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State of the Art or State of Confusion? A Brief Look at Recent Narratologies

Abstract:

This article discusses the most recent developments in narratology. Starting from the recent observation by Zara Dinnen and Robyn Warhol that the discipline is relevant and suitable for studying all of “contemporary cultural life”, the authors present various attempts at ordering the multiplicity of narratologies. In addition, they put forward their own categorisation of recent postclassical approaches, distinguishing between narratologies that broaden the notion of narrative text and those that focus on communicative context, cultural context, and “storytelling”.

Keywords: Narratology, post-classical narratology, literary theory, contemporary

In a recent overview of “contemporary narrative theories”, Zara Dinnen and Robyn Warhol not only try to capture the state of present-day narratology, but also aim to demonstrate “some of the rapid changes in the field that have resulted from the transformation of narrative itself in the contemporary world”¹. The word ‘resulted’ seems to indicate a causal relation between present-day social reality (the cause) and contemporary narratology (the effect), as if new narratologies follow new trends in social reality. Maybe the terminology is too one-sided, neglecting the dialectics between the two domains, but the link is typical of many present-day narrative approaches. They no longer restrict themselves to narrative texts, let alone to highbrow literature. Instead they are dealing with all genres and media, and, more generally, with all kinds of pressing matters of everyday life and culture. They focus on vital social and political issues such as gender, race, ethics, and law.

In fact, narrative approaches are often presented as the perfect vehicle to study almost all aspects of life, from birth to death, from individual to institutional, from micro

¹ Zara Dinnen and Robyn Warhol, “Introduction”, in: *The Edinburgh Companion to Contemporary Narrative theories*, ed. Z. Dinnen and R. Warhol, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 2018, p. 1.

to macro. There hardly seems to be anything left that cannot be studied in narrative terms. The twenty-eight essays that Dinnen and Warhol present as a representative sample of present-day narratologies all deal with “the question of how theories of narrative are being, and can be, put to use to better understand contemporary cultural life”². All aspects of life are included, and they are studied in an interdisciplinary way. In the final essay, Amy Shuman and Katherine Young use affect theory, feminist narratology and conversational analysis to come to grips with the ways in which (co-)narration gives form to the feelings of Shuman’s son Lino, “a thirty-year-old man with intellectual disabilities, including difficulty speaking”³.

The One and the Many

Looking at the diversity of approaches that claim the label of narratology, one might wonder if they still have a common subject, object, method and theory. As is well-known, the discipline originated in the structuralist study of narratives and the term “narratology” was coined by Tzvetan Todorov in 1969⁴. Ever since David Herman’s introduction to *Narratologies* (1999), it has become customary to talk of structuralist narratology as “classical” and to call the later approaches “postclassical”⁵. The plural in David Herman’s milestone collection already suggests that the one (i.e., the structuralist approach) has been replaced by the many.

The growing number of narrative studies and their ever-widening scope tie in with the so-called narrative turn⁶ of the seventies and eighties, which manifested itself in almost all domains of the humanities, including Hayden White’s historiography and Jerome Bruner’s psycho-cultural studies⁷. Strangely enough, narratology was born in the sixties, a decade which was not so narrative-minded. As Jan Baetens demonstrated, structuralist narratology developed in a literary and cultural context which, at least in its highbrow manifestations, was hostile towards narrative traditions⁸. In France, the *nouveau roman*

² *Ibid.*, p. 2.

³ Amy Shuman and Katharine Young, “The Body as Medium: A Phenomenological Approach to the Production of Affect in Narrative”, in: *Edinburgh Companion*, op. cit., p. 404.

⁴ See Luc Herman and Bart Vervaeck, *Handbook of Narrative Analysis*, Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press 2005, p. 41, pp. 185–186 [second edition forthcoming 2019]. Compare Kent Puckett, *Narrative Theory: A Critical Introduction*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2016, pp. 224–233.

⁵ David Herman, “Introduction: Narratologies”, in: *Narratologies: New Perspectives on Narrative Analysis*, ed. D. Herman, Columbus: Ohio State University Press 1999, pp. 1–30.

