in the relevant virtual settings so as to modify or create a sequence of events. It is also true that the interactive narrative provides pleasurable literary experiences based on vivid *narrative immersion*, which is at the same degree or higher than what a textual narrative can provide to readers. Narrative immersion can be facilitated through the immersive spatial, temporal and emotional dimensions of the interactive narrative, which intensifies the literary experience of the player. Still, digital games have pre-narratability and structural differences between traditional text-based linear and digital non-linear interactive narratives, and this has led many critics to claim that digital games simply cannot deliver a complete narrative. However, there is an open-world role-playing game, *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim*, which provides an evidential counterargument to its confronters who make that claim. The quest-based interactive narrative structure of *Skyrim* makes available a narrative immersion for players which speaks to *the sense of being there*.

This paper will argue that digital games can deliver narrative and provide narrative immersion which is as pleasurable as that which attaches to literary experiences. We will explore the degree of pre-narratability in interactive narratives, narrative immersion in digital games, as created by the cognitive narrative perception of players about the sequence of events, as well as four crucial testimonies regarding pleasurable literary experiences which come from the narrative immersion of *Skyrim*. This means that it can be proven that digital games are the most futuristic narrative format for next-level literary experiences.

Keywords

digital games, interactive narrative, narrative immersion, role-playing games

1 Introduction

Narratives are a basic element of human nature, irrespective of whether they tell sorrowful, amusing, tragic or other types of stories in our multifaceted lives [1]. This fundamental drive allows humans to come up with innumerable narratives and narrative media. One of the major narrative media is text-based literary works that have been and will be written so as to provide readers with pleasurable literary experiences. During the ongoing digital revolution, these text-based narrative are being transformed into dynamic variations, from textuality to (digital) multimodality. This represents a "combination of text, video, [audio] and navigable space" [2], and a number of innovative digital narratives have been accepted in various media formats such as "interactive cinema, interactive fiction … electronic literature," and "digital games" [1].

Digital games have been in the centre of these numerous digital narrative utilisations, and they have been a dominant media among other multimodal media because of their comprehensive visual and literary artistry and their unique *interactive narrative*. This narrative accepts direct or indirect interventions from players or users, as well as interactions with digital and virtual artifacts within fictional settings. This allows players to compose, modify and deliver their own sequence of events, i.e., the multimodally composed fundamental coexistence between narrativity and interactivity means that digital games can provide the most technologically advanced and vicarious literary experiences, which go beyond physical limitations and limited imagination. More intensified experienceable and pleasurable imagined worlds occur at the player's cognitive level. This immersive experience related to the literary pleasure of interactive narrative is known as *narrative immersion*. It originates in the textual literary experiences of readers, but has been amplified to a greater degree by highly developed digital and visual technologies.

In conjunction with many kinds of pop culture media, however, the narrative (and also literary) value and academic potentiality of digital games have been fiercely attacked. There are critics who challenge and reject the narrative potential of digital games because of their real-time and "lifelike" narrative structure. In relation to this issue, Abbott has argued that although digital games have some degree of narrativity, they are not narrative because they are "like theatre improve or reality TV" and "like life itself," which is unpredictable, unplanned and unscripted [3]in their *pre-narratable* structure before any recounting of narratives [4].

2 Digital games as a (pre-narratable) and interactive narrative based on the cognition of players

Ironically enough, digital games really can be considered to be a narrative because of their pre-narratability. Also known as ante-narrative, this is a concept that was well defined by Boje, who argues that it refers to "narratives not yet told and interacting in moving fragments with living stories as yet untold" between the "living story" and the "narrative" [5]. This means that the basic narrative elements such as "non-linear, incoherent, collective, unplotted" pre-narrative stories or story fragments are generated as the next step of the living story (*life-itself* to *lifelike*) before they are contextualised as complete nar-

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ratives [4]. Abbott echoes this concept by arguing that the endless possibilities of "intrusion" or "infiltration" by the pre-narratable and non-linear paths and story spaces hinder and interrupt the "traditional dramatic productions" or "plot points" of digital games [4]. This means that digital games cannot be narrative even though some of them (e.g., role-playing games) do have some levels of narrativity or narrative elements such as "quests, dungeons and monsters" [4].

Abbott's argument, however, misses the fact about the crucial existence of participants – digital game players and their narrative cognition. Wolf has argued that "as long as recipients feel that there is some sort of script which limits their choices, narrative still applies, albeit to a reduced extent" [13]. This is true even in the pre-narratable stage where the narrative exists because people recognise it. If digital games have goal-oriented, scripted plots or points of denouement that are based on certain systemic objects such as a quest system, then there is always a strong chance to form, deliver and receive narrative meanings by recognisers, deliverers or recipients of narrative meaning. Players have sufficient agential capacity to compose narratives by negotiating narrative meanings from life experiences (playing games) and then perceiving the pre-narrative non-linear stories. In brief, the non-linear and interactive narrative of digital games provides players who recognise their authorial and spectatorial status simultaneously [3] with a unique intervention-able or modifiable narrative system. They can perceive and convey the essential sequence of events in digital games via their agents (avatars) as narrators in a certain plot system (e.g., a quest system). The perceived and modified pre-narratives from the interactive narrative of digital games will eventually become relatable as a literary narrative pleasure for players who face a "spatiotemporal circumstance" [7].

Once again, if we think about the narrative potential of digital games, we might argue that they are neither narrative nor an example of literature because of their lack of traditional textuality and visuality. On the other hand, the visual language provides valid evidence of digital games as an interactive narrative. The visual, dominant, computational and multimodal language is "not limited to a textual stimulus" [8], and it generates meaning effects from "perceptions, interpretation and responses to those meanings" [1], at "a player's cognitive level just as when readers read literary works" [8]. Likewise, the context of multimodal texts in digital games does not only rely on the lexical sense of the digital media, but also relies on the multimodal narrative perception and interpretation among players "from the visualised cyber text … players may feel that the virtual world invites interventions by reflecting their thoughts, feelings, sounds, sights or unconscious desires in the world directly" [1].

The perceived and modified pre-narratives from the interactive narrative of digital games will eventually become relatable as a literary narrative pleasure for players who face a "spatiotemporal circumstance"

Players can use multimodal text-based sensory reflections to reconfigure and re-participate in the narrative world as a metaphor of reality with the *sense of being there* and by identifying themselves as "being in the world with the others and with oneself" [9]. The experiential function of the metaphorical sense is one of the essential literary effects of literary pleasure, where one feels like being "submerged in water … the sensation of being surrounded by a completely other reality about the enjoyment of immersion as a participatory activity" [4]. Ryan clearly conceptualises this as *narrative immersion*.

3 Narrative immersion

3.1 A conceptual and historical overview of narrative immersion

Narrative immersion is not a new concept in this digital age. Earlier ideas about it have existed since text-based literary narrative media were the mainstream, with the digital narrative dominating at this time. Text-based narrative immersion, therefore, has various historical companies and ancestors, including *vicarious gratification*, *absorption*, and *transportation*. These all resound with the interactive narrative's spatiotemporal sense of being present in virtual settings.

Vicarious gratification in literature is aimed at fulfilling "the reader's unconscious fantasies," [10] which means that this narrative immersion is mostly applicable to fantasy fiction. Reading renowned fantasy novels by authors such as W.H. Auden, C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien is a great example of experiencing vicarious gratification [11]. Literary pleasure which occurs when reading fantasy literature means that the passive desires of the reader or the participant leads them to want to find "'transcending' reality, 'escaping' the human condition and construction superior, alternative and 'secondary' worlds" that are to be entered in "better" and "unified" functional spaces [11]. Escaping reality and entering fictional world which surround the reader's fictional and cognitive perception certainly creates an early concept of the sensual feeling of being there.

Second, Victor Nell has written about psychological and cognitive *absorption*: "Reading performs the prodigious task of carrying us off to other worlds ... envelop[es] us in alternative realities only because we give them explicit permission to do so. Books are dreams..." [11], while absorption suggests the intentional or unintentional absorption of the reader so as to transform one's 'state of consciousness through entrancement" and "losing one's sight of anything external to it" [12]. In Nell's *Lost in a Book*, an anonymous reader confesses to the unique escapism in absorption from every reality: "Reading removes me for a considerable time from the petty and seemingly unrewarding irritations of living ... I read for 'reward' as much as for 'escape'" [11]. These confessions resonate with the readers' conscious or subconscious entrancement while losing a sense of reality because they are absorbed into the literary pleasure which brins them to alternative realities.

Another theoretical definition of the sense of being relates to Gerrig and his concept of *transportation*. This represents the experiences of readers when they visit narrative worlds [9] in a way that is similar to that which related to the previous two concepts. This perspective of the sense of being there provides higher similarity to the narrative immersion of the interactive narrative of digital games. According to Ryan, Gerrig's transportation consists of the following steps which readers experience:

> 1) *Someone (*"*the traveller*"*) is transported* ... into the textual world and shapes a "textual identity" of the fictional world;
> 2) *By some means of transportation* ... the readers' physical status and suspicion about the "textual identity" are dispelled from the narrative world;
> 3) *As a result of performing certain actions* ... performative reading by those who change "the textual direction" into a "reality model" "as the mental representation of a textual world, with literary pleasure depending on the reader's own performance;
> 4) *The traveller goes some distance from his or her world of origin*, which refers to the cognitive adaption of the reader into the world;
> 5) *Which makes some aspects of the world of origin inaccessible* as "a deep absorption in the construction/contemplation of the textual world";
> 6) *The traveller returns to the world of origin, somewhat changes by the journey*, which refers to the reflective response of readers who are affected and changed by the textual world [10],[11].

The concept and steps of transportation greatly echo with the concept of being there into an alternative world. This is particularly true from steps three to five, because they reconfigure one's fictional reality through cognitive performance. In Gerrig's *Experiencing Narrative World*, he refers to Gibbson's testament so as to prove

the actuality of transportation: "Every time we open the pages of another piece of writing, we are embarked on a new adventure in which we become a new person ... that set of attitudes and qualities which the language asks us to assume" [9]. In terms of this testament, I would claim that the perception of "new adventure" demonstrates the initial step of transportation which dispels the reader's actual personality into an alternative reality. Ryan also argues that transportation is an imagery presentation of the textual world in the readers mind; according to her, however, transportation is only a "folk theory" in the sense of there being narrative immersion [12].

From the terminological and metaphorical perspective, the idea of narrative "immersion," which means being surrounded and soaked by unrealistic things, dates back to the Biblical concept of baptism. According to *The Form of Baptism: an Argument designed to Prove Conclusively that Immersion is the only Baptism Authorised by the Bible* by J.B. Briney, Hoefling explains that "*Baptizein* means first immersion, dipping; then washing and purifying, because this takes place generally by dipping into water" [13]. The theological concept of baptism speaks to being dunked into water, and that resonates with the literary immersion which implies that the experience of readers means that they are being surrounded by or dipped by the fictional worlds and literary elements [7]. Furthermore, the concept of narrative immersion can easily be found in paintings [12]. Artists seek to deliver the "illusion" of "presence" in "two-dimensional" "pictorial space" in Renaissance and impressionist paintings [12]. These methods allowed the minds of viewers to "complete a complex process of interpretation and construction of sensory data" [12]. After the settlement of pictorial immersion, 19th-century literary technique developments led to readers finding immersive reading experiences in textual narrative. Highly realistic techniques at the time granted a metamorphosis for readers into a "virtual body" in the texts so as to turn them into the "direct witness of events" and to attach them to "emotional ties" with characters who arouse "constant suspense" [12]. Likewise, regardless of the various genres of pictorial or textual narrative media, narrative immersion calls upon participants to entertain and experience narratives and their worlds with the sensory feeling of being there.

Janet H. Murray expounds a deeper metaphorical and comprehensive definition of narrative immersion in her *Hamlet on the Holodeck*: "The physical experience of being submerged in water ... the sensation of being surrounded by a completely other reality, as different as water is from air, that takes over all of our attention, our whole perceptual apparatus .. about the enjoyment of immersion as a participatory activity" [4].

Regardless of the various genres of pictorial or textual narrative media, narrative immersion calls upon participants to entertain and experience narratives and their worlds with the sensory feeling of being there.

As she argues, all-inclusive narrative immersion is an individual's cognitive absorption, which creates meaning and interpretation of meaning from "participatory" literary experiences in another world, as though being sunk into deep water as an alternative reality and losing one's sense of reality for a while.

3.2 Digital narrative immersion in virtual reality

However, even vicarious gratification, absorption, transportation, textual and pictorial forms of a sense of being all share the same concept of immersion or immersive experiences. The concept of narrative immersion as a literarily pleasurable narrative experience means that this can

only encompass all of the ideas that are textual, as well as multimodal and digital. This is because the textual and two-dimensional pictorial and fictional world greatly demand that readers or viewers engage in cognitive efforts or burdens to make them effectively achieve a sense of being there. This is different than the interactive plots of video games and their highly developed visual graphics, which do not place unnecessary cognitive burdens upon players who feel the sense of being there. Hence, the narrative immersion of digital interactive narratives is the strongest and most vivid concept of proposing the pleasurable literary experiences of game players, as Mel Slater has argued: "The more that a system delivers displays (in all sensory modalities) and tracking that preserves fidelity in relation to their equivalent real-world sensory modalities, the more that it is 'immersive'" [4].

This means that the non-linear interactive narrative structure of digital games allows players to directly intervene in game stories so as to create their own plot streams. This can motivate a "feeling of agency" via the sensory actions of participants, then bolstering narrative immersion in their corporeal and cognitive levels [4] as truly immersive both in reality and in virtual reality. In hypertext fiction, for instance, interactive textuality permits the reader to directly type involvements "in the construction of the text as a visible display of signs" [10] in the plot and from the interactive process of participating in and reconstructing the plot and the sense of being there as narrative immersion is fortified. Similarly, highly developed technological and visual interactivity enables the narrative immersion of digital games to rebuild and reconfigure the realistic virtual worlds through "a response to an unfolding narrative, the characters inhabiting the story world or the depiction of the world itself" [11] in terms of enjoying narrative pleasure.

To summarise, returning to the definition of interactive narrative and narrative immersion means a unique combination (or coexistence) between interactivity and non-linear narrativity, as well as the developments of the digital technology which shapes the literary experience and pleasure in the interactively navigable and immersive narrative space which is unbound beyond the physical restrictions and limited imaginations of players. This immersive effect in terms of feeling "a sensation of being surrounded" by "other reality" [4] prominent echoes with the verisimilitude of players' narrative immersion into the interactive narrative of digital games, as facilitated through the immersive spatial, temporal and emotional aspects of an interactive narrative.

4 Three branches of narrative immersion in *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim*

4.1 Three branches of narrative immersion

Narrative immersion has three different and distinguishable branches according to the players' three different immersive reactions: *spatial immersion* as "the response to the setting"; *temporal immersion* as "the response to the story"; and *emotional immersion* as a response to the characters [12]. All three immersions guide players toward a certain degree of literary and narrative pleasure that is derived from the intensive preoccupation with narrative events, settings and characters.

First of all, temporal immersion provides invigorated narrative *suspense* more than text-based narrative immersion, which means "the desire to know what happens' next. In general terms, suspense has three sections. On is *dramatic tension* which mainly relates to or depends upon the interest of readers, players and participants in a protagonist's destiny among his or her dangerous situations and the hope of readers to find a positive conclusion of the suspenseful situations. The second type of suspense relates to "the construction of virtual scripts and events" when tracking the potentially "visible roads into the future." Last, but not least, there is the *intensity of suspense*, which refers to "the range of possibilities" which the protagonist has, with these choices being more and more limited according to the development of the story [12].

Spatial immersion primarily relates to narrative settings in which "the reader's private landscapes blend with the textual geography; this "tele-transport" gives readers, participants and players "a sense of being" in "represented events" [12], then driving them toward the

pleasure of exploration and adventure in the narrative settings.

Emotional immersion stirs an emotional response among readers about the narrative. This significantly resonates with Aristotle's literary concept of *catharsis* in tragedy. Equally, we have dynamic emotional responses in life, because emotional immersion arouses emotions such as "empathy, sadness, relief, laughter, admiration, spite, fear," as well as sensory feelings along with the path and fate of the protagonist in his or her story structure [12].

4.2 Immersive literary pleasure from text based narrative immersion in *The Lord of the Rings* to digital narrative immersion in *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim* (the first and second testimonies)

I have played various digital games and am a reader who is addicted to reading a number of literary texts irrespective of genre. I have experienced these three kinds of immersion through text-based literary works, as well as digital games. The experiences sometimes consist of only one independent branch of immersion, while in other cases they become a complex form of three types of immersion. Both have provided me with dynamic and pleasurable literary experiences.

I still remember the nostalgic enjoyment which I felt when reading the fictional fantasy world of *The Lord of the Rings* for the first time about 20 years ago. My beautiful, dangerous and dreamful imaginations from the textualized fantasy narrative carried me into the fellowship's adventures path toward Moria's deep dungeon. I took part in the Battle of the Helm Deep, and the king of the eagles rescued me from Mount Doom at the very end of the story. These settings allowed me to feel that I was part of their beautiful, but perilous narration. At all literarily depicted moments, I could not escape from strong inner tension and ongoing suspense about the fellowship's survival, with Gollum's irrational yearning for the ring and with Sauron's evil triumph and failure. I felt great sympathy toward the sufferings of Frodo and Sam. In each sequence of events, I envisioned and imagined the potential events with an innocent desire to know which events would appear next, where the text would bring me, and how the protagonists would grow in emotional terms. While reading the books, I definitely experienced narrative immersion and literary pleasure. I was fully engaged and situated in the Middle Earth as a participant in the unforgettable journey through its sequential plot.

