

Introduction: Unnatural and Cognitive Perspectives on Narrative (A Theory Crossover)

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Abstract This special issue presents a “crossover” between two strands of contemporary narrative theory: a second-generation cognitive approach that foregrounds the linkage of stories, mind, and the human body; and an unnatural approach, which focuses on narratives that depart from and challenge everyday cognitive parameters, including those involved in so-called literary realism. In this introduction to the special issue, we take our cue from Franz Kafka’s “Wish to Become a Red Indian” (a paragraph-long short story) to illustrate these ways of theorizing about narrative and to

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discuss the conceptual divides that separate them. From an unnatural perspective, the cognitive approach flattens narrative to real-world psychology; from a cognitive perspective, the unnatural approach ignores the way that every narrative, no matter how challenging or innovative, exploits our cognitive makeup. By examining these assumptions and by tracing the history of cognitive and unnatural models of narrative, this special issue seeks to move beyond a conceptual standoff between them. The essays collected in the issue demonstrate that it is possible to combine a cognitive approach with an interest in unnatural stories — or, conversely, an unnatural approach and attention to the cognitive and embodied dynamics of narrative. In addition to previewing the arguments advanced in the articles, this introduction explicates the innovative method of scholarly collaboration through which the articles came about, and the different results it produced in each case.

Keywords narratology, interpretation, defamiliarization, mimetic bias, embodiment

Wenn man doch ein Indianer wäre, gleich bereit, und auf dem rennenden Pferde, schief in der Luft, immer wieder kurz erzitterte über dem zitternden Boden, bis man die Sporen ließ, denn es gab keine Sporen, bis man die Zügel wegwarf, denn es gab keine Zügel, und kaum das Land vor sich als glatt gemähte Heide sah, schon ohne Pferdehals und Pferdekopf.

Franz Kafka, “Wunsch, Indianer zu werden”

Oh to be a Red Indian, ready in an instant, riding a swift horse, aslant in the air, thundering again and again over the thundering earth, until you let the spurs go, for there weren't any spurs, until you cast off the reins, for there weren't any reins, and you scarcely saw the land ahead of you as close-cropped scrub, being already without horse's neck and horse's head!

Franz Kafka, “Wish to Become a Red Indian”

Two Possible Readings

Here is a way of reading Franz Kafka's “Wish to Become a Red Indian” (2009 [1913]; for the German original, see Kafka 2013): in just one hypothetical sentence, Kafka's text captures the narrator's longing for freedom and fluidity of movement. The initial *wenn* (in the sense of “if only,” but rendered as an exclamation in the English translation) suggests that this is an impossible scenario, given the narrator's present circumstances; the remainder of the sentence deepens that feeling of impossibility, building up to the paradoxical disappearance of the horse's neck and head. As Carolin Duttlinger puts it in her reading of the text, what “remains is a sense of pure movement: a movement across space, but also the movement of the text” (2013: 24). From the perspective of a cognitive approach to literature, Kafka's story achieves evoc-

ativeness through its close integration of theme, syntax, and psychological effects. Note that the hypothetical body of the American Indian is never referred to directly, and yet, as soon as they read about the “racing horse, leaning against the wind,” readers cannot but conjure up a sketchy image of someone—perhaps the American Indian, perhaps themselves—riding the horse. The animal’s motion, and therefore the rider’s implied motion, draws readers into this fictional situation, asking them to experience the shedding of the spurs and reins in a first-person way, as if they enacted those gestures on the character’s behalf. Syntactically, the juxtaposition of short phrases divided by commas creates a sense of pace and rhythm, which resonate with and reinforce the readers’ imagination of movement. All this contributes to readers’ surprise when, in the final clause, most of the horse is literally jerked away from under their bodies.

This analysis of the reading experience of this passage is admittedly speculative, but it is consistent with work in the mind sciences, particularly work produced under the heading of “embodied cognition” (e.g., Gibbs 2005). The focus of this movement is the human body and how it deeply informs cognitive processes, shaping even the comprehension and appreciation of a literary text as sophisticated as Kafka’s “Wish.” Research on the embodiment of language suggests that understanding verbal cues involves the activation of “experiential traces” (Zwaan 2008) derived from our engagement with the material world; for instance, physical impressions of motion, or of dropping something (such as the spurs or the reins), or of seeing a vast expanse of land are interwoven into our experience of Kafka’s text. The upshot is that readers make sense of this sentence by piecing together—more or less consciously—memories of past embodied interactions. Likewise, the sense of expectation created by the narrator’s wishful imagination and the increasing puzzlement that readers may experience are deeply affective, embodied sensations.