⁶ For an overview, see Martin Kreiswirth, “Narrative Turn in the Humanities”, in: *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory*, ed. D. Herman, M. Jahn and M.-L. Ryan, London: Routledge 2005, pp. 377–382. An early mention can be found in Christopher Norris, *Contest of Faculties: Philosophy and Theory After Deconstruction*, London: Methuen 1985, pp. 20–22. A recent contribution that pays attention to the paradoxes between theory and context (including the French *nouveau roman*) is Hanna Meretoja, *The Narrative Turn in Fiction and Theory: The Crisis and Return of Storytelling from Robbe-Grillet to Tournier*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan 2014.

⁷ See, for instance, Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-century Europe*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press 1973, and Jerome Bruner, “The Narrative Construction of Reality”, *Critical Inquiry* 1991, vol. 18, no. 1, pp. 1–21.

⁸ Jan Baetens, “Nouvelle narratologie, nouveau récit/ New Narratology, New Story”, *Questions de communication* 2017, vol. 31, pp. 231–243.

famously claimed the era of storytelling had come to an end. Still, in the influential journal *Tel Quel* nouveaux novelists and structuralist scholars collaborated.

That is not the only paradoxical thing about structuralist narrative studies. At its birth, classical narratology was both more modest and more universalist than the postclassical varieties that have prospered for almost three decades now. More modest, because it focused upon narrative texts and because it developed a well-delineated structuralist theory and methodology to study them. More universalist, because it claimed the method and the theory were valid for all stories from all places and times⁹. Recent theories, as Dinnen and Warhol show, often call themselves 'situated', i.e. they acknowledge "their definitively historical contextualism, which tends to counter the generalising impulses" of classical, structuralist (and some recent) theories "by attending to differences in narrative born of specific times and places"¹⁰. As a result, the idea of a super theory reconciling all types of narratology has been abandoned. For instance, unnatural narratology explicitly rejects the idea of one theory for all narratives and instead advances its own project as a necessary complement to traditional narrative approaches¹¹.

The imperialist move (everything can be studied in terms of narrative theory) and the rejection of a general, synthetic theory has led to a bewildering array of narratologies and to the gradual fading of a shared terminology and theory. Raphaël Baroni complains that postclassical narratologies have reduced theory to a toolbox and subordinated it to its practical use¹². In addition, Baroni points to the precarious institutional place of narratology, which is usually restricted to departments of literature, whereas its application is cross-disciplinary: "Paradoxically, from an institutional viewpoint, the theory of narrative appears to be dying, whereas its field of application has never seemed so wide and its utility has never seemed so evident"¹³. This leads to at least two problems: the literary theorist does not have enough knowledge of the transdisciplinary contexts in which the theory will be used, and the scholars working in those disciplines are not fluent with the theoretical advances in literary studies. The interdisciplinarity claimed by almost all postclassical narrative studies has little institutional anchorage and the expertise of such advanced disciplines as neurology, medicine, sociology and political studies can hardly be developed by the narratologist in any real depth or breadth.

What is needed, says Baroni, is an integration of old and new, theory and practice, structuralist and newer narratologies. Sommer talks of a "merger" between structuralist and more recent narratologies¹⁴. In general, a detailed elaboration of the classical

⁹ See Roland Barthes' famous "An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative", *New Literary History*, 1975, vol. 6, no. 2, pp. 237–272 (especially 237–239).

¹⁰ Dinnen and Warhol, op. cit., p. 3.

¹¹ Brian Richardson, "Unnatural Narrative Theory", *Style* 2016, vol. 50, no. 4, pp. 385–405.

¹² Raphaël Baroni, "L'empire de la narratologie, ses défis et ses faiblesses", *Questions de communication* 2016, vol. 29, pp. 1–20.

¹³ Ibid., p. 1. Interestingly, Roy Sommer talks about narratology's "near-death experience of a predominantly poststructuralist fin-de-siècle" ("The Merger of Classical and Postclassical Narratologies", *DIEGESIS* 2012, no. 1, p. 144).

¹⁴ Sommer, op. cit., p. 154.

paradigm is not the main concern of postclassical theories, and seems in fact to be restricted to narratologies focusing on new media and genres, such as comics and digital narratives. For instance, Kai Mikkonen's *The Narratology of Comic Art* (2017) is a very nuanced synthesis between the study of comics and classical, Genettean narratology. He deals with temporal organisation (where he uses the relation between narrated time and narrating time to decide temporal order, duration, and frequency), characterisation, focalisation, speech and thought representation (with an interesting take on the visual means to suggest the simultaneity of two perspectives present in free indirect speech), and narration. In all of these, he changes, adapts and sometimes supplants the structuralist concepts to adequately study the mix of word and image that distinguishes comics. Markku Eskelinen's *Cybertext Poetics: The Critical Landscape of New Media Literary Theory* (2012) starts from Genettean narratology and presents an advanced ludology to study digital games and cybertext.

