



THE POINT OF NARRATOLOGY: PART 2*

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ABSTRACT

Resisting the current fashion of calling everything, and ourselves as scholars, “post- ” something, as well as the unnoticed scholarly privileging of the present, or “presentism” that comes with it, I return in this article to an age-old novel, written by someone who was severely traumatized. Miguel de Cervantes Saveedra wrote his world-famous novel *Don Quijote* after having been held as a slave in Algiers. “Trauma” is a state of stagnation and the impossibility of subjective remembrance that result from traumatogenic events; not the events themselves; the distortion of time and its forms that result, rather than the violence that causes the trauma. This implies that the traumatic state challenges narratological concepts such as event, development, and other temporal categories. Therefore, I will concentrate my discussion on focalisation and temporality as both problematic as well as indispensable, and end up arguing that the traditional interpretation can also be reversed: the hero did not go mad because he read too much, but escaped in reading to evade the traumatizing reality.

In this article I revisit the concept of focalisation, in its tight connection, but not identity, to related concepts such as the gaze, looking, and imagining. The hypothesis that readers envision, that is, create, images from textual stimuli, cuts right through semantic theory, grammar, and rhetoric, to foreground the presence and crucial importance of images in reading; of imaging as part of that activity.

KEY WORDS

narrative, trauma, focalisation, imagination, envisioning

CLASSIFICATION

JEL: D83, D84

*The added number (part 2) after my title refers to the fact that 29 years ago, I published an article with the same title: *The Point of Narratology*. *Poetics Today* 11(4), 727-753, 1990. The ongoing need to make that point is the point of this article.

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INTRODUCTION

Narratology is an interdisciplinary field that offers concepts for analysing and understanding cultural utterances across media, cultures, and times. If only for that reason, it is important to keep furthering it. This is not always obvious. The collective endeavor of academic thinking is steeped in attempts to move forward; to discover new ideas. This is, of course, useful. But one important drawback threatens. Current trends in academic thought frequently contain a “post-” attitude. Terms such as “postcolonial”, “poststructuralist”, “postmodern” and most clearly the disingenuous term “posthuman” testify to this inclination. In all these cases, the risk is to disavow and no longer know that which came before. This evolutionist ideology considers the present as “beyond”, “after” and of course, “better” than what came before. Unfortunately, the tendency to jump over the hurdle to actually have to first get to know, understand, and deploy that which one seeks to overcome, leads to regress, not progress. For the nuances of the theory too easily rejected remain hidden, their point, unseen. History is annulled, and concepts meant to help specification and detailed analysis become diluted. As a result, the word “narrative” has become as vague as, and equivalent to, “message” or “prose”; no specific conception of what narrative is, seems to be called for¹.

Also, what I call the “anthropomorphic imagination”, the reading attitude that considers characters and figures as people, which plays such an activating role in reading narrative, is looked down on as naive rather than explained and taken on board as an element of reading as interactive process; and from that inside insight, criticised where necessary. Hence, the concept of reading or viewing itself has lost much of its important interactive thrust, which earns it a place in narratology. A more productive attitude is to respond to, instead of disavowing, what came before. To make that point, I will recall once again my own primary concern, the concept of focalisation.

Due to the unnoticed scholarly privileging of the present, or “presentism”, I have frequently discussed and felt compelled to return to focalisation in fiction, for example as a seemingly but never quite absent focaliser; in academic writing that invites “critical intimacy” [1]; and in visual narrative, not only cinematic but also photographic, drawn and painted. These examples all raise issues of focalisation; notably of further differentiating it, so as to adapt itself to intercultural situations. Neither narrative, nor its backbone focalisation is bound to literature, or textuality for that matter. Moreover, by rejecting the relevance of concepts, the absence or negative of narrative functions remains unnoticed, whereas that is as telling as their presence or explicit invocation. There is an elective affinity, although not an identification, between focalisation and seeing. Reading focalisation and practicing counterfocalization where needed is an activity with political relevance².

