

Anne Enderwitz

Fictionality Reconsidered

- **Fictionality Across the Arts and Media. Annual Conference of the Friedrich Schlegel Graduate School of Literary Studies, Freie Universität Berlin, October 13–15, 2011.**

The conference *Fictionality Across the Arts and Media* was hosted by the Friedrich Schlegel Graduate School of Literary Studies at the Freie Universität Berlin. Its aim was twofold: to explore the possibilities of fictionality beyond a textual or narrative paradigm but also to revisit and revise existing theories of the fictional. The conference was part of an annual tradition of themed conferences. This year's focus was inspired by the question whether fictionality as a key concept of literary studies is applicable in a transmedial and transdisciplinary context. Although the fictionality of narrative texts has been explored in detail by a variety of authors, the significance of the concept for non-verbal or even non-narrative art forms has received little attention. At the same time, the conference wanted to explore the implications of broadening the scope of the concept for theorizing the fictional.

In line with this aim, the participants addressed a variety of existing theories but also attempted to move beyond the narrative focus of these theories and to re-conceptualize the fictional in a way that accommodates different media and art forms. Among the art forms and media discussed were drama, poetry, the autobiographical novel, film and music as well as photography, painting, comics, and ready-mades. Keynote speaker Kim Myung-hwan from South Korea broadened the perspective on fictionality by drawing on non-European works and discourses.

The conference demonstrated that classical positions still give rise to controversy, especially when viewed in a transmedial and transdisciplinary perspective. Some of the key approaches that delineate the discursive field and informed some of the papers should be mentioned briefly. Gérard Genette and Dorrit Cohn have analysed the relation between narrative and fictionality from a narratological standpoint.¹ John Searle has situated fictional discourse within the framework of speech act theory by depicting fictional utterances as speech acts that are best described as pretending to make an assertion.² Peter Lamarque and Stein Haugom Olsen have suggested an institution-based approach that understands the fictive dimension of stories in terms of a practice that involves a fictive utterance on the part of the writer and a fictive stance on the part of the reader.³ Lubomír Doležal, Marie-Laure Ryan, and others have used possible-worlds theory to explore the status of fictional worlds.⁴ Werner Wolf has elaborated on the difference between *fictio* and *fictum*,⁵ and Frank Zipfel has offered an extensive study that takes on the task of disambiguating the key concepts of the debate.⁶ Not surprisingly, Kendall Walton's theory of fiction as a game of make-believe came up repeatedly as it represents an attempt to define fiction independently of genre, art form and medium.⁷

As the conference was bilingual, the speakers were very aware of terminological ambiguities and translation difficulties. Thanks to this awareness, habitual sources of confusion, such as the double meaning of fiction as referring, on the one hand, to imaginative prose texts and denoting, on the other, more generally that which is »imaginatively invented« (*OED*), were easily avoided. Although a neologism that has not yet made its way into the *Oxford English Dictionary*, »fictionality«, quite as the German »Fiktionalität«, seemed to be widely accepted as denoting the problem of the fictional. Several speakers reminded the audience of the etymol-

ogy (Latin: *fingerere*) as well as of the different uses of the German ›Fiktion‹, which can be explained with reference to its two adjectives: ›fiktiv‹ and ›fiktional‹. As Frank Zipfel suggests in his key study, ›fiktiv‹ refers to the ontological status of that which is represented in a given text, whereas ›fiktional‹ refers to the status of the text itself.⁸ In English, the triad ›fictitious‹, ›fictive‹ and ›fictional‹ makes matters even more complicated: whereas ›fictional‹ may refer simply to the quality of »pertaining to, or [being, A.E.] of the nature of fiction« (*OED*), ›fictive‹ and ›fictitious‹ suggest a subject matter that is »feigned«, »imaginary«, »not real«.

