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Media, genres, facts and truth: Revisiting basic categories of narrative diversification

The title of this essay contains one term that is currently very popular in academic discourse, and three terms that are rather unfashionable, though the last two have recently enjoyed a revival (Fludernik and Ryan 2020). The popular term is the first one. The advent of computer technology and the profound changes it has brought into our lives has directed critical attention to the importance not only of digital media, but of media in general for culture, politics and cognition. It has also expanded the interest of literary scholars to works that do not exclusively rely on the printed word, such as comics, various kinds of word-image combinations, computer games, and the phenomenon known as transmedia storytelling. But for all its theoretical prominence, medium[1] remains an elusive concept, because it is not an analytic category created by theoreticians to serve a specific purpose, but a word of natural language, and like most of the words of language it has multiple senses. My purpose in this essay is not to propose a new definition, but rather, to approach the issue of media through their relations to genres, facts and truth. In order to do that, I will rely on what I regard as the most relevant definition for narratologists and literary critics: media as "material or technical means of artistic expression" (Webster English Dictionary).

Before I bring into play the other concepts of my title, let me sketch three major components of media differentiation (Ryan 2014):

1. A semiotic component, which describes the types of signs used by different media. These signs can be of any of the three types described by C.S. Peirce: *symbolic*, in media supported by language; *iconic*, in most visual media; and *indexical*, in media based on visual or sound recording (though visuals are also iconic). But artistic media can also consist of sensorial elements that do not qualify as signs, because they have no inherent meaning, such as abstract images or musical sounds.

2. A material component, which describes the means through which signs and sensorial elements are encoded and delivered. This material component can be a natural ability, such as the human voice for oral language, or a technology, such as print or photography. One problem with associating media with technologies is that technologies constantly evolve, and often disappear. Does it mean that a change in technology leads to a new medium? If this were the case, digital photography would be a different medium than analog photography. The distinctive feature of the medium of photography is therefore not the technology that produces it, but the function of this technology. Both analog and digital photography are still images produced by a mechanical capture of light patterns emitted by objects in the world. Technologies may be transitory, but the functions they fulfill are durable. New media can therefore be born, as new types of information become encodable, but media hardly ever die, because once a type of information can be transmitted, it becomes indispensable, and ever new technological supports will be developed.

3. A cultural component, which deals with the role of media in society, the behavior of their consumers, and the institutions that guarantee their existence. It is in this third sense that one generally speaks of "the media" as either guardians of freedom of expression, or as hopelessly biased suppliers of fake news and as "enemies of the people."

The three components carry variable weight in the distinction of individual media. Some modes of communication may be regarded as distinct media on the basis of a combination of

cultural role and technological support; this is the case for social media such as Facebook and Twitter (though whether Facebook and Twitter are media or genres is debatable, as we shall see below). Other media, such as film or photography, are distinguished from their semiotic cousins drama and painting through technological criteria; but it is because the technology affords new possibilities of expression that it is considered a distinct medium. And finally, if art forms such as music, literature, painting or dance are to be considered media, the semiotic component will be dominant in their definition. It is the variety of these distinctive criteria that makes lists of what counts as a medium in a given culture so relative, and the project of a media taxonomy so problematic.

Genres

In contrast to media, the concept of genre has fallen out of favor in academia. It used to be the backbone of literary theory, and one of the first things students learned was that literature is divided into three so-called "natural kinds," the epic, dramatic and lyric, each of which produced various subgenres. An important topic of investigation for literary scholars was the origin, the evolution and the diversification of literary forms across time. But not anymore! The recent *Companion to Literary Theory* published by Blackwell in 2018, and edited by David Richter, has chapters on Trauma studies, Disability Studies, Queer Theory, and Gender Theory, but none on Genre Theory. A genre is a category in a system of classification, but questions of taxonomy have been displaced by questions of identity and subjectivity. There is apparently no place for generic categories in a theoretical climate that values fluidity and ambiguity, and in which boundaries seem to be crossed as soon as they are established. Compared to older periods, such as the Middle Ages or the seventeenth century, contemporary literary production is remarkably contemptuous of generic distinctions. In the seventeenth century, especially in France, authors were criticized for not respecting the rules of genres. Nowadays the dominant literary genre is the novel, which can be regarded as a non-genre, because, as Bakhtin (1981) observed, it can embed any form of discourse. When literary value is associated with the breaking of conventions and boundaries, there is little incentive to teach student about the genres that dominated literary production in bygone eras.

