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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 Talking about the "empire" of narratology in today's context will certainly be seen as a heresy or an anachronism for a field of research that enjoyed its heyday during the structuralist movement, broadly between 1965 and 1975. Since then, narratology appears to have receded into the limbo reserved for academic fads, becoming an abandoned territory that is visited only as part of a history cruise down the river of past ideas. Yes, we can still see a few Greimasians here and there, clinging to their semiotic rafts, and the terminology of Gérard Genette is still widely used in literary studies, even though the author himself has since turned to other horizons since the beginning of the 1980s. Nevertheless, the fashion has passed. In France, theses on the theory of narratology have becoming increasingly rare, dwindling virtually to the point of non-existence. Moreover, it is commonly held that very few questions of interest remain to be explored in this area. Any thesis supervisor should have scruples about shunting doctoral students into the sidings of narratology, since it seems clear that an academic institution already in crisis can offer even fewer outlets to students with this type of profile. Furthermore, this situation is not unique to France. James Phelan, editor of the journal *Narrative* and one of the USA's most influential narratologists, also deplores the institutional weakness of narrative theory (*Diegesis*, 2015: 86):

> "Why isn't narrative theory more central to the study of the humanities in North America and especially in the United States? This question is part-lament, part-invitation to reflect on the field and its relation to the structure of the academy in

> North America. Although narrative theory has productively expanded its scope beyond literary narrative, its most plausible location in the college and graduate school curriculum is still in literature departments. And literature departments remain tied to the paradigm of literary history as the primary principle for organizing knowledge. From the perspective of that paradigm, narrative theory is a luxury or an extra rather than part of the discipline's core. No English Department would go without a specialist in modernism, but lots of them go without a narrative theorist. As the humanities struggle, it becomes harder for narrative theory to keep let alone expand its place in literature departments. As perhaps is already evident, this problem is far easier to diagnose than to solve, so I will just say that those of us in the academy in North America should be looking for solutions."

2 More problematic still, the main accomplishment of narratology, i.e. the famed "toolbox" that it supplied for literary studies and subsequently for other disciplines, today appears to be brought into question for its excessive formalism. For its critics, narratological analysis confines commentary to an objective description of narrative structures, neglecting an analysis of their functions and of the meaning of the text in its biographical, historical or cultural context, and without discussing any of the aspects highlighted by the cognitive and ethical approaches that are so popular today: the use of fiction, the immersive experience in the narrated world, the empathy felt for characters, the ethical assessment of their actions, etc. Even one of the founding fathers of narratology said that "the analysis of these *means* of access cannot be a substitute for the analysis of meaning, which is the *purpose*". (Todorov, 2007: 23). So we apparently have an outdated approach and a question that has been settled: if narratology still has a territory, it can only be an outbuilding, a hospice, or the back of a cupboard in the departments of literature, which are themselves in the process of dying. We have drifted a long way from the empire that seemed within our reach in the 1960s.

The Empire of Narratology

3 However, although we may doubt the existence of an *empire of narratology, it seems difficult to ignore the extent* of the territory occupied by its subject: the narrative. We are still far from having left behind what English speakers refer to as the "narrative turn". Some twenty years ago, Martin Kreiswirth (1995: 629) described the turn in these terms:

> "Everyone aware of the current intellectual scene has probably noticed, there has recently been a virtual explosion of interest in narrative and in theorizing about narrative; and it has been detonated from a remarkable diversity of sites, both within and without the walls of academia. Along with progressively more sophisticated and wide-ranging studies of narrative texts — historiographic, literary, cinematic, psychoanalytic — we find a burgeoning development of disciplinary appropriations or mediations: narrative and psychology, narrative and economics, narrative and experimental science, narrative and law, narrative and education, narrative and philosophy, narrative and ethnography, and so on, as well as numerous, newly negotiated cross-disciplinary approaches".

4 From the mid-1980s, another idea began to take hold, promoted primarily by intellectuals such as Paul Ricœur (1984-1988), Peter Brooks (1984), Hayden White (1987), Carlo Ginzburg (1986) and Jerome Bruner (1991). This idea was that our identities, our relation to time, to society and to our collective or individual history, are all the product of a form of narrative construction, what Paul Ricœur referred to,

perhaps incorrectly, as an "emplotment", whose role is to *configure* our experiences or the events of the past. Jerome Bruner (1991: 4-5) claims that "we organize our experience and memory of human happenings mainly in the form of narrative". He therefore concludes that "narrative is a form not only of representing but of constituting reality". (*ibid.*).

5 This simple idea had major repercussions in the fields of human and social sciences. This is reflected in the return to favor of narrative forms in the fields of historiography (Carrard, 2013) and sociology (Bertaux, 1997), as well as in the development of the study of "media narratives" (Lits, 2012), "life stories"[1] in adult training, "narrative approaches" in[2] therapeutic procedures and "language biographies"[3] in language didactics, to mention only the trends with which I am most familiar in this *narrativist wave*.

