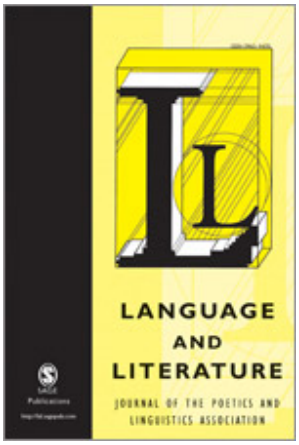
Real readers reading Wasco's 'City' : a storyworld possible selves approach



Real readers reading Wasco's 'City': A storyworld possible selves approach

Journal:	*Language and Literature*
Manuscript ID	Draft
Manuscript Type:	Article
Keywords:	cognitive narratology, cognitive literary linguistics, reader response research, emotion, character construction, storyworld possible selves

Abstract:	This study empirically investigates reader responses to the one-page graphic narrative 'City' (Wasco, 2015) within the theoretical framework of storyworld possible selves, or SPSs (Martinez, 2014; 2018). These are blended structures resulting from the conceptual integration of two input spaces: the mental representation that readers construct for the narrator or character that perspectivizes a narrative, and the mental representation that readers entertain for themselves, or self-concept. In our study, we use a questionnaire to elicit information about the internal organization of SPS blends in fifteen real readers, and we discuss the bearing of both collectively shared and idiosyncratic SPS blends on character construction, emotional response, and narrative construal.

Real readers reading Wasco's 'City': A storyworld possible selves approach

1. Introduction

Recent research on reader response, particularly within the fields of cognitive stylistics (Whiteley and Canning, 2017) and cognitive narratology (Alber 2018; Herman and Vervaeck, 2019), underscores the need to empirically obtain information about the ways in which individuals interact with literature and narratives. These lines of research typically build on the underlying assumption that narratives provide gapped, Gestalt representations of storyworlds (Herman, 2002) and of the entities that inhabit them (Margolin, 2012), to be meaningfully filled out, emotionally actualized, and bodily enlivened by readers during the act of reading. Yet, empirical reader response research still poses notable methodological challenges. From a cognitive stylistics standpoint, these are mostly related to the choice between experimental approaches that rely on quantification and frequently resort to text manipulation in order to test hypotheses, and naturalistic, more ethnomethodologically oriented approaches (Peplow and Carter, 2011; Bell et al., 2019). Within the field of cognitive narratology, the difficulties revolve around accounting for both the cultural predictability shared by the communities of readers which literary critics usually address (Herman and Vervaeck, 2009; 2017), and the idiosyncratic variation postulated by scholars in the field of narrative immersion (Miall and Kuiken, 2002). Furthermore, the analysis should desirably allow connecting both culturally predictable and extremely idiosyncratic responses to the formal features of the narratives by which they are prompted, in order to 'map reading experience and texture together' (Stockwell, 2015: 134).

The theory of storyworld possible selves, or SPSs (Martinez 2014, 2018), addresses these challenges within the fields of cognitive stylistics, cognitive narratology, and social psychology. Storyworld possible selves are defined as 'imagings of the self in storyworlds' (Martinez, 2014: 119), and are formally conceived as blends resulting from the conceptual integration of two input spaces: the mental representation developed by readers for a focalizing character or narrator, and the mental representation that readers entertain about themselves, or self-concept. SPS theory has been acknowledged in the fields of cognitive literary linguistics and stylistics (Mucha, 2016; Harrison, 2017; Kowalczyk, 2019; Martinez and Sanchez-Pardo, 2019), narrative studies (Bruns, 2016; Stagherlin, 2016; Wake, 2016; Herman and Vervaeck, 2019), and narrative engagement and absorption (Oatley, 2016; Jakobs and Lüdtke, 2017). However, despite the model's intrinsic claims on empirical affordances, it has not yet been applied to the study of the responses of real narrative experiencers. Accordingly, our main aim in this study is to empirically explore SPS projection by focusing on reader responses to the short graphic narrative 'City'.

This one-page narrative (Appendix) appears in the collection *Het Tuitel Complex*, by the Dutch graphic artist Wasco (2015). While the main character appears elsewhere in the collection, 'City' clearly stands on its own as a fully-fledged story. Herman and Vervaeck (2019: 203-204) speculate on the projection by readers of this graphic narrative of several kinds of primary, or culturally predictable, storyworld possible selves: a science fiction past SPS, derived from previous narrative experiences and activated by the spaceship in panel one; an undesired SPS in an apocalyptic scenario; and a traveller/tourist SPS, prompted by the character's actions and behaviour inside the storyworld. In the present study we empirically test these predictions by focusing on the

SPS projection processes of fifteen real readers of 'City.' We hypothesize that the primary storyworld possible selves predicted by these literary scholars will be projected by the participants, through processes of mind-modelling (Stockwell, 2015) and character construction (Margolin, 2012; Culpeper and Fernandez-Quintanilla, 2017). Additionally, we also expect a certain degree of individual variation in the form of SPS slipnets (Martinez 2018: 170-171), or highly idiosyncratic and unpredictable SPS blends, based on individual readers' personal experience.

Our main related hypothesis is that the projection of these different types of storyworld possible selves will result in notable differences in character construction and emotional response. Furthermore, while previous studies have explored the linguistic anchoring of storyworld possible selves in terms of narrative construal and intersubjective cognitive coordination between fictional and real minds (Martinez, 2014, 2018), SPS triggers of a visual nature such as those in Wasco's narrative have not been considered before. Consequently, a further aim is to explore the visual anchoring of SPS blends. Our hypothesis in this respect is that the visual neutrality observed by Herman and Vervaeck in 'City' (2019: 204) will match the referential ambiguity and indefiniteness with which these cognitive structures are associated in verbal narratives. Since graphic narratives require a high degree of bridging inferences, or 'inferences that connect story elements' (Hutson et al., 2018: 3000), they provide enhanced opportunities for readers to emotionally actualize and enliven a narrative experience. In the absence of verbal language, moreover, these opportunities seem ideal for the international nature of the participants in the study, who are users of English both as a native and as an international language.

In line with current reader response research (Whiteley and Canning 2017; Bell et al. 2019), we use a predominantly naturalistic, qualitative approach which focuses on the analysis of the answers provided by fifteen readers to a questionnaire whose design combines cognitive narratology with mainstream research into possible selves in social psychology. This will be presented after a brief introduction to storyworld possible selves and their underpinnings in narrative engagement research, self-schema theory, and blending theory. The results suggest that an SPS approach can provide useful insights into both culturally determined and extremely idiosyncratic processes of character construction, emotional response, and narrative construal.

2. Narrative engagement and storyworld possible selves

How to empirically investigate reader responses to narratives is not the only challenge posed by reader response research. First and foremost, the problem lies in the slippery nature of reader response and engagement itself, which has been the object of intense interdisciplinary study spanning fields as varied as narratology, narrative psychology, psychiatry, neurophysiology, communication studies, cognitive literary linguistics and cognitive stylistics, or education. These studies, further discussed by Martinez (2018: 1-40), unanimously highlight the role of emotion, both derived from *empathic attachment* to characters (Keen, 2011), where empathy is understood as 'feeling the same as the other' (Miall and Kuiken, 2002: 223), and from *fresh emotions*, or emotions not shared with any of the characters (Miall and Kuiken, 2002). Furthermore, emotional responses to narratives are found to be strongly *idiosyncratic* (Miall and Kuiken, 2002; Holland, 2009), as they are derived from feelings of *personal relevance* (Kuzmičová and Bálint,

