

equally useful. This is unlikely, because the poets who begin a stylistic change cannot know ahead of time how fruitful the change is going to be. To know this would mean that they already knew all of the useful similes and poetic devices implicit in the style. If they knew this, they would themselves have used all of these poetic devices.

An autoregressive statistical analysis of the cycles is most appropriate. In such an analysis, one attempts to predict the mean score for one period from the mean scores for prior periods. Of course, this is consistent with the evolutionary theory, which involves the assertion that the main cause of poetic content in any period is the poetic content of prior periods. Partial autocorrelations — the autocorrelation at a given lag partialling out the effect of autocorrelations due to earlier or intervening lags — fall to about zero after a lag of two. This is the pattern expected with a second-order autoregressive process (see Gottman). It is of great interest that a completely different pattern of autocorrelations would have been found if reflectionist theories of artistic change (primordial content in a given period is due to extra-literary "shocks" in the current and/or prior periods) were true (Gottman). Because the first autoregressive parameter is statistically insignificant, the best autoregressive model for Primordial Content in a given period (PC) is  $PC_t = -.368PC_{t-2}$ . That is, amount of primordial content in the poetry of a given period is a function of primordial content two periods prior ( $PC_{t-2}$ ) to the period.

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## Dimensions of Meaning in Modern Narrative: A Systems-Theoretical Approach to Narratology

### 1. Introduction

Until fairly recently, narratology has been haunted by a strange discrepancy: while claiming to concern itself with *all* kinds of narrative, it has almost exclusively relied on examples from fictional or literary narrative.<sup>1</sup> This state of affairs can be traced back to the early twentieth century, when the emergence of the novel as an aesthetically self-conscious literary genre coincided with the first attempts at theorizing narrative. Since then realizations of narrative in literature or other discourses have been based on anthropological and ahistorical attention, from the specificity of modernity to narrative strategies in general. Further, the linguistic foundations of structuralist narratology made sure that this veil of "naturalness" remained largely intact in spite of the most thorough scientific inquiries. The following observations will argue that this lack of historical consciousness can be remedied by adding a systems-theoretical dimension to narratology. Focusing on communication rather than language, narrative will be interpreted as a mode of meaning production in specific social systems within a larger framework of socio-cultural evolution.

In recent years, narratology has been called upon to pay attention to empirically testable communicative situations and the closely related area of reading research (see, for example, Fludernik 1993). To date, the most extended attempt is Monika Fludernik's reconceptualization of narrative and narratology in terms of pragmatics, reception theory, and constructivism in her recent book, *Towards a "Natural" Narratology* (1996). While sharing many basic assumptions with Fludernik's enterprise, the approach presented in this article is much more

1. Compare for example the relationship between title and content in standard works such as Barthes; Genette; Stanzel. Notable exceptions to this rule can be found in the English-speaking world: see the titles of Chatman or Rimmon-Keenan. For recent surveys of the field see Jahn and Nünning (from a systematic — as opposed to the systemic — point of view) and Omega and Landa (from a historical point of view).

historically and sociologically oriented. In my article here, I propose that a systems-theoretical perspective will provide a suitable starting point for a historical contextualization of narratological categories.

## 2. Systemic Contexts of Modern Narrative

Expanding on what may be termed the anthropo-linguistic view embraced in structuralist narratology, the following observations will focus on the complex interrelation between individual and cultural factors governing the narrative apprehension of reality and history in modern Western society. In a theoretical design based with modifications on Niklas Luhmann's theory of social systems every narrative can be read with regard to specific horizons of meaning.<sup>2</sup> These horizons are opened up by possible contexts of communication which can be described in systems-theoretical terms. Generally speaking, systemic communication of this kind is conditioned by three basic systemic references which all have their share in determining what a narrative can mean:

1) In a society based on functional differentiation, the emergence of a social system must be motivated by a specific *function* that only this system fulfills for society as a whole. On this level, the meaning of narrative is inseparably linked to the historically contingent structure of society which nevertheless provides comparatively steady semantic paradigms.

