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Unreliability in Non-fiction: The Case of the Unreliable Addressee

1. Introduction

In this article, I aim to explore unreliability in non-fictional narration. Departing from the widespread conviction that unreliable narration is only possible in fiction, I set out to define the contours of rhetorical approaches to narratology that have paved the way for the discussion of unreliability in non-fiction. I then explore unreliability in relation to non-fictional discourse, especially that found in hybrid genres such as literary documentary and docu-fiction. My argument begins by identifying stylistic criteria as a key element in the assessment of degrees of reliability and unreliability. I then engage questions of the cultural and ethical underpinnings of unreliability judgments by dealing with forms of experimental journalism and with Laurent Binet's documentary novel *HHhH*, which is discussed as a third-person antithesis to Jonathan Littell's *Les Bienveillantes*. I conclude by advocating a more addressee-oriented narratology.

2. Some Preliminaries: Towards a Rhetorical Narratology of Unreliability

"Only in fictional narrative do we have true cases of unreliability" (2001: 100) Monika Fludernik (2001: 100) writes in "Fiction vs. *Non-Fiction*." Dorrit Cohn (2000: 307) argues that in non-fiction the unreliability rests with the author rather than the textual speaker. Most attempts to discuss non-fictional unreliability have been directed towards unreliable autobiography, i.e. in texts paying particular attention to the homodiegetic narrator (cf. Phelan 2005: Ch.2). If "true" unreliability is seen as a privilege of fiction, this is mainly due to the fact that fiction allows us quite easily and readily to reconstrue the profile of a narratorial voice solely on the basis of textual clues. But it needs to be pointed out that other paratextual and extratextual signs of unreliability have always been on the horizon of narratological theory. Tamar Yacobi's pioneering article is a typical example of a structuralist-functionalist approach to unreliability: She singles out five potential sources of unreliability: genetic, generic, existential, functional, and perspectival (1981: 114). Yacobi argues that narrative unreliability applies only in the case of perspectival unreliability, i.e. unreliability generated by the skewed perspective of an intratextual agent. Peritextual and extratextual circumstances may attenuate the communicative situation, but these were assumed not to belong to the study of narratology proper.

In a previous contribution (Martens 2008), I presented a case for unreliability in third-person narration. I saw the necessity to do so in response to a number of strong statements as to its theoretical impossibility. In the meantime, it is feasible to say that the idea of heterodiegetic unreliability have begun to gain sway as evidenced both through specific examples such as McEwan's *Atonement* and new methodologies borrowing from analytical philosophy (cf. Köppe/Kindt 2011; Zipfel 2011). Zipfel (2011: 126) cites the specific case of Ambrose Bierce's *An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge* as an example. Zipfel states that it seems difficult to conceive of a narrational text with a completely covert narrator, i.e. a narrator without any personalising features, as unreliable. That is indeed the case. Almost all cases of unreliable heterodiegetic narration involve narrators stepping out of their roles. In fact, my own argument for heterodiegetic unreliability was part of a broader scrutiny of the conditions under which we assume unreliability to occur. I highlighted that Dorrit Cohn allowed for the detection of unreliability even in those cases where "corrective information" can be supplemented by other perspectival agents. She does so by squarely addressing the idea of narrative competence. Under the label of discordance, she posited "the possibility for the reader to experience a teller as normatively inappropriate for the story he or she tells". (Cohn 2000: 307) This opens up the possibility of considering stylistic overttness as a source of unreliability. In the present article, I wish to extend my considerations into the domain of non-fictional narration. This leads us to address related questions: Beyond the homodiegesis/heterodiegesis divide, why is it that we continue to privilege fiction and to link unreliability to narrators and not, for instance, to addressees? And how can we take into account gendered and other culturally determined markers of reliability? Before we can answer these questions, we need to take into account some of the basic methodological options underpinning the various branches of rhetorical narratology.