Most often, however, contemporary narratologies develop their own vocabulary and syntax. The broader their scope, the smaller their reliance on classical terminology. Sometimes they reduce the structuralist framework to a bare minimum or leave it out altogether. That in itself is not a bad thing, but it may complicate the communication between the various forms of contemporary narratology.

Tricky Taxonomies

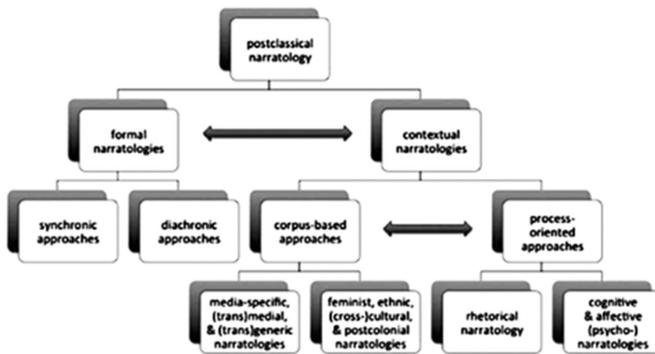
To gain some form of overview and to find some sort of system in the diversity of contemporary narratologies, many proposals have been made. Ansgar and Vera Nünning classified the multitude of approaches according to eight disciplines: contextual and thematic theories (including feminist and postcolonial narratology), transgeneric and intermedial narratology (including film studies and cybernarratology), pragmatic approaches (comprising rhetorical and ethical narratology), cognitive and reader-oriented studies, poststructural and postmodern types, linguistic contributions, and philosophical narratologies. The final category labelled "other interdisciplinary narrative theories" included anthropological and psychoanalytical narratology, and showed that a perfect systematisation was not really feasible¹⁵.

It is not just that there are so many postclassical approaches, it is also that they change over time. Jan Alber and Monika Fludernik proposed to distinguish between a first stage of postclassical narratology, characterised by "multiplicities, interdisciplinarity, transmedialities", and a second phase, displaying "consolidation and continued diversification"¹⁶. In 2012 Roy Sommer gave an insightful overview of existing taxonomies and proposed a new one¹⁷:

¹⁵ Ansgar Nünning and Vera Nünning, "Von der strukturalistischen Narratologie zur 'postklassischen' Erzähltheorie: Ein Überblick über neue Ansätze und Entwicklungstendenzen", in: *Neue Ansätze in der Erzähltheorie*, ed. A. Nünning and V. Nünning, Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier 2002, pp. 10–13.

¹⁶ Jan Alber and Monika Fludernik, "Introduction", in: *Postclassical Narratology: Approaches and Analyses*, ed. J. Alber and M. Fludernik, Columbus: Ohio State University Press 2010, p. 15.

¹⁷ Sommer, op. cit., p. 153.



The arrows indicate that there is a constant interaction between formal and contextual approaches (on level one), as well as between corpus-based and process-oriented studies. This exchange means that in reality, the various disciplines overlap. It is not just that a combination of, for instance, cognitive and transgeneric narratology is feasible, the mix is part and parcel of the approach itself, from the very outset.

This has led Dinnen and Warhol in their 2018 volume to embrace the overlap and do away with the traditional attempt to draw clear boundaries. They propose six categories to order and organise the contributions and they immediately add that each part contains “essays that could well have appeared in another section. This overlap is intentional and the dividing rubric is merely pragmatic, as we acknowledge the integration of concepts and arguments within narrative theoretical inquiry today”¹⁸. Here are the categories: ‘Mind-Centred and Cognitive Approaches’, ‘Situated Narrative Theories (including feminist, queer and postcolonial studies)’, ‘Theories of Digital Narrative’, ‘Theories of Television, Comics, and Graphic Narrative’, ‘Anti-Mimetic Narrative Theories’ (consisting of the unnatural approach which has gained immense popularity in the wake of Brian Richardson’s studies), and finally ‘Philosophical Approaches to Narrative’. Just like with Nünning’s early taxonomy, the final category is a bit of a mixture, which presents widely diverging texts, such as Mark Currie’s diachronic and interdisciplinary overview of the concept ‘contingency’, James Phelan’s rhetorical analysis of (non)fictionality and Ruth Ronen’s study of “The story of the law”. A specialised philosophical approach to narrative, such as the one advocated by Peter Lamarque, is missing¹⁹. Not that this matters; it is merely indicative of the looseness with which labels are used nowadays to systematise the vast array of postclassical narratologies²⁰.

