

Adventures in Duck-Rabbitry: Multistable Elements of Graphic Narrative

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Abstract: Multistability refers to those moments in a narrative when readers are made aware of two mutually exclusive possibilities, conceived as an analogy to the visual illusion of the duck-rabbit, which can be seen either as a duck or as a rabbit, but not as both at the same time. Such mutually exclusive possibilities can arise from image elements that have different functions in different panels, words that refer to different things in the dialogue and the panel images, narration that can be read as either extra- or intradiegetic, or, indeed, moments of hesitation whether a metalepsis (a transgression of narrative boundaries) has taken place or not. Duck-rabbitry, that is, the tendency to create multistable moments (or instances that mimic the “tilt” between one percept and another), is a narrative effect in its own right and therefore needs to be distinguished from multiperspective, polyphonic narration, and allegory (because, in these cases, the two possibilities are not mutually exclusive), as well as from irony (because, in this case, one possibility is considered superior to the other). It extends across the narrative space of the fictional world, the narrative time of the plot construction, and the experience of the reader, leading to particular effects of fluency and rupture. While this article foregrounds comics as a medium that is particularly prone to duck-rabbitry, the conclusion also draws attention to its occurrence in other media and its importance for the project of transmedial narratology.

Keywords

Ambiguity, comics and graphic narrative, duck-rabbit, multistability, transmedial narratology

The duck-rabbit was a humble visual trick tucked away on the pages of the German magazine *Fliegende Blätter* (October 23, 1892), along with cartoons about huntsmen and entertaining

fables, before it was discovered by philosophy, art history, and the psychology of perception and began its rise to fame through these disciplines. The contrivance is this: we perceive a single figure depicted on paper (see Figure 1) that can appear both as a duck and as a rabbit, but never as both a duck and a rabbit *at the same time*. The duck-rabbit is a classical example of what is called “Kippbilder” in German, that is, a visual illusion that invites the switching back-and-forth between two different, coherent percepts on the basis of the same visual image. In some instances, such as the Rubin vase, this multistability involves a switch between figure and ground. For our purposes here, however, we will focus more specifically on instances that “tilt” between two different percepts and become multistable with respect to what they seem to represent.

[INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE]

Figure 1: The duck-rabbit. From: *Fliegende Blätter*, 1892

In Pursuit of the Duck-Rabbit

While the duck-rabbit itself is not a graphic narrative, its origin in the illustrated papers from the turn of the 20th century places it in close proximity to the form. In particular, the cartoons and caricatures in *Fliegende Blätter*, where the duck-rabbit first appeared, have been considered as a key influence on early comics, such as Rudolf Dirks’s *Katzenjammer Kids* (1912–39; see Smolderen 113). The multistable visual trickery of the duck-rabbit shares family resemblances with the mechanical “mischief gag” (where a hose seems empty in one panel and then suddenly full of water in the next; see Smolderen 114), the metamorphoses in Winsor McCay’s *Little Nemo in Slumberland* (1905–26), and multipath page layouts such as those in Frank King’s

Crazy Quilts (1914; see Smolderen 87). The aesthetics of visual panache in these early newspaper comics, however, seems rather different from contemporary graphic narrative with its narrative engagements that extend beyond the single page “mischief gag,” its perspectives that do not rely as often on multi-path page layouts to achieve their complexity, and the seriousness of its concerns (see Kukkonen, *Contemporary Comics Storytelling* and the collected articles in Gardner and Herman; Stein and Thon for an indicative coverage of the range of graphic narrative today). Can we observe what I call “duck-rabbitry” (that is, multistable percepts and instances that mimic their characteristic “tilt”) in comics (and other narrative forms) more generally?