One reason why genres fell into disfavor is that they are so difficult to define. Here are a few lists that I have collected during my readings on the topic. First there is the standard, omnipresent trilogy of what German romanticism called the "natural genres" of literature: epic, dramatic, lyric. Then there are finer divisions within literature. For instance, in the seventeenth century, Boileau distinguished "idyll, elegy, ode, sonnet, epigram, rondeau, madrigal, ballad, satire, vaudeville" (Frow 2015: 64), and Goethe a century later mentions this list: "allegory, ballad, drama, elegy, epistle, fable, idyll, ode, novel, parody, romance, satire" (Frow 2015:65). These are genres of "high literature," but there are genres in folklore too. André Jolles, in *Simple Forms*, has chapters treating Legend, Saga, Myth, Riddle, Saying, Case, Memorable, Fairy tale, and Joke. Nowadays, we have so-called "genre fiction" (romance novel, mystery, thrillers, science fiction), which are considered to belong to popular culture, while "high literature" is far less classifiable—a symptom of the loss of prestige of genre. But why should genre be limited to literature? There are genres in music, in painting, in film, and in computer games. And why should genre be limited to the arts? Paul Hernadi mentions "the essay, the feuilleton, the puzzle, the formal address, the newspaper report, the polemical satire, and the proverb" (Frow 2015:69). One could add: biography, autobiography, and history among narrative texts, and outside

narrative, recipe, law, advertisement, job interview, scientific paper, and will. Any noun that describes a kind of text can be considered a genre. Moreover, any combination of features that is found in several texts and that is deliberately adopted by authors can be considered a genre or subgenre; for instance, a 2018 *New Yorker* article dealt with a proclaimed genre of "Holocaust fiction for children" (Franklin 2018).

From a semiotic point of view, there is no single type of criterion that defines all the items of the lists I have proposed. Some genres are distinguished by purely formal properties: sonnet, madrigal, rondeau; some are distinguished by thematic, or semantic categories: comedy, tragedy, biography, history, science-fiction, fantasy; some are distinguished by pragmatic features: a recipe is a directive for turning ingredients into dishes; a law tells you how you should behave; an advertisement promotes a product. Many genres can only be defined through properties that belong to more than one semiotic category. For instance, if we define novels as long narrative texts of prose fiction meant for entertainment, long and prose are formal, narrative is semantic, and fiction is regarded as semantic by some authors and as pragmatic by others. As for "meant for entertainment," it is definitely a pragmatic criterion. In addition, individual properties may be shared by many genres, and be applicable in several media. Among these properties are "narrative" and "fiction."

Here I would like to address two controversies raised by the notion of genre.

1. Do all texts have a genre, or only some of them ? The turn of the century Italian philosopher Benedetto Croce argued that truly great literary masterpieces do not fit in any culturally established genre, but rather create their own: "Every true work of art has violated an established genre, and in this way confounded the ideas of critics who thus found themselves compelled to broaden the genre" (Duff 1999:130.) This idea is echoed by Maurice Blanchot, a French critic writing in the 60s who represents a school of thought that I call "textualist," because it is characterized by a quasi mystical conception of literature as the manifestation of the largely ineffable essence of language. Here is what he writes: "A book [by this he means a work of high literature] no longer belongs to any genre; every book stems from literature alone…It would thus be as though, the genres having faded, literature were asserting itself alone in the mysterious clarity that it propagates […]" (Duff 1999: 195). Blanchot supports his argument by asking: to what genre does *Finnegans Wake* belong? According to Blanchot, belonging to a genre is a mark of inferior literature, a position reflected in the pejorative connotation of the term "genre fiction," which characterizes stereotyped works of popular culture produced by easily definable rules.