2) On a different level, a social system is characterized by specific relations of reciprocal *performance* with other systems in its environment. Although psychic and social systems differ as to their basic operational form — consciousness and communication, respectively — both operate on the basis of *meaning*. It is meaning in this sense which makes complex processes of co-evolution and reciprocal facilitation between psychic and social systems possible. Thus, an investigation into the meaning of narrative can be grounded in specifically modern conditions of what might be termed *performative interpenetration* between psychic and social systems.<sup>3</sup>

3) Finally, the identity of a social system is based on *reflexivity*, i.e., regulative self-observation and self-description controlling the relation between *function* and *performance*. On this level, the system works out a specific "symbolically generalized" *medium* and a specific "binarily schematized" *code* of com-

munication. It is here that specialized horizons of meaning can be established. Even in such general terms it is obvious that the systemic references of function and reflexivity point to functional dimensions of meaning, aimed at maintaining a system's specific communication at the cost or reward of evolving increasingly specialized structures. However, functional dimensions of meaning regulate the availability of content-based or semantic dimensions of meaning. Systems-specific versions of these are then worked out on the level of reflexivity before they are put to the test of communicability on the level of performance. It is here that a system joins the "ecology" of meaning resulting from the complex interplay of psychic and social systems in modern Western society. The central characteristic of this specifically modern culture is the lack of an overriding principle of integration: ever since the eighteenth century modern culture has been oscillating between claims of "objectivity," subjective experience, and a reluctant recourse to reflexivity.<sup>4</sup>

With this framework in mind, modes of narrative presentation can be examined A) With respect to their potential for "objective" and subjective dimensions of meaning negotiated on the level of performance and B) With regard to reflexive dimensions of meaning implying the systemic references of function and reflexivity. These dimensions are to a certain degree "present" in every modern narrative and can be realized in actual contexts of communication. However, specific systemic contexts "sublimate" tendencies which might disrupt the system's horizon of meaning. It is interesting to note that those social systems which can be regarded as the most obviously relevant contexts of narrative in modern culture, that is, literature and science (especially historiography), seem to occupy diametrically opposed positions in this respect: while scientific communication with its claims of "objectivity" has to establish a fairly rigid horizon of meaning, flexibility is the fundamental characteristic of literary communication (see, for example, Nünning 129-205).

Nevertheless, literary and scientific communication share one fundamental feature which may serve as a suitable starting point for comparison: the specific systemic communication of both literature and science employs written texts ("works of art" and "publications," respectively) as symbolically generalized media of communication. In Luhmann's theory, a written text provides traces of two levels of selectivity. On the one hand, it recurs to selections of *what* is being communicated (information) and, on the other hand, to selections of *how* it is

2 See Luhmann (1984, 1990, 1995). For a short outline of my adaptation of Luhmann, see Reinfandt 1995. For an English introduction to basic concepts of Luhmann's theory, see Schwanitz. For a bibliography of Luhmann's theory applied to literature, see De Berg.

3 For this double-edged concept of performance focusing on the interpenetration between psychic and social systems, see Reinfandt (1995, 59-61) and, in detail, Reinfandt (1997, 29-41).

4 In this context, the *grands récits* of modernity of "enlightenment," "idealism," and "historicism" (see Lyotard 1984) may be labelled as "objective," "subjective," and "reflexive" dimensions of meaning.

being communicated (message).<sup>5</sup> However, a text will only be realized as communication if the difference between information and message is negotiated on a third level of selectivity, in Luhmann's terms understanding (1990, 24-26, 178-79). Thus, meaning emerges from a complex interplay of textual features and possible contexts of understanding in modern society. If a text serves as a symbolically generalized medium of communication, the latter are invariably systemic contexts.

In this respect, the social systems of literature and science can be described as follows: with regard to the functional dimensions of meaning, literature can be plausibly "reduced" to the rather abstract function of entertainment by interesting texts. Thus, the binary opposition "interesting vs. not interesting" suggests itself as the specific code of modern literary communication.<sup>6</sup> Within this theoretical design, the most striking feature of literary communication is the semantically variable dependence of its code on the interpenetration between the literary system and psychic systems. Thus, the confrontation of the modern individual with an increasingly pluralistic social context which no longer provides reliable paradigms of personal identity becomes the focal point of literary performance. Negotiating information from all spheres of society, modern literature integrates the many truths of modern society with special reference to psychic systems' needs and makes this achievement its very own truth.

In the light of the above notions, it becomes obvious that many of the aspects traditionally considered to be "functions" of literature, such as, for example, the propagation of educational ideals, religious beliefs, scientific knowledge, political views or patterns of private experience, will have to be dealt with on the level of performance. This specific flexibility of the literary system's horizon of meaning finds its institutional equivalent in an asymmetric mode of inclusion: only a minority of psychic systems who actually contribute new texts are actively socialized in the system, while the majority of psychic systems involved in literary communication are passively socialized and do their reading in private.