The duck-rabbit, in its most basic form, does not depend on visual perspective, verbal discourse, or a sequence of images. Wittgenstein takes the figure as a heuristic example of different “ways of seeing” in *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*, indicating the “aspectuality” of the world (§70ff.). The switch of perspective in the multistable illusion of the duck-rabbit dramatizes what we usually cannot see about the world, namely, the very fact that we perceive things from a certain perspective. Most of the time, it is very rare that we perceive anything but a duck or a rabbit, and it takes the special moment of the contrived visual illusion to drive home the point that this could be otherwise. Currently, studies of visual perception, focused on multistable visual illusions and so-called binocular rivalry (in which each eye is presented with a different percept and perception switches back and forth between the two), similarly indicate that it takes the special case of the visual illusion to make the bias of perception recognizable. The expectation that what we perceive in the world is coherent might simply be too strong to be overcome in everyday perception. Philosophers have connected this assumption both to the particular visual perception of the illusion of the duck-rabbit and to the point of view that we take more generally on the world. Thomas Kuhn famously suggested that, after the advent of

modern science, a “paradigm shift” took place with the result that we cannot perceive the world and think about it in terms of the older Aristotelian model. Kuhn argues explicitly through the duck-rabbit (111–26), comparing scientific revolutions to the multistable figure, where the two perceptions—that is, the Aristotelian model of the world and the modern scientific view—are mutually exclusive and shape our perception in terms of episteme.

From these observations, it seems rather easy to extend the duck-rabbit to narratives working with multiple perspectives and the complexities of focalization, which have also been discussed for comics (see Hatfield; Horstkotte and Pedri; Kukkonen, *Neue Perspektiven*). Individual images in a comic can similarly be charged with multiple meanings, for example, when they recur in narratives told from a different point of view that provides a different significance for the material objects or events represented by these images. Thierry Groensteen, in his discussion of Alan Moore’s comic *Watchmen*, calls this procedure “braiding,” and Silke Horstkotte and Nancy Pedri have shown that “braiding” is an important strategy for focalization (and, more particularly, for highlighting different focalizations in a multiperspectival narrative) in comics. These instances of braiding, however, are strictly speaking not an issue of duck-rabbitry, since they are always clearly embedded in the context of a narrative told from a particular point of view and do not “tilt” from one reading to another instantaneously.

In the afterword to the collection *Transnational Perspectives on Graphic Narratives*, Shane Denson describes comics as a medium of “multistable frames” (277), arising from its sequences and seriality. He begins with the frame of the comics panel that enables readers to perceiving the represented object (such as “a duck”) and the representation of the object (such as “a drawing of a duck”). “This reversibility of the image,” he writes, “is due to the fact of framing; a frame (whether physically manifest or only virtual, existing as a condition of

perceptual selection) marks a boundary that defines the image as a unit, thus separating it from the space around it, but it also marks a zone of connection and in fact invites the viewer to cross its threshold, to pass into the territory it defines and behold it from an engaged—at the ideal limit, immersed—perspective” (274). Denson then extends the multistability of the frame from the individual panel to the larger seriality of the comic (along the lines of Groensteen) and into the media landscape around mainstream comics with their multiverses, character reboots, and convergence culture, where a constant framing and re-framing takes place, as well. Denson’s understanding of multistability is similar to that of Ernst Gombrich in *Art and Illusion* (even though he does not mention Gombrich) in that he understands multistability in terms of a switch between the represented and the representation. Here, the duck-rabbit is discussed as an image that we can both perceive as a duck (or a rabbit) and as a visual illusion printed on paper; it provides something like a meta-perspective on the medium, which is rather different from the switches between competing percepts that underlie traditional interpretation of the duck-rabbit. Denson’s notion of multistability orients itself along the figure/ground constellations of the Rubin vase rather than the mutually exclusive percepts of the duck-rabbit, and, in that sense, his notion of multistability is rather different from mine.

If we take a narrower definition of the duck-rabbit, that is, not as a mere figure of multiperspectivity as it unfolds through the temporality of the narrative and not as a figure/ground configuration of framing, but instead as a single instance that “tilts” between two different readings, it will be helpful to draw on Shlomith Rimmon-Kennan’s examination of “narrative ambiguity” (a notion which she understands in terms of the duck-rabbit: see Rimmon ix-xi), in order to define more precisely what I mean by “duck-rabbitry” and its multistable moments in narrative. It is not a question of “the multiplicity of subjective interpretations given

to a work of fiction” (Rimmon 12) or a general openness and freeplay of meaning that is connected—stereotypically—with postmodernism. The clues of multistability are mutually exclusive, and yet they call on readers to make choice between them, they “enter into the full commitment of [...] determined meaning” (Rimmon 19). The ambiguous narrative remains unresolved because the recuperative cognitive strategies of allegory (reading in terms of layers of parallel meaning), irony (reading in terms of one superior meaning), or multiperspective narration (reading in terms of perhaps conflicting perspectives that are ultimately resolved) do not apply.¹ In contradistinction to Rimmon-Kenan, I think that instances of duck-rabbitry can be combined with allegory and multiperspective narration. The multistability that is specific to the duck-rabbit can work as a hinge point between different layers of allegory or perspectives in a longer narrative. Before we get to this, however, we need to establish how duck-rabbitry might play a role in contemporary graphic narrative.