6 Far from receding, the wave has continued to grow in recent years, through the recognition of the rhetorical powers of the stories that are told, particularly in the fields of marketing and political communication. On looking behind the rather worrying label of "storytelling", we suddenly became aware of an onslaught of narrative forms, not only in the recreational media of the society of the spectacle and in scientific, legal, medical and educational practices, but also in the communication of politicians and companies who are seeking in any way possible (narrative in this case) to shape our behavior[4]. Narrative imperialism then takes on a far more worrying connotation, becoming invasive or oppressive, and calling for various forms of resistance. Some see this narrativist drift as incompatible with the rational foundations of our democratic societies (Salmon, 2007); others see in literature a virtuous form of narration, which forms a rampart against the warped practices of political or commercial storytelling[5]; others again are calling for active resistance by means of counter-narratives in the political field. With respect to this last trend, Yves Citton (2010: 171) calls upon left-wing citizens to start "telling inspiring stories" once again.

7 In short, for researchers who have a tendency to merge a pro-narrativist conception with constructivist epistemology (often reduced to relativism), our identities are unquestionably the product of narrative mediation, and our relation to the world depends on an *emplotment* in which reality is transformed from its shapeless and mute beginnings, controlled by a temporal flow without structure or meaning. In this respect, narrative mediation is said to correspond to a semantic enrichment of experience and a domestication of temporal issues, with its inevitable share of transformations, breakups and bereavements to be overcome[6]. In terms of rhetorical approaches, we accept the hypothesis whereby the stories we tell are generally well received by the public, giving rise to a torrent of emotions and conditioning future actions through simulated experiences that would serve as behavioral models, by virtue of a process of analogical transfer[7].

8 This expansion of narrativity can therefore be explained primarily by the recognition, from a pragmatic standpoint, of the impact of narrative on reality. Narrative has the power to convince the addressee or to condition their behavior (Plato talked about the "contamination" of the audience through *pathos*). However, we can also recognize its ability to build identities and to configure reality by enriching its meaning. It goes without saying that these functions are contradictory to some extent: rhetorical emotion appears to be far removed from the semantic enrichment linked to the configuration of reality, showing that there are probably different types of storytelling,

from both a functional and formal standpoint.[8]. However, we cannot ignore the ethical ambivalence of the use of narrative in society: viewed as *virtuous* when confined to aesthetic, didactic or therapeutic usage and *vile* for political or commercial use, at least if we adopt the axiological orientation of the 'humanities'.

From omnipresent narrative to *homo fabulator*

9 We have never talked so much about narrative in our societies and we have never paid so much attention to its powers, sometimes endowing it with exaggerated virtues or vices, as part of a critical approach that only too often seems to be naive or to play into conspiracy theories. Moreover, we can see a certain degree of historical short-sightedness in referring to this wave as being new to modern society, whereas in reality, narrative has been used for rhetorical, historiographical or therapeutic purposes since the dawn of time. Plato's criticisms of *mimesis* in the political field, Aristotle's thoughts on the therapeutic effects of *catharsis* or the recognition of the power of *narratio* in classical rhetoric show that the wide-ranging social or political use of narrative probably dates back to the time when our species became capable of symbolic representation. So, although the narrative wave is clearly present in contemporary society, it is visible first and foremost in a renewed interest for narrative phenomena, extending well beyond the restricted field of aesthetics. What is new is therefore the awareness of the *family resemblance* between a variety of narrative uses and forms that were formerly compartmentalized into disciplinary fields and by modern society's hermetic sealing-off of medical, legal, educational, political, commercial, media fields, etc. Nevertheless, the recognition of the transmedial, transhistoric and transcultural nature of narrative, which was eminently clear to the first narratologists, has led to what we are forced to call a form of narrative anthropology, encouraging some researchers to describe us as *homo narrans* or *homo fabulator* (Molino, Lafhail-Molino, 2003; Rabatel, 2009).

10 The heart of narrativity is said be to be the ability of humans to use their imaginations to transport themselves to places, times and experiences other than those relating to the direct experience of real life[9]. This aptitude appears to refer to what some cognitivists – carrying on the work of Karl Bühler (1934) on *deixis am phantasma* – have called the "deictic shift"[10], i.e. the cognitive ability to project oneself, from "me-here-now" to "him/her-there-then". Taking a phylogenetic standpoint, Carlo Ginzburg (1986: 243) suggested that the phenomenon could have cynegetic origins. "Hunters are believed to have been the first people to "tell stories" since they were the only people able to read a coherent sequence of events into the mute (if not imperceptible) traces left by their prey". Taking an ontogenetic standpoint, Harald Weinrich (1964: 49), underlined the educational value of stories to teach children about the decentering of self:

> "Through stories, children familiarize themselves with the narrated world. They open their minds to the existence of a universe that is different to their normal environment, where their concerns are no longer only to eat, sleep, play or obey. Through stories, they learn to participate in a world other than the environment they live in. This learning process, which begins with stories, will continue through all the different genres of narrative literature. This is essential learning since it is about freedom. The lesson taught by stories continues to hold true in adulthood and for all other stories: children learn to free themselves from the world of

> immediate constraints and to decenter themselves: just for a moment, the prince or the miller's young son relegates the child's self to the background".

