WOLFGANG HALLET

Reading Multimodal Fiction: A Methodological Approach

1. Towards a Methodology of Reading Multimodal Fiction

Traditionally, the novel is a word-based genre arranging words and sentences in linear form and representing characters, actions and events, spaces and places as much as thoughts, feelings and sensual perceptions, and even colours and forms of objects. Therefore, the integration of other semiotic modes of representation and narration in the narrative discourse and in the act of reading fiction poses a cognitive and interpretive challenge in many respects, for ordinary readers and for literary scholars alike. Whereas there is a whole theoretical and methodological repertoire of reading and analysing the word novel and other verbal literary texts available (cf. Nünning and Nünning 2010), to date no major attempt has been made to systematize the ways in which multimodal novels can be studied and analysed. However, the ever-growing number of multimodal novels, and of multimodal youth or young adult novels in particular, urges literary studies to approach this sub-genre of the contemporary novel in a systematic, methodologically and theoretically grounded manner.

The rapid development and growth of digital technologies that make use of multiple modes of signification ranging from verbal text and visual images to music and sound in a single act of communication and representation has led to the emergence of new forms of the printed text beyond the monomodality of the printed page as a display of printed letters. This constitutes a development towards the collage of different artefacts, giving a new weight to the page or double page as a meaningful, layouted textual unit of its own, making use of the 'material stuff' of paper of a certain standard size of the page and (mostly) black letters of a certain font-type in printed form. What Baldry and Thibault (2005) state about the development of the page in Western print culture in general also applies to the shift from the monomodal to the multimodal page of the novel:

> What was essentially a linguistic unit 100 years ago has now become primarily a visual unit. The page is no longer, as it was predominantly in the 19th century, simply a convenient division for the purposes of printing. In Western culture, it is increasingly looked upon as a textual unit in its own right. (Baldry and Thibault 2005, 58)

In the light of these remarks it becomes obvious that the literary classroom, at school and at university level alike, faces new, hitherto unknown challenges when engaging in the reading of multimodal texts, and fiction in particular. Therefore, this essay attempts to make proposals for a more systematic comprehension and analysis of the modes involved in multimodal novelistic narration and of the textual meaning that the interplay of different semiotic modes in the novel evokes and constitutes. It thus seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of a new type of 'reading' in school and university classrooms that does not rely on linguistic signs only, and to respond to the need to integrate a larger range of semiotic modes into the construction of meaning in the act of reading. The systematic methodological approach is also supposed to facilitate teachers' design of reading instructions and tasks in the literary classroom at the level of school and higher education.
The multimodal novel is here defined as a genre that integrates nonverbal modes of meaning-making such as, e.g., photographs, cartographic maps, handwritten letters and all sorts of other artefacts into the narrative discourse of the novel and in which such artefacts represent semiotic resources that are produced, circulated or displayed in the fictional world. This definition makes it possible to distinguish the more recent phenomenon of multimodal novelistic narration from other, more traditional forms of multimodality that mainly rely on paratextual or extradiegetic elements that are not part of the novel's diegesis, like additional images or drawings that may illustrate key scenes in the course of narration or a map that is provided in the front matter to facilitate the reader's orientation.

Since the concept of 'semiotic resources' in multimodality theories is a highly disputable and also very broad category, it is also advisable to define 'mode' in the context of multimodal fiction. For instance, in multimodality theories colour or font types are also regarded as semiotic modes. However, since these modes cannot occur on their own, independent of other signifiers that needed for the making of meaning, the 'meaning' of a colour or a font type (if there is something like this at all) is always tied to the meaning of the artefact in or with which it is used. If colours or font types carry meaning, it is always in connection with a set of codes and a sociocultural context in which they generate meaning. Thus, in an analogy to morphology, semiotic resources that are not independent meaningful textual or communicative entities of their own could be designated as 'bound' resources since they are always directly tied to distinct semiotic units of representation or communication. For instance, the reproduction of the colour of scribbled notes or names on a paper pad in an art store (as in Foer's novel Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close, 2006, 47-49) adds an experiential dimension and realism to the paper pad that parallels the reader's lifeworld and the storyworld, but it is only in connection with this ephemeran that the colours of different felt pens 'make sense' in terms of representing the world of New York that the narrator seeks to explore and document neatly. It is the vast number of artefacts which the young narrator collects and photographs on his journeys through New York in quest of his father that turn this novel into a scrapbook, "important evidence and litter" (87). "I put them in Stuff That Happened to Me, my scrapbook of everything that happened to me" (42): "maps and drawings, pictures from magazines and newspapers and the Internet, pictures I'd taken with Grandpa's camera. The whole world was in there" (325).

