

My Friend is a WWI Soldier: A Semiopragmatic Approach to Docufictions on Social Networks

Catherine Bouko & Maria Giulia Dondero

At the beginning of the twentieth-first century, notable for the triumph of both fiction and a taste for reality (Veyrat-Masson 2008), interactive documentary-dramas appeared on social networks. These Internet-based audiovisual productions invite semiotics to reconsider its tools in order to grasp their complex, hybrid nature, above and beyond the binary opposition of reality and fiction. After considering the semiotic systems which characterize social networks and condition enunciation (Van Dijck, 2013), we proceed to examine the Léon Vivien, Louis Castel and Little Suzon documentary-dramas from a semio-pragmatic point of view. We will examine the relationship between reality, fiction and realism on the basis of the semiopragmatic models developed by Hanot (2002) and Jost (2001) in order to analyse these audiovisual productions on four levels: profilmic, plastic, iconic and diegetic. By adapting these models to Internet, we will be able to identify the authenticating and fictional strategies employed in such online productions to make the archive images waver between the status of index and icon.

KEYWORDS Online docufictions; semiopragmatics; Facebook

Introduction

On May 25, 2013, the death of the fictional veteran Léon Vivien (fictionally occurring in 1915) was announced on his Facebook page. Over 800 people wrote a message on his page, expressing their sadness, some even to the point of tears, at learning of Léon's death, a person to whom people felt extremely close. The message posted on Léon Vivien's page by the Musée de la Grande Guerre (Pays de Meaux, France) bears witness to the scale of emotion which this virtual soldier had generated: 'The images and words had gradually created invisible links between you and him. Links so strong that thousands of you cheered at the birth of his son and cried on the day of his death. The bullet which killed him on a grey morning in May proved that a projectile one hundred years away can also strike you in the very heart.'

Over several months in spring 2013, on an almost daily basis, the DDB communication agency published online messages posted by the character Léon Vivien, devised on behalf of the Meaux Museum of the Great War. The story, illustrated by a large number of (audio-) visual documents, is based on the museum's substantial collection. Just as on any friend's Facebook page, Internet users reacted to Vivien's messages by commenting day after day. All in all, nearly 7,000 messages were posted by followers and 60,000 people became 'fans' of Léon's page.

While most Internet users recognised the fictional nature of this Facebook World War I experience, some approached it as a true story. Someone actually lambasted a comment which claimed that Leon was fictional: 'These words bewilder me. He is not a fictional character!!!! This is a person who lived through the First World War and wrote about and photographed what he saw... When you don't know what the stakes are, it's best to keep quiet!!!!'. Others wanted to know where Léon Vivien had been buried. While these misunderstandings were a relatively rare occurrence, it is striking to see how this Facebook experience managed to generate a singularly close relationship with the Internet users who followed Vivien on a daily basis; some of them

developed real emotional attachment to a character that never existed. Numerous comments, such as 'Rest in peace my dear Léon, I will miss you', 'Oh noooooooooo, Léon!!! Why did he die!! F***ing war!! :(' or 'Léon, where are you??! You can't be dead, no!' illustrate such strong sentiment.

Several months later, the Caen Mémorial created the bilingual French-English story for Facebook and Twitter of the fictional G.I. Louis Castel, who participated in the D-Day landings. He told of his fictional adventures between December 9, 1943 and July 6, 1944. In 2015, the same Mémorial launched the story of little Suzon with the aim of heightening children's awareness of the World War II. Suzon is the nickname of Suzanne Thomas, a nine-year-old girl who lives in Paris when the war breaks out in 1939. Little Suzon, unlike Vivien, Castel or any member of Facebook, does not write posts intended for all the members of her Facebook network; she uses her Facebook page as a private journal and often begins her posts with 'Dear journal'. In this case, a feeling of closeness to Suzon is constructed by means of a *mise en abyme*. While Léon Vivien and Louis Castel used their Facebook page to post public messages, her private journal serves as an intermediary between her and her followers. This *mise en abyme* may create some distance, but, the diary-form makes it possible to get to know her intimately by disclosing personal information normally shown to no one.

In this article, we suggest analysing the phenomenon of docufiction on social networking websites through a twofold semiopragmatic approach. First, we will analyse these docufictions' contextual constraints as well as the engineering of social networks which influences both the interactions between these docufictions' characters and Internet users and their reception. Finally, we will examine the textual constraints at the profilmic, plastic, iconic and diegetic levels.

