



Blendings of Real, Fictional, and Other Imaginary People

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Abstract: Evolution has equipped us with the ability to conceive of people and their actions in hypothetical, purely fictional, and fantastic scenarios. The way we conceive of real people, the way we make sense of fictional character, and the way we process needs and desires related to other people in our fantasies are all interconnected with one another. These are all instances of blending, often based on rather minimal direct information but supported by shared character-related schemata and mental simulation, the latter typically eliciting a degree of partial identification. The structural relationships and interconnectedness between these three processes can be examined in terms of the formalist notion of motivation.

Keywords: blending, character construction, imagination, motivation, off-line simulation, partial identification

Understanding other people, making sense of their behavior, and appreciating the roles they play in our social networks is a constitutive social skill. It involves mentally constructing other people based on our general knowledge of human behavior, what we take to be a person's individual traits, and the situation we assume him or her to be in. It calls for a certain type of imagination and entails a degree of simulating the other person's thinking in one's own mind so as to get an idea of how he or she conceives his or her situation as well as of his or her emotional states in that situation.¹

Like many other of our cognitive abilities, the capacity to figure out what other people are like and what they are up to is not confined to actual situations. It has a strong tendency to function *off-line*. This may take the form of imagining real people in hypothetical situations or completely imagined people in more or less realistic situations. In fiction such imaginary products of an individual mind or minds are made public. The fictional characters, which thus emerge, in turn influence both conceptions of real people and private fantasies. Each of these three processes—thinking of real people within an actual situation, fantasizing about real people or imagined characters, and following the exploits of fictional characters—involve narratives of some sort,

expressing the conditions, motivations, meanings, and consequences of human action. Each of the processes involves awareness of the roles people/characters play in a variety of social situations or frameworks.

We may assume that there is a universal person schema that involves notions about social roles and persistent selfhood, which serves as the foundation of understanding what it means to be a human being.² Schemas are mental sets that enable us to interpret perceptual data and relate to wider frameworks. They have an important role guiding our attention, and they allow us to form expectations as well as to toy around with ideas about things. Thus the same basic person schema is operative irrespective of whether the objects of attention are tagged as real, fictional, or imaginary. Furthermore, the processes of conceiving of persons or characters in these three domains constantly feed and modify one another. Consequently, fictional characters as well as characters that we create in our private fantasies can evoke at least temporarily just as strong sensations of sympathy or antipathy as real people do.

This interaction can be analyzed in terms of *conceptual blending*. That is, under the aegis of imagination the three different organizing frames can be brought together in a generic space where notions about what being a person is all about are processed in a variety of modes ranging from the actual to the virtual.³ This is why, in addition to engaging one in their various pursuits, fictional characters may give rise to recognition of certain aspects of the character or his/her situation as somehow alike or otherwise relevant to one's own traits or concerns. This phenomenon can be explored as an instance of blending, commonly referred to as identification.

Exploring some of the formal features of this interaction throws light on why the fates of fictional characters—and filmic characters in particular—can be so strongly felt and how this relates to basic psychological concerns. Another important conceptual tool to be employed is an expanded version of the formalist notion of *motivation*. As this article demonstrates, the three processes of person/character construction have certain common structural features that reinforce the interaction among them.

An Evolutionary-Cultural Perspective

Being able to assess what other people are like and how one can relate to them is the very foundation of our biocultural development. According to Merlin Donald, the roots of consciousness are deep in the presymbolic functions of the mind, but only intentional representations have enabled the cognitive leap into the level of culture (Donald 2001: 117, 156). This took place in what Donald has referred to as the *mimetic realm*, “the murky realm of eye contact, facial expressions, poses, attitude, body language, self-decoration, gesticulation, and tones of voice” (2001: 265). This called for direct executive governance of action and thus its cognitive core came to be what Donald calls

kinematic imagination, “the ability to envision our bodies in motion” (2001: 271). It continues to be the protocultural layer that children of every generation encounter at the very beginning of their lives and it remains an integral part of the primary sphere of social interaction. It has also become—pardon the pun—an important aspect of *cinematic imagination*. The craft of film acting is an elaboration of bioculturally evolved gestures, facial expressions and other non-verbal means of expression that offer a certain broadly defined repertoire of expression in a given cultural context. This is further shaped by cinematic means designed to cue the spectator in mentally constructing characters. Many of these expressive devices derive from our bodily orientation into our environment.

Among the surprisingly few attempts to explore the cognitive foundations of film acting is David Bordwell’s article “Who Blinked First?” Bordwell’s notion about cinematic conventions applies particularly well to acting:

How may we best understand cinematic conventions? They are often built out of ordinary-life behaviors, but not just any behaviors. The ones favored seem to put people’s social intelligence on display. One important function of art may well be the opportunity it affords to test, refine, and expand our knowledge of why others do what they do. (2008: 334)

Such testing is most obviously manifest in the cinema that fully exploits the repertoire of expressive means developed in the mimetic realm. However, this kind of modeling of human behavior takes place in all forms of narratives. These narratives are the principle means of articulating ideas about humans and their action. As Donald puts it: “Narrative imagination wins control by altering the mimetic templates of culture and bringing them in line with myth” (2001: 232–33). Equally important, narration also assumes the guises of all sorts of imaginary scenarios often quite unrelated to our immediate situation, thus allowing for exploring all *possible* courses of action. No doubt, as soon as this faculty developed it also enabled running counterfactual scenarios in one’s mind, thus allowing further detachment of immediate situationality. The degree to which the real and the imaginary have been discerned from one another has varied considerably through cultural history. In the public sphere one measure of this is the degree to which the writing of history has emerged as a practice distinct from myths and sagas. But the borderline tends to remain blurred, and none the less so in the private sphere.