In this contribution I will make an emphatic historicizing gesture, and invoke one of the monuments of the cultural legacy of the Western world, one of its primary best-sellers, *El Ingenioso Hidalgo Don Quixote de la Mancha* by Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra (1547-1616). To foreground the political relevance of this novel for today, it matters that he wrote it after experiencing five years of captivity as a slave in Algiers (1575-1580). The novel, in two parts – the first published in 1605, the second in 1615 – at first sight reads like a parody of medieval epics and romances, and that is how it has been mostly interpreted. The famous chapter I, vi where the Priest and the Barber destroy the majority of the books in Don Quixote’s library, is also a treatise of literary criticism, but based on the clichés of the time. Given the shady role these characters play, their literary insights must be met with suspicion within the fictional universe of the novel. It seems odd to me that the large majority of interpretations of the novel go along with it, and with the medically highly dubious statement that due to reading “his brain dried up and he lost his wits” (I, i)³.

The most illuminating analyses of this novel confront it with interdisciplinary approaches. A good example is Bruhn's article [2] that places it in the context of ritual, popular culture, and the Bakhtinian carnivalesque. This leads him to considerations of the narratological key question "who speaks?" and concludes from the failure to come up with clear answers that this is in fact the first modern novel [2; pp.203-205]. He calls this novel's enunciation "theatrical and labyrinthine" – which is, in fact, an answer to the key question. Integrating the issues of place and time, in other words, of the chronotope in a characterization of important places, such as the inn, and the poetics of characterization of the figures, he ends up with a fine analysis, also, of the ethical and political points [2; pp.206-207]. Bruhn's analysis stays far away from the repetitions of the cliché judgments of the Priest and the Barber, the Housekeeper and the Niece in chapters V and VI.

The standard reading makes it only too easy to consider Don Quixote mad, without inquiring into the kind and causes of that alleged madness. In view of the more dynamic sense of history I have termed "preposterous" [3], *Don Quixote* can also be seen as a precursor of later novels that mock adventure stories, such as eighteenth-century *Jacques the Fatalist and his Master* (Denis Diderot, 1765-1770) and *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (Lawrence Sterne, 1759). But it also resonates with postmodern novels of the twentieth century. In view of this temporal reversal, the standard interpretation may be challenged. Most importantly, *Don Quixote* stands out in its intensity and creative expression of prolonged hopelessness. This leads to what is termed trauma, a notion over-used and hence, in danger of losing its specific meaning. In my view, "trauma" is a state of stagnation and the impossibility of subjective remembrance that result from traumatogenic events; not the events themselves; the distortion of time and its forms that result, rather than the violence that causes the trauma. This implies that the traumatic state challenges narratological concepts such as event, development, and other temporal categories. Therefore, I will concentrate my discussion on focalisation and temporality as both problematic as well as indispensable, and end up arguing that the traditional interpretation can also be reversed: the hero did not go mad because he read too much, but escaped in reading to evade the traumatizing reality⁴.

SEEING IT

In order for a theoretical point to be useful, it must be seen. To avoid over-generalisation of focalisation (diluting the concept) this calls for some unpacking. I will do that first through a close look at two neighbouring concepts that touch but are not equivalent to visibility, both as sense perception and as insight. These concepts are the "gaze" and "focalisation", different but affiliated. They are often conflated, with disastrous results, or, alternatively, kept separate, with impoverishing results. They are all three "travelling concepts" – concepts taken from one domain to another, with changes in use, meaning and analytic value along the way. In *Don Quixote*, two systematically opposed focalizers are the knight himself, when Don Quixote makes his erroneous ("mad") interpretations of what he sees, and his squire Sancho Pança, whose down-to-earth vision of the world counters his master's. The ironic battle between these two visions is an emphatic demonstration of the importance of focalisation. It is the motor of the narrative, which, mired in the timelessness of trauma, cannot really have a sequence of events as its backbone⁵.