In the North-American context, the influence of Neo-Aristotelianism as propagated by the Chicago school has led to a branch of rhetorical narratology that explores the ways in which authors address and engage audiences (Booth, Phelan, Rabinowitz, Kearns). Wayne C. Booth's *The Rhetoric of Fiction* gained notoriety for opposing New Criticism's strict reservations concerning the 'affective fallacy'; his disciples have strengthened the links with narrative studies. This has led to a branch of narratology which focuses on volition and reader-author interaction. Its rhetorical focus on narrative, however, differs from that of stylistics or cognitive poetics: Booth and Phelan put emphasis on synthetic notions like plot, character, and genre rather than on the analysis of style, poetic diction, and figurativity as rhetorical strategies in literary communication. Wayne Booth capitalizes on the sense of collusion that irony accrues (which is definitely a rhetorical tool) and on the sense of social inclusion/exclusion that it evokes (cf. *The Company We Keep*). Phelan's taxonomy of

unreliable narration presents a sophisticated development of the Boothian model while sticking to its basic tenets (including the implied author).

In a widely acclaimed article, Nünning (1993) criticized the notion of the implied author on account of endowing textual features with human agency. Vera and Ansgar Nünning set out to give both a comprehensive structure (Nünning 2008) and a history (Nünning 2004) to the metaphorical notion of secret communication “‘behind the narrator’s back”; i.e. a story which transpires in spite of quite different intentions on the part of the narrator (conference description/introduction; cf. Vogt 2009: 38). In order to study unreliability within its historical and cultural context, Nünning, seconded by Zerweck (2001: 154f), argued that narrative theory needed to take into account both textual features and context.

At a 2005 conference in Leuven (documented in D’hoker/Martens 2008), Phelan and Ansgar Nünning had the opportunity to cross swords and directly discuss their viewpoints. To the surprise of many, the expected clash did not take place. Phelan and Nünning concluded that their approaches were largely compatible. This unexpected outcome is due, I argue, to the phenomenological underpinnings of both theories. Booth’s hypothesis of the implied author resonates with the core characteristics of a phenomenological approach to literature. It considers intention (both of the author and of the reader) as a yardstick, hence the centrality of the “implied author”. In the case of Nünning, the confluence of his ideas with phenomenology is less forthcoming. But whenever constructivist principles are called upon, phenomenology is behind the corner. It turned out that Phelan’s phenomenological approach and (the culturalist and rhetorical extension of) Ansgar Nünning’s structuralist-functionalist approach shared a common ground. However, crucial differences cannot be ignored: in Phelan’s account, the reader wants to join the “authorial audience” (1996: 93) by definition. This echoes the assumptions of Chaïm Perelman’s (humanist) view of the universal audience. The emphasis on judgments chimes in with Gadamer’s hermeneutics and its rehabilitation of prejudice (i.e. of that which comes before reading, as detailed by Rabinowitz (1998)). In the Nünning’s account, the readers’ norms are the outcome of a dynamic process contingent on shifting memory contests and involving worldmaking throughout various modes and media. The addressee is embedded in a community of memory, conceived of as a culturally and historically variable notion shaping the evaluation of facts and events. This emphasis visibly shifts attention away from the narrator and allows for the study of genres and media that rely less on the profiling of a narratorial instance (cf. Schwanecke/Nünning, in this volume).

The unreliability does not primarily pertain to *facticity* (the question whether the narrative gets the extratextual facts right), nor to any psychological property of the narrating instance (since these may have been given short shrift). Rather, the