Imagination has obviously had tremendous evolutionary advantage as it has made humans capable of preparing for possible events and acting in cooperation with other humans in view of some distant future goal. Seeking to grasp another creature’s point of view can also be extended to animals so as

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to predict their behavior, which in addition to being useful in hunting and domesticating animals opens the doors to the creative animating and anthropomorphizing of nature. Furthermore, the dissociation from immediate situationality which imagination allows is a prerequisite for articulating many sensory and affective dimensions of human experience. Myths, stories, and fantasies can be used both explicitly and implicitly to address all sorts of concerns on both conscious and unconscious level. It is in the very nature of symbolic and social systems together with social norms to block and inhibit some of our desires and natural instincts. As some of these are left partly or poorly articulated or not articulated at all, consciousness becomes handicapped in dealing with them in any straightforward fashion.

These concerns are all the more likely to keep on bothering the mind, thus giving rise to a variety of symptomatic responses in the form of fantasies with intertwined psychological and social references. These are typically projections of archetypal patterns of human relationships into one's own sphere of hopes and frustrations, dreams, and anxieties. The term *archetypal* refers here to crystallizations of near-universal ways of responding to basic psychological concerns on an imaginary level, free of the restraints of the real world. In our fantasies these give rise to narratives of romantic or sexual fulfillment, winning the admiration and respect of others, gaining power and control over one's adversaries, punishing wrongdoers and revenging oneself on one's humiliators. Such narrative patterns also make much of fiction, mass art in particular, highly attractive. We may also indulge in fantasies of self-depreciation and paranoia. These inspire dysphoric fiction and at times more critical representations of the human condition—which just might have some kind of a therapeutic effect through questioning unhealthy notions of personhood and human relationships.

Fantasizing not only allows for processing psychological concerns but, equally important, it can be enormously entertaining and stimulating thanks to being free of the consequences and moral concerns, which the imagined actions might entail in real life. Being able to process big feelings in the realm of fantasy may well help us to behave in a more reasonable way in real life as when aggressive feelings are processed and discharged in fantasy scenarios. In a somewhat more positive vein, the imaginary appeal of film stars or pop idols is a case in point. In a sense there is a real life referent but what matters is the fantasmatic image that is publicly constructed around them and the appeal that has on people's imagination.⁴ For adolescents in particular such figures may serve as objects of uncritical devotion that have little to do with the real person behind the imaginary construction. This allows for experiencing big feelings without the entanglements that are likely to crop up when such feelings are projecting on a person who actually lives in the same social environment. On a more morbid mode, fantasy might also be employed to process

suppressed and unacceptable desires. Fantasy may award us illicit enjoyment through imagining crimes and atrocities committed by evil others, thus allowing for indulging vicarious enjoyment of the forbidden.

In parallel with such excessive functions—excessive in that these fantasies surreptitiously go beyond what we find decent and acceptable—fantasizing has an even more fundamental function in our lives as part of the mental process through which we come to experience life as meaningful and different goals worth striving for. This has not always been sufficiently appreciated. Stanley Cavell wrote:

It is a poor idea of fantasy which takes it to be a world apart from reality, a world clearly showing its unreality. Fantasy is precisely what reality can be confused with. It is through fantasy that our conviction of the worth of reality is established; to forgo our fantasies would be to forgo our touch with the world. (1979: 85)

Cavell sees films as having a special role to play in the way we relate fantasies to the real world parameters of our lives. He writes about movies as “reliefs from private fantasy and its responsibilities; from the fact that the world is already drawn by fantasy” (Cavell 1979: 102). In their book on Cavell’s philosophical perspective on film William Rothman and Marian Keane offer an example of how this might work out in terms of characters.

When in It Happened One Night, Claudette Colbert steps around the hanging blanket, the “Wall of Jericho” separating her side of the motel room from Clark Gable’s side, his responsibility toward his desire, and toward this woman who has by this act declared her desire for him, puts him in a situation in which he must acknowledge his desire for her if his fantasy is not to be completely thwarted. (Rothman and Keane 2000: 178)

As Rothman and Keane point out, in Cavell’s philosophy “The world drawn by fantasy is not a world separate from the real world; fantasy and reality are aspects of the one existing world” (2000: 79). The same applies to our relationship with people: The way we relate to people cannot be neatly separated from the fantasies they evoke in us. In a sense it is a question of whether imagination is put into good use in conceiving of other people—or ourselves for that matter—so as to offer us and others new vistas of what it is to be a certain person, or what kind of relationships we might possibly have with them.