Towards a semiopragmatic approach to online docufictions

The difference between fiction and non-fiction has generated considerable debate, revived over time by the emergence of so-called 'hybrid' forms. We follow Lioult's approach (2004), which considers it important to move past the paradigm of the confusion of genres. He builds on Ponch, who maintains that while the barriers between fiction and non-fiction may be fixed, the intentions in a mixed work, 'in the hybrid, the distinction between fiction and non-fiction does not break down. All that dissolve are somebody's inhibitions against making in which both assertive and fiction-making illocutionary force are signaled.' (Ponch 1999: 158)

In docufictions on the Web, not only are the intentions mixed, but they also subvert the traditional hierarchy between fiction and non-fiction. Indeed, they intensify the reversal observed by Isabelle Veyrat-Masson in televised docufictions: 'The role of fiction is completely reversed with respect to its primary function and its initial recreational usage: we have moved from recreation to re-creation. [...] In docufiction, archives are illuminated by fiction; the traditional relationships between the two regimes of truth are reversed' (2008: 120-126, our translation).

In 1999 Shaeffer wrote that 'of all the currently known mimetic representation devices, cinema is without doubt that which most easily manages to produce effects of this type' (quoted in Lioult 2004: 31, our translation), which is to say, perceptive illusions and shared recreational pretenses, created in order to entertain rather than trick the spectator. Nowadays, docufictions on the Web question this assertion. Indeed, it would appear that they allow for the development of perceptive illusions and shared recreational pretenses which are at least as effective as those exploited in films, due to the mechanism of the social networks which host them (cf. supra) and their particular narrative strategies. Our attempt to understand Vivien's, Castel's and Suzon's docufictions is based on a semiopragmatic model which does not take meaning as determined ontologically, by internal semantic constraints, but constructed *a posteriori*, by each Facebook member, and is thus not fixed in advance. Semiopragmatics focuses, effectively, on reception, as Christian Metz's reminds us in his famous quotation:

The path that the semiotician follows is (ideally) parallel to that of the film *viewer*. It is the path of 'reading', not of 'composition'. But the semiotician forces himself to make explicit this procedure, step by step, while the viewer practices it directly and implicitly, wanting above all 'to understand the film'. The semiotician, for his part, would also like to be able to understand how film is understood. (Metz 1974, quoted in Buckland 2000: 79)

Following this standpoint, our research aims to examine how these docufictions construct their followers' reception. To do so, we will analyse 'contextual' and 'textual' constraints (Odin 1994: 39, quoted in Buckland 2000: 97), which condition each follower's reception and channel diversity in apprehension. In our case study, contextual constraints lie in Facebook's technical and ideological constraints. We will see how sharing, liking, performing one's identity and narrating on Facebook condition each follower's reception. Contextual constraints also lie in the 'promise' (Jost 2009) underlying the press releases. Through the latter, the creators of these docufictions promise a certain type of docufiction, which mixes facts and fiction, and by so doing, they implicitly condition reception and construct their ideal audience. Next to these contextual constraints, we will also analyse the docufictions' textual constraints. The latter can be considered as textual cues influencing reception. We will see that these cues navigate between fact and fiction by means of a semiopragmatic method, which is structured on four levels: profilmic, plastic, iconic and diegetic (Hanot 2002).

The promise: contextual constraints in press releases

Before analysing the Facebook page as such, let us study its 'promise' (Jost 2009: 48). Jost's notion of promise was created for television programs but it can be applied to online docufictions, as well. The promise is a contextual cue which leads viewers towards specific modes of reception. Television genres fulfil promises: naming this or that film a 'comedy' for example, implies a promise of fun and this conditions the viewer's reception. Such a funny feature can be ontologically or pragmatically determined: if we see images of a man slipping on a banana skin, we can find it funny in the context of hidden camera, although quite ridiculous in a comedy. Jost goes beyond the various genres (comedy, docufiction, reality TV, etc.) suggesting that they all relate to three general categories he calls 'worlds': the *real*, which refers to the real world (eg. the news); the *fictional*, which implies suspension of disbelief, and the *playful*, which is a combination of the first two and is based on complying with a certain set of rules. Such a standpoint raises the following question about online docufictions: to which 'world' (real, fictional or playful) do their producers actually relate them? In other words, does their promise involve an authentic, fictional or playful relation to the events?

To answer this question, let us first examine the press release published when the Léon Vivien page was launched. The April 10, 2013 press release includes formulations referring to both the real and the fictional. The release insists on the 'patronage by a historian' and defines this experience as a 'formidable instrument of knowledge and collective memory' (our translation). The fictional dimension, however, is also highlighted when the communication agency states that it 'imagined what a young Frenchman might have posted on a day-to-day basis if the social network had existed a century ago'. Next to this simultaneous evocation of the categories of the real and the fictional, the ambiguity of the promise delivered by the press is further intensified by its emphasis on the 'genuine human story'; an expression which functions almost as an oxymoron, combining the apparently contradictory ideas of the 'genuine', as it relates to historical truth, and the 'story', which relates to fictional conventions. If the promise seems from the beginning a little ambiguous, subsequently it proved also somewhat changeable, since it was revised during the development of the project.

The last message posted on the Facebook page (on May 24, 2013), written no longer by Vivien but by the Museum itself, suggests a rather more modest objective, whose focus is on empathic understanding: 'This page had no other goal than making you feel and share, as closely as possible, what the soldiers of [19]14 lived through, as

well as their relatives back home. Your thousands of comments, coming straight from the heart, showed us that we succeeded’.