Methodologically speaking it follows that when analysing the multiple modes of a novel, bound semiotic modes would not be singled out for analysis. Instead, the focus would be on 'free' modes and textual entities of making meaning, i.e. genres in the broadest sense and across modes (cf. Bateman 2008, 9-11 and 177-248). The paper pad, the map or the family photograph and other conventionalized forms of representation and communication would be regarded as semiotic modes and genres, whereas other semiotic resources like the print colour or the size of the page would be of secondary interest. They would only become relevant and an object of analysis in connection with the artefact in which they occur (cf. section 3), adding a specific shade of meaning without actually constituting a meaning of its own.

There is a second methodological implication to this definition of the mode. In the context of reading fiction, such a definition makes sense or is at least helpful since textual (generic) entities are able to generate and evoke meanings of their own, even if, or particularly because, they are combined with other distinguishable semiotic modes, but also set off as signifying artefacts against the verbal text of the narrative. Thus, the interplay of 'free' semiotic modes in the novel can be analysed, accounting
for the way in which, e.g., a photograph, a diary entry and a map are interrelated and for the way in which verbal narration organizes the whole narrative discourse or assigns a place, purpose or meaning to the nonverbal mode in the novelistic narrative as a whole (see section 4).

Of course, the multimodal novel is but one instance of a larger number of other genres and types of multimodal artefacts that are nowadays objects of literary study and analysis. Comics, the graphic novel, film and television series are all multimodal texts and as such have attracted the interest of literary studies. More recently the emergence of transmedial and digital storytelling (cf. Thon 2016) has emphasized the need to develop a theory and methodology of multimodal fiction. Therefore, the integration of various semiotic resources and their interplay in meaning-making processes and in the narrative discourse may shed light on a number of paradigmatic shifts in literature, not least in terms of what counts as ‘a text,’ of how we conceive of the narrative instance and its command of the organization of a discourse that is not solely verbal; of the constitution of the storyworld, and of the reader’s cognitive activities (also cf. Gibbons 2012, 26-45). In any case and in all of the other instances of multimodal narration, readers of multimodal novels need to engage in acts of signification across semiotic modes and in the construction of transmodal meaning of a single text as opposed to ‘simple’ acts of alphabetical decoding and signifying (cf. fig. 1).

Fig. 1: The multimodal constitution and cognitive construction of the fictional world (Hallet 2014, 167)

2. The Challenges of Reading Multimodal Fiction

Multimodal texts have been omnipresent in our cultural and medial environment and everyday communication ever since visual images and printed texts have been reproduced and circulated. We are almost ‘naturally’ used to ‘reading’ simultaneously visual images, posters of all kinds, brochures, TV screens that present pictures, spoken language, diagrams and various ticker bars, films of various genres and, of course, websites. The number of artefacts and genres that could be listed here is countless. Together with W.J.T. Mitchell, one of the founders of ‘picture theory,’ we must even assume that in acts of decoding and reading monomodal artefacts like the painting, the photograph or the word novel there are always other ways and forms of meaning-making involved or implicated so that the image/text problem is not just something constructed ‘between’ the arts, the media, or different forms of representation, but an unavoidable issue within the individual arts and media. In short, all arts are ‘composite’ arts (both text and image); all media are mixed media, combining different codes, discursive conventions, channels, sensory and cognitive modes. (Mitchell 1995, 94-95)
Still, and probably due to this tacit multimodality of the making of meaning, most people are probably not really proficient ('literate') users of visual images or diagrams in the same sense that they are proficient readers of verbal texts. And yet, users and consumers of all of these 'composite' artefacts would claim to be able to 'read' and understand their meaning so that, in everyday life, the comprehension of multimodal texts is, to a greater or lesser extent, based on intuition rather than on a well-developed literacy. This is probably so because, according to Mitchell, every image also evokes other texts and every text also calls to mind certain images so that multimodality is a 'natural' cognitive act of meaning-making. Being multimodally literate would therefore be defined as the ability to decipher, decode and 'read' various semiotic modes and their combination in a single act of representation or communication.

Intuition-based rather than fully literate comprehension is partly due to the specific, seemingly simple affordance of visual representations (see section 3) which often rely on the recognisability of the depicted objects, i.e. on the degree of similarity between the depiction and its referential equivalent in the experiential world. Photography, and colour and filmic photography in particular, has culturally and cognitively succeeded in suggesting that the two-dimensional representation we look at and see on the book page or on the film or TV screen is so similar to the corresponding part of the depicted world that we tend to believe that we 'understand,' as if "looking at the real world through a window" (Meyer 2013, 156-57; my translation). This is why for the large number of types of representation and non-linguistic ways of communicating content that make use of the mimetic quality of visual images (like, e.g., colour photography images, realistic film images or realistic paintings), it is of particular importance to be able to apprehend and analyse them as artefacts that represent content in a specific way rather than 'showing reality.' It is part of the mimetic strategy of such artefacts to suggest to the viewer (of film or photographic images) that what they see 'is real' (cf. section 3 on The Unforgotten Coat; Boyce 2011). As against this, other representations like charts or maps make it more obvious that every single semiotic mode requires a familiarity with, or even specialized knowledge of, the specific sign-system and ways of encoding and presenting its information. The cartographic map or tables and grids would be examples of such semiotic modes that are frequently employed in everyday communication. Bateman (2008, 3-7) presents the interesting example of a tabular, seemingly simple gas bill, showing that truly understanding the information it presents is not possible at a single glance. Instead, retrieving information from this specific semiotic mode of representation and communication requires a corresponding, quite complex 'tabular literacy' that is necessary to make sense of the various digits and letters of the bill and their tabular arrangement.