2019) and of *resonance*, or memory recall (Seilman and Larsen, 1989). Narrative engagement has also been understood as the *enlivenment* and *enactment* of a character's or narrator's embodied perspective on the storyworld (Kuiken et al., 2004; Caracciolo, 2017), and as a process of *embodied simulation* of a character's experiences (Lamm et al., 2007; Oatley, 2016) frequently involving *identification* with characters, particularly first-person narrators and character-focalizers (Kuiken et al., 2004; Oatley, 2016). Most importantly, since early times, narrative scholars have underscored the presence of feelings of *self-transformation* (Miall and Kuiken, 2002; Kuzmičová and Bálint, 2019), which can be traced back to Aristotle's notion of *catharsis*, a kind of clearing or cleansing of the soul (Burke, 2011: 12). However, the methodological issue still lingers. As Martinez (2018: 255) puts it:

> All these engagement phenomena – empathy, identification, self-transformation, idiosyncratic resonance – are well documented by researchers in the psychology of narrative reception and emotional response, but […] their actual operations are seldom specified in terms that make them amenable to linguistic and literary research. (Martinez, 2018: 255)

It is in response to these challenges that the model of storyworld possible selves (Martinez, 2014, 2018) was developed. In their basic form, storyworld possible selves are blends resulting from the conceptual integration of two input spaces (Figure 1). One is the mental representation built by readers for an internal agent that provides perspective on the storyworld, be it the narrator or a focalizing character. The other is the mental representation that individual readers entertain for themselves, known in social psychology as the self-concept. According to Martinez (2014, 2018: 89-111), the conceptual integration of these two input spaces is possible because both are mental models: in cognitive naratology, characters are 'text-based mental models of possible

individuals, built in the mind of the reader in the course of textual processing' (Margolin, 2012: 76). The self concept, on its part, is understood in social psychology as 'a complex mental structure of the self containing episodic, semantic, and procedural

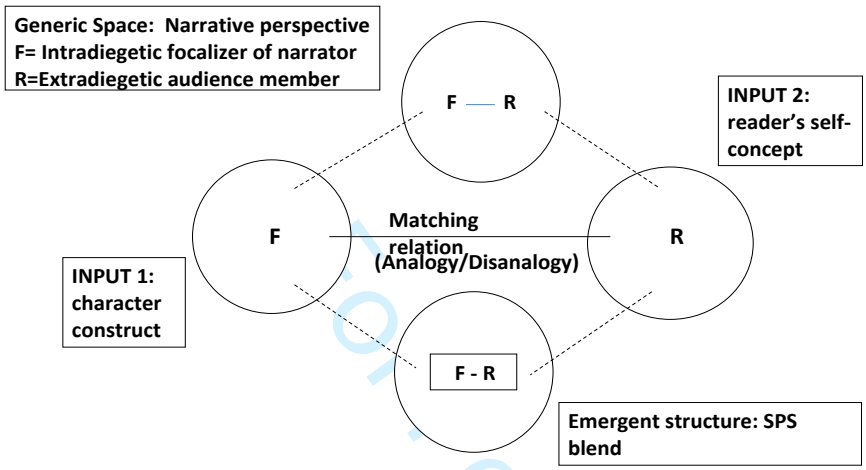


Figure 1. An SPS network (Adapted from Martinez, 2018: 15)

knowledge, built from their interaction with the physical and the social world' (Martinez, 2014: 117), and consists of two interrelated structures: self-schemas and possible selves (Markus, 1977; Markus and Nurius, 1986; Dunkel and Kerpelman, 2006). Individuals may be *schematic* or *aschematic* in a domain depending on whether they have self-schemas – the sportive self, the caring parent self - for category membership in that domain or not. Domain schematicity has attention priming effects, so that people who are aschematic in a domain do not devote time or attention to related information, situations, or events.

Possible selves, on the other hand, are 'individuals' ideas of what they might become, what they would like to become, and what they are afraid of becoming' (Markus and Nurius, 1986: 954). Markus's self-schema theory holds that approaching a desired image of the self, or *desired possible self*, such as the loved self or the

successful self, results in positive emotional responses, while approaching an undesired self-image, or *undesired possible self* – the unemployed self, the endangered self - is accompanied by negative emotions. *Past possible selves*, or images of oneself in the past, are also considered possible selves on the grounds of their bearing on present behaviour (Markus and Nurius, 1986).

The notion of possible selves has not passed unnoticed in reader response research (Richardson and Eccles, 2007; Slater et al., 2014; Schrijvers et al, 2016). However, these studies do not systematically develop the link between the concept and its potential applications to the study of narrative engagement from linguistic and literary standpoints. On the contrary, by drawing closely on self-schema theory and its methodological underpinnings, the model of storyworld possible selves can contribute useful tools to the empirical study of reader emotional responses to narratives.

The empirical affordances of storyworld possible selves are further enhanced by their roots in Blending Theory (Fauconnier and Turner, 2002). According to blending scholars, two or more mental spaces become conceptually integrated in our minds through the activation of certain of their internal matching features, and the further activation, selection, and projection of some of these internal features into a newly emergent mental space, or *blend*. As a result, the blend contains features selectively imported from each of the inputs on grounds of relevance. Most significantly, it contains as well novel structure not imported from the blends, but derived from the integration process itself. Furthermore, features in the blend may now be projected back into any of the inputs, even if not originally there, and the complete network can be 'unpacked' (Fauconnier and Turner, 2002: 312-324), that is, the internal features of a blend can be traced back to the input spaces where they originated.

As Martinez (2014; 2018: 9-27) notes, the blending properties of SPS blends are crucial to an understanding of narrative engagement, since they allow the analysis of fresh emotions, both positive and negative, as derived not just from empathy or resonance, but from approaching or moving away from a textually-prompted desired or undesired image of the self. According to Martinez (2014, 2018), an additional source of fresh emotions revealed by an SPS approach derives from domain schematicity and the possibility of enriching existing self-schemas with new, useful behavioural strategies, within the safe simulation environment of the storyworld. Empirical research shows that even minor changes to core self-schemas are strongly resisted and generate feelings of anxiety (Markus, 1977). Within an SPS approach (Martinez, 2018: 140-141), this also accounts for some of the emotions generated by readers when a narrative experience challenges their worldview. Similarly, as Martinez also points out (2018: 22-23), feelings of self-transformation can be understood as the backwash of features, both novel and/or previously projected from the focalizer's input, from an emergent SPS blend into the individual reader's self-concept network. Backwards feature projection from the SPS blend into the character's input space, conversely, explains idiosyncratic processes of character construction. Summing up, by drawing on blending and self-schema theories, storyworld possible selves provide enhanced methodological opportunities for the empirical study of reader response and narrative engagement. As Herman and Vervaeck (2019: 204-205) put it, 'The storyworld possible selves approach evidently cries out for empirical verification, but it manages to combine specific thoughts and feelings on the part of individual readers with the details of narrative representation.'

3. Hypothesizing primary SPS projection by readers of Wasco's 'City'

SPS blends may be of different types depending on the nature of the inputs, the type of blending operation involved, and degrees of cultural predictability (Martinez, 2018: 123-148). To begin with, depending on the internal topology of the input space containing an individual reader's self-concept substructure activated by a narrative experience, it is possible to find self-schema SPSs, desired and undesired possible self SPSs, past possible self SPSs, and past SPSs. *Self-schema SPSs* emerge from the activation of one of the individual's self-schemas, such as the self as a good friend or as an inquisitive individual, to be engaged in linking matches with the reader's construct of the focalizing character or narrator. *Desired* and *undesired possible self SPSs* similarly involve the activation of one of the reader's desired or undesired possible selves, such as the desired loved self in romantic stories, or the undesired endangered self in apocalyptic scenarios. *Past possible self SPSs* involve the activation of one of the reader's past images of the self, such as the disappointed child past self prompted by the opening paragraphs of Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* (Martinez, 2018: 130). Finally, *past SPSs* are SPS blends which have been incorporated in the self-concept as a result of previous narrative experiences, and which, if intertextually activated, intervene in readers' narrative construal operations (Martinez, 2014: 126-127; Stagherlin, 2016; Martinez, 2018: 132-133; Martinez and Sanchez-Pardo, 2019).