Here is another way of reading Kafka’s text: perhaps the most basic question one can ask about a narrative is what it is about. Stories become stories by telling us about things (experiences, events, exchanges) that are happening to or because of someone (individuals, identities, American Indians). Kafka’s text does at first sight appear to be populated with things and existents: a “swift horse,” a “thundering earth,” “spurs,” “reins,” “a land,” and an “Indian.” These appearances, however, turn out to be conjured up only to have their initial nonexistence emphasized. Upon closer inspection, most of what might appear solid in the text is under erasure. This happens through a narrative of sorts, in the form of a process of transformation in three phases. Phase 1 consists of the first five half-sentences, in an ever-accelerating buildup: from wish and readiness, to riding, to being almost airborne to thundering across the land. In a symmetrical composition, phase 3 also consists of five half-

sentences. They “denarrate,” to use Brian Richardson’s (2001) term, the existence of what was presented in phase 1. Missing are now the spurs, the reins, the visible land, the horse’s neck and head. This leaves phase 2, the one half-sentence linking the bringing forth done by phase 1 and the negating done by phase 3, as literally speaking the central part of the text. “To let the spurs go”, *die Sporen lassen*, stands at the center of the process by which the narrative calls something forth and sends it into oblivion, thus rendering effortful any final judgments about what the text is about, even hindering them. Several different readings must be performed simultaneously: to let go means stopping doing something, but it can also mean stopping holding back. The climax, urging life forward in ever-increasing movement, is also the anticlimax. The epitome of vital action is already inscribed with disappearances.

The permanent defamiliarization produced by the oscillations between being and nonbeing echoes throughout the text. There is no narrating *I*, no personalized *ich*, only the indefinite pronoun *man*, which is used in impersonal constructions (the equivalent of the English *one* in a sentence like “one has to be patient”). Kafka’s story is not narrated in the first or third person. The same holds true for the title: *Wunsch, Indianer zu werden*. It is all wish and no subject. Furthermore, the words *gleich bereit* are central. They suggest at one and the same time speed, readiness, and riding on horseback (*beritten* in German). The desubjectified wish to be an American Indian turns out to be altogether about being or not being (on) a horse. There is not a single word about the American Indian’s identity, but only words about the horse: *Pferde, Sporen, Zügel, Pferdehals, Pferdekopf*. But then even the horse, that the American Indian is not, is not there. It doesn’t even disappear but is never there. The wish turns out to be a wish to be nothing, to be something that is not. One can notice the strangeness and outright grammatical unnaturalness of the second part of the rhyming pair of words *wenn* and *denn*, with *denn* rendered in English as “for,” though it could also be translated as “because.” As opposed to *aber*, which would be expected in its place, *denn* suggests a bewildering coherence and causality where *man*/“you” lets go of the spurs and throws away the reins because they aren’t there. Instead of, as it might seem at first glance, being a story about one person dreaming of being another person, it becomes one about absence and nonsubjectivity. There is no one wishing and no one wished for, but only pure wish annihilating both. The text is about potentiality rather than actuality, as shown by the fact that it is cast entirely in the German subjunctive mode (*wäre*). It is about absence rather than essence. The *denn* makes sense, in this perspective, as affirming the pure *Wunsch* without subject and without object. *Man* can let go of imagining specific spurs, reins, and horses because they are not there.