A counter position is represented by Jacques Derrida. In "The Law of Genre" he claims: "I submit to your consideration the following hypothesis: a text cannot belong to no genre, it cannot be without a genre. Every text participates in one or several genres, there is no genreless text." (Duff 1999: 230). And he adds: "there is always a genre and genres, yet such participation never amounts to belonging." I don't know if Derrida is talking about literary texts or about texts in general (in fact he would probably reject this distinction), but his position concurs with a conception of genre that transcends literature. Every text has identifiable distinctive features, even *Finnegans Wake*: it may not correspond to the culturally established conception of novel, but it is a work of prose fiction of a certain length offered as an aesthetic object, which means, intended for the pleasure of the reader. Derrida's claim that works do not "belong" to genres, only "participate " in them, can be understood as meaning that they are not limited by the rules of genres. Like the rules of language, the rules of genre can be seen as shared conventions that allow the expression of an infinity of meanings. Texts are to genres what individual sentences are

to language, or, to use Saussurean terms, what *parole* is to *langue*. Yet if every text has a set of features that connect it to other texts, these sets may or may not have cultural recognition, and may or may not correspond to an existing label. It is in this sense that *Finnegans Wake* can be considered without genre, because the genre novel is normally associated with narrative. But after *Finnegans Wake* we have seen many literary works of prose fiction that do not really tell a story, so narrativity no longer seems to be a defining feature of the novel.

2. Does the set of all genres form a system, or is it a loose, unstructured list of items? The difference between a system and a list is that in a system, an entire field is organized into categories according to a common distinctive feature, and each element of the system is defined through its oppositions with other members. Throughout literary history, critics have attempt to turn lists of genres into systems by organizing them into spatial configurations, such as trees (to represent genealogies), or triangles, squares and circles. (The most famous one is the circle proposed by Northrop Frye in *Anatomy of Criticism*.) These formal models usually do not rely on the generic labels used in a given culture but on analytic categories that can be used across cultures (Ben-Amos 1969). A good example on how systems of genres can be built on analytic categories is the traditional division of literature into the three so-called natural genres of epic, lyric and dramatic texts. The analytic basis of the triad lies in Plato's observation that in some narrative texts, the poet speaks in his own name (the so-called diegetic mode) and in others he lets the characters speak (the mimetic mode). In addition there are mixed genres that combine the diegetic and the mimetic mode. Plato then proposed examples of culture-specific genres to illustrate the three formal, analytic categories: drama for the mimetic class, and epics for the mixed class: in epic poetry, the mimetic component is represented by dialogue and first person narration , and the diegetic component by descriptions and third person narration. For the purely diegetic class Plato was at a loss to find an example, because there is really no narrative genre that forbids direct quotation. He came up with the dithyramb, a lyric genre of ancient Greece. Later generations extended the dithyramb into poetry in general, and this is how the basic triad of lyric, dramatic and epic was born. All the genres of a given culture and period could then be organized into one of these categories. The dramatic held comedy and tragedy, the epic held the novel and all of its subgenres, and the lyric held all formal types of poetry—the sonnet, the rondeau, the madrigal--, and later on all relatively short texts printed in such a way as to give significance to the contrast between black and white spaces. The three basic genres were later associated with specific attitudes toward life, or world-views: there was the lyric, the dramatic, and the epic world views. By turning the originally formal categories into semantic ones, this move emancipated them from the three genres. There could now be lyric dramas, epic poems, and dramatic novels.

The systematic approach to genres presupposes that genres are constituted by their opposition to the other members of the system. This was also Saussure's conception of language: "in language," he wrote, "there are only differences *without positive terms*" (1966:120; emphasis original). For Saussure, words are not defined by their relations to things in the world, but by their relations to other words. But many genres are positively defined by their particular content, this is to say, by something in the world, and not by differential relations. We know that there is a genre called the fantastic because it deals with a world populated by both humans and supernatural creatures, and this world vaguely corresponds to the Middle Ages. We also know that there is a genre called mystery story because it deals with the solving of crimes by a detective. But we don't really need to compare the fantastic with mystery stories to define either category. Also, insofar as systematic approaches rely on differences rather than on positively

defined features, they do not allow hybrids. If the essence of the mystery story lies in the fact that it is not science fiction or the fantastic, we could not have science fiction mysteries or fantastic science fiction such as *Star Wars*.

The alternative to a system-based conception of genres is to regard individual genres as elements of an unstructured, expandable, heterogeneous and ever changing list. In this approach, genres are defined positively—by their semantic content, their formal rules, or their pragmatic function; different people are competent in different genres (for instance you may be an expert in medieval forms of poetry and I may an expert in the genres of legal discourse); and new genres develop when new needs arise for communication, or when the success of a text implementing an original group of features—for instance, a combination of realistic setting and supernatural elements -- inspires imitations. Conversely, genres become dormant when certain groups of features are no longer produced, either because the needs are no longer there, or because they have fallen out of fashion. But in the literary domain, unlike in the practical domain, genres never totally disappear, since the texts that represent obsolete forms still exist and can still be read.

