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## Immersive Media in Quiroga, Borges, and Cortázar

### What Allegories Tell about Transportation Experience

In the short stories of Horacio Quiroga, Jorge Luis Borges and Julio Cortázar, immersive media are frequently staged as allegories of immersion. They are associated with a specific type of plot which is about the access to diegetic worlds or exit from them, and which provides more information about historical contracts on fiction than do the frozen metaphors of being “lost in a text”. Media frames that are represented as fictional frames come with a variety of functions, including not only re-centring, but also disorientation (Quiroga); they refer to existing discourse rather than to existing technology and raise the question how experience can be narrated (Borges); and they tend to cross the line between allegoric representation and intermedial enactment of immersion (Cortázar). The methodological conclusion from this corpus would be to reconsider what fiction says about immersive media. As this would help understand how fictional frames change throughout history, it would also allow discussion of the cultural horizons of interview-based studies on immersive experience.

#### 1. Allegories of immersion

Julio Cortázar’s *Continuidad de los parques* (1960, *Continuity of parks*) is about a reader who becomes involved in a novel. Reading Cortázar’s short text, one experiences a growing uncertainty, as pragmatic as well as semantic cues suggest that this hero *literally* becomes transported to the fictive world of the novel he is reading. So much so that he is himself the future victim of one of the novel’s figures. Thanks to its subtle and surprising rhetoric, *Continuidad de los parques* has achieved canonical status in narrative theory: Gérard Genette took it as an example of “narrative metalepsis” (Genette 1972, 243-246). Jean-Marie Schaeffer developed the idea that metalepsis is a device – among others – that draws the reader into the text (Schaeffer 2005). Marie-Laure Ryan read it as an allegory of narrative immersion (Ryan 2001a, 163-171). Indeed, Cortázar’s text reminds the reader of the immersive potential of a rather old-fashioned medium, the book, as against other media which around 1960 had become the latest and freshest paradigms of immersion. *Continuidad de los parques*, thus seems the perfect starting point to explore narrative allegories of immersion and their contribution to cognitive studies of the “book problem” and of frozen metaphors such as “transportation” or “being lost in a book”.<sup>1</sup>

Unlike metaphors, which are hard to track, allegories can be connected to historical change. During the fifty years preceding *Continuidad de los parques*, Argentinian authors had explored other media, such as cinema, as new models of fiction – and they had staged them as paradigms of immersion. The immer-

sive power of new media had become a model or counter-model for immersion through literature, for the risks of highly involved reading, as well as for its promises. And although many relevant studies have analysed the rhetorical features of this corpus of texts, this has been done from a systematic rather than historical angle. Narratology has mostly addressed this phenomenon through the concepts of “metalepsis” and “mise en abyme” (Cohn 2005, 130). Just as in the example from Cortázar, allegories work with effects of crossing diegetic levels through interaction (metalepsis) and similarities (mise en abyme). Allegories of immersion seem to rely on a specific type of plot about accessing or exiting from fictional environments. I would argue that media frames express the author’s ideas on diegetic (or, more specifically, fictional) frames and outline a historical dimension of experience.<sup>2</sup>

The *en-abyme* reading in *Continuidad de los parques* is an ideal example of the contract or code that fictional texts provide in order to help us deal with their fictionality, or with fictionality in general. This contract is often expressed by means of allegorical metatext. Indeed, fiction often contains hints, allegories or even explicit comments on the difference between fictional and factual environments. Of course, this metatext changes remarkably throughout history. In the twentieth century, new media are the paramount image in this allegory; they also tend to be valued for their immersive qualities – not only in fictional, but also in non-fictional documents. But most importantly, they also provide frames of reference for the reader’s experience. In a recent article for *LHN*, Marie-Laure Ryan suggested that empirical studies could help grasp the importance of “mental visualizations and cognitive mapping for the understanding of plot and the experience of immersion” (Ryan 2012). In return, empirical studies can be held up against the media frames that appear in allegories of immersion, both to help understand the plot and to articulate the experience of immersion in a historically accurate way.

Now, the communicative frame that allows us to recognize and process fiction is often foregrounded by transgression: hence the narrative (in the sense of “eventful”, cf. Hühn 2008) character of the allegorical metatext. Extreme immersion – such as that shown in Cortázar’s short text – is a breach of the fictional contract, because it has a character interact with a character from a novel he reads, *while* he reads it. “Infiltration” plots foreground this contract, too, which is why I would subsume them under the allegories of immersion. Infiltration, according to Gertrud Koch’s definition, is the interaction of fictional characters with those of a non-fictional environment (Koch 1997, 433). Immersion and infiltration plots are at the centre of many self-conscious narratives, from Cervantes’ *Don Quijote* to fictional films such as Woody Allen’s *Purple Rose of Cairo* (cf. Genette 2004, 70). The allegorical function of both these types of plot is to help understand and communicate about fictional immersion. What makes them popular with writers of different epochs and genres is that they provide an original and puzzling narrative event.