¹⁸ Dinnen and Worhol, op. cit., p. 3.

¹⁹ See for instance Peter Lamarque, *The Opacity of Narrative*, London and New York: Rowman & Littlefield International 2014.

²⁰ Likewise, the collection of postclassical approaches proposed by Sylvie Patron limits itself to a very short summary of taxonomies and does not try to come up with an alternative: *Introduction à la narratologie postclassique: Les nouvelles directions de la recherche sur le récit*, ed. S. Patron, Villeneuve d’Asq: Presses universitaires du Septentrion 2018, pp. 11–19.

Leaving aside the issue of taxonomy, one might try to characterise the postclassical approaches by zooming in on the things they seem to share. Whereas classical narratology tends to limit itself to the text, postclassical studies embrace the context. The context may take all kinds of forms. It may be oriented toward the agents involved in the narrative communication, thereby re-introducing the subject and the individual. This person may be situated within the narrative communication, e.g. in rhetorical narratology which reintroduces the (real and/ or implied) author into the field of study and also looks at the reader, who is supposed to follow the directions from the author. But postclassical analyses may also look at characters as if they were real persons. They may even study real persons from a narrative perspective, as we have seen with the conversational analysis proposed by Shuman and Young.

The context need not be restricted to the micro-level of the individual (as a communicative agent or a real human being). It may also involve the macro-level of social class, gender, cultural stereotypes, and prevailing ideologies. This attention for context does not necessarily eclipse the text. On the contrary, it may draw attention to certain texts and aspects that were hitherto left unstudied. For instance, feminist and queer narratology may address texts that highlight gender issues and may reveal those issues in texts that were thought of as being neutral in this respect. Based on the type of text and context under consideration, one might come up with four groups of postclassical approaches corresponding to an ever-widening contextualisation. The expansion moves from text to communicative context, to sociocultural context and finally to everyday narration.

Broadening the Text

The first set of approaches, which broadens the conception of narrative text, includes intermedial studies, diachronic narratology, and theories that regard the text as a world (possible world, storyworld). Intermedial studies expand the classical notion of narrative text and include not only other genres than narrative prose, but also other media than printed texts. Under this heading one may encounter narratologies studying poetry²¹, film²², audiotexts (such as radio plays and audiodrama)²³, but more prominently all narrative studies of (new) media such as comics²⁴, graphic novels²⁵, and cybertexts²⁶.

²¹ Peter Hühn and Jens Kiefer, *The Narratological Analysis of Lyric Poetry: Studies in English Poetry from the 16th till the 20th Century*, Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter 2005.

²² Peter Verstraten, *Film Narratology*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press 2009.

²³ *Audionarratology: Interfaces of Sound and Narrative*, ed. J. Mildorf and T. Kinzel, Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter 2016.

²⁴ Thierry Groensteen, *The System of Comics*, Jackson MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2007.

²⁵ Jan Baetens and Hugo Frey, *The Graphic Novel: An Introduction*, New York: Cambridge University Press 2015.

²⁶ Espen J. Aarseth, *Cybertext: Perspectives on Ergodic Literature*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997. See also Markku Eskalinen, *Cybertext Poetics: The Critical Landscape of New Media Literary Theory*, London/New York: Continuum 2012.

These theories not only focus on the concepts and the analyses of genres and media, but also on their manifold interactions, studied under the overall term of “intermediality”²⁷.

As we said, these types of narrative studies still tend to make use of classical, structuralist terminology. To assess the usability of those terms for the study of media and intermediality, Ryan and Thon propose a continuum. On the left side, they situate notions that are “medium free” (or transmedial), such as setting. On the right side, one can find “medium-specific concepts,” such as the gutter, referring to the empty space between panels in comics. In between there are concepts which are “transmedially valid yet not medium-free”. Those need extensive revision if they are to be transferred from one domain (say classical narrative studies of fiction) to another (say film studies). Ryan and Thon mention “interactivity” as an example, which is different in all media and seemingly absent from others (such as traditional fiction)²⁸.