Franck Moulin, Communication Director of the Caen Mémorial, insists on the accuracy of the Louis Castel narrative, which is built upon several true stories: ‘His story is a puzzle of true stories drawn from testimonies found in our archives or in books. The historian Emmanuel Thiébot wrote the historical plot from beginning to end, to which a dramatic fictional layer was added to give the character body’ (quoted in *L’Express* and AFP 2013, our translation). He also affirms that ‘there is a romanesque layer on top of the story, but nothing is invented.’ (quoted in Le Cain 2013). Such seemingly contradictory statements amplify the promise’s ambiguity.

In terms of Castel’s adventure, the Mémorial also highlights the shared emotional experience involved in spending several weeks at the G.I.’s side: ‘Thank You. Thank you to everyone who has followed Louis Castel, the GI who displayed such strong enthusiasm in his commitment to the Liberation of France and Europe. [...] Louis Castel could not have existed without your encouragement and your interest in history. There were over 27.300 of you following Louis on Facebook, and more than 7.700 on Twitter, showing your solidarity and your gratitude every day. In “liking”, commenting, and sharing, you have contributed to this adventure’ (Mémorial de Caen on Louis Castel’s Facebook page).

The issue, then, is not about the function of Vivien and Castel as learning devices but as a touching, immediate, and real experience. Quite evidently, the promise made to the Internet user is plural, meandering between offering knowledge, emotional experience, and fictional entertainment.

Technical and ideological constraints of online docufictions : how to share, like, perform one’s identity and narrate on Facebook

In order to create a narrative to which Internet users can react, the developers of docufictions on social websites may use the asset of these sites’ specific mechanism. José Van Dijck (2013: 65) reminds us that ‘sharing, friending and liking are powerful ideological concepts whose impact reaches beyond Facebook proper into all corners of culture, affecting the very fabric of sociality’. Let us briefly see how the Facebook company conditions how to share, like, perform one’s identity and narrate on its social platform.

Firstly, the propensity of Facebook to share content through networking allows for raising awareness about Léon Vivien’s page. When one or more friends have ‘liked’ the page, it appears in the top right hand corner of one’s personal Facebook, amongst the recommended pages. Facebook’s ‘tribal functioning’ (Benoit 2013: 82, our translation), in which content is shared between peers, determines therefore access to information, at the risk of standardizing the types of content which are diffused. Coming into contact with these docufiction characters is therefore a question of our friends’ affinities as well as of our own areas of interest.

Social marketing on Facebook tends to make advertisements look like members’ posts; for example, when they use interactive strategies and seem to ask questions like ‘what nicknames do you use to call your children?’ asked by a baby diaper company. Such assimilation of Facebook social codes is also at work with these docufictions, which resemble friends’ profile pages. One’s newsfeed is thus filled with a mix – sometimes hardly visible – of fictional, business and non-fictional links. The majority of non-fictional posts creates a general impression of authenticity, which benefits docufictions.

Secondly, Facebook can be considered as a ‘kissland’ (Benoit 2012: 47, our translation), in which a cool and relativistic attitude is favoured, leaving little room for differences of opinion. The social network offers different tools to help nourish friendships, focusing for the main part on the phatic function of communication: the ‘like’ button (whose ‘dislike’ counterpart does not exist) and the now defunct means of ‘poking’ someone, which amounts to virtually entering into physical contact with someone, are two well-known examples. This may explain why more than 60.000 people liked Vivien’s page. That said, it doesn’t mean that they all followed

his adventures; they may have ‘liked’ the page once but didn’t really follow him and didn’t click on the ‘unfollow’ button. It also appears that many Internet users only ‘liked’ his messages but never commented on them. As Barry Schnitt, Facebook’s director of corporate communications and public policy has stated, Facebook favours empathetic contact, ‘by making the world more open and connected, we’re expanding understanding between people and making the world a more empathetic place’ (quoted in Kirkpatrick 2009). Empathy for Léon Vivien or Louis Castel is demonstrated in a kind of interpersonal relationship with the Internet user, who develops a feeling of intimacy and closeness to the fictional soldier. This would be all the more valid for older Internet users who tend to maintain interpersonal interactions on Facebook, rather than more collective relationships, for example via messages aimed at all of their friends (McAndrew and Sun Jeong 2012: 2360).

