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À quelles conditions est-il possible de faire une narratologie comparée ?

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EDITOR'S NOTE

This English translation has not been published in printed form/Cette traduction anglaise n'a pas été publiée sous forme imprimée.

- 1 While the title of Raphaël Baroni's article (2016) evokes "the empire of narratology," the article itself quickly convinces the reader that the "empire" has seen both its own territory and its power over the neighboring lands of literary theories and cinematography studies shrink over the years. However, as Baroni emphasizes, narrative has become continuously more diverse, reaching faraway shores that Roland Barthes (1966) could never have imagined in his *"Introduction à l'analyse structurale du récit"* (An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative) because they were so different from the narrative objects of study of the 1960s: video games, web series and interactive novels. In short: narrative is everywhere, and we live in its empire and under its control.
- 2 How do we explain that the discipline that aims to conceptualize and theorize about it has been relegated to the depths of academia? For me, this question was especially pertinent when a certain book—*Storytelling. La machine à fabriquer des histoires et à formater les esprits* (Storytelling: Bewitching the Modern Mind; Salmon, 2007)—was published. It emphasized the "art of storytelling" while not acknowledging the more conventional research previously produced by narratologists of various schools. For those who made narrative their main research focus, there was a clear paradox given the scant attention they received for their contributions to the field, as if the ways narrative was used in marketing or political communication had nothing in common with literary or audiovisual uses. One might have had a similar reaction to what one

feels when reading texts on visual studies or cultural studies that unwittingly rediscover findings that have been uncovered in the field of semiology.

- 3 But, as Raphaël Baroni notes, the problem posed by what is not so much a new discipline as a new label is that it has tainted the concept of narrative with a “worrying” connotation that, whether intended for commercial or political use, it is meant to manipulate people and focused more on the potential (although unproven) effects of narrative rather than how it functions. The merit of Baroni’s article is that it first examines the discipline by attempting to map its evolution with respect to an epistemological dimension by outlining the contours of identified zones and *terrae incognitae*, and research methods, as well as with respect to an institutional dimension by exploring the discipline’s place in academia today.
- 4 Rather than producing a point-by-point commentary on an article with which I generally agree, it seemed that a better approach would be to begin with several assumptions that can be extended, further developed or contradicted.

Is narrative really everywhere?

- 5 As Roland Barthes (1966: 1) said, narrative is everywhere: “Among the vehicles of narrative are articulated language, whether oral or written, pictures, still or moving, gestures, and an ordered mixture of all those substances.” This statement is also a program in a way, which I have attempted to extend by looking at the audiovisual dimension. On the surface, this would seem perfectly legitimate because film is indeed an “ordered mixture” of pictures and gestures, but also of sound, which Barthes omitted from his list. Yet, while recently updating *Le Récit cinématographique* (Cinematic narrative, Gaudreault, Jost, 1990), when it came time to provide a definition, we realized that the expression itself was not self-evident to narratologists, beginning with the most eminent of them, Gérard Genette. The founder of the narratological “system,” when questioned by André Gaudreault—with whom I wrote the abovementioned book—on the merits of this title, replied in a personal letter dated February 22, 1983 (Gaudreault, 1988: 28):

“If we consider (broad definition) any kind of ‘representation’ of a story, there is obviously theatrical narrative, film narrative, comic book narrative, etc. Personally, I am rather, and increasingly so, in favor of a narrow definition of narrative: *haplè diègèsis*, the presentation of facts by a narrator who signifies them verbally (orally or in writing), and in this sense, for me, there is no theatrical or filmic narrative. Theatre *does not narrate*, it ‘reconstitutes’ a story on stage, and cinema *shows* a story on the screen that is also ‘reconstituted’ (in fact, of course, constituted) on the set.”

