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Fictual Matters

Narration as a Process of Relating
in Mark Bowden's *Blackhawk Down* (1997)[1]

Mark Bowden's hypertext *Blackhawk Down* (1997) is a paradigmatic example of literary journalism. In this essay, I shall demonstrate that the performative power of Bowden's hypertext is erected upon a number of textual signals that can be rendered intelligible with the help of analytical tools provided by narratology. I seek to shed light on the genre- and media-specific structures that serve as ways of cultural worldmaking as well as the ethical and epistemological functions of narratological categories that Bowden uses in order to advance narration so that it becomes a process of relating. The most urgent need in the context of a Critical Ethical Narratology (CEN) is to find a way to talk about the formal properties of hybridized (fictual) genres and to combine this discussion with a consideration of their ideological and ethical implications. The analytical framework of CEN promises to give insights into literary journalism as a genre that is heavily involved in the representation, construction and dissemination of ethical values and norms.

1. The 'fictual' in literary journalism

Literary journalism (e.g. Keeble / Tulloch 2012, Hartsock 1999, 2000, Sims 1984, 1990, Sims / Kramer 1995) is an umbrella term for what is variously referred to as literary non-fiction (Anderson 1989, Goudsblom 2000), documentary fiction (Foley 1986, Pedri 2001), factual fiction (Flis 2010), or the literature of fact (Weber 1980) by scholars. The reason why these terms are often used interchangeably has to do with the fact that different kinds of literary journalism are ontologically similar and share epistemological common ground.

They are ontologically similar insofar as these hybridized genres are characterized by a unique blend of fact and fiction. Works of literary journalism such as Mark Bowden's hypertext *Blackhawk Down* (1997) not only effectively assimilate the repertoires of fictional and factual genres, but they also, in a sense, surpass these genres and take on the status of a new, postmodern 'supergenre'. Moreover, epistemologically speaking, the aforementioned genres share some common ground, because they are all invested in "discovering, constructing, and self-consciously exploring meaning beyond our 'media-constructed reality'" (Hellmann 1981, xi).

For the purpose of this essay, the genre label 'literary journalism' shall refer to bi-referential works that testify to the productivity and constructivity of a genre in which the worlds of fact and fiction are transformed into a qualitative-

ly altogether novel union. Literary journalism distinguishes itself from other genres through its anti-totalizing ideology and its mythopoeic, non-endorsive arrangement of facts (cf. Zavarzadeh 1976). The genre label refers to works that are characterized by "a personal ordering of a universe which, though it already exists, is nonetheless given shape by the author's own experience" (Hoeks 2000, 39). Literary journalism is a particularly innovative genre that is subject to constant renewal, and therefore cannot be subsumed under the traditional triad of epic, lyric and drama. Genre, Mikhail Bakhtin and Pavel Medvedev (1928, 137) argue, is "an aggregate of the means for seeing and conceptualizing reality". In other words, genres possess a certain performative power; they shape and mold reality and create effects of truth central to what we perceive to be 'reality'.

In *The Mythopoeic Reality*, Mas'ud Zavarzadeh (1976, 56) argues that the emergence of the 'fictual', a neologism that he uses to describe the merging of the fictional and the factual, is inextricably linked to "runaway contemporary technologies". Similarly, Ansgar Nünning and Jan Rupp's (2011) claim that not only hybridization but also medialisation plays an important role in terms of generic development and innovation is highly applicable to literary journalism in general and Mark Bowden's hypertext more specifically. Neither hybridization nor medialisation is an end in itself; on the contrary, both processes are shaped by social, cultural and technological developments. Contemporary works of literary journalism are not only an integral part of the media systems of our times, but they also function themselves as a medium of cultural self-reflection (cf. Butter 2007). Put differently, literary journalism both shapes and is shaped by contemporary media culture.

In *Fables of Fact*, John Hellmann (1981) emphasizes the significant role of mass-media journalism in the shaping of a postmodern ethos or what Jean Baudrillard (1981) described as a postmodern culture of simulacra. In *Fact and Fiction*, John Hollowell (1977, 5) alludes to the political ferment in the U.S. in the 1960s, televised assassinations, and the hippie movement as signposts of a "blur […] of the comfortable distinctions between reality and unreality, fantasy and fact". According to these scholars, the postmodern ethos contributed to the feeling that Americans were "daily confronted by realities that were as actual as they seemed fictive" (Hellmann 1981, 2). Considering that literary journalism discards the notion of truth as objective and universal, and is therefore able to mount a counter-discourse to the objectivity norm, the chief occupational value of mainstream American journalism (cf. Schudson 2001), it can be seen as a distinctively postmodern genre. The self-reflexive and critical stance characteristic of literary journalism subverts, furthermore, David Harvey's (1989) claim that postmodern cultural artifacts are depoliticized, follow a logic of consumption and are part of a culture of irreverent pastiche.