In contrast to literature's leanings towards private, individual, and subjective experience and its confrontation with the many truths of modern society, scientific communication aims at an elimination of just these aspects of meaning. On the functional level, science specializes in the communicative production and

5 Schwanitz uses the term "utterance" which seems to me an inadequate reinstatement of anthropocentric models of communication within a systems-theoretical framework. While "communication" would be adequate enough, it would also spoil the clarity of the terminological hierarchy. Therefore, I prefer the term "message" which also implies the material existence of written texts.

6 Systems-theoretical definitions of the function and the code of literature have so far been offered by Luhmann, Schmidt, Plumpe and Werber (for an overview see Reinfandt 1995, 58-59). My own position follows the one put forward by Plumpe and Werber (see Werber, Plumpe and Werber, Plumpe).

verification of knowledge as truth. In doing so it employs the specific code of "true vs. untrue" — on this and some of the following aspects of my postulates, see Luhmann 1990 — which avoids the semantic variability of its literary counterpart and calls for linguistic and textual features of precision and transparency worked out by the systemic context itself. As a result of this rigid specialization, scientific communication emerges on the institutional level as the only social system that does not establish an asymmetric mode of inclusion: the increasing specialization of academic discourse leaves no room for amateurs, all psychic systems involved in scientific communication have to be actively socialized in the system.

### 3. Narrative in Literary and Scientific Communication

So how do these differences of systemic context affect the functioning of narrative? The most obvious difference between literary and scientific realizations of narrative is the seemingly clear-cut distinction between fictional narrative on the one hand and factual or historical narrative on the other. This distinction has lately been commented upon by narratologists Gérard Genette and Dorrit Cohn, for example. Both agree that, as Genette puts it, "most of the characteristic textual indices of fictional narrative ... point to the same specific trait, that of direct access to the subjectivity of characters" (1990, 761). Thus, Genette's category of mode which comprises aspects of focalization is of central importance for distinguishing fictional and factual narrative. Following up on this argument, Cohn illustrates the implications of a specifically narratological perspective when she states that "in this sense we might say that the modal system of historical (and all other nonfictional) narration is 'defective' when compared to the virtual modalizations of fiction" (786): while literary narrative is characterized by its variable realization of the full range of Genette's types of focalization,<sup>7</sup> historical narrative is limited to a type of focalization not even adequately covered by Genette's terms. Neither internal focalization, which can be considered a fairly reliable signpost of fictionality, nor zero focalization, which comprises passages of internal focalization, nor external focalization with its strict exclusion of any kind of comment or conjecture, seem to be applicable to historical narrative. In consequence, Cohn calls for a new category of zero focalization in a narrower sense which eliminates the option of variable internal focalization and smooths over the mimetic strictness of external focalization by drawing on what she terms "a language of 'nescience' ... of speculation, conjecture and induction (based on referential documentation)" (787).

In spite of all the difficulties in finding reliable markers of fictionality, the

7 As Genette's categories have been deduced from literary examples this point should be fairly obvious.

difference between the quality and range of focalization employed in fictional or factual narrative seems to be the most important feature which could be considered "a point of *narratological* divergence between the two types" (Genette 1990, 763; my emphasis). Nevertheless, this narratological divergence can be more adequately explained if it is seen in the light of contextual processes of systems differentiation. If one takes an anthropological dimension of narrative for granted (in the sense of, for example, Ricoeur 1984-88, Iser; see also Fludernik 1996), unrestricted narration in zero focalization seems to be the most "natural" type of narration. Someone who is telling a story either knows "what happened" or she/he is making it up anyway. The idea that this "natural" type of narration stands at the beginning of a process of differentiation induced by increasingly specialized systemic contexts can be supported with regard to the history of the modern novel from the eighteenth century to the present (for a detailed account from a systems-theoretical perspective see Reinfandt 1997, 123-254).