Ten years later I played a role-playing game, *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim*. This offered a fantastic chance to travel through a mysterious, mythic and epic open world and to become the heroic protagonist, the Last Dragonborn. This was very much like the reminiscing and engrossing reading of *The Lord of the Rings*. My mind and my cognitive perceptions were immediate absorbed into he polar setting and the quest-based narrative, which depended on the choices that I made with my avatar. I sought to create and enjoy the literary entertainment of gameplay by creating my own sequential order of events with a great expectation to learn about the mysterious future of the protagonist's unexpected journey with a small number of given clues. Most impressively, emotional immersion was the most intensive narrative pleasure in this game. I could enthusiastically engage in the suspenseful literary event which occurred after the killing of the first Dragonborn, Miraak. As soon as that was done, one of the Deadric princes (the evil deities in Skyrim), Hermaeus Mora appeared unexpected-

The experiences sometimes consist of only one independent branch of immersion, while in other cases they become a complex form of three types of immersion.

ly and forcefully set the Last Dragonborn into its enslaved champion status by taking away his or her free will, thus altering the First Dragonborn, who was his champion of servitude [1]. The tragic event of the Last Dragonborn's downfall aroused extreme catharsis in my heart, with great sadness, frustration and confusion about its fate with unstoppable emotional immersion.

The realistic virtual space in *Skyrim* provides players with the sensory feeling of being there, with well-woven, but freely selectable quest lines which offer a grand epic plot with various mythic backstories for the player's immersive literary experience. The Last Dragonborn is the sturdy and heroic protagonist, but its destiny is inevitably tragic. I cognitively experienced narrative interpretation and found that my alternative identity was in the plot stream. Akin to my experience, there are many other testimonies about narrative immersion in *Skyrim* in the online world.

4.3 Immersive literary pleasure from digital narrative immersion in *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim* (*the third and fourth testimonies*)

Mattie Brice published a blog that was titled "Storyline? In 'Skyrim'? No thanks!" The text resonated with all three types of immersion. Mattie played *Skyrim* once and decided not to follow the main quest lines. Instead, he chose to convey his own narrative. This led to him experiencing three types of immersion in the most enjoyable ways – particularly intensive temporal and spatial immersion:

"The Jarl of Windhelm told me that I couldn't ignore the summons of the Greybeards (which I promptly did). I realised that the only support for a 'fate' that would determine the protagonist's activities in the game was the existence of a main story line... Skyrim's stronger narrative structure is found in the small details of a grand landscape. The locations and itself themselves are the plot points and characters for the player to read. The focus on player initiative is also paramount to the narrative. I found a letter from a witch in which she detailed an interest in starting a coven with her daughter. There was also a maid in a fortress that was constantly under attack. These people weren't telling the story; I created one in my own mind. The narrative restarted in a relationship between the environment and the items found therein, specifically placed for the player to find and to create an explanation about them..." [14].

This testimony illustrates the desire to now "what happened next" in the story after experiencing temporal immersion. At the same time, his text also shows that a perception of temporal immersion depends on the player's own decisions in an interactive narrative. He also testifies that his narrative and narrative setting, where streams were "the small details of a grand landscape," was "in the relationship between the environment and the items found therein, specifically placed for the player to find and to create an explanation about them" [5]. This demonstrates a strong affection for spatial immersion. He endorsed the given setting of *Skyrim* as a virtually created alternative world and decided to explore it on the basis of his own desire to convey his own narrative with his literary enjoyment of unpredictable events: "My decision to keep going into the ruins or to get the claw back to the store would be more meaningful if I came to that decision on my own ... the narrative is in the play. Let me play!" [14].

Another interesting bit of testimony is found in the *Game FAQ Skyrim* forum. It speaks not just to narrative immersion, but also to the future application of interactive narratives in digital games. This reflects the fact that players have different immersive experiences and distinguishable processes of narrative cognition. It also demonstrates the possibility of narrative creations during narrative immersion. One player posted a question, asking others to consider that they really lived in Skyrim's land. What would they do? Other players replied with their own short narratives, which were created by their own imagination when they reflected upon their own experiences with the game. Among them was Ace_43, whose reply demonstrates three different immersions simultaneously and in a short form:

"I built a house just down the road from Whiterun. Nothing fancy, just a quiet little home with a few acres and a small brook running through it. Bandits usually don't wander

this close to the city, [thought] I've had a few bold ones over the last few months. A group of them actually kidnapped my wife while I was in town buying supplies. Once I tracked them down to their cave, I struck them with great vengeance and furious anger about those who attempted to poison and destroy my life. They knew that my names was Mikoü the Lionhearted when I laid my vengeance upon them" [15].

Uniquely, this post reflects the player's authorial capacity to compose his or her own narrative because this is a new creation of interactive narrative. There were three immersions – events in Whiterun (spatial), events related to dramatic tenson (temporal), and tragic events related to the player's reactions (emotional). The story was not actually being played; instead, it was a literary plan to play in future (even though the post was written in the past tense). The user wrote the text on the basis of his playing experience in the past, and this was reflectively utilised to create another plot. Eventually this brief passage indicates the writer's potential *self-reflectivity* from his past immersive playing experiences so as to compose a new narrative endlessly and repetitively according to his will and the expandability or applicability of interactive narrative as a freely constructible and creative next-level future literature.

5 Conclusion

These testimonies demonstrate the resounding fact that digital game players and readers of textual literature can experience similar literary-narrative pleasure through being absorbed by the fictional and virtual spaces. It is also identifiable that digital narrative immersion from interactive narrative intensifies the literary pleasure. I would argue that the driving engine to possess and develop these innovative narrative media tools would be to fulfil the human desire to communicate from generation to generation and from individual to individual beyond the limitations of time and space. Since ancient wall-painting, there was the age of Guttenberg's printing revolution, the evolution of the typewriter, and then the digital revolution. All of this means that humankind has contributed to the narrative paradigm shifts endlessly so as to create more imaginative and effective narrative media. Regardless of the technological differences among the narrative media, however – differences such as textual and digital, the fact is that the essence of the "literary" narrative which contains the multidimensional human life for the creation and provision of literary pleasure remains unchangeable.

Despite the different structural spectrums of digital and textual mediums, narrative can exist on both sides. Among them, digital games are definitely narrative and can be seen as the future format for literary narrative pleasure.

Instead, new literary entertainments from the digital media have gradually become stronger. The advent of open-world interactive role-paying games such as *Skyrim* must be seen as one of the greatest bits of evidence about reinforced and imaginative literary pleasure from its immersive narrative structure. In this respect, I truly believe that narrative immersion from the interactive narrative of digital games is the most futuristic literary experience that can be applied to various media divergences. Unlike Abbot's claim that "the future of narrative is the past of narrative" [4], the future of the narrative depends on our use of future technologies, just as the printing revolution chanced our ancestors' literary narrative experience permanently. Despite the different structural spectrums of digital and textual mediums, narrative can exist on both sides. Among them, digital games are definitely narrative and can be seen as the future format for literary narrative pleasure.

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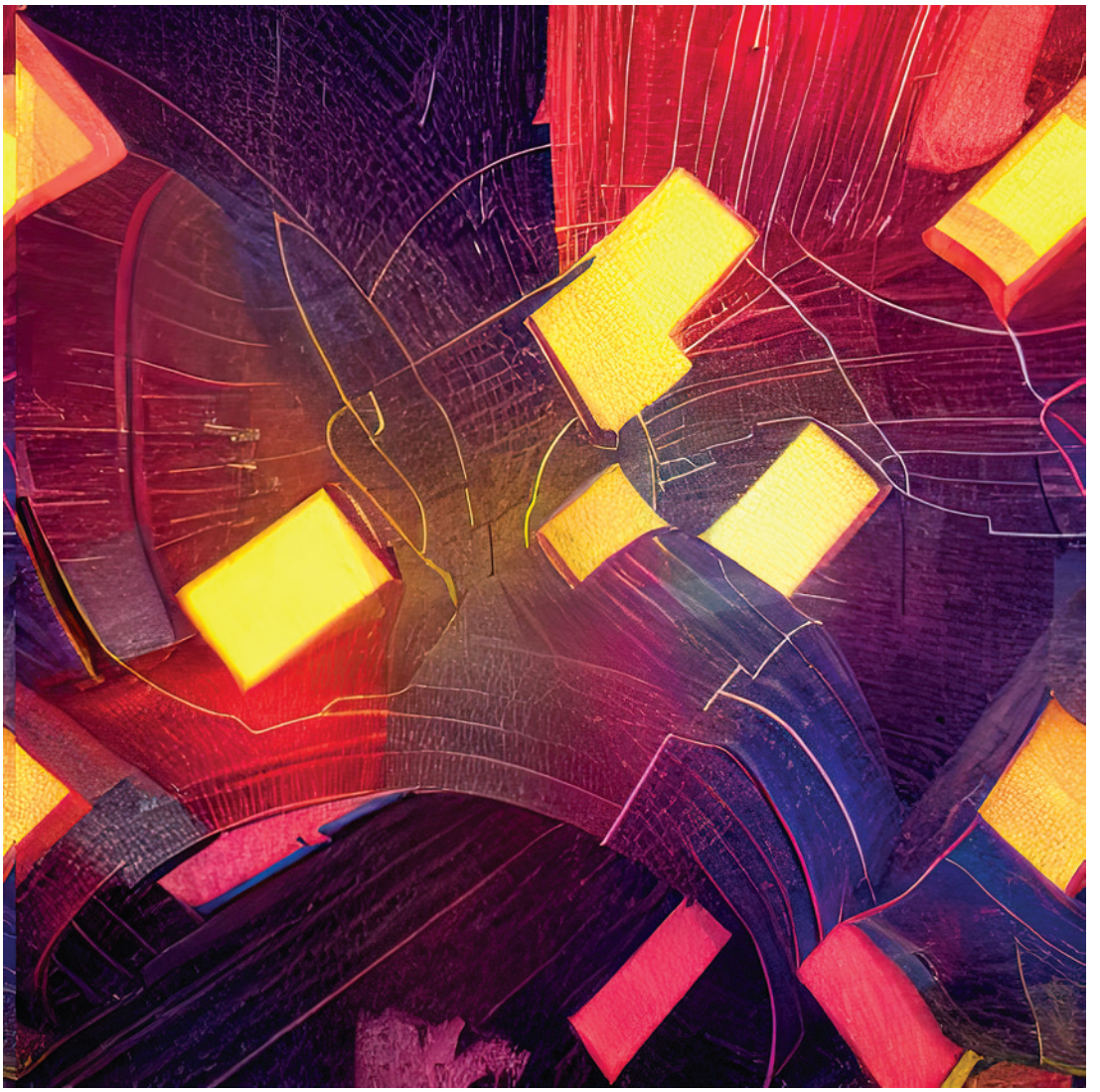

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Historical Phases of Narrative Strategies[1]

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Abstract

Strategic differences in any area of activity are generated by differences in initial conditions, as well as by differences in potential goals. The purpose of narration relates to the communicative event that is an interaction between consciousness, and this, too, can be strategically different. When it comes to the initial conditions of narration, the determinative factor is the narrative picture of the world "which provides the scale for determining what constitutes and event" (Lotman). Such pictures are phasic in their genesis, and each takes shape in narrative practices at a certain level in the development of human consciousness. They can later be actualised in historically cultural context. This paper will successively consider the precedent, imperative, adventurous and probabilistic pictures of the world, seeking to clarify the specifics of the narrative points of view which they manifest.

Keywords

narrative strategy, image of the world, ethos of narration, point of view, Russian literature, myth, parable, anecdote, novel

1 Introduction

1.1 Definition

Narrative strategies replace interactive concepts in the system of narratological categories. All other characteristics of the narrative are drawn toward this concept in one way or another.

Narrative strategies are sometimes and unreasonably reduced to narrative techniques. This is, in particular, a popular understanding of this category, as formulated by Prince: narrative strategy is "a set of narrative procedures followed or narrative devices used to achieve some specific goal" [1, p. 64]. In this definition, strategy is substituted for tactics. The concept of strategy comes from military science, and it correctly serves to characterise the most fundamental attitudes of activity. In a similar vein, Roussin discusses the "suppositions" of storytelling [2]. The fundamental distinction between strategic and tactical competence is fundamentally important when applied to narrative practices, because this prevents the misidentification of the author and the narrator. The strategic position of the author ensures the unity of the basic principles of narration and the communicative goal, and the speech acts of one or more narrators lead. The author's position can be homogeneous with the position of the narrator, or it can be detached or ironic.

Bakhtin argues that there are "two events – the event that is narrated in the word and the event of narration itself" [3, p. 225]. The dual-events nature of a narrative also requires a two-dimensional approach when defining the relevant narrative strategy. In any field of activity, for that matter, the different strategies are determined by the difference of the initial conditions and the difference of target settings.

1.2 Explication

Picture of the world. Initial conditions are determined by a picture of the world "which provides the scale for determining what constitutes an event" [4, p. 234]. "Picture of the world" is a common term used to describe a multitude of systems of the representation of life: linguistic, ethnic, scientific, religious, artistic, professional, age-based, gender-based, etc., images of the world. Each of these versions has a set of initial assumptions about the most general preconditions for the presence of human beings.

Ethos of narration. The target settings can also be fundamentally different, and this will be determined by the ethos of narration. According to Ricoeur, there are no ethically neutral narratives, because "the anticipation of ethical considerations [is] implied in the very structure of the act of narrating" [5, p. 148]. Booth has described a comparison of "the encounters of a storyteller's ethos with that of the reader of listener" [6, p. 8].

The fundamental distinction between strategic and tactical competence is fundamentally important when applied to narrative practices, because this prevents the misidentification of the author and the narrator.

Narrative ethos is a rhetorical category which actively enters the realm of non-classical narratological concepts [7, p. 20]. Bakhtin argues that the ethos corresponds to the "typical model of addressee" [8, p. 200] of discourse. When discussing the philosophy of language, Levinas has considered a mental attitude that is implicit in the intersubjective space of communication. Ethos is not subjective as a moral attitude; it is an intersubjective "magnetic field" in which the subject finds itself, according to Foucault, "sustaining discourse."

The ethos of narrative discourse presupposes the addressee's readiness to move toward the value horizon of the narrator. The category of ethos in narratology signifies the position of value, and this means that the subject's perception of history is called to take while remaining as a participant in the communicative event. Of course, if we reread the same text, we can always assume a position of analytical distance, but at this point we would disrupt the intersubjective relationship between the narrator and the addressee.

Point of view. These conditions and target settings are directly expressed in a narrative via the relationship between the narrator's point of view and that of the character in their relation to the reader (the addressee of the narrative). These are basic perspectives which form a kind of framework for any narrative discourse.

The point of view is the position which a narrator takes vis-à-vis the story world. The term "point of view" is similar to the concepts of "perspective" and "focalisation." These three concepts are often used synonymously, but there are a few differences among them. Perspective is usually understood as the subjective worldview of a character or narrator (if the latter is personified). Under the framework of a constructive approach toward a narrative, the term speaks to the specifics of reader activity. The recipient inevitably transfers his ideas about the person and the human mind to the hero, thus building up his "perspective" so that his existence is conceived as being pseudo-real [9, 424]. Classical narratology, however, does not imply a strict distinction between perspective and point of view.

On the basis of work by Lanser [10, p. 13], Niederhoff has argued correctly that a point of view represents "a relation between a viewing subject and a viewed object. Narratologists have occasionally succumbed to the temptation of simplifying things by reducing the relation to one of the elements that is connected by it" [11]. When shifting the emphasis toward the object, in turn, scholars are more likely to use the term "focalisation," although they prefer the term "point of view" or "perspective" to draw attention to the subject. In our opinion, point of view is a generic concept in relation to focalisation and to a point of view in a narrower sense (the point at which the story world is viewed).

Schmid considers point of view to be a basic and mandatory component of the narrative in that it determines its "optics" and the selection of translated information about the story world. Choosing a point of view is the first step in generating a narrative. The given object becomes part of the story when it is in the field of the subject's vision. In other words, a narrative simply cannot exist without a point of view [12, p. 195]. Narratologists who interpret the concept of point of view more narrowly, by contrast, do not agree with this idea. "If we think of the concept in spatio-visual terms," then a lack of a point of view is acceptable: "One can tell a story without a fixed viewpoint in the literal sense, just as one can paint a landscape without perspective" [11].

The category of ethos in narratology signifies the position of value, and this means that the subject's perception of history is called to take while remaining as a participant in the communicative event.

This paper accepts Schmid's typology of the point of view. According to this, a narrator can tell a story from his own perspective or from the perspective of one or more characters [12, p. 105].

2 The typology of narrative strategies

2.1 The imitative strategy

The formation of narrative strategies is an historical process of a phasic nature. The first step in forming such a strategy involves a mastery related to verbal storytelling that is free of any paralinguistic means of representation. Narrative replaces the more primitive communicative practice of syncretic display. The most archaic narrative practices (tales about mythical heroes and fairy tales) have inherited the mythological picture of the world. This suggests that everything in the world has already existed and will exist again, as is the case with changing seasons. This is a precedential picture of the world in which only that which is supposed to happen happens. According to Eliade, this is a person who "refuses to grant value [...] to the unusual events" [13, p. 85]. In contrast to myths, narrative discourse confers eventfulness on singular incidents. By inheriting what Freudenburg describes as "the inventory of myth" [14, p. 228], however, the discourse also inherits the precedential nature of the latter. Eventfulness is initially presented to the mythological substratum because it is presented as a precedent and the first occurrence in a series of such happenings. The archaic character is similar to a mythological character in that it is a performer of actions which realise some level of necessity.

