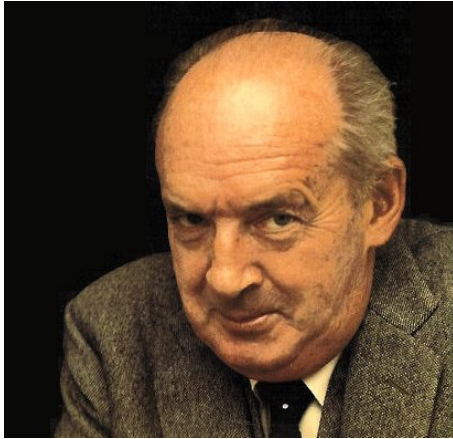


fictim design

'Fictim' is a coined term, a neologism, indicating a contrived point of view that, typically attached to a narrative, a technology, or a layer of design considerations, is used to frame a 'fictitious' condition that is used, in fragmentary form, to intervene at certain strategic points in the design and design process. The closest analogy to the fictim design method is that of a musical score, where multiple lines of melody continue simultaneously at points and intermittently at others. In fictim design, an instrument's line may also function as the frame for the entire work, as if to say that the conductor who carries the score in his pocket as he takes a cab to the Russian Tea Room is also 'playing a line of action'. The fictim design method is used to maximize the potentiality of the point of view and vanishing point; and to frame the representational and instrumental function of the design process in a decisively poetic manner.



Vladimir Nabokov, making a 'Kinbote face'

1. the analogy of Pale Fire

In Vladimir Nabokov's novel, *Pale Fire*, a poet finishes a new poem and takes it to his neighbor, an Eastern European who has rented the next-door house. Inexplicably, he is shot by an intruder, and the colleague, who imagines himself to be the exiled King of Zembla and the intruder to be an assassin who intended to kill him rather than the poet, takes the poem and flees. In hiding from both the assassin and the police, he annotates the poem, believing it to be a coded message about his kingship and abdication. Insanely, the improbable interpretation makes some sense, and Nabokov creates meaning by continuously reframing all of the reader's provisional attempts to make sense of the novel. This is a literary example of the 'fictim design' technique, where multiple lines of narrative are created to later intersect, combine, disappear, re-appear ... or not! in the course of the project's progress. The frame of fictim design should include at least one layer for the 'architect', the ostensible producer of the work of art. Other producers can exist, but it is possible to include the 'real producer', fictionalized, at some lower layer of the fictim design's structure. The word 'fictim' is constructed following the Lacanian term 'sinthom' (from 'symptom), to indicate a fictional 'victim' (a personality created in order to be destroyed).

2. techniques of fictimization

Any attempt to create a representation — a film, a drawing, a building or landscape design, etc. — can be framed simply by creating a narrative that functions at the simplest level as a journal of the work process. This puts the work itself at one remove from the original goal, and interposes a dramatic level where the work and its vicissitudes, both as a proposition and as a material representation, are equalized.

This device has been used by Italo Calvino (*If, on a Winter's Night, a Traveler ...*), where a reader hoping to enjoy a novel by Calvino is interrupted when the book is stolen, and Filipe Alfau (*Chromos*), whose characters take charge of the story once the author's back is turned.

Narrative elaboration is the most obvious technique of fictim design, with the requirement that the narrative be accompanied by artifacts, found in fragments or in wholes, that constitute a basis for a new conception of the 'final work'.

3. rules of the game

For a 'line' to exist, it must be sustained by both a script and a set of artifacts that support its material existence. Storyboarding is one way to establish the extent, structure, and timing of a narrative sequence. More typical narrative forms include plays, performance scores, stories, and anecdotes. Any of these can be put to music or pantomime. At the point where narrative lines and artifacts begin to accumulate, groups working on a single project may swap materials and either consolidate their efforts or invent new options. This borrows from Bernard Lassus's example of the 'red dot' experiment, where visitors to a tent at a municipal festival were encouraged to speculate on the graphic meaning of a red dot (identically reproduced on sheets of paper) by embellishing around it. The logic of fictim design also resembles the famous Surrealist game of 'The Exquisite Corpse', where a drawing was assembled by a group on a piece of paper folded sequentially as it passed from hand to hand.



starter list of fictim media

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Fictim media include any means of constructing a point of view. Consequently, a great variety of media types are usable, each with their own 'rules of form' and conventions, which must be acknowledged even if ironically. This list is a starter kit, to be amplified by any practitioner of fictim design. There is no definitive list, or reason for excluding a medium that supports the essential act of re-framing and fictionalization.



drawing: This is the most traditional form of project development; in the fictim context, the more important unit is the drawing series or set, which can involve incompleteness, fragmentation, loss, or destruction in order to create opportunistic openings.

film/video: This medium spans everything from the amateur home video to the professionally produced film or film clip. A film can appear to be the intended final form of a narrative, or it can be itself a contraband item that figures in a larger plot.

surveillance camera stills or video: This is a form of spyware that provides an ambiguous and fragmented testimony.

correspondence in general: The epistolary novel is the model for this medium, which can take place in the form of e-mail, letters, post-cards, or any other customary communications medium.

post-cards: In particular, post-cards provide the opportunity to work with content that may or may not be intended; the picture-side of the card may contain a concealed message or clue.

answering machine messages: an auditory source that excels in providing evidence of missed connections.

train plane and bus schedules: These can be used in conjunction with an itinerary, to chart a journey or a trip plan; tickets also provide useful forensic materials.

narrative: A story can provide the framework for an account with varying types of fictim sequences and evidence; a short story can be fragmented or whole; it can contain stories within stories, and (like all stories) alternate between action and exposition.

mise-en-abîme: Within any story framework, another story or account can be given, with the customary doubt that is cast on any story whose source cannot be verified.

sketches: A journal can contain sketches or be a sketchbook that provides indirect data about a main plot line.

photo-booth photos: This medium has been exploited with great dexterity by the film *Amélie*.

recorded conversations: The Louis Malle film, *My Dinner with André* is the paradigm of this form.

radio broadcasts: When Orsen Welles used this for his own famous fictim production, 'The War of the Worlds' was believed by many listeners to be a real news broadcast. Suicides occurred; Welles had to apologize publically. Use with caution.

interviews: Actual interviews of naïve subjects can be edited to great effect. Scripted interviews can be made to appear spontaneous.

journals, diaries, confessions: Personal accounts allow for irrationality, madness, perversion, and outright lies.