2. *Blackhawk Down* as a paradigmatic example of literary journalism

Literary journalism can take on the form of a non-fiction novel, sequential photography, a graphic novel or, as is the case with Mark Bowden's *Blackhawk Down*, a hypertext. Although this essay focuses on the latter (i.e. hypertext), neither other media nor non-fictional genres other than literary journalism are beyond the boundaries of CEN (cf. Berning 2013a, b, c). The American author and journalist Mark Bowden recognized the narrative potential of the World Wide Web already in the late 1990s. In 1997, his newspaper series "Blackhawk Down: An American War Story" was transformed into a hypertext (Fig. 1).
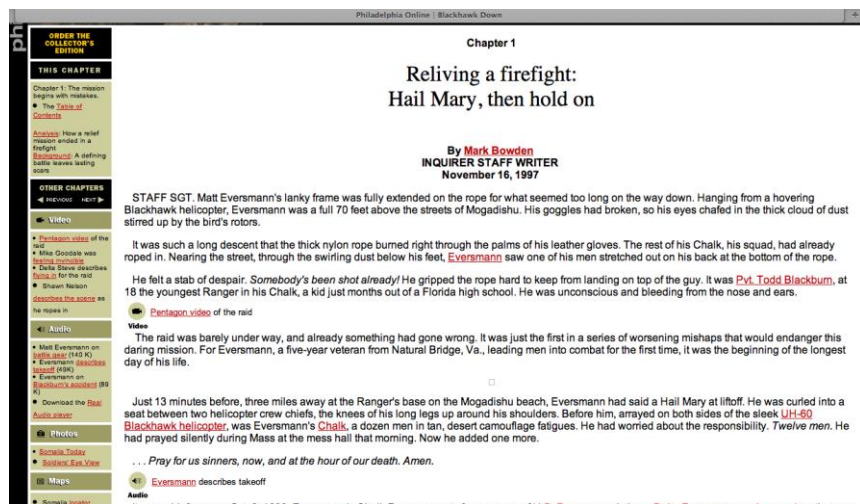

Fig. 1. Blackhawk Down, Graphical User Interface (Bowden 1997)

The story, which originally appeared in *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, consists in its multimedia version of twenty-nine chapters, enriched with graphics, maps, photographs, audio and video clips. Hypertext is a type of narration that "uses the best devices of the novel – and the movie! and the radio! and the CD-Rom! and networked communications! – to tell stories" (Quittner 1995, n. p.). It is a fairly new form of cultural signification that exemplifies the multimodality of meaning making. In this type of medium, literariness depends not only on language and visual storytelling devices, but also on the specific use of hyperlinks.

Blackhawk Down consists of a total of 343 links. Precisely "because the text consists not only of the words the author has written but also of the structure of decisions that the author creates and the reader explores" (Bolter 1991, 154), *Blackhawk Down* enables new kinds of connectivity for the reader. A hypertext creates the impression of "a universe where the 'and/and/and' is always possible" (Douglas 1998, 155), but the narrative fabric of *Blackhawk Down* is based on an illusion of choice: "The user should progress under the impression that his actions determine the course of the plot, when in fact his choices are set up by the system as a function of the effect to be reached" (Ryan 2001, 246).

What makes *Blackhawk Down*, a minute-to-minute account of the Battle of Mogadishu for which Bowden received international recognition, a particularly interesting, yet overlooked, laboratory for analyzing the construction of ethical values and norms is that the author is aware of the problems involved in representing the precarious life of the Other and of the powers of mourning and violence (cf. Butler 2004). Bowden's hypertext inspires various processes of relating crucial to enlightened ethical discourse and authentic ethical soul-searching. If one accepts Jane Stadler's claim that "narration is literally a process of 'relating', of accounting for the complexity of ethical situations and the patterns of responsiveness and responsibility within them" (Stadler 2008, 19), then it is important that one does not place ethics in the realm of abstract rules, thereby reducing the analysis of value construction to an exercise in ideology critique.

Instead, I will propose an analytical framework – Critical Ethical Narratology[2] (CEN) – with the help of which it will be shown that narrative techniques and strategies are semanticized in Bowden's hypertext to the extent that they convey ideologically charged values and norms and contribute to culture-specific notions of narration as a process of relating. The conceptualization of narration as a process of relating can be fruitfully linked to the idea of a non-violent ethics as proposed by Judith Butler (2004). Inspired by Emmanuel Levinas's (1969) definition of ethics as something that rests upon an understanding of the precarious life of the Other, rendered intelligible via "the domain of representation where humanization and dehumanization occur ceaselessly" (ibid., 140), Butler's approach contributes to a way of thinking that is simultaneously culturally sensitive and critical. Against this background, CEN is best understood as a critical project, because it asks us to scrutinize our own ways of meaning making and the values and norms that guide our cultural world-models.