In order to see the relevance of such concept-probing for an inclusive narratology that has wider relevance than just for the modern Western literary tradition, I also briefly invoke work by Indian artist Nalini Malani, whose shadow plays stage acts of memory that I would qualify as Palimpsestic. Malani has been working with the diffuse, repressed or otherwise distorted memories of religious-political violence in the wake partition (1947), superimposed by the

violence of Hindus committed against Muslims (1992-1993) and the violence in Gujarat in 2002. Note that these three waves of violence seem acts of repeating, and thus constitute together a non-evenemential palimpsest of collective trauma⁶.

The “gaze” is a key concept in visual studies, one I find important enough to fuss about, to avoid conceptual fuzziness. It is widely used in fields whose practitioners participate in cultural studies, both as a common word and as a concept. Norman Bryson’s analysis [4] of the life of this concept of the gaze, in art history and in feminist and gender studies, amply demonstrates why it is worth reflecting on. He rightly insists that feminism has had a decisive impact on visual studies; film studies would be nowhere near where it is today without it. In turn, film studies, especially in its extended form, which includes television and the new media, is a key area in cultural studies, but also, given that film is a time-based, sequential medium, a field enmeshed in narratology. The itinerary Bryson sketches is largely informed by the centrality of the concept of the gaze in all the participating disciplines. One of these is literature⁷.

The concept of the gaze is sometimes used as an equivalent of the look, indicating the position of the subject doing the looking. As such, it points to a subject position, real or represented. We can allege the classical example of Don Quixote’s seeing giants where Sancho warns him that these are simple windmills to understand the decidedly subjective nature of looking (I, viii), and its consequences for the narrative action. Sancho worries about the expense of destroying windmills, whereas Don Quixote is concerned with the sticky notion of “enemy”. This staging of two distinct and incompatible views determines the action to follow, Don Quixote’s first heroic/failed action after he has hired Sancho. The gaze is also used in distinction from the look, as a fixed and fixating, colonising, mode of looking – a look that objectifies, appropriates, disempowers, and even, possibly, violates. This makes it an important concept for a critique of colonialism – and of the remnants of it, or renewed forms, in so-called postcolonial literature and art. It increases the difficulty of looking at Malani’s 2012 installation *In Search of Vanished Blood*. As its title indicates, this work solicits an interactive viewer willing to *search* for what has *vanished*; the trauma of violence⁸.

In its Lacanian sense, the gaze is very different from – if not opposed to – its more common usage as the equivalent of the look or a specific version of it [5]. The Lacanian gaze is the visual order (equivalent to the symbolic order, or the visual part of that order) in which the subject is caught and by which the possibility of seeing is limited. The gaze is the world looking (back) at the subject. Nothing makes this clearer than a Malanian shadow play based on slowly turning cylindrical shapes that cast on the surrounding walls evocations of figures from Indian epic and mythology, popular painting, Greek mythology and recent literary texts – artefacts that all have in common that they represent, evoke or resist violence in and for the present. This is how, in this work, the world and its history look back at us. Significantly, the viewer is trapped between the cylinders and the shadows on the walls, and cannot help being caught “in” the shadows. This artwork can shed a retrospective light on what seems the madness of Don Quixote, but can also be seen as a reflection of his being caught in the author’s traumatic state without a sense of an ending of captivity⁹.

Don Quixote chapter I, xiv, offers a different but congenial reflection on women’s lot, including the blame they get for men’s obsessions in a mirroring play of projection. This chapter has been prepared by a goatherd’s rather sympathetic account of the event in chapters xii and xiii, where the character of the central woman figure is focalised as “objectively” as possible, a pre-empting of the nasty responses to her in the following chapter. This questions the hysterical reaction to amorous rejection – the idea that some men won’t take “no” for an answer. Positing again a firm oppositional pair of focalisations, the woman opposes a firm “‘no’ means ‘no’” to this. In addition to the beginning of Don Quixote’s pointless (“mad”) altruism, this scene expresses the idea, which might seem contemporary but is already

expressed in Cervantes's novel, that the young woman Marcela does not need Don Quixote's help, and that men such as Don Quixote who try to be "good guys" still reproduce some of the masculinist pitfalls in their interactions with women. The occasion is the suicide of a young man who could not abide Marcela's refusal to become his.