In light of these specificities of various non-verbal modes of representation and communication and their combination in acts of narration, the challenges of reading multimodal fiction are threefold:

- Readers of multimodal fiction must be literate in every sign system that is part of the novelistic narrative in question, i.e. they must be able to decode and apprehend the meaning of the specific mode that is presented, e.g. understand a photograph or a diagram or a map as a meaningful artefact in its own right (cf. section 3).
- Readers must be able to interrelate a single mode to another mode or various other semiotic modes that are presented in the course of narration. The most basic intertextual or intermedial ability would be a profound understanding of how the verbal
narrative text and an image or artefact are interrelated and part of the same narrative (section 4). For the multimodal novel, in the vast majority of cases it is a verbal narrative in which other artefacts are embedded. This dominant role of verbal narration implies that the verbal discourse often takes on the role of organizing the other modes and assigning them a place and meaning in the whole narrative (cf. section 4).

- Finally, the interplay of all of the modes employed and presented in the narrative discourse needs to be fully explored and synthesized in the transmodal meaning of the whole novel or in a hypothesis thereof during the reading process (the “resource integration principle,” Baldry and Thibault 2005, 4-21). It is this transmodal integration of the multiple semiotic modes of the novel that actually complies with the challenges of reading multimodal fiction, since it accounts for the fact that only a full integration of all of the modes in a holistic apprehension (or interpretation) of the novel is an appropriate way of reading multimodal fiction (cf. section 5). This need to synthesize explains why and in what way the model in fig. 1 defines the act of reading as multiliterate.

The following sections delve deeper into these three different dimensions of multimodal reading processes. I will use various examples from young adult novels. All of them are, of course, paradigmatic instances of how semiotic modes are employed in multimodal novels and in what way different levels of analysis can be distinguished and systematically used to explore in depth the meaning of multimodal fiction.

3. The Affordance of the Single Semiotic Mode

In order to make full use of the contribution that the single semiotic mode makes to the constitution of a novelistic text and its overall meaning, every single mode needs to be ‘read’ and analysed in the same manner and depth as the verbal text. This is only possible because, for one, other modes are also sign-systems with underlying codes and their own work of signification, and secondly, for every semiotic mode a specific aptness, a communicative efficiency, an epistemological potential and a capacity to produce meaning can be identified that is specific for this mode only. This specific ‘affordance’ of a mode, as it is termed in social semiotics and multimodality theory (cf. Kress 2010, 80-83; Jewitt et al. 2016, 71-72), relies on the textual and communicative metafunctions that M.A.K. Halliday (2004, 29-31) has assigned to all kinds of text and communication: the ideational (or referential or representational) function, i.e. the ability to represent and communicate content, knowledge and experiences; the interpersonal function, i.e. the capacity to establish social interaction between interlocutors; and the textual function which concerns the materiality and signifying potential of semiotic resources (e.g. the alphabet for the written language) and the coherence of a communicative entity as a distinct textual (or medial) unity. By transforming these metafunctions into analytical categories, methodologically these three metafunctions may serve as a basic approach to the meaning of the single semiotic mode. Using the polaroids in the youth novel The Unforgotten Coat (Boyce 2011) as an example, an analysis of the single artefact would thus be interested in the following questions:

(1) What is the content, type of knowledge or kind of experience that the single mode introduces into the novel and the storyworld, in terms of either an individual contribution by one of the characters or the narrator, or in terms of the
sociocultural background knowledge that is accessible in the storyworld (the ideational function)? All of the polaroids in The Unforgotten Coat are produced and presented by Chingis in order to represent the peculiarities of his and his little brother Nergui's home country Mongolia to his new classmates and the teacher in Britain as well as to Julie, his 'good guide' and narrator. Creating a clear content focus for each of the photographs, mostly by selecting a single object, Chingis is able to give everybody an idea of what the landscapes and the flora and fauna of his country of origin look like and what kind of people live there. Julie O'Connor, the autodiegetic narrator expands this visual insight into a full encyclopaedic knowledge by consulting other sources like Wikipedia in an attempt to learn everything about the country and its history. However, it is not only important, but crucial to note that what the reader can know about the content represented in the photographs depends largely not on the pictures themselves but on the explanatory verbal discourse that Chingis provides. The sky, the desert, the rocks and the sky that are presented to the people in the storyworld and to the reader become 'Mongolian' only because Chingis claims they are. In the end, it turns out that all of these polaroids were not at all taken in Mongolia but in the Liverpool area; they are fake photos showing a very familiar environment that becomes recognizable once they are decoded in light of this other background and the insight that the images (part of them trick photographs; 64-65) were purposefully produced to mislead people and to equip Chingis, the photographer, with a life story that conceals his status as an illegal immigrant to Britain.