Thirdly, Facebook conditions how one’s performs one’s social identity via one’s posts and comments. The experienced intimacy and the authenticity of Internet users’ reactions to the positive and negative events experience by Vivien and Castel can also be explained by the fact that Facebook is a ‘nonymous’ environment (Zhao *et al.* 2008: 1818): the individuals (are supposed to) interact with the other members of the website via their real name, which can obviously have consequences for the nature of the interaction and the performance of identity. For Zhao *et al.*, the nonymous online world emerges as a third type of environment, between totally anonymous websites and nonymous offline worlds. In nonymous online environments,

People may tend to express what has been called the ‘hoped-for possible selves’ (Yurchisim *et al.* 2005). [...] Hoped-for possible selves are socially desirable identities an individual would like to establish and believes that they can be established given the right conditions. [...] They are ‘socially desirable’ or norm-confirming, but that does not necessarily mean that they are not true selves: even though they are not yet fully actualized offline, they can have a real impact on the individuals. (Zhao *et al.* 2008: 1818-1832)

McAndrew and Sun Jeong’s findings, among others, confirm Zhao’s *et al.* hypothesis, as they consider that ‘Facebook usage is heavily driven by a desire for social interaction’ (McAndrew and Sun Jeong 2012: 2360), rather than for impression management, e.g. for impressing other people. As a result, the performance of identities tends to show accurate reflections of their personality rather than idealised selves. However, Facebook’s nonymity is quite specific, as some members prefer using a pseudonym instead of their real name, for privacy reasons, a phenomenon which Facebook is actively trying to prevent. That said, if Facebook offers a virtual space for genuine social interactions, it also provides a perfect social basis for these docufictions which aim to create closeness to their characters. Such closeness can then rely on one’s impression of authenticity and reliability of Facebook members’ profiles and interactions, including Vivien’s, Castel’s and Suzon’s. Following these docufictions becomes, subsequently, a daily social activity like any other we maintain on Facebook; these fictional universes are included in one’s numerous real interactions. The context makes them even more truthful and reliable.

Fourthly and lastly, Facebook organizes specific narrative formats. Van Dijck observes the development of a narrative mode of organising posted information, which corresponds perfectly with the logbook-style tales offered by these docufictions:

The gradual shift from user-centered connectedness to owner-centered connectivity brought along a change in the organisation of Fb’s content from a *database* structure into a *narrative* structure. In the platform’s early years, content was generally organised around user connections, news and friends updates, and active discussions. Database *of* users and *for* users. [...] Over the course of several years, the platform’s owners clearly strove toward more uniformity in data input and began to introduce specific narrative features in the interface – a transformation that culminated into the implementation of Timeline in 2011. The resulting narrative is a construction in hindsight, a retroactive chronological ordering of life events. [...] The narrative presentation gives each member

page the look and feel of a magazine – a slick publication, with you as the protagonist. With the introduction of Timeline, Facebook has crept deeper into the texture of life, its narrative principles imitating proven conventions of storytelling, thus binding users even more tightly to the fabric that keeps it connected. (Van Dijck 2013: 54-55)

Such narrative formatting is perfect for stories such as these docufictions, and enables them to blend even more into the background of one's social interactions.

Online docufictions: textual constraints

Our analysis of the textual constraints aims to analyse how these docufictions mix fiction and non-fiction at four different levels. In his approach to cinema and documentary, Lioult proposes a theory of the relation between fiction and non-fiction, based upon general notions which are not specific to cinema and are applicable also to docufictions. In Lioult's opinion, the distinction between fiction and non-fiction can be found in three¹ pairs of characteristics (2004: 150):

Non-fiction	Fiction
Inclusion of 1st order reality, with objectively recognizable properties	Inclusion of 2nd order reality, made up of representations of 1st order reality
Filmic treatment of this reality	Profilmic treatment of this reality
Indexicality of icons	Emblematic of iconicity

According to Lioult, each pole focuses on the construction of meaning with its own characteristics but *exploits* the characteristics of the other pole. We have mentioned the hypothesis that the barriers between genres are fixed but their creative intentions are mixed. Indeed, in this case, we find characteristics unique to each pole but creative intentions which navigate between the two, using the final purpose of the other pole. Docufictions certainly fall under the heading of fiction, if only due to the fictional nature of the character relating the events. For Jost, the simple fact that a fictional character narrates real events is enough for considering a genre as fictional. In these docufictions, the three characters narrate some real events (e.g. Jean Jaurès' murder, mentioned by Vivien) but their own actions are deprived of precise time and space indications, which could link them to real events that occurred during the wars. By doing so, their creators do not narrate incorrect information about the wars: if nothing is true, nothing can be false.

On the other hand, online docufictions tend to intensify the practice of using non-fiction characteristics. To describe how exactly they do this, we will use the four-level analytical model suggested for cinema by Dominique Château (1986), which was subsequently taken up and applied to television by Muriel Hanot (2002). The four levels it includes are the profilmic, the plastic, the iconic and the diegetic. This model was chosen on account of its potential to analyze multiple aspects of the expression plane, as well as because of its inclusivity: each level deepens the questions raised by the previous ones. In addition, this model allows us to take account of both the actual messages making up the posts and the visual and/or sound documents that often accompany them.