The precedential picture of the world also determines the ethos of archaic narratives. As Neklyudov has argued, the moral code of these narratives means adhering to "rules of behaviour," while "wrong" actions characterise the "false hero" [15, p. 26]. The receptive attitude of the addressee of early narrative texts involves acquiring and preserving an attachment to a common generic experience of "correct behaviours" in a choral identity with everyone. This attitude implies an optic of narration in which the diegetic world is seen from a single perspective held by the narrator, the characters and the reader. This complete solidarity with other narrative instances ("eyewitnesses" of the events) is a necessary precondition for the adequate perception of the narrative. The ethos of the imitative narrative strategy is the ethos of calm.

2.2 The regulative strategy

The historical crisis of mythological consciousness led to the formation of several paths for the further development of human mentality. The most important one was the emergence of religious legends, and this required a fundamentally new regulative strategy. In post-mythological religious consciousness, an imperative picture of the world was formed, as manifested in the narrative practices of the Old Testament. This picture of the world is based on the initial assumption that life is determined by a super world order in which a sacred law or a subject of higher justice rules. It is not determined by cyclical recurrences.

The narrator's point of view determines the entire course of the story, and the narrator thus becomes the representative of such a subject in the narrative. The character's vision is not presented in the structure of the narrative, and his perspective is not actualised. All events are demonstrated and evaluated from the perspective of the narrator, who is the bearer of an unquestionable system of values. The reader also sees things from narratorial point of view: "[...] all the subject-object relations expressed in the text" converge "in one fixed focus," [4, p. 265].

The Old Testament narratives are characterised by the ethos of duty. The narrative focuses on the ultimate positivity or negativity of the chain of events, allowing readers to extract values of existence from the perceived story. The ethos of duty exists with concern for the dignity of one's position in life and the legitimacy of one's motives and actions.

A kind of quintessence in the second narrative is a parable. The historical roots of parables are found in the hagiographic genre of Medieval authorship, as well as in many genres of fiction such as fables, canonical genres of drama (tragedy/comedy), etc.

2.3 The adventurous strategy

A radically new strategy is found in adventurous Greek novels from the 2nd century AD. The world of adventure, according to Bakhtin, is one

of initiatory chance, "where the normal, pragmatic and premediated course of events is interrupted" [3, p. 92]. Bakhtin further argues that "Greek adventure-time lacks any natural, everyday cyclicity" [3, p. 91]. This is an occasional picture of the world, presenting life as a chaotic stream of mishaps. This is like a game of chance, where any outcome and the most improbable set of circumstances are possible. For the adventurous character, everything is determined by the unpredictable "lot" that falls to him.

his 1922 essay "The End of the Novel," Mandelstam defined the writing of novels as "the art of becoming interested in the fate of individuals" [17, p. 72], as opposed to national heroes or generic characters. In contrast to adventure novels, 19th-century classic novels developed the strategy of the biographical narrative so as to reveal the indirect trajectories of individual existences via a series of situations that could be precedent, imperative, adventurous or occasional. The biographical strategy is based on a

The reader's optics will still be closely tied to the narratorial point of view, but now the reader is also allowed to look at the diegetic world through the eyes of the characters.

The receptive attitude of an adventurous narrative can be defined as an ethos of desire or an intention to self-actualise (i.e., to become oneself). This reading imbues the narrated story with a meeting that involves the "desire" [16, p. 40] of the reader.

The narrator is a private witness to events, thus allowing for an alternative view of the story. This creates the possibility of structuring a character's perspective. The reader's optics will still be closely tied to the narratorial point of view, but now the reader is also allowed to look at the diegetic world through the eyes of the characters.

The adventurous strategy emerged long before Greek novels in the marginal narrative practice of anecdotes about the private lives of notable historical figures. These anecdotes captured the separation of private life from polis communality, and this carried a germ of carnival-related profanation. Bakhtin has linked this to the emergence of the novella: "The 'extraordinary' in the novella is the violation of the prohibition and the profanation of the sacred" [3, p. 41]. The canonical novella is a product of the third basic narrative strategy.

2.4 The biographical strategy

The genre-forming factor of a novel relates to the biographical structure of the narrative. In

probabilistic picture of the world which, on the one hand, combines existing types of eventfulness, and, on the other hand, generates its own type of eventfulness that is different from all previous ones. In Pushkin's *The Captain's Daughter*, the main character, Grinyov, leaves the precedent world of domestic existence and finds himself in a world of adventurous incidents (losing to Zurin, experiencing a disastrous snowstorm and a miraculous rescue, a duel with Shvabrin). With a noose around his neck before the outstretched hand of Pugatchev, Grinyov enters a situation of unequivocally imperative choice. During his trial, Grinyov can justify himself and defend his noble honour, but only at the cost of the loss of his human dignity (that is how he imagines Masha's involvement in the trial) . This is atypical "bifurcation point" that is characteristic in the probabilistic picture of the world. The defining nodes of the novel's narrative are the moments of inevitable, but not predetermined changes in life, with the character appearing as a subject of individual experience and personal self-identification. The narrator does not possess complete knowledge of the diegetic world. The narratorial point of view loses its authority not only in terms of witnessing and evaluating the narrated events, but also if identifying them. In this respect, this is likened to the point of view of the character which, for its part, appears to be dominant.

This trend is very clear in the post-novel genre of the short story, which was primarily represented in Russian literature by Anton Chekhov (*A Nervous Breakdown, the Lady with the Dog*). Paperny has correctly observed that Chekhov's "reader [...] is like a person who enters a garden in which there are no explanations, no signs and no pointers as to where one must look, listen, breathe in the scent and decide for oneself" [18, p.49].
In Chekhov's *The Student*, Ivan Velikopolsky falls under the influence of cold weather and an absence of the comforts of home life, and he succumbs to pessimism. He meets two widows and tells them the parable of Peter's denial. Vasilisa weeps, and Lukerya's "expression [became] strained and heavy like that of enduring intense pain." Velikopolsky realises that "truth and beauty which had guided human life there in the garden and in the yard of the high priest had continued without interruption to this day" [19].

The whole story is a narrative from Ivan's point of view. The emotional decline and the spiritual elevation of the character occur within his horizons. It is necessary to hear the narrator's voice and to find out what will happen to the hero afterward if one is to comprehend Ivan's discovery and determine whether it is simply the impulsive and meaningless gust of a young man. It is necessary to comprehend the context of his future, but the point of view in the short story does not provide us with access to such information. Only at the end of the story the narrator is peering out of the shadow of the character's perceptions for one brief instant, thus hinting at the uncertainties of the hero's future: "[...] and the feeling of youth, health, vigour – he was only 22 – and the inexpressible sweet expectation of happiness, of unknown mysterious happiness, took possession of him little by little, and life seemed to him enchanting, marvellous and full of lofty meaning" [19].

The narrator, as opposed to the character, remains unsure about the significance of changes in his world. Facts may or may not turn out to be events once the character has chosen one of the possible continuations of his life.

Perspective is never a reliable tool for a reader to identify and make sense of a story. The addressee of the narrative gains unprecedented freedom whilst, at the same time, assuming an equally unprecedented responsibility in terms of clarifying the meaning of the narrative (the ethos of responsibility).

2.5 Hybrid strategies

In theory, each of the pictures of the world can serve as a basis for any (or almost any) ethos, which gives reason to discuss hybrid narrative strategies in the history of narration. The table below illustrates the possible hybrid strategies along with the basic ones, which are presented in bold.

Ethos/ Picture	**I** Calm	**II** Duty	**III** Desire	**IV** Responsibility
A Precidential	**AI** (imitative strategy	AII	AIII	AIV
B Imperative	BI	**BII** (regulative strategy	BIII	BIV
C Occasional	CI	CII	**CIII** (adventurous strategy	CIV
D Probabilistic	DI	DII	DIII	**DIV** (biographical strategy

Gogol's *Dead Souls* combines occasional eventfulness with the ethos of duty. The probabilistic picture of the world in the narratives of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky differ in terms of ethos. Tolstoy's narrative is organised by the ethos of necessity. The narrator is always aware of the measure of the hero's rightness, although he does not always say so directly. Tolstoy often leads his characters toward the realisation of a moral truth. In Dostoevsky's novels, the probabilistic chain of events unfolds in the intensive responsibility to take part in the struggle of world power. Raskolnikov's anguish and the happy ending of his story can, of course, bring to mind the ethos of duty, but then there is the epilogue to the novel, in which Raskolnikov does not make any parable-like choice. Agreeing with Bakhtin that each of Dostoevsky's characters has his own truth, which is polyphonically conjugated with other truths without the author's "final world,"

one cannot help but realise that the reader is also left in a similar position. Dostoevsky does not allow for the dispersion of alternative readings. This is how the narrative effect of solidarity is formed.

3 Conclusion

The pilot study of a Narrative strategies can be classified as basic models for narrative discourse. An examination of these models makes it possible to trace the regularities which characterise not only the transformation of narrative practices, but also the gradual changes in human culture that are associated with the perception, storage, comprehension and transmission of event experience.

It should be noted that narrative strategies do not replace one another irrevocably. Once they emerge, they are again actualised in the subsequent stages of the evolution of the narrative. The regulative strategy, for instance, first asserted itself in religious devotion, but then it was consistently applied in Medieval literature and, later, in Classicism.

The study of narrative strategies is available at the level of the formal organisation of the narrative text. This is a configuration of the points of view of the narrator and the character. This reflects the picture of the world that is conveyed by the narrative and its target settings. "Traces" discussed in this paper can probably be found in other aspects of the presentation of the narrative as well.

The historical phases of narrative strategies and consistent with the processes of genre formation. The adventurous strategy corresponds to the novella, the biographical one to the novel and the short story. In this sense, the study of genres from a competitive perspective goes hand in hand with the identification of the strategic parameters of storytelling. The results of genre studies reliably support a deeper understanding of the nature of narration as an historically determined phenomenon.

An examination of these models makes it possible to trace the regularities which characterise also the gradual changes in human culture that are associated with the perception, storage, comprehension and transmission of event experience.

A narrative strategy is a universal analytical tool used to describe narratives in any medium. That is why it would be reasonable to trace the functioning of the discussed category about non-literary materials.

The hybrid strategies mentioned at the conclusion of this paper are worthy of further study. Potential combinations of conditions and target settings of the narrative require more detailed factual confirmation.

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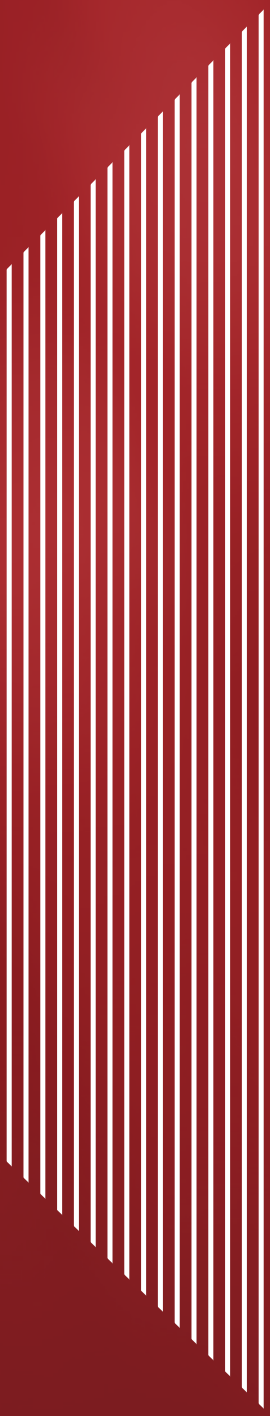

Rimi Nandy[1] and Santosh Kumar[2]

Whose Narrative? Political Counternarratives and Citizen Gaslighting on Social Media

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Abstract

This paper proposes the study of 'gaslight' narratives spread across various social media plat-forms, with respect to Indian political circumstances in the present context. With the increasing number of Covid-related deaths, there is a sudden movement towards sharing posts consisting of memes, news reports and videos criticizing the role of the government in fighting the crisis arising from the spread of the coronavirus. This is mostly featured on social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook. The presence of a counternarrative discrediting the criticism through the means of #positivity can be considered a form of gaslighting of citizens. The construction of such counternarratives features the use of mind manipulation similar to the practice of psychological gaslighting. The prevalence of fake news further plays an important role with respect to trans-media gaslighting in social media. The paper seeks to analyze status updates to understand the method of mind manipulation to create an illusionary truth in the eyes of various social media users.

Keywords

gaslighting, post-truth, social media, affective, algorithm

1 Introduction

The post-truth era negates the importance of truth value in the dissemination of information. This has increasingly influenced the practice of political activities. Truth is no longer relevant in shaping public opinion. The focal point of "post-truth" is its access to human emotions in place of reasoning. The vanishing distinction between 'fact' and 'opinion' is greatly influenced by a shift towards centralization of affective components. The manner in which human emotions interact with information goes a long way in the construction of post-truth narratives. Post-truth has existed since time immemorial, from Galileo's execution to Hitler's politics of Aryan superiority. It has become more reinforced in the present age and time due to the availability of social media.

The focal point of "post-truth" is its access to human emotions in place of reasoning.

Digital space has broken down various differentiating boundaries to blur the real and the virtual, truth and falsehood and the public and the private. All of these distinguishing factors pertaining to an individual's social life have morphed into multiple truths and identities. The modern age introduced the concepts of consumerism and performativity. The postmodern age further breaks down into different compartments of hybridization and conglomeration. The single identity is multiplied to perform multiple identities. The real self is no longer relevant.

The birth of social media has created a space which enables the construction and propagation of post-truth. The inner working of social media platforms based on algorithms is one of the major elements behind transforming these platforms into compartments of similar viewpoints. Post-truth does not refer to the passive reception of information by users. Instead, it is the coming together of the communicators and the audience. According to Marcinkowski, post-truth is closely related to the "primacy of anticipation over content" [1]. Post-truth is created through a process of co-creation, where the communicator is always working towards providing information which is expected to satisfy the ideas and beliefs of the users. The newsfeed of a social media profile caters to the expectations of the user, thereby creating a kind of 'echo chamber' which resonates similar ideas by means of various updates provided. According to Laura Galante, a cyberspace analyst, "our realities are increasingly based on the information that we're consuming at the palm of our hand, and from the news feeds that we're scanning, and the hashtags and stories that we see trending" [2]. This creates an effect on the users, termed as the "illusory truth effect". This term is used to describe a phenomenon which leads people to believe information to be true if it is repeated very often. Since the algorithms repeatedly feature information which is connected to a user's belief and value system, it appears to be true. This faith in the information is not based on its verifiability but rather on the willingness to believe in the information as it is more self-gratifying. The information coupled with positive comments and repeated shares creates a sense of truth value which is entirely illusory. The illusory truth effect can be considered a form of gaslighting, which is also based on repetition of actions or phrases.

The very identity of politics has also changed due to the emergence of the social media sphere. The participatory democracy that Hannah Arendt talks about is also affected by the epistemic bubbles formed by personalization and spectacularisation of politics. A single truth does not allow the presence of multiple opinions. According to Arendt, a political space is a space of political conflicts through which the correct decision is reached. However, this form of politics is most often considered to be a utopian concept of politics. Since politics in the present age is greatly dependent on spectacle, the element of truth within the political sphere becomes redundant. Politics as a performance necessitates a populist leader who uses some

form of lying. In the words of Arendt, "Since the liar is free to fashion his 'facts' to fit the profit and pleasure, or even the user expectations of his audience, the chances are that he will be more persuasive than the truth-teller" [3, p. 25]. As the quantity of information becomes more important than the quality, it therefore becomes easier to use manipulated truth to cater to the increasing demands for information. This makes it less challenging for political parties and political figures to 'gaslight' citizens into believing their version of the truth.

1.1 Tracing the course of 'gaslight'

The gaslight phenomenon first found its way into illness discourse through its representation in the movie Gaslight. Initially restricted to the power dynamics within domestic space, it has now crossed over to political discussion within public forums. One of the triggering factors behind the spread of the gaslight phenomenon is the birth of a 'networked' society. First thematised in the 1938 play by Patrick Hamilton, the gaslight became emblematic of British Victorian society. A marker of the Victorian household, it evokes a time when the use of gaslights was commonly seen in the form of streetlights and interior light fixtures. The play was later adapted into a film in the year 1944. George Curok, the director of the movie adaptation of Gaslight, popularized the term "to gaslight" in order to refer to the psychological manipulation of the wife by the husband. The movie acquired its name from the flickering of the gaslights inside the house when the husband searched for his wife's aunt's jewelry in the attic. Switching on the gaslights in the attic disturbed their glow in the other rooms, which made the wife suspect that the attic lights were being switched on. However, the husband covered up the truth by making his wife believe that she was losing her sanity. In the hands of patriarchy, women have been clinically considered to be hysterical and insane.

The psychological manipulation practiced by patriarchy to destabilize women was later adopted by the Nazi regime to practice mass manipulation of the citizens of Ger-many. In this respect, the term "big lies" became essential. The concept of "big lies" was used to bait the inherent fear in the mind of the masses. In the words of Richard Evans, "If you subject people to a barrage of lies, in the end they'll begin to think well maybe they're not all true, but there must be something in it" [4].

The term 'gaslighting' has been repurposed in recent years to describe Donald Trump's use of false accusations targeting the emotions of his followers in order to strengthen his position in the American political scene. The idea of post-truth and 'gaslighting' is intrinsically linked with the construction of a fictional other. This created discrimination between 'us' and 'them' fortifies the position of post-truth. With the increasing disillusionment regarding traditional forms of politics and democracy, there has been a shift towards enactment of partisan politics.