11 More recently, a link was established between this mental projection into an imaginary world (not necessarily fictional since it may reflect past events or a true story) and what neuro-cognitivists refer to as "mirror-neurons" whose imitative function makes empathy possible[11]. We should nevertheless specify the need for a clear distinction between cultural productions encouraging the audience to project their imaginations, be it in a verbal, audiovisual, mimo-gestual or other way, and the cognitive skills behind them. We can remember an event, put ourselves in the place of others, dream or daydream, but it would be incorrect in this case to talk about "narrative". As underlined by the philosopher Gregory Currie (2010: xvii), a narrative is a cultural artefact produced intentionally for a given purpose, which is very different from the cognitive skills required to produce or analyze this artefact. He therefore concludes that "no life is a narrative, since no life is a representational artefact" (*ibid.*: 23). He adds that it is also important to make a clear distinction between narrative and other forms of representation, since not all cultural artefacts tell stories.[12]. Moreover, some narratologists have come out in support of the rare "anti-narrativists" who, like Galen Strawson (2012), say that our identities are not necessarily narratives, and that it would not necessarily be a good thing for them to become so. With reference to this point, James Phelan (2005: 206) sees the belief in the omnipresence of narrative as a form of *imperialism*, that is not without danger, not only for narrative theorists but also for all the disciplines concerned by this "narrative turn":

> "The thesis [of the narrative identity] is a noteworthy phenomenon within the broader narrative turn because it is an instance of what I call "narrative imperialism," the impulse by students of narrative to claim more and more territory, more and more power for our object of study and our ways of studying it. This expansionist impulse is natural—it follows from our enthusiasm for our object —and it is often well-founded: in many cases, narrative and narrative theory help enrich the new territory. But, like other colonizing projects, narrative imperialism can have negative consequences both for the colonized and the colonizer. Narrative imperialism can lead us to devalue existing insights from the colonized disciplines. It can stretch the concept of narrative to the point that we lose sight of what is distinctive about it. And it can lead us to oversimplify some of the phenomena it seeks to explain".

Against a purely instrumental use of narratology

12 Following this brief overview of the status of contemporary narratology in the context of the "narrative turn", I would now like to return to the astonishing contrast between the significant scale of the "narrative turn" and the relatively derisive space occupied by "narrative theory" in academic institutions. This apparently contradictory situation can be explained to some extent by the fact that the researchers currently studying narrative, or at least those who include narrative approaches in their institutional practices, are very rarely 'narratologists'. They are, for example, psychologists, legal experts, historians, sociologists, educational specialists, doctors, or specialists in marketing, media or communication, who, in most cases, have acquired the basics of narratology along the way. Too often, this knowledge is limited to the reading of fragments from the monumental and incredibly complex work[13] of Paul Ricœur, or from a few classics of structuralist narratology (Roland Barthes, Algirdas Julien

Greimas, Gérard Genette), or even their post-structuralist, post-modern or linguistic heirs (Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleter, Jean-François Leotard, Jean-Michel Adam). In the worst cases, they take imported and often dated concepts as stabilized terminology, applying them to their objects in almost total ignorance of the work undertaken in the field of narrative theory over the past thirty years.

13 Two years ago, at the *Narrative Matters* conference (Paris, 23-27 June 2014) on the theme of 'Narrative and Knowledge', I was very surprised to see that only a small number of papers concerned narrative theory. This trend can also be observed in the bastions of narratology, namely the conferences hosted by the European Narratology Network (ENN) and the International Society for the Study of Narrative (ISSN). In short, everybody is working with narrative or talking about it, but people rarely listen to the real theoreticians of this specific form of communication. In the case of ordinary users, it is generally agreed that the theory of narrative is already established, and that its concepts can be applied in a broad range of fields as a way to *do something else*.

14 Moreover, this attitude is partly encouraged by narratologists themselves, since they are ready to place their skills at the service of other disciplines, offering introductions to the theory of narrative along with popularized manuals. This year's annual ISSN conference included a panel entitled "*Getting our theories straight*[14]". In one of the most controversial lectures, Paul Dawson criticized the trend of summing-up narratology as a "toolbox", enabling a form of distant reading, instead of pursuing more detailed knowledge of narrative phenomena. Without going quite as far, it seems to me that while it may be possible for the theory of narrative to continue serving other disciplines, it would be dangerous to consider it as a simple heuristic tool, since this would mean setting aside its nature as a changing concept and ignoring the epistemological and methodological debates that are continuing to take place in this field. In my most recent work (2017), I set out the need to facilitate the educational structuring of new narratological approaches for literary studies but, at the same time, I would encourage users of this theory to take account of the epistemological developments that could lead to a change in their practices. This is because a number of fundamental concepts no longer resemble, in their current form, the ideas standardized in text books. For example, it is largely irrelevant to use the concept of plot to describe the outline of the events making up the *fabula* or, alternatively, to explain how the author manages to set the plot by intriguing the reader, leading the latter to imagine the narrated world at a given point in its development (Baroni, 2007; 2017). This change of perspective has a direct impact on the way the notion of plot is used in text commentary; narratology is no longer used only to objectively describe the narrative structures, but also to discuss their functions in the interaction between the text and the reader. This is just one example among many others – such as the theory of the "optional narrator" (Patron, 2009) or the "textual construction of a point of view" (Rabatel, 2009) – of the way in which the theory of narrative could transform practices that instrumentalize the conceptual apparatus of narratology.