In this special issue, we seek to open a dialogue between two approaches to literature, each representing a major strand in contemporary narrative theory, namely, the strand known as “second-generation cognitive narratology” and the strand known as “unnatural narratology.” These two takes on Franz Kafka’s early text hint at some of the themes and concerns this dialogue brings to the fore—issues at the very heart of attempts to make sense of literary sense making. The first take is an example of a reading informed by a “second-generation” cognitive approach to literature, as formulated by two of the coeditors (Kukkonen and Caracciolo 2014). This approach investigates the workings of literary narrative through the lens of embodied cognition. It falls into the now established field of cognitive literary studies (Zunshine 2015), but it emphasizes the body’s share in experiencing and interpreting literary texts, and literary narratives more specifically. The second take is an example of a reading informed by “unnatural narratology,” as formulated by the three other coeditors (Alber 2016; Iversen 2016; Nielsen 2013). Without automatically resorting to methods and tools based on how typical, everyday, so-called natural narrative functions, unnatural narratology aims to investigate narratives that are unnatural insofar as they subvert, challenge, or deconstruct conventional storytelling practices.

The Conceptual Backdrops of Our Two Readings

From the perspective of unnatural narratology, it makes sense to discuss critically whether a cognitive reading that focuses on embodiment and experiential traces does not involve a number of questionable presuppositions about both fictional narratives and their readers. In addition, it is important to sketch out affirmatively what an unnatural reading might contribute to Kafka’s narrative and to one’s understanding of it. On a general level, it is difficult, if not impossible, to fully grasp such unnatural narrative phenomena as, say, omniscience (or zero focalization) and retrogressive temporalities (Alber 2013; Nielsen 2013), which transcend real-world possibilities and at the same time flourish in fictional narratives, on the basis of experiential backgrounds only. Since these phenomena constitute impossibilities in the actual world, the pool of our prior experiences that representatives of second-generation cognitive approaches seek to foreground (Caracciolo 2014a; Kukkonen and Caracciolo 2014) cannot possibly contain information about them. When we are confronted with manifestations of the unnatural, the readers’ task becomes both interesting and Sisyphean: they are invited to enact seemingly impossible experiences within storyworlds that refuse to be organized through recourse to prior experiences (Alber 2016). For obvious

reasons, such enactments cannot be done on the basis of experiential traces only.

In addition, certain readers of fictional narratives (and unnatural narratologists are certainly among them) are first and foremost interested in textual phenomena that cannot easily be accounted for by reference to their experiential backgrounds or human experience in general. Instead, such readers look for the weird, the strange, the baffling, the outlandish, the inexplicable, or simply that which cannot easily be accounted for. From their perspective, these breaches or holes in easily determinable meaning concern what fictional narratives are ultimately about—this is, in a nutshell, why they want to read fiction (Iversen 2013; Mäkelä 2013; Richardson 2015). Lisa Zunshine, a representative of the first generation of cognitive approaches to narrative, writes that “our enjoyment of fiction is predicated—at least in part—upon our awareness of our ‘trying on’ mental states potentially available to us but at a given moment differing from our own” (2006: 17). Furthermore, “by imagining the hidden mental states of fictional characters, by following the readily available representations of such states throughout the narrative, and by comparing our interpretation of what the given character must be feeling at a given moment . . . , we deliver a rich stimulation to the cognitive adaptations constituting our Theory of Mind” (ibid.: 24–25). Second-generation cognitive narratologists obviously go one step further by taking the embodiment of our minds and the idea of evaluative engagements into consideration. Ultimately, however, they also primarily see fiction as a training ground that enables readers to invoke or enact human experiences of various sorts; they assume a continuum between real-world experiences and fictional narratives. For unnatural narratologists, this approach does not sufficiently account for the numerous fictional constellations that defy explanations in terms of experiential traces, because they go beyond human experiences.

Let us zoom in on the first reading presented above: this cognitive interpretation is of course convincing and especially interesting in what it has to say about the hypothetical rider and horse and about the rhythm of the text. It has a keen eye for the impossibility of the scenario and for the paradoxical and surprising disappearance of the horse. This is a perceptive reading and one that an unnatural theorist can (at least in principle) subscribe to.