Comics as a Multistable Form

There are, in fact, many instances where comics employ duck-rabbits in their narratives.

Consider the following page from Alan Moore’s *The Swamp Thing* (see Figure 2).

[INSERT FIGURE 2 HERE]

Figure 2: Alan Moore, *The Saga of the Swamp Thing*

We can read the thick brown line that separates the second from the third panel either as the wooden board on the surface of the old man’s desk or as a panel boundary. The two readings correspond to the switch in perspective between the two panels (we can relate them through the

establishing shot in the first panel) and the inversion in the power relationship between the two characters. Woodrue's report gives the old man the necessary leverage to fire him because he no longer needs his services and insight. The pressure of the old man's hand on the report translates into the pressure he is about to exert on Woodrue through the switch between the multistable readings of the brown board. We have here a localized visual element that can be read in two different ways. The switch relates easily to switches in perspective and the plot, thus using the comics form to enhance the narrative event.

The characteristic "tilt" between the two percepts can also be achieved through other elements of graphic narrative. For example, the word "blood" becomes a duck-rabbit when the villain of *The Swamp Thing* introduces himself in a speech bubble as "Jason Blood" and when, on the next page, another narrative resumes with, "Blood on its muzzle. Blood on his hands where it kissed him" (1: 21–22).² In the first instance, "blood" is a name. In the second instance, it is a noun referring to the blood that another character perceives on his hand. The first instance is spoken in direct speech by Jason Blood; the second is presented as part of a non-diegetic voice-over narration by one of his victims. The word "blood" (and other, similar duck-rabbits in the narrative) turns into a hinge that connects the different narrative perspectives of *The Swamp Thing* and indicates that they are inextricably entwined. The "tilt effect" of the duck-rabbit is achieved here through the two different referents of the word "blood" in the panels of the comic (first: the person of Jason Blood; then: the red substance on the boy's hands), the shift from direct speech to narration, and, finally, the turning of the page, where the materiality of the comic book supports the switch (and reversibility) between the different readings.

Duck-rabbits, it seems, negotiate a shift in perspectives (as in the first example) or are worked out through different narrative strands (as in the second example). In terms of the comics

form, they can involve elements of the panel grid of the page, words and images, or elements of the materiality of the comic book. The shift in perspective can depend on a single instance (as in the first case) or on a repetition (as in the second case) through which the multistability is fixed in narrative time. In both instances, the two perspectives are so closely placed together that readers have both of them present.³

Duck-rabbits can also be found in matters of narration. Jan-Noël Thon (194–99) discusses “Preludes and Nocturnes” from *The Sandman* series (1989–93), written by Neil Gaiman, as an example of graphic narrative that leaves open whether the narration is that of a character in the ongoing stream of events (that is, intradiegetic) or whether the voice of the narrator is not anchored in the fictional world (that is, extradiegetic). Many other duck-rabbits can be found in *The Sandman*. The phrase “And then she woke up” (2: 219) could belong to the discourse of an unspecified narrator but also to the diary of the person who wakes up. When a caption grows a tail at the end of a page (6: 257), it thereby hence points both to an extradiegetic and an intradiegetic voice. The comic form integrate lines from *The Tempest* that can be read as those of Caliban in the play (presented as if written on parchment) or as those of Shakespeare in conversation with his wife (pictured in the panels) (10: 166). In this case, *The Sandman* represents written narrative in different media forms (such as the handwritten note, the illustrated fairy-tale book, and the play-script) that nevertheless could function as part of the ongoing dialogue in the comics-specific mode of speech bubbles and caption.

