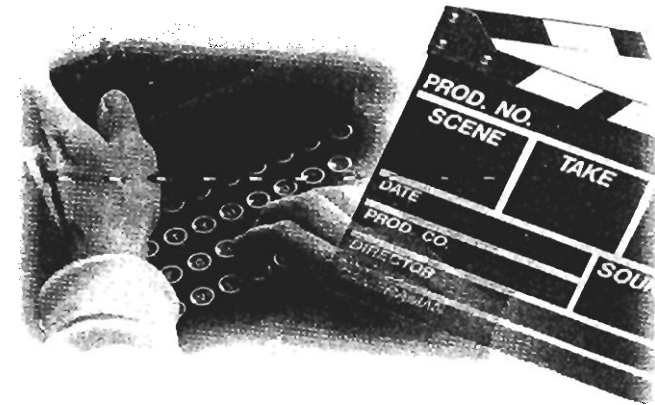


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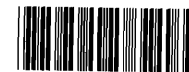
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Transécriture and Narrative Mediatics

The Stakes of Intermediality

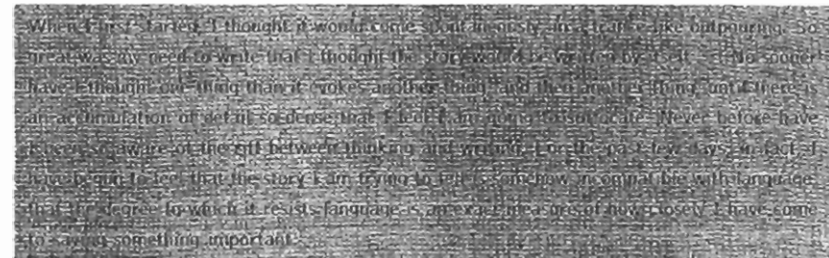
André Gaudreault and
Philippe Marion

Adaptation, mediality, and intermediality: these are the issues engaged in our text. Our original aim was to demonstrate that, in moving from one medium to another, the “subject” of a story – we will return to the issue of what we mean by “subject” – would necessarily undergo a series of informing and deforming constraints linked to what might be called the new medium’s intrinsic configuration, since each subject would be presumably endowed with its own configuration. This configuration, in our original conception, would be always already more or less compatible with a particular medium and would thus preprogram, as it were, any process of adaptation. Beginning from these early intuitions, we decided to develop a deeper reflection concerning adaptation, rewriting, transécriture, and trans-semioticization. The first question we confronted is at the very kernel of the whole problematic: is it possible for the story (*fabula*) to exist outside any and all media? Or, to put it differently, is it possible to imagine a story in a kind of original virgin state, prior to any mediatic incarnation?

The Means of Expression as the Occasion for a Physical Encounter

We can begin our investigation by looking at the issue of expressive production and creation. When the artistic “subject,” and here we use “subject” in a different sense, in the sense of the expressive artist, when this “subject” decides to express him or herself, he or she is always confronted by a kind of resistance specific to the chosen medium of expression. Human thought, as it “materializes” itself, always undergoes an encounter

with the world of contingency. There is no incarnation that does not brush up against the flesh that actualizes the very process of incarnation. In one of his novels, Paul Auster describes the uncertain writerly materialization of the thoughts of his narrator:



Here Auster evokes the resistance of the expressive material in relation to the artist’s desire to inscribe in that material whatever ideas come into the artist’s mind. The thoughts of the narrator – since we are dealing here with a novelistic representation – will remain incommunicable, merely playing with their own opacity, if they were not incarnated in a given expressive form, in this case writing. But perhaps it is also true that the said form – that is, literature – is inadequate to the project envisioned by the narrator. But could it not be that the inadequacy attributed to the incarnational resistance of thought itself as a floating aura, might in the end be nothing more than a refusal of cooperation on the part of the material of expression? One might go even further and see the issue from a more positive angle: perhaps all these vague ideals which throw themselves endlessly against the breakwater of scriptural language are mistaken in persisting in this direction. Might they not find a better semiotic incarnation in another medium, in music for example?

We can also note that if these thoughts escape the narrator, it is also because those thoughts have hardly yet been formulated. That idea obviously evokes the question of the possibility of the existence of thought “before” or “beyond” (depending on one’s point of view) prior to its formulation. Can thought exist without being always already formulated, that is to say, mediated, if only for oneself alone, inside one’s head? This question is a momentous one, touching on such diverse fields as epistemology, philosophy, and ethics, and we will return to it later, but for the moment our project is more modest. We would like to establish the propositional foundations for what we would call a narrative mediatics, a project “nourished,” as it were, by transdisciplinary intuitions.²

Within this train of thought, and along the same lines as suggested by the Auster text cited above, is the notion that all expression is first of all an encounter with opacity. In order to become transparent, communication has to be measured against the fundamental opacity inherent in any material of expression. As in the famously clear line attributed to Hergé: we know the extent to which its “ideality” comes only from work transcended, from the graphic drudgery of erasures, hesitations, and corrections. We also know that narrative as well as graphic clarity is the ideal product generated by a wrestling with the graphic-figurative material, but that the finished work tries to muffle that conflict in

favor of transparency in the expression-representation. In the case of graphic design, or of the image in general, transparency is obviously linked to what is represented, to the real or imagined referent. Transparency means that the material image is effaced in favor of what it evokes beyond itself. Which is to say that monstration, at least when it tends toward figuration, is transitive. Every analogical *simulacrum* needs such transitivity; that is, every image strives to make itself forgotten as a contingent means of representation.

Any means of expression, and especially any means of artistic expression, then, has to be framed in relation to the constraints of the chosen materials of expression. That is the sense in which expression is always a quasi-physical encounter, a "*corps à corps*." At the same time, a constraint is not a limit, because a constraint is also the source, and even the condition, of creativity. If one were to create – we can always dream – an "imaginatics," a transversal discipline which would study the genesis of creative works in so far as they emerge from the interactive encounter of a subjective imaginary opened up by a means of expression, then this discipline would have to take into account the role of this material opacity within the creative process.

If one looks at the example of literary creation, for example, theorists normally take into account the stimulation that comes from the writer's encounter with language, with writing in its very materiality. The writerly encounter is linked to what one might call "fictional germination." Commenting on his own literary genetics, Claude Simon points out that: "What one writes . . . is the product not of a conflict between a vague initial project and language itself, but rather of a symbiosis between the two . . . which makes the result infinitely richer than the first intention."³ In literature, writing, in the specificity of its opacity, becomes itself a material for fiction, "the singular adventure of a narrator who never stops searching, touchingly discovering the world by groping in and through writing."⁴

We might equally draw our example from musical creation. If one studies the genesis and evolution of the sonata form in Beethoven, one notices an intense interaction between musical form and mediating material, notably in relation to the new pianoforte. In that period, the composer discovered the timbre and potentials of this "avant-garde" instrument, which prefigured the emerging new symphonic orchestra. Thus, in several sonatas, for example Opus 27, Number 1, Beethoven develops a strong interactive confrontation with the percussive element and the specific resonating capacities of the pianoforte, as one can attest by examining Beethoven's successive manuscripts and by the name "sonata quasi una fantasia" (as if one were improvising). As Beethoven himself revealed, musical scenarios conceived on paper are often profoundly modified through interaction with the sonority and dynamics of the instrument which opened up extraordinary new horizons.