(2) This specific function of the content and the experiences represented in the polaroids also provide an answer to the second question concerning their interpersonal function, asking what kind of social or communal relation this specific photographic mode constitutes in the fictional world. The interpersonal effect is of a threefold kind: On the one hand, the photos are Chingis's main tool to establish his status as an exotic, yet full member of British society, the school community and his school class. When asked for why he came to the town of Bootle in Britain, his simple answer is, "We are nomads. We move around." (30). Before the secret behind the photographs and their true story is revealed, these photographs make it possible for the narrator to present Chingis's version of his life story. At a more specific interpersonal level, the photographs help to establish and develop a close friendship between the narrator (and 'good guide') and the protagonists, Chingis and his younger brother. It is Julie who first discovers the secret of fake photography when she finds the polaroids and Chingis's notebook in the pockets of his 'unforgotten coat.' Finally, as artefacts these photographs are also valuable social and cultural objects that can be lost and found and can bring back the memory of the childhood days and Chingis's story to Julie the narrator so that, at the interpersonal level, the photographs constitute a very special interpersonal relationship between the narrator and the narratee.

(3) All of the polaroids are instantly identifiable as texts in their own right, with a specific 'textual' boundary represented by the typical white frame around the photographic content of polaroids and a very clear (almost simplistic) semantic coherence constituted through the single object at the centre of the photo. This textual quality of the polaroid is emphasized by the layout which often presents a single photo on a whole page or at least on the greater part of it. Thus, the reader is
urged to assign the equivalent of a full textual page to the photograph while studying it and before carrying on reading the verbal discourse. Other instances of modes as clearly identifiable textual units are the handwritten diary entries that 'Monster' Steve Harmon makes in the novel of the same title and in which he keeps track of and reflects upon his trial in court and his prison life (Myers 1999); the various kinds of lists ('Things I want to do'; 'Favorite things'; 'Ways to live forever' and many more) that Sam presents after he had to learn that he suffers from leukaemia; a poem by Emily Dickinson from 1863 and her mother's handwritten journal from which Franky 'Freeky Green Eyes' Pierson learns the truth about her mother's death (Oates 2003); simple felt pen sketches, a funeral services contract or a newspaper clipping with an agony aunt letter. In other novels, one would come across photographs, most prominently in W.G. Sebald's novel Austerlitz, 2002, but also in youth novels like The Amber Amulet (Silvey 2012); maps (dominant in Reiff Larsen's novel The Collected Works of T.S. Spivet (2009) or scientific formulae and explanations as in Mark Haddon's The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time (2004) or in The Amber Amulet.

As can be inferred from the examples, all of the modes and genres employed in multimodal novels (or other texts) possess a particular signifying potential which is, in a sense, superior to that of other modes. For instance, a photograph of a landscape or a person can display a large number of features and elements of the object in an instant that cannot or can only with great difficulty be represented in verbal form. On the other hand, 'affordance' also implies that a mode may be inferior or have its weaknesses as compared to other modes. For instance, The Unforgotten Coat (Boyce 2011) reveals that the polaroids are highly ambiguous in terms of their representational capacity and thus raise the question of the representational and even epistemological reliability of visual artefacts.

All of the three dimensions of semiotic artefacts, be they verbal, visual or graphic 'texts,' also emphasize that 'reading' the single artefact requires a certain degree of proficiency in the specific 'language' (the codes) on which their communicative and representational function rests (cf. Meyer 2013); the alphabet for the verbal text, the photorealistic code for the photograph, the cartographic code for all kinds of maps and different kinds of cartographic representation. Maps may serve as the most common example. They occur in various multimodal novels as semiotic tools that are reproduced or produced by the narrator or the characters. In The Amber Amulet they provide spatial orientation for the protagonist, twelve-year-old Liam McKenzie. A map of the neighbourhood (Silvey 2012, 12-13) helps this 'Masked Avenger' (and the reader) to organize his nightly vigilances, and a map of the Baltic Sea area (58-59) explains where the 'natural amber depository' (encircled in red by hand) is located in north-eastern Europe. However, maps like these can only be read and provide spatial orientation if the reader is proficient in the cartographic codes that the map displays: black lines (partly dotted), white spaces, geometrical forms and proportions must be decoded as representing streets, gardens and houses; and in the Baltic Sea map it's colours, lines and proportions that must be apprehended as representing a part of Europe and Scandinavia. In the case of maps, it is particularly obvious that their signifying potential is based on cultural, historically emerged and scientifically grounded conventions (in geography, architecture etc.) that define the meaning of colours and lines as signifiers.
The 'language' of maps is among the most common semiotic and communicative resources present in people's everyday lives. As compared to maps which often serve a specific purpose (like in navigation systems), photographs are even more omnipresent and so common, both as a visual medial environment and as artefacts that are extensively produced in everyday life, that most people are not aware of the underlying codes that make it possible to 'read' them. Still, they rely on at least two code systems that are at work whenever we look at a photograph and try 'to read' it (cf. Hallet 2010 for details; also cf. Meyer 2013, 162; Fritzsche 2013): a system of representational codes that makes it possible to parallel the cultural-experiential codes used in everyday life (available as the knowledge of buildings, landscapes, people, dresses etc.) and their mimetic depiction in colour photographs, and an aesthetic code system that makes it possible to apprehend the composition of a photograph (or other visual artefacts) by distinguishing foreground and background, centre and margin and so forth, a focalizing and aesthetic system that attracts the viewers sight, interest and affects.