Other instances of multistability in comics are connected to the occurrence of metalepsis, that is, the moments when narrative attains a meta-dimension because it transgresses boundaries between narrative levels.⁴ Consider the following example from Brian K Vaughn and Fiona Staples’s *Saga* (2012–; see Figure 3).

[INSERT FIGURE 3 HERE]

Figure 3: Brian K Vaughn and Fiona Staples, *Saga*

Two journalists discuss the possibility of going to “see the author.” This could be a metaleptic moment in which the characters realize that they have been written (that is, in which they come to see themselves in terms of a perspective of a higher level of narrative embedding). Indeed, on the next page, one of the journalists looks straight out of the panel frame and (possibly) at readers, saying “In here with us?,” as if the panel indeed provided a window into the fictional world, a “fourth wall” through which readers could move. However, metalepsis is only one possibility to comprehend what is represented on these pages. The character that the two journalists refer to as “the author” is a writer of paperback romances, that is, a character *within* the fictional world of *Saga*, and the second journalist was not looking at readers, but at yet another character, who sits at the table opposite his bed. As the panel sequence continues, it becomes clear that we have a case of shot/reverse shot editing in which readers see two partners of a dialogue in turn.

However, multistability does not merely depend on the framing of the panels in this instance. Rather, the moment of “tilt” in multistability can be connected to the question of whether the boundary between narrative levels has been transgressed or not, and can be located across different aspects of the graphic narrative. Does the character talk about its author? Does the character address readers, visually and verbally, by breaking the “fourth wall”? In other words, does the character turn its gaze and perspective beyond the boundary of the fictional world? *Saga* entertains for a moment the two distinct possibilities of introducing or not

introducing a metaleptic jump into its narrative. On the left-hand page, all signs point toward metalepsis (and the reference beyond the fictional world). On the right-hand page, the references are rooted in the fictional world. While the temporal extension of the narrative pushes readers from one reading to another (and thereby disambiguates the duck-rabbit eventually), the pages of the comic book keep both options in play—at least while readers keep them open. Throughout its run, the series gestures toward the possibility of metafictional transgression through duck-rabbitry and thereby destabilizing readers' perception of its narrative boundaries.⁵

In a third set of examples, I would like to address the issue of multistability as a property of the fictional world. Sergio Toppi's *Sharaz-De* (2001) retells some of the famous stories from the *Arabian Nights* in a striking visual style, where the white on the page may appear as the sky in one panel and then might be cracked like a wall that is broken, as characters make their escape through it, in the following panel, and where the foreshortening of perspective lets a djinn's necklaces appear as the portcullis of a dungeon that a character is about to enter. The frequent metamorphoses of the narratives of *Arabian Nights* become a property of the malleable storyworld of *Sharaz-De*, which is indicated through strategies of multistability even in instances when no actual transformation takes place. Toppi employs a plethora of representational strategies to enhance this impression. A diagonal line, for example, might indicate the slope on which the Sultan is walking or the outlines of the coat of the lover of his wife (see Figure 4).

[INSERT FIGURE 4 HERE]

Figure 4: Sergio Toppi, *Sharaz-De*. Mosquito, 2013

Toppi draws on multistable readings of the function of the panel boundary (similar to the previously discussed page from *The Swamp Thing*; see Figure 2), dramatic foreshortenings, and the embodied dramatics of turning a page. One particularly striking example involves the transformation of a feather into a hand during a sequence of panel images. The final panel depicts the hand on the corner of the page, right where the reader's physical hand will grasp the material paper when turning the page. The metamorphosis from feather to hand is thus extended to the paper hand and the physical hand, which is further reinforced as the movement of the reader's hand is placed in continuity to the implied movement of the hand in the panels that follow on the next page.

Even though Toppi makes use of comics as a multistable form with great aplomb in *Sharaz-De*, he does not lead our analysis to the familiar, Bakhtinian paths of multiperspective narrative (as in the examples from verbal literature) or to the tension between frames (as the account of Denson would suppose). Instead, what I have described as the "malleability" of the fictional world is due to the theme of magic and metamorphosis in *Sharaz-De*, but it becomes enhanced and enacted through the duck-rabbits that run across the entire gamut of narrative devices. We encounter duck-rabbits that draw on the comics form and make readers hesitate about what it is they actually perceive: duck-rabbits that draw on the visual trick of foreshortening and make readers wonder about the relative size of the things that are represented on the comics page, duck-rabbits that draw on the visual qualities of the written word in Arabic (I shall discuss an example of this in the next section), duck-rabbits that yield moments of hesitation whether a transformation spills out across the boundaries between the fictional world and the real world, etc. The multistability of duck-rabbitry creates a global aesthetic effect in *Sharaz-De*.

