

Vera Nünning (Ed.)

New Approaches to Narrative

Cognition – Culture – History

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Bergstraße 27, 54295 Trier

Postfach 4005, 54230 Trier

Tel.: (0651) 41503 / 9943344, Fax: 41504

Internet: <http://www.wvttrier.de>

E-Mail: wvt@wvttrier.de

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In contrast to other ‘publications of proceedings’, however, this book was from the start conceived of as more than just another collection of essays. Instead, it aims at providing an overview of the most fruitful new trends and approaches within narrative theory on the one hand, and at showing the usefulness of applying narratological categories to different kinds of narrative on the other, thus highlighting the potential of narrative theory for other disciplines. In order to give non-experts in the field some guidance for the selection of those chapters that might be of interest to their research, a general introduction gives an overview of recent developments; it also identifies gaps that might profitably be filled in the future. The three parts of the book are devoted to different kinds of approaches to narrative, viz., cognitive, cultural and historical narratology, each of which is introduced by a brief essay which maps the field.

Incidentally, this setup corresponds to the motto of the Gutenberg University: ‘moving minds, crossing boundaries’. Our workshop provided a wonderful opportunity to move both minds and bodies, and it is to be hoped that the crossing of disciplinary boundaries, which is most apparent in the third part of the volume, will be continued and realised by the readers of this book.

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Mainz, May 2013

Vera Nünning

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FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE: NEW APPROACHES TO NARRATIVE

VERA NÜNNING

Narrative and Narrative Theory as ‘Boom Industries’

As early as 1998 David A. Hyman stated that ‘Narrative is a boom industry’, and this statement is even more true today. Not only have narratives been a more or less ubiquitous phenomenon in the history of human culture but their importance as both an object of study and a means of presenting results has been acknowledged in a growing number of fields of research. The recognition of the significance of narrative, which has led some scholars to proclaim a ‘narrative turn’ (Isernhagen 1999: 176f., 180) or a ‘narrativist turn in the human sciences’ (Kreiwirth 1995), can be linked to a number of factors. Prominent among these are the growing awareness of the omnipresence of narratives both in daily life and in a broad spectrum of disciplines, ranging from anthropology over sociology, law studies, political studies, psychology (with a whole subfield of ‘narrative psychology’), medicine, theology, historical studies and philosophy to literary studies and linguistics. Moreover, the persuasive function of narratives has now been acknowledged – and explored – both in psychology and media studies.

Perhaps the most important factor for both the growing interest in narratives and the development of a broad range of new approaches to narrative is the appreciation of their cognitive functions. By now, narratives are recognised as a way of understanding, conceptualising and constructing the world: Narratives serve to make sense of incoherent events. Already during the 1980s and 1990s, Jerome Bruner drew attention to this function of ‘narrative thinking’, which is a complementary process to ‘propositional’ or ‘argumentative’ cognitive practices used in the sciences. Since then, cognitivist scholars have taken up the problem and shown the usefulness of narratives as a ‘tool for thinking’ (cf. Herman 2003) and as an important means of worldmaking (cf. Nünning/Nünning/Neumann 2010). While the basic processes involved in cognition are held to be universal in cognitive studies, many of the factors concerning the understanding of particular texts are shaped by cultural factors; narrative conventions, which are part and parcel of the process of sense making, are both culturally specific and historically variable. Forms and structures of narratives are neither universal nor neutral media of ‘representing’ reality; instead, they play an important part in the process of ascribing meaning to whatever is being ‘represented’. Narrative conventions shape meaning, they construct the models of the world and create identities which then form the basis of social interactions.

The performative power of narratives and narrative conventions highlights their interdisciplinary importance as well as their potential for the study of cultural history. Since narrative forms shape the process of meaning making and the understanding as

well as creation of our social and cultural worlds, they should assume a prominent position in the study of narrative in all fields. But although the analysis of narrative is practiced in a host of disciplines within the humanities, narrative theory as well as the more specialised field of narratology has so far been somewhat less popular beyond the field of literary studies. The potential of narratological categories and criteria for the analysis of narratives has yet to be recognised by many scholars concerned with the interpretation of stories in other disciplines. This neglect may be due to a number of reasons, among them the sheer wealth of narratological studies, the breadth of research questions they pursue, and the difficulty of following the ongoing developments within these areas: Even though there are a number of volumes which have mapped the field, it is certainly difficult to keep up with the most recent trends.