The accidental narratologist

15 Narratology can be instrumentalized, but it cannot be summed up in terms of a simple toolbox whose nature can be understood simply by reading a few classics[15]. Each researcher studying the phenomenon of narrativity should therefore seek to stay

abreast of the latest developments in the theory of narrative, even helping it to move forward, particularly in cases where the object being studied resists the concepts applied to it, thus adding to its interest. Fortunately, the French-speaking community has many researchers who are continuing to further our understanding of narrativity in its various forms, media-related or cultural, rather than simply basing their studies on standardized, simplified theory. Nevertheless, the public rarely perceives these theoreticians as real *narratologist*s, and they are themselves sometimes unwilling to lay claim to the title. In particular, we should highlight the significant input of many linguists who have contributed to the development of the theory of narrative as part of the science of language, including Jean-Michel Adam, Françoise Revaz, Alain Rabatel and Dominique Maingueneau. Moreover, John Pier (2011) claims that contemporary narrative in France has largely slipped into the field of discourse analysis. However, if we limit ourselves to this one development, then the picture is incomplete, as the topography of French-speaking narratology appears to be more complex. Alongside the many linguists and literary scholars who are continuing to study these issues[16], there are also philosophers and sociologists such as Jean-Marie Schaeffer and Olivier Caïra. The work of André Gaudreault and François Jost (1990), or of my colleague Alain Boillat (2007) in Lausanne, to mention just a few, also highlights the significant contribution made by film studies to the theory of audiovisual narrative. In Belgium, the studies of Jan Baetens and those relating to the activities of the Observatory for Media Narrative (ORM) at the Catholic University of Louvain also show the interest of approaches that look beyond the confines of literature, and even verbal language, to study variations in narrative in other media. This has been explained by Marc Lits (2012: 38). While pursuing the legacy of Paul Ricœur and structural narrative, the members of the ORM have never forgotten the need to continue their predecessors' efforts to theorize narration:

> "Since its founding just over twenty years ago, the Observatory for Media Narrative (ORM) has sought to theorize the concept of media narrative. At this time, the concept of the narrative was frequently found in structural theories of textual and discourse analysis as well as in textual linguistics, but was virtually non-existent in the field of media analysis and information and communication studies. Taking its inspiration from the work of Paul Ricœur (1983-1985) and the three volumes of *Time and Narrative* among other works, the ORM shaped the concept of media narrative and developed media narratology. [...] Two decades of research have highlighted processes relating to character development, the virtual narration of media supports, mediagenics (Marion, 1997), and the interactions between specific diegeses and journalistic genres or socio-economic contexts, such as in the case of news reports, photojournalism or, today, web documentaries.

16 It is not unusual to run into researchers from different disciplines at ENN or ISSN conferences, and their impact on contemporary narratology leaves little room for doubt even though, generally speaking, French-speaking studies count less than before on the globalized research scene, maybe in part as a result of their diverse institutional attachments. I will discuss this last point at the end of this article.

A problem of identity and institutions

17 It seems to me that the main problem of narratology is that it has been unable to establish itself permanently in the institutions of academia, owing to it being a relatively new field and because of its lineage. In other words: if narratology appears to

be moribund, then it is probably because we have a tendency to confuse it with a branch of literary theory, looking for the members of its congregation only in departments of literature, whereas in reality, they are spread out across a range of institutions. Moreover, if narratology is clearly not in great shape, at a time when we probably need its services more than ever today, this is mainly because the researchers who recognize the need to develop the theory of narrative (and not just to simply import a few fashionable concepts into their work) are too few and too widely dispersed. We therefore find ourselves with a problem of identification: would a linguist, a comparative researcher or a specialist in journalism with an interest in "narratology" accept being identified as "narratologists" or at least accept that one of the facets of their complex identities as researchers be tied to this discipline?

18 Unfortunately, in the academic field, we are used to adopting simple, monological identities, making it easy to classify each individual within existing institutions. The main aim of this classification is to occupy and defend a strategic position in a field of limited resources fraught with tensions and power struggles. To quote Dominique Maingueneau (2006: § 3), the term "discipline" can nevertheless be understood in two very different ways:

> "Academic institutions everywhere are split up into disciplines, corresponding more or less to a purely administrative breakdown (departments, faculties). As a result, academic disciplines are broadly consistent. Here, moreover, as in any other institution of a bureaucratic nature (the term is not used pejoratively), players are inevitably led to believe that this breakdown corresponds to an effective partitioning of reality, projecting into some transcendental realm the principles of the classification that structure their practices. Moreover, the clearly illusory nature of these categories is constantly being reinforced by the very people who criticize them: the fear of being annexed by another discipline tends to bind the members of a community together. [...] Yet we still need to be clear on what we mean by "discipline". Even if it is not always easy to establish a breakdown, we should start by making a distinction between disciplines in the *institutional* sense of the word, i.e. those that recognize the practices of the administration, and disciplines that structure *research*, those that enable players in scientific fields to organize their activities.