- 6 As we can see, the theory of the protean narrative as put forward by Barthes is quickly de facto contradicted when applied to objects that are “conveyed by audiovisual language.” This reticence to consider that film corresponds to a “strict definition of narrative” is clearly surprising with regard to common sense: not only does it seem evident that one goes to the cinema to be told stories, but we also participate in a linguistic translation of what we have seen on an almost daily basis, when we tell our friends about a film we loved or hated. But beyond this experience, which creates a gap between what the ordinary spectator feels and the theory of narrative, this Genettian approach is the symptom of the pre-eminence of the literary discipline over all others.

The “real” definition of narrative would necessarily be that which was created at a time when researchers were only concerned with the narrative power of words.

- 7 This literary supremacy is such that the *Larousse* dictionary continues to define narrative in French as the “oral or written development of real or imaginary facts,”¹ while the *Trésor de la langue française informatisé* describes it as the “presentation (oral or written) of events (real or imaginary),” and *Le Petit Robert* as the “oral or written relationship (of real or imaginary facts)”. By default, then, neither the Bayeux Tapestry,² nor comic strips nor film are narratives.
- 8 The same applies to Jean-Marie Schaeffer (1999: 301), whose reasoning no longer follows Platonic orthodoxy, but rather begins from the point of view of reception: “Spectators do not see a film as something that someone tells them about, but as their own perceptive flow.”
- 9 In short, from the moment that audiovisual perception is involved, the word “narrative” is no longer appropriate. Schaeffer (*ibid.*, 304) clearly establishes this limit when he writes that “As soon as [a sequence] is *filmed*, it can be *seen and heard as a perceptually accessible representation of a sequence of actions*; as soon as it is *told* (strictly speaking), it can be *read as if it were spoken by a narrator*.” For a semiologist of cinema, such a statement is quite shocking because it implicitly admits that, firstly, images are *transparent* and that they appear to *film* themselves, and that secondly, film is reduced to an image, thereby excluding all situations with a voice-over that narrates the story like a novel written in the first person.
- 10 The idea that film has no narrator is also found in Marie-Laure Ryan, who rebels against literary imperialism (another way of creating an empire):

“The founding fathers of narratology recognized from the start the transcendent nature of narrative with regard to the medium [...]. [However,] the desire of Barthes and Bremond to open narratology to types of media other than literature went unfulfilled for years. Under Genette’s influence, narratology developed in such a way that it was almost exclusively devoted to literary fiction. Media representing the mimetic mode, such as theatre and cinema, were largely ignored, and *due to their absence of a narrator*, they were even sometimes denied the status of narrative, despite the similarity of their content with the plots of diegetic narrative. However, this situation changed dramatically at the end of the 20TH century with what has been called the ‘narrative turn’ in the humanities” (Ryan, 2012: § 8 MT).
- 11 Upon reading this long quote, an initial surprising point is Marie-Laure Ryan’s view that narratology long ignored cinema, even though the first texts from cinema narratologists were published in the early 1980s—several years after the publication of *Figures III* (Genette, 1972)—as they began extending their research to documentaries (Simon, 1978; Chatman, 1978; Vanoye, 1979; Branigan, 1984; Bordwell, 1985; Casetti, 1986; Jost, 1987, 1992; Gaudreault, 1988; Gaudreault, Jost, 1990, to name but a few). Meanwhile, even as she sought to restore the relative importance of non-literary narratologies, she ignored the debate raging among cinematic narrative specialists on the issue of the narrator, as if the “absence” of a narrator was an incontestable truth. Such a position is a paradox that eschews the research of film narratologists by adopting without further consideration the “narrow definition” of narrative inherited from Gérard Genette (and Plato).
- 12 The whole narratology of cinema is based on the premise *that there is no narrative without a narrator*. This premise was put forward even before the semiotic turn by Albert Laffay (1964), who wanted to describe a phenomenon that he did not call a

“semiotic break,” but which was similar, between the real world and film. This led to the assertion that film is a discourse and that this discourse is structured by an instance, a “*grand imagier*,” or “grand image-maker.” The reasoning is thus the opposite of that developed by literary academics, who share a narrow definition of narrative as *haplè diègèsis*. These academics force objects to conform to the definition, whereas the first semiologist, following Albert Laffay, began with the idea that “the user” recognizes narrative. Christian Metz (1968) drew from this as the basis for his “*Remarques pour une phénoménologie du narratif*” (“Notes Toward a Phenomenology of Narrative”), with the starting point as the first impression felt by a person who consumes a story that someone tells: “Because it speaks, there has to be someone speaking.” It is not because this instance who tells the story is “necessarily perceived” in any narrative that they are “necessarily present.”