Such a proficiency is necessary for all other ways of representing, shaping and structuring the world, be they diagrammatic, musical, artistic or scientific. All of them may occur in multimodal novels, as the scientific drawings in The Collected Works of T.S. Spivet (Larsen 2009) or in The Amber Amulet (Silvey 2012) or instances of musical notation in Anthony Burgess's novel The Pianoplayers (1986) demonstrate.

However, when analysing the single artefact in a multimodal novel it is important to remember that artefacts do not have a meaning as such, but that they take on and produce meaning only in given sociocultural contexts and interactions, which, in the multimodal novel, is the fictional lifeworld and its inhabitants as sign-users. A social semiotic analysis of single artefacts therefore views artefacts as a semiotic material residue of a sign-maker's interests mediated through the environment the sign was made in. It sets out to examine the social world as represented in artefacts. The analysis of artefacts is based on available information of the context in which they were produced. (Jewitt et al. 2016, 74)

There are two major effects on the reader's perception of the integration of a non-verbal mode in the narrative. One concerns the imagination of the fictional world. As it has been selected and is foregrounded as a prominent element of the narrative discourse, the single semiotic mode represents an important or crucial social, communicative or cultural practice and its affordance in the fictional lifeworld.

The other effect concerns the way in which the narrative discourse is constituted. It has become obvious that through the three metafunctions mentioned above one of the contributions that the single semiotic mode can make to the novel (the ideational or representational, the interpersonal and the textual meaning) is a specific perspective that is introduced and expressed through a certain kind of text or artefact by one of the characters (the author and creator), be it a photograph, a handwritten letter or an e-mail or any other kind of 'text.' This particular role of the non-novelistic mode is due to the fact that characters bring in a 'voice' of their own, presenting their personal experiences, their views of the world, their versions of the story and so forth in the form of a semiotic artefact. In The Amber Amulet this is the protagonist's self-characterization and self-expression as a super-hero (the Masked Avenger) through photographs, notes, letters and many other artefacts. Thus, although the novel is presented as a third-person narrative, the protagonist has a (semiotically distinct) voice of his own. In The Unforgotten Coat Chingis succeeds in presenting a whole (made-up) life story to the narrator and to his social environment through the polaroids, and in
"Freaky Green Eyes" (Oates 2003) the journal of the narrator's mother introduces an alternative (true) story as opposed to her father's version. However, as much meaning as the single mode may constitute and as dominant as its role in the narrative discourse or in the story may be, the multiperspectivity which is thus constituted is actually an effect of their interplay with all other modes and voices of the novel that will be studied more closely in section 4. Only in light of, and in comparison with, all other modes can the role and contribution of the single mode to the meaning of the novel as a whole be assessed. This is what 'multimodal' as a generic attribute indicates. The specificity of the single mode can only be assessed in light of its embeddedness in a whole range of other modes and voices.

4. The Interplay of the Semiotic Modes

As indicated above, any methodological approach to reading multimodal texts must account for the multifarious ways in which the semiotic modes are interrelated. There are highly specialized ways in which these interrelations can be analysed and described, as in Bateman's (2008) genre and layout approach to a systematic analysis of non-literary multimodal documents across genres. Even if fixed categories or guiding questions should be used in more systematic approaches, it is important to remember that qualifying interrelations always depends on the reader's acts of comprehension and the meaning that they assign to the texts and the novelistic narrative as a whole. There is no such thing as 'relations' or 'meaning' independent of the kind of interaction into which the reader is drawn (cf. Bucher 2011, 127-135). The type of relations that is identified always depends on the given communicative or discursive context, i.e. on the way they are presented in the multimodal narrative of the novel and the story-world that it constitutes.