The conception of genres as members of an unstructured list is certainly less elegant than the wheel, squares, or triangle systems proposed by literary critics, but it is much more flexible, since it can always accommodate new genres and hybrid genres, and more importantly, it is not restricted to literary genres. But this flexibility can be seen as negative. The systems are pretty stable, because they rely on a single type of criterion, and this criterion can function as a discovery procedure; but the lists accept any type of distinctive feature, and there is no discovery procedure that make it possible to tell what is a genre and what is not. One can make lists of three genres as well as lists of hundreds of genres. How then is it possible to tell which ones are useful and which ones are not ?

Genre *versus* media

How does the concept of genre relate to the concept of medium? While most people agree that film and TV are media and that sonnets and novels are genres, some concepts do not fall easily on either side of the border. Take for instance drama. In the triadic division of literature into lyric, epic and dramatic drama is considered a genre because it usually relies on texts, and these texts are read in literature classes. But as Gérard Genette has argued in *The Architext*, the distinction of the dramatic from the lyric and epic genres relies on a different type of criterion, which Genette calls the mode of enunciation: it is spoken by actors, rather than being inscribed on paper. I will go farther—drama is more than a mode of discourse (the term mode, really, does not mean anything), it is a medium in its own right, relying on different types of signs than written literature. Or rather, drama is a medium when considered as performance, and a genre when considered as text, though we should remember that the purpose of the dramatic text is to serve as direction for performance.

Both genres and media are types, or classes within a larger category; the first step in trying to capture their difference is therefore to define this category. For media, I propose communication. Media are types of communication. For genre, the answer is media. Genres are divisions within a medium. For instance, there are genres of TV (news broadcasts, series, serials, reality TV, sports, etc.), genres within film (drama, action, comedy, documentary, shorts), genres within painting (landscape, historical, portraits, and even the genre called genre painting). But why do we need to distinguish media from genres? After all, there are submedia within media;

why couldn't genres be regarded as a lower level of submedia? We could for instance regard written language as a medium of communication, literature as a submedium of written language, the novel as a submedium of literature, and thrillers as a submedium of the novel. Is it a pure matter of convention to call the lower categories "genres" and the higher ones "medium", or is there a breach of continuity, a qualitative difference, between media and genres?

I believe that there is a significant difference, and in Ryan 2006, I proposed that it is based on what comes first: the chicken or the egg. Let individual artifacts (or texts) be the chickens and genre and media be the egg. With genres, the chicken comes first. Genres originate in innovative texts that create a desire to duplicate their properties. For instance, somebody writes a novel with an original combination of real-world setting with fantastic elements; the combination is successful; other authors imitate it, and the genre of fantastic realism is born. With media it is the other way around. Somebody invents a new medium (a new egg) that offers new possibilities of expression. Then authors use this medium to create texts that actualize these possibilities: the egg has produced chickens. The medium is the material support of the text, and texts cannot come into existence without a material support. The medium must therefore come first.

Another way to distinguish media from genres is to look at what they are made of, and at why we choose them over their neighbors. Media are made of affordances; we choose them because of their expressive possibilities, and we try to work around their limitations. These affordances are inherent to the semiotic substance of the medium or to its technology of representation. Genres by contrast are made of rules, conventions and restrictions. These rules are man-made, and they are deliberately selected because they allow efficient communication. They work by narrowing down the field of the possible and channeling expectations, making it possible for users to make concerted choices. The affordances of media, by contrast, work by opening possibilities of expression different from those of other media.

Still, these considerations are approximative, and they do not constitute an absolute, fool-proof way to tell what is a medium and what is a genre. The border between media and genres is relatively stable in traditional media, but it is very difficult to define in the case of the various applications of digital technology. Are applications such as email, blogs, micro-blogs (that is, Twitter), hypertext, and video games the submedia, or are they the genres of digital textuality? John Frow, the author of a recent book on genre in the Routledge series New Critical Idiom, chooses to treat them as genres (2015:150-55). He does so in two ways. First he connects them to established older genres. For instance, blogs replace diaries and ship logs; email replaces letters and the telegraph. But the genealogical argument is unconvincing; email replaces snail mail, but it cannot be said to descend from it. It just fulfills the same pragmatic function in a more efficient way. And there is no genealogy for Twitter: it is an entirely new phenomenon. Second, Frow demonstrates that these so-called genres are regulated by conventions: for instance, the reverse chronological order, the comment section and the links to other documents for blogs; the length limit, the hashtags, the retweet function and the followers list for micro-blogs, and for email, the citation of former messages, the organization into conversations, and the possibility to save them into distinct mailboxes. But in contrast to the rules of literary genres, these so-called conventions are not freely adopted by users, the way an author decides to write a comedy or a sonnet; rather, they are imposed by the code of the application.

