



PRESENTATION

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The massive consolidation of information and communication technologies was celebrated at the turn of the last century as a historic opportunity for widespread access to information and knowledge in our modern societies: the utopia of an informed and rational citizenry. Now that we are well into the second quarter of the 21st century, many of those promises seem chimerical, with the rise of disinformation through social media and the current crisis of confidence in the veracity of information or in the relationship with representations based on images, sound, or audiovisual media. Although the phenomenon of the blurred relationship between reality and fiction is not entirely new and refers to discussions that, at least in the West, date back to the Sophists or Plato's critique of writing, it is legitimate to ask whether we are facing a real paradigm shift in this regard.

The critical-cultural perspective we propose in the Fic-Trans academic research project focuses the analysis on the theoretical foundations and discourses that underpin both the recent "success" of the concept of post-truth and the set of rhetorical and discursive strategies that operate at the boundaries between fictional and factual genres, seeking to explain or subvert the dominant perceptions of these boundaries in the current context. This issue therefore proposes a critical study of the risks and opportunities that emerge from the blurring and increasing loss of boundaries between fiction and nonfiction (Lavocat, 2016), with a special focus on contemporary visual culture, from its interrelation with both the concept of post-truth (McIntyre, 2018; Carrera, 2018) as well as with the concepts of intermediality and media hybridization (Sánchez-Mesa and Alberich, 2022).

On the other hand, as critical theories of mass media, new media, and digital cultures have taught us, fiction has always moved and played with the borderline spaces between reality and the fictional construction of that reality. However, in today's visual and media culture, we find a proliferation of works where the hybridization between fiction and nonfiction is exacerbated to the point of becoming particularly problematic and interesting from a theoretical and critical point of view. The documentary itself, traditionally and institutionally associated with the recording and representation of the historical world (Nichols 1999), is becoming more conscious and self-reflective (Catalá 2023), in a more complex space following the consolidation of a regime of relationship with reality profoundly modified by the massive impact of digital images and social networks. The emergence of technologies associated with Generative AI has only exacerbated a trend already evident on the digital horizon of post-photography (Fontcuberta, 2016).

Among the various limits that this critical exploration proposes to raise, there is one that is undoubtedly fundamental: those that mark the difference between documentary cinema and fiction cinema. These limits are certainly blurred, sometimes denied by part of film theory, and continue to be negotiated in an endless movement addressed in the opening article of the monograph by María José Higuera and José P. Pérez Ruffi. Given the discursive nature of any documentary narrative, the possible difference between audiovisual documentaries and fiction will depend on the specific qualities of their respective discourses, specific forms that are

catalogued and systematized in this work by reviewing the reference literature on this issue and then carrying out an analysis of their presence in a corpus of 33 series produced during the first quarter of the 21st century. The authors refer to these specific forms as “strategies” according to which there would be “a documentary audiovisual language,” distinguishing three types according to whether these strategies correspond to image, sound, or editing. These are formal conventions that lend authenticity and veracity to the fictional discourse of the series studied, where the hybridization of fiction and non-fiction emerges precisely from the confusion or play in the process of encoding and decoding languages and their respective conventions (p.11).

These techniques, common in documentaries as noted in the commentary on the audiovisual language of non-fiction formats, give fiction series an impression of authenticity and veracity that can blur the lines between reality and fiction. In any case, we are talking about stylistic conventions and impressions that refer to these conventions through precise rhetorical strategies, both in the case of non-fiction audiovisuals and fiction audiovisuals. The codification of resources or languages associated with fiction or non-fiction allows for their subsequent decoding by the audience. The hybridization between fiction and non-fiction arises from play, simulation, and confusion in the process of encoding and decoding languages, and from the respective conventions that lead to their formulation.

This oscillation or play on the boundaries between the genres of documentary and fiction depends in turn on normative, institutional, or regulatory frameworks within which the conditions of possibility for the production of works belonging to one or the other space, or both, are established. The cartography of this regulatory map, at the state and regional levels in the case of Spain, is the contribution of the article signed by Juan J. Feria and Francisco J. Gómez, who start from the hypothesis that the changes generated in contemporary media culture and its digital and transmedia context have favored experimentation and cross-fertilization in the space of so-called “nonfiction.” Readers of this article, which is solidly based on very comprehensive documentation, will see the mismatch between the richness and profusion of forms of hybridization at the boundaries of the different genres associated with documentary film and the regulatory frameworks that govern the possibilities of its limited distribution and exhibition circuit.