The Three Processes in Interaction

Person or character-related imagination is an integral part of our social intelligence and what might be called everyday social creativity. We employ it to

not only to gain a true impression of other people but also as a means of developing new kind of relationships with them so as to make those relationships more satisfying. In one of its most pragmatic functions, imagination is employed in real-life situations when trying to foresee how other people might respond to something that I actually intend to say or do. This might easily lead to fantasizing about how they would react, say, if I really told them what I think or showed them what I am capable of doing. In both cases the imagination is guided primarily by notions about the actual characteristics of those people as perceived in terms of a given social framework. Thinking about a person is further steered by the actual or virtual context that serves as a framework within which a situation is shaped in the imagination. Imagination is almost unavoidably guided—sometimes even restricted—by received notions about stereotypes and typical human behavior. At its most subtle, however, imagination offers new ideas and perspectives as to how one might relate to other people, even what I and other people could be like or what we might achieve in our lives. Thus notions about what real people are like and fantasies about them constantly and teasingly interact and elaborate one another. Fiction, in turn, gives this interaction an intersubjective dimension as it interacts with both our notions about the real world (e.g., utilizing and elaborating on what is thought to be realistic behavior) and our fantasies (finding inspiration from them and inspiring them in turn).

Manfred Jahn in his article “‘Awake! Open your eyes!’ The Cognitive Logic of External and Internal Stories” (2003: 199) proposes a model of the *cycle of narrative*, which connects with what he refers to as external and internal stories. He sees this as a fundamental division within the realm of storytelling. The two sides have the following contrasting features:

external story (e.g., a fairy-tale)	internal story (e.g., a fantasy)
physical	virtual
recordable	reportable
public	private
addressee orientation	no addressee orientation
permanent	fleeting

Jahn observes that “the cycle of Internalization and Externalization creates a causal chain linking reception and production and suggesting that both processes are perhaps mutually dependent” (2003: 203). We should go further, however, and explore how both of these interact with notions about what is conceived as the real world. With certain adjustments both sides of Jahn’s table could be related to non-fictional accounts. This includes writing of history and reporting news in the public sphere as well as narrating what

has happened to oneself or other people in one's own private sphere. Such narratives are needed in attempting to make sense of events and in justifying decisions and actions. In terms of Jahn's table, also real world narrative accounts can be either public or private, external or internal, physical or virtual, and either have or not have addressee orientation. This enables narratives about real people to interact effortlessly with both external and internal stories, often to the extent that the borderlines between reality/fiction and fantasy/reality interfaces tend to blur. Thus the ways in which fiction influences our fantasies may have an effect on how we relate to real people. This might be either beneficial or detrimental: beneficial in that they may enrich our awareness of the possibilities and potentialities that people (ourselves included) possess; detrimental when they lead into ignoring the true needs of ourselves or our fellow men.

The third interface—fiction/fantasy—is also not clear-cut. One measure of the effectiveness of fiction is its ability to engage our fantasy. Though we may assume that there is a sphere of pure aesthetic appreciation of fiction and the characters that generate its stories, we appropriate a piece of fiction and its characters by relating those characters and the situations they go through to our own more or less fantasmatic sphere of representations of human affairs.

The cycle of narrative thus has three processes—the way we conceive of real people, the way we make sense of fictional character, and the way we process needs and desires related to other people in our fantasies. We could visualize the interconnectedness of these processes in terms of a triangle with each process at one of the three points and each of the sides representing a two-way interaction:

- Fiction emerges from the interaction between notions about real people and fantasies about human (or inhuman) action; fiction in turn influences both notions about real people and our fantasies about them.
- Notions about real people are processed both in private fantasies and public fiction; those two in turn influence notions about real people.
- Fantasies feed on fiction but gain their relevance from being related to our needs and desires with respect to real people; fantasies in turn inspire fiction and to some extent even our relationship with real people.

Research made in cognitive studies have suggested that similar, if not exactly the same cognitive mental functions, are involved in processing person-/character-related notions in these three realms, albeit in a different mode in each case. Whereas imagining real people involves a degree of simulating their thinking in our own minds, employing imagination in fantasy or fiction may be said to involve *off-line simulation*.

Off-Line Simulation

As the capacity to imagine how other creatures conceive a situation from their point of view and how they might consequently act and react develops, like so many human traits, it also begins to run off-line. Running off-line involves loosening the connection between our mental states and our immediate situation. This can be an instance of the nervous system constantly having to be in some state of activation, so that when the environment offers no stimuli or any reason to carry out practical tasks, the ability to conceive of hypothetical action is put into non-practical use. Gradually it begins to form a quasi-autonomous sphere of experience of its own, which in various ways communicates with but is not determined by experiences directly related to the environment. According to Gregory Currie: “With off-line simulation, states of imagining function as internal surrogates of beliefs because they retain belief-like connections to other mental states and to the body. Imagining, like beliefs, can lead to decisions and can cause certain kinds of bodily sensations” (1995: 149–150). Because of this events that are known to be fictional—or merely figments of our fantasy—might momentarily give rise to similar emotional states as similar events in real life. This is why we may respond emotionally and even viscerally to the exploits of fictional characters and to the fantasy scenarios we run through in our heads *as if* they were real (Currie 1995: 149–50).⁵ This capacity may be fundamental, not only for aesthetic appreciation, but in making sense of other people and strange situations in which we may find ourselves in real life. As Currie and Ravenscroft put it: “Placing yourself, in imagination, in another’s position requires the capacity to make use of appropriate imaginative states; temporarily, one puts aside some aspect of one’s own mental economy—some belief or desire—and substitutes for it a thought content you actually don’t believe, or don’t want” (2002: 147).