2 Theoretical background: post-truth and networked society

The rise of networks transformed digital space by recreating the manner in which human interaction and connections are built. In the words of Papacharissi, social media offer a rich "performative palette", which can be used by individuals to not only express themselves but also perform their ideas, ideologies and beliefs [5, p. 1]. Devoid of geographical borders, a network can connect any person to another, irrespective of distance, time and boundaries. A major impact of the emerging social network spaces is the blurring of public and private spaces. Instead of clearly distinguishable public and private spaces, what has resulted out of the digital sphere is a social space. Social media spaces such as Facebook have become an amalgamation of various spheres of life. This is not only restricted to social practices but political practices as well. Like any other dissolving boundaries brought about by the postmodern age, it has become increasingly difficult to distinguish between the social and the political. In the words of Hannah Arendt, the political realm is a "web of relation" formed by individuals coming together to perform political actions [6, p. 16]. This is in line with the spaces provided by social media. However, these spaces are not entirely restricted to the discussion of political issues alone. Instead, most often the political is discussed through social experiences. There-

fore, the idea of space and its relation to politics is greatly problematized.

Social media has also changed the manner in which information is created and consumed. Bruns uses the term 'produsage' to refer to the user-generated content pertaining to news feeds [7]. One of the important elements used on Twitter to write microblogs of 140 characters is the hashtag. Hashtags are used to categorize content into different units. These units of information are "a mix of reports, opinions about, and general affective reactions to news of social and informational relevance" [7, p. 34]. The affective capacity of information is intrinsically linked to the concept of post-truth. Affect refers "to the ability to affect and be affected" [7, p. 13]. In keeping with the role of affectivity, a space is created for the growth of fake news. The term fake news does not refer to lies or false news. Rather it is a tool used to create alternate truths. Due to the ease with which content can be created and disseminated, fake news has become rampant within the social media circle. A crisis situation increases the demand for information among the masses. This creates a space which is then exploited by propagating fake news. In a time where there is a dearth of information, it is easier to pass off fake news as truth [8, p. 7]. The increasing impact of social networks on society can be clearly seen in the manner in which truth functions within the sphere of political democracy. The narratives created using 'disinformation' prove that rational discourses are being replaced with emotional effects. This has created a "bubble democracy". The social network algorithms have created 'echo chambers' where a user comes across viewpoints in line with his/her viewpoints. As such, the masses never come in contact with alternative viewpoints, thereby creating a form of democracy based on homogeneity of thoughts. Social media, which launched Web 2.0, resulted in the democratization of voices. Specialization is no longer relevant. On a social media platform, anybody can be a journalist or critic. The lines between facts and opinions have been blurred. Since post-truth is more in line with emotional response, most often opinions are mistaken for truth. The social perception of truth has been transformed. Therefore, the practice of politics has also undergone a marked change in its perception, attitude and nature.

2.1 Politics and spectacle in the post-truth era

Guy Debord, in his Society of Spectacle, theorizes about 'spectacle'. He believed that life in modern society, influenced by the capitalist economy, moved away from living to representation. The term 'spectacle' in this respect represents the social relations of people which are experienced through a mediated form. The impact of consumerism can also be felt with respect to political practices. Debord is of the opinion that 'spectacle' is merely a tool in the hands of capitalists "for distracting and pacifying the masses" [9]. Due to the development of a capitalist consumer culture, the representation has become more essential than the real. This has further affected the concept of political actions. Politics is now increasingly associated with the idea of theatricality. According to Bernard Stiegler, people enacting democracy has been transformed into the audience enacting democracy [10, pp. 133-148]. Donald Trump manipulating the data regarding the number of attendees at his political rally is an example of how slight alterations to factual truth do not dissuade his followers from believing his version of the truth.

On a social media platform, anybody can be a journalist or critic. The lines between facts and opinions have been blurred.

The birth of the postmodern age displaced the idea of a grand narrative. It has been replaced by the presence of multiple truths. The demarcations between truth and untruth, real and unreal have been removed with the advent of

postmodern thoughts and ideals. Digital space is no longer restricted to just calculating data to achieve a result. Instead, towards the beginning of the new millennium, with the advent of social media, the role of digital space shifted towards that of interaction. In the words of Michael Wiberg, what was created in the process is an "interaction society" [11, p. 1]. Social interactivity becomes the focus of Web 2.0. The nature of politics also undergoes a major change within the Web 2.0 environment. Following Hannah Arendt's understanding, politics is based around conflict. The political realm is the space where people gather to undertake political debates. Democracy originates from the plurality of opinions. Without conflicting opinions, democracy becomes irrelevant along with the very idea of politics. One of the major characteristics of social media is the idea of personalization. The ability to personalize one's profile allows a social media user to surround himself/herself with people of a similar mindset. This creates the absence of conflict. Social media filters are entirely based on the idea of 'homophily'. This feature of social media platforms transforms the very concept of politics and democracy. The 'filter bubbles' resulting from the practice of customization and personalization have created a favourable condition for the flourishing of post-truth. The 'post' in 'post-truth' refers to an age where verifiable facts have been substituted by the belief in opinion. It refers to the irrelevance of truth. The rise in commercialization has led to the birth of a society of spectacle. The advancement in digital and information technology also plays a major role in paving the way for the strong foothold of post-truth. These reasons coupled with an increasing economic crisis and distrust of political figures has created a space for the development of disinformation or information manipulation. What is important in the post-truth age is how information is used to affect the emotions of the masses. Post-truth is not equivalent to lies. Instead, it brings forth the availability of alternative points of view. The unverified information available on social media acts as an alternative truth. The masses "have never thirsted after truth. They demand illusions, and cannot do without them. They constantly give what is unreal precedence over what is real; they are almost as strongly influenced by what is untrue as by what is true. They have an evident tendency not to distinguish between the two" [12, pp. 19-20]. Both McCarthyism and Trumpism are based on the 'paranoid-style' politics of the post-truth era. Social media platforms have reinforced the practice of post-truth politics, as they have enabled easier dissemination of curated information. These platforms provide access to unchecked information fortifying one's socio-political viewpoints. This enables the formation of a community of supporters who work towards building a fictional reality for strengthening a political position. The 2016 American presidential election created a platform for the recurrence of the term 'gaslighting' in the political context. As a tool of psychological manipulation, gaslighting is not entirely based on lies; rather, it focuses on creating 'alternative facts', thereby creating a confused truth. The main function of political gaslighting is to discredit expert opinions and facts. The act of using "alternative truth" is seen as a revolt against the establishment. It gains its strength from acting as a tool for overthrowing the establishment built by technocratic intellectuals. Trump's use of blatant lies to perform before his followers an alternative viewpoint creates a "cacophonic dissonance". Politicians of the present age feed on the psychology of groups. As a result, the

What is important in the post-truth age is how information is used to affect the emotions of the masses. Post-truth is not equivalent to lies. Instead, it brings forth the availability of alternative points of view.

'gaslighting' strategy is used to negate the presence of a single truth, instead creating a chaos of multiple truths to break the bounds between the true and the false.

The declining faith in traditional forms of politics and, to a greater extent, in liberal democracy has seen global shift towards right-wing politics. The spread of corruption and scandals has led to declining trust in the perceived truth of authority representing the interests of the common people. The rise of right-wing authoritarianism is based on the failing trust of the public in the "authority". The notion of corrupted liberal elites disguising their private interests in the garb of liberalism has been greatly exploited by popular culture through the entertainment industry, fragmenting any sense of social reality.

3 Indian politics and political 'gaslighting' in the time of Covid: a case study

"Imagine a world that considers knowledge to be 'elitist'. Imagine a world in which it is not medical knowledge but a free-for-all opinion market on Twitter that deter-mines whether a newly emergent strain of avian flu is really contagious to humans. This dystopian future is still just that – a possible future" [13, p. 3]. This quote beautifully sums up the 'infodemic' which has accompanied the global pandemic of COVID-19. The amount of information which is regularly generated and consumed by users of social media creates a great influx of data which can be overpowering. When being bombarded by information, it becomes difficult to verify the truth element in all avail-able information. The concept of truth has also been transformed in the age of the net-worked public.

A similar pattern can be observed by analyzing social media posts on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter countering any form of criticism against the Indian government. A passive analysis method was followed to study posts related to COVID-19 and the Indian government's role in handling the crisis. For this purpose, the Facebook, Insta-gram and Twitter pages of MyGovIndia were studied in detail to understand the inter-action between the government and citizens in online political spaces. The social me-dia sphere has been effectively exploited by the Modi administration to sway public opinion in favour of the present government. Growing criticism of the failure of the Indian government in containing the spread of Covid in India is countered by discrediting such claims with statistics in favour of the government. Post-truth survives on presenting alternative truths, and statistics is one of its most essential tools.

Computer-mediated communication ascertains the practices of new media forms. New media essentially provides different multimedia tools for successful expression of thoughts, ideas and representation. Images have become crucial in the sphere of representation on social media. Social media provides a space which could be considered a hybrid of Habermas's public sphere and Arendt's political realm. This space at the same time becomes a boundaryless space for engaging in private and public inter-action, including political discussions. The study of diseases has shown how politics becomes intertwined with the body. The stigma connected to physical presence is in-grained in the bodies of the dead or the suffering.

In keeping with Debord's idea of the spectacle, advertisement plays a crucial role in the political engagement with the 'audience'. The idea of 'image making' is one of the most important goals of political party advertisements. A few select examples from the MyGovIndia Facebook page have been used to show how such political advertisements are molding the reaction of citizens in favour of the government. As this page is used for representing the face of the government to the citizens, it becomes a repository of the attitude of the government towards the irrelevance of truth value. This shows the importance of the effect a piece of information has on readers in place of its truth value.

The images used in the MyGovIndia pages across Facebook, Instagram and Twitter are directed towards creating a counternarrative to the voices of criticism and dissention. The most common images shared across these platforms are of comparative statistics showing the percentage of vaccinations completed in different countries. The aim of these posters is to uphold

before the citizens how India has successfully implemented a higher percentage of dosages compared to developed countries like the USA and the UK among many others. The information provided through such statistics is not entirely false. However, the truth is manipulated to represent the number of dos-ages administered, not taking into account the major disparity in the population figures between India and the developed countries. This is where the impact of political gas-lighting can be observed with reference to the use of post-truth. A counternarrative is also seen in the comments on such posters. One of the comments says: "This is not fast in reality because population is different."

Another image posted on Instagram shows a comparison between India, Canada, Italy, France, the USA and Germany. As per the statistics shown, India has successfully administered the 1st dosage among 93% of the 18+ population. In response to this im-age, a few comments ask why China has not been included, since with respect to population, China is nearer to India.

Images and videos of Covid deaths in India were circulated on Facebook. These videos were mostly taken from Reuters and CNN. The videos showed the inhuman conditions inside Covid hospitals, patients lying on the floor due to lack of hospital beds, death due to lack of oxygen. The critical attitude towards the crisis situation is negated by certain supporters of the government. In a comment, a person says: "What a biased media coverage by Reuters, So much good efforts by govt. not given any coverage...only negative image of India is presented before the world" [14].

A Facebook user shared a report by the Times of India based on the Uttar Pradesh government's claim that no deaths occurred due to lack of oxygen during the COVID-19 crisis. The user shared the news article with the caption "its 100% true, believe it, else u r "ANTI-INDIAN"" [14].

The partisan politics implemented in the present political milieu is evident in the responses to criticism of the Indian government. The construction of the invisible 'other' entwined with conspiracy theories is used to manipulate citizens into believing alter-native truths used to discredit criticism.

The posts updated in the MyGovIndia pages of Facebook, Instagram and Twitter ca-ter to the politics of spectacle. The mediated reasoning of the ruling party uses the spectacle to divert the attention to non-issues. This has been observed in other democratic nations as well. The lived experience when mediated through social media plat-forms transforms opinions into alternative truths and discredits facts by terming them as 'fake news' or as 'conspiracies'.

This makes the study important in understanding the changing attitude of society towards truth value and in analyzing the role of social media in such instances.

A news article shared on the Reuters Facebook page reports on a cow drinking event organized by a Hindu group. In one of the comments, a user responds by saying that "this channel covers only such type news to project India in a poor light in internationally 120cr out of 140cr people in India are uneducated/half educated & all have different level of understanding. This channel may be funded by foreign agencies to run such campaigns" [15].

Therefore, the statistics provided are biased towards India. Apart from the biased representation that can be observed in the MyGovIndia pages of Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, the responses to comments in the form of words, likes, and emoticons indicate how the users are practicing their beliefs based on their encounter

with con-tent catering to their form of personalization. The silofication of information through the use of search filters further complicates the process of verification. The exposure to similar viewpoints further concretizes preconceived biases. In the words of Eli Pariser, "the internet can cut people off from opposing views not because it enables people to join insular communities and customize away opposing views but because some of the biggest websites are automatically filtering away content we may not like behind the scenes" [16, p. 110].

4 Conclusion

Social media platforms are being used by the present Indian administration to counter criticism through denial and discrediting claims of opposing viewpoints. The 'demonization' of the political opponent by resorting to divisive politics further accentuates the prevalence of post-truth politics. There appears to be an indifference among citizens created by the 'epistemic bubble'. The presence of such secluded spaces re-duces the desire of an individual to access spaces of conflict which might bring forth opposing viewpoints. This can be observed through the analysis of various social media pages which have been created in support of the government. Supporters sharing a similar fear of the 'other' readily contribute towards discrediting words from the op-position. It can be observed that the counterattacks are mostly based on 'affective' value rather than the truth value of information. The significance of the posts shared on platforms showcasing the role of the government during the Covid crisis is a very recent phenomenon. There has not been any significant work contextualized within the COVID-19 crisis. This makes the study important in understanding the changing attitude of society towards truth value and in analyzing the role of social media in such instances. A further study could be conducted using sentiment analysis and text analysis of social media posts of both supporters and the opposition for a comparative study of the differing attitudes of the two in the post-truth era. This would further help in understanding the extent of the influence of political gaslighting in the Indian political scene.

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Do Stories Matter? Narrativity in YouTube Videos Targeted at Pre-schoolers

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Abstract

This paper examines narrativity in videos that are targeted at children who are 3-6 years old, using the channel "CoComelon Nursery Rhymes & Kids Songs" as the focus of the research. We argue that narrativity plays an essential role in the success of Internet content. The paper attempts to test this thesis via qualitative analysis and by reflecting upon the responses of several respondents in a preliminary survey. First, we exclude factors such as SEO factors, mise-en-scène and characters to analyse the two most famous videos that have been produced by the CoComelon channel. We have found that because these videos are characterised by repetitiveness, narrativity should be sought at the level of a single episode, not at the macro-level. In this sense, the videos contain a high degree of innovation and realism. Next, we consider the construction of the characters to be a purposeful blend of stereotypes and individuation. The videos do not introduce narrativity into the material, instead depicting processes that are as such already narrative – bathing, eating, going to school, etc. These are fundamental processes which compose the everyday experience of the target audience, and thus they are "stories which matter."

Keywords

YouTube, *CoComelon Nursery Rhymes & Kids Songs*, pre-schoolers, narrativity

1 Introduction

1.1 Do stories matter?

The global Covid-19 pandemic and its consequences heavily transformed many aspects of everyday life in Western civilisation. Over the past two years, everyone, including researchers in the area of narratology, wondered about the impact of an increased amount of screentime on the population and particularly on children. Many Internet platforms and social networks, particularly YouTube and reddit, have seen a rise in viewership [1]. In the case of YouTube, a significant amount of top-viewed content is obviously targeted at children [2]. This begs the question of whether YouTube videos became the main source of entertainment for children during the pandemic, also taking on the role of babysitting and providing relief for parents who were in the trap of having to work and also to take care of their kids. An examination of the structure and inner nature of the most popular Internet content can provide new insights into how we created, process and consume stories. We can also sketch out a preliminary evaluation of the fallout of pandemic restrictions.

An examination of the structure and inner nature of the most popular Internet content can provide new insights into how we created, process and consume stories.

The central subject in this paper is the YouTube channel CoComelon. An informative survey was conducted in the summer of 2021, and this allows us to reflect one some of the dimensions of narrativity which our research has put into the spotlight.

1.2 The *CoComelon* channel

The *CoComelon Nursery Rhymes & Kids Songs* was launched in 2006 as *ABCKidsTV* and rebranded in 2017. It is produced by the Treasure Studio company which was established by California resident Jay Jeon and his wife [3]. Since 2017, it has been among the most popular channels on YouTube, with 122 million subscribers and more than 114 billion views as of December 2021. This makes CoComelon the most subscribed and viewed channel in the category "education" [4], also being in eighth place in absolute rankings related to viewership rise [5], and third in absolute subscriber numbers after the Indian music and film channel *T-series*, and the *YouTube Movies* channel [6]. Other channels are targeted at children, notably *PinkFong BabyShark – Kids Songs & Stories* [7], or, more recently a copycat of *CoComelon, Super Jojo – Nursery Rhymes* [8]. These are also very popular with between 20 and 50 million subscribers, but they are different from their predecessor. This leads to the question of the uniqueness or special nature of content which is produced and published on the CoComelon channel.

Since 2017, it has been noted that videos targeted at children are a significant and, therefore, visible part of YouTube [9], although YouTube has always claimed that it was never meant for children [10]. The scandal known as "Elsagate" [11] revolved around channels such as "Toy Freaks" and "Webs and Tiaras," and this attracted attention to the problem late in 2017. The resulting public debate eventually resulted in YouTube creating the YouTube Kids platform, thus hoping to create a safer environment for underaged users [12].

That same year, 2017, CoComelon hit the magic target of one billion views, and that put it right at the top of the list in terms of popularity on YouTube. It may be no coincidence that the breakthrough video for the channel was called "No, no" Bedtime Song [13], which featured a toddler who was refusing to go to sleep and was persuaded by his older sister to do so. This coincided with the infamous popularity of

the "Toy Freaks" channel, for which a key tag phrase was "bad baby" [14].

1.3 Methodology

Our goal in this paper is to review the content of a set of videos which were posted around the first peak of popularity during the summer and autumn of 2017, seeking to establish those features which ensured or accelerated their success.