Given its interest in real-world cognition and embodiment, however, this cognitive reading makes assumptions about Kafka’s narrative and its readers that are neither indisputable nor self-evident. From an unnatural perspective, three presuppositions are particularly questionable. First, for an unnatural narratologist, there is not necessarily a person-like narrator behind the text who could be argued to be “longing for freedom” and/or constrained by (his or her) “present circumstances.” By contrast, an unnatural reading is based

on the fundamental artificiality of all textual phenomena. Second, readers do not necessarily behave or think as cognitivists stipulate. It is argued above that “readers cannot but conjure up a sketchy image of someone—perhaps the American Indian, perhaps themselves—riding the horse. The animal’s motion, and therefore the rider’s implied motion, draws readers into this fictional situation, asking them to experience the shedding of the spurs and reins in a first-person way, as if they enacted those gestures on the character’s behalf.” It only takes one person to falsify this assumption. From this perspective, cognitive presuppositions about what *all* readers do (or sometimes even *should* do) have a highly questionable status. Such decisions seem to be a matter of interpretive options or reading choices rather than norms or rules.¹ Third, it is unclear that readers really make sense of narratives “by piecing together—more or less consciously—memories of past embodied interactions.” Few readers have experience with spurs and reins, and no reader has experience with letting go of spurs and reins that were, explicitly and emphatically, never there. How could experiential traces help in such cases?

Kafka’s narrative thus seems to obstruct rather than solicit embodiment. The perceptiveness and subtlety of the above reading appears to be complicated rather than facilitated by cognitive assumptions that preexist the reading. These assumptions are unnecessary at best. By contrast, an unnatural reading of the text would seem to make no prior assumptions that are not actually validated by the text itself. Unnatural narratology thus involves a more open approach that does not try to impose cognitive presuppositions on the text. Perhaps what the Romantic poet John Keats called “negative capability” can be used as a way of thinking about an alternative attitude: the state of being in “uncertainties, mysteries, doubts without any irritable reaching after fact or reason” (Keats 1935: 72).

From the perspective of second-generation narratology, Kafka’s text has the potential to create the experience of riding a horse, with the rhythmic, fleeting movement involved, as well as the realization that there is no actual horse that can serve as the grounds for this experience. In fact, the power of this realization lies in the ambiguity that the presence of the horse is falling away while the text still carries the immersive experience of horse riding. The

1. Indeed, in this context, Marisa Bortolussi and Peter Dixon state that “how readers process narrative is essentially an empirical question that can only be answered by systematic observation of actual readers reading actual texts; it cannot be answered solely on the basis of intuition, anecdotal evidence, or even sophisticated models of human experience” (2003: 13). At RWTH Aachen University, Jan Alber is currently working on an empirical investigation that concerns how real (flesh-and-blood) readers try to come to terms with fictional narratives that contain unnatural scenarios and events.

complexity of Kafka's text here reveals the multifacetedness of an embodied cognitive approach to literature.

The embodied language of the text does not depend on a simple correlation with actual real-world experiences. Even if you have never ridden a horse, embodied language can draw on existing "experiential traces" (Zwaan 2008; see also Caracciolo 2014a) that approximate the experience described. Narrative can thus develop its own design for ambiguous, unlikely, or unreal cues that feed into the ways in which we predict and imagine bodies and their movement (Kukkonen 2016). Embodied cognition fuels the comprehension of what is not there and gives presence to language itself in its propositional content, rhythms, and sounds. Such an understanding of embodied cognition then provides the building blocks of a model of reading that captures the feeling of a real experience that comes out of the reader's exchange with a text.

Work on the embodied dimension of cognition, language comprehension, and literary reading more specifically is the basis of a complex reader model here and not a prescription for how all readers should and will read Kafka's text. Readers may or may not be consciously aware of their embodied experience while they engage with the text. They may or may not pay attention to the rhythm of the prose or inhabit the different meanings of *bereit* in more or less embodied ways. Indeed, readers might associate the source of the experience with a narrator figure, with a largely empty semantic center or with previous reading experiences. In the latter case, early twentieth-century readers might see Kafka condensing the pleasures of reading the novels of Karl May, fictions about the desire for the freedom enjoyed by the Apache Winnetou, which were popular when Kafka was a young reader. The "presupposition" that reading draws on embodied aspects of cognition does not delimit options for interpretation. On the contrary, it opens diverse perspectives on how language connects with readers' minds and bodies.