Noël Carroll has argued against the notion of off-line simulation, at least as it pertains to mass art. In his opinion, most such narratives “give us ready access to the mental states—the intentions, desires, and emotions—of characters” (1998, 350). In *Casablanca*, for instance, “we do not have to simulate Rick’s feelings about Ilsa; Rick tells us all we need to know in order to feel sorry for him” (350). According to Carroll, we then use this information together with the other information we are given about the situation the character is in “to generate *our own* emotional reaction to the character and her circumstances.” Carroll sees no need for an “intervening stage of simulation” (350).

We could reply to Carroll first by pointing out that understanding fictional characters is based initially on an understanding of the story situation, whose basic information might be available as factual information such as when Julie is informed about the death of her husband and daughter at the beginning of Krzysztof Kieślowski’s *Blue*. Arguably, we feel sympathy for her because of a central imagining to which the film entices us. Later on, as Julie watches

the funeral of her beloved on television, we see in extreme close-ups her wet eye and the corner of her twitching mouth which, by eliciting affective mimicry and running parallel with a sense of empathy, might generate a similar reaction in us. We may further argue, that to understand Julie's reactions and behavior from here on, we have to be able to imagine—based on often indirect cues, our everyday working knowledge of human psychology, certain cultural assumptions, our awareness of what kind of film we are watching—what Julie is feeling and thinking at different stages of the story. This involves a mental process that could well be called off-line simulation in the sense Currie uses the word. (See Figure 1.)

Blue is an instance of art-cinema narration, in the sense Bordwell defines the word in his *Narration in the Fiction Film*. Subjective states are crucial and often merely suggested rather than made explicit as in the kind of films that Carroll discusses in his study, appropriately titled *A Philosophy of Mass Art* (1998). Perhaps it is fair to assume that in a film where emotional situations and affective reactions are obvious and stereotypical no simulation of character is needed to elicit the spectators' own emotional reaction. But viewing a film in which emotions and mental states of the characters are not made so obvious calls for simulating the emotional states of the fictional characters in one's own mind in order to understand how and why the characters are reacting and behaving the way they do. In similar fashion, in real life there are many everyday situations, which are so obvious that we only need to recognize them in order to understand why people react to them the way they do. But there are many other situations that call for attempting to understand why a particular individual behaves the way he or she does. This calls for imaginative simulation of his or her situation in our minds. Currie and Ravenscroft conclude that it is not necessary to assume a conflict between the simulation model and the so-called theory model, namely the idea that understanding of



Figure 1. An extreme close-up of Juliet in Kieślowski's *Blue* is conducive to affective mimicry and thus helps to generate sympathy for her.

other people is based on ideas and theories about other people, because imagination and conceptual thinking always go hand in hand (2002: 50–52).

The way off-line simulation allows for certain cognitive faculties and schemas to function across the three domains enhances character construction in all of them. This may be seen as an instance of what in recent research has been referred to as *blending*. This concept helps to clarify the notoriously elusive concept of *identification*.

Blending and Identification

Blending or *conceptual integration* is a concept introduced by Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner (2002) to explain how combinations of inputs from different conceptual spaces can cause new structures of meaning to emerge in what they call *blended space*. An intermediary term is *generic space*, in which the common terms of the *input spaces* are mapped together. The blended space can be used as a frame for combining chosen elements from the input spaces in order to produce new meaning, often in terms of counterfactuals, and it typically involves unconscious cognitive exploration (Fauconnier & Turner 2002: 73). This remarkable ability allows us to relate even ostensible

mutually exclusive things such as fact and fiction in a creative way. What emerges in blending is an expression in which the inputs are compressed or related to give rise to a new, holistic understanding of whatever is at issue. It should also be noted that “projection from the inputs to the blend is selective,” and that “the blend develops emergent properties that are not possessed by any of the input views” (Turner 2006: 10).

Moreover, blending allows our notion of the real, the fictitious, and the imagined to interact creatively—

and sometimes confusingly—with one another. Conflicting organizational frames are combined in blending into an organizing frame, incorporating different—even ostensibly conflicting points of view—into flexible yet reasonably coherent mental representations about complex phenomena. Turner sees the brain as a “vast bubble chamber, constantly trying to blend different things” (2006: 112). Blending can be thought of as both a conceptual tool that can be used as a heuristic device and a basic cognitive operation that is apparently going on all the time in our minds as we interact with our environment.

Character construction across the three domains almost irresistibly involves blending of notions thought to be accurate descriptions of real people, models appropriated from fiction, and hopes and desires as well as fears and anxieties crystallized in our fantasy. With this in mind, the domain of fantasy with regard to character construction can now be clarified. In our minds we constantly run various fantasy scenarios involving characters that are blends

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of (1) real life people as we perceive them, sometimes in a stereotypical fashion; (2) an enormous repertoire of fictional characters, some of them stock characters we have learned to recognize since early childhood, and (3) needs and desires as crystallized in more or less collectively shared archetypes and possibly projected on more or less individualized figures. The process involves picking up characteristics of these people/characters/types that suit the fantasy we are running through in our minds. This produces the generic space that is the first stage of blending. These elements are then used as material in the actual blend; that is, in constructing a fantasmatic character.