Bearing this contextuality and relativity of interrelations in mind, any systematic analysis needs to rely on interrelation categories that can serve as hypotheses on the type of interrelatedness of modes and genres that can be identified in the context of a novelistic narrative. Apart from multimodality theories (cf. Bateman 2008; Bucher 2011; Chan 2011), there are various other disciplinary contexts such as picture theory (e.g. Mitchell 1995), design theory (Schriver 1997) or picturebook theory (e.g. Lewis 2001; Serafini 2014) in which categories for such intermodal relations, mostly text-image-relations, have been proposed. This is also why the terminology may differ. Basically, the following types of interrelations may occur; they may be

- redundant (or symmetrical): an image or other modes such as a map or a diagram provide approximately the same information as the verbal narrative. This kind of relation is rare since the specific affordance of every mode makes it almost impossible to represent precisely the same content in different modes;
- complementary (or expansive or enhancing): two or more modes provide information that is only partly available in the other(s). The information provided in one mode is additional to or represented in a more detailed manner in the other. For instance, a general description of the neighbourhood would be complemented by the spatial or topographical information of maps (as in The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time, Haddon 2004, 35; or in The Amber Amulet, Silvey 2012, 12-13). Likewise, a list which is simply mentioned as a generic entity in the verbal narrative (as, e.g., in Ways to Live Forever, Nicholls 2011) reveals its details plus its materiality and design if reproduced as a document in its totality;
juxtapositional (or: contradictory): one mode contrasts with another in some way.

This may affect certain details of an object, but also the story as a whole. Thus, in *Freaky Green Eyes* (Oates 2003, 186-194) the information in the mother's journal contrasts with the story that was available to the narrator prior to her detection of the journal.

These three categories refer to the information and representation (or: content) that is presented in a certain mode, i.e. to the way the storyworld unfolds across modes.

Another type of categorization refers to the role of the individual mode in the narrative discourse. As already pointed out in section 3, every semiotic artefact that is introduced into the storyworld and integrated in the narrative discourse is indexical (in Charles S. Peirce's terms) of its creator or author and thus also represents their position and voice in the polyphony of the novelistic discourse. Thus, an e-mail dialogue, as in *Freaky Green Eyes* (68-69) or in Nick Hornby's *Juliet Naked* (2009, e.g. 104-105 or 142-143), represents two views and perspectives in addition to the narrator's. Likewise, visual, graphic or diagrammatic artefacts represent their creators' viewpoints, strategies or ways of thinking, individual ways of looking at the world that result in the polyphony and multiperspectivity of the novel as a whole.

If semiotic artefacts are not authored or created by one of the individual characters in the storyworld, they may be identified as belonging to their world or representing an individual choice or preference in case they are collected or archived. The same applies to more or less anonymous sources like a newspaper article or an advertisement. In that case, such texts (modes) can be regarded as forming a part of the 'semiotic space' to which the characters are exposed and in which they live, as contributing to the semiosphere that they inhabit, as Lotman (1990, 123-130) says. This way, all of the modes that are part of the narrative add a specific perspective or a cultural way of articulating things or a view beyond the narrator's or one of the character's voices. In that sense, the multimodal novel may even be regarded as imitating or representing the polyphony and multisemiotic constitution of cultural discourses and the various positions that are present in a given cultural context.

A fundamental difference concerns the degree of explicitness with which various modes can make references to each other. Whereas it is quite unusual or exceptional for visual modes to refer to other modes, the capacity to make reference to, comment or elaborate upon other modes in the novel is part of the specific modal affordance of the verbal discourse. Thus, in the vast majority of instances it is a prominent function of the verbal narrative discourse to frame all the other modes and assign to them a role and place in the novelistic discourse and in the storyworld. This is accomplished through naming agents and creators, commenting upon the sociocultural role of a mode in the storyworld or, at a metasemiotic level, reflecting upon the signifying or epistemological capacity of non-verbal modes. In one of the most popular multimodal youth novels, *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-time Indian* (Alexie 2007), the autodiegetic narrator provides a consistent rationale for why he integrates his own drawings and hand-made portraits in his autobiographical story and where the potential of visual images lies as compared to the human language:

I draw because words are too unpredictable. I draw because words are too limited. If you speak and write in English, or Spanish, or Chinese, or any other language, then only a certain percentage of human beings will get your meaning. But when you draw a picture, everybody can understand it. (Alexie 2007, 5).
Thus, in most multimodal novels a superior role is ascribed to the linguistic-discursive mode: it assigns and defines a place to other modes in the fictional world, explains their origin and relevance or connects them to the agents or the narrator and other constituents (time and chronology, space, story effects etc.) of the narrative. Thus, the verbal mode takes on the task of framing all other modes, suggesting a hierarchy and cultural order of interrelatedness between them. Often the linguistic part of the narrative discourse also reflects or comments critically upon the semiotic or epistemological quality and capacity of visual modes (cf. section 6). Even if the verbal human language is subject to a critique of its signifying and epistemological potential, verbal narration in the multimodal novel bears witness of its superiority by framing other modes and integrating them into the novelistic narrative.