This volume offers an overview of some of the most interesting new approaches to narrative, while also delineating their usefulness as analytical tools and interpretative frameworks. By providing concise introductions to the premises, key concepts and methodology of cutting-edge approaches within narrative theory, this volume gives an overview of some of its major new developments. Moreover, it aims to initiate an interdisciplinary dialogue between narratology and other fields of study concerned with the interpretation of narratives by highlighting the possibilities and potentials of narrative theory for the analysis of a wide range of texts. The breadth in scope is reflected in the topics of the contributions, which have been arranged in three sections which arguably explore three major research fields within narrative theory. The first of these focuses on new approaches in the field of cognitive narratology, which concentrates on the relation between cognitive processes and the interpretation and production of texts, and is thus based on an interdisciplinary exchange between narrative theory and cognitive science. The second part shifts attention from the relation between narratives and the mind to that of narratives and culture, shedding light on the performative power of narratives and their ideological implications and functions. The contributions in this section on cultural narratology take up and refine the categories developed within classical narrative theory. The third section is marked by its interdisciplinary character and lays even more emphasis on the cultural moment of production of the narratives in question than the second; moreover, it shows the fruitfulness of applying narratological categories to factual historical and historiographical narratives. In order to demonstrate the latent significance of narrative theory for scholars in other disciplines, the chapters consist of two main parts each, the first delineating the key premises and concepts of the approach in question and the second exemplifying and demonstrating the usefulness of the approach by applying its categories to the interpretation of a particular narrative. The chapters end with a brief conclusion situating the respective approach within the scope of larger trends and pointing to further developments and areas of research.

Since the chapters in this volume discuss the potential of those approaches which have been developed or significantly modified during the last fifteen years or so, it seems appropriate to place these in a larger context. This introduction will therefore

provide a very brief overview of recent developments in narrative theory and highlight some gaps which future studies might profitably fill. In addition to presenting a working definition of narrative, this introduction will also outline the conceptual matrix of the volume and direct readers' attention to the three parts of the book in order to make it easier to choose those chapters that may be specifically promising for the particular field of research that they are interested in.

New Approaches in Narrative Theory¹

If narrative can be called a boom industry, narrative theory certainly qualifies as a burgeoning field, too. A glance at the status of the field ten years ago can serve to illustrate what has been achieved since the two volumes *Neue Ansätze in der Erzähltheorie* (2002a; 'New Approaches in Narrative Theory') and *Erzähltheorie transgenerisch, intermedial, interdisziplinär* (2002b; 'Narrative Theory Transgenerically, Intermedially, Interdisciplinarily') were published. It can also illustrate why it seems sensible to take a new look at recent developments and trends, and once again to take stock of those approaches that have turned out to be particularly productive.

When Ansgar Nünning and I tried to provide an overview of the state of the art in narrative theory in 2002, we were surprised that the field was so diverse, rich and fertile that we ended up publishing two volumes instead of one. In the first, contributors sketched new approaches within the field of narratology, providing an overview of 'postclassical' narratology, ranging from feminist narratology over a cultural historical narratology to postmodern deconstructions of narratology. Other essays in the first volume focused on postcolonial and pragmatic narratology as well as on a possible-worlds theory approach. The most recent of the developments discussed was cognitive narratology, which has obvious parallels of concern with Monika Fludernik's concept of 'natural narratology'. Since then, there has been an explosion of research within narrative theory, which has branched out in a wide range of different approaches as 'narratologies'.