SPS blends can also be classified according to their degree of cultural predictability. Those likely to be shared by communities of readers are called *primary SPSs*, while extremely idiosyncratic ones are *secondary SPSs*, or *SPS slipnets* (Martinez, 2018: 170-171). The former can be easily anticipated, as they draw on socio-cultural experience. The latter, however, are strongly based on personal experience, and are thus difficult to

describe in ways that avoid the pitfall of speculation. The first panel in Wasco's 'City', for instance, shows a little being in red peeping out of a tiny spaceship that seems to have landed in a city. The little being is then seen walking along the city's deserted streets in the company of a tiny white dog. They may both look so tiny and cute that they hardly seem to pose a threat. On the contrary, inconspicuous visual neutrality regarding age, gender, ethnicity, social class, occupation, or even otherness, makes the anthropomorphic protagonist an ideal non-verbal prompt for inclusiveness, so that readers can easily identify with its perspectivization of the city (Herman and Vervaeck, 2019: 252-253). As Herman and Vervaeck hypothesize, within a science-fiction scenario, the little stranger and the dog could be aliens on a reconnaissance mission, maybe looking for signs of life: the character calls the dog's attention to the bird in panel six, and both seem to run after it, as if hoping to be led to some kind of life form - fruitlessly. Then they get to the door in panel fifteen, which seems to lead into what looks like a graveyard. When sitting down on the bench right after that, the protagonist might be thought to ponder what has happened to the city's inhabitants, and the spaceship is then off in a couple of images, without further delay. Such a reading is likely to set off matches with readers' undesired possible selves in a dystopian scenario.

However, the characters' actions occasionally rather look like those of human tourists, who take a genuine interest in the new environment, point to something they notice (the bird in panel six), enjoy art (panels twelve and thirteen), stop to relish a view (panel ten), and even sit down on a bench for a moment of repose (panel seventeen). This may hinge on the desired tourist or traveller self, with its concomitant self of exploration, free to look and leave. This reading would involve the projection of a desired or self-schema tourist SPS blend. The rest of the study accordingly explores the

projection by the readers in the study of these two primary SPS blends - an undesired or feared SPS in a dystopian scenario, and a desired or self-schema traveller SPS in a tourist or space travel scenario - together with the likely projection of idiosyncratic SPS slipnets.

4. The protocol

In order to test these predictions, we asked fifteen readers to fill out a questionnaire focusing on the activation of their self-schemas and possible selves, and on the bearing of this activation on their narrative experience. The answers were expected to provide evidence of the projection not only of the primary, collectively predictable SPSs that had been anticipated - the apocalyptic survivor SPS and the tourist or (space) traveller self SPS - but also of a number of idiosyncratic, unpredictable SPS blends.

The participants were a group of fifteen respondents at the Complutense University of Madrid, in their early/mid-twenties. Four of them - two males and two females, all Spanish - were undergraduate students in a 4th-year Semantics course in English, while eleven - two males and nine females, including seven Spaniards, one American, one Belgian, one Venezuelan, and one French person - were post-graduate students in an MA in English Linguistics. Twelve of them had Spanish as their mother tongue; there was also a native speaker of French, a native speaker of English, and a native speaker of Flemish. In the analysis, the respondents are identified using a code that includes the initial letter for their group – S for Semantics and E for English Linguistics – and a number. They also filled in a consent form in which they were invited to identify

themselves, and to provide a contact e-mail address. Nine of them did, and the further ethnographic information thus obtained proved of great relevance, as shown below.

The questionnaire was designed following existing empirical research into possible selves in the field of social psychology, particularly the collection of essays in the volume *Possible Selves: Theory, Research and Applications* (Dunkel and Kerpelman, 2006); original studies on self-schema theory (Markus, 1977; Markus and Nurius, 1986); and a few other recent studies (Dunkel, 2001; Nurra and Oyserman, 2017). All of these suggest that open-ended questions are the most effective way of gathering information about individuals' self-schemas and possible selves. Accordingly, our questionnaire consists of four tasks of a predominantly open-ended nature distributed across four different pages (Figure 2). Each of the tasks was presented on a separate page, and the respondents were instructed not to move onto a new page until the preceding one had been completed, so that later questions did not bias their responses. The tasks were presented in English, as all participants were highly proficient users of this language, but the participants were invited to respond in their mother tongue at will if this was Spanish, and in English otherwise, with the aim of ensuring that the responses were as complete as possible. Responses in Spanish are provided together with our English translation.

Task 1 consists in retelling the story and was presented on the first page. In Task 2, the participants are requested to provide speech bubbles for those panels in which the characters appear, with the aim not so much of eliciting information as of making sure that attention is paid to significant details such as the bird in panel six or the graveyard in panel sixteen. Task 3 includes the open questions proper. The first of these elicits details about the characters, such as gender and otherness. The rest target the activation

of relevant self-schemas and possible selves, and their related emotional responses. Finally, Task 4 elicits the formulation of desired or undesired possible selves of a global nature.

TASK 1: RETELL **[presented on page 1]**
Look at the story carefully and retell it using your own words. Length: 50-250 words.

TASK 2: INSERT SPEECH BUBBLES **[presented on page 2; lined from Panel 1 to Panel 17]**
Look at the story again. If you could insert speech bubbles , what would you write in them? (P1 = Panel 1), etc.
P1: '_____.'

TASK 3: OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS **[presented on page 3]**
1. Briefly comment on the character in red.
2. Use an adjective to describe how the character in red feels in the following panels:

Panel	Feeling	Reason
P6		
P7		
P16		
P17		
Other		

3. Have you ever felt like this? Explain.
4. Would you like to have a similar experience? Why? Why not?
5. Does the story remind you of any sort of human activity? If so, what do you think the point/message of the story is?
6. Has the story triggered any sort of unexpected awareness/realizations in you?
7. Write two sentences containing the word 'should' that come to your mind after reading the story.
8. Describe the panel that you find most striking, and briefly explain why.

TASK 4: PERSONAL EXPECTATIONS **[presented on page 4]**
Bearing the story in mind, complete the following sentences with something that you believe to be true. Be as specific as you can:
- In the near future I expect humans...
- In the near future I expect the world...
- In a far future I expect…

Figure 2. Condensed version of the questionnaire.

The processing of the questionnaire was done qualitatively, valorizing information from wherever it appeared in the answers to the different tasks. This was then classified as indexing the activation of self-schemas, desired or undesired possible selves, past

selves, and past SPSs, with a focus on frequency of occurrence and on the presence of recurrent linguistic patterns in the respondents' productions.

Attention was then paid to the way in which each participant constructed the perspectivizing character, including gender, otherness – alien or human – and mind attribution. In this respect, two characters are depicted – the human-like figure and the dog – and some of the respondents actually mention them as joint protagonists:

> (1) A woman and a dog are walking around a city. They visit very different places, such as a square with lots of statues, a viewpoint on a river, a museum with paintings, and a temple. (E2: Task 1) [English in the original]

However, the character in red seems a better candidate for the role of focalizer, not only on the grounds of cognitive anthropocentricity, or 'the fact that we are foremost interested in humans like ourselves' (Dirven and Verspoor, 2004, p. 6), but also because, in the verbal renderings of the story provided by participants in Task 1, this character is more frequently attributed with a mindset - intention, decision, purpose, emotion - as in these examples:

> (2) [...] The red man wanders around and notices how the different yet all the same streets are devoid of citizens. In order to take a better look upon the city, the man decides to get on a bridge he spots during his aimless wandering. (S2, Task 1) [English in the original]

> (3) A person from a planet other than Earth has decided to visit a city in our planet. At first, she has felt lost, because she does not know the place, it is unknown to her. After walking around the city, she finds some interesting things, such as statues and art, which she enjoys. (E5, Task 1) [English in the original]

On the basis of these findings, the study next looked into linking matches across the focalizer's and the individual readers' input spaces, with a focus on both shared and individual features. Particular attention is paid to the ways in which these commonalities and differences affect character construction, idiosyncratic SPS projection, emotional response, and the individual construction of narrative meaning.

