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‘I felt like I’d stepped out of a different reality’: possible worlds theory, metalepsis and digital fiction

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'I felt like I'd stepped out of a different reality':

Possible Worlds Theory, Metalepsis and Digital Fiction[1]

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Introduction

This chapter offers a Possible-Worlds approach to metalepsis (Bell and Alber 2012) and, through its application to digital fiction, profiles a transmedial approach to this narratological device. It begins with an overview of the theory of metalepsis before arguing that conceptualising metalepses as transgressions between worlds as opposed to the more abstract concept of diegetic levels more accurately accounts for what readers are asked to imagine happens when they encounter a metalepsis. It then shows how Possible Worlds Theory — and the concepts of counterparthood and transworld identity in particular — provides a systematic and replicable means of analysing metalepsis.

By combining the Possible-Worlds approach with a stylistic and multimodal analysis of Andy Campbell and Judi Alston's (2010) *Nightingale's Playground* the chapter shows how metalepses are enacted in digital fiction, not just through verbal language as is typical in print texts, but also through non-textual elements such as sound, images and interactive interface elements. Further, it shows that digital fiction allows metalepses to take place across the actual-fictional world boundary so as to insert the reader within the fiction in a way that is simply not possible in print. The chapter concludes that Possible Worlds Theory is able to model metalepses more accurately than other narrative theories that do not have

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an ontological focus. Yet while it can facilitate both a transmedial and media-specific analysis, it requires some modification for its application to digital fiction.

What is metalepsis?

A metalepsis, as initially defined by Genette (1980) is 'any intrusion by the extradiegetic narrator or narratee into the diegetic universe (or by the diegetic characters into a metadiegetic universe, etc), or the inverse' (234-5). Metalepsis is thus a term that describes the movement of entities between what are, according to actual world logic, distinct realms. Metalepses can be 'descending' (Pier 2005) in which a fictional entity moves from a diegetic level to a hierarchically lower one as in, for example, Woody Allen's short story 'The Kugelmass Episode' (1980), in which university professor Kugelmass hires a magician to help him enter the fictional world of *Madame Bovary*. Alternatively when a fictional entity moves from a diegetic level to a hierarchically higher level, the metaleptic jump is 'ascending' (Pier 2005). This happens in, for example, Flann O'Brien's (1939) *At Swim-Two-Birds*, when the characters that are invented by the fictional author, Dermot Trellis, check themselves into his hotel to torture him. Metalepses, as Herman (1997) notes, can also 'dissolve the border not just between diegetic levels, but also between the actual and the non-actual - or rather between two different systems of actuality' (134). Thus 'metalepsis' is also used to describe instances in which authors appear in their own works (e.g. Chen 2008, Kukkonen 2011) such as Jonathan Coe's appearance at the end of his novel *The Terrible Privacy of Maxwell Sim* (2010), and also in instances of second-person address to the reader (e.g. McHale 1997: 89-95; Fludernik 2003: 389) such as the address to 'you' at the beginning of Italo Calvino's (1979) *If On A Winter's Night a Traveller.* Crucially, in all cases of metalepses, an entity moves across an ontological boundary.

Metalepsis and Ontology

Following the original Genettean definition, some narratologists analyse metalepses in terms of transgressions between diegetic or narrative *levels* (e.g. Cohn 2012, Fludernik 2003). This form of analysis can be applied to texts, such as 'The Kugelmass Episode' and *Swim-Two-Birds,* in which metalepses take place across boundaries that exist within the fictional world only because diegetic levels can be analysed within this space. However, other metalepses, such as the appearance of the author within their work or the use of second-person address, do not suit this model as well because the actual world is not properly accounted for in a diegetic level model. When Jonathan Coe appears in *The Terrible Privacy of Maxwell Sim*, a diegetic level analysis would propose that a fictionalised version of Coe exists as a quasi-narrator figure in an extra-diegetic level. This narrator then intrudes into the diegetic level below him. However, this does not accurately model what readers are asked to imagine happens when Coe appears in his novel; they are supposed to believe that Coe in the text is Coe, the author from the actual world and that an ontological boundary has been violated.