Diachronic narratology, the second member of the first group, does not broaden the genre or the medium but the time of the narrative text under scrutiny (including for instance narratives before the rise of the novel)²⁹ and of the narratological tool box. For instance, the idea of focalisation or of unreliable narration can be studied from a historical perspective. In a prominent essay³⁰, Fludernik attributes the new interest in diachrony to three factors: the rise of feminist narratology³¹, which often insists on the importance of context for the analysis of narrative; renewed work (initiated by Michael McKeon)³² on the origins of the novel, which showed how fictional and non-fictional texts in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries connected with each other and thus prepared the ground for the genre; and the application (inspired by Hayden White)³³ of the toolkit to historiographical texts³⁴. Fludernik’s *Towards a ‘Natural’ Narratology* of 1996 is itself an early example of the new diachronic narratology in that it retells the history of narrative fiction from Middle English prose to postmodernism through the notion of ‘experientiality’³⁵. The impact of this book on the field of narratology has also contributed to the new historicising trend.

²⁷ *Storyworlds across Media: Toward a Media-conscious Narratology*, ed. M.-L. Ryan and J.-N. Thon, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press 2014. Jan-Noël Thon, *Transmedial Narratology and Contemporary Media Culture*, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press 2016.

²⁸ Marie-Laure Ryan and Jan-Noël Thon, “Storyworlds across Media: Introduction”, in: *Storyworlds across Media*, op. cit., p. 4.

²⁹ See for instance Irene J.F. de Jong, *Narrators and Focalizers: The Presentation of the Story in the Iliad*. London: Bristol Classical Press 2004. And Eva von Contzen, “Why We Need a Medieval Narratology: A Manifesto”, *DIEGESIS* 2014, vol. 3, no. 2, pp. 1–21.

³⁰ Monika Fludernik, “The Diachronization of Narratology”, *Narrative* 2003, vol. 11, no. 3, pp. 331–348.

³¹ See the section on feminist and queer narratology in this chapter. For an illustration of the links between feminist and diachronic narratology, see Susan Lanser, “Sapphic Dialogics: Historical Narratology and the Sexuality of Form”, in: *Postclassical Narratology*, op. cit., pp. 186–205.

³² Michael McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel, 1600–1740*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press 1987.

³³ White, op. cit.

³⁴ Fludernik, “The Diachronization...”, op. cit., pp. 331–332.

³⁵ Monika Fludernik, *Towards a ‘Natural’ Narratology*, London and New York: Routledge 1996.

The third and final example of postclassical narratologies broadening the text is made up of studies which look at the text in terms of fictional and possible worlds. Ruth Ronen³⁶, Thomas Pavel³⁷, Lubomir Doležel³⁸, and Marie-Laure Ryan³⁹ have all pointed out the usefulness of the possible world concept for narrative theory. The idea of the storyworld has gained wide circulation in postclassical narratologies too. To David Herman, storyworld is not a given universe consisting of characters, situations and events; it is a readerly construction, involving “mental models of who did what to and with whom, when, where, why, and in what fashion in the world to which the recipients relocate [...] as they work to comprehend a narrative”⁴⁰. That leads to the second group of postclassical studies, focusing on the processing of narratives.

Broadening the Communicative Context

The second group of postclassical theories study the text as one aspect of the communicative process. In rhetorical narratology, exemplified by the work of James Phelan and Peter Rabinowitz, the text is studied as the intentional message produced by an implied author and to be decoded respectfully by the intended reader, or the “authorial audience” as Rabinowitz would have it⁴¹. Phelan and Rabinowitz define narrative “as a purposive communication of a certain kind from one person (or group of persons) to one or more others. More specifically, our default starting point is the following skeletal definition: *Narrative is somebody telling somebody else, on some occasion, and for some purposes, that something happened to someone or something*”⁴². This view expands the intratextual communication between narrator and narratee to the contextual communication between an (implied) author and a reader⁴³.

The role of the reader becomes much more important in cognitive studies, which no longer decree a subservient attitude of the reader towards the implied author,

³⁶ Ruth Ronen, *Possible Worlds in Literary Theory*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1994.