5. Input 1: the focalizing character

The focalizing character - the little being in red - is visually ambiguous in terms of gender and otherness, so that it may be constructed as either an alien in a human city, or a human on another planet. In other words, the panels that make up 'City' leave plenty of opportunities for inferences and Theory of Mind attributions on the part of readers, based on the character's appearance, actions, and body language. In fact, this character is constructed in astonishingly varied, personal ways (Table 1). For instance, regarding gender, six of the respondents describe it as a male, three as a female, and another six do not specify its gender. Linguistically, this is reflected in the use of masculine nouns such as 'man' (S2), and the Spanish masculine marked *un individuo* (a male individual, E6), *un mago* (a male magician, E7), *Caperucito* (Little Red Riding Hood-He, E9), *un viajero* (a male traveller, E10), and *un humano* (a male human, E11). Regarding the character's origin, five of the fifteen participants consider it an alien – 'an alien person' (E1), 'visitors […] from a planet other than Earth' (E3, E5), 'arrive on the Earth' (E9), and 'a traveller from space' (E10) – while for another five it is a human (S2, S3, E2, E4, E11). Only three respondents do not specify its origin (S1, E6, E8), while another three attribute it to the realm of fantasy (S4, E7, E9).

Participant	Gender	Otherness	Location	Aim
S1 Spanish, male	**Unspecified** The hatted being [*El ser con gorro*]	**Unspecified** A being	A city [*Una ciudad*]	Visit the grave of someone they knew
S2 Spanish, male	**Male** A little red man	**Human** A man	A world	Space exploration
S3 Spanish, female	**Unspecified** A person/it [*Una persona*]	**Human** A person [*Una persona*]	A city [*Una ciudad*]	Tourism
S4 Spanish, female	**Unspecified** A creature [*Una criatura*]	**Fantasy** A creature [*Una criatura*]	A new place [*Un nuevo lugar*]	Find the legendary bird and save the city
E1 American, female	**Unspecified** An alien person	**Alien** An alien person	Earth	Travel, know new places
E2 Spanish, male	**Female** A woman	**Human** A woman	A city	Tourism
E3 Belgian, male	**Unspecified** A little character dressed in red	**Alien** The visitors	A city	Space exploration
E4 Colombian, male	**Female** A woman [*Una mujer*]	**Human** A woman [*Una mujer*]	Unspecified	Tourism
E5 French, female	**Female** A person/she	**Alien** A planet other than Earth	A city in our planet	Space exploration to find life
E6 Spanish, female	**Male** An individual/he [*Un individuo*]	**Unspecified** An individual [*Un individuo*]	A very modern city [*Una ciudad muy moderna*]	Discover new places
E7 Spanish, female	**Male** A tiny magician/he [*Un pequeño mago*]	**Fantasy** A tiny magician [*Un pequeño mago*]	An unknown city [*Una ciudad desconocida*]	Find life and live an adventure
E8 Spanish, female	**Unspecified** The character in red [*El personaje de rojo*]	**Unspecified** The character [*El personaje*]	A city [*Una ciudad*]	Unspecified visit
E9 Spanish, female	**Male** Little Red Riding Hood-He [*Caperucito*]	**Alien, Fantasy** Little Red Riding Hood-He [*Caperucito*]	Earth [*La Tierra*]	Find earthians on a place called Earth
E10 Spanish, female	**Male** A traveller from space/he [*Un viajero del espacio*]	**Alien** A traveller from space [*Un viajero del espacio*]	A city [*Una ciudad*]	Exploration visit
E11 Spanish, female	**Male** A human/ He [*Un humano/ Él*]	**Human** A human [*Un humano*]	An unknown planet [*Un planeta desconocido*]	Exploration visit and adventure
TOTAL (15)	MALE: 6 UNSPECIFIED: 6 FEMALE: 3	HUMAN: 5 ALIEN: 5 UNSPECIFIED: 3 FANTASY: 3	A CITY: 8 EARTH: 3 NOT EARTH:1 OTHER: 2	

Table 1. Idiosyncratic focalizer construction by readers of Wasco's 'City'.

The conceptualization of the focalizer as either alien or human can also be inferred from the description of the location depicted. To ten participants this is, simply, 'a city' (S1, S3, E2, E3, E6, E7, E8, E10), ‘a world’ (S2), or ‘a new place’ (S4). Only in four cases do the participants specify whether the story takes place on either Earth (E1, E5, E9) or on ‘an unknown planet’ (E11). Finally, there are also remarkable differences in the participants’ conceptualization of the focalizer’s purpose before, during, or after the trip. To some, this is a trip of exploration (S2, E3, E5, E6, E7, E9, E10, E11) to some frustrated by the absence of life in the city (S2, E6, E7, E9, E11), so that the character leaves in order to continue searching, or to heal the awe of discovering that everybody has died. To others, this is just a leisurely trip (S3, E1, E2) in which the character enjoys the new place and its sights in the company of the dog. In this tourist scenario, the two characters are said to leave the city once everything has been seen and taken in, usually in order to happily visit some other place.

Additionally, a few strongly idiosyncratic instances of character construction can be found. For instance, in one case (S1) the focalizer has come to the city to 'visit the grave of someone they knew', so that, after visiting the graveyard, it feels terribly upset at recalling the pain, and decides to fly away. And in another case (S4), the focalizer arrives in the city on its own, comes across the dog there – while all other participants construct them as fellow travellers – and together they look for the legendary bird that supposedly ruled the city and has disappeared. Mind modelling also bestows the focalizer with feelings proportionate to these varied aims and wanderings, ranging from rage and desolation (S1, S2) to happiness (E2), mere boredom (E5), or homesickness (E1). As shown below, these variations in characterization and mind modelling seem to be strongly connected to the activation of relevant self-schemas and possible selves.

6. Input 2: readers' self-schemas and possible selves

6.1. Individual readers' self-schemas

Assertions expressing current perceptions of the self, such as 'I don't like wars and all deaths are unnecessary' (S4: Task 3-Q4), as well as expressions of generic, inclusive reference indicating the individual's set of values, such as 'You should never quit trying to find what you want' (E9: Task 3-Q8) are predominant indexes of the activation of relevant self-schemas. Additionally, cases of mind attribution to the focalizing character which seem the result of backwards projection from specific readers' self-schemas via an SPS blend have also been considered to indirectly index the activation of that self-schema in those readers. This is the case with the 'sentimental' self (S1, E10), the 'helping' self (S3, S4), the 'determined' self (E7), and the 'social' self (E6). As shown in Table 2, thirteen of the fifteen respondents present the activation of, at least, one relevant self-schema. These self-schemas are extremely varied – fourteen types across thirteen respondents – with the 'traveller' (E2, E4, E8) and 'adventurer' (S3, E7, E9) selves as the most frequent.

Yet, a vast majority of these structures are absolutely idiosyncratic, that is, found in just one respondent: these are the 'homesick' self (E1), the 'tourist' self (S3), the 'perseverant' self (E9), the 'achiever' self (E5), the 'social' self (E6), the 'determined' self (E7), the 'optimistic' self (S2), the 'war-hater' self (S4), and the 'cemetery-lover' self (E10). Notice that the 'tourist' self, predicted to intervene in primary SPS projection, is explicitly mentioned as a self-schema by just one of the participants (S3), but can be connected to the 'traveller' self in four more cases (E1, E2, E4, E8). Only two participants (E3, E11) show no evidence of the activation of a relevant self-schema. The figure at the bottom of the column 'Respondents' reflects the number of

respondents showing the activation of a self-schema. Notice that those with more than one self-schema activated, such as S1 or E1, have been counted only once.