Of course, media frames vary greatly throughout history, and this diversity is related to the historical evolution of media as well as of fiction. Woody Al-

len's *Purple Rose of Cairo* shows how the screen lets Tom Baxter exit the black-and-white space of the movie but holds back his fellow actors. The plot works fine because of the difference between two media: black-and-white film can be defined as fictional environment within a coloured world. There is more, though. Take a look at the frame in which an actress bounces against an invisible wall: the glass wall she squeezes her face against is not just a hint of cinematic technology; it is a reminiscence of a much older allegory – expressed in Leonardo da Vinci's "parete di vetro" as well as in a type of dramatic stage that is imagined like a room with a wall made of glass (Michalski 1932, 68-69). It seems, then, that fiction, in this example, reduces to very simple, material devices – the chromatic difference, the glass wall – that illustrate the limit between the fictional and the factual.



The allegory itself changes throughout history, as new media go with new frames: there are various interpretation of the elements of classical poetics, such as verisimilitude or empathy, there is "realism" in all its senses, there are media-related devices such as the central perspective, movement, sound, colour, and finally also pragmatic items such as interaction, augmented reality, suspense etc. Functional diversity spans from function to dysfunction, from re-centring to disorientation (cf. Ryan 2001a, 103-105 and 124). Allegorical metatext helps draw the line between different diegetic levels (such as in *Purple Rose of Cairo*), but often just expresses the difficulty of doing so.

It has been said that new media not only lend their main topics to modern literature, but also provide models of performance: literature is shaped by the technical devices that show what *works* with imagination (Kittler 1986, 1993). The argument I am about to develop will take a different stance. Within the limited corpus of modern Argentinian fiction, immersive media become an allegory of immersion, but these media are neither necessarily an imitation of

existing media, nor is their function as homogeneous as Kittler suggests. Instead, these metatexts offer very diverse answers to the interesting question raised by the historical change in frame: how can immersive experience with new media be put into words?

## 2. Quiroga: Cinema as a new paradigm of immersion

Horacio Quiroga, one of Cortázar's favorite authors, is a good example of the different ways in which the frames of cinema were addressed. In countless film reviews and theoretical essays, the Uruguayan-Argentinian writer asks about the poetic potential of the new medium or, as he puts it, the new "art" (Quiroga 1996). Like many of his contemporaries, he holds cinema up against the stage, which had long been a traditional paradigm of fiction. Not only does he draw attention to the specific qualities of the *biógrafo* (as cinema was called in Argentina at that time); he also relies on images and codes from cinema in order to mark diegetic levels – even more so when the plot is one of immersion or of infiltration.

The narrator and hero of *Miss Dorothy Phillips, mi esposa* (1919, *Miss Dorothy Phillips, my Wife*) finds out that his romantic relationship with Dorothy Phillips, the silent film star he so much admires, has been 'scripted' by directors and producers, just as he has 'scripted' his fictitious role as a South American press tycoon in order to impress Dorothy. Cinematic script and illustrated film magazines present themselves as the thin line between the factual and the fictional worlds of glossy images and genre film. Romantic engagement with a film star has the hero immersed in an environment which is entirely shaped by the media – an experience he seems to enjoy: "Estamos haciendo un film –le dije–. Continuémoslo" ("We are about to do a movie', I said, 'let's get on with it.'"; Quiroga 2002, 483). In sharp contrast to this form of illusion on the side of the narrator, an epilogue gives apologies to *the real* Dorothy Phillips for having acted out his fantasy with her in fiction. The first edition ends with the facsimile signature of Quiroga, whose writing closes the frame of fiction and intends to communicate directly with the actress. Although this ironical postscript of the author comes as a surprise, his handwritten name also re-establishes the threshold between fictional and factual communication (cf. Chihaiia 2011, 194-200). In short, traditional writing provides a safe environment, while cinematographic script is a frame that fosters transgression.

The implications of this distinction become evident in *El espectro* (1921), whose fantastic transgression contrasts with the ironic exhibition of different fictional environments in *Miss Dorothy Phillips*. Here, in what looks like a horror version of *Purple Rose of Cairo*, two actors experience a strange interaction with the woman's dead husband, also an actor, who seems still to frown upon them from the screen of a silent Western movie. What is more, he infiltrates the space of the audience as a phantasmagoric projection:

I saw him come forward, grow, reach the very border of the screen, without taking his eyes off me. I saw him detach himself from the screen, come towards us in a beam of light; come through the air over the heads of the parterre, rise, reach out to us with a bandaged head.