While the ontological peculiarity of the device is especially pronounced in instances in which the actual-to-fictional boundary is crossed, all cases of metalepsis ask readers to imagine that entities have moved between worlds. The characters from Dermot Trellis' novel move from the world *in* which they were created to the world *from* which they were created; Kugelmass moves from a fictional world in which Emma from *Madame Bovary* was created to an embedded fictional world in which she exists.

Adopting the term 'world' as opposed to 'level' in textual analysis seeks to address the narrative mechanics of metalepsis more authentically by emphasising the ontological nature of the device. However, it is also significant for the method of analysis because it allows tools that are specifically designed to analyse the relationship between worlds to be utilised. In line with the methodological remit of stylistic analysis, I suggest that established concepts and terminology from Possible Worlds Theory, a systematic and comprehensive framework that is designed specifically to analyse worlds and the interactions between them, can be adopted (Bell and Alber 2012).

Possible Worlds Theory as an Approach to Fiction

As a theory that is founded on propositional modal logic, Possible Worlds Theory is primarily concerned with the relationship between the 'actual world' – the world we belong to – and 'possible worlds' – worlds that are constructed through imagination, hypothetical situations, dreams, wishes, etc. While Possible Worlds Theory originates in philosophical logic (e.g. Hintikka 1967; Kripke 1972; Lewis 1973; Plantinga 1974), it can also be used in a narratological context (Ryan 1991) because the world described by a fictional text represents a particular type of possible world: a textual actual world. As a methodological approach, Possible Worlds Theory provides appropriate terminology for labelling different ontological domains and is extremely proficient at analysing complicated ontological configurations. It is therefore especially effective for analysing fictions that play self-reflexively with ontological structures (e.g. Ashline 1995, Bell 2010, Punday 1997, Ryan 2001) including metaleptic texts (cf. Pier 2011). Most relevant to the study of metalepsis are the Possible-Worlds concepts of 'transworld identity' and 'counterparthood' which can be used to explain the process whereby individuals can be cross-identified between different

worlds (e.g. Margolin 1990; Pavel 1979) and thus can ultimately be used to explain the ontological mechanics of metalepsis.

Possible Worlds Theory, Counterparthood and Transworld Identity

While 'transworld identity' and 'counterparthood' both originate in Possible-Worlds philosophical logic, they each have a distinct and, crucially, contradictory theoretical heritage: the 'abstractionist' and 'concretist' schools of possible-worlds logic respectively (Nolan 2002). Historically, when Possible Worlds Theory has been applied to literary texts, this inconsistency has been largely ignored. However, when using Possible Worlds Theory to analyse metalepsis, it is imperative that concepts from both schools are available but also, as the section below explains, kept distinct.

From a 'concretist' perspective (e.g. Lewis 1973) possible worlds comprise tangible domains which materially exist; they have the same ontological status as the actual world. Thus, the individuals that populate possible worlds also exist in the same way that the individuals that populate the actual world exist; constituents of both possible worlds and actual worlds are concrete. An entity in the actual world cannot be the *same* entity as that in a possible world because it is impossible for them to exist simultaneously with the same ontological status (i.e. actual) in two different worlds. As Lewis (1983) explains, 'worlds do not overlap … No possible individual is part of two worlds' (39). From Lewis's concretist perspective, therefore, it is impossible for the same individual to exist within a number of different possible worlds. Each individual within each possible world as a 'counterpart' of the others as opposed to the same individual travelling between domains.

Conversely, from an 'abstractionist' perspective (e.g. Hintikka 1967, Kripke 1972, Plantinga 1974), possible worlds represent the way things might have been rather than how they actually are within an alternative ontological domain. While the actual world is a concrete domain, possible worlds comprise imaginary conceptions only. Accordingly, their constituents, including the individuals that populate them, are also only imaginary. According to this philosophical position, the same individual *can* travel between and thus exist within a number of different ontological contexts. As Kripke (1972) explains 'in talking about what would have happened to Nixon in a certain counterfactual situation, we are talking about what would have happened to him' (44). Kripke refutes that the same individual exists in different ontological domains as a counterpart and instead the same individual is seen to travel between the potentially infinite numbers of possible worlds. Individuals therefore possess what abstractionists refer to as 'transworld identity'.