1. Fictionality in the Context of Primarily Non-Verbal Media and Arts

The question of whether ›fictionality‹ can be applied to primarily non-verbal media was discussed in various papers. In their paper »When Appearances Aim to Deceive: Illusion, Representation and Fiction in Pictorial Media«, **Katharina Bantleon** and **Ulrich Tragatschnig** (Graz) discussed *trompe l'oeil* paintings as well as the meta-referential potential of contemporary photography. They made it clear that the concept of fictionality was rarely used in relation to such art forms. **Lars Blunck** (Berlin) pointed out as well that the concept of the fictional had not yet found its place in discourses on photography, a medium whose academic reception is still largely determined by Barthes' *La Chambre Claire*. As Blunck explained, in this perspective photography is seen as indexical; it cannot be fictional because it represents the reality in front of the camera lens. In his paper »Wie sind fotografische Fiktionen möglich: Argumente für einen bildpragmatistischen Fiktionsbegriff«, Blunck questioned this perspective with a Husserl-inspired pragmatist approach. **Stephan Packard** (Freiburg) focused on Comics in his paper »Inventing Images: Narrative and Fictional Drifts in Comics«. He discussed in how far images can be fictional or factual and suggested that fictionality might best be understood as a scalable quality. He demonstrated how verbal and pictorial conventions interact in the production of fictionality. In his paper »Medientheorie und Fiktionalität«, **Jens Schröter** (Siegen) confronted the concept of fictionality with media-theoretical discourses and artefactualism and suggested that intersections between the different discourses might constitute a fruitful subject in a history of science perspective. In his talk »Fiktion: Eine relevante Kategorie der Metareferenz in Literatur und anderen Medien?«, **Werner Wolf** (Graz) discussed not just the relation between fiction and metareference but also argued convincingly that fictionality as a cognitive framework could well apply to music. His audio-examples of Mozart's »Ein musikalischer Spaß« provided evidence for this hypothesis as well as some comic relief.

The above papers demonstrated that the fictional status of non-verbal media can at least in some cases be fruitfully and convincingly postulated. At the same time, they drew attention to the fact that much work remains to be done, as there have been few attempts so far to integrate fictionality with ›native‹ discourses in disciplines that focus on non-verbal and non-narrative media and art forms. Here, the limits and uses of the concept as well as the ways in which it interacts with existing terminologies and discourses must be carefully evaluated.

Not surprisingly, the situation appeared very different for the medium film. There is little doubt about its ability to produce fiction and, as **Oliver Jahraus** demonstrated, about its ability to comment auto-reflexively on its fictional character. In his paper »Inception: Medienmetapher und Fiktionsspiel«, Jahraus demonstrated that the filmic image itself cannot explicate its factual or fictional status. Therefore, auto-reflexivity is essential for rendering the difference factual/fictional operational. In his paper »Fictions of the Real«, **Helmut Galle** offered an analysis of the documentary film *Restrepo* (2010) in the context of the simultaneously published book by the same author: *War*. He discussed the reception of these works as

factual or fictional in the context of a paratextual rhetoric of authenticity. **Christian Pischel's** paper »Zwischen weitverstreuten Trümmern gelassen abenteuerliche Reisen unternehmen« – Auf was antwortet die Frage nach der Fiktionalität im Film« presented a survey of different approaches to fiction in film studies and identified different dimensions in which fictionality comes into play. Pischel emphasized the historical contingency of the difference fiction/non-fiction.

2. Theorizing Fictionality

The conference helped to bring the heterogeneous uses of fictionality into focus. It can be discussed as an institution-based practice, but also as a cultural practice that is constituted through specific cultural artefacts. It can be analysed in a phenomenological perspective and may be confronted with cognitive patterns (**Cristóbal Pagán Cánovas:** »Fictional Worlds in the Lyric: Conceptual Integration and Spatial Cognition«). Interestingly enough, the old question of the ontological status of the fictional came up repeatedly and seemed to have acquired a new urgency in the confrontation of different media: Does fictionality necessarily imply reference to an invented object?