The example of Beethoven is not meant to imply a form of cultural elitism implicitly linked to the image of the classical composer as musical demiurge. We can also draw our example from the realm of popular culture. The *Jimi Hendrix Experience* constitutes a complex cocktail: the creative intuitions of an improviser in interaction with a specific instrument, the guitar, in dialogue as well with the whole phenomenon of electrified, amplified, and saturated sound, as well as with the social-cultural-anthropological moment

of mass pop concerts. To put it ironically, how can one convert Jimi Hendrix into an English flute? Or, better, how can one convert Jimi Hendrix into an English flute without performing a veritable adaptational re-creation? Here we encounter the fundamental and very Hegelian problematic of the interaction of human beings with their means of expression. Human beings invent expressive or technical means and devices which allow them to have a certain grasp and understanding of the world, but these means also resist human intervention and thereby offer, as part of the specific confrontation with this resistance, inexhaustible possibilities for creativity.

This physical encounter between idea and material, or in terms of the narrative arts the encounter between the story (*fabula*) and the medium, has important consequences because it assumes that any process of adaptation has to take into account the kinds of "incarnations" inherent in this encounter in terms of the materiality of media. Whence our desire to reframe this problematic within a new "transversal" discipline – narrative mediatics – which would deal with questions of intermediality, transécriture, and transmediatization, and whose goal would be to study the encounter of a narrative project – that is, a story not yet fixed within a definitive matter of expression – with "the power of inertia of a given medium."⁵ Indeed, in order to be communicated, any real or imaginary narrative substratum is obliged to deploy a means of mediation allowing for finding the configuration within which the coherence of story making or *mise-en-intrigue*, this crucial act which Ricoeur calls "second mimesis,"⁶ can be constructed.

Fabula, Syuzhet, Media

But before proceeding in this direction, we have to disentangle a rather tangled skein, bringing to the surface a notional pair quietly present in this article since the very beginning, to wit the distinction between *fabula* and *syuzhet*, inherited, as everyone knows, from the Russian Formalists. The exercise, as we shall see, is very revealing. But first a warning. In what follows, we will be using not the translation but rather the transliteration of the words "*fabula*" and "*syuzhet*," as is the custom in the Anglo-Saxon world, in order to better mark off their differential character than their French equivalents – "*fable*" and "*sujet*" – which are too polysemic and tarnished by ill usage. We must point out from the outset that for the Russian Formalists the "*fabula*" exists absolutely independently of any specific medium. It is, by definition, external to any actual work; it is not at all incarnated. Tomashevsky is very clear on this point:

All *fabulae* are ensembles of linked events, which are communicated to us by a given work. The *fabula* can be exposed in a pragmatic manner by following the natural order, i.e., the chronological and causal order of events, independently of the manner in which they are placed and introduced in the work itself.

The question of the independence of the *fabula* for an adept of narratology can be clarified through Bremond's famous formulation suggesting that a narrative is a "layer of autonomous signification, whose structure can be isolated from the message as a whole" and that the structure of the recounted story is independent of "the techniques which are used to express it."⁸ It seems possible, and legitimate, at first glance, to extract from a narrative work a kernel of actions quite apart from the means of expression through which this kernel of actions is relayed. The pedagogic and canonical process of the synopsis, or narrative summary, is based on precisely such an idea. But what are the limits of such a procedure? How much of the original work remains in the summary and how much is lost? Although we cannot give a definitive answer to this question, we can clarify some elements of an answer.

At the same time, we cannot accept the overly categorical claim that a *fabula* cannot exist except as it is embodied in some medium or other. All we need to do, to realize the limitations of such a view, is to close our eyes and imagine the story of "Little Red Riding Hood." The *fabula* of "Little Red Riding Hood" clearly exists, in each of our brains. More accurately, it exists as it is deformed and informed by each of our brains, or even more precisely by the powers and limitations of our brains which play the role, in this case, of media, or better of pseudo-media since their perception is not shared with other people, unless one turns to a "medium" in the other, more magical, sense of that word.⁹ To share our *fabulating* experience with another subject, we have to rely on a real medium such as language, mime, or design. Which implies as well the ways in which the media inform and deform any given *fabula*.

But when the Formalists argue that the *fabula* is independent of the media, it does not mean it is possible to refer to that *fabula* without thinking of a medium. To think, or express, the *fabula* in its very independence in relation to media, we still need to express or think the *fabula* in relation to some medium. In most cases, the medium will be verbal language as a kind of integrated medium closely linked to our own thought processes. A *fabula* like "Little Red Riding Hood," moreover, is more easily separated from its mediatic actualization insofar as it has a mythic dimension as a kind of psychic landmark indicative of collective social identity, and even of the human race.

Beyond the *fabula*, there is also the *syuzhet*, which has always been difficult to define, insofar as the Formalists have always defined it as both distinct from the *fabula* and at the same time in some sense not so distant from it. One might even suggest that the *syuzhet* includes the *fabula* or at least includes diverse elements of the *fabula*, but only after having passed through the crucible of what one might call the *mise-en-syuzhet*, or a process of, to use a rather barbarous neologism, "*syuzheticization*." A later passage in the Tomashevsky text clarifies the point: "The [*fabula*] is opposed to the [*syuzhet*], which is constituted by the same events, but which respects their order of appearance in the work itself and the sequence of informations that designates them."¹⁰

One part of this statement – "the sequence of informations that designates" the events – is intriguing, and Tomashevsky does not elaborate on it, except for one note: "In short, the [*fabula*] is what really happened, and the [*syuzhet*] is the manner in which the reader

learns about what happened." If we take Tomashevsky seriously, then, the *syuzhet* is, in a way, the text as it is incarnated in a specific medium. We encounter the same idea in a text by Tynianov: "It [the *syuzhet* of the story] represents a kind of dynamics which takes form on the basis of all the material links . . . having to do with the style of [the *fabula*] and so forth."¹¹ And again, this time in relation to the cinema: "The script usually provides the '[*fabula*] in general' together with a few elements linked to the 'bouncing' character of the cinema. How the *fabula* will be developed, what will be the *syuzhet*, is something the scriptwriter knows nothing about, any more than the director before the projection of the fragments."¹² Thus the *syuzhet* would be the equivalent of the *fabula* insofar as it is mediated. In other words, the same *fabula*, the same anecdotal substratum, could undergo various "*syuzheticizations*." So "Little Red Riding Hood" could undergo a writerly *syuzheticization*, an oral *syuzheticization*, a filmic *syuzheticization* and so forth, all of which would be quite distinct.