While originating in philosophical logic, these two concepts can be used in a narratological analysis of metalepses. For instance, in the descending metalepsis in 'The Kugelmass Episode' described above, when Kugelmass pursues Emma Bovary, readers are asked to imagine that Kugelmass has left one textual actual world and moved to another textual actual world; in Possible-Worlds terminology, the Kugelmass possess transworld identity.

In other instances of metalepsis, the concept of 'counterparthood' is required because readers need to keep two versions of an individual in mind at the same time. In *The Terrible Privacy of Maxwell Sim* when Jonathan Coe talks to protagonist Maxwell about the creative process of writing the novel, readers are asked to believe that Jonathan Coe from the actual world now also exists in the textual actual world described in the novel. However, in order

that readers can recognise the figure that sits in the train carriage as Jonathan Coe, they have to know that Jonathan Coe also exists as the author of that text in the actual world. Jonathan Coe's descending metaleptic jump is therefore not an example of transworld identity because he has not made a permanent transition from actual to the textual actual. Instead it is an example of counterparthood: Jonathan Coe exists in the actual world as the author of *The Terrible Privacy of Maxwell Sim* and Jonathan Coe also exists in the textual actual world as a character with the same ontological status as the other characters. The two Jonathan Coe figures are thus counterparts of one another.

Metalepsis and Non-Print Media

The preceding section presents a systematic and replicable approach to metalepsis in fiction which can, in theory, be applied to any fictional narrative containing a metaleptic jump. Until relatively recently research on metalepsis has primarily focussed on printed narratives and thus on exclusively verbal manifestations of this device. Yet as Kukkonen (2011) notes 'metalepsis ... occurs in a variety of multimodal media' (18) and different media 'allow for different ways of depicting the fictional and the real world, of drawing and identifying the boundary between them and of realizing different types, effects and functions of the transgression of these boundaries' (18-19) (cf. Ryan 2006). Within recent studies that analyse non-print texts, analyses show how the affordances of various media facilitate different kinds of metalepsis. This chapter will contribute to that research by analysing metalepsis in digital fiction.

Digital fiction is 'fiction that is written for and read on a computer screen, that pursues its verbal, discursive and/or conceptual complexity through the digital medium, and that would

lose something of its aesthetic function if it were removed from that medium' (Bell et al., 2010). Digital fiction is therefore 'born digital' and thus created for and through digital media rather than being converted from print. It includes hypertext fiction, kinetic poetry, Flash fiction, and some videogames. Digital Fictions are often multimodal, so that in addition to text, they may use images, film, sound or animation to depict the textual actual world. Further, in almost all digital fictions, the reader has an overt role in constructing the narrative (for example, by selecting hyperlinks or by responding to textual cues) so that the reader must interact with the narrative throughout the reading experience.

Using the Possible-Worlds approach outlined above, this chapter will provide two examples of metalepsis in a Web-based digital fiction called *Nightingale's Playground.* It will show how metalepses can be enacted multimodally and how the digital context allows multimodality to work alongside the reader's interactive role. By analysing two examples of media-specific metalepsis, this essay will also examine the extent to which the Possible-Worlds approach can be used to analyse metalepsis in non-print media.

Metalepsis in *Nightingale's Playground*

Andy Campbell and Judi Alston's *Nightingale's Playground* is an eerie first-person Web-based narrative. Split into four parts, the narrative focusses on protagonist Carl and in particular his relationship with his old school friend Alex Nightingale. The narrative reveals that the two friends bonded while playing the 1980's cult 8-bit videogame, *The Sentinel*, in which players have to get closer to the all-seeing, all-powerful 'Sentinel' without being noticed. As *Nightingale's Playground* progresses and readers learn more about Carl and his past, his narrative seems to become less reliable as some parts of the text suggest that Alex

may not have existed at all. However, the narrative leaves it ambiguous as to whether Carl has imagined part of his past and is therefore psychologically unwell or whether something supernatural, and related to the Sentinel from the videogame, has happened that has meant that Alex and everyone else's memory of him has been erased.

The work uses text, static and moving images, and sound effects and, as is typical in digital fiction, the reader must click on objects onscreen to reveal text. Thus, engaging with what Ensslin (2014) has defined as a 'literary-ludic' feature, readers must take part in the textual game: they can also only progress to the next part of the narrative once all sections of a particular sequence have been visited.