Early examples of modern novel writing are either in the autobiographical mode such as, for example, Defoe's *Moll Flanders* (1722), or in the authorial mode such as, for example, Fielding's *Tom Jones* (1749). In both cases, there is a strong emphasis on the "objectifying" effects of retrospective or conventional narrative distance. On the other hand, the evolution of modern literary communication shows a strong tendency towards presenting the subjectivity of characters in more or less unmediated ways: after beginnings at least partial legitimization of verisimilitude in Richardson's *Pamela* (1740), the seeming immediacy of presentation is increasingly legitimized by conventions established in literary communication itself, the most prominent of these being free indirect discourse. The conventional character of subjectivistic modes of presentation in internal focalization is finally driven to extremes in modernist novels, thus provoking the emergence of its obvious counterpart, an "objectivistic" mode of presentation in external focalization. Both types of modernist narrative technique were implicitly claiming to be superior ways of apprehending "reality." However, since then the realization of the inherently and ultimately fragmented character of the specifically modern "ecology" of meaning has increasingly undermined such claims. As a consequence, the hybrid horizon of meaning in literary communication has reached a new evolutionary stage. This is instructively illustrated by the state of contemporary fiction: at the end of the process of differentiation marked by the broad categories of "realism" and "modernism," literary narrative can freely employ all those modes which have been played through so far, but in "postmodern" times the "naturalness" of yore has become one literary convention among others (see, for example, Vitoux 1991, 1992). Nevertheless, the self-conscious and self-confident interplay with *all* dimensions of meaning available in modern culture remains the central performative achievement of literature.

Scientific communication, on the other hand, seems to have imposed stricter

rules on the seemingly "natural" transparency of realist modes of writing developed since the eighteenth century. In accordance with the scientific ideal of "objectivity," nineteenth-century historiography relies on a strictly neutralized act of narration creating the illusion of events speaking for themselves. As Hayden White has pointed out, nineteenth-century narrative historiography tends to locate its meaning "objectively" in the order of things as manifested in, for example, Hegel's state (20-22). This, however, as White's work indicates, is not the end of scientific processes of specialization. If retrospective second-order observation made possible by the increasing specialization of scientific communication casts doubt on the narrative strategies employed in nineteenth-century historiography by laying open the particularities of their ideological context, the only alternative is to locate the meaning of a critical narrative historiography reflexively in the scientific discourse itself. Thus, the evolution of the social system of science aims at a rigidly controlled horizon of meaning: as opposed to literature, scientific communication has neither room for subjective dimensions of meaning nor for "objective" dimensions of meaning imported from other social systems. Science produces its own truth while literature negotiates and integrates the many truths of modern society.

However, both literature and historiography make use of the strange phenomenon that "forms of narrative blithely overrun the boundary between fiction and nonfiction" (Genette 1990, 773). From this observation Genette draws the conclusion that it is "urgent for narratology to follow their lead" (1990, 773). It is here that systems-theoretical approaches may come in useful because of their potential for establishing a historically grounded polycontextual frame of reference which sheds light on the interrelation between socio-cultural evolution, empirical communicative situations, the pragmatics of reading, and aspects of narratology.

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## Literature, Media, and Society: Toward a Media Description Standard

### 1. Introduction

Literary studies employ many categories and terms covering periods of literary history and types of literature such as epochs, styles, genres, etc. These categories and terms allow for a general ordering of literature and the comparison of literary types, styles, themes, motifs, etc. These terms are mostly text-oriented in the sense that they emphasize and distinguish grammatical, syntactical, and semantical features of texts. Following the basic theoretical assumptions of the Empirical Study of Literature, I propose that in the context of a socio-psychology (or psycho-sociology) of the communicative system it is necessary to be able to distinguish different types of media subsystems. Taxonomical and category differentiation, I argue, would be necessary for the purposes of observation, comparison, historiographical description and evaluation, for societal design, political planning and future developments of the arts, etc. In order to do so we are in need of a standard or measure for comparing media subsystems, literary or other. It is evident that such a standard should not only be text- or product-based but must include non-textual features of media and media use. Thus, the present article has the purpose to stimulate discussion about general dimensions and parameters for the description of the media system. In the following, I will present some suggestions concerning 1) Ecological; 2) Economical- and technological; 3) Political- and social; 4) Cultural; and 5) Media-specific preconditions and constraints of media use in general, of literature in particular, and of certain types of related actions (writing, reading, publishing, etc.). This effort aims at a set of dimensions or categories which allow for a systemic and systematic ordering — to some extent in quantitative terms — of media-systemic units (e.g., national literary systems).

### 2. Media and Media Analysis

The term "media" covers the whole range of communicative action from non-verbal signs and natural language to the most advanced communicative technologies like electronic mail, TV-conferences or cyberspace communication.