3. A narratological approach to literary journalism

Bowden's hypertext *Blackhawk Down* is characterized by what narratologists regard as the typical characteristics of narrative: (a) events, change and conflict, (b) sequentiality, (c) temporality and (d) experientiality (cf. Neumann / Nünning 2011). The first characteristic, i.e. eventfulness, refers to a change of state, that is, a transition from one situation to another. It functions as a hermeneutic category that invokes the notion of conflict insofar as it is linked to an unpredictable turn or a deviation from the sequencing of events. In *Blackhawk Down*, eventfulness emerges from the depiction of the failed U.S. relief mission in Somalia in 1993 whose tragic outcome only slowly revealed itself to the American public.

The concepts of sequentiality and temporality are closely linked to eventfulness, because the causal and/or chronological sequence of events implies the

presence of temporality (cf. Hühn 2009). Experientiality is defined by Monika Fludernik (1996) as the evocation of human experience within a represented human context. Together, eventfulness, sequentiality (temporality) and experientiality make room for a conceptualization of literary journalism as a specific form of narration that is characterized by a temporal sequence of events, which are causally and/or chronologically connected and that evoke some kind of human experience.

Moreover, literary journalism is conditioned by what James Phelan (2007, 217) calls the ethics of 'global referentiality'. Global referentiality means that everything in the story, from people to places and events, has a referent in the actual world, and thus an existence independent of the narrative. The referential aspect has important implications in terms of the ethical, aesthetic and cognitive stance of the reader. The author's commitment of being faithful to the historical record heightens not only the potential for identification on the part of the reader, but it also alters rhetorical purposes and interpretive strategies (cf. Ryan 2010). The narrativization of experiences makes it impossible for readers to remain emotionally indifferent to the narrative. Hence, literary journalism's added cognitive value lies in its capacity to engage the reader and to affect his or her ethical disposition (cf. Flis 2010).

It is striking, however, that narratology "has confined itself a little too blindly to the study of fictional narrative, as if as a matter of course every literary narrative would always be pure fiction" (Genette 1983, 15). What makes the analytical framework of CEN so useful is that it can address not only many of the pressing questions that an ethical or critical analysis alone could not resolve, but it also enables researchers to work independently of a conception of narratology that privileges either form or content. CEN is best understood as an impetus for carrying Fredric Jameson's (1981, 141) concept of an ethics or "ideology of form" forward into the twenty-first century. Since works of literary journalism "embody a mode of tacit moral knowledge that cannot be adequately captured in general or propositional form" (Eagleton 2012, 66), their ethical vision is inextricably linked to aspects of form, genre and mediality. Together, these aspects 'trouble' not only our understanding of what narratives are and what they can do, but they also serve as a forceful reminder that the formal features of literary journalism are shaped by the culture of which these narratives are an integral part.

In light of this, CEN can be seen as a particular form of cultural extension of classical, structuralist narratology, because it combines narratological categories derived from structuralist narratology and postclassical narrative theory, and thus can account for emerging cultural models of multimodal ways of worldmaking (e.g. hypertext). If one accepts Martha Nussbaum's (1990, 223) argument that "[g]ood ethical criticism […] does not preclude formal analysis, but actually requires it", then CEN must grant the ethical category formal status – something that was not the case in the Golden Age of narratology in the 1960s and 1970s. In this way, the analytical framework of CEN can make a

"significant contribution to the study of culture beyond the boundaries of literature" (Currie 1998, 96).

From the perspective of transmedial narratology, literary journalism is a genre that is always already anchored in a particular medium (cf. Jannidis 2003). Precisely because "media are not hollow conduits for the transmission of messages" (Ryan 2004a, 1), their function "must be conceived of in a more flexible way as influencing, but not *a priori* determining, narrativity and narrative content" (Wolf 2011, 166). Wolf argues that Seymour Chatman (1978), by drawing on Louis Hjelmslev's (1943) glossematics, made a modest attempt to incorporate mediality in his model of narrative as a semiotic structure (Fig. 2).

	Expression	Content
Substance	Media insofar as they can communicate stories. (Some media are semiotic systems in their own right.)	Representations of objects & actions in real & imagined worlds that can be imitated in a narrative medium, as filtered through the codes of the author's society.
Form	Narrative discourse consisting of elements shared by narratives in any medium whatsoever.	Narrative story components: events, existents, and their connections.

Fig. 2. Basic Elements of a Narrative (Chatman 1978, 24)

Chatman (1978) differentiates not only between story (content) and discourse (expression), but also between a form and a substance of content and expression, respectively. In his model, the medium falls under the substance of expression, which means that mediality can be seen as a subcomponent of narrative discourse. However, a comprehensive analysis of value construction in hypertexts must go beyond the identification of media as an aspect of discourse (cf. Wolf 2011). Rather, scholars must account for the fact that media-specific structures of hypertexts "exercise constraints on what kinds of stories can be told" (Ryan 2005, 20), and, as a result, reconfigure narrativity on the Internet.