³⁷ Thomas Pavel’s most important work in this area is *Fictional Worlds*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1986.

³⁸ See for example Doležel’s “Narrative Modalities”, *Journal of Literary Semantics* 1976, vol. 5, no. 1, pp. 5–15 and “Extensional and Intensional Narrative Worlds”, *Poetics* 1979, vol. 8, no. 1, pp. 193–212. A more recent and encompassing treatment is *Heterocosmica: Fiction and Possible Worlds*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press 1998.

³⁹ See especially Marie-Laure Ryan, *Possible Worlds, Artificial Intelligence, and Narrative Theory*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press 1992.

⁴⁰ David Herman, *Story Logic: Problems and Possibilities of Narrative*, Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press 2004, p. 5.

⁴¹ “Authors are forced to guess; they design their books rhetorically for some more or less specific hypothetical audience, which I call the authorial audience. Artistic choices are based upon these assumptions—conscious or unconscious—about readers, and to a certain extent, artistic success depends upon their shrewdness, on the degree to which actual and authorial audience overlap”. (Peter J. Rabinowitz, *Before Reading: Narrative Conventions and the Politics of Interpretation*, Columbus: Ohio State University Press 1998, p. 21.)

⁴² James Phelan and Peter J. Rabinowitz, “Narrative as Rhetoric”, in: *Narrative Theory: Core Concepts and Critical Debates*, ed. D. Herman, J. Phelan, P.J. Rabinowitz, B. Richardson, and R. Warhol, Columbus: Ohio State University Press 2012, pp. 3–8.

⁴³ We discuss the problematic nature of this expansion in Luc Herman and Bart Vervaeck, “The Implied Author: A Secular Excommunication”, *Style* 2011, vol. 45, no. 1, pp. 11–28.

but which study the dialectics between the cognitivist makeup of the reader and the textual elements in terms of bottom-up and top-down processing. Within this general outline, an ever-increasing number of cognitive narratologies have been developed, starting with the early work on frames and scripts⁴⁴, proceeding to the schematic representations of the mental processing involved in reading narratives⁴⁵. and recently leading up to approaches which, influenced by affect and corporeal theories, broaden cognitive processing to embodiment⁴⁶.

Broadening the Cultural Context

The third group consists of narratologies that study the text in terms of a still wider context. Instead of restricting itself to the traditional communicative process and agents (the sender, the message, and the receiver), these theories explicitly deal with the role of the sociocultural context and lay bare the ideological dimension involved in the creation and the processing of narrative.

A first instance of this is to be found in narrative ethics, a general term referring to all kinds of studies that point to the value system any narrative text inevitably constructs. Some of these approaches elaborate the structuralist division of the text (in story, narrative and narration) by adding a fourth level, involving the reader's and possibly the author's conceptualization of good and bad. Examples of this can be found with Vincent Jouve⁴⁷ and Adam Zachary Newton⁴⁸. From a rhetorical and metahermeneutical perspective, Liesbeth Korthals-Altes raises similar issues⁴⁹.

A second form of narratology focusing on cultural contexts would be the "situated" narratologies Dinnen and Warhol mention: feminist, queer,⁵⁰ and postcolonial studies⁵¹ find a place here. Typically, these narratologies tend to be critical of the texts and contexts they study. As Robyn Warhol says, "Feminist theory asserts that all literary critical approaches are political but that some are more honest about their politics than others.

⁴⁴ Manfred Jahn, "Frames, Preferences, and the Reading of Third-person Narratives: Towards a Cognitive Narratology", *Poetics Today* 1997, vol. 18, no. 4, pp. 441–468. David Herman, "Scripts, Sequences, and Stories: Elements of a Postclassical Narratology", *PMLA* 1997, vol. 112, pp. 1046–1059.

⁴⁵ An exemplary illustration of this in the field of character analysis can be found in Ralf Schneider, "Toward a Cognitive Theory of Literary Character: The Dynamics of Mental-model Construction", *Style* 2001, vol. 35, no. 4, pp. 607–40; Ralf Schneider, "The Cognitive Theory of Character Reception: An Updated Proposal", *Anglistik* 2013, vol. 24, no. 2, pp. 117–134.

⁴⁶ See Karin Kukkonen and Marco Caracciolo, "Introduction: What Is the 'Second Generation'?", *Style* 2014, vol. 48, no. 3, pp. 261–274.

