

A Review of the Colloquium «Narrative, Media and Cognition» — a Cartography of the Borders of Narrative

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ABSTRACT

We present an overview and discussion of the Colloquium «Narrative, Media and Cognition», which took place at Porto's Centre of Catholic University of Portugal in July of 2015, under the organization of the Research Centre for Science and Technology of the Arts (CITAR). Several scholars of different areas presented research about the uses and advances in narrative study and practice in a broad range of areas, giving some important insights about the latest developments in Narrative Studies, Ontology of Narrative and the uses of Narrative in Art, Cinema, Performance, Journalism, Marketing and Literature, among other fields. After briefly describing the main points of each presentation in the Colloquium we try to draw some conclusions and possibilities raised by the Colloquium and take a glimpse of future paths that the use of Narrative can end up taking.

KEYWORDS

Narrative; Media; Cognition.

1 | INTRODUCTION

“Because we believe on the usefulness of an interdisciplinary understanding of the mechanisms connected to [Narrative] processes, we organized the Colloquium «Narrative, Media and Cognition», giving particular emphasis to the study of the moving image in the media, as building blocks of audiovisual narratives.”

With such statement we set the direction for the call for papers of the Colloquium «Narrative, Media and Cognition», which took place on the July 14 of 2015 at the Catholic University of Portugal (Porto Regional Centre). Keeping continuity with the workshop of the same name that took place in 2014 at the University of Minho, the Colloquium was at this time organized by the Research Centre for Science and Technology of the Arts (CITAR), of the School of Arts and coordinated by the project “Audiovisual Narrative and Creation”, of the Digital Creativity Research Group. The aim of the scientific meeting was opening an opportunity for an in-depth debate about ways of



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thinking about narrative and building narratives as well as the emotional, social and cultural experience that these can have, based on the contribution of different artistic and scientific areas. Using Portuguese as the conference language, researchers coming from universities of Portugal, Brazil and Spain presented their work. A wide range of topics were discussed at the colloquium, from the analysis of the concept of narrative, to the reconnaissance and description of new structures of non-linear and multilinear construction, including its connection to the media, which, in a direct and indirect way, forced us to discuss literature, videogames and cinema. The notion of creativity and creation, its social cultural and artistic context, the fundamental elements of narrative, from conflict to action, from character to performer, without forgetting a more aesthetic approach to narrative, narrativity and narrator, as well as its communication strategies were also considered.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO A NARRATIVE CARTOGRAPHY

The proposed papers, after being chosen through peer-review, allowed us to organize the colloquium in four themed panels: “Ontology of the Narrative”, “Construction of the Narrative”, “Narrative and Audience” and “Non-linear Narratives”. In-between we had the plenary conference about “Woody Allen and fiction as a game: the Zelig example”, by Carlos Reis.

The first panel discussed several aspects connected to the Ontology of Narrative, and the way narrative can be interpreted or studied, especially in its connection to the audiovisual. The colloquium started with “After the master narratives of Art History – the “indisciplinary” films of Werner Herzog and Wim Wenders/Julian Salgado about Art” by Carolin Overhoff Ferreira. For this researcher, their perspective is interdisciplinary, which is her concept to read in these films a mix of documentary and fiction, turning the narrative into an hybrid that better allows them to analyze such different artistic aspects as primitive art and contemporary photography. The issue of the hybridity between documentary and fiction was also the subject of Marta Mendes, from the concept of literality, having presented the paper “Literality: understanding fiction as a real experience. Gilles Deleuze and Jean Rouch”. For this researcher, the idea of literality can be seen in the work of Jean Rouch, namely in its model of ethnographic

filmmaking, where we find a portrait of reality that opens itself to elements of strangeness and, therefore, mixes fiction and documentary. For Filipe Martins, in “From the narrative meaning to the aesthetical experience”, in a theoretical-practical sense, narrative should be aesthetically reframed between the informative and performative dimensions, arguing that all performativity is connected to a narrative sense, which inevitably sets it apart from the real. Yet, that creates a conflict with the ambition of most contemporary performative art of being authentic or having a connection to reality.

In the panel “Construction of the Narrative”, its participants discussed subjects as the different influences – individual, social, cultural ... – that can determine the creation process, noting as they reflect realities or how they can be used to oppose them, further them or complement them in new ways. Maria Guilhermina Castro presented evidence about the process of character creation, Maria Gil and Miguel Bonneville commented the unavoidable presence of autobiography and social influence in creation, while Daniel Ribas analyzed the social and cultural influence on João Canijo’s films. Following the theoretical line of thought proposed by Howard Gardner, the first presentation (“Creativity and cognition in the development of the character”) argued that creativity comes from the use of intelligence processes that are outside what is usually connected to this domain, while the second presentation (“Narratives of the self: autobiographical processes in the context of performing arts”) assume the importance of art challenging the convention, and the third (“Melodrama in Portuguese Cinema: the João Canijo example”) noted how the films of João Canijo describe a social reality of questioning the social structure. Its author, Daniel Ribas, also mentioned that, if in the film the fight for social innovation is usually fruitless, on the other hand, the film itself reflects in an original way the modes of creation, through the association to ways of fiction that are far apart, creating an ambivalence between the fictional and the real.