Yo lo vi adelantarse, crecer, llegar al borde mismo de la pantalla, sin apartar la mirada de la mía. Lo vi desprenderse, venir hacia nosotros en el haz de luz; venir en el aire por sobre las cabezas de la platea, alzándose, llegar hasta nosotros con la cabeza vendada. (Quiroga 2002, 595)

At the dramatic climax of the story the hero feels so threatened by his black-and-white rival that he takes a gun into the cinema and eventually shoots at the “ghost”. This has a strange effect. He himself and his lover die from the shot, and they are in turn transformed into silent cinematographic ghosts. The couple finally haunt various screens, looking for the right film theatre and movie to show them a way out of fiction.

As in the earlier text, the reference to an existing actress links the fiction to a possible immersive experience of the author: “Enid”, the lover’s name, leads to Enid Bennett, the star of *The Haunted Bedroom* (1919), a fiction film premiered nationally in 1920 at the “Grand Splendid” on Santa Fe Avenue, Buenos Aires, the film theatre also mentioned in *El espectro* (Chihaia 2011, 204-208). Unlike in *Miss Dorothy Phillips*, however, authorial irony is avoided here for the sake of dramatic effect. Cinema appears as a device of lifelike representation, which comes with a life-threatening type of disorientation. The hero has become the voiceless shadow of a narrator as well as the shadow of a man, and his present condition makes him unable to motivate the event that leads to his extreme immersion, or explain the interaction between screen and audience. It becomes clear that the cinema screen is a complex and somewhat obscure frame: it does not simply draw a line between the audience and the actors in the manner of Leonardo’s “parete di vetro”. The unfamiliar medium makes it difficult to tell whether persons (readers, viewers) are becoming immersed in it, or characters are infiltrating the outside world: the result is not a re-centring, but a modern type of errantry. Thus *El espectro*, where the narrator seems to lose his spatial orientation altogether, also points to the problems of communication that arise from a certain type of immersive experience.

We can conclude that media frames have two opposite functions for Quiroga’s tales of immersion. In *Miss Dorothy Phillips* the frames enhance reorientation: the movie-star fantasy is not only a glossy report and / or film script made up by the first-person narrator, but also a short story signed by the author, and this contrast is highlighted for the sake of ironical differentiation between the two roles. In *El espectro*, however, the life-like but mute figure on the screen comes across as a cause of disorientation: the narrator loses his thread, and the characters seem to enter an uncharted, uncanny sphere. The uncertainty about whether this is a story of extreme immersion or of the infiltration of screen ghosts, or both at the same time, prevails. So does the question about the framing function of cinema, as the narrator’s experience somehow seems to elude the empirical account of how and why he and his friend could cross the line. Although the fantastic use of film in “El espectro” does not exclude irony, its main purpose is to engage the reader in the puzzling

search for a return to life. Quiroga's two stories show, therefore, that the allegory is used to achieve very different poetic effects: it serves the ironic split of *Miss Dorothy Phillips*, as well as the fantastic horror of *El espectro*.

### 3. Borges: From cinema to the *aleph*

While Quiroga's narrative is rooted in a naturalist and fantastic tradition, Borges belongs to a group of Argentinian writers who entirely embraced avant-garde poetics. Borges's first poems show the influence of the European figureheads of modern literature, such as Guillaume Apollinaire, but also a very specific drift toward narrative fiction, which not only announces his later work but also provides a highly specific interpretation of modern topoi such as cosmopolitanism or simultaneity. A short comparison of *Zone* (1912), Apollinaire's emblematic poem on Paris, the capital of the nineteenth century, with Borges's writing on Buenos Aires illustrates the function of media in this context.

The comparison of Buenos Aires with Benares, which figures in many early works of Borges, announces the famous theory of *El Aleph*, in that it suggests a simultaneous view (or even presence) in different continents (Fiddian 2005, 360). In some texts, Madrid and even Dakar complete the journey through the capitals, which all seem alike, and all seem linked through some kind of magic empathy (Fiddian 2005, 360-361). One could relate this empathy to the cinema, which many contemporaries of Borges – and indeed the author himself – compare to a “magic carpet” (e.g. Arnheim 1932, 35). In a prominent essay on film, Borges expresses his delight in entering a building in the *Calle Lavalle* (a street in Buenos Aires where many film theatres were situated), and discovering himself on *Wabash Avenue*, the Chicago setting of a classical mobster movie (Borges 2002, 51; cf. the fundamental book of Aguilar / Jelicić 2010 on Borges's attitude to cinema). A similar idea can be found in Rafael Alberti's poem on cinema: “Nueva York está en Cádiz o en el Puerto. / Sevilla está en París, Islandia o en Persia” (*Carta abierta*, quoted in Conget 2002, 55). The magic-carpet-topos can be referred to the idea of modern ubiquity as it appears in Apollinaire's poem *Zone*; unlike Apollinaire, however, Borges stages the change of environment as a narrative event.