Analysis 1: The Metaleptic Cursor and Counterparthood

Entering the first 'chapter' of the text, entitled Consensus Trance I, the reader is presented with a darkened bedroom scene as shown in Figure 1.

INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE

The bedroom looks decrepit and contains a minimal amount of furniture – just an old mattress and wooden chair. The wall has pieces of wallpaper missing and the carpet is worn. The room has no light apart from that coming from the window; the shadows that these cause make the room quite difficult to see clearly. A red suitcase on a stripped bed suggests either that someone has just arrived or that they are leaving. Either way, this is not a particularly homely or welcoming environment.

As with many other digital fictions, the reader is given instructions on the first screen using the second-person: ‘Use the mouse to pan around and click on narratives you have read.’ Here the imperative gives the reader two commands with the verbs drawing attention to their two different roles: ‘pan’ to their exploratory function and ‘click’ to their interactive role. As the reader moves the cursor, the screen pans around and the visual point of view – or what Ciccoricco (2012) following Thon (2009) has called ‘point of action’ – shifts. This exploratory function means that the reader is given partial responsibility for the visual perspective. The narrative that they uncover is verbal however; when the reader clicks on particular areas of the room, she discovers text and the narrative advances.

As the reader explores the surroundings by moving the mouse, she is also able to delve into the narrator’s space and his belongings. For example, clicking on the red suitcase in the room, the visual perspective moves with the reader to the case before zooming in to give her a closer look. The narrator then tells us that ‘I took some things out of the case for a closer look’. In order that the reader can see the contents of the case, the reader has to click the mouse on the case again. The case then opens and the point of view zooms in again so that we can see items inside it more closely. Clicking on individual object within the case such as a calculator and a videogame case, we get more textual information about those objects from the narrator in the first person. There is a mixing of roles and perspectives here. The point of view is narrated verbally by the protagonist in the past tense, but the visual perspective is both his and ours in the present tense.

The reader’s relationship to the textual actual world in *Nightingale’s Playground* can be explained by utilising Ryan’s (2008, 1991) Possible-Worlds concept of ‘recentring’, a theory

developed to explain readers' relationships to fictional worlds in general. Ryan (2008) suggests that 'through their act of make-believe, readers, spectators, or players transport themselves in imagination from the world they regard as actual toward an alternative possible world — a virtual reality — which they regard as actual for the duration of their involvement in the text, game, or spectacle. … I call this projection into a virtual body an imaginative recentering' (251, cf. Ryan 1991: 21–3). Recentring is thus an epistemological process by which readers imagine and therefore, to some extent, believe that the textual actual world described by a text really does exist; for the duration of their reading, readers 'recentre' or deictically relocate (cf. McIntyre 2006) into that textual actual world. Ryan (1991) explains, 'we know that the textual universe, as a whole, is an imaginary alternative to our system of reality; but for the duration of the game, as we step into it, we behave as if the actual world of the text textual universe were *the* actual world' (23).

As Ryan also acknowledges in the first quotation above, recentring occurs whenever readers encounter a fictional narrative of any kind – they can be 'readers, spectators, or players' – and thus the concept of recentring can apply to and also be analysed in a range of media. Accordingly, recentering is not always stimulated verbally but can also be stimulated by a range of modes (cf. Van Looy 2005). In *Nightingale's Playground*, readers are recentred via verbal, visual and audible cues. In some cases, the recentring is instigated via one mode exclusively. For example, when the narrator tells us that 'Yesterday I went to a school reunion in the hope of meeting up with my old best friend Alex Nightingale', readers regard the adverb 'yesterday' as referring to a temporal point in the textual actual world, rather than the actual world, but there are no corresponding visuals to confirm that. By contrast, when Carl tells us that he 'ended up in this Hellish place', readers process the proximal

demonstrative, ‘this’, as referring to the room that is depicted visually on the screen. The reader is recentred multimodally therefore by text and image working together.

Irrespective of the modes at work which recentre the reader epistemologically and cognitively, the reader of any text is of course corporeally and thus ontologically external from the textual actual world in the actual world. The external position in this digital reading experience is emphasised further for the reader because of her interactive function. By moving and clicking the mouse, she is reminded that she is involved in constructing and reading a fiction. However, because the reader’s choices are symbolized onscreen by the cursor which she uses to explore and inspect the textual actual world (e.g. the bedroom, the suitcase, etc.), a trace of the reader can also be seen within it.