Along with the fascinating proliferation of forms of hybridization between factual and fictional discourses, the issue offers important insights into the role of intermediality in this web of creative possibilities between the arts and the media. This is the focus of Carlos Linares' article, which uses film and semiotic analysis tools to study the theatrical forms in the staging and planning of the Taviani brothers' film *Caesar Must Die* (), with special attention to the impact of Brechtian distancing techniques. The significance of intermediality, that is, the relationship and difference between the media specificity of theater and cinema in this case, proves fundamental to understanding the effects of this transmedialization, because the boundaries between reality and fiction are not the same for both media (arts). The different uses of theater in cinema (whether as content or as aesthetics or as a mode of expression and performance) introduce a fracture in the relationship between cinematic fiction and reality, emphasizing its constructed nature (p. 19) from a properly intermedial and transmedial notion of the political commitment of artistic forms.

If the previous work analyzes the creative possibilities of the transmedialization of theater in cinema, with the consequent addition of complexity of factual formal elements (body, co-presence in the event, exhibition of scenographic artifice, etc.) in fictional cinematic staging (the Taviani film), in the work by Juan José Balaguer and Arnau Gifreu we see the opposite movement. This text analyzes the use of fictional elements or genres and modes in the communication of activism on social media, based on the observation of a different attitude of such activism in the current context compared to mainstream popular culture. This change had already been described in the works of Henry Jenkins, who was interviewed personally by Balaguer on the subject, which constitutes an important added value to the text. The research focuses on the IG and X social networks of the organizations Greenpeace and Extension Rebellion (RX), using content analysis methodology between January 1 and July 1, 2024. The highly significant results debunk prejudices about the use of certain techniques and resources

(which are, incidentally, highly intermedial) in environmental activism, such as humor and memes.

A monograph such as this also required an analysis of the practices of users of non-fiction and fiction worlds, which are intensely intermedial and increasingly transmedial. For this reason, it includes an article by José M. Blázquez and Mario de la Torre on fandom and the alternative creation of stories and images in the case of hugely popular franchises such as Harry Potter and Twilight. The study focuses on the use of generative AI in the creation of these images, paying particular attention to the subversion of heteronormativity in the representation of romantic relationships between characters in these fictional universes, which is dominant in their transmedial expansion, based on the hypothesis that the use of GAI by fans responds to their drive for “the real” (p. 77).

Finally, Álvaro Jiménez Sarmiento's article (“Self-Referentiality in Orson Welles' Sketch Book, 1955”) provides an interesting case study, in the form of an exercise in media archaeology, where the narrative techniques and audiovisual staging of these short television programs (BBC, 6 episodes or installments), their content absolutely conditioned by the personality and authority of the talking head and the mixture of true and invented elements, are considered by the author to be possible precedents for similar techniques of connecting with the intimacy of viewers used by YouTubers. The force of self-referentiality and the constant “inscription of the self” (Weinrichter 2004, 53) in Welles' monologues, supported by drawings that illustrated his story, would function in a similar way to the omnipresence of the self (body and voice-narrative) as a guide to perception in the case of followers' ascription or “subscription” to the stories of their favorite YouTubers, with their hyperbolic and more emotional than rational discourses.

In short, the articles selected by Visual Review for this special issue are a glimpse of the type of research sponsored by the FicTrans project, in which we address the enormous and complex artistic and media experimentation taking place at the frontiers between documentary and fictional discourse, but also to the epistemological and political problems that arise from this mobility of boundaries or limits, or from the lack of social and cultural awareness of them. Thus, we are also addressing the study of a phenomenon that is not radically new, but is nevertheless worrying in its scope, namely the growing difficulty in reading or perceiving fiction as such, which leads not only to confusion between fictional characters and situations as if they were real or historical, but also to the controversial and disturbing proliferation of new forms of censorship of fiction, particularly those associated with forms of humor. We understand that it is necessary to redouble our efforts in favor of theoretical and critical research on the role being played by the hybridization of media and genres, based on the cultural and technological dynamics that affect inter- and transmedia practices in this context of oscillation between facts and fictions, with their associated discourses and genres.

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