As the three adjectives used in the title, viz. 'transgeneric', 'intermedial' and 'interdisciplinary', indicated, the second volume was dedicated to narrative theory beyond narratives defined in a narrow sense, exploring the relevance of narrative theory for an understanding of poems, plays, films and cartoons as well as the role of narratives in historiography and psychology. In this volume the term 'narratology' was slowly giving way to the more encompassing concept of the 'theory of narrative'. In his path-breaking article "The Problem of Narrativity in Literature, the Arts and Music: A Contribution to Intermedial Narrative Theory", Werner Wolf developed the ter-

1 The following overview of the field and recent developments is, as far as the description of the state of the art in 2000 is concerned, based on the two volumes which I edited together with Ansgar Nünning. The development since then has been sketched by Ansgar Nünning (2012), from which many of the arguments (though presented in a different order and with a different focus) are derived.

minological foundations of an intermedial approach to narrative and narrativity. This already points towards our aim for the whole volume, namely to map the field of possible intermedial and interdisciplinary applications of narratology, which had rarely been used beyond literary studies at the time. The two articles following Wolf's therefore explored the connection between drama and narratology, and poetry and narrative theory respectively. Both were future-oriented rather than geared towards taking stock of what had been done so far, since there were relatively few publications in either of the fields at the time. The two articles provided the building stones for a theory and methodology of narratological analyses of dramatic and lyrical texts; at the same time they were early contributions to a 'transgeneric' approach in narratology, which has gained considerable momentum since then.

The link between different media and narrative was the topic of three other articles, one of which could, already in 2002, look back on a well-developed field with finely tuned terminological and methodological tools. The narratological analysis of films was quite advanced – and has been pursued further since then – while the narratology of comic books and 'cyberage-narratology', which explores the connection between narrative theory and hyperfictions, had not attracted a lot of critical attention. At least with regard to comic books, this has changed with the publication of Martin Schüwer's seminal study in 2008. The interdisciplinary potential of narratology was highlighted in two further chapters, which were concerned with the role of narratives in psychology and historiography. In both fields, of course, the importance of narratives had long been recognised: especially philosophers of history such as Arthur Danto, Louis Mink and Hayden White had published in-depth studies on the connections between narrative forms, cognition and the presentation of history. Correspondingly, the sub-discipline of 'narrative psychology' focuses on the link between narrative and the creation of (personal) identity. In both fields, however, the application of narratological categories has added important new facets to the existing research. The latter two contributions therefore demonstrated in how far other disciplines can stand to profit from the application of narratological categories. This is not a one-sided process, however, since it also becomes clear that 'classical' narratological approaches can be enriched by integrating concepts and models of narrative which have been developed in other fields. By highlighting the benefits of the exchange between 'classical' narratological models and categories developed in other disciplines concerned with the study of narrative, these chapters also point toward possible lines of development of an inter- or transdisciplinary theory of narrative.

Although one of the main goals of the two 2002 volumes was taking stock of the state of the art, delineating the most important approaches of narrative theory available at the turn of the millennium, with the benefit of hindsight one can say that many of the developments outlined in these volumes were just beginning at the time. For instance, apart from Manfred Jahn's brilliant programmatic essays (cf. Jahn 1997; 1999) there was no fully-fledged cognitive narratology to speak of in 2000, while this approach has brought forth a multitude of studies concentrating on a broad range of

topics since then. The same holds true for postcolonial narratology, which was still in its beginnings a decade ago, whereas by now quite a number of applications have refined narratological categories and illustrated their usefulness in postcolonial studies. Still, many questions remain open, particularly as far as the elaboration of the methods and theories of narratology with regard to their usefulness in exploring the ideological dimensions of literature are concerned. It is the aim of a projected volume by Richard Walsh, which stages an encounter between narrative theory and postcolonialist questions, texts and theories, to demonstrate in how far the narratological toolkit can be brought to bear on an analysis of (post)colonial ideologies. Another emerging field is the exploration of the relevance of narrative theory for the study of historical sources and historiographical texts, which is of far greater importance now than it was at the time. In retrospect, the volumes can be regarded as a future-oriented forecast of lines of inquiry which were to be pursued during the coming years. Since we seem to be at the threshold of a similar outburst of narratological studies at the moment, it seems worthwhile to take stock of some of the most promising conceptualisations and elaborations of narratology and point towards some particularly fruitful developments.