Second-generation cognitive approaches to literature have pursued an account of the complexity with which readers' embodied engagements play out. Conceptually, second-generation cognitive approaches are rooted in the turn toward embodied, embedded, extended, and enactive modes of cognition in psychology, neuroscience, and philosophy of mind. Evidence of the role that bodily processes play in our experience of the world, our comprehension of others, and our very reasoning comes from a variety of paradigms in the study of the mind (Bergen 2012; Damasio 2000; Rizzolatti and Sinigaglia 2008). Such evidence has been developed to outline diverse relations between the mind and the body in embodied cognition, between the individual and its social and cultural environment in embedded cognition, between the mind/body and technologies in extended cognition, and

through the affordances of the environment actualizing themselves in the bodily experience in enactive cognition. These strands of research provoke basic questions about what it means to consider thinking as rooted in the body and in the environment. They explore, for example, the degree to which we need mental imagery and representations for thought (Clark 2016) and the degree to which experience can be direct (Hutto 2017). Literature as a mediated form necessarily works with representations. However, as we have seen with Kafka, these representations can feel surprisingly direct.

Drawing on the full richness of the embodied mind, second-generation cognitive approaches seek to develop a set of theoretical connections and concepts for literary analysis without reducing “cognition” to a single dimension. The assumption, rather, is that cognitive-level biases and schemata arising from our embodied engagement with the world interact in important ways with each reader’s interests and presuppositions, giving rise to a feedback loop between cognition and culture (Caracciolo 2014b; Easterlin 2012; Kukkonen, 2018). The concept of embodiment is meant not as a yardstick for literary interpretation but as a focus allowing second-generation scholars to explore the underpinnings of interpretation, including the processes that, arguably, flow into the unnatural reading outlined above.

On This Special Issue: Tensions and the “Crossover” Model

So far Kafka’s short story has allowed us to stage a confrontation between two ways of reading fictional narrative: the “unnatural” and what we have called a “cognitive” (or, more specifically, a “second-generation”) approach. The disagreements that have emerged in the process are not new and can be traced in many of the polemics generated by narratologists over the last two decades. Consider, for instance, *Narrative Theory: Core Concepts and Critical Debates* (2012), a book coauthored by five leading narrative theorists (David Herman, James Phelan, Peter Rabinowitz, Brian Richardson, and Robyn Warhol). In many ways, the book casts David Herman’s mind-oriented approach to narrative as diametrically opposite to Brian Richardson’s version of unnatural narratology. Herman himself writes: “I disagree with what I take to be one of the central assumptions of Richardson’s approach: namely, that the study of what Richardson terms antimimetic narratives requires a different analytic framework than the study of what he calls mimetic narratives” (ibid.: 223). This divergence is not surprising, given that unnatural narrative theory itself largely developed in response to Monika Fludernik’s *Towards a “Natural” Narratology* (1996), one of the seminal contributions to cognitive narrative theory. But while the tensions between cognitive and unnatural approaches are well documented, few attempts have been made so far to

understand what is at stake in the encounter between them and to see whether dichotomous opposition is the only way forward. Exploring and explicating the stakes of this encounter are the goals of this special issue.

To make the dialogue between cognitive and unnatural narrative theory possible, we devised a somewhat experimental model of scholarly collaboration. Instead of commissioning or soliciting essays on topics defined by the authors themselves, the editorial team started by identifying eight concepts or issues that speak to both cognitive and unnatural narrative theories: event (as a basic building block of narrativity), fictional minds, fictionality, the tension between immersion and defamiliarization, interpretation, mediality (and particularly the challenges raised by narrative in digital media), mimesis, and narration and focalization (as fundamental aspects of narrative mediation). These issues are central to recent and long-standing debates in literary and narrative studies, allowing us to bring out discrepancies, as well as potential linkages and overlaps, between cognitive and unnatural approaches. Subsequently, we invited a number of established and emergent scholars from both camps to choose one of these issues and address it in coauthored articles. The only constraint was that each article had to be coauthored by at least one representative for cognitive and one for unnatural narratology. The model was that of a “crossover” episode in comic books or TV series, in which a set of characters leave the comforts of their home worlds and team up in order to engage in new challenges.