In *Fervor de Buenos Aires* we find some verses which seem inspired by *Zone*. For example, the beginning of *La guitarra* – “He mirado la Pampa / de un patiecito de la calle Sarandí en Buenos Aires” (Borges 1996: “I have seen the pampas / from a little patio on Sarandí Street in Buenos Aires”) – calls to mind Apollinaire's line: “J'ai vu ce matin une jolie rue dont j'ai oublié le nom” (Apollinaire 1965: “This morning I saw a pretty street, whose name I have forgotten”). Although the line from *Zone* is itself a quote from a canonic novel (the beginning of *Don Quijote*, whose narrator pretends to have forgotten the name of the setting), the poem at no point offers the reader a narrative framework. All allusions to narrativity in Apollinaire are decoys, given that the poem rejects

any straightforward, coherent reading. Especially the city names seem to have been chosen in order to avoid any continuous setting: the space is chameleonic, and the many perspectives it opens can hardly be blended into a continuous form. There is no journey that could explain how the speaker finds himself a *flâneur* in Paris (“Maintenant tu marches dans Paris tout seul parmi la foule”), and at the same time on the shore of the Côte d’Azur (“Maintenant tu es au bord de la Méditerranée”), in a boarding house near Prague (“Tu es dans le jardin d’une auberge aux environs de Prague”), then Marseilles, Koblenz, Rome, Amsterdam, etc. (“Te voici à Marseille au milieu des pastèques / Te voici à Coblenz à l’hôtel du Géant / Te voici à Rome assis sous un néflier du Japon / Te voici à Amsterdam avec une jeune fille que tu trouves belle et qui est laide” – all quotes are from Apollinaire 1965). Although the experience of travel is hinted at in the poem, the simultaneity of these images and situations does not allow a narrative reading. Rather than reminiscences of a coherent journey, the abrupt juxtapositions evoke the infinite options offered to the cosmopolitan mind by an album of souvenir postcards.

When Borges takes up the topos of ubiquitous presence and simultaneous vision, he adds a plot which turns the non-narrative topos of ubiquity into a narrative magic carpet ride. In *La guitarra*, as well as in the essay on his magic journey from Buenos Aires to Chicago, the author refers to the immersive capacity of cinema, which can take the landscape of the pampas into a Buenos Aires patio, or relocate him on the streets of Chicago where a gang war is taking place. In other words, he uses cinema as a form of immersion that gives him aesthetic pleasure.

Twenty years later, when Borges writes *El aleph*, the form changes dramatically, with an enumeration of simultaneous sights that comes much closer to Apollinaire’s list. The narrator’s cousin provides a thorough explanation of how modern technology changes the space man lives in: modern man, he says, reaches ubiquity through the magic carpet of technology:

‘I view him,’ he said with a certain unaccountable excitement, ‘in his inner sanctum, as though in his castle tower, supplied with telephones, telegraphs, phonographs, wireless sets, motion-picture screens, slide projectors, glossaries, timetables, handbooks, bulletins ...’

He remarked that for a man so equipped, actual travel was superfluous. Our twentieth century had inverted the story of Mohammed and the mountain; nowadays, the mountain came to the modern Mohammed. (Borges 1970)

–Lo evoco– dijo con una admiración algo inexplicable –en su gabinete de estudio, como si dijéramos en la torre albarrana de una ciudad, provisto de teléfonos, de telégrafos, de fonógrafos, de aparatos de radiotelefonía, de cinematógrafos, de linternas mágicas, de glosarios, de horarios, de prontuarios, de boletines...

Observó que para un hombre así facultado el acto de viajar era inútil; nuestro siglo XX había transformado la fábula de Mahoma y de la montaña; las montañas, ahora convergían sobre el moderno Mahoma. (Borges 1986, 166)

However, not even taken together can these new media stand comparison with the *aleph*’s power. Easy transportation by means of technology turns into uncanny disorientation when the spot in which all things become present is revealed to Borges. The narrator reaches, as he says, the limits of what can be

told as literature; he also feels disorientated, as the very topological foundations of his existence collapse into an uncanny ubiquity:

I arrive now at the ineffable core of my story. And here begins my despair as a writer. [...] Perhaps the gods might grant me a similar metaphor, but then this account would become contaminated by literature, by fiction. Really, what I want to do is impossible, for any listing of an endless series is doomed to be infinitesimal. In that single gigantic instant I saw millions of acts both delightful and awful; not one of them occupied the same point in space, without overlapping or transparency. What my eyes beheld was simultaneous, but what I shall now write down will be successive, because language is successive. Nonetheless, I'll try to recollect what I can. (Borges 1970)