5. The Construction of Transmodal Meaning

As any common reader intuitively does, a more systematic and analytical approach to a multimodal text will have to integrate all of the individual meanings of the single modes and the effects of their interplay with each other in one transmodal (synthesized, holistic) meaning. It is constituted at a higher level across all the modes of the narrative discourse and more than just the sum of the individual meanings of the single modes or of the specific kinds of intermodal relations. As has often been stated, such transmodal meaning-making is a normality rather than an unusual challenge in everyday life. Therefore, the construction of a novel's transmodal meaning and its storyworld often imitates or resembles a reader's everyday meaning-making activities (cf. Hallet 2008 for details).

Since the novel is a narrative with a range of constituents, from a methodological perspective one of the standard procedures would be to try and identify in what manner a specific mode and intermodal effects contribute to the emergence of these constituents in the course of narration. In particular, an analytical approach would seek to describe modal effects on the constitution of

- *actions, plot and story*. Analytical questions concerning these constituents would try to describe in what way a specific mode or its interplay with other modes (and verbal narrative discourse in particular) contributes to the development of actions, the plot and the whole story. Such an analysis often reveals that a certain type of mode may even form the centre of the novel since it may be plot-driving or the semantic centre. This applies to the photographs in Sebald's *Kindertransport* novel *Austerlitz*, to the autodiegetic narrator's scientific drawings in *The Collected Works of T.S. Spivet* or to the polaroids in *The Unforgotten Coat*.

- *character*: In multimodal novels, specific semiotic modes are often directly connected with, or an expression of, an individual character's preferences, cognitive or interactional strategies or of their way of looking at the world. This way, the polaroids in *The Unforgotten Coat* are part of the protagonist's storytelling and authentication strategy; maps in *T.S. Spivet*, in Haddon's *Curious Incident* or in *The Amber Amulet* are the autodiegetic narrators' almost idiosyncratic strategy of structuring and understanding the world. And the lists in *Ways to Live Forever* (Nicholls 2011) represent the narrator's strategy to gather as much knowledge and experience of the world as possible before he will have to die from leukaemia.

- *space and setting*: The multimodal constitution of storyworld spaces is a new experience to readers. While in the traditional novel the spatial imagination of the
fictional world is mostly based on words and verbal discourse, there is additional spatial information available in multimodal novels. It may be presented in the form of photographs, cartographic maps, ground plans of houses or a narrator’s or character's drawing and many other forms. In many cases, exploring and 'reading' space in non-verbal symbolic form may even form the centre of the novel, as is the case in re-reading New York in Paul Auster's City of Glass (1990), re-constructing Europe as the space of the Kindertransporte and the Holocaust in Austerlitz, or re-exploring the North-American Continent in T.S. Spivet (cf. Hallet 2011 and 2016 for details). It is important to note that the representation of space in multimodal novels is not limited to spatial information in the narrow sense (as is the case in maps), but that it is often equipped with information on a space's inhabitants, prevailing social and cultural practices or its historical emergence in the form of documents, (fictional) autobiographic sources or found and collected objects. Foër's famous 9/11 novel (2006) is a paradigmatic instance of such a more comprehensive symbolic constitution and representation of space. The city space of New York and the narrator's journeys through the city are represented through photographic documentation, the collection of ephemera (like the paper pad) and the display of all sorts of other artefacts, including a flip-book presenting the cultural icon of the falling man in front of the twin towers of the World Trade Centre on 9/11 (cf. Hallet 2011, 233-234).

- social, cultural and communicative practices: The constitution of fictional as much as of non-fictional worlds depends largely on the ways its inhabitants act and interact, communicate and are culturally productive. As can be expected, multimodal novels often cast a particular light on these practices, displaying the symbolic or semiotic features of expressing oneself, of different ways of communicating, of building social orders, or of engaging in social interactions. Multimodal novels thus often interrogate prevailing social and cultural practices, the use of the human language, of other symbolic languages or of media in a given society, and its inhabitants' ways of making sense of the world (cf. Reinhard's theory of 'the sense of fictional worlds,' 1997). A novel like S. Ship of Theseus, By V.M. Straka (Abrams and Dorst 2013), which presents the reader with marginal notes, ephemera, forgotten postcards and deliberately placed notes, newspaper pages and so forth, thus displays a range of habits and practices that readers develop when working with a library copy of a book.

A multimodal analysis seeks to identify and describe the inter- and transsemiotic way a fictional world is constituted in the novel and the way the various modes contribute to unfolding it in the whole narrative discourse. One of the general theoretical implications is, of course, that 'narrative discourse' can no longer be defined as a solely linguistic act. In the multimodal novel, it integrates and interweaves a range of different semiotic artefacts and symbolic languages. 'Discourse' itself is now a multi-semiotic category.