unreliability inheres in the extent to which the unreliability of the addressee is brought into play. This can be achieved by exploiting the ambiguity of the deictics involved in second-person address or by the self-same procedures of dramatic irony (cf. Nünning/ Schwanecke, in this volume, in this volume) that apply in the case of docu-drama and docu-fiction. An added advantage of the rhetorical approach is that it is media-independent. Liesbeth Korthals Altes (2008) has advanced an encompassing contextual approach by drawing on the rhetorical notion of ethos. It is clear that the debate on unreliability has evolved to include an ever-wider range of genres and media, leading up to the question of whether there is still a common core to the concept. Brütsch (2011) argues that there is a fundamental difference between unreliability in literature and in film. In film, the status of events is thrown into relief by a surprise twist in retrospect although the previous report of these events is not attenuated by any conspicuous cues, e.g. argumentativeness of a profiled narrating instance. In literary fiction, Brütsch argues, unreliability is the object of a more gradual unravelling. The reader may resort to repair mechanisms in order to naturalize the conspicuous features of the discourse, but over the course of time these hypotheses will fail to resolve the inconsistencies. While I am convinced that these differences are legitimate, they appear not to neatly separate into options available exclusively to literature or film. In fact, the combination of reframing existing signifiers and of subjecting information to a specific stylistic profile is especially important in order to arrive at a comprehensive notion of unreliability in non-fiction.

3. Unreliability in Non-fiction?

The previous considerations are important to arrive at a definition of unreliability in non-fiction. The strong assumption that true unreliability is particular to fiction at least implicitly suggests the reverse conclusion that reliability is the default case in non-fictional narration. This account is wrong-headed in many respects: In non-fictional (especially oral) communication, judgments about reliability are made at various levels long before the semantics of the message is even considered. In addition, the assessment of reliability is a matter of scale rather than a binary all-or-nothing option. Various branches of rhetoric and its modern successors—pragmatics, linguistics and sociology (Goffman)—have studied the interplay of phenomena including:

- sound: 'normal' and/or consistent psychological motivation for the telling of the story;
- body language: poise, precipitation, including the asymmetrical signs that point towards the speaker's dissociation from the message, as in 'tongue-in-cheek' irony;

- audience adaptation: including the '*captatio*', the strategic pose of unreliability in order to court the attention or the benevolence of the audience;
- hedging (gender-specific): the amount of diffidence and 'tact' appropriate or necessary in view of the authority of the audience¹;
- voice (pitch);
- iconicity: from physiognomy to UX, i.e. design in view of optimal user experience); even applies in the case of written scientific communication; cf. (Waugh/Barletta/Smith et al. 2004);
- reputation and prestige of communication channel (publication outlet).

Any of these factors can be exploited for strategic purposes. Given its allegiance to the system of language rather than the individual performance, classical narratology has prided itself in the ability to do away with these aspects to a large extent. This has also led to a persistent preoccupation with fictional story material, as narratology long cherished its ability to reconstruct the profile of a narratorial voice solely on the basis of textual clues. While this focus has many merits, it would be wrong to deduce from the disjunction between fiction and non-fiction that unreliability would only apply in the former case. This is nevertheless the position defended by Ryan on account of the premises of speech-act theory.

In natural communication, the hearer is able to detect lies, errors and other faulty declarations because he [or she] has other ways of access to the frame of reference. He [or she] can either compare the speaker's representation of facts to his own experience, or to the content of another discourse. But in fictional narration, the text constitutes the reader's sole source of information about the represented state of affairs. (Ryan 1981: 530)

I do not propose to call into doubt the fact that non-fiction offers other ways of fact-checking. But especially narratorial stances that ship with a lot of authority and reliability are prone to experimentation. In a recent article, Staes discusses encyclopaedic novels as "narratives that obscure the fiction/nonfiction divide". Given the fact that novels such as those written by Richard Powers and William T. Vollmann abound with references to realia, the conventional certitude that "an author or

¹Cf. Goethe's maxim in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*: "Wer vor andern lange allein spricht, ohne den Zuhörern zu schmeicheln, erregt Widerwillen. Jedes ausgesprochene Wort erregt den Gegensinn." (He who addresses others for very long without flattering them evokes antipathy. Every assertion provokes its contrary.) (Goethe 1971: 118)

narrator's invocation of an external source gives her or him an air of reliability" (Staes 2013, n. pag.) is fatally overturned:

Narrativity itself is a mode that confers a specific authority to a communicative utterance. It owes its appeal to the depiction of a consistent storyworld, which used to be signalled through the dominant usage of the past tense. Present-tense narration poses a challenge to theories of unreliability. In texts like Irmgard Keun's *The Artificial Silk Girl* (1932) and Brett Easton Ellis' *American Psycho*, the present tense can still be seen as a sign pointing to a troubled mind. But the most recent historical fictions (e.g. Hilary Mantel's *Wolf Hall*) persistently use the present-tense in an unmarked way. Definitions of narrative themselves have shifted away from the rehashing of past experience (and from units of narrative typically enclosed within the confinements of book covers) in favour of a set of media-transitive criteria. This shift is of primary importance for the discussion of narrative unreliability since the detection of unreliability typically used to involve the detection of traits of oral discourse undermining the structured (typically written) ordering of experiences. Scholars have since drawn on theories of worldmaking that go beyond the domain of fiction strictly (see, e.g. A. Nünning (2010); V. Nünning (2010)).

4. From Gonzo Journalism to Unreliable News Reports

The usage of unreliability in non-fictional discourse can be exemplified in a very palpable way by means of experiments in literary journalism. Literary, stylized forms of journalism trespass on the realm in which the journalistic narrator is expected to remain covert. In the standard interview situation, even questions are left out, so that one seems to have access to a person's verbatim discourse and to an innermost reality straight from the horse's mouth. Various extra-textual registers reinforce culturally specific norms of authority (gender, age, etc.): For a very long time, television newsreaders tended to be male by default. In order to challenge these conventions, Hunter S. Thompson launched Gonzo journalism, a type of factual storytelling which puts the emphasis on the opinions of the interviewer. Instead of the passive attitude, the journalist took the stage.

This mixture of journalistic and literary conventions has been the object of much debate. In the German-speaking context, the case of Tom Kummer gained notoriety. The former reporter of the unconventional journal *Tempo* caused a scandal when it was revealed that he had invented many of his interviews with famous Hollywood stars (which he hadn't met at all). In his defence, Kummer argued that his interviews were meant to satirically expose the norms of lifestyle and human interest journalism and that they were so obviously made up that any well-meaning reader would have noticed their unreliability. From a narratological point of view, one can indeed say that

any type of rendering verbatim discourse involves representation, narrativization and “filling in”. Kummer lost his job, but Doll accurately observes that in the long run the pose of the recalcitrant, disrespectful journalist itself was not deemed inadequate. (Doll 2012: 328) Quite to the contrary: this interviewing style has become mainstream. Meanwhile, Martin Doll argues that former journalists of *Tempo* like Christian Kracht, Benjamin von Stuckrad-Barre, and Peter Glaser (Doll 2012: 328) took their writing to books rather than to magazines. He links the move with an increased concern with ethical and moral standards (after 9/11). In the relatively ‘safer’ fictional context of novels, unreliable narrators could be given free reign.

Arguably Christian Kracht’s *Faserland* (1995) features an unreliable narrator quite reminiscent of Brett Easton Ellis’ *American Psycho*. Revelling in a string of juste milieu references to expensive brands and trendy places, Kracht’s narrator drifts in and out of the superficialities of party life. The narrator is very critical of people with ecological and moral concerns. The book was a major success due to its large amount of referentiality. One can read the book as a risky reportage underpinned by the scenario of a travel report and spiced up with participatory observations about drugs and music.

Prior to its domestication as a fictional genre, the endeavour to lend credibility to stories straining the categories of the ordinary or the believable feeds on age-old narrative traditions of story materials (legends, hagiography, urban legends) and storytelling tactics. The persistence and success of urban legends hinges on a balance achieved via rhetorical means and by merging the ordinary and the familiar with the unwarranted. The reliance on small forms (“kleine Formen” in the words of the pre-structuralist folk narratologist André Jolles), also indicates that unreliable non-fiction owes its success to the felicity of speech acts. An interesting (fictional) experiment that puts this strategy of rhetorical authorisation into perspective is Thomas Glavinic’s bestselling novel *Wie man leben soll* (2004), translated as: *Pull Yourself Together* (Glavinic 2012). This novel recounts the story of a young couch potato who makes his way into life by taking the advice from self-help manuals. The manuals are a substitute for his lack of parental guidance. “One is utterly convinced that in some book one may find the answer to the question: who am I and what do I have to do?”² The persistent usage of gnomic sentences adds to the unreliability: The narrator casts his maturing insight into matters of sexuality and family life into lofty, aphoristic utterances which contrast starkly with his naivety and ignorance.