Self-schema	No	Respondents	Sample linguistic realizations
The traveller self	4	E1/E2/E4/E8	I love travelling and knowing new places. (E2: Q4) [*Me encanta viajar y conocer lugares nuevos*]
The adventurer self	3	S3/E7/E9	I consider myself a very adventurous person.(E7: Q4) [*Me considero muy aventurera*]
The curious self	2	S1/E1	I'm always curious about where I am. (E1: Q3)
The sentimental self	2	S1/E10	The character in red seems to be a curious and sentimental being. (S1: Q1)
The helping self	2	S3/S4	The character is adventurous and wants to help. (S4: Q1)
The homesick self	1	E1	[…] but I also miss 'home' sometimes. (E1: Q3)
The tourist self	1	S3	It reminds me of the tourism we practise. (S3: Q5) [*Me recuerda al turismo que practicamos*]
The perseverant self	1	E9	You should never quit trying to find what you want. (E9: Q7) To me this is the story of a disappointment and yet the point of departure for a new adventure filled with joy and hope. [E9: Q3]; what I feel many times throughout daily life [E9: Q4]
The achiever self	1	E5	I have sometimes felt that I wanted to reach a goal and I couldn't, which is very frustrating. (E5: Q3) [*Alguna vez he sentido que quería alcanzar un objetivo y no he podido, lo cual es muy frustrante*] (Q4. Would you like to have a similar experience?) No, but I think it helps you to learn in life. (E5: Q4) [*No, pero creo que es bueno para aprender en la vida*]
The social self	1	E6	Panel 17 [sitting on the bench]: [the character feels] disappointed. There's no human beings. (E6: Q2) We should take care of our important people.(E6: Q7)
The determined self	1	E7	The character in red is very determined and adventurous. (E7: Q1)
The optimistic self	1	S2	One should stay positive. (S2: Q7)
The war-hater self	1	S4	I don't like wars and all deaths are unnecessary.(S4: Q4) [*No me gustan las guerras y todas las muertes son innecesarias*]
The cemetery-lover self	1	E10	I have always felt attracted by cemeteries. (E10: Q8) [*Siempre me han atraído los cementerios*]
Total: 14 types	**22**	**13**	**Assertions; generic 'one'; 'should'**

Table 2. Activated self-schemas.

6.2. Individual readers' desired possible selves

The activation of desired possible selves is predominantly expressed through the use of counterfactuals, as in 'Visiting totally new places (or planets) would be very interesting and enriching' (E1: Task 3-Q4). Other linguistic realizations involve a) the modal auxiliary 'should' to refer to 'the self that I ought to be' (Markus and Nurius 1986), as

in 'I should be adventurer, I should take the risk' (E4: Task 3-Q7); b) the verbs of cognition 'hope' and 'expect'; and c) the modal auxiliaries 'can' and 'might'. Only nine of the fifteen respondents show the activation of desired possible selves. Moreover, these are just of four types: the 'traveller' self, the 'peaceful world inhabitant' self, the 'aware' self, and the idiosyncratic 'adventurer' self (Table 3). Six respondents (S2, E2, E5, E6, E7, E9) do not show the activation of a desired possible self.

Desired possible self	No	Respondents	Sample linguistic realizations
The traveller self	5	S1/E1/E3/E10 E11	Visiting totally new places (or planets!) would be very interesting and enriching. (E1: Q4) I should go to more unknown places. (E3: Q7)
The peaceful world inhabitant self	4	S1/S4/E10/E11	I expect us humans to be able to understand one another despite our differences. (E10: Task 5) [*Espero que nosotros los seres humanos podamos entendernos a pesar de las diferencias*] In a far future I expect that we have learnt to live in community, understanding one another and embracing our differences. (E11. Task 5) [*Espero que en un futuro lejano hayamos aprendido a vivir en comunidad, respetándonos y aceptando nuestras diferencias*]
The aware self	3	S3/S4/E8	I hope that human beings become aware of how unnecessary wars are. (S4: Task 5) [*Espero que los seres humanos se den cuenta de lo innecesario de las guerras*]
The adventurer self	1	E4	I should be adventurer, I should take the risk. (E4: Q7)
Total: 4 types	**13**	**9**	**Counterfactuals; 'should,' 'hope/expect/want'**

Table 3. Activated desired possible selves.

6.3. Individual readers' undesired possible selves

Counterfactuals are also strongly involved in the expression of undesired selves, as in 'Such a lonely experience would be terrifying' (E10: Task 3-Q4). However, while the expression of desired selves uses well-identifiable linguistic patterns – 'would', 'should', 'hope'/'expect' – the encoding of undesired selves is much more heterogeneous, as if these structures were hidden in the self-concept and reluctantly or ambiguously put into words. As shown in Table 4, the 'lonely' and the 'barren Earth inhabitant' undesired selves are the most frequent, with four respondents each. Just two idiosyncratic occurrences are found – the 'unsupported' self (E11) and the 'bored' self

(E5) – with the 'unsupported' self straddling the categories of desired and past possible selves, since its linguistic expression suggests both past experience and the wish not to undergo it again. The number of respondents presenting the activation of an undesired possible self, eight, resembles that of desired selves. Seven respondents (S4, E1, E3, E4, E7, E8, E9) do not show the activation of an undesired possible self.

Undesired poss. self	No	Respondents	Sample linguistic realizations
The lonely self	4	S2/E6 E10/E11	He/she is alone, sitting on a bench, and the image is very sad. (E6: Q8) [*Está solo, sentado en un banco, y es una imagen muy triste*] Such a lonely experience would be terrifying. (E10: Q4) [*Una experiencia tan solitaria resultaría aterradora*]
The barren Earth self	4	S1/S3 E2/E10	[…] walking across a city empty because of human action wouldn't be so nice. (S1: Q4) [*pasear por una ciudad vacía a causa de la acción humana no me agradaría tanto*] I expect that the world does not end up deserted and destroyed as in the image. (E2: Task 5) [*Espero que el mundo no acabe desértico y destruído como en la imagen*] It is not that weird to think that something like this might happen to us. (S3: Q6) [*No es tan loco pensar que algo así nos puede pasar*]
The unsupported self	1	E11	(Q3: Have you ever felt like this?) Yes, when first arriving in a new country or when you are in the middle of a delicate moment and do not feel supported. (E11: Q3) [*Sí, en los momentos primeros al llegar a un país diferente o al pasar un momento complicado y no sentir apoyo*]
The bored self	1	E5	This story has conveyed […] to me how boring and monotonous human life can be. (E5:Observations) [*Esta historia me ha transmitido […] lo aburrida y monótona que puede ser la vida humana*]
Total: 4 types	**10**	**8**	**Heterogeneous**

Table 4. Activated undesired possible selves.

6.4. Individual readers' past possible selves

Past possible selves, or memories of the self in past situations, are also activated in eight of the fifteen respondents (Table 5). This suggests that memories of past experience are neither the only nor the most significant prompts for narrative engagement. One of these past experiences – the 'tourist' self, anticipated in the research – is shared by six of these eight participants (S3, E1, E2, E8, E10, E11), proving to be strongly connected to

past images of the self (N=6). The other three - the 'unsupported' self (E11), the 'mourning' self (S1), and the 'failing' self (E5) - are idiosyncratic. Seven respondents do not show the activation of a past self (S2, S4, E3, E4, E6, E7, E9).