Bowden's hypertext, as the following analysis will hopefully make clear, gives readers an idea of why America's willingness to intervene in the genocides in Rwanda and Bosnia decreased considerably after the bloody battle in Somalia. Like in the case of the Vietnam War, it is the extremely graphic representation of the Battle of Mogadishu that fosters apprehension of the precariousness of the lives of both Americans and Somalis, thereby bringing to the U.S. public a sense of moral outrage. The Battle of Mogadishu took the lives of eighteen American soldiers and more than five hundred Somalis. Designing a hypertext like this entails more than ensuring coherence between individual nodes of a text. Multimedia designers (and scholars) have to understand the

medium-specific qualities of hypertexts not just technically but also aesthetically, culturally, politically and ethically (cf. Cranny-Francis 2005).

4. The literary 'writing space' of the Internet

In hypertexts ethical choices and aesthetic ones are closely intertwined, or, to stay with the hypertext metaphor, indissolubly linked (Gigliotti 1999). A hypertext like Bowden's *Blackhawk Down* is "text composed of lexias (blocks of words, moving or static images, or sounds) linked electronically by multiple paths, chains, or trails in an open-ended web" (Landow 1999, 154). Hypertext is a particular form of multisequential writing in which individual lexias can be part of more than one narrative sequence. Consequently, the creation of hypertexts requires "a certain modicum of lexias that not only make sense when entered from multiple places but also satisfy, in some way seeming (partially) complete when they end or when one departs from them" (Landow 1997, 211).

In *Blackhawk Down*, the hyperlink serves as a constitutive element of cultural worldmaking, because it forces the reader to make a decision, to accept or refuse a certain narrative path. In addition to this, the link enables Bowden to integrate different types of media in his story. He juxtaposes multiple worlds, explores the connections and tensions between them and foregrounds the worldmaking qualities of each medium. And yet, "[d]espite its multimedia nature, the internet is a surprisingly textual place; even images and sound need text for users to identify and link, and in some corners the web has taken a narrative turn" (Greenberg 2012, 383).

Blackhawk Down is the best evidence for the kind of narrative turn that Susan Greenberg (2012) describes in her article "Slow Journalism in the Digital Fast Lane", because Bowden succeeds in conveying a narrative totality and in shedding light on the possibility of narration in a medium that has been hailed as instantiating a post-narrative world (cf. Bakker 2001). The Internet offers a novel literary 'writing space' where "representation is conceived not as a window onto the world, but rather as 'windowed' itself – with windows that open on to other representations or other media" (Bolter / Grusin 1999, 34).

Bowden's hypertext is a form of expression that drifts away from monologic speech insofar as it consists of a number of semiautonomous documents that help to create a dialogized system (cf. Warnick 2006). For instance, photographs taken by soldiers during the battle and those taken by the *Philadelphia Inquirer* staff photographer Peter Tobia who traveled to Somalia with Mark Bowden in May 1997, four years after the bloody battle, turn Bowden's literary journalism into a digital collage. The lexias, or what Espen Aarseth (1994) calls 'textons', are simultaneously self-sufficient building blocks of a hypertext and part of a larger intertextual universe, as described in various theories of intertextuality (e.g. Bakhtin 1975, Barthes 1974, Kristeva 1980, Genette 1982).

Blackhawk Down derives its *raison d'être* from a particular cultural moment – circumscribed by Henry Jenkins (2006) as a 'participatory culture' – that reflects the collapse of meta-narratives in favor of micronarratives (cf. Lyotard 1991). Bowden's hypertext mirrors the shift away from old center-margin structures towards episodic plotlines that intend to convey the experience of a 'secondary orality' (cf. Ong 1982). Besides the fusion of oral and written controlling structures in hypertexts, the notion of secondary orality evokes features that are typical of cultural worldmaking in *Blackhawk Down* such as non-/multi-linearity and interactivity (cf. Slatin 1990). The latter, i.e. interactivity, "appears on two levels: one constituted by the medium, or technological support, the other intrinsic to the work itself" (Ryan 2001, 205). Hence, a model of interactivity that accounts both for the text as such and the discursive context is needed, because text and context can be regarded as dialogic spaces in which digital storytelling is extended and negotiated (cf. Page 2010). According to Marie-Laure Ryan (2004b, 354), digital media affect narratives on three levels:

> On the pragmatic level they offer new modes of user involvement and new things to do with narrative. […] On the discourse level they produce new ways to present stories, which necessitate interpretive strategies on the part of the users. […] On the semantic level, finally, the impact of digitality on narrative is […] a matter of finding the right fit between the medium and the form and substance of the narrative content.

In the analytical part of this paper, the influence of digitality on the semantic level will be analyzed. By applying the analytical framework of CEN to Bowden's hypertext *Blackhawk Down*, it will be demonstrated that narratological categories such as the narrative situation, narrative time, character-spaces and narrative bodies can illuminate value construction in hypertexts, although "time, space, and continuity of identity are not only brought into question, but radically distorted and rendered discontinuous" (Stadler 2008, 83) in digital media. In other words, the subsequent sections are an attempt to remedy the fact that literary journalism, as manifested in the form of a hypertext, constitutes a missing narratological paradigm (cf. Fludernik 2013).