2 „Man ist fest überzeugt, in irgendeinem Buch dieser Welt sei zu finden, wer man ist und was man tun soll.“ (Glavinic 2008: 116, my translation, GM).

Although we consider the psychology contained in such trashy manuals as sketchy or even trivial, the genre owes its appeal to the persistence of schemata of edifying literature and the felicity of directive and commissive speech acts (the promise that ‘if you change this minor aspect in your life, happiness will ensue’). This explains why counselling continues to be such a widespread phenomenon in management (even in the management of our own private lives). Glavinic pokes fun at the sense of trust that ensues from such life manuals and ventures to write a kind of counter-manual (cf. Peeters/Niehaus 2012).

Notwithstanding all experiments and innovations, journalistic narration is still strongly supposed to be reliable by default. This can be deduced from the amount of scandal that experiments continue to elicit. We conclude this section by dealing with *Bye Bye Belgium*, a fake television documentary that shocked Belgium (Dutilleul 2008). In 2006, the French-speaking national television interrupted its regular programme for a “breaking news” report. In the setting of the regular TV news studio, the regular, iconic news speaker announced that the Northern, Flemish-speaking part of the country had declared its independence. Footage showed how public transport had come to a halt at a new border dividing the country. Only after a few minutes, a subtitle indicated that the news was fiction. Of course, the unreliability of the news report could have been confirmed by switching channels: Flemish television channels were broadcasting their usual soaps and reality TV. But given the relative separation of the country’s public spheres, few people were inclined to do so. The fictional news report led to a severe scandal, although it did not cost any journalists their jobs. The unreliable report was defended as an act of engaging journalism; the journalist wanted to elicit the debate. In terms of rhetorical narratology, it is interesting that the notice “Ceci est une fiction” was subliminally overturned. A reference to the Belgian surrealist René Magritte, it was meant to stress unreality, but in reality it corroborated the sense that the country’s structure is so complex that reality indeed borders on surrealism. In addition, it was accompanied by an iconic picture by the painter Félicien Rops depicting a blinded lady escorting a pig. Within the attention economy of television, the visual is more reliable than the textual; moreover, any direct negation is likely to backfire. Experimental psychological research has amply shown that warnings about false claims are counterproductive and actually lend more credibility and familiarity to erroneous beliefs (Schwarz/ Sanna/Skurnik et al. 2007). Thus, despite the ludicrous content, the documentary managed to authenticate or authorise itself by repurposing existing signifiers (surrounding the country’s endless debate on its federal structure and autonomist tendencies in the North) and by using all the standardized signals of liveness (the interruption of an ongoing programme, even a somewhat outdated intervention by phone call). There were quite some contradictions: for instance, despite the urgency, there were many visibly pre-

recorded interviews. But the fact that the deliberate signals of unreliability went by unnoticed is of course due to the institutional setting overshadowing the actual narrative aspects of the message. The docu-fiction is no longer a vehicle for information, it creates a (somewhat cheap) sense of urgency and is naturally prone to reinforce the stereotypes which the two language communities harbour for one another. Deemed unacceptable by many professional journalists, the fake breaking news was unparalleled in the sense of urgency that it instated in the political issue. In the Anglophone context, the Yes Men have undertaken similar experiments, particularly in the domain of unreliable corporate storytelling (cf. Doll 2012: 391-416).