The way we relate to fictional characters also involves blending. To begin to analyze this process we might employ the formalist notion of motivation. For fictional characters to appear relevant and interesting to us they must somehow relate to our notions about real people. The characters are not likely to appear even comprehensible unless they evoke notions about real people (realistic motivation), however much this may be modified by the exigencies of plot development (compositional motivation), by genre conventions (trans-textual motivation), or the more purely aesthetic aspects of the work of art (artistic motivation). As shown below, this schema can be modified in order to take into account the way we construct fantasy characters in our mind. Following Cavell, we might argue that what makes fictional character significant for us is the resonance they have with our fundamental needs as crystallized in the figures of our fantasy. Thus we may pick up from the fictional characters traits that correspond to these fantasmatic desires, which may go beyond what we might think of as being realistic—the very point about fantasizing. This need not involve imagining having supernatural forces, but certainly something larger than life and free of the actual physical or social constraints of our lives. An adolescent might not fantasize about having Spiderman's resources at his disposal, but he may recognize many of the problems Peter Parker faces and share his exasperation when even superhuman powers do not suffice in trying to meet the demands exerted on him—such as delivering pizza in time at the beginning of *Spiderman 2* (Figure 2).



Figure 2. *Spiderman as pizza boy—a teenager has to be a superhero to cope with the challenges of his life.*

Quoting M. Scheler's *Idole der Selbsterkenntnisse*, Maurice Merleau-Ponty offers a wonderful account of how this might work out in practice, how fictional characters can bear on our fantasy cum reality orientation:

"The girl who is loved does not project her emotions like an Isolde or a Juliet, but feels the feelings of these poetic phantoms and infuses them into her own life. It is at a later date, perhaps, that a personal and authentic feeling breaks the web of her sentimental phantasies." But until this feeling makes its appearance, the girl has no means of discovering the illusory and literary element in her love. It is the truth of her future feelings which is destined to reveal the misguidedness of her present ones, which are genuinely experienced. The girl "loses her reality" in them as does the actor in the part he plays, so that we are faced, not with representations or ideas which give rise to real emotions, but artificial emotions and imaginary sentiments. Thus we are not perpetually in possession of ourselves in our whole reality, and we are justified in speaking of an inner perception of an inward sense, an "analyser" working from us to ourselves which ceaselessly, goes some, but not all, the way in providing knowledge of our life and our being. (1981: 380)

The constantly shifting balance—both in viewing and in retrospective reflection—among getting submerged in the fiction, projecting oneself into the situation of the character, worrying about what is going to happen to the characters, and observing the action and the emotions it generates in the characters in a more detached mode, is all part of standard cinematic experience. It is also part of the process appropriating the fictional characters into our own sphere of fantasy. Good fiction engages us by feeding energy into the fiction/fantasy interface, electrifying the fantasy/reality interface in our mind. Thus, although one might not actually fall in love with fictional characters they certainly may inspire our fantasies and notions about what love could or should be about—for better or worse.

Here we come to the all-important instance of blending commonly referred to as *identification*. Character construction in all three domains calls for a degree of involvement captured in this notion. Although the concept of identification seems to elude precise definitions it is nevertheless an invaluable tool in an effort to map out the functions of narrative in the cycle of fiction, fantasy, and reality orientation. It must be appreciated that identification does not operate on the basis of on/off logic; rather, it is a mental mode, which in the process of viewing a film and while reflecting on it, constantly competes with other, more detached modes of viewing and contemplating on the film and its characters. Identifications are never total or precise. Rather, some aspect in another person or character becomes assimilated, often through metaphoric or metonymic processes, into the fantasy of the observer. Noël

Carroll states, “But partial identification doesn’t sound to me like identification at all!” (1998: 314). Murray Smith in turn refers to what he calls “folk model” or “folk theory” of spectatorial response to character: “The model implies a singular and unyielding relationship between the spectator and a character; it conflates perceiving and constructing a character with affectively responding to a character; and it produces a crude, dualistic model of response, in which we either identify, or we don’t” (1995: 3).

Torben Grodal criticizes Carroll’s views, “identification does not exclude a certain distance, just as we do not fully identify even with ourselves: normally we are not totally obsessed by ourselves, but are able to look at our own emotions with varying degrees of distance” (1997: 85). Moreover, it appears that ordinary folk (i.e., people unaware of film theory) do not think of identification in such terms. People often say, “I could identify with that character” to indicate simply that they could find some relevant point of similarity between the character’s situation and their own lives. For example, I might not imagine myself engaged in such obsessional behavior as, say, Scotty in *Vertigo*, but I might recognize behind his behavior an inability to encounter an object of love in her own terms. This is something I can detect in my own romances, even if I (hopefully) have succeeded in keeping it at bay. Scotty’s behavior is fascinating not because it is so strange but because in his character Hitchcock has been able to focus on a very real human, perhaps specifically male, trait that we may not be acutely aware of in the normal texture of our lives (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Scottie is obsessed to fashion Judy to suit his idea of Madeleine. The dress of the imaginary woman will provide the one but final touch.