4.1. Narrative situation

The principal goal Bowden pursues with his hypertext is to contribute to the historical record. The Battle of Mogadishu entered the American historical record as the biggest firefight in an urban environment involving American troops since the Vietnam War. Bowden wants to inform and educate people about the 'humanitarian' mission in Somalia by restricting himself to the source material and the information he has gathered from eyewitnesses and people who were actively involved in the mission. In *Blackhawk Down*, the reader sees the events refracted through the lens of a concealed narrating subject. Bowden's role is that of the watchdog whose aim is to critically investigate the actions undertaken by major institutions like the military and individuals who exercise power.

Whereas the text itself is shaped by a heterodiegetic narrator, meaning that the narrator is absent from the story, the discursive context gives room for Bowden's subjective and ambivalent feelings towards the complex issue of human rights intervention in general and the mission in Somalia in particular. Although Bowden is careful not to bring in a verdict, his statement "that Mogadishu demonstrated that our forces, no matter how superb, are not invincible, and there is nearly always a terrible price to pay in battle" (Q&A, round 9) implies that, for Bowden, war is legitimate only as a last resort. Generally speaking, however, Bowden leaves the question of who is to blame untouched, and thus relegates the issue of guilt to the background. Instead, he makes use of medium-specific structures in order to create a narrative situation built upon the "foundational ethical value that it is a good thing for human beings to see and understand the interplay of life and death" (Gregory 2009, 117).

In contrast to analogue forms of narration where the introduction is often that part of the book in which the narrator introduces the characters and sets the tone for the scenes to come, in *Blackhawk Down*, the protagonists introduce themselves via audio and video clips. As a result, the first chapter of Bowden's hypertext is extremely rich in terms of multimedia elements. For instance, Sergeant Matt Eversmann, the leader of Chalk Four who commanded for the first time in his military career a group in combat in Mogadishu, describes in a five-minute audio clip how he and his crew felt shortly before the takeoff.

Eversmann is different from the much younger, battle-hungry Task Force Rangers; he does not radiate a feeling of invincibility. With the help of Eversmann's character, Bowden gives impetus to an ethical discourse in *Blackhawk Down* –, not so much because Eversmann is the focalizing agent of the first chapter, but rather because he is the ethical consciousness of the narrative as a whole. Bowden constantly foregrounds Eversmann's moderate opinion on the mission and advances, through the character of Eversmann, the disputable question of what kinds of responses are available to a democratic state in times of war. However, Bowden refrains from exploring the roots of the civil war in Somalia and America's complicity in the conditions that the troops were called upon to remedy (cf. Dawson 2011). In other words, he does not contribute to a critique of the political and economic forces that stand behind urbanization and criminalization in the global South.

The ethical dimension of the narrative situation resides instead in Bowden's inventiveness as regards new forms of mourning and community making. The personal modulations of the voice of the American soldiers play a powerful role in understanding life's deepest ethical issues and in advancing narration to a process to relating. Voice "is associated with presence not only because it comes from within the body but also because it conveys new information about the subject, information that goes deeper than analytical thought or conscious intention" (Hayles 1999, 219). Voice has a strong immersive effect and enables Bowden to turn his narrative into a crucial site for bearing witness. In *Blackhawk Down*, the politics of suffering function as the motor force of the making of selves and communities. "[I]t is not that mourning is the goal of

politics, but that without the capacity to mourn, we lose that keener sense of life we need in order to oppose violence" (Butler 2004, xviii). Mourning, to put this differently, encourages the reader to engage critically with the ethical responsibilities tied to so-called 'humanitarian' interventions. Or, at the very least, it hints at the arcane ugliness of war and the implications that survival as the sole imperative has for the ethics of the battlefield.

4.2. Narrative time

Although the assemblage of information bites in Bowden's hypertext does not totally upset the chronology of the event-story, it is important to account for the selection and combination of elements that go into the audience's creation of a narrative path. Against this background, Gunnar Liestøl (1994, 97) argues that the story-discourse distinction needs to be re-conceptualized in hypertexts so that two different levels can be taken into consideration:

> […] the discourse as a nonlinear text stored in space and the discourse-as-discoursed, as actually read. The actual way discourse-as-discoursed generates clearly has an effect on story and produces two story levels. There is one possible or potential story-as-stored and one actual story articulated by discourse-as-discoursed.

Following this logic, *Blackhawk Down* exists, as a message independent of the reader, as discourse-as-stored and story-as-stored. In the course of the appropriation, that is, in the transition from the diegetic universe of the text to the world of the reader, discourse-as-discoursed and story-as-discoursed emerge. Furthermore, in light of the reconfiguration of author and reader relations in the online environment, Liestøl (1994, 117) argues that hypertexts are "media dominated by the mode of showing". In *Blackhawk Down*, the telling-showing distinction is inextricably linked to the dialectic of the hyperlink. The link serves a double function: On the one hand, it establishes connections between narrative description and retrospective reflection. On the other hand, the link bridges temporal and emotional immersion. Whereas the hypertext serves primarily as a means to create temporal immersion, i.e. suspense, the links to the audio and video clips provide the conditions necessary for emotional immersion.