We have used the methods of narrative analysis of the content, combined with the findings of a survey focused on observations at home. This approach took into account two important factors – the specifically heterogeneous nature of the subject matter and the nature of our own interest. The content of the CoComelon channel is composed of videos that have a very diverse nature from many perspectives:

1. Authorship: CoComelon contains original content, but also works consider to be in the public domain such as "Wheels on the bus" or "Jack be nimble."
2. Content: Some of the videos are animations which teach children about shapes and colours, others contain well-known kids' songs, and still others offer highly original stories with various characters. We found that all of the videos involved music.
3. Animation techniques: Until January 2017, the CoComelon channel had 2D animation with crayon texture surfaces. Since then, most of its videos, with a few exceptions, have used 3D animation with basic colour materials and textures.
4. Publication strategies: Each type of video has its own publication strategy. Original content was usually posted on another day than were the compilation and the derivative content. The frequency of publication varied depending on the popularity of the channel.
5. Popularity: CoComelon videos usually attracted millions of views, while others had hundreds of millions of views (see the list below). This is not the case for single videos (such as "No, No Baby," which is discussed below) but it is the trend throughout the history of the channel (see below for a further discussion of the factor of SEO algorithms).

This means that it was necessary to adjust the selection of videos so as to create a representative and coherent set of objects of inquiry. Given that our main concern was the narrative of the videos depending on their viewership, we decided that we would only take original content into account, also using content which has attracted a certain level of popularity. This mostly applied to videos with more than one billion views, except for one video that we are using as a counter-example. We selected three videos:

1. "Bath Song," posted on May 2, 2018, with 4,500,172,620 views;
2. "Mum and Baby Blue Whale Lullaby," posted on April 26, 2017, 5,023,305 views;
3. "Yes, Yes Vegetable Song," posted on August 10, 2018, 2,692,480,380 views.

Also taken into account were videos which were sources or previous versions thereof. The three videos underwent partial qualitative analysis, isolating pieces of narrative and determining their place in the basic narrative structure. After this, a home observation study was conducted with children aged 3-6, the aim being to verify the hypothesis which related to the analysis of the narrative. The survey was a paper-assisted personal interview administered by a parent who was trained by the examinator. The survey involved seven Czech families living in our near Prague, and the process was conducted during the summer of 2021. Children watched each video and then were asked five questions which the parent has written down as precisely as possible (for all answers, see Table 1).

When it comes to the general methodology of child-related research, we relied on a research project conducted by David Smahel, et al., "EU Kids Online" [15, pp. 13-15]. We also used the work of Patti M. Valkenburgh and Jessica Taylor Piotrowski in terms of defining a pre-schooler [16, pp. 44-58], because the "EU Kids Online" study was focused on youngsters between the age of 9 and 17. We also used observations from other case studies of similar issues [17].

Analysis of the narrative involved methods of basic interpretation analysis of visual media. This strategy was first described by David

Bordwell and Kristin Thompson [18, p. 76]. Segmentation was elaborated for each video so as to define the main elements of the plot and the element of cinematic features such as a single take, a chance of perspective, etc. A verbal paraphrase or a quote from the lyrics was used in most cases[1] . The segmentation was a point of reference in analysing the answers which children gave during the survey. By comparing the answer to the relevant segment, we could judge the answer's correctness or narrativity.

Discussion

The purpose of the research was to develop an initial sense of the topics which emerged in the reception of a YouTube channel. It was necessary to limit the selection to a single channel and to narrow the content so that it could be compared to a different sample. Because the issue of popularity was the driving force for our research, we chose two very popular videos and one that was relatively unsuccessful. We opted to examine original content because our focus was on narrative, not on SEO or factors of clickbait. Last but not least, our research was limited because it was a pre-study, the aim of which was to test the success and effectiveness of the proposed questionnaire, its appropriateness and clarity, and its relevance to the narratological issues that were at hand. This, therefore, cannot be taken as a source of systematic answers to the question. Instead, it is more of an incentive to encourage other lines of research.

There were some factors, of course, which we had to ignore. One was the substantial role of the English language on the Internet. In order to ensure homogeneity, children with substantial foreign language skills were excluded from the research, which means that only visual perceptions were analysed. This despite the fact that most of the popularity of the CoComelon channel is probably based on the number of views by English-speaking children.

We also had to ignore the musical component of the videos, because all of the "stories" that are discussed here are actually songs. It would require a different kind of research project to determine how the musical component influences the rest of the work.

Furthermore, we dealt only marginally with the issue of parental control and the general matter of videos that are simultaneously targeted to parents and kids. As we shall see below, thus must have been of fairly great significance in the reception of CoComelon.

2 Narrativity as the recipe for success?

In an interview in *Bloomberg BusinessWeek*, the creator of the CoComelon channel, Jay Jeon, had this to say about the source of its success: "I never look up the reason why something is popular or how I can please the YouTube algorithm. I know what matters. Stories matter." This begs the important question that should be of interest for general narratology: does the narrativity of content play an essential role in its success? To put it more simply, do stories matter?

The purpose of the research was to develop an initial sense of the topics which emerged in the reception of a YouTube channel.

2.1 Objections

First of all, several objections need to be addressed. Despite Jeon's experience as a creator, the popularity of his channel may be attributable to:

1. The algorithms or tags of YouTube, or just a coincidence;

1 Example of segmentation, see Table 1.

2. The child-pleasing mise-en-scène (the basic colour scheme, roundness, cute elements, the head-to-body ratio, the "Disney eyes," etc.);
3. The characters, as opposed to the story lines.

The power of tags and a good moment

As we have already mentioned, YouTube algorithms probably have played a crucial role in the success of the CoComelon Channel. Events related to "Elsagate" may have created hype which brought new viewers to the channel. After the first wave of bloggers pointed out the general oddness and suspiciousness of some child-targeted content [10], the mainstream media took over, spreading the news about a "weird" channel for kids among new groups of potential subscribers, particularly from middle and upper-class families. We may supposed that the scandalous nature of the issue attracted reader curiosity as much as the attempt to search for the infamous "bad baby" tag that was mentioned in the incriminating article [19]. This search, at the end of the day, affected the selection of videos and their specific presentation on YouTube. The tag "bad baby" simple coincided with the description of the CoComelon video "No, No Bedtime Song," which was released in July 2017. This was a clear breakthrough for the channel, because the video attracted up to 1.3 billion views[2].

Although it is clear that these search factors are coincidental in terms of the reason for the first big CoComelon success, it is necessary also to take into account the quality of the content. The aforementioned video remained on YouTube for five months even before hype about it began. Even after that, CoComelon managed to stay in the Top 10. The amount of dummy or copy channels (*Super Jojo – Nursery Rhymes* [20]), and the real life re-enactments (as those created by the Milana Family Show [21]), serve to suggest that the content itself has features which ensure success apart from search engine conditions.

The specifics of animation

CoComelon has animation which makes use of all of the trick that appeal to children, including basic colour schemes, accentuation of the roundness of objects and figures [16, p. 48], changes in the ratio of the head and body, as well as "Disney" eyes[3] .

Another interesting question relates to the role of 3D animation. The rise in viewership in 2017 also responded to a massive change in overall graphics from two-dimensional graphics. In their place, there were draw-alike textures and videogame kinetics for life-like 3D animation in a more stylish and polished environment. We suppose that the textures and surfaces of objects are the most significant issues, because children are notable attracted toward unstructured blocks of colour [16, p. 52].

Characters

In the spirit of E.M. Forster [22, p. 38], we could state that the soul of tragedy is the character, not the plot, and there may be reasons to make that statement. A typical CoComelon video features a toddler named J.J. He is slightly younger than the target audience. Just as is the case with current heroic epic cycles from DC and Marvell, it may seem that the audience doesn't care about the story that is being told, just as long as the main hero is visible. That said, there are a few outstanding features which should be considered.

First of all, not all CoComelon stories feature J.J. Many episodes are focused on one of his signals, and as of this writing, a new spin-off line is being presented, featuring Cody as the

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The coincidence was suggested in a Czech article on the phenomenon (Veselý, K.: Populárnější než PewDiePie. Kanál Cocomelon je trhákem dětského internetu. Radio Wave, 3. 7. 2020, https://wave.rozhlas.cz/popularnejsi-nez-pewdiepie-kanal-cocomelon-je-trhakem-detskeho-internetu-8231307, last accessed 2021/9/14.), but is not stated in other literature on the problem. The pure analysis of code shows that the video in question does include the tag "no no baby", while the infamous vidou of ToyFreaks carried a tag "bad baby".

3

It is noteworthy that the „Disney eyes" can be successfully used also to raise interest in content for adults; for example, the movie enthusiast channel "Pitch Meeting" highlights Marvel characters by the "Disney eyes" solely to attract viewership. This trick, currently made massive by TikTok and Snapchat filter "Disney Eyes", was, to my knowledge, first used by Lady Gaga in her music video "Bad Romance" (not in the thumbnail, but inside the video, 0:53), the first video on YouTube to cross 100 million views.

Fig. 1: Child-pleasing mise-en-scène in CoComelon content

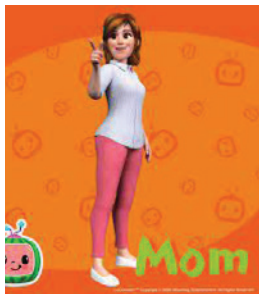

Fig. 2. Characters on the CoComelon channel

main character along with his family. Many of the most successful CoComelon videos have no family at all. Instead they feature repetitive "zipper" songs.

Second, the CoComelon channel is specific in is method of characterisation. The level of individualisation in each character is surprising. Two examples are "Mom" and "TomTom," who is J.J.'s older brother.

"Mom" (Fig. 2) is, at first glance, not a typical other who wears dresses, but she is characterised by what has elsewhere been described as "mum clothes" [23] – a shirt, trousers and comfortable shoes. This "presentation" combines mild realism in the depiction of the body and the clothes (wider hips, perceptible breasts, a practical outfit and hairstyle), with traditional idealisation or stereotype about motherhood (a pink and white outfit, big eyes, a permanent smile, a kind expression, and loving interaction with the children).

The same can be said about TomTom. He is a standard and stereotyped boy, but J.J.'s brother also has features which differentiate him from others – swimming goggles and overalls, which suggest certain interests and favourite activities.

CoComelon seems to use a type of realism when dealing with the individualisation of characters. It apparently is trying to present a typical family which audiences will recognise while continuing to adhere to idealised stereotypes. A very similar combination can be seen in the stories as such.

When it comes to the individualisation of characters, CoComelon seems to e trying to use a type of realism, trying to meet a current and typical family for its audience while sticking to the idealised stereotypes. A very similar combination can be seen in the stories as such.

2.2 Plots

The central issue in our inquiry is whether stories matter. More precisely, we wonder whether CoComelon videos offer stories that are distinctly different from other film products that are targeted at children. Having discussed the three significant objections and taken away some of the insights about parts of the story, we must now focus on the most important part: the plots.

We will use the theory of narrativity and terminology that was first proposed by David Bordwell and Kristin Thomson so as to theorise

They argued that the story consists of what is explicitly stated or inferred by the viewer, while the plot represents "everything visibly and audibly present in the film before us"

the cinematic work of art. They argued that the story consists of what is explicitly stated or inferred by the viewer, while the plot represents "everything visibly and audibly present in the film before us" [18, p. 76].

According to this terminology, the "plot" is the object of our interest. This applies to what is explicitly stated in the film along with its presentation, i.e., the form that the narrative can take in the film if it exists at all.

Classical structure

CoComelon videos have a classical narrative structure in terms of parts of the story. J.J. usually experiences everyday experiences at home, including eating, bathing, going to a day-care centre or making popsicles with his siblings. The video always has a solid beginning that involves classic cinematic procedures (an establishing shot of a kitchen, bathroom or the sea, with the main characters arranged in accordance with their role in the story line). There are also classical endings (an establishment shot of vegetables being eaten or both kids being clean and posing victoriously).

The question is how middle parts are structured, i.e., how is the narrative arch of the narrative transformation between the beginning and the end of achieved. We will demonstrated our observations on the basis of the lyrics of the song "Yes, Yes Vegetables," although the same structure can be found in all of the other videos that we have surveyed. This is true in most of CoComelon productions.

It seems that at first there is a real crisis in terms of an element of plotting that would result in the denouement is missing. Most videos are repetitive, tediously depicting the same activities again and again. Adults have to wonder about the easy job of producers of videos that are targeted toward children. J.J. is offered peas, carrots, squash, beans and broccoli, refuses to eat them, but it is then persuaded by his mother when she points out that a stuffed animal wants to eat the vegetables. In the last segment, the dialogue is switched, and J.J. speaks to his mom with the same exact words that she spoke so as to persuade her to eat the broccoli. From a macro perspective, possible plots can be the drama of a mother who tries to feed her child and eventually succeeds by eating the broccoli, or a drama of J.J. overcoming his unwillingness to eat vegetables, eventually ensuring a small, but important victory of his mother. These stories may seen to be interesting, but they are more focused on adults, because in both cases, there are general prejudices and tropes such as "broccoli is disgusting." It also, however, has the perspective of adult interests (the child needs to eat his vegetables).

Instead of accepting these plots as the only narrative, we would also like to consider smaller-scale features specifically because of the video's repetitive nature.

Most videos are repetitive, tediously depicting the same activities again and again.

Much of YouTube content for children is repetitive or at least segmented (e.g., countless adaptations of "Wheels on the Bus" or "Finger Family"). This is familiar in the culture of children and is usually attributed to the need of young kids to encounter things that are familiar, but slightly varied. Small children have a limited attention span and need to overcome centration [16, pp. 57-58]. When we focus on a single segment (44 seconds on average), we encounter a quite classic narrative structure involving a crisis, an attempt to resolve it, an emphasis on how it is overcome, and then a triumphant resolution. This can be seen in the segment which has to do with peas, with the original version of "Yum, Yum Vegetables."

M: Peas, peas, it's time to eat your peas! **exposition**

JJ: No, no, no, I don't want to eat the peas! **problem** (**collision**)

M: Please, please! The peas are good for you! **effort for a solution**

JJ: No, no, no, I don't like them, ew! **crisis**

M: See, see, Teddy likes the peas!

One, two, three! Almost gone, you see!
more effort

JJ: No, no, no, they're mine! I'll eat them now!!
solution

Yum, yum, yum, I like them, wow!
happiness

This structure is seen in all of the videos that are discussed here. In the "Bath Song," the overall plot displays a serious *non sequitur*, which should harm the plot (the bathtub is filled several times, bubbles are produced many times, children jump out of the tub and back into it without drying themselves, and the angle of the whole situation is changing). At the micro level, however, every segment is perfectly consequential, displaying a sequence that is both realistic (kids play with the toys that they have brought to the tub before) and repetitive (first TomTom, then JJ, then both). It should be noted that some seconds last for no more than three seconds:

Bath song - segmentation

1. Intro	0:12 – 0:15
2. Filling up the tub	**0:15 – 0:33**
a) Jumping in	
b) Soap, bubbles	
c) TomTom helps JJ in	
d) Scrubbing	
3. Chorus	**0:33 – 0:59**
a) „Wash my hair" (TT, than JJ, than splash)	
b) „Wash my face":	
c) Tomtom washes his face	
d) JJ washes his face	
e) JJ washes TomTom's face	
f) TomTom washes JJ's face	
g) Splash	
4. Toys (sharks and submarine)	**0:59 – 1:20**
a) Bringing toys to the bathtub	
b) TomTom helps JJ in	
c) Soap, bubbles, with toys	
d) TomTom and JJ play with sharks	
e) TomTom and JJ fight with scrubs	
5. Chorus (sponge)	**1:20 – 1:44**
a) „Wash my arms"	1:20 – 1:30
– JJ, one arm	
– TomTom, both arms	
– JJ, the same arm	
– Both, both TomTom and	
– JJ wash both arms	
b) „Wash my hands"	1:30 – 1:44
– JJ	
– TomTom	
– JJ	
– TomTom and JJ together	
– Splash	
6. Toys II (boats) mirror angle	**1:46 – 2:04**
a) JJ brings toys	
b) TomTom helps JJ in	
c) Soap, bubbles	
d) JJ and TomTom play with boats, sharks	
7. Chorus (sponge)	**2:05 – 2:38**
a) „Wash my knees"	2:05 - 2:16
– TomTom	
– JJ	
– TomTom and JJ	
– Splash	
b) „Wash my toes"	2:17 – 2:26
– JJ washes TomTom's toes	
– TomTom washes JJ toes	
– TomTom and JJ play (*different angle*)	
– Splash (JJ toes, *unconsequential*)	
c) „I'am all clean"	2:26 – 2:3 6
– JJ	
– TomTom (more dancing)	
– TomTom and JJ	
– TomTom throws away sponge, JJ mimics	
– Victorious pose inside the tub	
Ending	**2:37 – 2:40**
– Dance – TomTom faces to the wrong direction	
– Victorious pose outside the tub	

Table 1. Bath Song - segmentation

Narrative classicism, however, is not the only trick in the CoComelon arsenal.

Eliminating negative experiences

This transcript was from a less popular version of "Yes, Yes Vegetables." Two years prior, a version titled "Yum, Yum Vegetables" was released. An exceedingly popular video in 2018 changed the script so as to eliminate the negative parts of the story:

M: Peas, peas, it's time to eat your peas!
JJ: Yes, yes, yes, I want to eat my peas! [< No, no, no, I don't want to eat the peas!]
M: Good, good! The peas are good for you!
JJ: Yay, yay, yay, I love them, oooh! [< No, no, no, I don't like them, ew!]
M: See, see, Teddy likes them too!
One, two, three! He ate them up, you see!
JJ: Ha! Ha! Ha! The peas are all gone now! [< No, no, no, they're mine! I'll eat them now!!]
Yum, yum, yum, we like them, wow! [< ... I like them...]