- 13 Those who subsequently rejected this proposal were far fewer in number than those who sided with the theory of the absence of a narrator that Ryan considered to be an indisputable fact. From “invisible narrator” (Ropars-Wuilleumier, 1972) to “enunciator” (Casetti, 1983 and Gardies, 1988), “implicit narrator” (Jost, 1987) or “mega-narrator” (Gaudreault, 1988), the label assigned to this “grand image-maker” vary, but all the theorists proposing these names agree that it is impossible not to postulate a narrative instance for film—somewhat explicit narrators who tell “audiovisualized” stories. What separates one side from the other lies only in the way in which this agent is identified. There are two main methods: one “ascending,” the other “descending”.
- 14 The ascending method (Jost, 1987) begins with the spectator’s experience. On many occasions, we may feel a considerable gap between what a character is supposed to have seen and what the character actually sees. This is typical in classic films where characters (the explicit narrators) tell what they live through, which is usually shown from an outside perspective. This contradicts Gérard Genette’s rule (1972) that “the focal character is never described or even shown from outside.” Yet this is commonly seen in contemporary television series. For example, in the *Black Mirror* episode “White Christmas” (2014), a flashback visualizes the story of a character who has a camera implanted in his eye. Despite this, we also see him from the outside, which is logically impossible with such diegetic postulates. In these cases and in many others, where there is a gap between what is seen and what is told, we have to admit that an instance other than the explicit narrator or the character whose viewpoint is seen “pulls the strings of the narrative”—i.e., that there is an “implicit narrator.”
- 15 The descending method (Gaudreault, 1988), which is more ontological, begins from an a priori deduction of the agents, starting from the top. Based on the principle that cinema has two layers of narrativity—frame by frame and shot by shot—this theory presupposes the existence of at least two different agents: the *monstrator* and the *narrator*, each responsible in their respective ways for contributing to the whole that is regulated by a “mega-narrator.”
- 16 While the two methods take opposite approaches, they arrive at the same conclusion: the need to take two layers of narration into account: one implicit (outside the visual representation) and one explicit (represented). The theoretical position that advocates the absence of a narrator exists in cinematic research, but on an exceptional basis. It is embodied by David Bordwell (1985: 62), who says:

“On the principle that we ought not to proliferate theoretical entities without need, there is no point in positing communication as the fundamental process of all narration, only to grant that most films ‘efface’ or ‘conceal’ this process.”