Bowden exploits the cognitive function of the link in order to carefully structure attention. The early chapters of *Blackhawk Down* contain a lot of multimedia elements, which allow the readers to explore a plurality of possible worlds and enable their bonding with the characters. Since the narrator remains silent on the question of who deserves our sympathy or whose actions we should support, the narrative calls for a heightened degree of immersion. "Reporting, especially the immersive forms found in literary or creative nonfiction, can be understood in this context as an example of […] an expanded consciousness, a personal experience that is deliberately turned outward and tested by verification" (Greenberg 2012, 382).

In the first part of the story, emotional immersion increases at the expense of temporal immersion. As the story unfolds, however, Bowden constantly reduces the amount of links and temporal immersion increases, whereas emotional immersion decreases. It is not until the end of the story, i.e. when the story reaches a retarding moment in chapters twenty-seven and twenty-eight, that the amount of links increases again. These chapters are a summary of the ordeal of the Blackhawk pilot Mike Durant whose helicopter was shot down by Somali militias. Durant, who had dropped out of the picture in Mogadishu for eleven days, makes a tragicomic reappearance on the scene. His captivity destroys not only the belief in absolute control over life and death, but the shooting of his helicopter also turns the Blackhawks into a strong symbol for the U.S. military's vulnerability.

The video clip that shows the Blackhawks as they fly in alludes to the deathly attacks of the birds in Alfred Hitchcock's 1963 horror film. Durant enters the historical record as one of the soldiers the American public would later associate with the gruesome pictures that went around the world, i.e. pictures showing American soldiers who were dragged through the streets of Mogadishu by angry Somalis. In a video clip, Durant talks about the angry mob of Somalis. During his captivity, he was visited by some journalists, among them a reporter from the *Guardian* who asked him about the 'why's' of the battle. Durant replied: "Too many innocent people are getting killed. People are angry because they see civilians getting killed. I don't think anyone who doesn't live here can understand what is going wrong here. Americans mean well. We did try to help. Things have gone wrong" (Chapter 29).

Whereas the myth of America's technological omnipotence was hard to sustain in the face of the Battle of Mogadishu, the acknowledgment of human failure by the military was considered the biggest sin a trained soldier could commit. In *Blackhawk Down*, the configuration of temporal relations creates the impression that mistakes are not retrievable or fixable. This impression is rooted in the fact that the part-whole interaction between the diegesis and the multimedia elements is such that discourse-as-stored elements cannot infinitely recombine. Readers can replay an audio or video clip or mold the experience of narrative time through pausing, expanding or skipping certain lexias, but there is no way of escaping the larger structuring principle of narrative time in *Blackhawk Down* – death. Narrative time, it could be argued then, is essentially American time in Bowden's hypertext. According to Janet Murray (1997), our fixation on hypertexts is a sign for, and an enactment of, the denial of death.

> The demand for a true image, for more images, for images that convey the full horror and reality of the suffering has its place and importance. […] But it would be a mistake to think that we only need to find the right and true images, and that a certain reality will then be conveyed. The reality is not conveyed by what is represented within the image, but through the challenge to representation that reality delivers. (Butler 2004, 146)

Bowden does not so much exploit narrative time as a means to show how a soldier's understanding of what might be valuable or important in life alters at the sight of death or as a means to convey the idea that whenever the soldiers

are adjusting the line of fire, they are also adjusting their ethical compass. Rather, he configures narrative time in such a way as to trigger an embodied response in the reader. After watching thirty video clips, one feels inclined to accept death as a natural part of human life. In *Blackhawk Down*, narrative time reinforces the larger theme of the interplay of life and death in a war-like situation in which the two are only seconds apart from each other.

4.3. Character-spaces

In *Blackhawk Down*, the ethical dimension of the postclassical narratological category of character-spaces (cf. Woloch 2003) consists in its capacity to further extend the conversation in this dimension. In Bowden's hypertext, every scene or mininarration, separated from the main story either through a link, chapter headings or other forms of interface design, comprises a semiautonomous character-space that "frames the dynamic interaction between a discretely implied individual and the overall narrative form" (ibid., 18). Since "descriptions of persons and their actions are almost always ethically charged" (Brown 2006, 236), Woloch's notion of character-spaces is not only helpful for an understanding of how the construction of space 'thickens' the narrative into a concrete and habitable storyworld, but it also implies that characters or persons do not exist and act in an ethical vacuum.