Arribo, ahora, al inefable centro de mi relato, empieza aquí, mi desesperación de escritor. [...] Quizá los dioses no me negarían el hallazgo de una imagen equivalente, pero este informe quedaría contaminado de literatura, de falsedad. Por lo demás, el problema central es irresoluble: La enumeración, si quiera parcial, de un conjunto infinito. En ese instante gigantesco, he visto millones de actos deleitables o atroces; ninguno me asombró como el hecho de que todos ocuparan el mismo punto, sin superposición y sin transparencia. Lo que vieron mis ojos fue simultáneo: lo que transcribiré sucesivo, porque el lenguaje lo es. Algo, sin embargo, recogeré. (Borges 1986, 171)

Unlike Apollinaire's poem, Borges's story maintains a narrative mode and suggests a frame of vision that has often been compared with the real-world frame of cinema. Of course, the *aleph* is no cinema, although its revelation takes place in a dark room. It is a different device altogether, one that allows real simultaneity and casts doubt on the possibility to narrate the immersive experience at all – either through literature, or through a sequence of images.<sup>3</sup> Although it is typical of neo-fantastic poetics that the event does not perturb the diegetic world (Alazraki 1983, 35), it seems at least difficult to communicate the experience of the *aleph*.

This also has consequences for the narrator's position, as he feels unable to relate the event to existing frames or genres. In explicit contrast to his cousin, who "taps" the *aleph* for his attempt at a modern epos, the narrator struggles with language as well as with plot. Like Quiroga's short stories, Borges's text shows that fiction stages not only determinate media frames and plots of immersive re-orientation, but also experiences of indeterminacy and disorientation – all the more so when the allegory goes explicitly beyond existing media. In the first half of the twentieth century, at a time when thriving cognitive psychology and psychoanalysis already gave various more or less empirical accounts of media immersion (cf. Schweinitz 1996), these short stories insisted on the problematic condition of any discourse on that subject.

#### **4. Cortázar: The illustrated book-cover as allegory and vehicle of immersion**

Another neo-fantastic magic-carpet ride leads us back to Paris, to Julio Cortázar's *El otro cielo*. In this story, an Argentinian citizen enters a shopping mall in Buenos Aires in the 1940s – the *Pasaje Güemes* – and finds himself in the



French *galleries couvertes* of the 1870s. The narrator is so concerned with the opportunities this double life offers him – between his bourgeois existence with his bride and family on the one hand, and the experience of erotic transgression and *bohème* on the other – that he forgets to comment on the mysterious change of place and time.

In this case, the key allegory is not to be found within the fiction, but in a letter written by the author to his publisher about the sort of book covers he wants. The first edition of *Todos los fuegos el fuego*, which contains *El otro cielo*, illustrates the transportation with a collage. Cortázar's letter explains his intentions in detail:

Possibilities: 1) Front cover and back cover illustrated, one with the Galerie Vivienne (I already have some old photographs) and the other with the Pasaje Güemes; let us say that in the spine of the book both photographs would blend, which would insinuate that it is possible to pass from one mall to the other. 2) Cover illustrated with the Galerie Vivienne, cut vertically in half, so that one part appears as the positive and one as the negative, which would also suggest the notion of 'passage' from one side to the other.

Posibilidades: 1) Tapa y contratapa ilustradas, una con la Galerie Vivienne (ya tengo viejas fotos) y la otra con el Pasaje Güemes; digamos que en el lomo del libro se operaría la fusión de las dos fotos, insinuando el posible paso de una galería a la otra. 2) Tapa ilustrada con la Galerie Vivienne, cortada verticalmente en dos, de manera que una parte queda en positivo y la otra en negativo, lo que sugeriría también la noción de 'pasaje' de un plano a otro. (Cortázar 2000, 974, letter to Francisco Porrúa, 22-12-1965)

While the first of these possibilities was realized in *Todos los fuegos el fuego*, Cortázar turned to the second for his experimental two-volume book *La vuelta al día en ochenta mundos* (1967). It is not the cinema but the book – or more precisely the multi-media assemblage of book and photographs – that forms the vehicle of immersion. It is this new medium that gives the reader an implicit explanation of how the hero becomes highly involved in his phantasms of Paris, the *bohème* and transgression. The book-cover collage not only serves as an allegory of how environments can change, it is also meant to walk the reader through this change: the peculiar combination of book covers illustrates the transportation, but also “makes the photographs blend together”, “insinuate[s]” the possibility of a trespass between the two spaces, and “suggests the idea of ‘passage’”. In other words, the book covers draw the reader in and allow him to experience – through suggestion and insinuation – what the hero (and narrator) experiences. Cortázar seems confident that seeing a passage from *Passage* to *Pasaje* might help the reader understand the sudden changes of environment – by perceiving the fictional environment the way the narrator does.