The partial nature of identification also explains why we are able to enjoy fiction that clashes with some of the more morbid traits of our mind. Certain types of violence fascinate many of us both in factual and fictional accounts, perhaps all the more so because it is something that we absolutely do not condone. It is, for example, extremely difficult to depict rape on film so that it would not offer the possibility of horrified enjoyment. Jonathan Kaplan's *The Accused* (1988), which culminates in a flashback in which a young woman (Jodie Foster) is seen gangbanged, is a case in point. Partly in accordance with Murray Smith's analysis (1995) we must appreciate that the way we react to this scene is not tied to the flashback frame or point of view shots of any single or even several characters in the scene itself. Nevertheless, we may assume that the scene might evoke reactions captured in the notion of partial identification but not in the Smith's notion of engagement. The aspect of engagement that comes closest is that of *allegiance*, which is about evaluating "the character as representing a morally desirable (or at least preferable) set of traits, in relation to other characters in the fiction" (M. Smith 1995: 188). The blended notion of identification adds to this yet another dimension: in terms of allegiance one might make a totally negative evaluation of a character and nevertheless experience vicarious pleasure seeing him have his fill through totally reducing another person into an object of pleasure.

The possibility of sadistic enjoyment offered by the rape scene in *The Accused* derives from a shrewdly constructed structure of engagement/identification that it allows: genuinely felt antipathy against the morally repulsive act might actually function as an excuse for indulging in the fascination of the violence and humiliation. Audiovisual means are dexterously used to enhance this effect. According to Jeff Smith, "During the rape, director Jonathan Kaplan gradually fades out the dialogue and sound effects and lets Fiedel's music take over. The score quite clearly signifies Sarah's sense of violation, humiliation, and emotional anguish even as most of the other characters in the scene seem oblivious to it" (1999 225–28). The music does indeed steer us to land emotionally on the ethically right side. But Kaplan introduces this anguished music only quite late; more than half of the rape scene is accompanied by diegetic disco beat, which emphasizes the sexual craze of the men and their ignorance of Sarah's anguish—the ratio is about 3 minutes / 2 minutes. Thus the use of music helps Kaplan and the spectator in having it both ways, enjoying the pleasure of being fascinated by the violent act while condemning it. Also, the visuals emphasize the reactions of the men encouraging the rapists and the passive observers rather than Sarah's anguish—even while Fidel's music is being heard (Figures 4–7).

Based on the excuse that the concluding moral stand is the correct one, the spectator is offered a spectatorial position from which he can experience the event as the desire and enjoyment of a repulsive another, thus avoiding



Figures 4–7. The reactions of on-lookers to the rape in *The Accused*. For much of the scene the emphasis is on their frenzy, accompanied by a disco beat, rather than Sarah's anguish.



the unacceptable recognition of this desire in himself. This is the most paradoxical type of identification as it has to be disavowed to be enjoyed.

Identification can now be defined as a blending in which one input is the characters as cued by the film and another is those aspects of the viewer that the film activates, one based on his or her sensibility, personal history and sense of identity, including suppressed traits. This is part of a larger blend of conceiving of the character, including other inputs such as knowledge of the historical context from which the film emerges, transtextual features, and intertextual elements, all of which may help to develop a sense of identification with some aspect of the character representation. The notion of identification as an instance of blending captures the important relationship between self and fictional other in a flexible way. It allows for discussing different degrees of involvement as calibrated by various aspects of mentally constructing the characters as an integral part of the cycle of narratives.

The partial nature of identification allows for even more complicated blends to emerge. One important feature of person/character formation is the perceiving/assigning of roles and social functions to people and characters. Off-line simulation is partly based on knowledge of the roles people assume in different social situations. We are all familiar with assuming roles in a variety of social contexts and here again imagination carries us from institutionally defined or socially proscribed roles into playful fantasies in which we assume and ascribe to others roles in terms of an ever-expanding repertoire of fantasy scenarios. Such playful uses of roles have even been brought into the public sphere in elaborately acted out role games, shared computer games involving simulation of more or less realistic worlds, social simulation games and in forums for assuming fantasy roles purely for their own sake as in Japanese cosplay culture. These public forms of acting out fantasy scenarios typically develop in lively interaction with popular fiction, further blurring distinctions between the three processes of character construction. People can get so engaged in these plays and games that they become an integral part of their identity and social sphere. Such activities would seem to occupy the center of the triangle of character construction outlined above.

Motivating Characters across the Three Domains

In order to further analyze the workings of the cycle of narrative we must now examine how the three processes are similarly structured. A conceptual tool eminently suitable for this is the formalist notion of *motivation*. It was originally developed by the Russian formalists and has subsequently been elaborated by David Bordwell (1985) and Kristin Thompson (1988) for the purposes of film studies. They use the term to differentiate between the ways a spectator might explain to herself why certain features in the film are the way they are. That is, whether because that is the way things are in the real world (re-

alistic motivation); because of requirements of constructing narrative causality, space and time (compositional motivation); because of conventions of representation related either to visual, verbal and narrative representation in general or cinema and its genres in particular (transtextual motivation); or for its own sake (artistic motivation). This scheme is not a classical categorization in which all items would clearly belong to one class only. On the contrary, motivations are more than likely to appear in different combinations. Artistic motivation is arguably ever present as all devices in a work of art may be assumed to be there for the purpose of producing a certain aesthetic effect. It becomes prominent when the other three types of motivation do not appear to be operative.