In the plenary session “Woody Allen or the fiction as game: the Zelig example”, Carlos Reis analyzed the transgressive procedures of Woody Allen’s film, which mixes different narrative genres. Again, the meditation about such mix is followed by a questioning of the

limits between fiction and non-fiction, which takes a specific parodic dimension in the character Zelig.

The different papers presented at the panel “Narrative and Audiences” expressively displayed the interdisciplinarity of narrative, namely as a way of attracting audiences, but also the importance of knowing the audience. Paulo Cunha (“The Portuguese «filme de bordas». Alternative or conventional Narratives?”) pointed the exhibitionistic strategies employed on the so called cinema “de bordas”, following the concept by Bernardette Lyra and Gelson Santana and raising the question if these films are based on a less conventional perspective of cinema (more concerned about showing, and not telling) or on the way it can catch the attention of the audience, before the authors throw themselves at a more conventional narrative. Rogério Covaleski noted the importance of the “Narrative as an advertising strategy for actions of social responsibility and policies of sustainable consumption”, pointing the competitive advantage of narratives through different artistic means (like the short film or the videogame, using the specific example of “The scarecrow” marketing campaign of the chain of restaurants Chipotle) and the playful, educational and ethical contents that develop a closer connection to the values of the spectator. In “What is lost in poetry is gained in efficiency: The measuring system in the definition of journalist narratives”, Alciane Baccin and Vítor Torres considered the impact in journalism of the use of cyberdata about the behaviour of web users. Interviews made to four journalists noted that the knowledge of the preferences of the reader change the creation of narratives, for instance, using specific keywords or giving greater focus to some more searched-up topics, while it is important to keep the “journalistic sense” to insure a wider range of content. Pedro Alves also studied the quantitative analysis of the reactions of 105 spectators, in the paper “From the film proposal to the vital impact: the narrative and pragmatic analysis of the film «The Shawshank Redemption» (1994)”. The results showed the importance of the inspirational element, which means that cinema can be an opportunity for the spectator to learn, but also the creator, when he or she becomes aware of the several perspectives that can emerge.

The main focus of the fourth and last panel was essentially the study of “Non-linear Narratives”.

According to Daniela Côrtes Maduro (“Cognitive interactivity: the role of the reader in electronic literature”), electronic literature is placed under the typology of non-linear narrative. This kind of narrative needs an engaged and attentive reader, whose “ergodic” activity allows a greater physical and cognitive intervention on the text. This subject was furthered by the discussion of the strategies of audience participation in the interactive filmic narratives, which Carlos Sena Caires underlined in his presentation “The Interactive Film Narrative: audience-participation strategies”. Caires focused on the strategy of diegetic variation and repetition as an engine of interactivity, the strategy of simultaneity as an opportunity for choice and the matter of reciprocity and mimetic interfaces as promoters of interactivity. Pedro Teixeira and António Ferreira discussed the topic of non-linearity based on the case study of the 3D TV animation show “The Agency Show”. The authors of “Animation and interaction” underlined the importance of the processes of non-linear narratives in real time with the system of interactive broadcast used in this project, the CBS - Cartoon Broadcast System. The narrative control by the users is noted as being one of the strong points of this system. Finally, Fátima Chinita revisited the question of non-linear film narratives noting its complexity and complexification in the last few years, in “Film Variations of a Fabula: «Flirt», by Hal Hartley (1995)”. Besides films like «Memento» (2000), «Run, Lola Run» (1998) or «Amores Perros» (2000), Chinita presented a deeper analysis of the film «Flirt» by Hal Hartley (1995), where three stories, taking place in distinct geographical areas, challenge the conventions of multiplication in contemporary film narrative.

IN THE BORDERS OF NARRATIVE

This colloquium allowed us to draw several conclusions that we would like to briefly present here. First of all, the clear multidisciplinary interest of several fields on narrative and its pervasive presence in different media. Working with these different fields in the Colloquium was a clear advantage, allowing us a prismatic view on narrative and its uses, and giving a closer approach to the multiple geographies of human knowledge covered or related to narrative practices.

And furthering a classical debate in narrative studies, the question of the borders between reality and fiction

in narrative was a continuous issue among many papers and areas, showing the power of narrative to describe but also transform reality, leading to a blurred but also highly creative area of human experience. And this blurring seem to come out of at least a doubling: between the one who lives and the one who tells (even if they can be the same in different moments), between the raw content that will be narrated and the content already processed by the narrative, exists the ambiguous field of narrative. What is its width and scope?