- 17 However, after being chased away, the narrator slips in through the back door, because the American theorist was obliged to differentiate between films that presuppose a narrator and those for which it is pointless to assume one exists. According to Bordwell, one should only attribute to a narrator those narrative messages with multiple indices that point to a narrator (e.g., Jean-Luc Godard, Alain Resnais and Robert Bresson) whereas the presence of a narrator does not need to be assumed in the more classic films where no one “talks cinema.” In the end, we come back to a theory of gaps.
- 18 Polyphonic systems of enunciation and narration then developed (Jost, 1992; Jost, 1995; Châteauvert, 1996) and the author, removed from narratology by Gérard Genette, appeared as an essential instance for understanding cinematic narrative. I will stop there because the issue goes beyond the scope of this article. I am more interested here in the lesson that can be drawn from this theoretical excursion: what goes without saying for some literary narratologists (absence of narrative in the strict sense, absence of a narrator in film) runs contrary to the central issues in cinematic narratology.
- 19 More fundamentally, this “lesson” raises an epistemological question concerning the identity of the discipline, a question that also arises for semiology. Should we start from the observation that narrative is protean and encourage researchers to delve deeper in this direction, or should we, on the contrary, develop a unified theory of the narrative that is valid for all these semiotic manifestations? In fact, this questioning encompasses an opposition between a narratology of content or thematic narratology, and a narratology of expression. Thematic narratology is represented by the Greimas square, the conceptualization of which can apply to various languages (literature, comics or film) but without taking into account the specific characteristics of each. Narratology of expression postulates that the categories of narrative are universal and that the narratologist’s job is to adapt them to the materials of expression used by the different media. While this idea seems to be more useful on the whole, it must avoid two pitfalls.
- 20 The first is directly related to my first section. Most likely because of the chronological primacy of literary narratology, researchers working on audiovisual media read, quote or draw inspiration from its findings, whereas the reverse is quite rare. As a result, one sometimes has the impression that the opening towards other media is more an encouragement for specialists in cinema or television fiction than a desire to collaborate. The second pitfall could arise from remaining excessively attached to literary theory concepts. For example, by conforming only to the categories resulting from analysis of the novel, we could overlook the issue of space, which is crucial in cinema. When André Gaudreault and I wrote *Le Récit cinématographique* (Cinematic narrative, 1990), which adapts the Genettian system to films and television series, we had to add a chapter on space, which had not been taken into account by Genette, a specialist on Marcel Proust.
- 21 I have long called for a third approach that lies between the autonomy of narratology and the ambition to develop a general theory: comparative narratology. Strictly speaking, it is not a matter of making comparisons between cinema and literature, such as in the hackneyed theme of cinematic adaptation, but of taking a heuristic back-and-

forth approach. All too often, we settle for a “one-way trip,” as in, for instance, the concept of focalization. When we attempt to transpose it to cinema, we discover that its application to novels mixes both questions of knowledge (Who knows?) and perception (Who sees? as well as Who hears?). This is why an initial step is needed to reformulate the concept into “ocularization” and “auricularization” (Jost, 1987). But we must go further and return to the field where we began, asking, for example, what the possible discrepancies are in a novel from the cognitive, visual and aural points of view.

Where are the structures?

- 22 This vision of narratology, which uses otherness to build an extensive theory of narrative, is in line with Raphaël Baroni’s desire to not turn this discipline into a mere toolbox or reduce it to the descendant of structural theory. While I generally share this view, further discussion would appear to be necessary.
- 23 One of the epistemological problems posed by a structural theory was already indicated by Descartes in the first paragraph of *Discours de la méthode* (Discourse on Method, 1637) when he asks whether “the diversity of our opinions [arises] because we conduct our thoughts along different ways, and do not fix our attention on the same objects.” Moving beyond structural narratology is generally regarded as a paradigm shift. The “science” of text would, in a way, have progressed and researchers would have understood that the immanence that contained it within its limits would have to be shattered.
- 24 Another hypothesis is that this paradigm shift was the result of a change in the objects of study. Would Genettian theory have been different if it had not been based on *La Recherche du temps perdu*? (*In Search of Lost Time*)? Is it any wonder that this novel written by Marcel Proust as a “cathedral” is the chosen terrain for a study of time and narrative? Of course not. Let us go further still: if the structural method was at the heart of 1970s narratology, it is because not only researchers, but also writers were swimming in the crystal-clear waters of this methodological pool. It was an era of major colloquia on the French New Novel in Cerisy-la-Salle, France, and neither Alain Robbe-Grillet nor Claude Simon, around whom the debates revolved, questioned the descriptions of the structural elements in their work. Not only did they not question them, but they accepted them and provided new food for thought to researchers by revealing their secrets of creation, or rather “production,” as they said at the time.
- 25 What I mean by this is that the object itself can limit the theory to some extent. While the French New Novel is now far removed from our present day, the structural production of narrative has not necessarily disappeared. How else can the mass production of American series be explained? One only has to read the many American screenwriting manuals and analyze episodes of the most popular series—*CSI* (Monnet-Cantagrel, 2015) or *Grey’s Anatomy* (Jullier, Laborde, 2012)—to see how operative the concept of format is. Of course, this does not only cover plot structuring—which also has a very important semantic dimension—but the structural development is nevertheless central: a narrative is first considered according to its key narrative movements, whether the acts that organize it, the arcs that determine the characters’ progression or plots A, B and C that skillfully keep the spectator on tenterhooks. It goes without saying that, in this context, in order to fully grasp the scholarly work on time that results from all these dimensions, the tools of the *old* narratology are still useful.