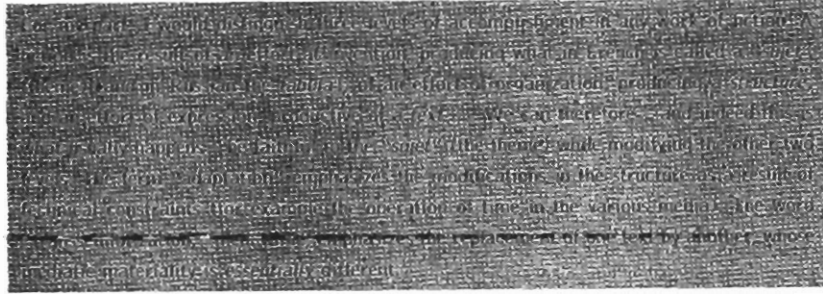
David Bordwell would disagree, since for him: "The structuration of the *syuzhet* is, in logical terms, independent of the media, since the same *syuzhet* structures could be materialized in a novel, a play, or a film."¹³ One might think that Bordwell here commits the error denounced by Chklovski decades before: "Many people confuse the notion of [*syuzhet*] with the description of events, with what I propose we call the [*fabula*]. But in fact the [*fabula*] is nothing but a material in the service of [*syuzhet*]."¹⁴ But Bordwell, in fact, does clearly distinguish *between fabula and syuzhet*, which he defines as "the concrete disposition and representation of the *fabula* within the film."

Bordwell's error, in our view, lies in not taking into account the range of phenomena that the Formalists include within the wide net of their *syuzhet*. In fact, their notion of *syuzhet* is in a way too broad, since it includes both (1) what Bordwell sees in it, i.e. the specific structuration of the *fabula* within a specific work – and it is not clear that structuration in this sense has anything to do with the media in question – and (2) the diverse aspects of mediatic incarnation implied by structuration. As formulated by the Formalists, in other words, *syuzhet* comprises two very different phenomena, even though the Formalists are not entirely wrong to connect them. Yet within our project here it strikes us as useful to distinguish the two points and consider them as enjoying a relative autonomy.

It is true that the *syuzhet* represents the ensemble of the motifs of the *fabula* according to, as Tomashevsky puts it, "the succession of events in the work itself."¹⁵ But for us the definition of the *syuzhet* cannot be limited to such factors since, as Tomashevsky also points out, it is not insignificant that: "The reader becomes aware of a specific event at a specific point in the work and that the event is communicated directly by the author himself, or by a character, or with the help of indirect allusions."¹⁶ There can thus be no doubt about the textual nature of the *syuzhet*. Thus at one end of the spectrum we have the *fabula*, the story as pure virtuality, the abstract story prior to any mediaticization. At the other end of the spectrum we have the medium, the expressive support, the semiotic vehicle, also abstract in its way, insofar as here it is being considered in its virtuality. *Fabula* and medium are completely independent in relation to each other, while

the *syuzhet* mediates a kind of rendezvous between the two, a product of the incarnation in media of a narrative substratum.

And this *syuzhet* has two faces or aspects. One turns toward the *fabula*, the other toward the medium. We will call one aspect the *syuzhet*-structure and the other the *syuzhet*-text, partly inspired by Thierry Groensteen's enumeration concerning the various "levels of accomplishment" of a work of fiction (he uses the French word "*sujet*," while we, following the Formalist usage, prefer *fabula*):



Groensteen concludes with a very important question, to which we shall return, to wit: "To what extent can structure and text be literally transposed?"

A fiction, then, is the product of three kinds of creative intervention: (1) an intervention in terms of invention, the famous *inventio* of classical rhetoric, which generates the diverse elements of the story being told; (2) an intervention having to do with organization, bearing on the structuration of the story, which can be identified with the *dispositio* of classical rhetoric; and, finally, (3) an intervention at the level of expression, through a medium, of the narrative elements already "invented" and "disposed." This tripartite division in terms of the levels of accomplishment – theme, structure, and text for Groensteen; *fabula*, *syuzhet*-structure and *syuzhet*-text for us – allows us to pose in a much clearer way the question of the relation between narrative ideas and the constraints specific to the diverse media. When we move from one level to another, in the order that we have established, we discern a progressively greater implication of media in terms of the text being constructed. Which suggests to us that the *fabula* is already implicated by the media in question. Indeed, it matters little that the *fabula* is independent of specific media, since the *fabula* only exists as such insofar as it is on the side of "thought," for as soon as we imagine the *fabula* being on the side of the constructed, we are in the realm of the media.

Anyone who doubts this idea need only try to adopt the *fabula* of "Little Red Riding Hood" in a "unipunctual" medium such as still photography. Specifically mediatic questions like "pluripunctuality" quickly come to the surface.¹⁸ Every *fabula*, in fact possibly every event, in its configuration, even before its "medial incarnation," already has certain features which are in a certain sense "medial." Furthermore, the relationship between a given story or event and a given medium already carries a certain meaning, which at

least partially confirms our basic feeling that each *fabula* is intrinsically endowed with its own configuration which is always already compatible with the various media and thus preprograms, as it were, every process of adaptation.

As for the *syuzhet*, which would then occupy an intermediate terrain between *fabula* and medium, and which we prefer to regard in a theoretical sense as the place of securing of the told and the telling, in this sense the *syuzhet* is deeply implicated in the media. The *syuzhet*-structure already implies a minimum of medial consciousness, to the extent that, as Groensteen suggested in the text cited above, the technical constraints inherent in specific media impose a certain dimension or calibration on the structure of the *syuzhet*, in terms of the treatment of time, for example. Whence some of the specific challenges of adaptation. As for the *syuzhet*-text, it exists in symbiosis with the media in the sense that it can only be developed as it is poured into medial form, resulting in serious problems for adaptation.

Médiagenie and Adaptation

Up to this point, we have dealt with media in terms of *fabula* and even more of *syuzhet*. Now we have to move in the opposite direction, beginning from the media. Our goal is to show that if one wants to grasp the genesis and the status of a mediatized story, one cannot remain at the level of a simple logical consecution articulating the sequence of "*inventio*," "*dispositio*," and a mediatic-expressive structuration. For that reason, we will now further explore the idea of narrative mediatics introduced earlier.