The narratological reason why this account by necessity takes the form of a scenario for a theatrical-cinematic intermedial translation is the need to oppose two visions more clearly. The following is a succinct staging of that scene, in order to posit the different focalisations. A small group of men dressed in black make gestures and sounds of mourning. This must go on for some time before the poem is being read. Someone finds a piece of paper, blown away by the wind. This is a fragment of a manuscript Grisóstomo left behind when he killed himself¹⁰.

A male voice reads fragments from it, in which the deceased writer attributes action to focalisation¹¹:

*Disdain doeth kill; and whether false or sound
Suspitions will all patience overthrow;
But jealousy with greater rigour slays
A lengthy absence doth our life confound;
Against fear of oblivion to ensue
Firm hope of best success gives little ease.
Inevitable death lurks in all these.
But I – amazing miracle! – still live,
Jealous, absent, disdained, and certain too
Of the suspicions that my life undo.
'At one same time can hope and fear exist?
Or is it reason that they should do so,
Seeing how much more cause there is for fears? ...
O tyrant of love's state, fierce jealousy!
With cruel chains these hands together tie,
With twisted rope couple them, rough disdain!*

Suddenly, while we hear his droning voice, Marcela appears, from the top of a hill. There are some men who seem to be reading from loose sheets of paper, then look up and their jaws drop when they see Marcela's beauty. This is the confrontation between the sympathetic account in the two previous chapters and the hatred expressed by one of them, who becomes agitated and shakes his fist at her, and aggressively challenges her¹²:

*Have you come here, perhaps, fiery basilisk of these mountains, to see if the
wounds of this wretch, whom your cruelty killed, will bleed afresh at the
sight of you?*

Seeing is central. The man alludes to the potential power of the look as a motor of events. Marcela, now near the men, defends herself, looking at the viewer¹³:

*Those whom I have attracted with my looks I have undeceived with my words.
I, as you know, have riches of my own, and covet no one else's. I have a taste
for freedom and no wish for subjection. I neither love nor hate any man. I do
not deceive one man and encourage another. I do not trifle with one nor keep
another in hope. I enjoy the modest company of the village shepherdesses and
the care of my goats. My desires are bounded by these mountains [124].*

In other words: no means no. Meanwhile, Don Quixote comes racing to help Marcela, looking silently into the camera in close-up, while French psychoanalyst Françoise Davoine, who participates in the project, comments in voice-over¹⁴ [6]:

Marcelle affirms forcefully that she won't let herself be trapped by ideologies that seek to make her feel politically guilty. She refuses complicity with death-discourses pretending to be utopian, and she stands up against the political weapon of inducing guilt.

Don Quixote pushes Marcela away and talks to the men. He threatens them¹⁵:

*Let no man, of whatever state or condition, dare to follow the fair Marcela, under pain of incurring my most furious indignation! She has shown with clear and sufficient argument that she bears **little or no blame** for Chrysostomo's death.*

The nuance “*little or no blame*” betrays the ambivalence in the focalisation of the knight who seeks to help but remains caught in his masculinist vision. Marcela looks at him with surprise and annoyance, then pushes him aside. This conflict of gender-bound focalisations is here inter-medially translated from narrative to theatrical video.

Marcela's remnant of guilt is in her beauty as perceived – focalized – by the men. In its more common use – perhaps between ordinary word and analytical concept – the gaze is the look that the subject casts on other people, and other things. Feminism initiated the scrutiny of the gaze's objectifying thrust, especially in film studies, where the specific Lacanian sense remains important [5]. More broadly, the meaning-producing effects of images, including textual-rhetorical ones, have been recognised. In this type of analysis, the gaze is also obviously central. Using the shadows of cultural memories as her medium, Malani makes an appropriating gaze impossible. The figures are fugitive, moving, ungraspable; whereas the viewer is caught between subject and object position. Thus her work seems to provide a direction of reading the scene of Marcela narratologically, in order to notice the ambiguities the conflict of the focalisations entails.