The structure of the plot is the same, and we believe that by keeping it while eliminating the conflict helped the video to achieve the necessary epic solidness, creating an odd mixture of assurance and uncertainty. The shivering of the narrative conflict remains evident in the texture, but on the surface, the external manifestation of the video is entirely unconflicted.

Slight variations
When we carefully observe the singular stories in the segment, we discover minor variations in each episode, which Raphaël Baroni has called narrative tension or the dynamic of what is known and unknown [24, p. 55]. The drama this time involved proper cutlery that is to be used for each type of vegetable, as well as JJ's ability to understand this:

Peas: The peas fall from the folk, and Mom recommends and spoon
Carrots: JJ eats carrots with his hands, and Mom recommends a fork
Squash: JJ is using a spoon, the squash is dropping, and mom recommends a fork
Beans: JJ eats beans with his hands, and Mom recommends a spoon
Broccoli: Mom eats broccoli with her hands, JJ recommends a fork

What initially seems to be the story of a mother who is feeling her child is actually a drama related to a toddler learning how to use cutlery. This plot is more appropriate for the target audience, and it is once again presented with the repetitive scheme at the microlevel of each segment. "Yes, Yes Vegetables" has a fairly sophisticated plot at the macrolevel, but at the microlevel there are small and innovative stories. We understand that this is not an attempt to appeal to various target groups such as adults, older children, preschool children and toddlers, instead being a feature of a semantically rich and engaging plot. Here we can recall that this feature was described by Jay Jeon as "stories matter."

Realism
The described innovativeness of the narrative can be distinguished from other interesting features in CoComelon videos [25]. We can spot individual actions which the characters perform despite their stereotypical nature. Mom east the peas instead of the stuffed animal. JJ throws away his sponge after he sees his brother doing the same. In both cases, we can say that these are "human" reactions which might even evoke or empathy and our interest.

This shows that CoComelon is a very clever blend of the familiar and the new. The story is not particularly innovative at the macrolevel, but it is fanatically innovative at the microlevel of each segment. The characters are obviously "animated" in that they move around in a very stereotypical manner, but they are truly brought to life through small and individualized actions than would be the case, e.g., with a realistic mapping of their clothes or careful work on the texture of their hair and skin. CoComelon does not represent any excessive quality in animation, but we can perceive that the correct elaboration of the individual narrative actions can ensure more popularity than is the case with cinematic qualities. It can be said, indeed, that these "stories," or, more precisely, these "plots do matter." In the sense that dealing with the behaviour of the characters and the links between the behaviour and the plot represents a better investment of the filmmaker's time than is the case with working on the animation as such.

It can be said, indeed, that these "stories," or, more precisely, these "plots do matter."

3 Narrative Features

In order Our next question is whether and to what extent our survey supported our hypothesis. Figure 1 shows a complete list of survey answers. Given the minimal nature of this process, we only take it as grounds to point out three noticeable features which concert narrativity: the pleasure of retardation, the importance of characters, and the nature of the underlying process.

Section A					
Video	Have you seen it?	Did you enjoy it? Why?	Who was it about?	What happened?	How did it end?
Bath Song (a)	No	Yes, because it is nice	Baby and boy	They bathed	Well
Blue whale (b)	No	Yes, it is nice	Two whales	They were playing	Well
Vegetables (c)	No	Yes, it is nice	Mom and baby	Baby ate	Well
Subject B					
Bath Song (a)	Yes, on a tablet	Yes, because it is beautiful	I don't know - me and my brother, both of us	They bathed with sponges	They did this (final pose)
Blue whale (b)	No	Yes, because it was beautiful	Fish, I was there, the baby, the big fish was the mom	A boy was sleeping, nothing, they sang	Wel
Vegetables (c)	Yes, on a tablet	Yes, because it was very beautiful	Me and mommy	He ate	Well
Subject C					
Bath Song (a)	First time	Yes, don't know	Baby and boy	Bathing and adding more toys	Don't know
Blue whale (b)	No	Yes, they did somersaults	Whales	Spinning and splashing water	They continued to somersault
Vegetables (c)	NO	Yes, don't know	Baby and mom	He couldn' pick up the spoon	Momy gave him a stuffed animal and they pretended
Subject D					
Bath Song (a)	Yes	Yes, it seemed od that the boat floated	Baby and big boy	Washed themselves	They were moving
Blue whale (b)	No	Yes, because it was twice	Small whale, big whale	Swimming, spinning and then straight to the other side	They continued to swim
Vegetables (c)	I don't think so	Yes, I liked how they fed each other (many times for the boy, once for mom)	Boy and mom	They ate	Mom ate last
Subject E					
Bath Song (a)	No	Yes, because they put foam on their hair	Baby and his brother	Foam everywhere - hands feet	The same
Blue whale (b)	No	Yes, daddy held the club, they spun, water splashed out of their holes, they looked at fish	Whales	Nothing	They both splashed and smiled at each other
Vegetables (c)	I guess not	Yes, mommy hed hi showed the stuffed animal how to eat properly, then baby would show some to mommy	Mommy and baby	Nothing some broccoli	Baby gave mommy

Table 2. Fig. 3. Results of the survey

Retardation
On the basis of Shklovskij's theory of prose, we can see a source of aesthetic pleasure first and foremost as a pleasure about retardation. Just as we rejoice at Roland blowing the Olifant three times [26, pp.27-28], children enjoy the typical mommy, the cute baby and the brightly coloured environment in which the same things are done all over again.

Some answers to the second question (*Did you like it? Why?*) seem to confirm the hypothesis. The most common answer (6 of 15, but only from two subjects) was "*Because it was beautiful/nice*." One striking answer touched upon the nature of Shklovskij's notion of retardation as the nucleus of art: "*Because it happened twice*" (D2b). There were also common answers about the content as such (6 of 15): "*It seemed odd that the boat floated*" (D2a), "*Yes, they did somersaults*" (C2b), and "*Yes, because they put foam in their hair*" (E2a). Some subjects even took the question as an incentive to repeat the whole plot: "*Yes, I liked how they fed each other (many times for the boy, once for mom)*" (D2c). The same was true with all of the answers from Subject E.

We understand this as an ability to determine elements of the plot. The subjects determine the activities (putting foam, feeding, doing somersaults, floating) and the agents (they, the boat, the mom, the boy), then attributing an emotional assessment to them (weird, funny, I liked...). We believe that this shows that at least in some cases, children do pay attention to plots and their basic components.

The characters once again
Second, it seems that the focus on the character is very real. The third question, "*Who was it about?*" had to be added, because children were constantly discussing the plot by naming characters. Answers to the third question are appropriate for the reference segmentation: "*Baby and boy*" (A3a), "*Whales*" (a3b), "*Baby and mom*" (A3c), "*Fish, I was there, the baby, the big fish was the mom*" (B3b). This also applied to all answers from subjects C, D and E. Subject B's answers were also correct if we take into account self-identification with the main characters: "*Me and mommy*" (B3c), "*I don't know – me and my brother, both of us*" (B3a). This shows that the characters do play an important role in terms of how children respond to the videos.

The creators of the relevant merchandising strategies surely know about this, and it is supported by another statement from Jeon in his interview in *The Independent*:

"We've tried to create characters that are adorable, likeable and universally relatable. We began to think of JJ, YoYo and TomTom as our imaginary kids, and over time, we built a family around them – parents, grandparents, animal friends and school classmates" [3].

The familiarity of the action, however, is not the only element of a successful story. The other is a processual and sequential nature.

As is the case with Batman and Sheldon Cooper, however, some episodes are enjoyed more than others. As we keep the importance of characters in mind, let us now move toward the third feature.

Familiar processes
Our content analysis showed that CoComelon videos do not tell real stories. They all depict very familiar processes which the children who took part in the survey had no problem in understanding. In 12 of 15 cases, the respondents identified the main plot correctly: "They were playing" (A4b), "*The baby ate*" (A4c), "*They bathed with sponges*" (B4c), "*They were bathing and adding more toys*" (D4a). Our assumption is that this is exactly the familiarity of the process which enables the viewer to understand the plot. This is adequate to the media preferences of pre-schoolers which are well known [16, p. 57].

The familiarity of the action, however, is not the only element of a successful story. The other is a processual and sequential nature. Pre-schoolers know about bathing and eating, and they are sure about the order in which those take place. The child's lifetime experience allows his or her to arrange things in the proper order. First the bathtub is filled with water, then toys are put into it, etc. Small variations in this succession and even innovations are no obstacle as long as the general sequence is not abandoned. Processes such as bathing and eating offer the advantage of having precise and distinctive beginnings and endings.

The point is that these videos do not construct a story as a narrative sequence which is above the child's unformed experience. On the contrary, the narrative sequences are present in the experience of kids, the observation which reminds us of the foundational statements about the nature of narrative configuration [27, p. 53]. The filmmaker's job is to find the right story which his target audience will know already so that the audience can follow it and appreciate it. Repetition plays such a crucial role in children's videos, and it should be seen as a repetition of familiar processes featuring popular characters and well-liked media features.

Last but not least, let us emphasise the fact that this familiar process is responsible for the story's narrative energy. Apart from dynamism which relates to the conditions of the fil medium, there is a considerable lack of agency in these videos. JJ is moved by his mother from one kind of vegetable to another. His brother fills the tub and then throws toys. Were it not for the inexorable order of these processes, such acts would be seen as shifting the narrative, and JJ would become noting more than a secondary character in the story. Precisely because the subject matter is as regular as a natural process, the roles of mom and the brother can be pushed back a bit so that the little dramas of JJ can unfold (what cutlery he should use, whether he should throw away the sponge, etc.).

4 Conclusion

We have sought to provide an overview of the CoComelon channel, and with the help of a very limited study of reception, we have outlined why narrativity might be its core feature. We concluded that among other actors, the videos exhibit narrativity as their main element. It is narrativity, however, which is somewhat non-standard. First of all, it occurs on a very small scale of one segment that lasts for 40 seconds. Second, it is brought to life by striking a careful balance between innovation and familiarity in the construction of the characters and of the "plots." In thinking about the dynamism of what is known and unknown, we must distinguish between the macrolevel of the story and the microlevel of its individual segments. One observation is that innovation at the macrolevel is not desirable and that familiar processes of very good sequential nature must stand as a foundation. Therefore, we assume that this underlying process is in fact Jay Jeon's *story that matters*.

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Pictures:

Fig 1: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCbCmjCuTUZos6Inko4u57UQ
Fig 2: https://cocomelon.com/pages/about

Sabrina Durling-Jones | **AI**

Ludmila Komutstsi

The Spontaneous and the Literary in Self-Stories Within a Transmedial Environment

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Abstract

Among the genres that have emerged on the crossroads of narrative and media, the two that appear to need a closer scholastic interest are social media storytelling and web documentaries. While their technological, interactive and design-specific aspects have been widely discussed, their literary-narrative potential has been studied only by a small group of scholars so far. In this paper we draw on Verner Wolf's 2011 essay "Narratology and Mediality: The Transmedial Expansion of a Literary Discipline and Possible Consequences". Our purpose is to prove its central thesis, which states that, when approached with the literary-informed reading techniques in mind, social media true stories reveal the traits of near-literary narratives. The test case for the research is presented by a selection of self-confessional stories by ordinary social media users taken from the web documentary "Seven Digital Deadly Sins" (2014), a collaborative project between the Guardian and the National Film Board of Canada. Their qualitative analysis includes the affordances of the documentary's brilliantly designed interface, engaging the reader-users into the transmedial environment where they are given a chance to take the position of the sinners' "judges". The focus, however, is set up on the cognitive nature of the allegedly spontaneous tellability, experientiality and temporality of the sinners' confessional stories embedded in the interactive design. The results of the analysis show that, in effect, such stories are approaching the qualities of "unnatural", that is, literary narratives worthy to be seen as a new quasi-literary phenomenon.

Keywords

transmedial narratology, web-documentary, self-stories, social media, "Seven Digital Deadly Sins".

1 Introduction

1.1 Some Theoretical Prerequisites for the Literary-Narratological Approach to Social Media Storytelling

In the contemporary sociological field of narrative theory, the socio-cultural aspects of media storytelling have been widely discussed. Transmedial narratology, in turn, has been focused mostly on the ways various codes such as text, graphics, sound and video might interact in video games, web-documentaries and other novel genres of storytelling. However, sociologists and media communication theorists both tend to ignore the aesthetic potential of non-fictional narratives. The parallels between narration in the novel and spontaneous social media experientiality have received quite little attention. Meanwhile, platforms such as Facebook and Instagram on the one hand and web-documentaries on the other are gradually transforming our understanding of what narrative is considered compelling today [1, pp. 220-221].

In order to expand the narratological perspective on the emerging genres of interactive storying shared within social media and web-documentaries, it is necessary to understand the connections between conventions of literary narratives and the allegedly spontaneous self- expressions of social media users' experiences online. In following these connections, I adopt the position of Werner Wolf, a prominent representative of intermedial narratology, who insisted on understanding the literary origins of narrative theory and on the importance of applying narrative analysis techniques to non-literary material [2, p. 159]. The effectiveness of W. Wolf's methodology has already been demonstrated by a series of groundbreaking research accounts on the narrativity of "mini-stories" such as posts and status updates by users in Facebook and other genres of storytelling in computer-mediated communication [1, 3, 4, 5, 6]. Research by Maria Mäkelä, for one, [6] offers a particularly convincing base of arguments for taking a literary- narrative and cognitive stance to textual self-storying in social media. In this article I'll draw on some of her arguments while, unlike her, giving attention also to the transmedial environment designed as a frame for the stories of social media users. These stories were selected by the team of the Canadian-British web-documentary "Seven Digital Deadly Sins" to be embedded in its interface [7]. Their literary and cognitive analysis is claimed to suggest another evidence in favour of the expediency of adopting a literary reading strategy when dealing with non-literary material. Besides, the web-documentary "Seven Digital Deadly Sins" is a transmedial narrative that deserves a special consideration as a brilliant work of new digital art. It is designed as a polycode system offering the user various options to co-participate in the collective anthropological investigation of the ways new digital habits of communicating on social media have changed human values and morals.

Studies of digital storytelling have hardly focused on how digital stories are actually told, what narrative genres they represent, and, particularly, what their main textual and interactional aspects are.

1.2 The Criteria of a Compelling Narrative

Studies of digital storytelling have hardly focused on how digital stories are actually told, what narrative genres they represent, and, particularly, what their main textual and interactional aspects are. By contrast, an emphasis on narratives in online environments as genres is emerging in

sociolinguistic research [8]. Although a move to make "non-canonical" social stories a part of narrative analysis is going in tune with cognitive approaches to narrative both within sociolinguistics and in narratology, sociolinguists tend to ignore the aesthetic and cognitive potential of literary narratives which, when consciously or subconsciously used in online communication, makes certain stories fascinating and others less so. In sociolinguistic approaches, the prototypical definitional criteria of narrative, such as the sequencing of events, are seen as necessary but not as sufficient. Instead, what counts as a good story in cognitive narratology presupposes the superimposition of a narrative form over reality to align the message with basic cognitive schemata of storytelling: readers (and social media users) seem to be looking for the signs of experience, affect, bodily reactions familiar to them.

With regard to the criteria applied to evaluating non-fiction stories, research into socially and cognitively informed narratology has foregrounded the three categories that are of crucial importance for understanding the ways narratives communicate meaning. These are experientiality, temporality and tellability.

Temporality involves presenting the events and episodes in different tempos (a speeding-up, a slowing-down, a stand-still, etc.), modes (retelling past events, description of a scene, a dialogue, an account of the dull, routine actions etc.) and order (a chronological sequence, a flash- back, a flash-forward). Narrative temporality thus allows for high variability in representing different events in different shots, so that uninteresting, routine actions are shown as iterative while meaningful and psychologically significant experiences are framed as richly detailed scenes. This possibility, in turn, involves variation in the use of tenses. While the narrative past tense is normal for accounts of the past, the use of Past Perfect will create the effect of a flash-back and the present tense forms will render the effect of simultaneity, crucial for the existential impressionistic quality of the "now" moments.

Tellability may be defined as the quality of "being worthy to be told": "tellability has to be assessed in terms of manifestation of some significant exemplary experience <...> [that] reaches beyond the local context of the immediate context situation and is open to further

Social media settings render tellable the very effort of telling a boringly routine or, conversely, a significant experience of coping with life challenges.

"Narrativity as mediated experientiality" is a concept from Monica Fludernik's "natural narratology". She has connected sociolinguistics to the analysis of non-fictional narratives on the grounds that their perception lies in "naturally occurring storytelling" [9, pp. 19-20]. Mediated experientiality refers to "narrativizing" life occurrences to fit our basic cognitive schemata for story comprehension [9, p. 33]. In a narrative account the pull toward reading or listening comes from the prompt "What's on your mind?" or "What is it like?", as "the reader is on the lookout for familiar epistemic, affective, and bodily parameters that would yield a presentation akin to the reader's experiential schemata" [6, p. 5].

elaboration" [10, p. 203]. A story may deserve the right to be told either for its intriguing plot or for a moral lesson it contains. A story may have a high or a low threshold of tellability: some events may have little significance for the teller, for the setting or the listeners, while others are so intimate that the tellers tend to avoid sharing them in the current context.

Narrative frames of unpretentious personal stories may forge more truths than fiction has ever done. Social media settings render tellable the very effort of telling a boringly routine or, conversely, a significant experience of coping with life challenges. Such accounts matter because

Fig.1. A screenshot of a story fragment with an online update and an option to share it on FB or Twitter.