And, with the renewed interest in these fictional formats, we see them reappearing here whereas they had disappeared elsewhere.

- 26 In terms of reception, some practices reflect the same tendencies, such as “speed watching,” where spectators are able to use new functionalities on YouTube, VLC or Google Chrome to watch a video at a faster speed. At an accelerated playback speed of 1.5, a 52-minute video can be viewed in about 35 minutes. But even if fans of speed watching do so out of a love for series that lets them watch even more, they nonetheless reduce the experience to the consumption of a story. In this sense, they adopt structuralist behavior: it is irrelevant to them whether the story is written or filmed. What they want to know is what happens next—to see how the plot turns out.
- 27 Admittedly, all American series are not written in this way. Alongside these “formatted” fictions, there are others that display a continuously renewed freedom of writing, which may devote an entire episode to one character, or, on the contrary, split the narrative in multiple directions (*Oz*, *Breaking Bad*). Such series can still be analyzed for their structure, but not with first-generation literary narratology tools; instead, a sort of non-narrative narratology approach, which may seem contradictory, must be used. This is not the case if we admit that, apart from the narrative structures that allow the plot to be constructed, there are also purely aesthetic structures within the same series that do not create narrative tension but rather *echoes*, *reflections*, and *rhymes*, and that make the piece, if not a cathedral, then at least a composition, in the pictorial or musical sense. A simple example is the dog motif in *Breaking Bad*, which functions as an intermittent metaphor for the characters. In Episode 407,³ “Problem Dog,” Jesse’s account of the look in the eyes of a dog he killed for no reason clearly refers to the frightened misunderstanding of the eyes of Gale, whom he killed to obey Walter. In “Rabid Dog” (Episode 512), the story is an implicit reference to Jesse’s erratic actions. In Episode 516, it is Walt who assumes this animal identity. After abandoning Holly in a fire station, he waits at the side of the road with his bags and his barrel containing \$11 million for the man who will drive him far away to New Hampshire. The final shot shows a stray dog crossing the road. This time, the character’s situation mirrors this visual detail. What is interesting about these details is that they are optional in a way: spectators who do not notice them will not lose the plot, but those who do spot them will get additional pleasure from an aspect that is indeed part of the narrative, but which deviates from the structural narratology (Jost, 2016).

Necessarily pragmatic narratology

- 28 Between *In Search of Lost Time* and *Breaking Bad*, there is another common point that encourages us to go beyond structural analysis: both raise the question of the limits of the work and, at the same time, the sovereign field of narratological tools. Gérard Genette clearly considers *In Search of Lost Time* to be a single work. This presupposition has implications for the concepts he develops. For example, instances of “anachrony,” which refers to changes in the order of the story’s chronology, are divided into *internal* and *external* within the novel, which is understood a priori as the set of books that make up *In Search of Lost Time*. However, because it was published in several volumes, each with its own title, some readers may read only one or two volumes, and perhaps even read them out of order. In these conditions, the internal/external dichotomy is a function of the limits assigned to the work. When the author jumps forward (prolepsis),

he may do so either within one of the books or within the entire 2,000 to 3,000 pages (depending on the edition). At a time when television series, in the literal sense of “self-contained narratives,” have given way to a format with story lines that span several episodes or even several seasons, the temporal analysis of fiction can vary according to the reference “text”: some analysts of series consider one episode as a unit, while others feel that temporality only makes sense when applied to the series as a whole. Strictly speaking, narratological study should only take place after the end of the last season, but it often does not.