The objectification and the disempowering exotisation of others further flesh out the issues of power inequity that the concept helps to lay bare. This is its relevance for “postcolonial” theory. Indeed, the affiliated concepts of the other and alterity have been scrutinised for their own collusion with the imperialist forces that hold the gaze in this photographic and cinematic material. Merging in her work the mythologies of India as well as Greece, Malani makes any distinction between self and other, already precluded by the form and medium of the work, also impossible on the level of content. And this is precisely what the Marcela scene demonstrates¹⁶.

Enabling the analysis of non-canonical objects, such as snapshots and Bruhn's carnivalesque [2], the concept is also helpful in allowing the boundaries between elite and larger culture to be overcome. Between all these usages, an examination of the concept itself is appropriate. Not to police it, or to prescribe a purified use for it, but to gauge its possibilities, and to either delimit or link the objects on which it has been brought to bear. Only with such examination can it prove its usefulness for an inclusive narratology. Considering the theory in terms like “post-classical”, then, discourages such an important intellectual activity.

So far, in its development in the cultural community, the concept of the gaze has demonstrated its flexibility and inclination to social critique. But it also has a more hands-on kind of relevance. For it has an affiliation with – although is not identical to – the concept of focalisation. In narrative theory, the concept of focalisation, although clearly visual in background, has been deployed to overcome visual strictures and the subsequent metaphorical floundering of concepts such as “perspective” and “point of view”. It is precisely because the concept of focalisation is *not* identical to that of the gaze or the look (although it has some persistent affiliation with both of these visual concepts) that it can help to clarify a vexed issue in the relationship between looking and language, between art history and literary studies, but also, between mainstream and inclusive narratology. The common

question for all three of these concepts is what the look of a represented (narrated or depicted) figure does to the imagination of the reader or the look of the viewer. The scene of Marcela demonstrates this.

Retrospectively, my interest in developing a more workable concept to replace what literary scholars called perspective or point of view was rooted in a sense of the cultural importance of vision, even in the most language-based of the arts. My long-term argument with Gérard Genette, for example, turned out entirely based on cultural-political disagreement [7]. Hence, vision must not be understood exclusively in the technical-visual sense. In the slightly metaphorical but indispensable sense of imaginary – akin but not identical to imagination – vision tends to involve both actual looking and interpreting, including in literary reading. And, while this is a reason to recommend the verb “reading” for the analysis of visual images, it is also a reason *not* to cast the visual out of the concept of focalisation. The danger of dilution here must be carefully balanced against the impoverishment caused by the excess of conceptual essentialism that goes by the proud name of “rigour”¹⁷.

The term focalisation also helped overcome the limitations of the linguistically inspired tools inherited from structuralism. These were based on the structure of the sentence and failed to help account for what happens between characters in narrative, figures in image, and the readers of both. The great emphasis on conveyable and generalizable content in structuralist semantics hampered attempts to understand *how* such contents were conveyed – to what effects and ends – through what can be termed “subjectivity networks”. But to make that point, it is necessary to test the theory, and analyse where and why it fails to deliver¹⁸.

The hypothesis that readers *envision*, that is, create, images from textual stimuli, cuts right through semantic theory, grammar, and rhetoric, to foreground the presence and crucial importance of *images* in reading; of *imaging* as part of that activity. The fact that Malani makes her viewers come to terms with being caught in images that evoke past violence – especially against women – in the present, demonstrates that the importance of images lies in their rigorous *present tense*. This temporality is key to the analysis of how reading includes imaging, not only as a visual activity but also as occurring in the present. Let me call this first phase of the dynamic of the concept-in-use, the gaze-as-focaliser¹⁹.