In times of information overload, media and advertising business themselves increasingly cater to the resisting, recalcitrant reader. Companies and cities order their marketing by 'rebellious' theatre groups because an unreliable, extraneous representation yields more credibility than an inside view. To some extent, unreliability has become the new norm to target addressees. These addressees are increasingly assumed to be equipped with more sophisticated decoding capacities, but they are also increasingly at a loss of cues expressive of stable irony that allow for a sense of collusion behind the back of an unreliable speaker. This is due to the increased hybridization of formerly unified cultural and social discursive communities (cf. Hutcheon).

5. New Sincerity: Binet's *HHhH*

Theorizing unreliability in relation to non-fiction or hybrid fiction requires us to take into account not only media specifics but also new tendencies and trends in the literary system. Practitioners of unnatural narratology have raised unreliable narrators to the norm: "[O]ne goes from unreliable narrators to incompetent ones to delusional and then completely insane storytellers." (Richardson 2006: 2) Recent developments in literature even aim to counteract the sense that unreliability has increasingly become the norm. Wallace's ambiguous plea for post-irony and reliability is a good example:

The next real literary 'rebels' [...] might well emerge as some weird bunch of anti-rebels, born oglers who dare somehow to back away from ironic watching, who have the childish gall actually to endorse and instantiate single-entendre principles. Who treat of plain old untrendy human troubles and emotions [...] with reverence and conviction. (Wallace 1993: 192)

After postmodernism, writers like David Foster Wallace embraced and favoured new types of post-irony and sincerity (cf. Altes 2008). A typical representative of the "New Sincerity" is Laurent Binet, whose novel *HHhH* (2010) will now be discussed. The

novel's title is an acronym standing for "Himmlers Hirn heit Heydrich", *pointing* to a wry joke that allegedly circulated at the time of the Nazi occupation suggesting that Himmler was the real mastermind of the Nazi system. Binet's prizewinning, experimental novel *HHhH* recounts the plot to assassinate Heydrich, one of the highest-ranking members of the SS and the infamous architect of the Final Solution. The first part of the book is a kind of metafiction that deals with the narrator's frustrations and attempts to arrive at a reliable version of the story. This kind of speculative epistemology is not new; it is also present in Sebald's work and is typical of a modernist style applied to the traumas of the 20th century.

The narrator highlights that he is not the most competent speaker (he indicates that his command of German is sketchy). To some extent, this puts him into the disadvantaged position of the 'real' witnesses who had first-hand experience but did not survive the events. The metafiction qualifies him as a more reliable speaker for the purposes of the story at hand. In the second part, the narrator seems to shed his scruples and switches to a fast-paced account of the events in Prague. The novel does not attribute unreliability exclusively to the perspectival limitations of narrator, but ships with a radical doubt as to the validity of fiction as such.

The narrator refuses to make anything up; this leads him to extensively review various other books about the topic and also other fictionalizations and film adaptations. The narrator is more like an aggregator. This is another venture into the grey area that Dorrit Cohn mentioned in *Distinction of Fiction*: explicit references to sources normally belong to historiographical discourse. Binet refers to his book as an "infra-novel" (Binet 2012: 241). To most critics, the narrator's concern with sincerity and his precautions have appeared excessive and even pedantic. Nevertheless, I think the petty concerns are justified, and they even elevate the suspense. The lengthy digressions as to whether Heydrich's convertible Mercedes was either green or black is of little importance, but it points to a broader sense of unreliability that hints at a fundamental sense of impropriety. Binet confronts the addressee with his or her propensity to fill in the gaps on the basis of story material sedimented in collective memory but also with an innate tendency towards voyeurism:

[T]he proliferation of the 'docu-drama' bears testimony to the voyeuristic need to 'be there' and to enjoy fiction-like participation, not only in imaginary worlds, but also in historical events. (Ryan 1999: 120)

As the trauma theorist Dori Laub pointed out, there are no reliable witnesses to the events surrounding the Holocaust, even though these witnesses were sincere. At the same time, Binet's narrator raises awareness about the genre conventions to the extreme, so that the text runs the risk of becoming self-defeating: "And just so there's no confusion, all the dialogues I invent (there won't be many) will be written like

scenes from a play. A stylistic drop in an ocean of reality” (Binet 2012: 21). Binet does engage in short dialogue scenes, which, however, he immediately rejects. This act of abrupt rejection is spectacular and breath-taking. As a reader, one grows aware of the immense emotional impact that these dialogues have in conventional approaches to retelling historical events.