In his paper »The Margins of Fiction and the Representational Arts«, **Alexander Bareis** (Lund) focused on photography, ready-mades and other forms of art. On the basis of Kendall Walton's theory of fiction as a game of make-believe, he argued against the view according to which the ontological status of the referent is a decisive factor in determining the fictionality of an object of art. **Christoph Klimmer** and **Julia Schumacher** (Hamburg, »Fiktion macht Glauben. Fiktionalität und Wirklichkeitsannahmen«) maintained that fictional works can postulate propositions that the reader or audience recognizes as true and is able to distinguish from fictional ›truths«. With his contribution »More than Mere Truth«, **Remigius Bunia** (Berlin) shifted the problem of fictionality away from the question of truth by focusing on structures below the level of propositions: verbs and nouns. He argued that this focus on the ›chrematical dimension« (things/nouns) as well as on the ›processual dimension« (processes/verbs) allowed for a more adequate description of the fictional character of nonverbal media of representation. **Frank Zipfel** (Mainz, »An Institutional Concept of Fiction – from a Transmedial Point of View«) suggested an institutional concept of fiction that theorizes fiction as a practice that involves games of make-believe on the side of the author's intention as well as on the side of the reader's response. Focusing on drama, Zipfel elaborated on the potential of a transmedial understanding of fiction as an institutional practice. In her paper »Die Inszenierung von Dramatikerfiguren«, **Janine Hauthal** (Wuppertal) also concentrated on drama, exploring in particular the presence of author-figures in dramatic texts and their implications for the illusion effects created in a play. Both Zipfel and Hauthal insisted on the distinction between the dramatic fiction (the fictionality of the written play) and the theatrical fiction (the performance). In the conclusion to his paper, Schröter argued against a media ontological approach, suggesting like Zipfel that fictionality is largely determined by institutional practices. Jahraus emphasized that fictionality does not just refer to the ontological status of the represented world, but also to the relation between film and recipient. Wolf reminded the audience of the different concepts related to fiction. Whereas fictitiousness refers to the ontological quality of the represented world, fictionality refers to a cognitive frame that suggests a certain indifference to truth value. **Barbara Ventarola** (Würzburg) argued that the concept of fiction is frequently limited to narrative and intimately linked to European modernity. In her paper »Fiktionen als Medien möglicher Kommunikationen – Überlegungen zu einer neuen Fiktion(alität)stheorie«, she redefined fictions as media of possible communica-

tion and reconfigured fictionality within a multidimensional, multivectorial model that allowed for transcultural and transhistorical application.

Claudia Löschner (Berlin) and **Klaus W. Hempfer** (Berlin) discussed and evaluated the benefits and drawbacks of Käte Hamburger's genre theory. Löschner (»Entgleisende Beschreibung. Über Fiktionalität der Lyrik als Grenzerscheinung in Käte Hamburgers *Logik der Dichtung*«) discussed Hamburger's categorisation of poetry as non-fictional in the light of Hamburger's little known essay »Drei Gemälde. Unmaßgebliche Gedanken zu einem System der Künste« (1978). Hempfer (»Zur Fiktionalität von Lyrik«) emphasized the inherent contradictions that characterize Hamburger's approach as it emerges in *Logik der Dichtung*. He suggested that poetry could be described in terms of prototype theory and family resemblance, concepts that allow for scalability: for a »more or less« rather than an »either-or«. According to Hempfer, it is constituted prototypically by means of a »performativity fiction«.

Not surprisingly, the three days of intense discussions did not yield a consensus about how to define fictionality in a transmedial context and with regard to different art forms. Yet the papers as well as the general discussions were instrumental in bringing the differences and dividing lines between various approaches into focus. They helped to clarify very much the implications of different uses of fictionality and enabled the participants to formulate new and promising questions.

Anne Enderwitz
Freie Universität Berlin
Peter Szondi-Institut

Notes

¹ Cf. Gérard Genette, *Fiction et Diction* [1991], Paris 2000, and Dorrit Cohn, Signposts of Fictionality: A Narratological Perspective, *Poetics Today* 11 (1990), 775–804.

² Cf. The Logical Status of Fictional Discourse, *New Literary History* 6 (1975), 319–332.

³ Cf. *Truth, Fiction and Literature. A Philosophical Perspective*, Oxford 1994.

⁴ Cf. for example Marie-Laure Ryan, Fiction, Non-Factuals and the Principle of Minimal Departure, *Poetics* 9 (1980), 403–422, but also *Possible Worlds, Artificial Intelligence and Narrative Theory*, Bloomington/Indianapolis 1991.

⁵ Cf. *Ästhetische Illusion und Illusionsdurchbrechung in der Erzählkunst. Theorie und Geschichte mit Schwerpunkt auf englischem illusionsstörenden Erzählen*, Tübingen 1993.

⁶ Cf. *Fiktion, Fiktionalität, Fiktivität. Analysen zur Fiktion in der Literatur und zum Fiktionsbegriff in der Literaturwissenschaft*, Berlin 2001.

⁷ Cf. *Mimesis as Make-Believe. On the Foundations of the Representational Arts*, Cambridge, MA 1990.

⁸ Cf. Frank Zipfel, *Fiktion, Fiktionalität, Fiktivität. Analysen zur Fiktion in der Literatur und zum Fiktionsbegriff in der Literaturwissenschaft*, Berlin 2001, 19.

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