The collaborative process was kept as open-ended as possible: as editors, we did not suggest a specific format or even desired outcome but left the authors free to devise their own approach to this task. The results oscillate vastly in tone and method: in writing about “Mimesis” and “Event,” for instance, the authors developed a unified framework that takes into account input from both fields; in other cases (such as “Narrative Media,” “Fictionality,” “Fictional Minds,” or “Immersion and Defamiliarization”), a more guarded but still optimistic collaboration is envisioned; in one essay, “Narration and Focalization,” the authors stage an actual dialogue between two fictionalized versions of themselves; finally, in the essay on “Interpretation” the authors end by acknowledging the perhaps irreconcilable differences between cognitive and unnatural theories. Ultimately, the encounters of these articles are open to multiple readings, but the results, we think, are valuable and deeply thought provoking across the board, resonating with many current areas of investigation in narrative as well as literary studies.

Before offering an overview of the essays, it is worth pausing to reflect on cross-cutting themes and questions at the heart of all the contributions to this special issue. Two fundamental areas of tension, or fault lines, stand out. The first is a matter of emphasis: a commonly voiced objection is that the cognitive

approach is mimetically biased, because it underscores the continuity between engaging with fictional narrative and engaging with the physical world. This implies foregrounding narrative's adherence to real-world (and in this sense "mimetic") parameters; there is thus (unnatural theorists point out) a risk of sidelining the specificity of artistic and fictional practices.² Unnatural narratology, by contrast, emphasizes (or overemphasizes, cognitive scholars would argue) the *differences* between fictional narratives and real-world experience, including the forms of narrative that emerge in everyday conversation. A particularly debatable topic within this area of discussion is the status of fictional minds, that is, the mental processes readers ascribe to characters in fiction. Unnatural theorists take issue with Herman's (2011) critique of what he calls the "exceptionality thesis," which posits that fictional narrative can represent characters' minds in ways that are intrinsically different from our knowledge of other minds in real interactions. By contrast, for Herman the minds of fictional characters are not exceptional; readers do not enjoy an unmediated access to them—at least, no more than their understanding of other people's real minds is necessarily mediated. The debate around the "exceptionality thesis" (see Iversen 2013; Nielsen 2011, 2013) goes to the heart of the fundamental conceptual divergences between cognitive and unnatural narratology, namely, whether "natural" ways of understanding narratives (with our mind and bodies) can work for the unusual, exceptional, and sometimes downright impossible narratives we find in literature. More than a few contributions to this special issue argue over that point.

The second tension has to do with methodological issues. In his reflection on the state of the art in narrative theory, Roy Sommer distinguishes between "process-oriented" and "corpus-oriented" approaches to narrative. The former deal with the "conditions and processes of narrative comprehension" and interpretation more generally (2012: 152), while the latter are geared toward a specific set of texts that match an interpreter's formal, political, or thematic interests. The cognitive approach, as the authors of the articles included in this special issue practice it, is process oriented and tends to project individual narratives against a backdrop of responses and evaluations that can be generalized across readers and texts. For example, besides unnatural narratology, another "opposite" of cognitive narratology in *Narrative Theory* is Robyn Warhol's feminist take on narrative. Cognitive narratology, however, especially of the second generation, sees narratives as "situated" and is working toward cognitive accounts that take social, cultural, and gender aspects into consideration (Kukkonen 2016), yet without focusing on a

2. See also the "Mimesis" article in this volume, by Alber, Caracciolo, and Marchesini, which complicates the equation between mimesis and the simulation of real-world parameters.

particular corpus of texts. Unnatural narratology, on the other hand, foregrounds the interpretive and theoretical stakes of engaging with narratives that resist mimetic models. This approach emphasizes textual conventions, the extent to which they diverge from everyday language use, and (potentially) how they challenge customary interpretations. Reader responses may still be a factor in some versions of unnatural narratology (Alber 2009, 2016), but they are considered only in relation to a specific corpus defined by each unnatural theorist.

The tensions we have identified here are, of course, only ideal (and to some extent exaggerated) tendencies in each approach. We discuss in the next section, and in each article, how the authors have chosen to negotiate these tensions as they attempt to come to grips with eight theoretical issues from their respective positions.