Inasmuch as this scheme is applied to narrative works of art it might be improved by making the notion of artistic motivation more precise. One way of achieving this in a way that would not do violence either to the structure of the scheme or its previous history is by defining artistic motivation found to be novel and idiosyncratically expressive in the representation. This would contrast artistic motivation more sharply with other categories of motivation, particularly the transtextual, which involves resorting to the conventional ways of representation. Similarly, departures from what is observed to be realistic or from adherence to obvious compositional requirements are typically instances of finding new ways of expression. These distinctions would appear to make artistic motivation a more clear-cut category than previous formulations.

In view of the topic at hand yet another adjustment, this time an expansion of the field of application, could be made. The scheme of motivations might be a more powerful conceptual tool than its earlier proponents seem to have realized. Although it has been originally devised and further developed for the analysis of fiction and film, it actually reflects an even more fundamental structure of how various human activities and products are related to the exigencies of the real world, compositional requirements, established conventions, and what may be recognized as aesthetic or expressive qualities:

- *Realistic motivation*: The way we make sense of and relate to the social world at large entails taking into account what are thought to be facts of the real world. However, we should be aware that those facts are selected according to current needs, which may range from accurately modeling the world in some respect to responding to psychological concerns.
 - *Compositional motivation*: Appreciating any given phenomenon involves observing how its various elements function as parts of larger wholes. With regard to narrative representations this entails observing how a sequence of causally more or less tightly linked scenes or situations in which people or characters have certain roles and corresponding
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narrative functions are presented in terms of a relevant—possibly shifting—point of view.

- *Transtextual motivation*: This appreciation necessarily takes place within some standard notions and conventionalized patterns of perception and making sense of social phenomena.
- *Artistic motivation*: At its most rewarding, appropriation involves discovering new unique or personally meaningful qualities in the object of perception.

Space does not allow for a substantial elaboration of this extension of the concept of motivation but hopefully its application across the domains of character construction will be sufficiently thought provoking to entice the reader to reflect on the wide range of heuristic possibilities of this conceptual scheme.⁶ The way motivations function in the processes of person/character formation can be presented as follows:

Category	Fictional characters	Real life people	Fantasy characters
Realistic motivation	Characters observed to be verisimilar in certain respects	Presumably factual notions about real people	Ties to real persons, their traits and social functions; realistic traits of fantasy characters
Compositional motivation	Characters as plot functions within scenes and narratives as a whole	Social situations and frameworks in which people have certain roles and functions	Fantasy situations and frameworks in which characters are assigned roles and functions
Transtextual motivation	Stock characters and formulaic narrative patterns	Stereotypes and other forms of typification in terms of social and psychological roles	Archetypes and roles related to universal needs and desires, fears, and anxieties
Artistic motivation	Novel, insightful ways of representing characters and their actions	New possibilities and dimensions people and their relationships might have	Exploring potentialities of people, their relationships, and human experience at large

It is immediately obvious that the pertinence of the different categories of motivation differs in each of the three processes. With regard to psychological

construction of real people, realistic motivation is obviously predominant while the mental construction of fantasy characters involves by its very nature what in this scheme is referred to as—somewhat inopportunistly, perhaps, but in line with the function it has in the process of character formations—artistic motivation. With regard to fictional characters the balance between the motivations depends on the mode of narration. In *classical narration* compositional motivation prevails, often supported by transtextual motivation. Realistic motivation is important but subsumed by the compositional and the transtextual. *Art-cinema narration* often emphasizes realistic motivation and relies on artistic rather than transtextual motivation. However, if artistic motivation becomes dominant, we might want to categorize the film as an instance of what Bordwell has called *parametric narration*—a mode of narration in which “style [is] promoted to the level of a shaping force in the film” (1985: 279).

Realistic motivation: All three processes involve reference to what are imagined to be true traits or features of real persons.

Compositional motivation: Just as in a film characters can be thought of as plot functions in the construction of story causality, space, and time, we relate to real people in terms of social situations that determine certain parameters and practical frameworks within which people observe, relate to, and interact with one another. These actions shape situations in a similar manner as narrative requirements shape scenes in fiction. And just as in the case of fiction this involves adopting a point of view, constraints in space and time, as well as relating a situation (like a scene) into a larger whole. Fantasies in turn may take place within purely imagined situations, but also they can be said to have a compositional structure, albeit a fairly ephemeral one. My fantasies may move and develop extremely freely regarding time, space, and causality because the only crucial and constant organizing centers are my current psychological concerns—which can be quite volatile. This contrasts strongly with the compositional aspect in relating to people in real situations as the social parameters as well as the imagined situation may be shifted according to desire—most literally so. Nevertheless, in the fantasy there is a situation in which the characters play roles or have certain functions in the service of my fears and desires.