19 If we confuse institutional disciplines with research disciplines, this could result in a rejection of the 'narratologist' label by those who are promoting narrative theory, thus helping to conceal the links between their work and other research that is very clearly positioned in the field of narratology. Concealing these links could reduce their impact on the general theory of narrative and on all the studies that are part of the expanding field of 'narrative studies'. Too often, I have heard linguists claim that narratologists are clearly "literary scholars" and that, as a result, nobody can be a narratologist and a linguist *at the same time*[17]. In textual linguistics, however, the central concept of the "prototypical narrative sequence" (Adam, 1997) is a direct extension of the work of Vladimir Propp, Algirdas Julien Greimas, Claude Bremond and Paul Larivaille. Moreover, Ann Banfield took her inspiration from generative and transformational grammar in criticizing the Genettian hypothesis of the need for a narrator in a fictional statement. As for the study of the textual construction of point of view (Rabatel, 2009), based on linguistic approaches to polyphony, it also opens a dialog with the work of Gérard Genette on focalization. Even the concepts of the novel's scenography and ethos (Maingueneau, 2004) can be considered to be an update of the description of the enunciative devices of fictional narratives. In this respect, they offer a perfect fit with the scope of contemporary narratology, as shown by their inclusion in the latest work

by Liesbeth Korthals Altes (2014). The few examples I have taken here come from the field of language sciences, but we could say the same of other approaches: comparative, sociological, aesthetic, psychological, cognitive, ethical, ludological, etc.

20 So we are dealing with a vicious circle: we can study narratology in many institutions, and we cannot deny that a level of interdisciplinarity is needed to drive this meta-discipline forward, but it is increasingly difficult to see exactly where the theory of narrative is positioned, and thus to keep pace with its discussions and developments, or to identify with its objectives. A subsidiary risk would be to think that this disciplinary dispersion, akin to some of the work carried out in the field of 'cultural studies', means that a contemporary theory of narrative can only ever be a mish-mash of perspectives, lacking the rigor of a unified epistemological tradition. Although the problem of the institutional vicious circle seems difficult to address, we may nevertheless try to show that the second statement is untrue

A research discipline defined by an expanding subject

21 We should remember that narratology, as a research discipline, was founded to correspond to the specific nature of its subject. While this subject is not necessarily literary or verbal, it should not be confused with any other form of communication since not *everything* is narrative. At least this is what Tzvetan Todorov (1969: 10) wished to emphasize in creating this neologism;

> "Narrative is a phenomenon that we encounter not only in literature, but also in other fields which, for the moment, are each part of a different discipline (folk tales, myths, films, dreams, etc.). Our objective here is to develop a theory of narrative that can be applied to each of these fields. Rather than being part of literary studies, this work concerns a science that does not yet exist, that we shall call *narratology*, the science of narrative. The results of this science will however be of interest for literary knowledge since narrative is often at the core of literature."

22 In one of the founding texts of narratology, Roland Barthes (1975: 237) talked about the "prodigious variety of genres, each of which branches out into a variety of media, as if all substances could be relied upon to accommodate man's stories". Two years earlier, Claude Bremond (1964) said that any genre or media that could tell or refer to a story could be considered as narrative, and could therefore be the subject of this emerging science.

23 The fact that most of the pioneer narratologists were literary scholars who identified more or less closely with structural epistemology is ultimately just an epiphenomenon linked to the sudden emergence of this discipline in a context marked by its times. But narratologists did not appear out of nowhere and the epistemological orientations of their predecessors were as varied as those of their successors would be in the future. Even during their brief hour of glory, the approaches founded on a logic of action (Bremond, 1964), those attempting to formulate a typology of figures in narrative discourse (Genette, 1972), or the functionalist orientation of Meir Sternberg (1978) were strongly heterogeneous, leading to lively epistemological discussions. In this respect, the theory of narrative differs little from other disciplines, such as literary studies or language sciences, which encompass a broad range of perspectives, sometimes contradictory, sometimes complementary. We can follow the debate between pragmatic and generativist approaches, or try to separate the territories of

phonology, sociolinguistics or acquisition linguistics, without going so far as to criticize the lack of epistemological or methodological rigor of language sciences as a whole. On the contrary, it is the diversity of these trends that guarantees the rigor of an analysis that prefers multiple viewpoints and dialogue to isolation in any given school of thought.

24 This leads us to the conclusion that neither literature nor structuralism have ever been essential to the narratological project. Its Greek ancestors were already interested in narratives of varying semiotic manifestations: from purely "mimetic" representation, embodied in tragedy and comedy (ancestors of the cinema or cartoon), to "diegetic" or "mixed" narratives of the epic (ancestor of the novel). The same is true of their more recent heirs, as explained by Marie-Laure Ryan (2012: § 8):

> "The founding fathers of narratology recognized from the very beginning the medium-transcending nature of narrative: [...] Barthes' and Bremond's wish to open up narratology to media other than literature went unfulfilled for years. Under the influence of Genette, narratology developed as a project almost exclusively devoted to literary fiction. Media representing the mimetic mode, such as drama and film, were largely ignored, and because of their absence of narrator, sometimes not even recognized as narratives, despite the similarity of their content with the plots of diegetic narration. But this situation changed dramatically in the late 20th century with the so-called "narrative turn" in the humanities".