The second phase goes in the opposite direction. Take “Rembrandt”, for example. The name stands for a *text* – “Rembrandt” as the cultural ensemble of images, dis- and re-attributed according to an expansive or purifying cultural mood – and for the discourses about the real and imaginary figure indicated by the name. The images called “Rembrandt” are notoriously disinterested in linear perspective and also highly narrative. Moreover, as I have analysed in my book *Reading “Rembrandt”* [8], many of these images are replete with issues relevant for a gender perspective – such as the nude, scenes related to rape, and myth-based history paintings in which women are being framed. For these reasons combined, focalisation imposes itself as an operative concept. But, while narrativity may be medium-independent, the transfer of a specific concept from narrative theory – in this case, focalisation – to visual texts, requires the probing of its realm, its productivity, and its potential for propagation versus the risk of dilution²⁰.

This probing is all the more important because of the double ambiguity that threatens here. Firstly, focalisation is a narrative inflection of imagining, interpreting, and perception that *can*, but need not, be visual imaging. This would allow disparaging presentations of “others” through actions, for example, to pass unnoticed. To conflate focalisation with the gaze would be to undo the work of differentiation between two different modes of semiotic expression, and obliterating the critical potential of a subtler narrative analysis. Secondly, and conversely, the projection of narrativity on visual images is an analytic move that has great potential but

is also highly specific. To put it simply: not all images are narrative, any more than all narrative acts of focalisation are visual. Yet narratives and images have *envisioning* as their common form of reception. The differences and the common elements between the two concepts are equally important. This is also why Malani's shadowy images move, turn, appear and disappear. This is how they hold us: as Huyssen has it, by their "visual lure and aesthetic fascination" that keep the present tense active beyond a mere, because powerless, lament about gendered violence [9; p.52].

In my own work, the examination of the concept of focalisation for use in the analysis of visual images was all the more urgent because the new area of visual imagery appears to carry traces of the same word by which the concept is known. This was a moment of truth: is focalisation in narratology "only a metaphor" borrowed from the visual domain? If so, does its deployment in visual analysis fall back on its literal meaning? Instead, and supported by Malani's images and Cervantes's story-telling, I claim that the concept of focalisation helps to articulate the look precisely through its movement. After travelling, first from the visual domain to narratology, then to the more specific analysis of visual images, focalisation has received a meaning in visual analysis that overlaps neither with the old visual one – focusing with a lens – nor simply with the new narratological one – the cluster of perception and interpretation that guides the attention through the narrative. Or, as in Malani's work, the multiple narratives brought in to facilitates "acts of memory". It now indicates neither a *location* of the gaze on the picture plane, nor a *subject* of it, such as either the figure or the viewer. What becomes visible is the *movement* of the look – a movement Malani makes so inevitable on all levels that nothing can offer a more convincing, because experiential argument than this artwork. This movement can help us understand the "madness" of *Don Quixote's* barely sustainable story-telling.

In that movement, the look encounters the limitations imposed by the gaze, the visual order. For the gaze dictates the limits of the figures' respective positions as holder of the objectifying and colonising look, and the disempowered object of that look. The tension between the focalisor's movement and these limitations is the true object of analysis. For it is here that structural, formal aspects of the object become meaningful, dynamic, and culturally operative: through the time-bound, changing effect of the culture that frames them. Thanks to its narratological background, the concept of focalisation imported mobility into the visual domain that usefully and productively complemented the potential to structure envisioning that had been carried over from visual to narrative in the first phase.

For all these reasons combined, I privilege focalization as the most important concept in an inclusive, or "concurrent" narratology. Its potential to not only facilitate precise and hence teachable interpretations but also to entice interactive reading with empathy, to facilitate experiential participation in the movement inherent in representation, is key for a deployment of narratology in contexts where readers lack specific knowledge and might therefore be tempted to judge prematurely, to cast aside a book, or to look down on an action. This holds especially for the memories of colonial but also "post"-colonial violence, and exposed to the hilt in Malani's shadow play that makes all of us participants in that violence in the present tense. A consistent attention to focalisation, instead, promotes an exciting discovery of new visions, imaginative and enriching. If we want our students to be politically aware and ethically sensitive while developing their artistic sensitivity, this is the best breeding ground for such attitudes.