The Profilmic level

The profilmic level can be briefly defined as the scenographic layout of the elements to be photographed, before the actual shooting. This involves determining whether the layout aims to create the *effects of the past* or *of the present* (Hanot 2002: 34-40, our translation).

In an effort to offer Internet users a time-travel experience, the enunciator will exploit the *effect of the past* of 'retroactively dated' (Hanot 2002: 34, our translation) archival images. This process can also be observed in the use of music sound clips, which sound 'old-fashioned' to contemporary ears (Hanot 2002: 38, our translation). In this way, the enunciator highlights the effect of the past characterizing these documents.

In addition to the use of archival material, the enunciator constructs certain pictures. The profilmic aspect (the characters' poses, their appearance, the various background elements of the photo) is in this case reconstructed by convention. With Léon Vivien, as with Louis Castel, we find photographs which personalize objects and integrate them into the fiction, as in the examples presented in Figures 1 and 2.



Figure 1: Photograph accompanying Louis Castel's post on December 31, 1943: 'New Year's Eve. "Seconds, come and get it!". Tonight, we will be allowed double rations and a "special dessert": cookies!'© Mémorial de Caen



Figure 2: Photograph accompanying Léon Vivien's post on November 9, 1914: 'Get dressed, team! I'm going back to my room to prepare my bag for a military march which will take place tomorrow morning.'(Our translation)© DDB Paris

While the photographs created today recall the photographic practices of the time, the photos of small objects in Vivien's and Castel's hand and photographed with the other hand, as well as some of Vivien's self-portraits, recall the contemporary practice of 'selfies' taken with Smartphones rather than the customary practices at the beginning or the middle of the twentieth century. The slightly quirky nature of these photographs means that a certain knowledge of the photographic art is required for it to be identified; this is not an issue for non-expert Internet users, who do not notice the anachronism.

In the absence of appropriate archival material, the Caen Mémorial has sometimes taken the decision to resort to drawings for characters' Facebook profiles and for various illustrations accompanying their posts (see Figures 3 & 4). While reproducing the profilmic aspect of the time, they cannot possibly be equated with authentic documents and do not really contribute to the creation of a reality-effect.

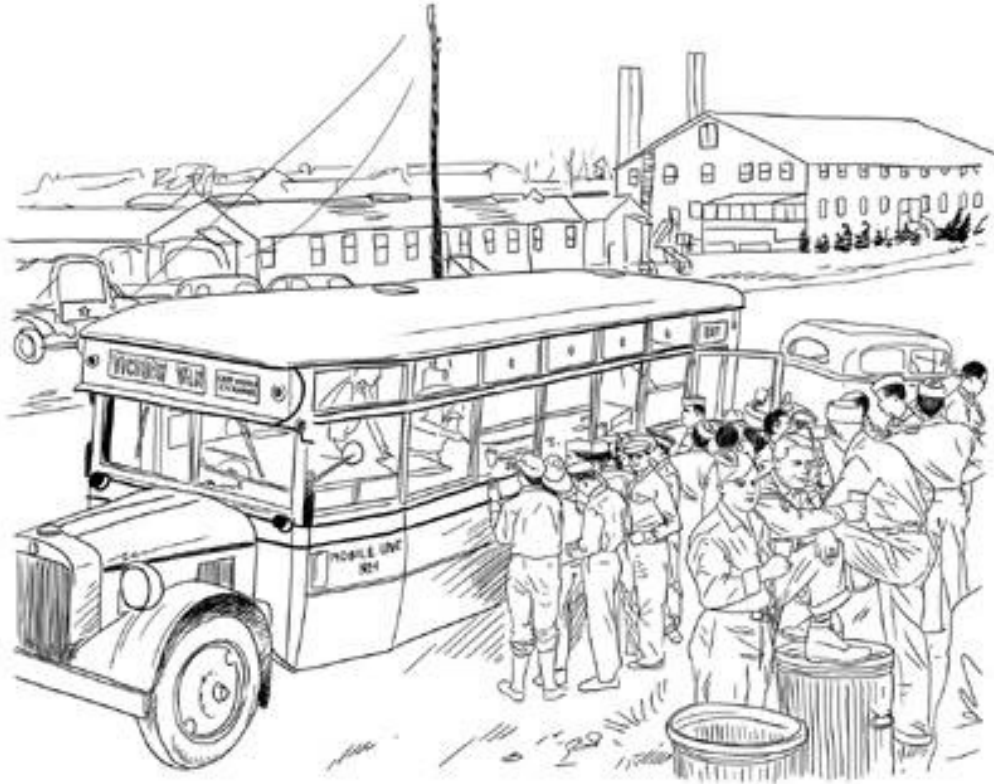


Figure 3: Drawing accompanying Louis Castel's post on December 9, 1943: 'Another few days at the Kilmer camp. Milk, always milk! Personally I would prefer a good côtes-du-Rhône, a vintage Burgundy or some Bordeaux!'[©] Mémorial de Caen