If one applies the chicken-and-egg criterion to digital applications, then they are media rather than genres: the email code had to be created first before people could exchange email, and Twitter had to be created before people could send micro-blogs. On the other hand, if one

associates media with affordances and genres with constraints, as I have suggested above, it is questionable whether the constitutive features of digital applications are affordances or limitations. Do they allow users to do things that cannot be done with other applications, or do they force them into a fixed pattern of behavior? The answer is probably both, and this is why it is so difficult to decide whether they are genres or submedia. But if one steps one level down, digital applications can certainly give rise to various genres. For instance, within computer games, there are the genres of God games, first-person shooters, casual games, and environmental games; within blogs there are "campaign blogs, health blogs, law blogs, news blogs and countless others" (Frow 2015:155).

To sum up the argument: what makes the distinction between media and genres so difficult with digital technology is the fact that every application is the product of a code that rigidly determines what users can and cannot do. This control of behavior by code can be seen as both affordance and limitation. But is it really necessary to decide whether the various kinds of social media are genres or submedia? Does their classification into one or the other of these categories have important theoretical implications? I doubt it. Yet it would be wrong to say that because we cannot tell what is a genre and what is a medium in digital texts, the border is inherently fuzzy and we should give up the distinction between genres and media. I believe that the importance of the distinction depends on the domain of investigation, as well as on the purpose of the investigator.

Facts and truth

I will treat facts and truth as correlates, since a fact is the referent of a true proposition. Now that we have supposedly entered the age of post-truth, an age marked by the Brexit vote and the election of Donald Trump as U.S. President, facts and truth have become endangered species in political discourse. Post-truth was selected the 2016 Word of the Year by the Oxford Dictionaries. It is defined as "relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief." [2] According to philosopher Lee McIntire (2018), the origin of the post-truth phenomenon lies, at least in part, and rather paradoxically, in the philosophies that dominated academia in the 80s and 90s. Following Nietzsche and his claim that there are no facts, only interpretations, postmodernism and deconstruction regard truth and knowledge as the product of relations of power and dominance. If postmodernism endorses a theory of truth, this is truth as dictated by power, truth as consensus, or maybe truth as coherence, but it rejects any idea of truth based on correspondence between the world and its representations. In literary matters, this critique of truth led to what I have called the doctrine of Panfictionality (Ryan 1997), namely the claim that all narratives are inherently fictional, because they construct reality, through the choice of information and its arrangement into causal sequences, rather than passively reflecting it like a mirror. Post-truth means that no fact can get in the way of your beliefs, since facts, to quote Roland Barthes, "have only a linguistic existence" (Barthes 1981a:16). In the present political climate, it is as urgent to rehabilitate the notions of fact and truth, as it seemed important to question their foundations at the end of the twentieth century.

Rehabilitating these notions does not mean that we have to find a definitive answer to the question of their nature, a question that has preoccupied philosophers for centuries. We can rely instead on the fact that most people have an intuitive idea of the difference between texts that assert facts and claim truth and texts that present themselves as products of the imagination. This

means that we can approach facts and truth from a communicative rather than from an ontological perspective. Here I will regard facts as the referent of true propositions; propositions, in turn are the semantic content of assertions. According to Searle (1969), a speech act of assertion is felicitous when the sender believes in the truth of the proposition he is asserting, has valid reasons to do so, and wants the receiver to share this belief. A non-felicitous assertion can fail in two ways: either the proposition is not true, in which case we have honest error; or the sender does not believe in its truth, but wants the receiver to do so, in which case he is lying. If we regard truth as a relation between a proposition and a state of affairs existing in the world, it follows that there is a strong connection between making truth claims and language as a medium of expression. Language is indeed the only medium that can articulate definite meaning. To see this, compare the proposition "the cat is on the mat" with the image of a cat on a mat. While the sentence asserts a specific proposition, excluding others (such as "the cat is sleeping," "the cat is black," etc.), the image is unable to do so because it represents an infinity of visual properties. Even with a painting titled *Cat on a Mat*, spectators will see far more in it than the location of the cat. The sentence, by contrast, limits representation to a single proposition, this is to say, to a definite fact.