Laurent Binet shares his epistemological concerns with Daniel Kehlmann, another prize-winning author. *Die Vermessung der Welt* (2005, translated as *Measuring the World*) solved the conundrum by taking recourse throughout the text to the German-speaking journalistic convention of the subjunctive mode, which signals objectivity as well as distance through the restriction to verbatim report. This somewhat quaint and jarring style (not retained in the English translation) allows Kehlmann to dodge the artifice of attributing dialogues and thoughts to historical characters and is explored to comic effect, since it is also used to render intimate bedroom scenes.

He threw himself on her, felt her shock, paused for a moment, then she wound her legs around his body, but he apologized, got up, stumbled to the desk, dipped the pen, and without lighting a candle wrote *sum of square of diff. betw. obs'd and calc'd >Min*. It was too important, he couldn't forget it. He heard her say she couldn't believe it, and she wasn't believing it either even though it was happening right in front of her. But he was already done. On the way back he hit his foot against the bedpost” (Kehlmann 2007: 127).³

The context of post-postmodernist New Sincerity and New Narratability may point in the direction of a generalized surpassing of unreliability. This becomes particularly evident in Binet's almost sentimental account of the last hours of the resistance fighters. At this point, the narration slips into the narrator's present: “Today is May 27, 2008. When the firemen arrive, about 8:00 a.m., they see the SS everywhere and a corpse on the pavement” (Binet 2012: 315).

The dates obviously point to the time of writing rather than that of the historical action. In a similar way, iconic film scenes are recalled in order to visualize the action.

While this is going on, Gabčík keeps running. Tie flapping in the wind, hair messed up, he looks like Cary Grant in *North by Northwest* or Jean-Paul

³ „Er wälzte sich auf sie, und weil er fühlte, dass sie erschrak, wartete er einen Moment, dann schlang sie ihre Beine um seinen Körper, doch er bat um Verzeihung, stand auf, stolperte zum Tisch, tauchte die Feder ein und schrieb, ohne Licht zu machen: *Summe d. Quadr. d. Differenz zw. beob. u. berechn. → Min.*, es war zu wichtig, er durfte es nicht vergessen. Er hörte sie sagen, sie könne es nicht glauben und sie glaube es auch nicht, selbst jetzt, während sie es erlebe. Aber er war schon fertig. Auf dem Weg zurück stieß er mit dem Fuß gegen den Bettpfosten“ (Kehlmann 2005: 149).

Belmondo in *That Man from Rio*. But obviously Gabčík, though very fit, does not have the supernatural endurance that the French actor would later display in his spoof role as a hero. Unlike Belmondo, Gabčík cannot keep running forever. (Binet 2012: 267)

These associations are anachronistic from the point of view of the storyworld; hence, they might come across as unreliable to historians, since these personal associations clearly indicate the personal involvement of the narrator in the way in which he recounts the narrated events. Nevertheless, in a world more geared towards visual media and strategies of sampling, they are very apt to capture the atmosphere and possibly also more reliable than a painstaking reconstruction of the actual historical settings.