Important Developments in Narrative Theory 2000 to 2012

Despite the ubiquity of narratives and the talk of a ‘narrative turn’ in the humanities and social sciences, the field of narrative theory only began to be mapped a decade ago. There were many scholars active in the field of narratology, and, as the brief sketch provided above may have served to show, there were quite a number of interesting diversifications within the field of narratology as well as attempts at applying narratological categories to other genres, media and disciplines. However, narrative theory, which encompasses narratology and integrates the concerns of other disciplines interested in the analysis of stories, had scarcely been the object of interdisciplinary attention at the time.

The past decade has seen a host of studies assessing and refining the narratological toolset as well as sketching narrative theory’s relations to other areas of inquiry, which demonstrates how the field of narrative theory has strengthened and consolidated. Important encyclopaedias and handbooks have mapped the field and provided the basis for a systematic study of both narrative theory and its possible applications. Among the most significant landmark works in this context, the *Routledge Encyclopaedia of Narrative Theory* (Herman/Jahn/Ryan 2005) not only defines central terms and approaches, but also delineates a host of relations between narrative and other areas, such as cognition or the emotions. Moreover, a number of handbooks and collections of essays provide in-depth analyses and even more comprehensive and detailed accounts of key concepts and major approaches in narratology. Particularly noteworthy publications include the *Handbook of Narratology* (Hühn/Pier/Schmid/Schönert 2009), *Narratology in the Age of Cross-Disciplinary Narrative Research*, edited by Sandra Heinen and Roy Sommer (2009), and *Current Trends in Narratology* (Olson 2011).

These publications can be viewed as milestones in the consolidation and innovation of the field, along with the *Companion to Narrative Theory* (Phelan/ Rabinowitz 2005) and the *Cambridge Companion to Narrative Theory* (Herman 2006), while many of the more recent introductions to narrative theory (cf. Fludernik 2006; Wenzel 2004; Neumann/Nünning 2008) outline the state of the art and the key concepts and methodology.

Moreover, three book series continue to turn out high-level, systematic analyses of different kinds of narratives, while also elaborating and complementing existing narratological categories. Three of the handbooks mentioned above are published as volumes of the series called “Narratologia” (“Narratologia: Contributions to Narrative Theory/ Beiträge zur Erzähltheorie”, de Gruyter). Other important series include “Theory and Interpretation of Narrative” (Ohio State University Press) and “Frontiers of Narrative” (University of Nebraska Press). The centre for narratological research ‘Project Narrative’ at Ohio State University has been particularly active in the development of narrative theory, especially with the publication of the academic journals *Narrative*, which is not restricted to narratological studies, but rather lays great store by the exploration of application of narrative theory, and the more recently established *Storyworlds*. The first is edited by James Phelan, the latter by David Herman, who are both among the founding directors of the ‘Project Narrative’. In addition, new centres are emerging, two of them situated in Germany: the Zentrum für Erzählforschung at the University of Wuppertal and the Bonner Zentrum für Transkulturelle Narratologie, at the University of Bonn.

Perhaps even more importantly, there have been new attempts to establish a dialogue between different approaches to narrative. The most impressive and fruitful volume is the product of a collaboration by five leading scholars, namely David Herman, James Phelan, Peter J. Rabinowitz, Brian Richardson and Robyn Warhol, who co-authored the volume *Narrative Theory: Core Concepts and Critical Debates* (2012). This systematic account of definitions of core concepts such as narrative, plot and character presents and debates four different approaches, from the point of view of cognitive studies, rhetorical narratology, unnatural narratology and feminist or gender-oriented narratology. This volume testifies to the development and modification of central categories of the analysis of narrative as well as to the eminently dialogic spirit that prevails in narrative theory.

Some of the approaches within the field of narratology have not only produced new interpretations of narrative texts, but have also advanced the methodology and elaborated central premises and concepts. This is particularly true for feminist narratology, which has developed into a ‘gender-oriented’ narratology (see also Nünning/Nünning 2004). The key concepts of this approach have been refined in order to take recent insights in the field of gender, masculinity and queer studies into account. By now, the exploration of the narrative construction of male identities is just as prominent as that of female ones; and a number of scholars have integrated R.W. Connell’s