The notion of *transtextual motivation* cuts more obviously through the three processes: various forms of stereotypification as communally shared schemata strongly guide the way we relate to real life, fictional as well as fantastasmatic otherness. We need typification because making sense of real-life persons can never be a purely bottom-up process. We could not possibly encounter the real world or real people in all their complexity without having some preliminary inkling as to how to categorize what we encounter. Thus all sorts of top-down schemata are needed. Genre films, which by definition rely to a great extent on transtextual motivation are also the most prone to rely on

stock characters and formulaic narrative situations. One of the fundamental questions of ideological criticism is, of course, to what extent such fictional typification strengthens typification in real life. It may do so partly through fantasmatic representations; that is, archetypal figures related to commonly shared if not universal psychological concerns.

Finally, in terms of the newly defined notion of *artistic motivation*, we may observe that in fiction characterization often exceeds the limits of plain realistic depiction, narrative requirements, and the tendency to resort to stock characters. It might involve a degree of caricature, which offers new insights into the human issues at hand. In the best of cases this calls for questioning one's habitual notions about oneself as well as of the world at large. The notion can now be extended to the realm of making sense of real people. Here "artistic motivation" is apparent in trying to figure out the potentialities of another person, what he or she might actually achieve, or what kind of a relationship one might have with him or her. This involves employing imagination in a creative fashion yet within the limits of the actually feasible. In this it contrasts with the final item in the table in that there imagination is at its most volatile, playing on notions concerning real-life person as well as drawing inspiration from fictional representations in order to freely fantasize with person-related schemas disregarding physical, psychological, social, or moral restraints. It is fair to assume that artistic creativity has its source in the use of fantasy as an unconstrained mode of imagination, so perhaps the notion of artistic motivation even in this context is not that inopportune after all.

Thus the cycle of narration with regard to person/character construction swirls through the four categories of motivation, all of which are in constant interaction with one another within each of the three processes:

- Notions about what are thought to be features of real people emerge and are modified not only through our interaction with real people but also by fictional representations of people and our own fantasies about other subjects.
 - Our sense of real situations, fictional scenes, and fantasy settings interact with one another. I might fantasize about how to behave in an upcoming situation as inspired by a film and this might modify my behavior when I actually am in that situation. In turn, the way we conceive real-life situations inspires both fantasy and fiction settings allowing for the processing of certain kinds of concerns.
 - Typification plays a role in all the three processes. We resort to it in our encounters with real persons, fantasy connects it with our psychological concerns and fiction allows us to share it within the context of pleasurable imaginary contexts.
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- We may develop new notions and affects with respect to our fellow men. This takes place in an imaginary sphere, which can draw its inspiration from fiction and develop in fantasy scenarios.

The scheme can be used as a heuristic device, which helps us disentangle the ways the three processes of person/character construction are interrelated in four fundamental ways. As such it may help us to better understand the ways in which identification with characters in films takes place as instance of blending in which our reality orientation, psychological concerns, and need to share these with other people resonate with one another in a particularly engaging fashion.

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This article is based on a paper presented at a session of the Society for the Cognitive Study of the Moving Image Conference, Madison, Wisconsin, June 2008. I thank all the participants of this session as well as the referees and editors of *Projections* for their important corrections and challenging remarks, which have helped me to focus my argument.

Notes

¹ There is slight terminological problem here as imagination in everyday talk tends to be associated with fantasy and not with thinking about real life. However, following Kant, imagination should be thought first of all as the mental capacity that enables us to make sense of perceptual data, registering of which is always intertwined with conceptualization. Imagination allows for awareness of features of the perceived object which are not immediately apparent but which nevertheless form an integral part of the perception of the object. Conceiving of other people is a particularly elaborate version of the role of imagination. Perception as relating to another person involves necessarily the ability to imagine what kind of a person he or she is beyond immediate impressions.

² Paraphrasing Clifford Geertz, Murray Smith offers the following list of features that are included in “the narrow, fundamental category of the human agent (on which culturally specific developments are based)”:

- 1) a discrete human body, individuated and continuous through time and space;
- 2) perceptual activity, including self-awareness;
- 3) intentional states, such as beliefs and desires;
- 4) emotions;
- 5) the ability to use and understand a natural language;
- 6) the capacity for self-impelled actions and self-interpretation;
- 7) the potential for traits, or persisting attributes (M. Smith 1995: 21).

³ Quite possibly we should also take into account dreams as they, too, in their various ways relate to conceiving of characters and to some extent at least interact with the three processes operative when we are awake. For the sake of explanatory economy, however, dreams will be classified here as a form of involuntary fantasizing. It seems fair to assume that the ability to fantasize, as mainly manifested in *daydreams*, is much more immediately relevant to our understanding of how we make sense of and relate to real or fictional characters.

⁴ I have appropriated the term *fantasmatic* from Slavoj Žižek. However, I employ it here without specifically Lacanian connotations to refer to the quality of representations of either real people or purely imagined characters in our fantasy that are responses to our psychological concerns rather than attempts at modeling people in a way that would conform to real life constraints.

⁵ Currie and Ravenscroft also explore the question of to what extent we can assume that the simulation of other people’s beliefs and desires takes place on the basis of the same mental faculties as the processing of one’s own beliefs and desires (Currie and Ravenscroft, 2002: 66–70).

⁶ The terminology employed might not appear entirely suitable for the conceptual expansion proposed but for clarity’s sake I will refrain from launching neologisms at this stage.

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