Again, the frame of reference is a cultural form, a specific avant-garde genre. The narrative potential of diaporamas had been explored in film a few years earlier, by Chris Marker's *La Jetée* (*The Pier*, 1962); indeed the time-travel-plot in *El otro cielo* recalls that of Marker's short film. What Cortázar does is to transfer the principle of the “photo-roman” to the two book covers. The images of the two malls work as what Ryan calls a graphic map, providing definite frames of re-orientation that help understand the experience of transportation:

Another function of graphic maps, particularly prominent in children's narratives, travel stories and fantastic literature, is to spare the reader the effort of building a cognitive map, thereby facilitating the mental visualizations that produce immersion. (Ryan 2012)

In Cortázar's case, the illustrated book cover is more than simply an allegory of immersion: it encourages mental visualizations of the character's experience and thereby seeks to "produce" immersion on the part of the reader, as well as visually represent the transportation plot.

To use media as allegories of immersion does not necessarily prompt immersion. On the contrary, references to media frames are more likely to have the reader step back and contemplate the diversity of thresholds to the fictional environment from a remote (and safe) place. Quiroga's *Miss Dorothy Phillips* and, to a certain extent, Borges's *El aleph*, are good examples of this type of response. However, *El otro cielo* is an example that could figure both in a historical account of allegories of immersion and in an empirical study of multimedia immersion. While the book involves a character experiencing a form of transportation, and communicates this through short fiction and a minimalist "photo-roman", it also expects the reader to participate in the experience and shift his attention from one frame to the other, so that "immersion can be lived as well as allegorized" (Ryan 2001a, 171). I think this double agenda of allegory contains a serious challenge for immersion studies.

## 5. The rhetoric of immersion

The example of Cortázar shows the importance of complementary methodologies when it comes to immersion studies. The question of what makes the immersive quality of fiction has been raised in several contexts. Marie-Laure Ryan's (2001a) and Jean-Marie Schaeffer's (1999) seminal books opened classical narratology to analytical aesthetics and cognitive psychology; and the last decade saw the emergence of a new research network centred on games and film rather than on literature. Psychology, neurology, engineering, sociology and cultural studies have joined narratology in the effort to grasp what makes a film captivate its audience, or what keeps one stuck to the commands of a game over a 24 hour stretch or even more. Immersion studies are a huge field of applied and interdisciplinary media scholarship, represented in autonomous units and departments – for example, the Institute of Immersion Studies in Kiel (northern Germany), which publishes a yearbook (<http://immersive-medien.de/de/jahrbuch>) and counts a professorship with that title.

Within this new field of study, in which books are not the default medium but a "problem" source (to quote Biocca's expression), narratology can hardly pretend to be the paradigmatic discipline. Psychology and sociology have contributed fundamental concepts such as "flow" (Klimmt / Vorderer 2003, 354) and "deep play" (MacMahan 2003, 69) to the understanding of immersion, and prompted an empirical approach to this phenomenon. In game studies, as Ali-

son MacMahan says, “investigation can take two forms: a quantitative, analytical one or a qualitative, aesthetic one” (2003, 69-70). While empirical interviews and tests are the method of choice for quantitative investigation, cognitive and aesthetic theory will determine the categories in which one can discuss the quality of immersion. As narrative effects only explain parts of the presence / transportation experience, there is no fundamental need for narratology; and as the qualitative part of the investigation discusses systematic aspects, historical narratology seems even less necessary.

The narrative and game theory of the last decade have made several interesting suggestions on typology, which covers qualitative, systematic aspects of immersion. Ryan’s 2001 differentiation of spatial, temporal and emotional immersion is clearly centred on narrativity, as she associates each type with “one of the basic constituents of narrative grammar: setting, character, and plot” (Ryan 2001a, 119). Arsenault / Picard (2007) seek to adapt her Kantian and narrative categories – such as “diegetic”, “narrative” and “identificatory” immersion – to the larger categories and new types of game studies.<sup>4</sup> A former essay by Arsenault (2005) takes up the division suggested by Ermi / Mäyrä (2005) and develops a more sophisticated system based on the cause of immersion: indeed, while simple “sensorial” immersion can be achieved by technological means (such as a multi-sensory or 3-D-environment), “challenge-based” immersion implies interaction, and “imaginative” immersion (or “fictional” immersion, as Arsenault prefers to call it) is triggered by identification with the character. With similar intent, but with anthropological reference, MacMahan (2003, 79) insists on the difference between two aspects of “presence” effects: perceptual or psychological immersion in narrative and ludic engagement in an environment. Berry (2006) takes a similar socio-anthropological angle, but is more concerned with the different contexts of immersion: he distinguishes “phenomenological” (experiencing a setting), “narrative” (becoming part of a story) and “anthropological” (becoming part of a social phenomenon) immersion. A comprehensive model such as Thon’s mentions spatial, ludic, narrative and social dimensions of immersion, which refer to various aspects of this “multidimensional experience” (Thon 2008, 33).