Still under this debate on the real and fictional, one of the most recurring issues was the current dilemma in Cinema of the crossbreeding of fiction film and documentary. This hybridization process, known since the first film, is particularly striking in the way it can shape narrative. And the colloquium made it quite clear that cinema as an art can be understood as a method of fictionalizing the real, precisely because the real is shaped by the narrative models and the personal gaze of the artist.

Another important discussion was the confrontation between the persistence of classical narrative structures, and the new ways of ordering stories. These new stories seem to reflect unconventional or even deliberately disruptive – like multimodal, rhizomatic or branching narratives – which promote more complex stories, but also stories that strive to portrait a more contemporary outlook on human existence. This outlook is not only confined to the creative processes of the author, but also to the way readers and spectators live and experience stories.

Finally, one of the colloquium core topics was the cognitive processes of authors and audience in what narrative is concerned. Several authors discussed and underlined the importance of better understanding these cognitive processes. The growing interconnectedness of contemporary world raises the importance of the way the audience relates and responds to narratives, that are more and more interactive and non-linear, but also the way that authors try to make their own narratives more distinct and original and closer – or more surprising – to the audience expectations. This defines a new way for narratives to connect audience and storytellers – in a more participatory or even co-creative way – that can

have important implications for cognitive skills of creating and understanding narratives.

These three issues underline clearly that Narrative is at a crossroads – of fields, uses, practices and techniques – that make it more than ever an important domain of research for scholars coming from different areas. We believe that this Colloquium was an important step in this direction, which will be more fruitful in the upcoming years.

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BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Maria Guilhermina Castro was born in Porto, Portugal, in 1973 and received both her graduation and her doctorate from the University of Porto. In 1998 she started to teach at the School of Arts of the Catholic University of Portugal, where she now also coordinates the research project “Audiovisual Narrative and Creation” (CITAR). Guilhermina has written psychology books and presented several papers about characters, narrative and romantic relationships, among others themes. It is worth mentioning her acting training through open courses at ESMAE (Superior School of Music and Performing Arts) and the advanced training in Morenian Psychodrama. Guilhermina was also psychologist in private practice and schools.

Carlos Sena Caires has a doctorate in Aesthetics, Science and Technology of the Arts from the University of Paris 8 (France). He is an assistant teacher at the School of Arts of the Catholic University of Portugal, and a senior researcher at the Research Centre for Science and Technology of the Arts (CITAR). Since 2013 he coordinates the master degree program in Sound and Image and the digital design post-graduation. From 2010 to 2013, he was the chief-editor of the CITAR Journal and since 2010 he coordinates the CITAR research group of Digital Creativity. As a researcher, whose main field study regards digital interactive arts, he specialized himself in interactive filmic narratives.

Daniel Ribas is invited assistant professor at the Polytechnic Institute of Bragança and at the Catholic

University of Portugal, in the field of film studies. He holds a PhD in Cultural Studies (University of Aveiro and University of Minho), with a thesis on national identity in the films of João Canijo. He has written several articles and book chapters, especially on contemporary Portuguese cinema. Founding and current board member of AIM – Portuguese Association of Moving Image Researchers and, for several years, also board member of the Portuguese Association of Screenwriters. He graduated in Sound and Image (specialized in screenwriting) at the School of Arts of the Catholic University of Portugal and he also has a career as a screenwriter. He is film programmer at Curtas Vila do Conde and Porto/Post/Doc Festivals, and editor of Aniki: Portuguese Journal of the Moving Image and Drama – cinema and theatre magazine.

Jorge Palinhos is a playwright and researcher. Has a degree on Modern Languages and Literatures by the Faculty of Letters of Porto and a Master in

Terminology and Translation at the same university. He has written and worked for theatre since 2003, and several of his plays have been presented and distinguished in Portugal and abroad. He studied dramaturgy with Guillermo Heras, Hans-Thiers Lehmann, Jean-Pierre Sarrazac, Mick Gordon, Michael Bradford, Andrea Thome, Jose Sanchis Sinisterra, Neil LaBute, Raimondo Cortese, Thomas Bakk, Linda Seger, Goran Radovanovic, Ahmed Boulane, Paulo Filipe Monteiro and Vergílio de Almeida. He co-edits the journal Drama, published by the Portuguese Association of Screenwriters and Scriptwriters and he is a member of the scientific commission of the journal Persona. He has also published with Sinais de Cena, P3, Grande Porto e Porto24. He has published articles in several journals and presented papers in several conferences. Currently he has received funding from FCT to develop research on Contemporary Drama and teaches Theatre in the University of Arts of Porto and Game Design in Polytechnics Institute of Bragança.