Figure 4: Illustration accompanying Suzon's post on October 2, 1940: 'Dear diary, it's the beginning of a new school term! [...] When I come back from school with a muddy blouse, aunty grumbles at me because I'm dirty. Well, I'll leave you because I've got a load of homework for tomorrow and afterwards I've still got my chores on the farm! No quiet life for me...'(Our translation)[©] Mémorial de Caen

As opposed to authentic archival material, these documents of questionable credibility tend to reinforce the fictional nature of the tale. Although such drawings are rather rare in Louis Castel's story, they are quite systematically used to illustrate Little Suzon's story. All drawn by the contemporary French designer Alice Dufay, these drawings correspond more to children's visual habits than 'old' pictures. Such plastic choice is thus likely to attract children familiar with books and cartoons. Let us now see how the plastic level conditions our hybrid approach to these docufictions.

The Plastic level

Our focus here is on 'indexes of materiality' (Hanot 2002: 46, our translation), which correspond to indexical *traces* left by the passing of time: black and white marks, yellowing and/or deterioration of photographs, sound static, etc. The developers of Léon Vivien decided to age all the photographs by using the same black and white patina. The various origins of the documents are also hidden, so as to favour a coherent global narrative; the plastic homogeneity gives the impression that all of the photographs have been taken in the same time period, with the same device. The care taken with the plastic dimension demonstrates that the enunciator favours the *transparency* rather than the *unveiling* of the medium, in an attempt to support the aesthetic aspect of the tale. The purported spontaneity of Facebook posts does not show itself through (falsely) naturally brute plasticity. The combination of a *profilmic past effect* and a *past effect of materiality* creates an 'effect of historicization' (Hanot 2002: 52, our translation) unique to archival documents and reconstructions. The profilmic and plastic modification of the original documents is hardly visible upon a quick reading; the Internet user is placed in a 'quasi-perceptive' position (Schaeffer quoted in Jost 2004: 33, our translation) which invites him to take in the image without examining the details. Facebook's general momentum in itself, moreover, whereby posts rapidly follow each other, reinforces this quick, global reading.

The developers of Louis Castel and Suzon, on the other hand, have chosen to preserve the original, plastic characteristics of the photographs. The latter originate from various archival collections and some are available in online databases. The sought-after 'pastness' effect of materiality is thus undeniably authentic. This choice, however, entails certain differences in the black and white patina and a degree of grain variation between some of the photographs used. As is the case of the drawings, narrative coherence is once again rather perilous. While photographs are sometimes harmonised, other types of visual documents used (newspaper extracts, military documents, etc.) maintain their own particular indexes of past materiality, contributing, thus, significantly to the effect of historicization sought by the enunciator.

The Iconic level

On the iconic level, we investigate the extent to which the reality put forward constitutes a reality which flaunts itself or a reality which erases its reference marks. In other words, are we faced with a *true* or a *realistic* presentation of events? In these Facebook docufictions, the original self of the enunciation is not real but a fictional character. Against this background, the relationship with events cannot be real but only *realistic*. These docufictions offer us, in Barthes' sense (1957), a somewhat *mythical* way of handling real world conflicts: Vivien's experience unfolds in an undetermined space and time; dates and places are not given. Lioult (2004: 150) provides an apt summary of the iconic issue when he states that cinema most often assumes the function of a parable or allegory, while documentaries demand that space and time, characters, etc. represent *themselves*. This is confirmed in docufictions on the Internet: events captured in photographs are inserted into the story but they mainly act as *archetypes* of the war they narrate, beyond their *hic et nunc* origin and beyond the created fiction. For example, Vivien narrates his departure to the frontline and writes that they arrived in a 'large village in the countryside' after a night long train journey, but he never gives the village's name. Such a technique is also

used in relation to his stay at the barracks, during which he shows numerous pictures but he never links them to a specific location. In a similar way, Castel informs us about his stay in the Military Police, without giving any spatial indication.

The various photographs used in Louis Castel's tale act to de-contextualize the profilmic elements, erasing thus any specific historical reference, and to re-contextualize them in a fictional universe. For example, actors and actresses watching a softball match in New York (Paul Robeson and José Ferrer) become 'Jack' and 'Jacqueline' in the story, who have come to support Castel at a baseball match.



Figure 5: Photograph accompanying Louis Castel's post on December 20, 1943: 'We were not the Yankees but what a game! To support me, even playing baseball, there is no one better than Jack and Jacqueline.'© Everett Collection Historical/Alamy

Inserting real and well-known events in the story strengthens such a mythical approach to war. For example, several of Vivien's posts are devoted to the famous Paris taxis' requisition by the French army to transport troops to the first battle of Marne. Subsequently revealed to have had very little actual impact, the Paris' taxis requisition event belongs clearly to the popular mythology of the Great War. Castel for his part reminds Winston Churchill's famous words 'I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears and sweat'. As we see, events described in detail but without specific spatial indication are combined with real war myths to create these docufictions.