Past possible self	**No**	**Respondents**	**Sample linguistic realizations**
The tourist/ traveller self	6	S3/E1/E2 E8/E10 E11	(Q3: Have you ever felt like this?) Yes, when I have been to cities with an ancient past, such as Rome. (S3: Q3) [*Sí, cuando he estado en ciudades con una historia muy antigua, como Roma*] Yes. I've lived in and visited a lot of places. (E1: Q3) Yes. In all my trips, I have felt enthusiasm, puzzlement, thrill and tiredness, for the very same reasons. (E2: Q3) [*Sí. En cualquier viaje que he hecho, he sentido entusiasmo, desconcierto, emoción y cansancio, exactamente por las mismas razones*]
The unsupported self	1	E11	(Q3: Have you ever felt like this?) Yes, when first arriving in a new country or when you are in a delicate moment and do not feel supported. (E11: Q3) [*Sí, en los momentos primeros al llegar a un país diferente o al pasar un momento complicado y no sentir apoyo*]
The mourning self	1	S1	[...] they eventually reach their destination, the cemetery. There, they visit the grave of someone they knew, and this makes the memories of how everything ended return to the mind of the hatted being. (S1: Task 1) [*finalmente llegan a su destino, el cementerio. Allí, visitan la tumba de alguien que conocían, y esto hace que los recuerdos de cómo todo acabó vuelvan a la mente del ser con gorro*]
The failing self	1	E5	I have sometimes felt that I wanted to reach a goal and I couldn't, which is very frustrating. (E5: Q3)[*Alguna vez he sentido que quería alcanzar un objetivo y no he podido, lo cual es muy frustrante*]
Total: 4 types	**9**	**8**	**Past and perfect forms**

Table 5. Activated past possible selves.

6.5. Individual readers' past SPSs

Past storyworld possible selves, or possible selves incorporated in the self-concept from past narrative experiences, are activated in a vast majority of participants (N=12), and prove to be the second most frequent after self-schemas. But, as opposed to the latter, which were extremely idiosyncratic, past SPSs revolve around collective genre echoes that predominantly involve a past SPS of space travel, as predicted in the study. This is present in ten participants (S2, E1, E2, E3, E4, E5, E8, E9, E10, E11), as shown in

Table 6. Additionally, a few idiosyncratic past SPSs evoke the genre of fantasy (S4, E7, E9), and one of the respondents projects a past SPS from a non-fictional narrative, the Holocaust (E10). In this case, the linguistic realizations are nouns and names denoting entities in previous narrative experiences, such as 'alien', 'spaceship', 'Earth', 'Little Red Riding Hood', or 'Holocaust'. Only three participants (S1, S3, E6) do not show the activation of a past SPS.

Past SPS	**No**	**Respondents**	**Sample linguistic realizations**
The space-travel, sci-fi past SPS	10	S2/E1/E2 E3/E4/E5 E8/E9 E10/E11	An alien person and their dog come down to earth in an unknown city. (E1: Task 1) A spaceship appears to have arrived in a city. (E3: T1) A person from a planet other than earth has decided to visit a city in our planet. (E5: Task 1) This is the story of the arrival of a human being with its dog, on a spaceship to an unknown planet. (E11: Task 1) [*El relato cuenta la llegada de un humano con su perro, en una nave espacial a un planeta desconocido*]
The fantasy past SPS	3	S4/E7/E9	Once upon a time, a little magician and its pet arrived in an unknown city. (E7: Task 1) [*Érase una vez, un pequeño mago y su mascota que llegó a una ciudad desconocida*]
Little Red Riding Hood past SPS	1	E9	Little Red Riding Hood and his tiny dog arrive on Earth. (E9: Task 1) [*Caperucito y su perrito llegan a la Tierra*]
The Holocaust past SPS	1	E10	It reminds me of those visits to cities that are as in days past or have been rebuilt/built in order to remember something (such as the Holocaust monument). (E10: Q5) [*Me recuerda a las visitas a ciudades que están como antaño o se han reconstruido/construido para recordar algo (como el monumento al Holocausto)*]
Total: 4 types	**15**	**12**	**Lexical ítems**

Table 6. Activated past SPSs.

6.6. Summing up: Individual readers' self-schemas and possible selves

Considered globally (Table 7), the self-concept substructures most frequently activated by Wasco's narrative in our respondents are self-schemas (13 participants) and past SPSs (12 participants). However, these two structures show significant differences in distribution: while self-schemas are strongly idiosyncratic, with fourteen different types across thirteen of the participants, the latter, connected to genre echoes and previous narrative experiences, are strongly collective, with just four different types shared by

twelve of the participants. Possible selves - desired, undesired, past - have a lower bearing in the data, with just four different types across eight or nine respondents.

	Self-schemas	**Desired possible selves**	**Undesired possible selves**	**Past possible selves**	**Past SPSs**
No. of respondents:	13	9	8	8	12
Different types	14	4	4	4	4
Linguistic realization	Present tense Assertion Inclusive pronouns	Counterfactuals Should	Varied: Present tense Counterfactuals	Past tenses	Lexical
Inputs for primary SPSs (most frequent)	Traveller /tourist self (5 resps.)	Traveller self (5 resps.)	Lonely self (4 resps.) Barren Earth self (4 resps.)	Traveller /tourist self (6 resps.)	'Space travel' self (10 resps.)
Inputs for SPS slipnets (1 resp. each)	Homesick self Tourist self Perseverant self Determined self War-hater self Cemetery-lover self	Adventurer self	Unsupported self Bored self	Unsupported self Mourning self Failing self	Little Red Riding Hood self Holocaust self

Table 7. Activated self-schemas and possible selves: Inputs for primary and secondary SPSs.

The analysis also shows that certain features of linguistic organization are recurrently associated with the expression of these cognitive structures in our study. For instance, assertions about the self such as 'I love travelling and knowing new places' (E2: Task 3-Q4), and expressions of inclusive reference indicating sets of values, such as 'One should stay positive' (S2: Task 3-Q7), are predominantly involved in the expression of self-schema activation. Counterfactuals are prototypically used to index the activation of both desired and undesired possible selves, as in 'Such a lonely experience would be terrifying' (E10: Task 3-Q4). Past and perfect tenses index the activation of a past possible self, as in 'I've lived in and visited a lot of places' (E1: Task 3-Q3). Finally, the activation of past SPSs is predominantly expressed through the use of explicit lexical items such as 'spaceship' (E3: T1) or 'Little Red Riding Hood' (E9: Task 1).

Table 7 also shows that the most recurrent input for primary SPSs is the 'traveller/tourist' self, activated as a past possible self in six participants, and as a self-schema in five. This is followed by the space traveller self, which occurs as a past SPS in ten respondents. This confirms our initial hypothesis about the relevance of the sci-fi genre and of tourist experiences to collective meaning construction. However, equally significant is the large number of inputs for SPS slipnets, based on the activation of strongly idiosyncratic structures such as the 'homesick', 'perseverant', 'war-hater', and 'cemetery lover' self-schemas; the 'unsupported' and the 'bored' undesired possible selves; the 'unsupported', 'mourning', and 'failing' past selves; and the 'Little Red Riding Hood' and 'Holocaust' past SPSs.

7. Building the SPS blends

This section explores the internal topology of the SPS blends resulting from the conceptual integration of the character constructs and self-concept structures found in the fifteen readers in the study, as described above. Table 8 presents the connections between these structures and the emotions attributed to the focalizer via SPS-related idiosyncratic character construction processes, particularly at the moment when it sits down on the bench near the end of the visit (panel seventeen), as if to ponder.