The digitalised trace of the reader is especially apparent when she explores some of the items closely – as in the suitcase. As explained above, in order to learn more about the contents of the suitcase, she moves the mouse onto that item so that the visual point of view moves and zooms to that item. This draws the reader’s visual perspective into the textual actual world. However, as a reader she has to do this from her position at the computer in the actual world. The distinction between these two spaces and the reader’s two different roles is signalled visually throughout this particular work by the border that surrounds the visual representation of the textual actual world on the screen. As Figure 1 shows, the space on which the reader has influence and in which the narrative unfolds is contained within a gilded picture frame, with the exterior that surrounds it containing the title and instructions only, acting as a kind of permanent front matter for the narrative. Thus, the reader is able to influence her view of the world by moving the mouse in the actual

world but we also get a digital trace of the reader within the textual actual world via the cursor. Thus, the cursor acts as a visual and ontological manifestation of the recentred reader in the textual actual world.

Analysing the role of the mouse in human-computer interaction in general, Bizzocchi and Woodbury (2003) suggest ‘we are so accustomed to this correlation [between hand movements and associated cursor movements] that it is perfectly transparent – we don’t think about it, we don’t question it, we don’t even notice it’ (558). However, when reading a digital literary text and one that allows readers to explore a graphical representation of the textual actual world, the cursor is ontologically salient because it grants the reader access to a distinct and autonomous ontological domain. Theorising the ontologically intrusive nature of the cursor in digital fiction, Ryan (2006) suggests that the cursor is ‘the representation of the reader’s virtual body in the virtual world’ (122). Ensslin's (2009) concept of ‘double-situatedness’ also implies dual ontology. She argues that ‘on the one hand, user-readers are 'embodied' as direct receivers, whose bodies interact with the hardware and software of a computer. On the other, user-readers are considered to be 'reembodied' through feedback which they experience in represented form, e.g. through visible or invisible avatars (third person or first person graphic or typographic representations on screen)’ (158). Both theorists thus suggest that the cursor is a version or a copy of the reader in an alternate space.

In *Nightingale’s Playground*, the reader-as-cursor does not have the same ontological status as the characters in the textual actual world; the reader’s presence is via the cursor rather than a character-like avatar as is typical in some videogames. However, as Ciccoricco (2012)

notes, 'the mouse pointer is in effect a literal, analog representation of the reader's movement in the text' (262) and the reader-as-cursor does have a presence and some influence within the textual actual world of *Nightingale's Playground*. It thus represents a form of metalepsis because the reader appears to have crossed an ontological boundary, albeit in a digital form. From a theoretical perspective, within Possible Worlds Theory, which relies on strict ontological categorisations based in philosophical logic, an entity belongs either to the actual world (and/or associated possible worlds) or to the textual actual world (and/or associated textual possible worlds), to both actual and textual actual, but, crucially, not in-between domains. Thus entities, such as the onscreen cursor, that are not completely textual-actual but that have a presence and influence in that realm compromise the theory to some extent.

Yet while the logical foundations of Possible Worlds Theory prohibit such ontological ambiguity, as the analysis above has shown, it is entirely possible within a digital literary context. Ronen (1994) regards logical violations as an unavoidable component of all types of fiction. She argues that 'the literary interpretation of possibility is … bound to make use of possible world notions in a way that intensifies the autonomy of fictional worlds at the expense of doing justice to the *logical* meaning of possibility' (61, my emphasis). She thus suggests that all fictional worlds compromise possible-worlds logic to some extent because the concerns of fiction are not those of possible-worlds logic. Most obviously, fictional texts construct worlds that readers interpret and enjoy rather than measure propositions against. From a cognitive point of view also, readers are adept at conceptualising ontological configurations which do not necessarily obey the logic laws of the actual world so that ontological peculiarities such as the reader's role within the textual actual world of

Nightingale's Playground, while perhaps uncanny, are part of that fictional experience and not necessarily problematic to process. The ontologically transgressive cursor simply represents a new, media-specific feature of storytelling, facilitated by the affordances digital technologies have brought. We might see the space that the reader occupies as the narrational part or mediating part of the textual actual world.