Previewing the Articles

The articles fall into three sections. Those in the first section focus on “Underlying Issues,” that is, general problems that are central to the encounter between unnatural narratology and cognitive approaches. The concepts discussed here — mimesis and fictionality — play a crucial role in and are touched upon by all of the essays. Articles in the second section address “Strategies and Effects” and deal with how more specific narrative techniques (as well as their potential effects on readers) can be investigated from cognitive and unnatural perspectives. Important concepts in this context are narration, focalization, fictional minds, events, immersion, and defamiliarization. Articles in the third section (“Ramifications”) contextualize the encounter between unnatural narratology and cognitive approaches vis-à-vis broader issues such as interpretation and narrative media.

The “Underlying Issues” section begins with “Mimesis: The Unnatural between Situation Models and Interpretive Strategies,” by Jan Alber, Marco Caracciolo, and Irina Marchesini. The authors discuss the ways in which the interweaving of fictional and historical characters in D. M. Thomas’s novel *The White Hotel* (1981) foregrounds theoretical problems relating to the concept of mimesis. Building on Stephen Halliwell’s and Paul Ricoeur’s accounts of mimesis, the article argues in favor of a middle ground between what Halliwell calls “world-reflecting” and “world-simulating” conceptions. The essay as a whole synthesizes unnatural narrative theory and cognitive-level insights into readers’ engagement with narrative and argues that mimesis is a complex dynamic where readers both activate and adjust real-world parameters when making sense of literary texts. It concludes, on an analytical level, that readers will recuperate discrepancies between the real world and story-

worlds by adopting different kinds of interpretive strategies, and it demonstrates, on a theoretical level, that unnatural narrative can put pressure on received concepts of mimesis—especially those based on “world-reflecting” accounts, inviting accounts that better accommodate the “world-creating” component of mimesis.

The second article in this section, “Fictionality: Cognition and Exceptionality” by Karin Kukkonen and Henrik Skov Nielsen, discusses continuities and discontinuities between fictional practices and everyday cognition. Nielsen’s point of departure is how fictionality allows for unnatural strategies that build on invention in communication, which can obviously be found in fiction (e.g., the novel) but also plays a role in genres that are typically regarded as *nonfictional* (e.g., political speeches). For Kukkonen, by contrast, invention is not sufficient to define fictionality, which, revisiting Wolfgang Iser’s *The Fictive and the Imaginary* (1993) in light of second-generation cognitive science, she presents as the global coherence projected by artfully constructed texts. Their discussion of Hilary Mantel’s *Beyond Black* (2005) and Ian McEwan’s *On Chesil Beach* (2007) highlights the implications of different takes on fictionality for the analysis of literary texts. Despite their divergent definitions, the two approaches converge on the idea that readers’ engagement with fictional texts cannot be flattened to real-world parameters because fictionality opens up ways of thinking about the world that are not available in nonfictional communication.

The first article of the “Strategies and Effects” section is “Narration and Focalization: A Cognitivist and an Unnaturalist, Made Strange” by Maria Mäkelä and Merja Polvinen. Mäkelä and Polvinen reconsider the Genettean concepts of narration and focalization by looking at the interrelations between the Neanderthal people, the *Homo sapiens* “new people,” and the narrator in William Golding’s late modernist novel *The Inheritors* (1955). They engage in a (partly fictional) dialogue between a cognitive theorist called “Merja Polvinen” and an unnatural theorist called “Maria Mäkelä” in which the two synthetically constructed scholars are almost stereotypical in their theoretical purism. While Polvinen’s alter ego highlights the Neanderthals’ intensely sensory being-in-the-world and asserts that their focalization becomes imaginable and understandable in the process of embodied enactments, Mäkelä’s argues that one should not explain away all linguistic and narrative surplus in the interest of establishing cognitive verisimilitude. With regard to the novel’s lyrical and aestheticizing narrative voice, the two theorists stress that neither approach has done justice to its role as a sympathetic mediator of Neanderthal experiences. The two interlocutors ultimately join forces when they simultaneously explore the experiential immediacy and the peculiarly textual possibilities and constraints of literary fiction. They thus

manage to demonstrate how the cognitive environment of this novel's reader is different from what he or she would experience in reality.