⁴⁷ Vincent Jouve, *Poétique des valeurs*. Paris: PUF 2001.

⁴⁸ Adam Zachary Newton, *Narrative Ethics*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1995.

⁴⁹ Liesbeth Korthals Altes, *Ethos and Narrative Interpretation: The Negotiation of Values in Fiction*, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press 2014.

⁵⁰ *Narrative Theory Unbound: Queer and Feminist Interventions*, ed. R. Warhol and S.S. Lanser, Columbus: Ohio State University Press 2015.

⁵¹ Gerald Prince, "On a Postcolonial Narratology", in: *A Companion to Narrative Theory*, ed. James Phelan and Peter J. Rabinowitz, Wiley-Blackwell 2005, pp. 372–381. Sue J. Kim, "Decolonizing Narrative Theory", *Journal of Narrative Theory* 2012, vol. 42, no. 3, pp. 233–247.

[...] Narrative values, aesthetic values, political values: from where I stand, they all come down to the same thing"⁵².

A final form can be described as cultural narratology. In its most general form, it studies the interaction between a culture's narrative templates and the use made of it in the text at hand. Narratives are seen as transformations of cultural elements, including ideas, values, stereotypes, and hierarchies. From a psychological perspective, this transformation was studied by Jerome Bruner, whom we mentioned earlier⁵³. One of the most influential contributors to cultural narratology is Ansgar Nünning, who has been working in this field for some three decades now⁵⁴.

Life as Narrative

In the past years, the role of "storytelling" in everyday life has been studied at great length. Essential to this perspective are notions such as intention, goal, discussion, and balance. It seems that telling stories is a conscious and goal-directed effort to order life and to balance relations with others and with reality. Whatever aspect of the balancing act is foregrounded, storytelling always zooms in on the constitutive role of narrative in everyday life, both on a small and a large scale. Narrative is never seen as a mere vehicle; it is shown to be creative and performative. Examples of small-scale analyses can be found in psychologically—and quite often therapeutically-oriented narrative studies of the self and others⁵⁵. Examples of macro-approaches are provided by narrative studies of climate change⁵⁶, advertising, political campaigns, and so on. This second type has been highlighted in the popular study *Storytelling: Bewitching the Modern Mind* by Christian Salmon. He dissects western capitalist economics and politics, showing that "the brand is a story"⁵⁷, that management depends upon storytelling, that military battles are fought in narrative terms too, and that presidential campaigns cannot succeed without the right type of storytelling.

⁵² Warhol in: *Core Concepts*, op. cit., p. 168.

⁵³ See for instance Jerome Bruner, *Acts of Meaning*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press 1990.

⁵⁴ Ansgar Nünning, "Towards a Cultural and Historical Narratology: A Survey of Diachronic Approaches, Concepts, and Research Projects", in: *Anglistentag 1999 Mainz: Proceedings*, ed. B. Reitz and S. Rieuwerts, Trier: WVT 2000, pp. 345–373; "Where Historiographic Metafiction and Narratology Meet: Towards an Applied Cultural Narratology", *Style* 2004, vol. 38, no. 3, pp. 352–357; and "Surveying Contextualist and Cultural Narratologies: Towards an Outline of Approaches, Concepts and Potentials", in: *Narratology in the Age of Cross-Disciplinary Narrative Research*, ed. S. Heinen and R. Sommer, Berlin: De Gruyter 2009, pp. 48–70. For an overview of the field, see Luc Herman and Bart Vervaeck, "A Theory of Narrative in Culture", *Poetics Today* 2017, vol. 38, no. 4, pp. 605–634.

⁵⁵ For an overview of theories on narrative identity formation, see Michael Bamberg, "Identity and Narration", in: *Handbook of Narratology*, ed. P. Hühn et al., Berlin: De Gruyter 2009, pp. 241–252. The performative aspects are underlined in Kristin M. Langellier and Eric E. Peterson, *Storytelling in Daily Life: Performing Narrative*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press 2004. For an exemplary work on narrative therapy, see Martin Payne, *Narrative Therapy: An introduction for Counsellors*, 2nd ed., London: Sage 2006.

⁵⁶ Annika Arnold, *Climate Change and Storytelling: Narratives and Cultural Meaning in Environmental Communication*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2018.