In Bowden's literary journalism, the dynamics of character-spaces are a result of the framing and sequencing of events, which are structured along the lines of three social groups. These groups fulfill the parameters of a 'protagonist-antagonist relation'. The first 'us versus them' relation follows an axis of racial division between young, white, male American soldiers and dark-skinned Somalis: the Rangers versus the 'Revengers'. The second 'us versus them' relation refers to internal divisions between the Revengers. The Rangers and Delta men, whose actions determine the third 'us versus them' axis in the narrative, were operating as separate units in the Battle of Mogadishu.

The majority of American soldiers depicted in the story seem to embrace the idea of America as the world's savior. Not knowing what awaits them in East Africa, they are resolute about making an end to Hobbesian anarchy and see serving their country both as a job and as their duty. Persons, Adam Zachary Newton (1995, 55) argues, are 'subverted' in all kinds of ways: "by projections of 'character' upon them, for example, or the indiscreet effacement of discrete selves through typification". In *Blackhawk Down*, typification functions as a narrative device that makes the absurdity of war complete. The soldiers of the competing military 'clans' are not only the henchmen of their team leaders, but they are also the ones to suffer from the bravado and chauvinism exhibited by these leaders. By raising the fundamentally ethical question "of what might be gained from another death" (Stadler 2008, 35), Bowden touches on culture-specific values and norms. Whereas the commander of the Rangers, Mike

Steele, blames himself for the death of his crew members, the Somalis are characterized as a savage horde that does not possess the same sense of protectiveness towards their fellow citizens.

With every hour that passes, the city of Mogadishu advances further to a symbol for the biggest fears of the American soldiers who are lost in the dark and dusty streets and who, far away from their friends and families, begin to see the futility of war. "He [Squeglia; N.B.] thought about his parents at home on a Sunday morning, reading the newspaper, without the slightest idea that, at this very moment, he was probably living the last minutes of his life" (Chapter 25). The category of character-spaces reinforces a Levinasian ethics of non-violence, in the context of which aggression is not annihilated, but rather "forms the incessant matter for ethical struggles" (Butler 2004, xviii). Bowden's hypertext is ethical in the sense that being lost in the 'Heart of Darkness' describes the state of mind most of the American soldiers will easily recognize – a state of mind, as it were, that reflects the "struggle to keep fear and anxiety from turning into murderous action" (ibid.).

In *Blackhawk Down*, the aesthetic of juxtaposition typical of hypertexts is mirrored in the configuration of character-spaces insofar as the three aforementioned character-spaces are not synthesized. The rift between these character-spaces functions as an allegory for the broader theme of cultural difference and the problems associated with the imposition of Western values and norms on the global 'Other'. The way in which ethical standards and norms are rendered intelligible via the configuration of character-spaces leaves little room for the recipient to identify either with the heroic, disciplined and brave soldiers the Americans pretend to be or with the Somalis whose treatment of the fallen American soldiers shows anything but respect for the dead.

4.4. Narrative bodies

What happened to twenty-five-year-old Somali Yousuf Dahir Mo'Alim who tried to protect Blackhawk pilot Mike Durant from an angry crowd is shown in one of the photographs of Peter Tobia's series. The body of the armed bandit and gunman for hire, who lives in one of the many tin-roofed shanties in Mogadishu, is covered with scars (Fig. 3). Tobia's photographs taken four years after the Battle of Mogadishu serve not only as some sort of forensic evidence, i.e. as a means to legitimize and enhance the authenticity of the events described in the story, but the juxtaposition of the text passages and the images "has the effect of dispersing the punctual and self-possessed body into a multiplicity of bodies inhabiting different temporal and spatial sites" (del Río 1996, 109).

Fig. 3. Blackhawk Down, Mo'Alim Shows his Scars (Peter Tobia in Bowden 1997)

In Bowden's *Blackhawk Down*, the photographs function as a means to bridge the experiential and the imaginary, i.e. the external world of material reality and the imaginary realm of the narrative. While the narrative contains only traces of the body of the 'Other', the inclusion of the images into the ethical space of the diegesis makes it possible to inject a sense of corporeality into the hypertext and to compensate for the lack of the Somali perspective on the events. Inasmuch as the photographs reduce the distance between subject and world, text and reader, self and 'Other', the photograph's "rhetoric of visibility and immediacy" (del Río 1996, 97) helps to dissolve the boundaries between empirical and imaginary bodies.

Although the photographs are also in a sense 'imprints' of the American perspective, meaning that Somalia is unavoidably subjected to the imperial 'I/eye', the very images enable Bowden to work free from a unified and self-contained diegetic heterocosm and let corporeality appear a little less evasive and enigmatic. Moreover, the images shape the reader's perception of narrative bodies in such a way that the multidimensionality of being enters into an ethical dialogue with the form of the narrative. Tobia's photographs project a field of other bodies – bodies of the past and the present. They can be seen as an affirmation of corporeality through processes of fragmentation. Tobia grasps the representational dynamics of the human body by accounting for the fragmented self in postmodernist culture. "As new paradigms emerge for thinking about human embodiment, so too we will see changes both in what it means to read a story, and in where writers put those bodies in their stories" (Punday 2003, ix).