In the article "Fictional Minds: Coming to Terms with the Unnatural," Lars Bernaerts and Brian Richardson discuss the mind of the gorilla narrator in *The Man I Became* (2016) by Belgian author Peter Verhelst. They argue that, since the novel's narrating *I* is humanized, while the experiencing *I* is a nonhuman animal, it makes sense to engage in a dialectics between a cognitive approach (which is mind oriented) and an unnatural one (which is more text oriented). Bernaerts and Richardson begin by reconsidering the process of mind reading as well as David Herman's (2011) rejection of the "exceptionality thesis" (discussed above). They point out that, for them, there remains a certain tension between fictional and real minds. In a second step, Bernaerts and Richardson look at selected passages from *The Man I Became* to engage in a dialogue between cognitive and unnatural narratology. The two scholars suggest that cognitively informed interpretive practice directed toward unnatural narratives may help to bridge the gap between the two approaches. As a matter of fact, they present an example of such a reading themselves: they read *The Man I Became* as a critical and dystopian novel by focusing on the interplay between the unnatural qualities of the first-person narrator and the cognitive realism of the novel's other fictional minds.

Christopher D. Kilgore and Dan Irving continue the discussion of strategies and effects by revisiting notions of the event in narrative. In their article "Event: From Object to Schema to System," they distinguish between understanding events in terms of an object in the story (as, for example, in the work of Seymour Chatman) and understanding them as constructed by readers in relation to mental schemata (as, for example, in the work of David Herman). Both these conceptualizations of event are insufficient, according to Kilgore and Irving, because they cannot capture certain unnatural modes of eventful narration. The authors therefore propose a third way for conceiving of event, namely, "event-as-system," and demonstrate how seeing events as emergent phenomena in a system allows for the analysis of events in the context of denarration and contradictory events. Event-as-system, as the conclusion indicates, might indeed be applied to any kind of narrative.

In their article "Immersion and Defamiliarization: Experiencing Literature and World," Miranda Anderson and Stefan Iversen bring the concepts of immersion and defamiliarization into dialogue and investigate the overlaps and differences between cognitive narratology and unnatural narratology. Their main argument is that seeing the two concepts as dichotomous and oppositional is reductive. They base their argument on readings of Chaucer's *The Book of the Duchess*, Borges's "The Circular Ruins," and Kafka's "A Country Doctor." Building on a reading of the passage from his *Biographia*

Literaria in which Coleridge famously writes about the “willing suspension of disbelief,” the authors suggest a scheme with four possibilities based on whether the text invites a high or low degree of suspension of disbelief, on the one hand, and whether it directs the attention mainly toward the fictional text or the real world, on the other hand. Arguing that Viktor Shklovsky’s account of defamiliarization has a wider range of functions than normally assumed allows for notions of defamiliarization to be intertwined with immersion—a process thematized by the authors’ three case studies.

The essay “Interpretation: Its Status as Object or Method of Study in Cognitive and Unnatural Narratology,” written by Steven Willemsen, Rikke Andersen Kraglund, and Emily T. Troscianko, opens the third section, “Ramifications.” This article sets out to address the proverbial elephant in the room for narratology and literary studies—the notion of interpretation. Beginning from the observation that readers’ interpretive engagement with literary narratives is where disagreements between cognitive and unnatural approaches most clearly come to the fore, the article dives into these disagreements by distinguishing between understanding interpretation as a method of study and understanding it as an object of study. Cognitive and unnatural narratology’s positions on how interpretation functions or ought to function when confronted with nonconventional types of storytelling are presented, leading to two different readings of Hans Christian Andersen’s “The Shadow,” which in turn produce two metareadings of the readings.

Our special issue closes with the article “Narrative Media: The Impossibilities of Digital Storytelling,” in which Jeff Thoss, Astrid Ensslin, and David Ciccoricco take on the challenge of digital media. They extend the debate between unnatural and cognitive approaches to multimodal and interactive narratives in video games and webcomics. In order to account for the specificity of these media, they set up a scale of unnatural features in narrative, ranging from violations of real-world physics (at one end of the scale) to violations of narrative conventions (at the opposite end), with various possibilities in between. The authors then position their four case studies (two video games, two webcomics) on this scale, bringing in second-generation cognitive models to explain aspects of both narrative design and audience response. The discussion shows how unnatural and cognitive narratology can work together toward a deepened understanding of the specific affordances of digital narrative and of its effects on players and readers.

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