6. Cultural Functions: Meta-Semiosis, Epistemological Skepticism and Cultural Critique

One of the more general conclusions that can be drawn from the considerations in the preceding sections is that the multimodal novel is just one instance of multimodality
as a general cultural practice of signifying, making sense of the world and communicating. However, due to the specificity of occurring in a literary text, multimodality in the novel does not simply mirror or imitate semiotic social and cultural practices in fictional form; it also reflects and comments upon them critically or self-reflexively. Therefore, beyond the narratological approach proposed in the previous sections it is productive to engage in a cultural and contextual functional investigation. As can be expected, novels that display different semiotic modes often thematise or question their representational potential or reliability, thus establishing a meta-level of narration and cultural reflection that can be systematized and subdivided in the following way:

- **Meta-fictional functions**: As has become clear from various examples, multimodal novels often thematise the way a story can be told and the degree of fictionality that is produced in the course of narration. Fictionality and fake stories may even form the core of the whole narrative, as is the case, e.g., for the stories about her mother that were told to the young narrator by her father in *Freaky Green Eyes* or for the authenticity of the polaroids in *The Unforgotten Coat*. Such reflections on the degree of fictionality of any symbolic representation are obviously relevant far beyond the boundaries of the fictional storyworld.

- **Meta-semiosis**: Questions of fictionality and representational power are obviously directly connected with the use of certain semiotic modes and assumptions about their respective affordances. It is an almost generalizable observation that one of the conspicuous features of multimodal novels is a critical evaluation, often also a revaluation of the communicative, representational or epistemological affordance, efficiency or appropriateness of specific semiotic modes. In such cases, the narrator or one of the characters would reflect or comment upon the cultural or semiotic work of a specific mode, questioning or criticizing its role or potential for discursive, representational or epistemological purposes. The multimodal novel is particularly suited or prone to such meta-semiotic reflections since in a comparative approach one specific mode, like verbal language or cartography established in mainstream culture, can be critiqued in light of or with the help of another mode. For instance, the realistic photograph is often regarded as being superior to the spoken or the written word since it seems to provide unquestionable evidence. Multimodal novels question and often critique this simplifying, but culturally established assumption by displaying the misleading character or representational insufficiency of this supposedly reliable photographic (or filmic) mode of representation. Likewise, other semiotic modes, including verbal language in multimodal novels, are questioned and submitted to sceptical investigation with regard to their respective affordance.

- **Epistemological scepticism**: Since symbolic forms and semiotic modes like the photograph, the cartographic map or formulaic languages are not only means of representation, but also ways of structuring and understanding the world (‘ways of world-making’; Goodman 1978), multimodal novels can be regarded as an important way of exploring the affordances of modes beyond their signifying capacity and engaging in epistemological reflections. In Sebald's *Austerlitz* the protagonist does not only give up his project of 'writing' a European photographic cultural history, but he also loses his confidence in languages and signs in general so that his encyclopaedic project fails:

Anglistik, Volume 29 (2018), Issue 1
© 2018 Universitätsverlag WINTER GmbH Heidelberg
The exposition of an idea by means of a certain stylistic facility [...] now seemed to me nothing but an entirely arbitrary or deluded enterprise. I could see no connections any more, the sentences resolved themselves into a series of separate words, the words into random sets of letters, the letters into disjointed signs. (Sebald 2002, 175-176)

Thus, multimodal novels often raise the awareness of the semiotic (symbolic) constructedness of what we call ‘the world’ and of the knowledge we can possibly have about it.

- Cultural critique: The functions addressed above often go hand in hand with a more general reflection on and critique of social, societal and cultural developments and the role that established signifying practices play in them. As in Reif Larsen’s *T.S. Spivet*, such a critique can be very fundamental and may concern the foundation of a whole society and state. In this novel, the young autodiegetic narrator accuses George Washington of “imagining all sorts of false geographies” (Larsen 2009, 33) and he generalizes his observations in a critical historical perspective on the emergence of the United States of America:

> [T]hese early cartographers of the Corps of Topographical Engineers [...] were conquerors in the most basic sense of the word, for over the course of the nineteenth century, they slowly transferred the vast unknown continent piece by piece into the great machine of the known, of the mapped, of the witnessed – out of the mythical realm of empirical science. (Larsen 2009, 16)

The cultural functions delineated above once more refer us back to the more general consideration that no single semiotic mode, let alone the manifold ways in which modes may be combined and interrelated can take on meaning regardless of the cultural context and social field in which they occur. However, in an analysis of semiotic modes, there is always a multiplicity of contexts at work since there are processes and practices of making meaning in the fictional world; but these fictional processes are related to various ‘contexts’ in the non-fictional world in which the novel is produced and received.

**Works Cited**


Anglistik, Volume 29 (2018), Issue 1

© 2018 Universitätsverlag WINTER GmbH Heidelberg