Fluency and Breaks

Toppi's *Sharaz-De*, which presents readers with a consistent use of duck-rabbits infusing every aspect of the graphic narrative, raises important questions regarding the narrative duck-rabbit and its relation to the temporality of the reading process. I have defined the multistability of the duck-rabbit as a moment when we switch between two different perspectives or percepts. Multistability is, in that sense, localized in a graphic narrative (on the panel boundary, on the corner of the page, as you turn it, etc.) and it can work as a hinge between the different perspectives. Quite often, the transition between the perspectives is abrupt and highly noticeable to readers, as the two examples from *The Swamp Thing* would suggest, but what is the relevance of the duck-rabbit for graphic narrative when it moves beyond these momentary transitions, as in *Sharaz-De*?

If we consider the duck-rabbit as a visual illusion, it seems that we are shifted back and forth between the two different percepts in an almost uncontrollable fashion. However, if we enter into the philosophical discussion around the duck-rabbit, we might find an interesting narrative dimension to this process. Let us begin with the debate between Jerry Fodor and Paul M. Churchland on the pages of the journal *Philosophy of Science* in 1988 that revolves around the issue of cognitive penetrability, the question whether what one knows can actually affect what one perceives. Fodor is a proponent of the encapsulation thesis, that is, he does not believe that higher-level propositional knowledge can impinge on (or “penetrate” down to) lower-level perceptions. Churchland, however, brings forth a number of examples of how we can train ourselves to steer our perception of visual illusions. In the case of the duck-rabbit (see Figure 1), try this: look at the left-hand side of the image, and you will perceive the beak of the duck (after

which the entire percept will fall into place); look at the right-hand side of the image, and you will perceive the muzzle of the rabbit (after which, again, the entire percept will appear).

Churchland suggests that once we perceive of such switches between perspectives as a skill that can be learned “our perception begins to look very plastic and very penetrable indeed” (175).

Attempt to direct your gaze at Figure 1 yourself, and you will easily be able to influence what it is you perceive.⁶ Arguably, the composition of the comics page also guides perception and can thereby contribute to a smoother perception of the “tilts” of the duck-rabbit. The diagonal line in *Sharaz-De* with the moving figure of the Sultan tracing it (see Figure 4), for example, does not have the strong break in perspective that the rather similar instance in *Swamp Thing* exhibits (see Figure 2).

Not only the composition of the page, but the very fact that the graphic novel tells a narrative might contribute to a more controlled movement between the switches of multistability. Jakob Hohwy in *The Predictive Mind* reports a study, which suggests that narratives might change beliefs and thus disambiguate the duck-rabbit. In this study, it was shown that two duck-rabbits, placed next to each other, can be disambiguated through a sentence such as “the duck is about to eat the rabbit” (131). In that case, the right-hand duck-rabbit becomes disambiguated as a duck whose beak is directed at the left-hand duck-rabbit (in turn, disambiguated as a rabbit). The verbal information that the beholder gains is, of course, narrative *in nuce*, along the lines of “the cat sat on the dog’s mat,” which Gerald Prince (147) has proposed as a minimal narrative. The higher-level predictions, which predispose us to perceive particular things, can be fixed and calibrated by a little narrative plot. Miranda Anderson has taken Hohwy’s comment as an invitation for discussing how narratives in Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar* (1599) revisit and

reevaluate what they narrate, thus moving their readers back and forth between different predictions and interpretations of the same events and objects.