We have already stressed the extent to which the encounter, or better the profound interaction, with the resistant opacity of the chosen matter of expression is itself generative, even decisive, within the process of creation. This general proposition needs to be further developed, especially in terms of the narrative arts insofar as they are fashioned within the crucible of the media which serve as a vehicle for them and even define them. Obviously, when one thinks of narratives, one spontaneously thinks of them in terms of their "natural" materialization in verbal language. But, even on this level, think for a moment of the very different character, and even the different meaning, of a story, or more precisely a *syuzhet*, when it is expressed orally as opposed to when it is expressed through the work of writing. And these differences proliferate even more when the *syuzhet* surfaces within such complex media as the cinema, television, and the comic strip.

Each medium, according to the ways in which it exploits, combines, and multiplies the "familiar" materials of expression – rhythm, movement, gesture, music, speech, image, writing (in anthropological terms our "first" media) – each medium, to recapitulate, possesses its own communicational energetics. Such is the nature of the power of inertia invoked earlier. The metaphor of inertia, borrowed from physics, perhaps brings with it overly negative connotations. One might prefer concepts such as "the force of gravity" or even "force of attraction." Such appellations doubtless point more effectively to the

expressive and narrative potential of a given medium when, as they say, one looks at it in the abstract. This observation recalls the distinction, proposed a few years ago, between intrinsic and extrinsic narrativity.¹⁹ Thus the film and the comic strip by their very nature have a certain narrative *je ne sais quoi* when they are defined in terms of the manner in which they activate and trigger a succession of images, as well as the manner in which they stimulate the possibility of introducing a principle of transformation within that succession. It is the responsibility of this intrinsic narrative potential to receive an extrinsic narrative content.

To receive or, better, to interact with the aforementioned content. To draw once again on the archive of metaphors drawn from the sciences, but this time from chemistry, the media "react" with the *fabula* that chooses that medium. Or to put it in a way more in keeping with what we have argued up to this point, the media can only take on the responsibility of communicating a *fabula* by developing a *syuzhet*-reaction whose scope, obviously, can vary a good deal. As a narrative project, the *fabula* is incarnated through interaction with a medium. This interaction is manifested first of all in and through the *syuzhet*-text, but also in and through the *syuzhet*-structure to which it is intimately linked. Narrative transparency therefore always brushes up against the opacity of a reaction-*syuzhet* secreted by the medium. The goal of the classical fictional story is, of course, to win over the public by trying to hide its status as artifact, but the media and the means of expression mobilized by such stories resist the attempt. This resistance, this opacity – we can recall again the example of Beethoven – can be the sources of creation, offering the *fabula* fabulous opportunities for *syuzheticization*.

Narrative mediatics requires more work on these issues in order to clarify the possible limitations and developments, while also defining more precisely the idea of media. It seems to us that this discipline should apply first of all to the mass media, that is, to complex media which gather together various basic materials of expression.

Alongside the extrinsic and intrinsic features already mentioned, we might also distinguish two broad conceptual categories: mediativity²⁰ (or perhaps mediality) and narrativity. The first would bear on the expressive power (much as one speaks of the power of an engine) developed by the media. This ontological potential is medium-specific and depends on the intrinsic features of the means of expression or representation that the medium requires or combines. Comic strips, for example, generally combine a designed image with a written text, both of which are poured into a homogeneous graphic dynamic. More generally, the potential of a medium derives from a double interaction: not only the interaction that allows a coded opening of an internal space where different materials of expression can be combined, but also the interaction that is produced by the encounter, or the (chemical) reaction of these first means of expression with the technical apparatuses designed to relay and amplify them. How many possibilities, for example, in the encounter of a single voice with the sonorous modulations made possible by the microphone! Mediativity would refer then to a medium's intrinsic capacity to represent – and to communicate that representation. That capacity is determined by the technical possibilities of the medium, by the internal semiotic configurations that it calls up, and by

the communicational and relational apparatuses that it is able to put in place. A cinematic example: in its manner of representing the pro-filmic (that which the camera records), the *filmographic*, in its specificity, has everything to do with mediativity.²¹ The same is true of "graphiation,"²² the basic instance of enunciation of the comic strip. And the same point applies for the mediatization-narration of events by direct transmission as one of the specific features of television.

As a necessarily more narrow category, narrativity refers to the character or the quality of that which is narrative. But this definition becomes inadequate in the context of narrative mediatics. It might be preferable to give narrativity a pragmatic, virtual meaning. One can observe the narrative character of a given object (for example, of a fiction film), but one can also discern the narrative "seed" or potential within a given object (for example, the photograph which suggests a possible story without actually being that story). We therefore have to distinguish between an explicitly affirmed narrative and a virtual narrative as a possible dimension inherent in a given configuration of an object (whether a sign, a message, or, more basically, a medium). In a sense, narrativity is included within the larger category of mediativity; it is in this sense a particular modality of mediativity.

Intrinsic narrativity, then, has to do with the ontological narrative potential of media which it possesses as a function of its own mediativity (for example, the contiguity and consecution of the images of a comic strip). Supposing that the media generate their own illusion, intrinsic narrativity shapes and conditions the *syuzhet*.

Extrinsic narrativity, meanwhile, has to do with the narrative disposition, stronger or weaker as the case may be, manifested in the anecdotal substratum on which the *fabula* is based. Thus, some real-life events, such as a horrific crime, the suicide of a star, or the Tour de France with its progressive stages, seem to slide more easily than other events into a story; such events seem to spontaneously ask to be rendered as stories. Such would be the object of study of narrative diegetics: to study what in reported events, whether real or imaginary, lends itself to narrative. Or, to put it differently, to study the question of a narrative virtuality of events which precedes even the formation of the narrative. If we push this thinking even farther, is it not this intuited narrative virtuality that enables us to "construct" an event? Diegetics could thus conceive of a downstream and an upstream approach to the media, since some *fabulas* seem less susceptible to the force of attraction of the media, and some are more easily detached from their mediatic *syuzhet* (think, for example, of the propensity for emancipation, even autonomy, of the little story in Lumière's *L'Arroseur arrosé* [The Waterer Watered]).

But here we touch on one of the most important consequences of narrative mediatics, having to do with questions of intermediality, transécriture, and adaptation. Each narrative project, in our view, can be considered in terms of *médiagenie*.²³ Fables and stories have the possibility of being brought to life in the best possible way by choosing the most appropriate mediatic partner. Perhaps this explains why some works seem "unadaptable." Being literally poured into the form a specific medium, these stories suffer enormous losses in the transition from one medium to another. The burlesque episodes lived on the screen

by a Buster Keaton or a Harold Lloyd only realize their full expressive potential in and through the silent film. One might make the same point about the intimate confidences of Proust in *A la recherche du temps perdu*, the various adaptations of which have generally been seen as scandalous. We find the same situation with the *Adventures of Tintin*, whose *fabula* is of a body, almost literally, with its *syuzhet*, and its *syuzhet* with the medium, and whose adaptation in the form of an animated cartoon is criticized, somewhat paradoxically, for freezing its characters in place. Here we have a strange paradox, indeed, since the model, despite the intrinsic stasis of its fixed images, seems less static than its adaptation into moving images. *L'intermedialité*, it seems, has its reasons, that reason itself does not know.