Thus while the reader-as-cursor does not have the same ontological status as other entities within the textual actual world, she does have a presence and some influence within it. She thus exists in a digital form within the textual universe. At the same time, as reader of the fiction she also exists, corporeally, in the actual world. Thus, like the case of Jonathan Coe appearing in his own fiction, analysed above, the reader is also present in two different ontological domains at the same time and she enacts a form of descending metalepsis. Yet unlike in Coe's print text, where the author appears verbally, the reader is appears visually. Using the possible-worlds approach to metalepsis, we can make the analysis more systematic by seeing the cursor as a *counterpart* of the reader. Readers are situated in the actual world but they are ultimately doubly-situated because of their presence within the textual actual world or, rather, this is a form of digital counterparthood.

Kukkonen (2011) hypothesizes that 'narrative research into hypertext forms ... will certainly reveal a wealth of what I would call "interactional metalepsis"' (18) and the metaleptic cursor would seem to offer one such case. Since all digital fictions utilise some form of onscreen navigational aid, the cursor-as-reader counterpart relation and associated digital metalepsis is not necessarily exclusive to *Nightingale's Playground* (see Bell 2014 for another example of a metaleptic cursor). However, the verbal and, crucially, visual point of

view within the text does allow the reader to permeate the textual universe and intrude into this fictional space in a way that is certainly not possible in print. It reveals how the cursor represents an exclusively digital metaleptic jump and also that Possible Worlds Theory can, with some modification, be combined with media-specific analysis (Hayles 2002) to analyse it.

Analysis 2: Audible Metalepsis and Transworld Identity

In addition to the verbal and visual representation that the reader receives of the textual actual world, *Nightingale's Playground* also contains a permanent audio accompaniment. Some audio, on the opening sequences, is 'non-diegetic', which is 'mood music … represented as being outside the space of the narrative' (Stam, 1992: 62, cf. Horowitz and Loone, 2014: 76 who consider sound in computer games). In the sequence depicted in Figure 1 above, for example, eerie background music plays which, when combined with the visual darkness of the room, creates a rather sinister atmosphere for the narrative. Other audio is diegetic or 'sounds represented as emerging from a source within the story, and temporally simultaneous with the image it accompanies' (Stam, 1992: 62). These sound effects are not just creating atmosphere, therefore, but instead are intended to represent for the reader what the narrator can or could hear at the time. Readers are to believe therefore that the sounds originate ontologically in the textual actual world. Examples in *Nightingale's Playground* include the sound of street noise when the reader's visual point of view is directed through a window; rain falling outside when a storm is shown on screen; and the sound of a busy urban landscape when the reader is given a view of a high street (see Figure 2).

INSERT FIGURE 2 HERE

In each case of the three examples mentioned above, textual narration accompanies the image. In the high street scene in Figure 2, we learn from the text that the narrator was in a confused mental state. He says 'I didn't realise at first that I'd brought the red case into town with me' and later that 'I felt like I'd stepped out of a different reality. Everyone droning around oblivious'. The narrative here is past tense and thus is Carl's recollection of what happened on this particular day. That the reader can hear the street scene is therefore ontologically and temporally anomalous because it suggests that we are witnessing his memory and/or Carl's past in bleeding into the present.

The various diegetic sounds in *Nightingale's Playground* ultimately constitute a form of ascending metalepsis because in each case a noise that originates in the textual actual world crosses the ontological boundary to reach the reader in the actual world (cf. Keazor 2011). While sound effects are used in various audio-visual media, such as cinematic film, and are thus not necessarily uncommon, in this digital fiction the diegetic sounds are intermittent and thus the metalepsis is foregrounded at particular points in the narrative. It is as though part of the textual actual world leaks into the actual world crossing what McHale (1987) calls 'semipermeable membrane' (34) through which both worlds seem to be temporarily but uncannily accessible to one other. More specifically, because a perceptible sound moves from the textual actual to the actual world – rather than there being two versions of those noises – the noises possess transworld identity. In this case, therefore, an inanimate entity, not a character or narrator, encroaches into the actual world and thus possesses transworld identity. That this digital fiction shows inanimate metaleptic components is significant from

a theoretical point of view because most studies of metalepsis focus on the movement of a character and/or narrator between ontological domains and thus on sentient components from a textual actual world. This example shows, however, that digital fiction allows inanimate objects to perform metaleptic jumps across world boundaries.