25 In an article, Roy Sommer (2012) summed up this new surge in transmedial narratology and the diversification of its epistemological frameworks:

> "The first decade of the twenty-first century has seen an unprecedented growth of interest in narrative and storytelling. While classical narratology was mostly regarded as the domain of a small group of structuralist scholars dedicated to narrativity, who sought to identify and classify universal structures and patterns shared by all verbal narratives, the various new or postclassical approaches to narratology have also been interested in non-verbal and non-fictional storytelling, audio-visual media, and the cultural and historical contexts of narratives".

26 It is important to keep this progression in mind. Too often, we tend to reduce the scope of narratology to its origins, and this has direct consequences on the supposed operability of this approach for addressing the issue of the different uses of narrative forms in our society. At least, this is what is suggested by this comment concerning the work of Christian Salmon on storytelling:

> "This leads us to replace the narratological approach to storytelling – its study as narrative – by a rhetorical approach to the phenomenon – its inclusion in a strategy of persuasion. Narratological analysis can be applied to any narrative, and this gives rise to a confusion into which Christian Salomon sometimes slips, even though this does not detract from the interest of his work. Unless we say that all narrative is storytelling, it is difficult to draw comparisons between the video games used in military training and the use of stories to encourage a change within a company or to market a product". (Rialland, 2009).

27 Ivanne Rialland is right to underline the dangers of equating advertising narrative, training simulation and managerial narration, but she is wrong to think that contemporary narratology is unable to process these differences and that, in consequence, it is incompatible with a rhetorical approach. On the one hand, rhetorical narratology, as described by Wayne C. Booth, James Phelan, and Meir Sternberg, is one of the most dynamic branches in the landscape of narrative theory with its strong contrasts. On the other, for narratologists adopting an inter- or transmedial approach, particular emphasis is placed on the specific characteristics of the medium, as

illustrated in this remark by Marie-Laure Ryan (2006: xxi) in her work *Avatars of Story*, where she asks:

> "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. While digital texts create novel variations in the manifestations of the traditional narrative categories of character, event, time, and space, it is in the domain of textual architecture and user involvement that they open truly new territories for narratological inquiry".

28 It nevertheless remains that this *family resemblance*, which is still discernible through these contrasting manifestations of narrativity, alludes to a form of transcendence that must be questioned, not only in terms of its anthropological or cognitive origins – which I have already mentioned – but also in terms of its effects on cultural productions marked by significant diversity in media and use, so that these formal and functional differences become meaningful within a common framework. This is precisely what I consider to be one of the main contributions of "natural narratology" described by Monika Fludernik (1996) or of the studies conducted in the field of transmedial narratology (Thon, 2016). These studies lead us to redefine the parameters of narrativity in order to make the concept sufficiently flexible to include, for example, as part of a prototypical and gradualist approach, visual narratives (see Wolf, 2003) or digital and interactive narrations (Ryan, 2006, 2012).

Conclusion

29 Interest in narrative phenomena has never been as strong as it is today, and I have tried to argue for a revaluation of narratology, endeavoring first and foremost to avoid creeping dilettantism when using narrative mediations or studying their objectives. It seems to me that the best way to improve the visibility and quality of research and training in this field lies in the institutionalization of a number of players, even if researchers from different backgrounds continue (as indeed they should) to contribute to the development of this general theory, from their own standpoint. Although a wide variety of approaches and interdisciplinarity remains a necessity for a subject that is so broadly polymorphic in its uses and in its media incarnations, we must nevertheless guarantee the existence of an institution that could serve as a point of convergence for all perspectives, such as the *seminar on contemporary narratology* organized by the Centre for Research into Arts and Language or CRAL (a joint research unit set up by the School for Advanced Studies in Social Sciences (EHESS) and the French National Center for Scientific Research (CNRS)), which unfortunately remains one of the rare[18] permanent institutions where studies of this type can be conducted in France. The existence of this point of convergence would make it possible to discuss the complementarity of different types of approach, and to measure their impact on a general theory of narrativity. In my opinion, only the existence of narratology chairs would guarantee the development of a viable theory of contemporary narrative, in phase with the challenges of its times, and towards which anybody could turn if they are seeking to integrate a narrative dimension in their practices or studies, in order to keep abreast of the latest developments instead of just relying on preconceptions and clichés.

30 The most viable solution in the short term could be to upgrade the status of narrative theoreticians in departments of literature. In such cases, competitions should no longer be restricted to positions with a profile based on historical or cultural criteria, in order to place a premium on more general theoretical competence. This would in turn mean being ready to welcome researchers, part of whose work could concern not only novels, but also serialized information, TV series, graphic narratives, and digital, interactive, or transmedial forms of storytelling (as in my own case, for example). Maybe we should start from the premise that each department of literature should have *at least one* narrative theorist, able to conduct a seminar on "contemporary narratology". A seminar of this type should be part of the basic education of literary students. It would welcome speakers and an audience from outside the literary field proper, as part of an approach with a clear interdisciplinary focus.