- 29 Transmedia involves a similar difficulty. Given the many possible paths offered by the various fragments of a narrative or its different versions, which should be taken? For example, starting by watching a video about a character in a series on the website of the channel that broadcasts it, and then watching the series itself is not the same as watching them in the opposite order or exposure to the fiction through trailers. This is where we must abandon structural theory to adopt a pragmatic approach that takes uses into account. Note that this approach is quite different from the a priori assumption that the “digital” narrative is different from all those that have gone before it, as Marie-Laure Ryan, quoted by Raphaël Baroni (2016: 233), does when she wonders

“How classical narratology, whose main concern has been so far texts that represent a certain combination of modes—diegetic, representational, retrospective, scripted, receptive, autonomous, determinate, and literal—can be extended to digital narratives, which are simulative rather than representational, emergent rather than scripted, participatory rather than receptive, and simultaneous rather than retrospective.”

- 30 Just as identifying a priori narratological instances is an ontological approach that may have little to do with the spectator’s experience, the fact that the “vehicle,” as Roland Barthes put it, for a narrative is digital does not necessarily change the nature of the narrative as such as such, where it would be either “representational” or “simulative.” Whether the picture is created by the strokes of a painter or by the pixels of a digital camera, and whether it is the result of a geometric calculation of perspective or an algorithm, does not change the fact that in both cases it is formed by signs of essence or icons, rather than signs of existence or indices. Whether the spectator watches a web series shot entirely using digital technology or a film that was digitized for online viewing does not change the representative nature of the images. As for simulation, it began to appear in films even before the arrival of digital technology: at the time of Georges Méliès, it was a black backdrop that made it possible to *simulate* appearances and disappearances; today, a green screen is used. In the past, a trick was used to simulate the parting of the Red Sea before Moses; today, all effects are possible, but this does not prevent simulation from still being used for diegesis, scenario and the construction of time, without which there is no narrative. Simulation and representation are opposites in a different way: while representation is a *sine qua non* of the story, since it contributes to building a world like ours, simulation is an utterance of reality, and therefore falls under what Käte Hamburger (1957) referred to as “feigning” (*fingiert*) reality. “Feigning” is ontologically different from fiction since it seeks to deceive (like a *trompe l’oeil*), whereas representation is an overtly mimetic construction.
- 31 If transmedia proliferation is indeed a consequence of digital technology—but not an invention because the splitting of the same diegesis into several types of narrative happened before it existed—it requires the creation of paths—from moving image to

still image, from long to short form, from audiovisual to comic book, etc.—more than static concepts that would make transmediality a fixed form.

Media narratology?