It is true that, basically, the reader who immerses him or herself in the story of a comic strip will always be disappointed when the story is transposed into film. The disappointment is perhaps exacerbated by the kind of false proximity of the relationship between these two means of telling stories through images. But the processes of fictionalization, the phenomenology of reading, and the modes of participation in the two media are quite different. With its way of displaying images across the space of a page, with its obvious deficiencies in terms of realistic illusion, the comic strip actively calls on the reader's participation. Readers have to draw on their own imagination to mentally represent what has not been given in perceptual terms (sound, movement, temporality). Once we have supplanted this lack, filled in the void, the comic strip world communicates the idea that our imaginary is indirectly responsible for the experience. Tintin, Haddock, and Castafiore all have a grain of voice which is the one that we have mentally ascribed to them. The Duponts have their attitude, their own gawkiness. When the same characters, in a film, become endowed with real voices and movement, the fans of these comics are almost necessarily disappointed. The incarnated voice of Captain Haddock will never be "realistic" or authentic for the person who knows the character through prior experience of the comic strip. To grasp this phenomenon even better, we can think of the experience of radio, which in some ways constitutes the opposite situation. When we know a voice through radio, when the medium has made it familiar, we are almost always surprised and often disappointed when we encounter the same voice accompanied by the body to which it belongs. Here we touch on the question of what one might call the localization of the foyer or place of the impression of reality, a localization which can be more or less internal or external to the medium, depending on the fictional configurations generated by the medium.

It might be useful, in this sense, to imagine a class of texts which consists of those works (plays, films, novels, comic strips, and so on) which are more or less unadaptable without major upheavals or without "breaking up" entirely. This hypothetical repertory would include those works that use the media to express the last entrenchments of the medium. In the comic strip, such would be the case of the stories of Marc-Antoine Mathieu whose plots integrate and dramatize the internal workings of the "ninth art" along with the process of reading that the work demands. In this sense, certain forms of *mise-en-abyme* would be a way of rendering both the *syuzhet* and the medium irreplaceable. A

number of works nourish themselves by accepting this mediatic opacity as a kind of necessary rustle. Others reveal their genius by the exemplary manner in which they inextricably mingle their narrative with the spectacular emancipation, and therefore the opacity, of the medium in question.

How does one find the forms of fidelity to the spirit of a medium? That kind of fidelity is probably more productive than the famous notion of fidelity to an author, or to a story. Every self-respecting adaptation needs to organize the violence done to the *fabula* and to the *syuzhet* of the source work, for in a way the new *syuzheticization* involves not only a *mise-en-sujet*, that is, the shaping of a story, but also and especially a *mise-en-sujétion*, and its "subjectedness" to a specific medium.

The weight of a story, like that of a body, is only imaginable in relation to a mediatic force of attraction. The more intense the *médiagénie*, the more awkward the attempts to free oneself from this force of attraction. In order to move in the direction of another medium, the "being" of the story, insofar as it exists, has to dress up in a space suit, as it were, which can allow it to confront a temporary but dangerous state of weightlessness. If the translation succeeds, the story will accept a greater weight, or a loss of weight. And even, at times, accept profound modifications in mass and aspect. All of which opens up, as on the moon, hitherto unsuspected developments and perspectives.

Translated by Robert Stam

Notes

- 1 Paul Auster, *The Invention of Solitude* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1982), p. 32.
- 2 For more on this subject, see Philippe Marion, *Cours de communication narrative* (Louvain-la-Neuve: DUC, 1992).
- 3 Claude Simon, *Discours de Stockholm* (Paris: Minuit, 1986), p. 25 (translation of quotation by Robert Stam).
- 4 Claude Simon, *Orion aveugle* (Paris: Minuit, 1981), p. 5 (translation of quotation by Robert Stam).
- 5 See Philippe Marion, "Le Scénario de bande-dessinée: la différence par le média," *Études Littéraires* (Quebec) 26: 2 (1993), 77.
- 6 Paul Ricoeur, *Temps et récit*, 3 vols (Paris: Seuil, 1983, 1984, 1985); English translation by Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer, *Time and Narrative*, 2 vols (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984, 1985).
- 7 Boris Tomashevsky, "Thématique," in Tzvetan Todorov, *Théorie de la littérature* (Paris: Seuil, 1973), p. 268.
- 8 Claude Bremond, *Logique du récit* (Paris: Seuil, 1973), pp. 11–12.
- 9 Our brain might itself be conceived of as a medium if we remember that it allows different parts of the body to communicate with one another and exchange information.
- 10 Tomashevsky, "Thématique," p. 268.

- 11 Yuri Tynianov, "Des fondements du cinéma," *Les Cahiers du Cinéma* 220-1 (May-June 1970), 67.
- 12 Ibid., 69.
- 13 David Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), p. 50.
- 14 V. Chklovski, quoted by B. Eikhenbaum, "La Théorie de la 'méthode formelle'" in Todorov, *Théorie de la littérature*, p. 54.
- 15 Tomashevsky, "Thématique," p. 269.
- 16 Ibid.
- 17 Thierry Groensteen, in a text appended to a letter to André Gaudreault, dated February 25, 1991.
- 18 Notions of "unipunctuality" and "pluripunctuality" are developed in André Gaudreault, *Du littéraire au filmique: système du récit* (Paris/Quebec: Méridiens/Klincksieck/Presses de l'Université Laval, 1988). To be published in English by University of Toronto Press in 2005.
- 19 Ibid., p. 43.
- 20 For more on this concept, see Philippe Marion, "Narratologie médiatique et médiagenie des récits," *Recherches en Communication* 7 (1997), 61-87.
- 21 Gaudreault, *Du littéraire au filmique*, passim.
- 22 Philippe Marion, *Traces en cases: travail graphique et figuration narrative. Essai sur la bande dessinée et son lecteur*, vol. 1 (Brussels/Louvain la Neuve: Bruylant/Academia, 1993).
- 23 For the first formulations of this concept, see Marion, *Traces en cases*, and "Petite médiatique de la peur," *Protée* 21: 2 (1993), 47-56.

Chapter 5

The Look: From Film
to Novel

An Essay in Comparative Narratology

François Jost

Born at the beginning of the twentieth century, the relations between novel and film have often been thought of in hierarchical terms. To the extent that filmic adaptations of novels are much more frequent than novelistic adaptations of films (commonly called "novelizations"), scholars tend to reflect more on the transformation of written texts into images than on the converse transformation. There is certainly much to learn from comparing a given novel with its filmic adaptation, both in ideological and narrative terms. But what I am proposing here is something quite different. Here, it will not be a question of studying film-novel relations, but rather cinema-literature relations. I will not be discussing the relation between two specific texts; rather, I will practice a kind of shuttle between cinema and novel in order to better comprehend a narrative category which functions equally well for the analysis of written as well as filmic narrative. In sum, it will be a question of what I call "comparative narratology." But how can we define such a field? To put it concisely, comparative narratology is less a matter of pointing up resemblances or differences between two semiotic systems than of deploying the cinema-literature shuttle in order to forge more precise and productive concepts.