The complexity of analysing the characters' posts is especially due to the fact that they collectively include the effects of 'fictionality' and realism: on the one hand, the internal focalization of Vivien, Castel and Suzon's tales brings out their fictional dimension, to the extent that the war reaches us via the eyes of a fictional character. On the other hand, the posts exploit the indexical strength of these archival photographs. The Internet user is faced with 'indexical icons' (Schaeffer quoted in Lioult 2004: 64, our translation) which maintain an impression of pastness, but which are also coded according to current photographic practices and especially, on the basis of contemporary symbolic representations of war. The tension between iconic, indexical and symbolic

functions encourages the multifaceted interpretation of the photographs. Vivien's enunciator stresses the indexical nature of these photographs – they consist of real footprints preserved by an authoritative institution like the museum– but erases their specificity in order to present them in a symbolic manner: they become war symbols deprived of any concrete indexicality. In contrast, the Caen Mémorial has kept visible references and copyrights on most of the photographs, and has also preserved the explanations accompanying them. These references have been deleted in Vivien's case, once again in order to homogenise the tale and to give the impression that the pictures originate from the same era and camera. Thus, fiction uses the contextualization of archival images to different degrees, in order to create an effect of realism and authenticity.

The Diegetic level

On the diegetic level, the questions raised by the profilmic, plastic and iconic levels are intensified, in order to investigate the way in which a tale is set up (or not): is the editing transparent, continuous and supportive of the tale? Or, on the contrary, is it unveiled and discontinuous, supportive of an indexical approach to the events? There is no doubt that in the case of docufictions, narrative logic wins hands-down. For example, we have shown how Léon Vivien's Facebook page shows analogies with Hollywoodian codes (Bouko 2014). It is noteworthy that the construction of this story, which aims at a dramatic climax, is based on Aristotle's three acts theory, widely recommended by professional Hollywood script consultants (see e.g. Seger 1992). In Léon's case, the three-act division ensures the necessary narrative balance: the first act lasts three months and a half; it serves to introduce the context and then the beginnings of the conflict from an external point of view, as Vivien has not been called up yet. The second act is the longest (five months and a half) as it primarily serves to recall the everyday life in the training camps and in the reserves, while the third act is the shortest one (one month and a half) and the most dramatically intense: Vivien bears witness to the horror of the battlefield by evoking many particularly violent events in great detail.

We have already mentioned the device's transparency in the homogenization of the photographs in the Léon Vivien case. On the diegetic level, Vivien and Castel's comments contribute to the construction of the narrative world by placing images in fictional space and time, without taking account of their indexical nature.

While immediate narration gives the impression of current, ongoing reality – the characters narrate their story at the very moment that things take place – and thus fosters the idea of a direct access to reality, the deictic signs themselves constitute 'indexes of fictionality' (Schaeffer quoted in Jost 2004: 57, our translation): in a story about the First or Second World Wars, indicators such as 'now', 'tonight' or 'tomorrow' can only refer to a fictional original enunciator which himself refers to a past narrative. Moreover, the unique mechanism of social networks superimposes itself here: the characters' messages resemble posts published by our friends and lend themselves to an 'authenticating' interpretation. Various procedures and effects, with contradictory aims, are at work, encouraging interpretation on a number of different levels.

Conclusion

The intense emotions expressed by Léon Vivien's followers aroused our curiosity: how can such fictional characters captivate so many Facebook members, who read their experiences of WWI or WWII day after day? More generally, how can history become dynamic thanks to social media? To answer these two questions, we adopted a semiopragmatic approach to analyze the docufictions presented on Facebook in 2013, 2014 and 2015, which were created around three fictional characters: Léon Vivien, Louis Castel and Little Suzon. A guiding idea in our analysis has been Buckland's argument that 'one dramatic way to define the pragmatic theory of meaning is to say that it is premised on *non*-communication – in which *failure* to communicate is the norm, and what needs to be explained is how successful communication takes place' (Buckland 2000: 80-81). Indeed, instead of

studying these docufictions from the point of view of their supposed transparency, we decided to analyse the *constraints* that condition their followers' reception and meaning construction. Two types of constraints were analysed: *contextual constraints*, in the context of which the implementation of Jost's concept of a *promise* revealed the ambiguity of the discourses linking these docufictions to the real and the fictional worlds. Facebook's interactional characteristics can also be seen as contextual constraints that condition how to share and like content, how to perform one's identity in such a 'nonymous' social space, as well as how to narrate, as each Facebook page is now chronologically structured, closely resembling personal life stories.