This ascending audible metalepses implies that the textual actual world can intrude into the reader's physical-sensory space. However, that the reader has access to the narrator's past world, via his memory, also means that she is intruding on the characters' private and personal (corporeal) space. The audible metalepses, like the metaleptic cursor, thus accentuate the reader's voyeuristic position in relation to the textual actual world. What is particularly unsettling about the cases of metalepsis in *Nightingale's Playground* is that by being able to access Carl's world via sound effects and exploring the textual actual world as a 'doubly-situated' counterpart, we are witness to if not corroborating with what is potentially a disturbed mind. As explained earlier, as we move through *Nightingale's Playground*, we learn that the narrator might not be as reliable as we might have initially thought. While Carl remembers his old school friend Alex Nightingale, his other school friends don't know who Alex Nightingale is. The narrator recounts, 'What's weird … is that none of them seemed to remember Alex at all.' Later in the narrative, Carl reports an interaction between him and his grandmother: 'I felt a chill down my back. She sounded a bit like Alex.' The narrator thus suggests that his grandmother might not be what she appears to be. He recounts elsewhere that his grandmother advises 'that there were things in the world, happenings, that she didn't understand, and neither would I, and neither would anyone else, and that sometimes it was best to just leave them alone.' In the context of Carl's narrative, this cautionary statement seems sinister rather than friendly familial

reassurance, but the reality of this remains ambiguous. Thus, readers are positioned visually, verbally and, sometimes, ontologically with the narrator, but we are not sure whether we can trust his perspective. The ontological status of Carl's tale is thus questionable. Further, while we are privy to the narrator's musings and allowed to explore the textual actual world to some extent, the reader is actually unable to explore it comprehensively because she belongs to a different ontological domain. There is a tension between epistemological access to intimate thoughts and the simulated ontological access to the textual actual world, and the actual ontological exclusion from the textual actual world. The reader is powerless within the textual actual world beyond what the narrator and the machine code will allow. Ultimately, readers do not find out what has really happened to Carl and/or Alex.

Conclusion

Metalepsis can be found in a range of different media including print and digital fiction, film, television, theatre, videogames, and comics. This article has shown metaleptic jumps can manifest textually, visually and audibly and that a multimodal analysis is needed if these different forms of representation are to be captured. In particular, the analysis of two different kinds of media-specific metalepsis has shown that the affordances of Web technology can produce varying types of ontological violation. Sound effects act as ascending metalepses which suggest that elements from the textual actual world are able to cross into the actual world. While audible metalepsis could be found in other types of text that incorporate sound, the analysis of the cursor has shown that *Nightingale's Playground*, and digital fictions in general, contains a metaleptic feature that is exclusively digital.

This chapter has also profiled a Possible-Worlds approach to metalepsis. In particular, the concepts of transworld identity, in which an entity moves from one world to another, and counterparthood, in which an entity exists in two different worlds at the same time, can be applied to both descending and ascending metalepses. The analysis of the metaleptic cursor shows how the actual-to-textual-actual boundary can be breached in digital media in a way that is simply not possible in other media such as print or cinema. However, the visual trace of the reader in the text means Possible Worlds Theory needs to accommodate the appearance of the reader in an in-between, or mediated, ontological space if it is to become a truly transmedial approach. The analysis of sound effects also shows that the same actual-to-textual-actual boundary can be breached by inanimate as well as animate objects. The theory of transworld identity from Possible Worlds Theory must thus be expanded to accommodate the metaleptic movement of inanimate objects, as opposed to just characters, across world boundaries.

As the examples throughout this chapter have shown, all forms of metalepses inevitably challenge theories of narrative, and in this case Possible Worlds Theory, because they flout the real-world logical and spatial parameters on which these theories rest. Echoing the way that the reader interacts with the text throughout their reading experience, digital fictions appear to allow two worlds to dissolve into each other. Representing a form of media-specific metalepses therefore, they demonstrate some of the innovative narrative possibilities that digital technologies can bring to fiction.

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