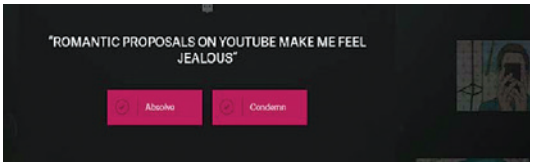

Fig. 2. A screenshot of the interactive opinion poll offering the user to "absolve" or "conemn" a digital habit (Envy).

they demonstrate recognition of individual hardships and joys of struggling with life. Such narrative practices are worthy of a literarily-informed analysis because the mere experiential framing of true life contexts in the "what's on your mind" prompt lends an aura of tellability and internalized eventfulness to any reported fragment of life.

2 "Seven Digital Deadly Sins": Transforming the Myth by the Media Environment

The web-doc "Seven Digital Deadly Sins" is a website created by the Canadian National Film Board in collaboration with The Guardian, UK. This "interactive reflection on our digital selves" (as the site's subtitle states) is a brain blowing test case of representing the power of the digital habits imposed on humans by social media, on the one hand, and the power of the traditional, verbal code of communication used by them to reflect on the transformation of their morals, on the other.
Pablo Vio, the creative director of the web-doc, emphasized the significance of its digital structural frame: "if you want to tell stories that move people, every pixel matters" [7]. In fact, the interface does make an important contribution to the cumulative narrativizing effect of this transmedial project.

2.1 "Every Pixel Matters"

The names of the taditional sins – Greed, Gluttony, Sloth, Envy, Wrath, Pride and Lust – are arranged on the opening screen like a hovering interactive ribbon and, as an option for the viewer, as a list of topics to navigate.

All the "sins" are structured in similar patterns. Each includes a video monologue by a famous person. Folk singer Billy Bragg confesses that he wouldn't have become a famous songwriter had there been You-tube in the times of his youth. Now, he confesses, he spends days on end watching fail videos there. Comedy actress Josie Long confesses in having given the elbow to her boyfriend so he wouldn't interfere with her devotion to Twitter. Such videos are surrounded by links to short confessional textual stories about sinful behaviours: "I spy on my kids", "I've been cyber-bullying", "I am a member of an extramarital dating site" etc. Each story is illustrated by an evocative picture to the right and one or two facts in the left margin, such as "The Number of selfies posted on Instagram so far is 35 million", which are updated online (see Fig. 1).

Strategically important are the three online polls embedded in each section, which invite the viewer to take the role of the judge, that is, to 'condemn' or to 'absolve' a particular sinful behavior (see Fig. 2).

Through such an anonymous opinion poll, a collective statistics is generated which clarifies the patterns of our collective consciousness and the growing discrepancy between the two lives we live – the life online and the one that we live in the real world.

The cumulative effect of the "Seven Digital Sins" is determined by the deliberate combination of these and other technologies. Similar to a social medium, this interactive website creates a narrative environment in which the user is lured to read what others tell, because, like a psychoanalyst, he wants to know what the others think, what the others feel on the subject. His narrative schemata are tuned in in such environment. On social media, even simple messages about the user's location (at the airport, in the mountains) gain the expression of "qualia", that is, the ability to mediate experience to the reader (What does it feel like

to be here? What are you thinking about?) only through the technical possibilities of a particular platform that activate the reader's tuning into the reception of stories about someone else's life experience.

We believe, however, that all the technological affordances of interactive platforms play but a secondary part compared to the verbal, storytelling element – in our case, they are masterfully tuning up the orchestration for our reception of self-stories written by the twenty "digital sinners".

2.2 The spontaneous and the literary in the digital sinners' self-stories

To highlight the literary techniques in the digital sinners' confessional auto-narratives, we will use the traditional methods of literary text analysis aimed at identifying their genre, plot structures and the level of their tellability, Another feature to be considered is the rhythmic patterns of temporality and other narrative elements that true writers have used so far. In order to reveal the cognitive schemata in the self-stories, we will analyse their experientiality. To do so, a simple test consisting of two questions will be applied. We'll keep asking the authors "What did you think?" and "What do you feel like?" to see the patterns of alternating the events and the states.

A Sitcom of Digital Wrath

The first narrative to consider is taken from the "Wrath" section. The author, who calls himself Walter, tells a story of an undeniable tellability. In effect, this guy's story looks pretty much like situation comedy (sitcom).

The exposition informs that his province premier (a woman) shut down her Twitter account because of a scabrous accident that had occurred to it:

> *A few years ago, the premier of Newfoundland and Labrador, Kathy Dunderdale, got into some hot water over her Twitter account. It seems whoever was managing the account for her had managed to link to some very distasteful porn.*

Such an entanglement immediately turns on the reader's curiosity: What did you think? What did you feel? Walter writes that he felt annoyed, that is was "a ridiculous overreaction":

> ***It annoyed me.*** *I don't know if I was necessarily angry – but* ***I was frustrated****. I think that it's very important for political leaders to keep in touch with the people they are working for.*

The story then takes a still more unexpected turn: Walter "disguises" himself into that female politician by opening a Twitter account and posting tweets in her name "to channel his frustration". He made her into "a conglomeration of <... > the Newfoundland women" he had grown with. The "character soon developed" and the game was a great success:

> *"Within nine months, I had accrued 10.9K followers. Pretty soon <...> CBC Radio had me on the air talking about it. I****t caught on big time"****.*

All the technological affordances of interactive platforms play but a secondary part compared to the verbal, storytelling element.

The comedic line, however, ends with a reflection revealing a real drama. When Walter wonders, whether he "was cyber bullying Kathy Dunderdale" his answer is "No" – his intent was "not malicious", never going to fat-shaming her. When we are wondering, what he felt, whether he had any pangs of conscience, Walter's reflection astonishes us again:

> *I found the whole experience* ***therapeutic****. It allowed me to express my frustration over things about the place I grew up, my province, in a fun way that people enjoyed. I mean, <... >,* ***I'm gay****, and grew up in a town of 33 people in rural Newfoundland called Cull's Harbour. If it weren't for social media I don't know who I'd be. Probably* ***just an unhappy hick.***

Lust: a Post-Digital Emma Bovary

Another story comes from the subject of "Lust". The author, named Jane, confesses to the adultery she practices through a dating site: "I'm a member of an extramarital dating site". The plot suggests a high degree of tellability, but the author does not emphasise any vivid details of her infidelity. She captures our interest in a different way, that is, by regular alternations of events and states:

> *The exposition: I never thought of myself as a potential adulterer. My dad cheated on my mum years ago, and I didn't speak to him for years after that. –> What did you feel? I was horrified. At the time I thought it was the most immoral thing ever, but now I see it from a different angle. A change in life: I have been married for the last seven years –> What do you feel? My husband shows no sexual interest whatsoever in me. And I am deeply unhappy. The beginning of action: After I set up a profile (on a dating site – L.K), I was inundated with winks and messages –> What did you feel? <...> it's flattering if you're feeling a bit low. <...> Being anonymous makes you feel safe, because it's almost like you're invisible.*

Such pattern of narrativizing one's life experience perpetuates a view of reality as a recognizable succession of disappointments, inconveniences and pain, and of the virtual world as a space of freedom and fun. It is similar to the Flaubertian technique of writing, his novel narrativisation of Emma Bovary's boredom, her seeking an escape from the vulgar reality in adultery. The author of our story is certainly not Flaubert, but intuitively she uses the same techniques of temporality as the French classic. The mundane routine that makes her unhappy is represented by summarizing long time periods (I did't speak to him for years; I've been married for the last seven years; My husband shows no sexual interest in me...), while the transition to a radically new model of life is marked by the narrative device of frequency. As a result, the new life, too, immediately turns into another routine, taken in a rather broadly brushed enumeration of her many dates: I've met maybe 20 or so men and I've gone on to have physical or romantic relationships with at least three-quarters of those. Remarkably, the change in life leads to a transition from auto-reflexivity to a description of the states of others, i.e. her new men: To be honest, most of the men I've met have just been incredibly lonely.

While the new Madame Bovary resembles her predecessor by an iterative narrative model, in their ultimate assessments of the sinful behaviour patterns they differ. Our contemporary, unlike Emma Bovary, is not experiencing any moral crisis, neither has she any intention of giving up on life. On the contrary, in the coda Jane confesses that sinning on the dating site has made her happier:

> *I am so much **more relaxed**. I am getting on better with my husband <...> **I'm happier**, and the needs he isn't meeting are being met elsewhere. I think I can safely say that being on that website has turned my life around.*

An Epiphany on "A Happy Front of Facebook"

The third story, entitled "I always put on a happy front on Facebook", is an illustration of "Envy". A journalist named Erika finds a dream job in Thailand and posts pictures of the beaches in her Facebook account to realise quite soon that the new job is unsuitable for her. A plot like this may look to many quite banal, meaning that the threshold for its tellability is quite low. However, the story is worth reading because it is vibrating with "the voice of our generation", the generation of Facebook users. It is a cry of an individual who has suddenly seen the futility of his attempts to reach success, who is craving for attention and feeling lonely in the social medium which was originally conceived as the one to bring people together.

The narrative frame allows the author to convey the tension between her inward collapse and the desire to "create a beautiful façade" required by the Facebook ethics:

> *People saw them (the pictures – L.K.), but they didn't know **how lost I was, the feeling of dread** that I had. I let people think my life was awesome. I didn't exactly realise I was doing it at the time, but **I did it out of pride**. I didn't want to look bad in front of my friends <...>.*

This inner monologue makes a well-read reader remember J. Joyce's epiphanies, that is, short sketches of trivial moments of life evoking a

revelation, a momentary clarity of vision that makes the character capture the essence of things. For Joyce, the trivial truth of life, comprehended by the hero in a moment of epiphany, was linked to the concept of beauty. His stories about Dubliners end with such sketches, particularly poignant in the childhood cycle:

> *I lingered before her stall, though I knew my stay was useless, to make my interest in her wares seem the more real. <...> The upper part of the hall was now completely dark. Gazing up into the darkness I saw myself as a creature driven and derided by vanity; and my eyes burned with anguish and anger* [11].

This is the final episode of "Araby", depicting the young protagonist's painful moment of realizing the futility of his romantic dreams, of the chivalrous service to "his lady", which collide with the ordinariness of Dublin's inhabitants. The confessional story of our contemporary, Erika, employs a similar narrative technique. The insignificant context gives way to the epiphanic comprehension of the poignant truth about herself as "a creature driven and derided by vanity", and it is this mediated experientiality that matters, that pulls the same strings in the reader's mind to make him, too, recognise the falsity of the external entourage of Facebook communication:

Facebook is about you putting yourself out there, and you want to present the best version of yourself <...> It's a kind of social politeness. Facebook elevates the social nicety of someone asking how you are to an art form.

3 Conclusion

Three confessional self-stories, taken for analysis by random sampling from twenty others, are indicative enough to provide an insight into the "small stories" of the post-digital world. They show different thresholds of tellability, but the specific communicative environment makes it possible to narrativize one's everyday life reality, though it is not always fit for narrativity. We can see how literary traditions are manifested in these self-stories, how the spontaneous self-expression gives way to new narrative practices. Perceiving "Facebook voices" from the perspective of a literarily aware reader allows us to hear in them a variety of configurations of narrativity, expressiveness, temporality, emotionality and representation of consciousness.

Besides, these stories matter because they offer a striking analysis of the ways our values and morality have changed under the influence of our digital habits. "Seven Digital Deadly Sins" shows just how much media is consuming us. Many of these stories make us wonder if the new patterns of behaviour are really sinful. Our contemporaries, in their majority, don't feel the remorse or guilt. On the contrary, digital sinning turns out to have had a liberating effect on them.

Finally, placing self-representational media practices in the spotlight of sociolinguistic and narrative investigations would shed further light on the ways digital stories can empower their writers and readers.

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Sabrina Durling-Jones | **AI**

Daria Baryshnikova

On the poetics of immersive multimodal narratives: Narration and formal experimentation in Earth Diver (2016)

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Abstract

Using Wouter van Looy's performance piece *Earth Diver* (2016) as a case study, this paper examines the way in which media-specific forms of narration are manifested in an environmental installation which is focused on the sensual experiences of its audience. The paper illustrates how the performance enables access to simultaneous experiences and contextualises problems and historical references through various perspectives about perception and the functioning of the mind. I seek to demonstrate that the narrative of *Earth Driver* is constructed not because of various models which supplement one another, but also because it emerges from intermedial relationships. I am to do this by examining the specificity of the you-narrative in the poetic text by Paul Verrept which is the narrative core of the performance. I will also argue that the mode of intermedial relationships in an artwork can offer a new way for the construction of captivating art environments. The result is a synthesised approach that is pursued in this paper, combining narratological analysis with an investigation of the artwork's musical and visual features, thus extending an understanding of the specificity of processes that create meanings in complex narratives.

Keywords

multimodal narrative, transmedial narratology, immersion, you-narrative

1 Introduction

Earth Diver is a multimedia performance piece which was commissioned in 2016 for the Ruhrtriennale Art Festival and for the vocal ensemble Chorwerk Ruhr, with Wouter van Looy as the director. From the very beginning, as the actions on stage unfold, *Earth Diver* compels the audience to delve into several narratives simultaneously and to experience the way in which they rearticulate and highlight one another. The performance can be seen as a merger of installation art and environmental theatre [1], the focus being on the sensual experience of the audience. Tracking immersive theatre traditions that have emerged during the past two decades [2], [3], [4], *Earth Diver* blends forms and principles of multimedia installation and physical and visual theatres during the 20th century. Formally, the performance involves videoart in a four-screen projection, recitation of poetic text by the vocal artist Phil Minton, early modern and contemporary live music, as well as electronic soundscapes. Singers from the chorus move through the scenic space and the auditorium, often going behind the audience so that sounds and voices keep reassembling and mixing. The story draws extensively upon early modern music polyphony and rhetoric so as to formulate a narrative about hope, despair and redemption.

Earth Diver blends forms and principles of multimedia installation and physical and visual theatres during the 20th century.

This study focuses on a multimodal immersive narrative and the ways in which simultaneous experiences can be presented on stage. This contextualizes issues and historical references through various perspectives about perception and the functioning of the mind. I will first outline the basic concepts and research approaches which are the basis for my analysis, and then I shall consider the general semiotics structure which underlies multimodal narrative presentation.

I base this work on the definition of narrative as a discourse of human experience. In her discussion about narrative, Monika Fludernik [5] replaces the focus on plot with a focus on consciousness. This means that an experiencing mind is at the core of any narrative. Thus the specific aesthetic effect of a narrative "can also be produced by the mimetically motivated evocation of human consciousness and its (sometimes chaotic) experience in being in the world." When it comes to the narrative mode, I base my thinking on David Herman's argument that this is a resource of "representation formulated within a particular type of discourse" [6, p. 79]. In this, the medium is viewed as a means to produce what is being represented in each mode. I also draw upon a distinction made by Kress and van Leeuwen of modes as "semiotic resources which allow the simultaneous realization of discourse and types of (inter)action" [7, p. 21]. In *Multimodal Discourse*, Kress and van Leeuwen introduce and define four levels of communications which contribute meaning: discourse, design, production and distribution. I sought to analyze the artwork which fits together with the contemporary trend of narrative complexity [8, pp.1-26]. The performance involves complex narrative strategies with an embedding of multilinear plots that are experienced in the multiform presentation. There is non-linearity and excessive stimulation of the audience. The complexity of the narrative is additionally constituted by symbolism, subtextual significance and rhythmical connections at the thematic level. There is no coherent chain of meaningful events in *Earth Diver*, which means that the audience must use multiple cognitive frames such as character identification, reliance on genre conventions, patterns, repetitions and intertextual connections which help to shape expectations, fill in gaps, direct attention and evaluate recognisable patterns. The result is a formulation of interpretation. Perception, cognition and imagination work together to create

a sensation of being engaged and (inter)acting with the work of art.

Marie-Laure Ryan examines narrative processes across a wide range of text from the printed novel to electronic games, interactive films and hypertexts [9]. She usefully defines the experience of immersion in the narrative media with three perspectives – special, temporal and emotional, stating that this is a mode of engagement with a narrative that brings an imagined world into being. This diversity is captured in some of the most engaging parts of *a*. The audience may experience immersion as blurring or blending as a sensation of being involved with a fictional world. Members of the audience are emotionally, mentally or physically absorbed into a certain kind of reflection with intertextual re-actualizing of the universal structures of human behavior.

In this paper I shall look at how images, words and sounds work together in shaping the narrative potential of a whole artwork while also creating effects of immediacy in the story. How is there interplay between various semiotic modes which unfold simultaneously and affect each of the stories and consciousness experiences that are represented here? How does multimodality influence the evocation of story worlds in the process of narration? I argue that various modes lead us to multiple interconnected story worlds in the past and the present, and this results in the construction of a narrative. The audience's experiences are intermingled with multiple cultural references suggested by poetic texts, video projections or Schütz motets. My focus will be on the specificity of you-narrative in the poetic texts of Paul Verrept. I will also compare the way in which Heinrich Schütz handles the musical form in the way in which the Barentzburg mine is filmed by Wil Catrysse. Finally, I will demonstrate how the medium-specificity and narrative strategies of *Earth Diver* contribute toward the creation of an immersive stage performance.

In this paper I shall look at how images, words and sounds work together in shaping the narrative potential of a whole artwork while also creating effects of immediacy in the story.

2 Narrative strategies in the story of loss and acceptance

An underlying dramatic situation in *Earth Diver* unfolds in parallel in two different modes. There is a poetic recitation, and there is a four-screen video projection which offers both verbal and visual elements. The plot involves mine workers who were abandoned after coal production ended at an isolated site near Spitzbergen. Director Van Looy combined video materials which represent the Barentzburg mine. He filmed these with a detached observer mode, and the images are accompanied by a highly emotional poem by Paul Verrept, which establishes the narrative core of *Earth Diver* in a very direct sense. The protagonist in this poem may be seen as someone who experiences a personal transformation from shock to acceptance. The experience is shown in a way which mimetically evokes processes of perception, observation, reflective speculation and imagination.