Narrative guides the predictions and preconceptions through which we perceive the fictional world. If one reconsiders narrative through the theoretical model of developing probabilities and predictions, as I have attempted to show in another article (see Kukkonen, “Bayesian Narrative”), plot events lead to recalibrations of the preconceptions through which we perceive the fictional world and form part of the learning process through which readers get a progressively better grasp of the workings of the fictional world in the course of the narrative. Not all plot events are duck-rabbits; however, duck-rabbits in graphic narrative seem quite closely connected to plot events (or the possibility of a plot event). More important for the purposes of the present article is the question of how the localized duck-rabbit is related to the overall experience of the graphic narrative and the temporally extended learning process that comes with reading this graphic narrative.

With the guidance of the narrative plots and the way in which readers’ attention is directed through visual composition and also through the physical act of turning the page, readers can be accustomed to a certain degree of fluency in the reading of duck-rabbits in graphic narrative.

[INSERT FIGURE 5 HERE]

Figure 5. Sergio Toppi, *Sharaz-De*. Mosquito, 2013

In Craig Thompson’s *Habibi* (2011), for example, readers are invited to share the perspective of the young girl Dodola, who is learning how to read and write Arabic script. The Arabic letters

are integrated into the visual image, but they are also presented as separate from the images to which they (presumably) refer. Readers are guided back and forth between the visual and the verbal representation in a mode that emulates the girls' clumsy attempts at reading and writing. Does Dodola read the words or look at the images? In this instance, the break between the different percepts becomes palpable.

In *Sharaz-De*, the ornaments on the sultan's headdress have been established across several pages, before they are connected to Sheherazade's speech bubble on the final page of the instalment (see Figure 5). The tail of the speech bubble and the ornaments to the headdress of the sultan, which recall the shape of Arabic script (but could not be read as such), connect to Sheherazade's narrative. Her narration leaves her mouth and goes straight into his head. Indeed, the headdress of the sultan has been likened earlier in the narrative to the blinding hood of a hawk (as the favourite animal of the sultan), so that we might even assume that she controls him through her language. The Arabic script is, again, a duck-rabbit, in the sense that it could be writing, or tails from the speech bubble, or ornaments on the sultan's headdress. It is multistable on the comics page. However, even though these percepts are mutually exclusive, they can be related to the perception of Sheherazade's speech. As the multistability of the duck-rabbit connects with the more traditional ambiguity of the allegory and as it develops across the narrative, fluency increases. Readers have been accustomed to the malleability of the fictional world through a multitude of multistable devices at this point. Unlike the girl in *Habibi*, we have learnt to read this strange language and established a fluency in shifting along with the duck-rabbits in *Sharaz-De*.

Multistable percepts can thus connect with the cognitive recuperation strategies of allegory, irony, and interpretation. More basically, it seems, paying attention to the way in which

duck-rabbits are positioned and accumulated in graphic narrative opens up a particular perspective on the experientiality of reading these narratives that can vary between disruption and fluency and can be localized at different points in the narrative (to characterize a particular moment, as in *Habibi*, where Arabic script is seamlessly integrated into the flow of reading elsewhere on the pages of the narrative) or developed throughout (to give readers a “feel” for the ease of access to the fictional world). If one can learn to change perspectives, and if narratives can guide us in negotiating the shifts of percept, then the duck-rabbit has a varied role to play across different levels of graphic narrative.

Conclusion: Scales of Duck-Rabbitry

The duck-rabbit has not made an appearance in the core critical discussions of the comics form (as it is provided by Groensteen, Hatfield, or McCloud). Nevertheless, as we have seen, it is not confined to the visual tricks of the early comics form, but rather extends across different means of narrative expression and yields narrative effects in terms of the time and space evoked by the graphic narrative. Taking a more systematic approach, we thus arrive at something like “scales of duck-rabbitry” on (1) the level of individual moments in the narrative, be they ambiguous elements within the panel, panel frame, or the use of single words, and (2) the level of narrative stance with multistability between extra- and intradiegetic narration and between transgression or non-transgression of these levels in a metaleptic move. Building on these duck-rabbits, narratives can then shift between different, mutually exclusive perspectives on the fictional world and structures of motivation on the level of the plot, as discussed by Rimmon-Kenan and Martínez. Depending on the degree and arrangement of the duck-rabbits, the fictional world can be made to appear malleable or fixed in terms of its boundaries and consistency, and, as the graphic

narrative progresses, readers will be able to familiarize themselves with duck-rabbitry in terms of fluency and breaks.