31 Departments of general or comparative literature could be particularly well suited to people from these backgrounds, since comparative studies could encompass these different genres, media or practices, providing a basis on which to build a transmedial narratology. As justification for bringing these subjects together, we could point out that, from a historical standpoint, it is in literary departments that we have always seen the strongest focus on narrative forms and the most frequent theoretical debates on narrative theory, at least until recently. In this way, the study of literary narratives and theories of literature would create excellent conditions for learning and research. This would also help to develop more general studies on narrative. At the same time, confronting narrative with other media systems would be an opportunity for literary students to learn how to transfer their analytical skills to new contexts, while developing an awareness of the specific nature of literature as a verbal, written and generally fictional medium. However, narratologists must be able to maintain full independence within the department with respect to their body of research and education, which must in no event be limited to literary narrative alone.

32 Based on the existing partitioning, we could also imagine narratologists being affiliated to language science departments. In this case, however, the problems would relate not only to the scope of research (since narrative is not expressed solely through verbal language) but also to the methods of analysis, given that strictly linguistic approaches would be inappropriate for the analysis of visual or audiovisual narratives. Information and communication sciences would, *a priori*, be more inclusive, but the risk here is that narratology could be diluted in a field that is simply too large. In an ideal world, it would probably be more efficient to create a new department, for a close fit between institutional and research disciplines, and maximum visibility of narrative theory. Unfortunately, it seems to me that this solution would be the most difficult to implement, given that it would involve a new player claiming part of the common cake, a prospect that can hardly lead to anything other than unanimous rejection by all the players already in the academic field.

33 As a result, it would be better to count on the appeal of narrative studies to give new value to a department in crisis. In any case, it is clear that during the brief period when narratologists were riding high in literary studies, the field enjoyed a social relevance never seen before or since, as pointed out by Antoine Compagnon (2004: 2):

> "Around 1970, literary theory was in full swing and it was exercising an enormous attraction on the young people of my generation. Under various labels – "new criticism", "poetics", "structuralism", "semiology" or "narratology", it shone in full force. No one who lived through those magical years can remember them without

> nostalgia. A powerful current was sweeping us all along with it. In those times, the image of literary studies, sustained by theory, was seductive, persuasive and triumphant".

34 Maybe the resurgence of narratology could re-dynamize literary studies, making them a center of attraction for anybody who is interested, from a theoretical and critical standpoint, in these narrative forms whose avatars are everywhere in our contemporary societies.

35 On a more modest scale, I believe that reviews[19] and research networks, such as ENN and ISSN are essential for enabling researchers to identify with narratology, and for guaranteeing a high level of epistemological and methodological debate within this discipline, despite the varied institutional affiliations of their members. A few years ago, I myself set up an interdisciplinary network to promote discussion among Swiss French-speaking researchers interested in narrative theory.[20] My project in the medium term, with the help of a few fellow narratologists in France, Belgium and Quebec, is to extend this network to all French-speaking narratologists, in the hope that it will stimulate greater recognition of their work at the international level. I hope that its future members will agree to add another facet to their identities, alongside their institutional affiliation, by joining not a French-speaking narratology network, but a network of *French-speaking narratologists*[21].

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NOTES

1. The ASIHVIF (Association internationale des histoires de vie en formation et de recherche biographique en éducation, literally: The **International Association of Life Stories in Formation and biographical research in education)** was formally set up in 1991, but its beginnings date back to the early 1980s. It brings together researchers and practitioners with an interest in adult education and the links between training and "life stories". Access: http://www.asihvif.com.

2. In particular, see the work of A. W. Frank (1995). For a critical and nuanced viewpoint concerning an approach of this type by a narratologist, I highly recommend an article by S. Rimmon-Kenan (2002). In particular, she underlines "limitations, perhaps even the hubris, of better-structured narratives. While narration may lead to a working through and mastery, it may also imprison the narrative in a kind of textual neurosis, an issueless re-enactment of the traumatic events it narrates (or fails to narrate)" (*ibid.* : 22-23).

3. Concerning "language biographies", I advise to read the work of the Research group on language biographies at the University of Lausanne, which I helped to set up with Thérèse Jeanneret from 2005. Access: https://www.unil.ch/fle/fr/home/menuinst/recherche/grebl.html. Also see R. Baroni and T. Jeanneret (2008).

4. See in particular C. Salmon (2007), Y. Citton (2010) and M. Marti and N. Pélissier (2012, 2103).

5. I am referring for example to the series of events organized between 2014 and 2016 by Danielle Perrot-Corpet through the Comparative Literature Research Centre and the Labex (laboratory of excellence) "Observatory of literary life" (Obvil) with the evocative title "Literature against storytelling".

6. Taking a phenomenological approach to narrativity, I have long criticised this conception, which simplifies the way one conceives the experience preceding narrative mediation (Baroni, 2009, 2010).

7. For a critical analysis of this conception, I refer to my studies on the cognitive and ethical function of what I have called "mimetic narrative" (Baroni, 2017). Also see my article in M. Marti and N. Pélissier (2013).

8. For a comparative approach to narrative emphasising the contrast between what I have called configuring (or explanatory) narrative, and "plotted" (or mimetic) narrative, refer to R. Baroni (2009: 9-94; 2010; 2017).