One could ask how much these systematic typologies should rely on historical research on immersion experiences (including its allegories), how much should come from empirical studies, and to what extent both types of investigation can be combined so as to benefit from each other. The present state of play shows that there is no simple answer to this question. The difference between the effect of immersion and its representation as a plot leads to two separate fields of study: while empirical studies look at immersive performance and experience, historical narratology can hardly escape the realm of their representation. However, in spite of this categorical difference, allegories of immersion have a heuristic function with respect to theory – the *aleph* has become a “myth” of hypertext theory (Ryan 2001b) – and a critical one with respect to empirical studies (to the extent that these are interview-based and rely on communication about what one can experience).

Let me explain why I think that a historical background can be useful for empirical investigation. As a term of recent criticism, “immersion” bundles several effects that resemble well-known categories of aesthetics and genre poetics, and adds two relevant characteristics: a media frame (in the sense that some forms and techniques of communication are more immersive than others) and a narrative frame (in the sense that the effect itself is being perceived as an event, rather than, say, an attitude, a judgment or a feeling). But looking at the epistemic conditions for empirical studies on immersion, one has to consider that both frames shape the communication of immersive experience: empirical studies rest both on media arrangements and on narrative elements that describe what happens during the experiment. Media arrangements and narrative elements are cultural frames of communication, and they should not be considered in an ahistorical perspective. Texts about strange immersive experiences such as those of Quiroga, Borges, and Cortázar bring to mind these media frames and use them to foreground the specific boundaries of fiction as well as the limits of storytelling, which also hint at the limits of communicating ‘what happens’ when one gets lost in a book, film or game.

Interview-based cognitive psychology has treated the experience of immersed reception as an effect of “transportation” (Lombard / Ditton 1997; Green / Brock 2000), and offers countless interesting articles, of which I have chosen one. The study “You are who you watch” (Sestir / Green 2010) tackles the exciting question of involvement-induced temporary self-conception – a question better known as “does media consumption shape the mindset and worldview of its consumers?” (Sestir / Green 2010, 273). The authors of this empirical study distinguish “identification” and “transportation” in an attempt at typological precision. Identification “is a process whereby viewers vicariously take the place of a media character and react to his or her experiences as if they were happening to the viewer” (Sestir / Green 2010, 274). “The state of feeling cognitively, emotionally, and imaginally immersed in a narrative” – a state media psychologists have recently named “transportation” (Sestir / Green 2010, 275) – covers a slightly different experience, which does not refer to a single character, but to a “mediated situation or environment” (Sestir / Green 2010, 276). This typology leads to two different sets of items, one aimed at identification effects, the other at transportation effects. Of course, challenge-based or ludic involvement could be tested, too; however the corpus and media frame to which the study refers (i.e. films and cinema) does not seem to prompt that type of immersion. Or does it?

Here is the point where historical research can complete the scope of empirical research. Allegories of immersion draw attention to the importance of media difference and historical changes in experience: not only in the sense that they work thanks to specific media’s immersive potential (cinema as against drama, for example), but also because intermediality helps us rediscover and articulate very ‘classical’ effects such as verisimilitude and emotional affection (which have long since been the subject of poetics and aesthetics) as “vehicles of immersion” (cf. Schaeffer 1999, 228). Historical allegories such as

those of Quiroga, Borges and Cortázar bridge the gap between the technological conditions of such “vehicles” and the rhetoric which prepares them for a specific, articulate experience. For there is nothing natural about the experience of transportation (cf. Sobieszczanski 2010): silent movies were considered media of high transportation in Horacio Quiroga’s time; they are not anymore. The texts commented on here engage not only with changes in technology, but also with changes in rhetoric which allow specific experimental scripts – and to some extent also the definition of specific cognitive effects, such as various “types” of immersion.<sup>5</sup>

The second element which seems crucial to the new rhetoric of immersion is the narrative dimension of experience. Unlike “attention”, for example, which can simply be conceived as a “technique of the observer” (Crary 1990), “immersion” follows a narrative scheme, either of transportation, or shift, or construction. Murray defines immersion as “the experience of being transported to an elaborately simulated place” (1997, 98), and even the less metaphorical “shift of attention” described by Thon (2008, 31) implies some eventfulness of experience. Finally, many interview-based empirical studies communicate on the subject of immersion experience by means of implicit narrative scripts. In transportation studies, for example, the narrativity of experience seems to be what sets it apart from traditional aesthetic or poetic categories such as “illusion” or “verisimilitude”. The experimental arrangement in *Sestir / Green* rests on written instructions which present the effect of transportation as an event: participants are told to “put themselves into the narrative by ‘focus[ing] on the events as if you were inside the movie itself” (*Sestir / Green* 2010, 277). An archaeology of immersion supplies the historical models necessary to describe the eventfulness of experience, as well as a general idea or “folk theory” (Gerrig 1993, 10-11) about how one can get “inside the movie”.