- 32 Claiming that narratology should extend to non-literary media (which, as I previously said, it has for a long time) does not only mean that we should be interested in narratives conveyed by images and sounds. What characterizes literary narratology is not only that it first dealt with fiction before turning to the factual, but that it is interested in the *text* rather than the *book*. It was not until the mid-1970s that Philippe Lejeune (1975) took the peritext into account in developing his concept of the “autobiographical pact.” In a way, this pact was based on a comparison between the cover and the published text, since this pact was defined by the fact that the name of the narrator of the narrative was the same as that of the author on the flyleaf. Nevertheless, like most communication theories of the time, this concept was based on an optimistic view that never questioned the sincerity of the author or publisher. Another very similar concept called the “contract” has flourished. Whether referring to a literary, fiction or media contract, many researchers (Eco, 1979; Verón, 1984; Casetti, 1988; Charaudeau, 1997; Schaeffer, 1999, among others) postulated that an author, publisher and receiver (reader or spectator) are bound by a way of reading the text: when reading a novel, the reader is expected to suspend his or her disbelief; when following a television news program, the spectator must “sign” a contract of credibility and attention (Charaudeau, 1997); when reading a particular newspaper, the reader has to accept a certain relationship with the newspaper/journalist (Verón, 1984; Casetti, 1988).
- 33 Unfortunately (or not), many cases show that these contracts are sometimes inequitable. For example, the author may take the “lion’s share” unbeknownst to the receiver. This was the case of Misha Defonseca (1997), who published *Survivre avec les loups* (Misha, a Mémoire of the Holocaust Years). As the English title indicates, Defonseca presented her story as a young Jewish girl raised by a pack of wolves who traveled across Europe as authentic, when in fact she had made it up. And yet, she enjoyed the symbolic benefits of authenticity that readers had not questioned. As for the “instruction” to suspend one’s disbelief, many judges do not do so when celebrities are implicated in fiction (see the many court cases where a writer is sued for defamation by one of their “characters”: Philippe Sollers, Patrick Poivre d’Arvor, Mathieu Lindon, Régis Jauffret, among others), nor do the many readers who complain to an author about factual errors.⁴ This is why I replaced the idea of the contract with the concept of “promise,” which signals the potential gap between the producer (in the broad sense) of a narrative and the receiver. This pragmatic theoretical framework further fractures the immanence in which the “text” (literary or audiovisual) was contained, and de facto imposes a transmedia analysis that takes into account the text itself as well as the different documents used to sell it (press kit, trailer, etc.). The goal is not to consider an abstraction (the text outside of publication) but an actual media object (book, film or DVD). Taking the medium into account as such is also the path chosen by Marc Lits (2008).

Conclusion: Institutional barriers

- 34 The need for narrative specialists in academia is obvious. But the where and how of achieving that is much less clear. Raphaël Baroni argues that there should be at least one narratologist in every literature department. One can only concur. However, it is more difficult to agree when he de facto extends the hierarchy of established disciplines that begin with a literary text to move towards scripto-visual or audiovisual narratives (and not necessarily “media” in the strict sense of the term). Why should we think of narratology as a centrifugal force that moves away from the novel to other lands? Cinema and television specialists have produced a great many theoretical advances regarding narrative that are only rarely included in literary narratologists’ bibliographies, even as they call for other “media” to be taken into consideration as well. The reverse is not true. Research on films or series quite often originates from the problems stemming from literary theory.
- 35 Comparison can be considered in two ways: first, in the manner of comparative literature, by legitimizing within the discipline studies on various semiotic objects (film, comic, novel, etc.). For example, there have been countless conferences and magazines dedicated to “films and novels” that analyze how the transition from literary to audiovisual texts has taken place.
- 36 The other way to theorize comparison is heuristic. It is not a question of putting two works side by side to measure losses and gains, but of attributing a strong theoretical function to the comparison. Here, the variation of objects is not considered as a simple opening or an additional freedom, but as a way of delving into the concepts, or in other words, varying their intensional and extensional definitions. Who is best placed to do this? I would suggest the field of information and communication sciences. Unfortunately, two or three decades spent in this section of the National Board of Universities (CNU) in France has led me to believe that it is a losing battle.
- 37 First, this is because despite various theoretical positions, this section of the CNU is defined more by its objects of study than by its disciplines. We can approach the Internet in a thousand ways, but we will still be in the field of information-communication. However, using novels or films as objects is a challenge. I remember, for example, what happened in the nineties following a job offer in “audiovisual semio-narratology” that was renamed “audiovisual communication” by the ministry. And yet, at the instigation of film specialists who were members of the CNU, the communicational approach was favored over the object-centric approach, which allowed young researchers working on films or novels to be qualified as university lecturers. The Copernican turn that put the object at the center made qualification a very random process. As Robert Boure (2006: 290) pointed out, defining the frontiers of information-communication “is always a question of territorial boundaries.” Many teachers and researchers consider that the concept of image goes beyond the boundaries of our field and that it belongs to aesthetics (18th section of the CNU).
- 38 It seems quite natural for an economist to be able to navigate between several departments that deal with culture (cinema, theatre or television). Why could this not be the case for narratologists? Narrative specialists could enrich their own vision and that of their students by moving from a play to a film, or from a series to its comic book versions, to forge analytical instruments nourished by these back-and-forth journeys.