Subsequently we examined the *textual constraints* on four different levels: profilmic, plastic, iconic and diegetic. In addition to archival material, Vivien's and Castel's docufictions also have recourse to purpose-made pictures or drawings. These additional materials reproduced the archive's profilmic features, and sometimes mixed them with contemporary photographic practices. The humanization of the war was achieved thanks to numerous pictures which illustrated the details of the soldiers' daily experience, notably outside of military operations, or picked up personal anecdotes or precious and moving moments. On the plastic level, we saw how these pictures had been homogenised in Vivien's case, erasing any plastic indexical trace in favor of coherent visual storytelling. On the contrary, Castel's docufiction left plastic traces of each picture, which showed their various origins. On the iconic level, we observed how Vivien's and Castel's docufictions constructed a mythic approach to war, mixing detailed events without any spatial indication with famous and mythic events which occurred during the two world wars. On the diegetic level, we observed how narrative strategies were used to create these docufictions. This four-part analysis makes it possible to conclude that *fiction exploits the characteristics of non-fiction*, in line with Lioult's hypothesis.

Through a careful blend of historical fact and fiction, the Vivien, Castel and Suzon tales prioritised emotion and united fans in an *empathic experience* of the war. In doing so, the creators of this experience on Facebook pay homage to the soldiers' subjectivity. To some extent, they seem to follow the principles of New History: 'creating an empathy with the past is surely at least as, if not more important, than any flawed attempt to resurrect the past under the belief that it comes back to us as it really was' (Munslow 2003: 147).

NOTES

1. He adds the pairing of analog and digital meaning, which we do not consider here.

REFERENCES

- Barthes, Roland 1957. *Mythologies*. Paris: Seuil.
- Benoît, Fabien 2013. *Facebook*. Paris: Le Monde en 10/18.
- Bouko, Catherine 2014. Les Usages du Passé sur les Réseaux Sociaux ou Comment Faire vivre la Grande Guerre sur Facebook. *Revue d'Histoire de l'Université de Sherbrooke* 7 (1). Available from: http://rhus.association.usherbrooke.ca/?page_id=1382. [Last accessed April 19, 2015]
- Bucher, Taina 2013. The Friendship Assemblage: Investigating Programmed Sociality on Facebook. *Television New Media* 14 (6): 479-493.
- Buckland, Warren 2000. *The Cognitive Semiotics of Film*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Château, Dominique 1986. *Le Cinéma comme Langage*. Paris: Editions AISS/IASPA/Publications de la Sorbonne/ACEV.
- Hanot, Muriel 2002. *Télévision: Réalité ou Réalisme? Introduction à l'Analyse Sémio-pragmatique des Discours Télévisuels*. Brussels: De Boeck.
- Jost, François 2004. *La Télévision du Quotidien: Entre Réalité et Fiction*. Brussels: De Boeck.
- Jost, François 2009. *Comprendre la Télévision et ses Programmes*. Paris: Armand Colin.

- Kirkpatrick, Marshall 2009. Why Facebook changed its privacy strategy. *Readwrite*, December 10. Available from: http://readwrite.com/2009/12/10/why_facebook_changed_privacy_policies. [Last accessed April 19, 2015]
- L'express.fr and AFP 2013. Louis Castel, le GI français qui va tweeter le Débarquement. *L'Express*, December 12. Available from: http://www.lexpress.fr/actualite/societe/louis-castel-le-gi-francais-qui-va-tweeter-le-debarquement_1308947.html#hqxB6COsTZZemluC.99. [Last accessed April 19, 2015]
- Le Cain, Blandine 2013. Un G.I. du Débarquement va raconter sa vie sur Facebook. *Le Figaro*, December 12. Available from: <http://www.lefigaro.fr/culture/2013/12/19/03004-20131219ARTFIG00592-un-gi-du-debarquement-va-raconter-sa-vie-sur-facebook.php> [Last accessed April 19, 2015]
- Lioult, Jean-Luc 2004. *A l'Enseigne du Réel: Penser le Documentaire*. Aix-en-Provence: Publications de l'Université de Provence.
- Mac Andrew, Francis T. and Sun Jeong, Hye 2012. Who does what on Facebook? Age, sex, and relationship status as predictors of Facebook use. *Computers in Human Behavior* 28: 2359–2365.
- Munslow, Alun 2003. *The New History*. London: Routledge.
- Ponech, Trevor 1999. *What is Non-Fiction Cinema? On the Very Idea of Motion Picture Communication*. Boulder: Westview Press.
- Seger, Linda 1992. *The Art of Adaptation: Turning Fact and Fiction into Film*. New York: H. Holt and Co.
- Van Dijck, José 2013. *The Culture of Connectivity: A Critical History of Social Media*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Veyrat-Masson, Isabelle 2008. *Télévision et Histoire, la Confusion des Genres: Docudramas, Docufictions et Fictions du Réel*. Brussels: De Boeck.

Catherine Bouko, Centre de Recherche en Information et Communication (ReSIC), Université Libre de Bruxelles, Belgium. E-mail: cbouko@ulb.ac.be

Maria Giulia Dondero, Département de Langues et Littératures Romanes - Sciences du langage et de Rhétorique (FNRS) – Université de Liège, Belgium. E-mail: MariaGiulia.Dondero@ulg.ac.be