The story is meant to be an allegory about an approaching apocalypse or global crisis [10]. The latter is conceptualised in the ideas of philosophers Peter Sloterdijk and Slavoj Žižek. In *Living in End Times* [11], the latter philosopher compares thinking and actions at the end of time to a grieving process which involves several stages such as denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. Žižek has borrowed this schema from the Swiss psychologist Elisabeth Kübler-Ross [12], who applied the concept to any form of catastrophic personal loss. Verrept's poetic text follows the stages

and mood that are suggested in Žižek's work in structural and conceptual terms, which means that this can be read as a story of shared experience in that these stages of acceptance or dealing with grief or loss are "humanly universal." Accordingly, the audience may rely on stereotypes about the pattens of human behaviour (denial, anger, etc.), as well as a relevant elements of experiential repertoire so as to scaffold the heuristics for narrative comprehension and to have an additional guide in terms of interpretation.

Initially the story seems to address the audience in an attempt to directly involve the audience members into the action which generates a complex range of perspectives, as if the suggestion was to experience an identification with the narrator. The storyteller in this case is mostly an agent of engagement, and a second-person narrator can provide greater reasons for empathy, emotion and involvement. This is built on the framework of experientiality that was proposed by Monika Fludernik [5]. In it, she identifies human(like) agents and their consciousness, but not the events themselves, as a central component of narrativity. I would argue that the narrator's experiences must be characterised, focusing on that which is most important and on the ways in which the narrator shapes meanings as a centre of the story. It is precisely the narrator's experiences which establish narrativity in *Earth Diver* and involve the audience therein. The voice that says "you" serves as the centre of consciousness in the text.

The story starts with the supposedly generalised "you-narrator" [13, p. 452] which tries to communicate the sense of participation in the scene to the audience:

> 1.
> (shock)
>
> inescapably, the cold grabs ***you*** by the ankles,
> winds its tentacles,
> around ***your*** legs and up, gripping ***you*** tight,
> a constrictor, a snake,
> searching for openings in ***your*** body.
> the cold creeps into ***you***, past ***your*** genitals, ***your*** anus, ***your*** ears, ***your*** nose, ***your*** mouth,
> to ***your*** stomach, to ***your*** intestines, to ***your*** lungs.
> where it will live, radiating to ***your*** flesh, ***your*** bones...
> between ***your*** lips, ***you*** breathe in the chill, which spreads so quickly,
> which takes possession of ***you.***
> (*my emphasis*)

This "you" can be interpreted as "one," "anyone" and, therefore, "possibly me" – the spectator. This persevering and detailed elaboration of the description and assertive repetition of "you" at the beginning of the text makes the audience uneasy and awkward. It works to engage emotions from the very beginning. Written mostly in the present tense, the poem is aimed at immersing the audience into the story and the performance. As the story develops further, it defines more exactly the circumstances of "you" ("the laboratory is empty, and they left you behind"). The audience may then start to realise that it is faced with a fictional persona to whom "you" refers. The experience of this fictional character is represented by a dense interior monologue which presents the fictional narrator's mind as if he were recording the flow of thoughts. Spectators feel the transgressive quality of the second-pronoun narrative, which seems to be directed toward the real audience, as opposed to remaining within the realms of fiction.

Monika Fludernik has defined several types of you-narratives. *Earth Diver* is "a reflectoral you-narrative in which the 'you' refers exclusively to the protagonist at the story level and *not* to a possible addressee at the discourse level; in fact, such narratives have no narrator persona and, therefore, no narratee in the function of the addressee of the narrator's discourse" [14, p 107]. "You" here exists only at the plot level, which means that the homodiegetic narration with an internal focalisation toward the you-protagonist may cause more intense emotions in the audience because it feels that it may be the addressee of the textual "you" in the textual world. This induces a feeling of identification.

In addition to this, the story involves the audience not only in the narrative strategies, but also with the performer's voice, rhythms and affects. The text is recited by the vocalist, Phil Minton. He uses extended vocal techniques which explore manifold aspects of human expression by changing his pitch and timbre of his voice. These techniques include unconventional sounds such as gasping, humming, muttering, whispering, whinging, whooshing, screaming and roaring. Occasionally Minton arrives at verbal gibberish. At the same time, however, these techniques impart a musical quality to the noises.

Verrept's text is mainly in the present tense so as to give it a sense of contemporaneity in the act of narrating and the actions that are narrated. This means that it grants the audience a seemingly intimate knowledge about the protagonist's actual circumstances. The narrative culminates with maledictions in the "anger" section:

> you shout: 'why me?'
> 'death to the one who allowed it to come to this!'
> 'death to the game of time.'
> 'death to randomness.'
> 'death to choice.'
> 'death to war.'
> 'death to peace.'
> 'death to the destroyers.'
> 'death to the poison in the ground, in the air, in the veins.'
> 'death to the foal.'
> 'death to the fox cub.'
> 'death to humility.'
> 'and death to light.'
> 'death to the gods, the prophets...'
> 'death to blood.'

Repetition of words brings an additional suggestive potential in the story, as well as a rhythmical move which grips the attention of the audience. Associative logic builds unexpected links between images and ideas which defamiliarize perception and retain a powerful emotional resonance. Associations in progress stress the present moment of thinking, register the mind in action, and present the mind's movements in the verbal form.

During the performance, this "malevolent" part of the poetic text is repeated twice, invoking a different experience each time. The first time it is read affectively in conjunction with an "industrial"-like and monotonous soundscape. Simultaneously, the screen shows a worker who handles his duties. We hear cinematic diegetic rustles and machinery clanks. Therefore, the visual and musical sequence reinforces feelings of anger and despair, as suggested by the poem. After a while, the text is repeated for a second time, and then, despite the fact that the screen is dark, the chorus sings Schütz's motet *Ich bin eine rufende Stimme* ("I am a calling voice"). The contradiction between the sacred text and the curse that is read against the background of the motet generates ambiguity in the narrative.

Another example is that at the end of the performance, there is the "acceptance" section. There is no hope, no thoughts and no feelings to communicate: "Your thoughts disappear before they become words." The accompanying screen images are doubled. We see a train of wagons on two screens moving slowly in the falling snow. After the train leaves, we see a man who stands alone on the abandoned road of the coal mine. The same image is projected on the second pair of screens, but now the man is no longer there. We hear the poetic text simultaneously with Schütz's *Herr, nun lässest du dienen Diener in Friede fahren* ("Lord, now you let your servant go in peace," which is a piece from the burial service music). The performer reads:

> 'the end is the end
> no one will come.'
>
> you are standing face to face with your loneliness.
> there is no despair, no...
>
> your thoughts disappear before they become words.
> you smile.
>
> You stand up.
> you gather your few belongings.
> you leave when it's still dark.

In summary, the text applies second-person narrative perspective in which the pronoun

'you' is used to recount individual actions replete with general or typical implications. The mixture of 'you' modes brings additional complexity: being not a coherent story of successive events it is represented more like nonlinear, dream-like associative sequence. Leaving an open end, it offers both a disturbing representation of the experience of a loss and a powerful model of immersive engagement as a narrative strategy.

3 Video and music rhetoric: a pervasive model of variations and amplification

The following discussion focuses on the musical and visual components of the performance so as to examine correspondence between Schütz's handling of sacred motets that are performed by the chorus and the way in which the Barentsburg mine is represented in Wim Catrysse's film. To illustrate this process, I rely on the typology that was suggested by Bence Nanay in his investigation of the multimodality of perception [15]. Nanay emphasizes the role of visual stimuli which influence the experience of the audience and vice versa. He distinguishes between several forms of how these modes interact with our art experience, in which the visual modes highlight, counterpoint or obscure musical form or expressive content [15, pp. 355-356]. Like Nanay, I consider the interrelation between various modes in *Earth Driver* to show how various prospective perceptions and mind functions can recontextualize major problems such as global crises throughout historical references such as early modern music. This also takes full advantage of narrative conventions in literary and visual artworks.

The beginning of the performance involves four video screens, and the audience is presented with an almost static view of Earth from outer space. Then the camera starts to move dynamically toward the ocean and the surface of the water. This visual sequence is rhythmically supported by the soundtrack, which involves howling wind and roaring thunder which is reminiscent of industrial sounds. I must mention the fact that the performance was staged at a salt warehouse, which had a Kokerei Zollverein coke oven. This created an additional semantic load of environmental and cultural references for the artwork. We hear Phil Minton first murmuring and then howling. His vocal activities are accompanied by the increasing rumble of electronic sounds which are together with the lute and the violone. When the camera falls into the waters of the sea, the sounds fade away, and the choir begins to sing Schütz's motet *Enhöre mich, wenn ich rufe*:

> Hear me when I call, O God of my righteousness: thou hast set me at liberty when I was in trouble; have mercy upon me, and hearken unto my prayer.
> O hearken thou unto the voice of my calling, my King, and my God.

The music fades, and the screen is black. There is a silent pause before which Phil Minton starts to howl. This howl is overlaid with vocalization in the context of the soundscape. The poetic narrative begins. This presentation has no dominant narrative mode, and each expression emphasizes the others. As a result, we can read the whole story as a complex reflection which involves multiple explorations of tis thematic and representative properties. These evoke emotional resonance in the audience.

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At the end of the first part of the performance (the "shock" section), the audience sees a snowy and rocky winter landscape with an abandoned building at a distance. Nothing is

happening in this bleak and freezing scene, except that snow is swirling around. It is a static image, as there is no movement on the screen except for the snow. At first glance, the narrative that is presented by these visuals may seem monotonous, because the concurrent and slow vocalization is all but frozen. At the same time, however, we hear this recitation:

> Time stands still
> Nothing moves now, even swirling snow
> freezes in the icy air.

The visual logic thus reinforces the narrative and establishes connections with links that are implied by the poetic text. Constellations of textual and semantic elements (cold, stillness, fear) and the way in which they can be projected onto the patterns of the film (the abandoned and frozen factory building, the snowstorm, darkness inside the mine) form multiple diegetic levels that are connected thematically and intertwined discursively. Visual details such as the abandoned factory building, the frozen landscape, the whirling snow, the dark tunnels, etc. supplement the verbal cues and activate each other's contexts and cultural backgrounds. This means that rhythmical and thematic connections establish a fundamental continuity between heterogeneous texts and their variations in different expressive modes.

Similarly, early commentators about Heinrich Schütz's music have viewed *form* in his music as either non-existent or entirely generated by text [16, p. 233]. At the same time, however, Schütz's music handles the charge of being "formless" only if the form is viewed in 19th-century terms as static and bound to abstract large-scale repertories. As soon as the audience gains an awareness of how the initially seemingly plain statement is being unwrapped, it not just becomes fascinated by the craftsmanship of the composer, but is also emotionally engaged.

I support the arguments of Bettina Varwig [16], who has investigated Schütz's music within the framework of rhetoric, stating the pervasive presence of rhetoric in 16th and 17th-century European culture. Varwig does not directly link Schütz's musical practices to specific rhetorical principles. Instead, she demonstrates how he used compositional patterns that are similar to the rhetorical methods of variation and amplification. Varwig convincingly demonstrates the way in which Schütz's text function through the rhetorical elaboration of musical elements in the composition – through manipulations and gradual changes in rhythmical and motivic elements.

This means that rhythmical and thematic connections establish a fundamental continuity between heterogeneous texts and their variations in different expressive modes.

Varwig's approach to Schütz's compositional principles allows me to focus on strategies that are prefigured by the semantic and syntactic aspects of the verbal text that is being amplified in concurrent musical and visual models. What is important here is what has been used in the Earth Driver performance at several levels which highlight each other. This very conscious playing with the audience's expectations is directed onto the configurations of recognisable functional units of a musical piece from any other part of the whole work (verbal narrative or visual imagery in the film). Such elements were configured, repeated, modified, amplified and varied, thus generating a complex texture of temporally unfolding experiences. Thus. the whole effect is governed by a large-scale and variative development which uses basic motifs of grief, desolation, hope and despair as a departure point for various routes which expand and exceed the initial message that is conveyed by the poetic text.

4 Conclusion: Blending Spaces, Engaging Minds

In this paper, I have sought to illuminate the issue of how various elements in the case study artwork come together and affect the audience. As I hope I have demonstrated, intersections among various expressive modes – the video narrative in multi-screen images, vocal recitation, vocal music by Heinrich Schütz and Nikolaus Brass, as well as electronic soundscapes – transform the narrative of the global crisis into a multimodal representation which merges several permanently changing perspectives of consciousness. Sensory perceptions of the film, the recitation and the music at the scene extend and intensify the generally fragmented reflections of the verbal text about the experience of being left behind or, perhaps, dying.

What is significant here is the fact that the second-person narrator in the poetic text intensely involves the audience and, therefore, emphasises the immersive potential of the multi-perspective contemplation. Challenging the process of perception with multi-perspectivity means that the performance integrates non-linear temporality into the polyphony of voices. Various media contribute to the recontextualization of earlier modern compositions within the actual cultural situation and with affordances that are provided by the multimodal configurations.

The result is the emergence of an ambivalent attitude. Highly emotional involvement is suggested by the text's narrative strategies, and it is blended with the accentuated detachment at the point of view of the film. Schütz's sacred motets which appeal to God are intertwined with despair and the desolation of the poetic text. This means that the artistic event emerges here and now with the interaction of various media and groups of people (the chorus, the actor, the musicians and the audience. Texts, images and music simultaneously interact to produce a new reality at the moment when they are performed. Every constitutive element and mode of the work refers not only to its already existing and previously constituted meanings, but instead creates something new that is being recontextualized within new relationships. This serves to contribute toward its complex of musical, visual, verbal and dramatic meanings.

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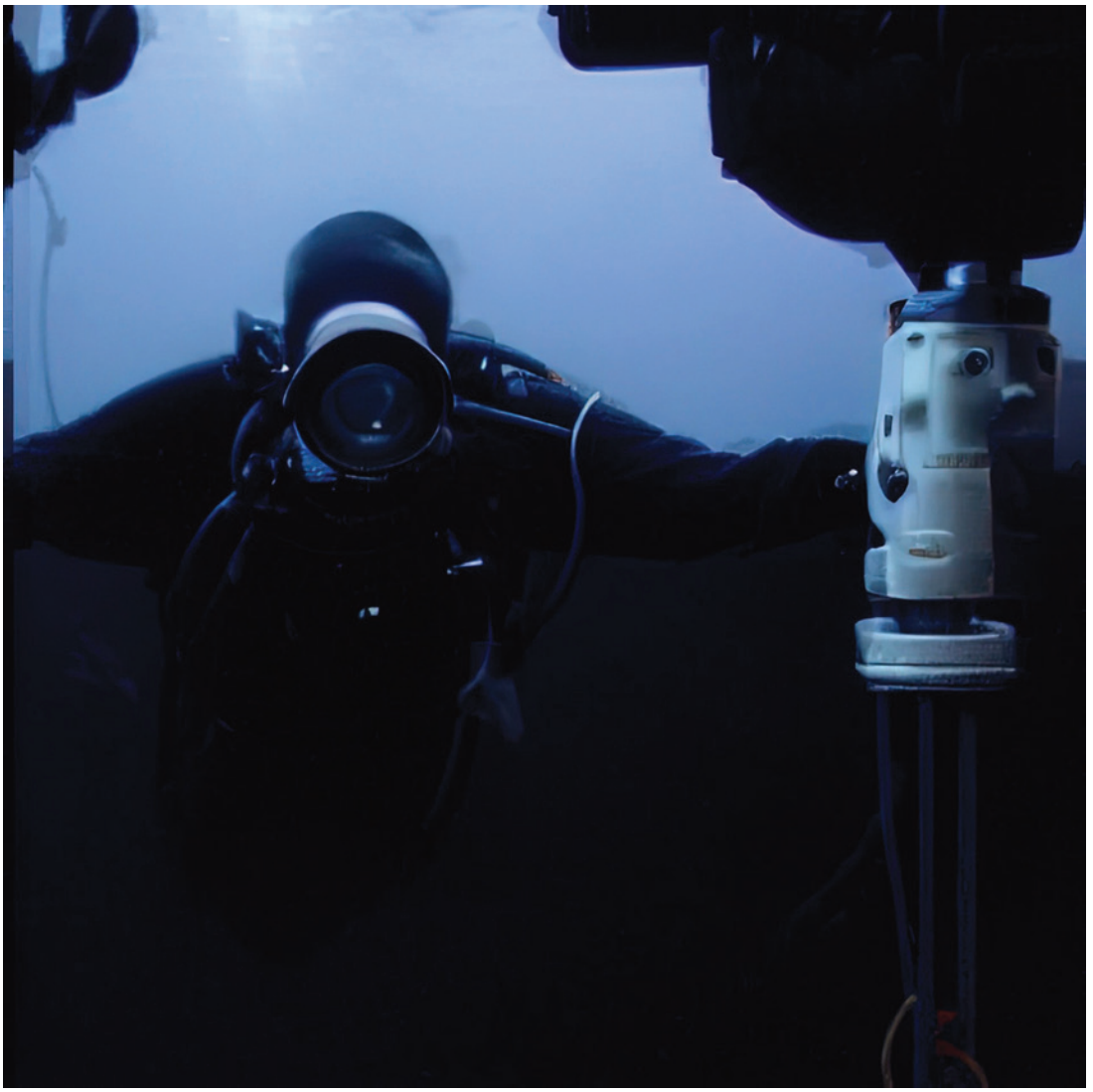

Sabrina Durling-Jones | **AI**

ADAMarts Volume 3

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