In *Blackhawk Down*, readers are impotent witnesses, i.e. unrepresented viewers, who look on and cannot be held morally accountable for the soldiers' actions. Yet they are asked to "respond ethically to those events, to the ways in which they are narrated, and to the epistemic and ethical orientations that influence and shape the narrator's discourse" (Brown 2006, 245). Bowden asks the reader to embark on a narrative path and to stitch together the ethical im-

port of the body so that "the seer incorporates the materiality and thickness of the object as a concern of his/hers" (del Río 1996, 106, Butler 2004).

In hypertexts like Bowden's, meaning emerges in the interstices of text and image. "[T]he reconfiguration of the story by the reader provides an opportunity for yoking together narrativity and ethical responsibility" (Pirovolakis 2010, 94). The subjective act of giving meaning to the events is a result of the recipient's cognitive and discursive competences. The interplay of different sign systems requires, moreover, the cooperation of different bodily senses. It is precisely the multidimensionality of narrative form that allows Bowden to bring into focus the existential condition of mortality and what seem to be insurmountable obstacles or 'windows' of vulnerability. Just like photography and cinema, then, *Blackhawk Down* "might be seen as a richly attentive way of engaging with others and with the world in search of narratively understood ethical insight" (Stadler 2008, 235).

To sum up: The analysis of Bowden's hypertext *Blackhawk Down* has revealed that the narrative fabric of literary journalism is as much causal and temporal as it is associative and metaphoric. Furthermore, the application of the analytical framework of Critical Ethical Narratology (CEN) to the hypertext has shown that the narratological categories of narrative situation, narrative time, character-spaces and narrative bodies can give crucial insights into cultural worldmaking and world-construction in 'fictual' genres (cf. Zavarzadeh 1976, 56). Far from providing easy answers to age-old questions about fact and fiction, ethics and aesthetics, truth and 'non-truth' in *Blackhawk Down*, Bowden's primary goal is to show that it is the relation to our own mortal existence that constitutes the ethical value of his literary journalism. It can, moreover, be concluded that a Levinas-inspired ethics of non-violence is "useful for those cultural analyses that seek to understand how best to depict the human, human grief and suffering, and how best to admit the 'faces' of those against whom war is waged into public representation" (Butler 2004, xviii).

5. Literary journalism as an antidote to the 'end of journalism'

Bowden's hypertext relates the literary and the ethical in ways that are both fascinating to decode and that makes his literary journalism indispensable to ethical inquiry. Bowden contributes not only to our emotional sensitivity in terms of contemporary crises, but his narrative also fulfills an important epistemological function in that it relates world and self, and, in so doing, "offer[s] an intellectual counterweight to the prevailing tendencies toward egocentrism and ethno-centrism" (Goudsblom 2000, 6). By proffering the aesthetic experience of a shared ethical and political reality, Bowden links the literary and the ethical in such a way that the epistemological, cultural and cognitive functions of literary journalism as a specific way of cultural worldmaking conjoin in prac-

tical insight, which is the *sine qua non* for good moral deliberation, according to Aristotle.

In this essay, I have demonstrated that a narratological approach to literary journalism is a fruitful line of research, because it allows scholars to lay bare literary journalism's performative power. Literary non-fiction is a genre that relates the fictional and the factual in innovative, imaginative and emotional ways (cf. Kramer 1995, Lehman 1997). "[W]hile anxiety remains about the 'end of journalism' and a shrinking market for writers of all kinds, fear is tempered by the growing awareness that new forms of distribution have removed constraints and offered opportunities for experimentation" (Greenberg 2012, 382). *Blackhawk Down* is a paradigmatic example of literary journalism that represents a novel dimension of storytelling and that underlines Bobbie Johnson's (2010, n.p.) argument that "there is a growing community of people dedicated to spreading good writing, using the very technologies that people say is killing long-form journalism".

In order to make sense of literary journalism as a hybridized, postmodern genre that is heavily involved in the representation, construction and dissemination of values and norms (cf. Baumbach et al. 2009), it is necessary to analyze the ways in which authors like Bowden make use of narrative techniques and strategies in their narratives and endow them with meaning. Rooted in the disciplinary triangle of narratology, ethical criticism and media studies, an analysis of narration as a process of relating (cf. Stadler 2008, 19), as performed in this essay, is conducive to a rapprochement between the aforementioned disciplines. Since literary journalism requires the cognitive, affective, evaluative and ethical abilities of readers, a combination of CEN and affective narratology (cf. Hogan 2011), which accounts for the interplay of textual and contextual parameters, while also shedding light on how the readers' emotions shape stories, constitutes a promising line of research for future inquiry into genres situated in the borderland between fact and fiction.

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[2] For an extensive discussion of the analytical framework of CEN, see Berning (2013c). For a narratological analysis of literary-journalistic (i.e. bi-referential) narratives, see Berning (2011, 2012).