Our itinerary will take us from what Metz calls a "universal code" – that is, a code found in multiple semiotic systems; for example, a narrative which could be literary, cinematic, or sung – to more restricted codes, concretely linked to the specificities of the materials. For comparative narratology, transcodification will be a heuristic method for understanding a certain concept of narrative. In this back and forth, we will begin with literature in order to find the origin of the concept, then move to the cinema to clarify it, and finally return to literature.

This chapter is oriented around the concept of what literary theorists call "point of view," or, following Genette, "focalization." It is curious that this notion, which evokes the look or the gaze, was first formulated by *literary* theory, since within the novelistic field, vision per se does not exist; it is only a transcription, the rough equivalent of a physical phenomenon, more metaphoric than actual.

Even in cases where a description is introduced by a verb of perception, such as "see," "observe," or "regard," the equivalence between a series of words and the described referent will always be a result of convention, of an implicit contract of transcodification in which the author participates. The expression of the thought or intellectual point of view of a character, meanwhile, is more simple and direct, since then it is a matter only of exchanging the verbal for the verbal – if we put aside for the moment the case of non-verbalized psychic movements translated or transposed by authors such as Joyce or Sarraute. What is called "point of view" thus covers two very different phenomena: on the one hand, perceiving, and on the other, thinking and knowing. Yet literary theorists generally use the same labels for the two activities: "vision," "point of view," and "focalization."

It is striking, then, that despite the purely conventional character of the gaze in the novel, literary theorists tend to look to the cinema to explain the functioning of vision in the novel. Thus we often read that the narrator of Camus' *L'Étranger* registers external events in the manner of a camera. As Linvelt puts it, "the novelistic action is not perceived by one of the actors, but rather focalized, so to speak, by a camera."¹ But, for a film theorist, this use of the camera metaphor is shockingly imprecise. What does it mean to distinguish between actions perceived by an actor and actions perceived by a camera? In films, frequently enough, what is seen by the character is also what is shown by the camera. The idea of the camera's neutrality is also surprising, since both filmmakers and theorists often speak of the "subjective camera." Indeed, what is most bizarre is that literary theorists, who need the cinematic model in order to think through novelistic procedures, do not bother to study either the functions of the camera or the ways in which the look is constructed in film. For those theorists, the camera is first and foremost an apparatus for objectively registering the world, little more than a tool without any narrative function. It plays no active role in the representation; it merely copies reality without changing it. But no informed contemporary scholar still believes in the old dream of automatic filmic transparency formulated by Bazin.

The camera metaphor unfortunately also triggers a kind of sliding from the idea of vision to the idea of objectivity or impartiality. And this sliding, in its turn, transforms a simple perceptual attitude into a mental attitude. Perception and mental attitude are presumed to function together. Literary scholars assert, for example, that if in a novel one follows the events through a character's point of view (Genette's "internal focalization"), one should not see the character from outside, since it is impossible to be simultaneously

inside and outside the character. For example, in *La Chartreuse de Parme*, the description of the Battle of Waterloo is reduced to what the character Fabrice knows – i.e. very little – and he should not be described from the outside. Following the same logic, if one does not know a character's thoughts, they suggest, one should also not know his or her perceptions.

Indeed, a careful reading of Genette's *Figures III* reveals a sliding between the moment where Genette defines "focalization" and the moment, a few pages later, where he explains it. In the first instance, point of view is defined in cognitive terms, through equality or non-equality. For example, Genette claims that a narrative features internal focalization when "the narrator only says what that character knows." In this formulation, the knowledge of the narrator is equal to that of the character. Genette argues further that a narrative features external focalization when "the narrator says less than the character knows," a formulation where the knowledge of the character exceeds that of the narrator. He speaks further of "zero focalization," where the narrator knows more than all the characters, or, more precisely, reveals more than any one of the characters knows. Here the knowledge of the narrator exceeds that of the characters. A few pages later, however, Genette deploys perceptual criteria – vision – to define point of view. Genette speaks, for example, of the traveling carriage in *Madame Bovary*, "told from the point of view of an external witness." Genette also speaks of a scene in which the "witness is not personified but is only an impersonal observer," or again of a situation in which "internal focalization implies the disappearance of the character." This sliding from the cognitive to the perceptive reaches a kind of climax when Genette chooses, as his example of internal focalization, a film, *Rashomon* (1951), which actually shows characters externally, from the *outside*.²

Even more curiously, this same confusion between seeing and knowing is found even in the work of some very reputable film theorists. Thus Jean Mitry defines the "subjective camera" as follows: "The image is called subjective because it allows the spectator to occupy the place of the heroes, to see and feel like them."³ Once again, perceptions and sensations have been conflated. Yet even the slightest reflection on the matter suggests that in the cinema the seen and the known do not always go hand in hand. What happens precisely, then, in that art for which point of view is a fundamental semiotic feature?

The Roles of the Camera in the Cinema:
The Construction of the Look

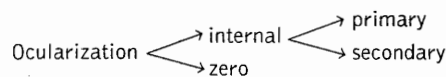
The cinema has two physical tracks – the image track and the sound track – so one easily imagines that film can simultaneously express what is seen – through the image track – and what is thought – through voice-over. The difference between seeing and feeling and knowing is almost a semiotic difference: it is possible to show someone or something and at the same time express something completely different through the voice.

In order to differentiate visual point of view, on the one hand, which once again is not a metaphor in the cinema but rather a narrative reality, and cognitive point of view on the other, I would propose the following terminology: *ocularization* has to do with the relation between what the camera shows and what the characters are presumed to be seeing; *focalization* designates the cognitive point of view adopted by the narrative, with the equalities or inequalities of knowledge expressed at their full strength. In a film, focalization is a complex product of what one sees, what the character is presumed to be seeing, what he or she is presumed to know, what he or she says, and so forth. Here I will restrict myself to the first problem, to wit the problem of determining the narrative value of what is shown by the camera, which I have referred to as ocularization.

Depending on the context, every photograph can be called objective or subjective. A photograph of a landscape can be related to the landscape itself (the referential function) or to the photographer (expressive function). That is why the same photographs are sometimes published as part of a report on a given country, and sometimes as part of a report on the work of a given photographer. And that is why any shot from any film can be transformed into a look simply by juxtaposing it with an image of someone looking. But how can we go beyond this "undecidability," this apparent neutrality? We get a glimpse of how in a small 1900 film, by the British filmmaker Hepworth, entitled *How it Feels to Be Run Over*. In the film, a horse-drawn carriage comes toward the camera and then moves off-screen, followed by an automobile, which also moves toward the camera, after which the screen goes black. White spots spread around the darkness, while we read the following words: "Oh! Mother – will – be pleased!"