Narrative theory has often dismissed the metaphorical dimension of “immersion” concepts in order to elaborate systematic categories (cf. for example Thon 2008, 35 on spatial immersion). However, allegories of immersion define specific forms of eventfulness that not only change with their cultural context, but also facilitate and shape communication about experience, which is an elementary condition of interview-based empirical studies. The texts we have discussed can be read precisely as such models of scripted experience – a reading which has already been practiced with scripted emotions in drama (cf. Oatley 2004). Fictions such as Quiroga’s, Borges’s, and Cortázar’s that deal with eventful immersion or infiltration seem to call for it. In order to understand immersion as a cultural form of experience, it is, I would argue, helpful to take a closer look at the historical scripts and media frames that support the “immersion” model of reception.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> What Frank Biocca labels the “book problem” (2003) is that a medium that does not offer sensomotoric stimuli can cause as much presence as, say, a 3-D motion picture. Richard J. Gerrig’s (1993) and Victor Nell’s (1988) books on reader-response psychology study the family of frozen metaphors of immersion and their relation to what goes on in the mind of a reader.

<sup>2</sup> In the field of arts history, Victor I. Stoichita (1993) has given a convincing account of the change that led from the concept of painting as altarpiece to that of painting as “tableau”. Michael Fried comments on the use of “the fiction of *physically entering* a painting or a group of paintings” in Diderot’s *Salons* (1980, 118). My own argument on modern allegory follows the line of their analysis of pictorial metatext and absorption narrative in early modern aesthetics.

<sup>3</sup> Marshall McLuhan’s view of media history has some resemblance with the discourse of simultaneity expressed by Borges’s narrator. This is probably due to a shared horizon of avant-garde rhetoric, which becomes evident in certain bold statements on simultaneous and ubiquitous experience: “For electric light and power [...] eliminate time and space factors in human association exactly as do radio, telegraph, telephone, and TV, creating involvement in depth. [...] So the greatest of all reversals occurred with electricity, that ended sequence by making things instant” (McLuhan 1964, 9-12). The difference, though, is that Borges does not indulge in this rhetoric, but questions its limits. The difficult re-negotiation of media frame has been described by Vittoria Borsò, who states that the *aleph* raises the question how the subject can experience his position in space – which leads to a topological as well as phenomenological problem (2007, 282-283).

<sup>4</sup> One could discuss whether there narrative grammar exists at all, or whether the categories put forward by Ryan are its elements. However, this is not the question: The first two catego-



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ries (“diegetic” and “narrative”) refer to an almost Kantian “How could a world be imagined otherwise?” (Ryan 2001a, 92; cf. the comment on Susanne K. Langer’s “almost Kantian, a priori categories of human experience”; Ryan 2001a, 42); the third (“identificatory”) means narrativity as eventfulness and could be paraphrased as ‘How could a story be imagined otherwise (than with agents)?’. I think that the three items are common sense. In hindsight, the typology has its limits, though, because it chooses a “fundamentally *mimetic* concept of immersion” and consequently decides to shut out “philosophical works, music and purely abstract games, such as bridge, chess, and Tetris” (Ryan 2001a, 15). Of course, the use of “abstract” and the interpretation of these games as non-mimetic is unhappy, although it puts emphasis on the paradigmatic role of narrative fiction. Challenge-based and ludic aspects, which have little importance for Ryan, will then take precedence in game-oriented analyses of immersion.

<sup>5</sup> It seems obvious that allegories of immersion are a special case of intermediality. According to Joachim Paech’s 1998 definition of “intermediality”, any medium can appear as a form within another medium or within itself. The historical relativity of media, and the historical relativity of media related-experience, can be reconstructed thanks to this fundamental power of self-reflection, which, in the case of literature, allows for narrative on the immersed reception of books as well as of other media.

<sup>6</sup> Sections 1-4 of this study were presented at the “Fiction in historical and cultural contexts” conference at the FFLCH-USP São Paulo, 19-21 March 2013. I would also like to add that my work on allegory has its origins in a research project on media and metaphor outlined and directed by Prof. Dr. Wolfram Nitsch at Cologne University, and acknowledge his support.