Media, genres and truth claims

Language-based media are not the only way to claim truth for certain facts. In everyday life, we form beliefs on the basis of direct observation; for instance, if we witness an accident, we will believe our senses and we will hold the proposition "an accident happened" for true. Now imagine that instead of witnessing an event directly, we watch it on a video recording on TV, YouTube, or through a surveillance camera. Then we are also entitled to regard the proposition "the event happened" as fact, even though the recording does not explicitly state the proposition. Kendall Walton (1984) has suggested that automatic, mechanical captures of the world such as photos and videos should be considered aides in visualization, comparable to glasses and telescopes. If seeing and hearing directly have a testimonial value that lead to beliefs in certain propositions, so do (though perhaps to a lesser degree) the mediated forms of seeing and hearing. This is why video and audio recording can be used as evidence in a trial. An image obtained by mechanical means is not only an *icon* that bears a visual or aural resemblance to an object, it is also an *index* related to this object by a causal relation: the properties of the object determine the properties of the image, even when they are not exactly identical. By contrast, a man-made image such as a drawing or painting is only an icon of the thing it represents, and it does not have the power to assert its existence. Man-made images have consequently a far reduced power to represent facts and to create knowledge, compared to images obtained by mechanical means. The truth of man-made images can only be a matter of visual appearance—of iconicity—and this truth is always relative, a matter of degree. By contrast, the truth of an image captured by mechanical means is a matter of existence: as Roland Barthes observed about photography, "with a photo I cannot doubt that the thing has been there" (1981b, 76).[3]

The point I want to make is that media, because of their different semiotic substance, differ from each other in their power to claim truth. If a medium can make truth claims, it can also be used for fiction, since fiction consists of pretending to make truth claims, or, to use the model of Possible Worlds theory (Bell and Ryan 2019), fiction consists of making truth claims for a world that is not our own actual world. Some media can be used for both fact and fiction; this is the case for media that rely on language as their basic mode of expression, as well as for

media that rely on automatic capture, namely film and photography. But not all communicative artifacts are either fictional or factual: media such as architecture or music stand outside the fiction/fact dichotomy, because their material is not a type of sign.

While all media that are capable of fiction are also capable of factuality, the reverse does not hold true: there are media that can be used for fiction but not to assert truths for the real world. One of them is the theater. Insofar as it consists of actors pretending to be characters, it is based on make-believe, and it is therefore inherently fictional, even when the performed text relies on true facts. If the actors were being themselves and if the text directly expressed their own opinions, this would be public speaking rather than theater. Another medium limited to fiction is computer games. Even when they are based on true information, as is the case for educational games, the mere fact that the player impersonates an avatar, and that there can be many different outcomes to the game, disqualifies the events caused by the player's actions from being true for the real world. Games rely on computer simulations, and computer simulations can use already known facts to make predictions about the future, but there is an ontological difference between predictions and facts.

While many media lend themselves to both truth and fiction, the question of truth is constitutive of genre. By this claim I mean that all texts of the same genre must share the same status with respect to the fact vs. fiction divide. If you want facts, you will read news, scientific papers, history, and biographies, and you will watch documentary films. If you want fiction you will read novels, short stories, comics, and you will watch plays, cartoons and acted movies.

I would like to conclude this discussion by addressing two possible objections to the claim that all texts of the same genres share the same status with respect to truth. One concerns novels. Many novels contain lots of facts; for instance, historical novels such as Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose*, or Karl Ove Knausgaard's multi-volume *My Struggle*, which is based on the day-to-day life of the author and on his relations to real people, but which he nevertheless choose to label novel rather than autobiography. Readers assume that authors have done their research, and they are often tempted to learn from these works about the real world. This is certainly the case for me; *The Name of the Rose* greatly contributed to my knowledge of the medieval world, because I trust the erudition of the author. I also got glimpses of Scandinavian society from reading *My Struggle*. But when authors call their work novels, they create a fictional storyworld, and even if they use verified facts to construe this world, they are not responsible for asserting these facts. The true facts that appear in fiction are not novel information discovered by the author, as would be the findings of historians, but established knowledge that is being used, but not presented as new. Moreover, it is not important for the reader to sort out what is true and what is not. With the exception of the declarations of unreliable narrators, all the propositions asserted in a fiction should be regarded by readers as "fictional truths," that is, as true in make-believe (Walton 1990). Fictional worlds can stand at various distances from the real world, they can be very remote, like the worlds of fantasy or science fiction, and they can be very close, like the worlds of faction or historical novels, but they are not the real world. They can overlap to some degree with the real world, and this may tempt some readers to extract facts from fictions, but readers will do so at their own risk: *caveat lector*. You would never quote knowledge derived from *The Name of the Rose* in a history paper.