In viewing this film, one at first has the impression that one is seeing an ordinary Lumière-style "view," a monstration, without any special twist. But then, when the automobile heads straight toward the spectators, their identification with the camera becomes more important than what is viewed. Finally, on reading the title "Oh, mother will be pleased!" one has the clear impression of having shared a particular look. In fact, catalogues from the period inform us that white spots against a black background were designed to signify the stars as seen by the unfortunate victim of an accident.

In order to interpret this shot, then, we have to situate it in relation to the imaginary axis of the camera-eye. Either one regards the image as being seen by specific eyes, in which case one assumes that those eyes belong to a character, or the status or the position of the camera becomes more important, in which case we attribute it to an entity external to the world portrayed, to what has been called the "grand imager." Or we can overlook the existence of this axis, in which case we have the famous illusion of transparency. These three possible attitudes in fact boil down to a binary choice: either a shot is anchored in the regard of an instance internal to the diegesis – what we have called "internal ocularization" – or it is not so anchored, and is therefore a case of "zero ocularization." We can chart this opposition in the following manner:



"Primary internal ocularization" may be defined by several configurations. In the first instance, it is marked in the signifier by the materiality of a body, whether immobile or not, or the presence of an eye which allows us, without relying on context, to identify a character not present in the image. It is a question of suggesting a regarding look without necessarily showing it. To this end, one constructs the image as an index, as a trace which allows spectators to establish an immediate link between what they see and the camera which has captured or reproduced the real, through the construction of an analogy with the spectator's own perception.

We find most of these configurations in the shot from *The Lady in the Lake* (1947) where Marlowe visits a man named Lavery: a slightly trembling forward tracking shot advances toward a sign on a door where we discover the name of the person being sought; another camera movement takes us from the sign to the hand pressing the buzzer, followed by another movement toward the name. Then the hand pushes open the door and sweeps over the house. We also discern the character's shadow.

Other criteria sometimes suggest the presence of a regarding look; for example, an unusually low angle or an out-of-focus background, or the deformation of the image in relation to what cinematic convention regards as normal in a given period (superimposed double images, out-of-focus effects) which suggest conditions such as drunkenness, strabismus, myopia, and so forth: for example, the road which becomes doubled during "Kaplan's" (Cary Grant) drunken ride in *North by Northwest* (1959); masking effects which suggest the (sometimes unnamed) presence of an observing eye (keyhole, binoculars, microscope). If masking effects, perceptual deformations, and the foregrounded presence of a part of the body almost invariably construct a character's point of view, the case of the shakily subjective tracking shot is more ambiguous. The shaking camera could signify the bodily experience of the person seeing, or could be merely an accident due to unfavorable shooting conditions which prevented a more stable image. The question is not always easy to answer since in semiotic terms nothing allows us to make an absolute distinction between a shot which simply elicits primary identification with the camera on the spectator's part, and a point-of-view shot linked to an unidentified character. With some films, it is possible to posit the difference, but in other cases we only know thanks to extrafilmic information concerning genre, period, mode of production. If the camera shakes in a big-budget Hollywood blockbuster, one can assume that it is not a question of technical ineptitude and that therefore the shaking implies an observing character. If the camera trembles in a 1960s' low-budget "direct cinema" militant documentary, on the other hand, one can assume that this stylistic "defect" has to do with the conditions of production as well as the "narrator" who "speaks cinema."

"Secondary internal ocularization" occurs when the subjective image is constructed through editing (as in shot/counter-shot); that is, through a contextualization of an image. Any image that is edited together with a shot of a person looking, within the rules of cinematic "syntax," will be "anchored" in the visual subjectivity of that person or character.

"Zero ocularization" occurs when the image is not seen by any entity within the diegesis. The "zero" here is not pejorative but technical; it simply signifies seen by no one,

"nobody's shot," or, as Eisenstein puts it: "the action which would be depicted without any author's relation to it (the subject) of any kind." In our modern terminology, we would say that this kind of ocularization has to do with the narrator; that is, the instance which seems to organize and execute both the representation and the story. But zero ocularization can be more or less marked: a normal angle seems transparent, while a bizarre or surprising angle more clearly unveils a narrating presence organizing the fiction. "Zero," then, simply means that it is not possible to assign an image to any specific gaze. Most shots of most films use zero ocularization, even in the case of characters or narrators telling their own stories in flashback.

Looking Relations in the Novel

Our little detour through the cinema has taught us the following. First, that seeing and knowing are two different things. A story can be limited to what a character knows (internal focalization) even while at the same time we see the character from outside (zero ocularization). The converse is also possible, as the case of Beckett's *Film* suggests. When a shot is in primary internal ocularization, we know less than the character – for example, we do not know his or her identity, as in the beginning of *Dark Passage* (D. Davies, 1947). The point is that in the novel as well, it is likely that the cognitive and the visual criteria do not always function together and in tandem; they can move in opposite directions.

Secondly, we have learned that the concept of ocularization or the determination of point of view assumes that it is possible to localize that point of view. When the positioning of the camera is not linked to the regard of a character within the diegesis, that positioning reveals the presence only of the cinematic narrator (zero ocularization). In the novel, then, it is likely that some moments allow us to identify an ocular position and others do not allow us to do so, and where we are not obliged to do so. Thirdly, we have learned that in the cinema there are semiotic criteria which enable us to posit with precision the relation between camera position and a character's (or the film's narrator's) point of view. And one suspects that we might also find in the novel some equivalent of this articulation of the narrative and the semiotic at the linguistic level.

With this in mind, let us examine an utterance such as the following: "Toward ten in the evening, the poker players began to show signs of fatigue." When Mieke Bal speaks of a "narrator-focalizer" and concludes that the word "signs" means "that the behavior of the characters may be seen and interpreted by a spectator . . . and that the narrative is obviously told by an extra-diegetic narrator and also focalized by an extra-diegetic focalizer" she fails to carry out the operations that I have been recommending here.⁴ Although the word "signs" does imply exteriority in relation to the poker players, one cannot limit oneself to such imprecise approximations when it is a question of defining a "focalizer." Within the utterance, there is no indication of the virtual looking position.

And if the idea of ocularization is to have any conceptual value at all, only this criterion – the question of looking position – should operate, as we have seen in our detour through the cinema. Moreover, if one imagines the filmed version of this poker scene, it becomes quite clear that the camera could be placed in any number of "correct" positions: low angle, high angle, behind the players, in front of the players, and so forth. If you are outside the scene, it is a case of zero ocularization; which does not imply that the scene is observed by someone. In the case of this quotation, then, there is no point of view but only a narrator who tells the story, in the third person, and who is only implicitly present. The choice that confronts the writer, then, is whether he will emphasize the narrative action or choose to make the narrator more or less perceptible to the reader.