Binet's critical foil in writing the novel is Jonathan Littell, whom he accuses of indulging in the voyeurism and fake realism that Binet's narrator refrains from simulating. In view of its cynical, unreliable narrator and its cold, trenchant style, Binet dubs Littell's novel unfavourably as "*Houellebecq chez les nazis*" (Binet 2012: 241). Littell's novel evokes the perspective of a refined aesthete, leaving it up to the reader to decide whether this is a reliable perspective to judge the events of the Holocaust. The unity of this personality is not without fabrication (the protagonist is present at all the theatres of war and the most iconic crime scenes, including Auschwitz, Belaja Zerkow etc.), but it is clearly the monologic discourse of an unreliable narrator. The detection of a number of gaps and incoherencies allows the reader to pierce through the ideology of the amiable character. Littell's narrator is unreliable due of the fact that he does not offer a moral corrective to his cool and dispassionate *désinvolture* faced with extreme violence and killings, although he visibly suffers the somatic and psychic consequences of repressing his trauma. Unlike Littell's novel, Binet's book is written in the third-person, although the narrator's persona is more profiled than is usually the case. Binet's digressive narrator insists on plain and old-fashioned notions of truth and insincerity, although he continually points out the limits of knowability. It is important to note that both authors have moved on to write non-fiction, to wit journalist chronicles of political events. Binet (2013) wrote a book on Francois Hollande's presidential campaign, which is not a heroical portrait but rather a rebellious report in the sense outlined above. Littell (2012) wrote an embedded report on the civil war in Syria. Both approach their projects as explicitly fallible observers. Once more, the opinionated look is more effective than the laudatory, as Hunter S. Thompson found out. This indicates that there is some similarity between the two authors. In terms of docu-fiction, however, Binet clearly holds the view that a dispassionate, documentary approach would amount to a complicity with the perpetrator of the crimes, which were facilitated through an anonymous bureaucracy.

Binet's docu-fiction veers away from the ontological pluralism and especially the linguistic materialism of historiographical metafiction. The novel explores the relation between the referentiality of documentary narration and ethical responsibility, which is very much unlike the detective type of unreliability. It introduces a new type of naïve authenticity. As such, Binet's novel is a deliberate rebuff to our passion for unreliability. Ever since Edgar Hilsenrath's *Der Nazi & der Friseur* (*The Nazi and the Barber*, 1971), we revel in the perpetrator's perspective, idiom, habitus and rhetoric; in Quentin Tarantino's *Inglourious Basterds*, only the addressee well-versed in film history (and in the director's oeuvre) will see that the 'nazi chic' is kept in check by the references to G. W. Pabst and others. When attempts are made to introduce some reliable corrective to this unreliable perspective, e.g. by the mature counterparts to the secretary Traudl Jung in *Der Untergang* or the young lover in Schlink's *Der Vorleser*, this attempt is nowadays often experienced as inauthentic and superfluous.

6. Conclusion

By foregrounding the addressee in its title, this article aimed to interrupt the ritualized collocation of "unreliable" and "narrator". Non-fiction gives less weight to the rationale for telling a story, which might even be motivated by institutional and extratextual parameters. Hence, the narrator figures less prominently in the list of possible sources or signs of unreliability. It turns out, however, that this circumstance itself foregrounds the unreliability of the narratee as a witness and as a participant in the act of communication, especially in media which seek to engage addressees through interactivity.

Unlike fictional narratives, non-fictional narratives can in principle be subjected to fact-checking. However, the mere possibility of fact-checking non-fictional narrative does not imply that people actually take advantage of this possibility. Hybrid text genres like docu-fictional novels successfully disturb the ability to discern between fact and fiction. This observation helps to highlight historical and contextual determinants: Unreliable docu-fictions exploit tensions that have beset the rise of the modern novel since its own institutionally still underdetermined outset. The novel owed its rise to fame precisely because of the persistent encroachments on the border between fiction and non-fiction. This transitional and unstable (Richard Walsh would say rhetorical) aspect of the notion of fiction prevents us from saying that forms of non-fictional unreliability simply amount to local acts of fictionalization. Fictional texts might indeed be self-consciously aware that they are performatively bringing into being a non-existing reality. But non-fictional texts are also increasingly aware of

how they function as speech-acts, which is corroborated by the observation that seemingly reliable speech-act situations can be ironically overturned in non-fiction too.

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