The second possible objection is that some supposedly factual genres actually present variable combinations of facts and invention, and that the binary distinction factual-fictional, or true-false is too rigid to account for them. One of these genres is autobiography. It contrasts with biography and history in that authors can make assertions about themselves without documenting

them, since they are the only one to know. Insofar as memory is unreliable, it is often impossible to tell what is true and what is not, especially when authors dwell on deeply private matters. The other genre is conversational narratives of personal experience. The audience expects the story to be true in its broad lines, but the storyteller is granted some freedom with the facts in order to make the narrative performance more enjoyable. For instance, dialogues enliven the performance, but the audience does not expect from the storyteller to remembers precisely what everybody said. Yet as a whole these stories are not fiction. The divide fact/fiction is clearly too rigid for these borderline genres. My way to deal with this problem is to distinguish two degrees of factuality. Strong factuality is represented by genres such as history, science writing and news; weak factuality, by autobiography and conversational narrative.

A similar distinction between strong and weak forms can arguably be made within fiction: when the storyworld of a novel stands close to the actual world, and this proximity is a great part of its appeal, we could call this weak fictionality. When a storyworld is far remote from the actual world, and when the major source of its appeal is the author's power of invention, as we find in fantasy, we could have a case of strong fictionality. There would consequently be a continuum leading from strong factuality to weak factuality, weak fictionality, and strong fictionality. This is a tempting model, but I believe that the divide between factuality and fictionality is stronger and of a different nature that the divide between weak and strong forms on either side of the continuum. It is stronger, because it is a matter of reference world and of authorial responsibility. By proposing their work as fiction or as fact, authors make an ethical commitment. On the factual side, the narrative is about our world, even if it departs from it on the level of detail; on the fictional side, the narrative is about a world that may resemble reality, a world that may represent how reality could be or could have been, but it remains an ontologically different world.

If we adopt the continuum solution, texts can be more or less fictional and more or less true. This solution is easy, and it accords with the general suspicion of binaries that characterizes contemporary thought; but it does not tell us at what point authors are held responsible for truth, and at what point they can freely invent. If we regard the distinction between fact and fiction as strict and binary, but distinguish strong from weak factuality, then we have three categories: in category 1, strong factuality, authors must adhere strictly to documented facts; in (2), weak factuality, authors assume responsibility for the truth of the story on the global level, but they are allowed to fill in blanks on the local level by using their imagination; in (3), fiction proper, the storyworld is presented for its own sake, as different from the real world. Category 3 encompasses both fictions that project a realistic world, such as *Anna Karenina*, and fantastic genres such as *Lord of the Rings*. There is consequently an asymmetry in this model, since factuality can be stronger or weaker, but there are no degrees of fictionality. At the limit a text could be entirely made of statements that happen to be true in the real world, but by labelling it fiction, the author would not assume responsibility for its truth.[4]

Conclusion

Through this examination of the relations between media, genres, facts and truth, I hope to have strengthened the foundation of a narrative theory that extends beyond its traditional territory of literary fiction. This extension would rest on shaky ground, if we were unable to define the key factors of narrative diversification. Media take us beyond language and literature; genre, beyond novels and short stories; fact and truth, beyond fiction.

[1] According to Latin usage, I use medium in the singular and media in the plural.
[2] https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/post-truth
[3] This testimonial value is nowadays seriously jeopardized by the ability of Artificial Intelligence to generate realistic sequences of images that place representations of real persons in imaginary situations. Automatic capture can no longer be distinguished from made-up images, and everybody can therefore be shown committing a crime. Still, it is by analyzing photos and films of people, this is to say, by relying on mechanical capture, that these systems are able to create fake reality.
[4] This is, I assume, what Noël Carroll means when he describes fiction as the act of presenting propositions unasserted.

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