⁵⁷ Christian Salmon, *Storytelling: Bewitching the Modern Mind*, trans. D. Macey, London/New York: Verso 2010, pp. 21–23.

Natural narratology, proposed by Monika Fludernik in 1996, also starts from the continuity between fictional narrative and everyday, oral storytelling. Her framework is a mixture of at least three traditions. The first one is “discourse analysis in the Labovian tradition,” and more specifically Labov’s work on “natural narratives”, that is “unelicited conversational storytelling”⁵⁸. A second source of inspiration is a brand of (Austrian) cognitive linguistics which focuses on embodiment and experience as crucial ways to make sense of the world, including narratives⁵⁹. The final reference is to Jonathan Culler’s “naturalization”, a term he introduced in 1975 “to account for readers’ interpretative strategies when confronting textual or semantic inconsistencies”⁶⁰. According to Fludernik, readers try to come to terms with strange and deviant textual elements by relying on various (cognitive) frames, ranging from everyday life experiences to knowledge about genre and typical plots.

Fludernik’s stress on the ways in which readers try to reduce the strangeness of a narrative, led some narratologists to underscore and defend the opposite, namely the respect for what cannot be grasped by any theory or frame. Brian Richardson had been studying the strange and the ungraspable aspects of (literary) narratives since 2000⁶¹, and in 2010 he teamed up with Jan Alber, Stefan Iversen, and Henrik Skov Nielsen to position “unnatural narratology” as a complement to natural narratology. In their view, classical and natural narratology are guilty of “mimetic reductionism”⁶². They “have a clear mimetic bias and take ordinary realist texts or ‘natural’ narratives as being prototypical manifestations of narrative. [...] What we want to highlight by means of the notion of the unnatural is the fact that narratives are also full of unnatural elements. Many narratives defy, flaunt, mock, play, and experiment with some (or all) of these core assumptions about narrative”⁶³. Alber and his colleagues point to three forms of unnaturalness, three domains in which narratives may defy mimetic conventions: unnatural storyworlds (in which impossible things happen), unnatural minds (e.g., a character that knows he is being narrated by someone else, or an omniscient character), and unnatural acts of narration (e.g., Poe’s “The Tell-tale Heart,” in which the heart of a dead man tells a tale)⁶⁴.

⁵⁸ Fludernik, *Towards ...*, op. cit., p. XII. The most important Labovian source for Fludernik is the study *Language in the Inner City: Studies in the Black English Vernacular*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press 1972.

⁵⁹ “In recent years new developments in linguistics have introduced the term ‘natural’ to designate aspects of language which appear to be regulated or motivated by cognitive parameters based on man’s experience of embodiedness in a real-world context. The term features as a label in the Austrian linguistic school of *Natürlichkeitstheorie* (‘theory of naturalness’)” (Fludernik, *Towards ...*, op. cit., p. 17).

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

⁶¹ See Brian Richardson, *Unnatural Voices: Extreme Narration in Modern and Contemporary Fiction*, Columbus: Ohio State University Press 2006.

⁶² Jan Alber et al., “Unnatural Narratives, Unnatural Narratology: Beyond Mimetic Models”, *Narrative* 2010, vol. 18, no. 2, p. 115.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 114.

⁶⁴ Postmodern narratology, proposed by Andrew Gibson (*Towards a Postmodern Theory of Narrative*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 1996) and Mark Currie (*Postmodern Narrative Theory*, London: Macmillan 1998) had a similar interest in narratives that could not be naturalised. These attempts gradually submerged into unnatural narratology.

This short exposé of present-day narrative theories is not exhaustive. Neither is it free of the overlap embraced by Dinnen and Warhol. For example, ethics is not only essential to the third group of approaches focusing on the cultural context, it is also one of the fundamental issues in rhetorical narratology, which we have placed in the second group. Likewise, fictionality is an issue that takes central place in the communicative and rhetorical approach, but it can also be grasped from the perspective of possible worlds and cognitive dynamics. Cultural narratology inevitably deals with stereotypes, which also play a role in the study of narrative processing. There is no escape: as narratology has come to tackle ever wider subjects from ever more interdisciplinary perspectives, it has branched out and become so multifaceted that its diverse disciplines can no longer be neatly separated. Shall we rejoice about this rather than complain about it? Interdisciplinary work on narrative may be difficult, but it is definitely worth a shot.

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