Across these different levels, duck-rabbitry reveals itself to be more than a narrative sleight-of-hand that achieves a localized effect on readers. Rather, it contributes to larger purposes of building a particular kind of narrative world and involving readers in qualitatively different ways. Multistability in narrative can be observed in many different media besides comics. Rimmon-Kenan and Martínez discuss verbal narrative in literary fiction by authors such as Henry James, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, and Heinrich Mann. Considering the extent to which duck-rabbitry complicates the narratorial voice in comics such as *The Sandman*, one might also investigate some instances of free indirect discourse in written narrative where the first and the third-person perspective do not blend seamlessly, in terms of duck-rabbitry. Beyond written verbal narrative, examples from film (such as Christopher Nolan's 2010 *Inception*) and music video (such as Michel Gondry's 1999 video for "Let Forever Be" by the Chemical Brothers and Henry Scholfield's 2013 video for "Tous les mêmes" by Stromae) can easily be found.⁷ Since duck-rabbits (and the multistability which they bring) are available to the narrative expressions of words, images, and their sequence in different media, arguably, duck-rabbitry is a truly transmedial phenomenon.

Are comics particularly prone to duck-rabbitry? The original cartoon of the duck-rabbit is not a comic, but, at the very least, it seems that comics' medial and material constitution is conducive to duck-rabbitry: the medium combines words and images that refer to the same thing (and thus make multistable moments easily achievable), the sequence of panels on the page allows for different directions of reading (and thus enables multistability that emerges from the different combinations of elements on the page), and the edge of the page is an aesthetically

privileged point that is fixed in printing. These are all observations made at some length by works central to the analysis of comics (such as Groensteen and Hatfield). It would be a matter of sustained investigation to work out whether graphic narratives employ duck-rabbitry more frequently than other narrative media and, if so, whether this accounts for tendencies towards particular genres, such as the fantastic and the supernatural in comics, and particular narrative constellations, such as the multiverse of the superhero comics (where multistability converges with the conditions of the production of the comic) or the medium's extended seriality (where multistability profits from the publication form of the comic). Indeed, the materiality and the mediality of some media, such as comics, might have developed particularly prominent uses of duck-rabbitry, which emerge from and reinforce choices of publication format, and which support particular choices of genre and theme in these media's narratives. However, this does not mean that comics are essentially a medium of multistability, but rather, that along the scales of duck-rabbitry, which are possible for narrative in any medium, comics have developed into a medium that frequently employs these devices and, hence, may be analyzed in the sign of the duck-rabbit.

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¹ Ryan (668–71) details a number of "possible modes of rationalization for texts that report contradictory versions of events" (668) in the context of possible-worlds theory.

² Since the trade paperback of *The Swamp Thing* is not numbered, I have used the following citation convention: (comic book: page number within the comic book).

³ Even though “blood” is repeated once, I would not consider this to be a case of “braiding” because it does not extend throughout the entire narrative.

⁴ See Kukkonen, “Metalepsis,” for a discussion of competing conceptualizations of metalepsis. I would like to thank Hansjoachim Backe for introducing me to *Saga* and its metaleptic potential.

⁵ This statement concerns the five first trade paperbacks of the still on-going series.

⁶ Fodor counters that attention really is “a wild card” (191), and that changing your fixation is the same thing as changing your pre-conscious beliefs, but, at least for the case of graphic narrative, this need not worry us, since the visual composition of the panel and the page quite clearly guide the readers’ gaze and thus enable a certain measure of control over the movement of the switch between the two different percepts of the duck-rabbit. Moreover, the temporal extension of narrative across time would also prompt a movement from one percept to another. Because the duck-rabbit in graphic narrative is visual in nature, readers are always able to move back to the earlier percept if they choose, but, generally speaking, there often is a direction of movement inscribed in the duck-rabbits of the graphic narrative.

⁷ The film *Inception* uses duck-rabbits to navigate the slippage between narrative levels. In “Let Forever Be,” the camera seems to tilt frequently to the side but the action it captures reorients itself to the new horizon, so that it is not clear where the ground is on which the dancers stand, whereas in “Tous les mêmes” the singer, depending which side of his profile he shows, appears as either a man or a woman. My thanks to Erwin Feyersinger for pointing out the Gondry example to me.

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