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NOTES

1. Available at: <http://www.larousse.fr/dictionnaires/francais/r%C3%A9cit/67040>.
2. The Bayeux Tapestry is an embroidered cloth from the eleventh century comprising nine linen panels assembled into a single piece measuring around 70 metres long and 50 cm wide. It represents major historical events such as the Battle of Hastings fought in 1066 and is often considered to be the precursor of modern comic strips.
3. The first figure in refers to the season, and the following two figures indicate the episode number. Here, for example, Episode 407 is from Season 4, Episode 7.
4. For readers who complain to an author about factual errors, see U. Eco (1994: 102): "Having had the experience of writing a couple of novels which have reached a few million readers, I have become familiar with an extraordinary phenomenon. For the first few tens of thousands of copies (the figure may vary from country to country), readers generally know perfectly well about this fictional agreement. Afterwards, and certainly beyond the first-million mark, you get into a no-man's-land where one can no longer be sure that readers know about it." The author explained that he had received many letters pointing out occasional errors regarding Parisian geography.

ABSTRACTS

Although Roland Barthes, in his programmatic article “*Introduction à l’analyse structurale des récits*” (An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative), wrote that narrative could be conveyed through language as well as through visual image, some narratologists—Gérard Genette leading the pack—consider that film does not, strictly speaking, “narrate,” and even go so far as to say that film has no narrator. This position, which is derived from literary narratology, is problematic and surprising when we consider that specialists in cinematic narrative have devoted many books to this issue. A third approach is urgently needed that lies between the autonomy of different forms of narratology and the ambition to develop a general theory: comparative narratology. What are the conditions necessary for this type of narratology? To answer this question, we begin by delving into what it means to abandon the structural theory of narrative. Is it a paradigm change or the result of a change in the objects of study? This article first considers the role of the structure for writing certain narratives (such as television series) and in reception with practices such as speed watching. It then demonstrates how multiple objects of study, as seen in transmedia, render the structural approach unsuitable and require a pragmatic approach. This methodological extension towards context prompts us to no longer consider narratology based on matters of expression, but to question what “media narratology” means.

Bien que Roland Barthes, dans son article programmatique « Introduction à l’analyse structurale des récits » (1966), ait écrit que le récit pouvait être véhiculé aussi bien par la langue que par l’image, certains narratologues, Gérard Genette en tête, considèrent que le film « ne raconte pas » à proprement parler, voire que le film n’a pas de narrateur. Cette position qui émane de la narratologie littéraire est problématique et étonnante quand on connaît les très nombreux ouvrages consacrés à cette question par les spécialistes du récit cinématographique. Entre l’autonomie des narratologies et l’aspiration à une théorie générale, il est donc urgent de suivre une troisième voie : la narratologie comparée. Quelles sont les conditions de possibilité d’une telle narratologie ? Pour répondre à cette question, on s’interroge d’abord sur ce que signifie le dépassement de la théorie structurale du récit. Est-ce un changement de paradigme ou résulte-t-il d’un changement des objets d’étude ? Cet article apporte d’abord une réponse en considérant le rôle de la structure dans l’écriture de certains récits (comme les séries télévisuelles) et, même dans la réception avec des pratiques comme le *speed watching*. Dans un second temps, il montre que des objets multiples comme en donne à voir le transmédia font exploser l’approche structurale et oblige à une approche *pragmatique*. Cette extension méthodologique vers le contexte incite à ne plus penser la narratologie en fonction des seules matières de l’expression, mais à s’interroger sur ce que signifie une « narratologie médiatique ».

INDEX

Keywords: audiovisual narratology, comparative narratology, epistemology, transmedia, pragmatics, narrator, television series, film

Mots-clés: récit audiovisuel, narratologie comparée, épistémologie, transmédia, pragmatique, narrateur, séries télévisées, film

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