9. Concerning the importance of "experentiality" in defining narrativity, see the work of M. Fludernik (1996).

10. See J. F. Duchan, G. A. Bruder and L. E. Hewitt (1995). S. Patron (2009) provides a detailed report in French of this approach, which I have also discussed (Baroni, to be published).

11. Within narrative theory, the approaches based on this hypothesis are referred to as second-generation cognitive approaches, as opposed to the approaches based on schemata theory. See K. Kukkonen and M. Caracciolo (2014) and A. Kuzmičová (2014).

12. "To distinguish narratives from other representational vehicles we need to say something about what distinguishes the content of narratives from the content of other things" (Currie, 2010 : xvii).

13. I have tried to underline the contradictory nature of the thesis defended between the first and third volumes of *Tme and Narrative* in R. Baroni (2010).

14. "Delving into the Narratological "Toolbox": Ontology, Disciplinarity, and the Limits of Textual Analysis", International Conference on Narrative, Amsterdam, 16 June 2016.

15. I will not discuss at this point the justification for the opposition between "classical narratology" and "post-classical narratology" introduced by D. Herman (1997), explained by G. Prince (2008), and criticised by M. Sternberg (2011). It seems to me that this term at least has the virtue of reminding the French-speaking public that narratology is not necessarily limited to the formalist and structuralist paradigms of its founding fathers.

16. See for example the major work by F. Lavocat (2016).

17. For an insight into the institutional discomfort that may arise from this situation in an academic career, I suggest the partially autobiographical article that I published on *Fabula* (Baroni, 2012). As somebody who has collaborated with her, I should like to add in passing that Françoise Revaz (2009) is one of those rare linguists who also consider themselves to be narratologists.

18. I would also like to mention the wide-ranging activities of the Interdisciplinary Laboratory of Narrative Culture and Society in Nice (access: http://www.unice.fr/lirces/) and the seminar of Theoretical and Applied Narratology (access: http://climas.u-bordeaux3.fr/le-laboratoire/nata) managed by Clara Mallier and Arnaud Schmitt in Bordeaux which, owing to a lack of institutional support, was unfortunately forced to suspend its activities in 2015.

19. Alongside the review *Poétique*, we should mention in the French-speaking field, the e-journal *Cahiers de narratologie*, which is particularly in phase with the new extra-literary territories of contemporary research and with its new epistemological approaches, particularly in the field of cognitive sciences. In the USA, *Narrative* IS THE OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF THE ISSN. We could also mention a few influential journals that enable us to keep pace with the latest events in narrative theory, including: *Poetics Today*, *Style, Narrative Inquiry*, *Image & Narrative*, *Diegesis* and *Enthymema*.

20. *Le réseau romand de narratologie* (Swiss French-speaking narratology network) or RRN was founded in 2010.

21. This effort resulted, in July 2018, to the creation of the *Réseau des narratologues francophones* (French-speaking narratologists network) or RéNaF. Website: https://wp.unil.ch/narratologie.

ABSTRACTS

This article is both an inventory and a health check of narrative theory in a contemporary context marked by what was called, some twenty years ago, the "narrative turn" of the Humanities. Paradoxically, from an institutional standpoint, narrative theory is in a relative state of decline, even though its scope has never seemed so wide, or its usefulness so clear to see. Today, narrative studies (in the broadest meaning of the term) underline our nature as *homo fabulator* or storytelling animals but many researchers fail to keep abreast of recent developments in contemporary narratology, especially in relation to the comparison with genres and media extending well beyond the scope of literary studies. In this paper, I will emphasize the importance of reinforcing and institutionalizing a research discipline that has never ceased to evolve, in order to ensure a central role for narratology in the expanding field of narrative studies. One solution might be to strengthen narrative theory in literary programs. This could increase the visibility of narratology in academic research while also giving new momentum to literary disciplines that are experiencing an unprecedented crisis.

L'article dresse un état des lieux et un bilan de santé de la théorie du récit dans un contexte contemporain marqué par ce que l'on a appelé il y a une vingtaine d'années le « tournant narratif » dans les sciences humaines. Paradoxalement, d'un point de vue institutionnel, la théorie du récit apparaît relativement moribonde, alors que son champ d'application n'a jamais semblé aussi large et son utilité aussi évidente. Les études narratives au sens large soulignent aujourd'hui notre nature d'*homo fabulator*, mais certains chercheurs ne prennent pas toujours la peine de suivre les évolutions récentes de la théorie du récit contemporaine face au défi de sa confrontation avec des genres et des médias qui dépassent largement le périmètre des études littéraires. J'insisterai sur l'importance de revaloriser et d'institutionnaliser une discipline de recherche qui n'a jamais cessé d'évoluer, de manière à assurer à la narratologie un rôle central au sein d'études narratives en expansion rapide. Peut-être qu'un renforcement de la théorie du récit au sein des sections de littérature contribuerait à la fois à assurer la visibilité de la narratologie au sein de la recherche académique et à redynamiser une discipline qui connaît aujourd'hui une crise sans précédent.

INDEX

Mots-clés: narratologie, études narratives, tournant narratif, discipline académique, institutions académiques
Keywords: narratology, narrative studies, narrative turn, academic disciplines, academic institutions

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