Consider, for instance, S2. This is an undergraduate Spanish male, a top student in the English Semantics group. This respondent, who displays the activation of an 'optimist' self-schema ('One should stay positive', Q7), an undesired 'lonely' possible self, and a 'sci-fi' past SPS, engages in SPS blending with what he constructs as a little man in a no-hope dystopian scenario. For this reader, such an experience would be 'soul-crashing' (S2: Q4), where the 'crashed soul' metaphor vividly reflects the

	Self-schema	**Desired possible self**	**Undesired possible self**	**Past possible self**	**Past SPS**	**Character emotions (Panel 17)**
S1 Spanish, male	Curious self Sentimental self	Traveller self Peaceful world self	Barren Earth self	Mourning self		Frustration and rage
S2 Spanish, male	Optimistic self		Lonely self		Sci-fi SPS	Morally affected
S3 Spanish, female	Adventurer self Helping self Tourist self	Aware self	Barren Earth self	Tourist self		Tranquil but sad at the end of visit
S4 Spanish, female	War-hater self Helping self	Aware self Peaceful world self			Fantasy SPS	Needs to find a solution to the situation
E1 American, female	Traveller s. Curious self Homesick self	Traveller self		Traveller self	Sci-fi SPS	Think about what has been done, seen and learnt
E2 Spanish, male	Traveller self		Barren Earth self	Traveller self	Sci-fi SPS	Enthusiastic and tired
E3 Belgian, male		Traveller			Sci-fi SPS	Amazed at the beautiful place
E4 Colombian, male	Traveller self	Adventurer self			Sci-fi SPS	Rest and enjoy the quiet
E5 French, female	Achiever self		Bored self	Failing self	Sci-fi SPS	Bored and sad failing to find the bird
E6 Spanish, female	Social self		Lonely self			Disappointed: no humans
E7 Spanish, female	Adventurer self Determined self	Peaceful world self			Fantasy SPS	Fun at the lived adventure
E8 Spanish, female	Traveller self	Aware self		Traveller self	Sci-fi SPS	Reflective
E9 Spanish, female	Adventurer self Perseverant self				Little Red Riding Hood SPS, Sci-fi SPS Fantasy SPS	Disappointed: this is not the planet Earth (no people) = keep on searching
E10 Spanish, female	Cemetery-lover self	Traveller self Peaceful world self	Lonely self Barren Earth self	Traveller self	Sci-fi SPS Holocaust SPS	Sad and tired
E11 Spanish, female		Traveller self Peaceful world self	Unsupport-ed self Lonely self	Traveller self Unsupported self	Sci-fi SPS	Surprised: no relatives at the graves Disappointed

Table 8. Main features in the participants' SPS blends.

shattering of his optimist self-schema: 'Upon witnessing the endless corridor of graves the graveyard contains, the red man is morally affected, what could have gone so wrong for everyone to perish?' (S2: Task 1). In this case, the sudden awareness that things can actually go very wrong, prompted in the blend by the character's experience and projected back into the reader's input, can now challenge the reader's 'optimist' self-schema and spark processes of self-transformation. Eventually, in the face of hopelessness, the character decides to fly away for another world.

Another interesting case is the strongly idiosyncratic SPS projected by S1, for whom the little character does not arrive in the city on some random trip. Rather, the city and, more specifically, its graveyard, is the character's destination, and the aim of the trip is to 'visit the grave of someone they knew' (S1: Task 1). Here, the activation of a 'mourning' past self – the self that lost a loved one – and of a 'sentimental' self-schema seem to override all the other self-concept substructures activated in him by the narrative - a 'curious' self-schema, 'traveller' and 'peaceful' desired possible selves, and a 'barren Earth inhabitant' undesired possible self. As a result, the respondent projects into the SPS blend the feelings of frustration and rage at the personal loss that has been recalled. These are, in turn, projected backwards into the focalizer's input space, so that, when sitting on the bench, it is frustration and rage that the character is said to feel:

> (4) […] and they finally reach their destination, the graveyard. There, they visit the grave of someone they knew, and this makes the memories of how everything came to an end return to the mind of the hatted being. Frustration and rage overpower the character who, together with the dog, leave the city. [S1, Task 1] [Spanish in the original; our translation].

Consider now E5, a postgraduate French female, a high academic performer as well. In this case, the characters' chasing of the bird in panel six activates the respondent's 'achiever' self-schema and a past possible self of 'failure' (cf. Table 1), so that the story is constructed with the focalizer as a female alien chasing a bird. Eventually, the character sits on the bench (panel seventeen) because 'she starts to feel bored' at the fruitless, aimless chase (E5: Task 1), and decides to give up and fly away. Compare this to E9, a postgraduate Spanish female that shows the activation of a 'perseverant' self-schema ('You should never quit trying to find what you want' (Q8)). This respondent constructs the two characters as a male Little Red Riding Hood and a dog named 'Wolfie' (*Lobito* in her Spanish rendering of the story). Both are looking for the planet Earth and think that this may be it, but, upon finding no people and eventually reaching the graveyard, the character in red concludes that this cannot be the Earth so they must keep on searching, and encourages the exhausted little dog: 'Come on, get on [the spaceship]. This is clearly not Earth, we'll surely find it tomorrow' (Task 2). [Spanish in the original; our translation].

Finally, let us look at E1. This is a postgraduate American female with a 'traveller' self-schema, a 'traveller' desired possible self, and a past 'traveller' possible self, who claims 'I'm always curious about where I am' (Q3), 'Visiting totally new places (or planets!) would be very interesting and enriching' (Q4), and 'I've lived in and visited a lot of places' (Q3). She also shows the activation of a past sci-fi SPS and constructs the little character in red as an alien traveller. But this reader also activates a 'homesick' self-schema, undoubtedly connected to her having lived outside her home country for years. Accordingly, the kind of mental activity and emotion that she attributes to the

little character when sitting on the bench is that it 'wants to return home' (Q2). The graveyard is not even noticed, nor the absence of life in the city at all resented.

It thus seems that the bench scene functions as an operator of mental activity in this graphic narrative, visually evoking the character's inner speech in inextricable connection to its body language and behaviour, in turn partially but significantly mind-modelled by the self-concept structures activated in individual readers.

These results not only confirm the research hypotheses, but also provide additional insights. In the first place, the hypothesis that certain culturally predictable SPS blends, or primary SPSs, would be projected on the basis of narrative cues, is confirmed. The most pervasive of these primary SPSs are the space-travel SPS, found in ten respondents (S2, E1, E2, E3, E4, E5, E8, E9, E10, E11), and the tourist/traveller SPS, found in eight (S3, E1, E2, E3, E4, E8, E19, E11). The other expected primary SPS, emerging from the activation of respondents' undesired possible selves in an apocalyptic lifeless scenario, is found in seven cases, both as a barren Earth SPS (S1, S3, E2, E10) and as a lonely SPS (S2, E6, E10, E11). The relatively lower presence of these undesired SPSs might be connected to the irregular linguistic encoding of undesired possible selves (Table 4), seemingly reluctantly put into words.

The second main hypothesis, namely, a significant emergence of secondary SPSs, or SPS slipnets involving strongly idiosyncratic self-schemas and possible selves, is also confirmed. In the analysis, self-images displayed by only one respondent, whether as a self-schema or a possible self, have been classified as prompts for SPS slipnets. Eleven of these - the war-hater, homesick, perseverant, cemetery lover self-schema SPSs (S4, E1, E5, E10); the bored and unsupported undesired SPSs (E5, E11); the mourning, failing, unsupported past possible self SPSs (S1, E5, E11); and the Little Red Riding

Hood and Holocaust past SPSs (E9, E10) - are present in seven of the participants (S1, S4, E1, E5, E9, E10, E11). Interestingly, self-schemas are a most frequent source of idiosyncratic SPS projection in the data than past possible selves. This suggests that reader response research, frequently revolving around narrative resonance and memory recall, should pay more attention to the role of readers' self-schemas, or present images of the self, in the generation of emotion and engagement.

In other words, this study suggests that, as predicted by SPS theory, storyworld possible selves can account for both idiosyncratic reader response and the collectively relevant responses, shared by communities of readers, which are of primary interest to literary scholars. An SPS framework also seems to account for the generation of fresh emotions, not just prompted by feelings of empathy towards narrators and characters, or by effects of resonance and memory recall, but also emerging as a) positive or negative emotions resulting from approaching or moving away from a desired or undesired possible self; b) feelings of self-transformation derived from the incorporation of novel features into an existing self-schema; and c) feelings of anxiety prompted when a core self-schema is challenged by a narrative experience. Furthermore, the notion of storyworld possible selves can also shed further light on idiosyncratic character construction as a process of backwards feature projection from individual readers' self-concept networks into a character construct via an SPS blend.