The fact that an image is seen by a spectator does not necessarily imply that it is oriented by a point of view in the diegesis. Distinctive indices and/or contextual information are necessary to say whether such an utterance moves toward a subjective intention. The example of cinema – where the look is definitely a fact of language – prods us into clarifying the question of novelistic point of view by articulating both narrative and semiotic criteria. Readers should try to determine, through and beyond the words, whether or not what they read is filtered through the eyes or through the ears. And just as one requires semiotic methods (concerning the material of expression) to analyze these questions in the cinema, one requires linguistics to analyse looking relations in the novel.

Let us examine, for example, the following utterances:

But the noise of the high heels cannot be heard here. (from Robbe-Grillet's *Dans le labyrinthe*)

Thus, on my right, the somber and silent image of death, and on my left, the decent bacchantas of life. (Balzac's *Sarrasine*)

Above the Hotel Recamier (far behind?) a crane stands out in the sky. It was there yesterday, but I don't remember any longer having noticed it. (from Georges Perec's *Tentative d'épuisement d'un lieu-Parisien*)

A luminous rectangle stands out against the wall, in the back and to the right, just in front of the staircase, and an illuminated zone from that point on. (Robbe-Grillet's *Dans le labyrinthe*)

In all four of these utterances, space is organized around a viewing position. The first example separates two spaces: inside and outside. The last three examples all lend a sense of laterality or depth to the described space, but the ocular position is not produced in the same way in the three cases. In the first example, the eminently deictic adverb "here" implicitly calls attention to what C. Kerbrat-Orecchioni calls a "locutor-observer."⁵ (The

fact that the observer is an ear changes nothing.) In the case of the first sentence, "auricularization" is deduced in the same manner as ocularization, in the sense that it is a deictic subjectivity, that is, a subjectivity characterized by a spatio-temporal situation, that constructs the text. In the second sentence, it is the possessive adjective "my" that relativizes the spatial description in function of the narrator. In the third sentence, it is the parenthetical sentence that allows us to attribute the sentence to the narrator. In the fourth sentence, we need more contextual information to determine whether we should attribute description to a character or a narrator.

The first point to make about these examples is that the vectorization of perception is more easily determined than the anchorage of a look. It is no exaggeration to speak of a narratological "law:" the existence of ocularization precedes its identification. This observation is not surprising, furthermore, given the difficulties of localization in language. To resolve the question of attribution of a point of view in any given instance, we have to solve two problems. First, the question of orientation in space. If the word "here" necessarily points to a locutor, it is not the same with paradigmatic oppositions like "left" and "right" and "behind" and "in front of." Kerbrat-Orecchioni demonstrates that such words can be used in very different ways. To say that "X is to the right of Y" changes meaning depending on whether Y is oriented in a lateral sense or not. "Go sit to the left of the chair" refers to the side which is "my" left. "Sit to Pierre's left" means to sit at the left side of Pierre, not to my left. Moreover, some objects presuppose a given orientation. The tops and bottoms of a building are the same for everyone, independent of viewing position, whence the need for the parenthesis in statement 3 above.

Second, we need to solve the problems linked to displayed speech. The fourth utterance is difficult to interpret because "in the back" and "to the right" can be deictic or can have to do with the position of a character about whom one is speaking, since "it often happens that when the space is the one where evolves, not the subject of the enunciation but an actant of the utterance, that the relation of the localization is determined in function of S1, the place where the actant is supposed to be."⁶ In that case, only a contextual analysis can allow us to determine positionality.

For the moment, we can bypass the problems relating to textual analysis. The list of textual indicators can be enriched through particular analyses. Be that as it may, linguistic reflection, based on a method culled from semiotic film analysis, allows us to offer a tripartite account of ocularization:

Primary internal ocularization occurs when spatial adverbs are deployed as deictics because we are sure that these adverbs bear on the one who is telling the story and on the one who is seeing the scene. As in the cinema, this configuration can be deduced from the signifying traces of the enunciation. Primary internal ocularization thus refers back to a first-person narrator, whereas in the cinema we can only affirm that it refers back to someone seeing the scene, but who is not necessarily telling it. In the cinema, there is no equivalency or solidarity between the observer and the speaker.

Secondary internal ocularization occurs when the description is anchored in the eyes of a character (once we have resolved the kinds of problems addressed above).

Zero ocularization is reserved for cases where the description is oriented in some way but without gaining meaning in relation either to the narrator or to the character. For example, when a painting is described in such a way that there is an orientation, that is, a specific attitude in relation to the painting, but without that attitude being ascribable to a specific narrator or character. In that case, the third-person utterance points to an implicit narrator, but not to a visual positioning. Zero ocularization in a novel is therefore closer to an *absence* of point of view, which is hardly surprising since point of view is not one of the inherent semiotic mechanisms of literature; it can therefore only be indirectly suggested or evoked.

Geographical ocularization, finally, characterizes those descriptions which do not point either to a narrator or to a character but rather to a kind of anonymous traveler of the kind one finds in touristic guidebooks or in Stendhal, with his famous definition of the novel as "a mirror traveling down a road."

Indeed, if literary theorists have often confused knowing and seeing, it is because the language uses the same words to express both attitudes, the cognitive and the perceptive. This process becomes manifest in the following utterance. "James Bond seems astonished." The sentence could either describe a deduction based on the visible appearance of the character or convey the idea that one does not really know the inner feelings of the character. Only the "detour" through cinema can definitively clarify this kind of situation. But the literary detour has also allowed us to bury a series of preconceived ideas from literary theory. First, in terms of the famous "objectivity of the camera." The notion of the "camera eye," often used by critics to evoke a neutral and objective description, is now revealed as a dangerous and baseless metaphor. Secondly, to speak of the looking position in a novel requires us to inquire into localization. In this sense, the concept of "focalizer" is more or less useless, since it adds nothing to the concept of "narrator." Third, the relationship between seeing and knowing is not obligatory. We can see a character *and* be inside his or her head. Ocularization does not always go hand in hand with focalization.

The semiotic materials of film and novel are not the same, and one cannot mechanically transfer concepts forged in one domain to another domain. But it is also useless to try to solve these problems through imprecise metaphors. If one has to define the point of view, which obviously has to do with the visual, it is important to look to those arts, such as cinema, which point concretely to an ocular position, as long as one takes into account the material differences of the two media. Thus transcoding is not only a prod for innovatory theoretical reflections but also a means for forging the more solid and rigorous concepts needed for comparative narratology.

Translated by Robert Stam