Narrative Minds and Virtual Worlds  
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Abstract:  
Affect and Artifice in Cognitive Literary Theory

This paper examines the relationship between emotion and self-reflection in literature. It suggests that the ontological structures and spatio-temporal metaphors that lead to a separation of emotionally immersed and reflectively rational ways of experiencing fiction is hampering our understanding of the phenomenon. Beginning in a rhetorical approach to fiction, I argue for a model where engagement with fiction is seen in terms of multiple and simultaneous layers of awareness in readers.

In a crucial role in the model of affect and artifice presented here are structures of joint attention and parallel mental processing (Bruner 1975/1976, Seemann 2011). Using joint attention rather than belief and knowledge of different ontological realms as a reference point for understanding emotional engagement with fictional narratives has two distinct benefits: it refocuses attention on literature as a rhetorical mode, and on the model of narrative communication as a way of analysing the different rhetorical positions embedded in literary works (Herman 2008, Caracciolo 2012). Furthermore, it takes mental action to be a system of parallel processes, and thus gives an alternative to the back-and-forth movement between the interior and exterior of imagined worlds. My focus is on Dave Eggers’s A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius (2000), a memoir that embeds an autobiographical narrative within self-reflective metalevel commentary, and explicitly calls attention to the issues of emotional sincerity and rational distance.
Representing Subjectivity in Graphic Narratives

Although many literary scholars have started to show growing interest towards graphic narratives, the concepts and methods for analyzing this hybrid medium are still under development. Graphic narratives pose challenges to narratology but also evoke interesting questions concerning, for example, the word and image relations and representations of minds. In this paper, I focus on the means for depicting subjectivity and embodied experiences in a graphic narrative Karu selli (1996) by Finnish comics artist Kati Kovács. Throughout her oeuvre, caricatured characters are rendered in a very expressive drawing style and her themes underline issues related to gender, sexuality and identity. I aim to show how the representations of subjectivity of comic book characters are built in the interaction between the verbal and visual but also in the relations between individual panels and page layouts.

Graphic storytelling affords a wide range of visual and verbal clues for the reader to interpret the mental states of the characters. The rendering of characters, drawing style, breakdown of the panels, speech and thought bubbles and verbal narration are some of the most essential tools for the construction of a graphic narrative. Formal conventions - such as speech and thought bubbles - are widely used in graphic narratives but artists develop continuously new means for representing the minds of comic book characters. I claim that visual and multimodal metaphors that many contemporary graphic narratives develop can be seen as one answer to the compelling challenge of both representing and interpreting minds.
Non-linear storytelling environments take us one step closer towards immersive experiences while relying heavily on the emotional congruency of the presented stimuli as a function of user action. Describing the drama of a given narrative framework, dynamic music scores also act adaptively as an individual component of perception and behaviour related phenomena of the player.

Examining empirically the immersive effects of dynamic music for the first time, a pilot study was conducted to explore imaginary and sensory immersion, suspension of disbelief, involvement, flow, spatial presence self location, possible actions as well as emotional valence/arousal in the context of an action-adventure video game, while also considering decoding skills and intensified emotional involvement in trait musical empathy and immersive tendency. 60 subjects answered self-report questionnaires of experiential states each time after playing the game “Batman: Arkham City“ in one of three conditions accounting for [1] dynamic music, [2] non-dynamic music/low arousal potential and [3] non-dynamic music/high arousal potential, in this way manipulating affective arousal, structural-temporal alignation and emotional congruency of nondiegetic music separately.

Investigating the perceived drama related interactive qualities of dynamic music in the likes of a Theory of Mind approach, different layers of virtual mind sets between the player, avatar and game environment moderate a regulatory continuous modulation of emotional response, leading to an increase of in-game immersion and, by indications of the gathered data, to a decrease of post-game aggression by narrative-dramaturgic context effects of dynamic music.