9. Conclusion

Our research aimed to explore the contributions that the model of storyworld possible selves can make to the empirical study of reader response. In order to do so, we used a

questionnaire focusing on the responses of fifteen readers of the graphic narrative 'City' (Wasco, 2015). The findings seem to corroborate our initial hypothesis regarding the activation of the respondents' primary SPSs in the sci-fi genre of space exploration, where the attributed aim is some sort of purposeful search, as well as of barren Earth undesired SPSs resenting the absence of human life in the city. The leisurely wandering of tourism is also worth considering, as hypothesized too, since random wandering and appreciation are also perceived as part of the little red character's experience of the storyworld. However, what seems most striking is the strong presence of SPS slipnets, or extremely individual projections, particularly involving the participants' self-schemas. Regarding visual clues, the main character's ambiguity in terms of gender and otherness seems to have facilitated the respondents' SPS blending processes, also confirming the research hypothesis in this respect.

The model of storyworld possible selves has thus provided useful insights into these fifteen narrative experiences by highlighting the interaction of the participants' self-schemas and possible selves with their processes of character construction and emotional response. This suggests that SPS theory can enhance the methodological apparatus of empirical reader response research by shedding light on a number of phenomena attributed to engaged readers, such as empathy, fresh emotions, personal relevance, identification, resonance, idiosyncratic character construction, and self-transformation. Further studies may use larger groups of readers and other types of research instruments, including differently designed questionnaires or interviews.

References

Alber J (2018) Rhetorical ways of covering up speculations and hypotheses, or why

empirical investigations of real readers matter. *Style* 52(1-2): 34-39.

Bell A, van der Bom I, and Smith J (2019) A reader response method not just for 'you'. *Language and Literature* 28(3): 241-262.

Bruns CV (2016) Reading readers: Living and leaving fictional worlds. *Narrative* 24(3): 351-369.

Burke M (2011) Rhetoric and poetics: The classical heritage. In Burke M (ed) *The Routledge Handbook of Stylistics*. London: Routledge, pp. 11-30.

Caracciolo M (2017) *The Experientiality of Narrative: An Enactivist Approach*. Berlin: De Gruyter.

Culpeper JV and Fernandez-Quintanilla C (2017) Fictional characterization. In Locher MA and Jucker AH (eds) *Pragmatics of Fiction*. Berlin: de Gruyter, p. 93-128.

Dirven R and Verspoor M (2004) *Cognitive Exploration of Language and Linguistics*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Dunkel C (2001) The role of possible selves in identity formation: a short-term longitudinal study. *Journal of Adolescence* 24(6): 765-776.

Dunkel C and Kerpelman J (eds) (2006) *Possible Selves: Theory, Research and Applications*. New York: Nova Science.

Fauconnier G and Turner M (2002) *The Way We Think: Conceptual Blending and the Mind's Hidden Complexities*. New York: Basic Books.

Harrison C (2017) *Cognitive Grammar in Contemporary Fiction*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Herman D (2002) *Story Logic. Problems and Possibilities of Narrative*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

Herman L and Vervaeck B (2009) Narrative interest as cultural negotiation. *Narrative* 17(1): 111-129.

Herman L and Vervaeck B (2017) A theory of narrative in culture. *Poetics Today* 38(4): 605-634.

Herman L and Vervaeck B (2019) *Handbook of Narrative Analysis*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

Holland N (2009) *Literature and the Brain*. Gainesville: The PsyArt Foundation.

Hutson JP, Magliano JP, and Loschky LC (2018) Understanding moment-to-moment processing of visual narratives. *Cognitive Science* 42: 2999-3033.

Jakobs AM and Lüdtke J (2017) Immersion into narrative and poetic worlds: A neurocognitive poetics perspective. In Hakemulder F, Kuijpers MM, Tan ES, Bálin K and Doicaru MM (eds.) *Narrative Absorption*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, pp. 69-96.

Keen S (2011) Introduction: Narrative and the emotions. *Poetics Today* 32(1): 1-53.

Kowalczyk AS (2019) 'I know not […] what I myself am': Conceptual integration in Susan Heyboer O'Keefe's *Frankenstein's Monster* (2010). *Lublin Studies in Modern Languages and Literature* 43(2): 109-123.

Kuiken D, Miall DS, and Sikora S (2004) Forms of self-implication in literary reading. *Poetics Today* 25(2): 171-203.

Kuzmičová A and Bálint K (2019) Personal relevance in story reading: A research review. *Poetics Today* 40(3): 429-451.

Lamm CC, Batson CD, and Decety D (2007) The neural substrate of human empathy: Effects of perspective-taking and cognitive appraisal. *Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience* 19(1): 42-58.

Margolin U (2012) Character. In Herman D (ed) *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 66-79.

Markus HR (1977) Self-schemata and processing information about the self. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 35(2):63-78.

Markus HR and Nurius P (1986) Possible selves. *American Psychologist* 41: 954-969.

Martinez MA (2014) Storyworld possible selves and the phenomenon of narrative immersion. Testing a new theoretical construct. *Narrative* 22(1):110-131.

Martinez MA (2018) *Storyworld Possible Selves.* Berlin: De Gruyter.

Martinez MA and Sanchez-Pardo E (2019) Past storyworld possible selves and the autobiographical reformulation of Dante's myth in Lorine Niedecker's 'Switchboard Girl.' *Journal of Literary Semantics* 48(1): 41-58.

Miall DS and Kuiken D (2002) A feeling for fiction: Becoming what we behold. *Poetics* 30:221-241.

Mucha K (2016) Diskurs-Konstruktionen als mentale Raumkonstruktionen. Zur emotiven Funktion von Literatur aus der Perspektive kognitionslinguistischer Theoriebildungen. *Journal of Literary Theory* 10(2): 271-302.

Nurra C and Oyserman D (2017) From future self to current action: An identity-based motivation perspective. *Self and Identity* 17(3): 1-22.

Oatley K (2016) Fiction: Simulation of social worlds. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 20(8): 618-628.

Peplow D and Carter R (2011) Stylistics and real readers. In Burke M (ed) *The Routledge Handbook of Stylistics.* London: Routledge, pp. 440-454.

Richardson PW and Eccles JS (2007) Rewards of reading: Towards the development of

possible selves and identities. *International Journal of Education Research.* 44(6): 341-356.

Schrijvers M, Janssen T, Fialho O, and Rijlaarsdam G (2016) The impact of literature education on students' perceptions of self and others: Exploring personal and social learning experiences in relation to teacher approach. *L1-Educational Studies in Language and Literature* 17: 1-37.

Seilman U and Larsen S (1989) Personal resonance to literature: A study of reminding while reading. *Poetics* 18: 165-177.

Slater MD, Johnson BK, Cohen J, Comello MLG, and Ewoldsen DR (2014) Temporarily expanding the boundaries of the self: Motivations for entering the storyworld and implications for narrative effects. *Journal of Communication* 64: 439-455.

Stagherlin N (2016) *Nemesis* and the persistence of tragic framing: Bucky Cantor as Job, Hebrew Prometheus, and reverse Oedipus. *Philip Roth Studies* 12(1): 73-87.

Stockwell P (2015) Mind-modelling with corpus stylistics in *David Copperfield*. *Language and Literature* 24(2): 129-147.

Wake P (2016) Life and death in the second person: Identification, empathy and antipathy in the gamebook. *Narrative* 24(2): 190-210.

Wasco (2015) 'City'. *Het Tuitel Complex.* Amsterdam: Scratchbooks.

Whiteley S and Canning P (2017) Reader response research in stylistics. *Language & Literature* 26(2): 71-87.

Appendix:'City'