CRYSTALS OF TIME

An inclusive narratology must demonstrate a surplus value, insights not otherwise gained, for the intercultural, intermedial, and interdisciplinary encounter. This relevance must be demonstrable for both popular narratives and the kind of complicated ones we tend to

consider “literary” or “artistic”. The intercultural situation of migration has been a central topic in much of my film and curatorial work. This has sensitized me even more to the importance of focalization: the representation of all forms of the perception of narrative content, regardless of who does the actual narrating²¹.

One important form of focalisation in the fields connected by that very important preposition “inter”, is memory. This involves time, another concept from narratology that needs more precision and density. Keeping the attention on memory as a specific form of focalization, through systematic attention to focalisation we can grasp how multi-temporality and multi-directionality join forces in complicating the sense of history as a series of events. The string of events we call history now becomes a constellation from which rays go out in all directions. Futurity itself, then, is multidirectional, encompassing the past as well as the times of others. If subjectivity is porous, however, then memory and history are inseparable. Memory must be understood as a *cultural* phenomenon as well as an *individual* and *social* one. Although the term “cultural memory” has been quite popular for a few decades now, my assumption for this paper is that these three “kinds” of memory cannot be separated. The distinction is only a matter of emphasis, of perspective and interest on the part of the researcher, analyst, or memorizing subject. All memories have an individual, a social and a cultural aspect. This is only logical, since the subjects that remember are also participants in all three of these domains. Moreover, memories have a three-partite temporality. Memory is a connection between the three times of human temporal awareness: the past, in which things happened that the memory engages – or not; the present, in which the act of memorizing takes place and into which the remembered content is, so to speak, “retrieved”; and the future, which will be influenced by what the subjects in the present, together and embedded in their cultural environment, remember and do with those memories. I focus on “cultural memory” – as I said, this is a focus only; one that brings forward political aspects, and the plurality of the subjects involved²².

The most insightful description of historical time is a perfectly adequate description of memory. In “Theses on the Philosophy of History” Benjamin imaginatively speculates on the *arrest* of thought [10]. This arrest constitutes a break with linearity, with “homogeneous, empty time”, a kind of de-automatization and “filling” or embodiment of time. This can serve as a characterization of Don Quixote’s relentless, ongoing and invariably failed attempts to do politically useful work. The failure of an adequate narratological analysis is just as productive, or more, than a successful one. This arrest puts the present forward, making that present both subjective and political. Moreover, it results in a great force, causing a “shock” that, in turn, leads to a crystallization of time into a constellation [10; p.262].

Like crystals of snow, crystals of time offer a model for thought that eludes the straitjacket of linearity that leaves both historical contradiction and subjective experience by the wayside. Searching for a linear string of events in narratological analysis is productive, precisely because the failure of the attempt characterizes the narrative as multitemporal. Instead, the Benjaminian idea of shock, or *choc en retour* of arrested thought allows us “to grasp time as dense with overlapping possibilities and dangers – an understanding of the present as ... the site of multidirectional memory” [11; p.80]. In such a conception of memory time and direction merge, or freeze, in the merging of focalisation and the image; hence the relevance of the concept for visual analysis. Deleuze puts it thus, in a key passage that gives density to memory as a form of focalisation [12]:

What constitutes the crystal-image is the most fundamental operation of time: since the past is constituted not after the present that it was but at the same time, time has split itself in two at each moment as present and past, which differ from each other in nature, or ... it has to split the present in two

heterogeneous directions, one of which is launched towards the future while the other falls into the past. Time has to split at the same time as it sets itself out or unrolls itself: it splits in two dissymmetrical jets, one of which makes all the present pass on, while the other preserves all the past. Time consists of this split, and it is this, it is time, that we see in the crystal.

The “emanation of past reality” that Barthes marveled at in photography [13; p.88] is compounded by an emanation of another’s (past or present) reality. In Cervantes’s novel, the author and the character (the Prologue calls them father and the son) are as “other” to each other as possible. Memory mediates to turn this novel into a document of “migratory aesthetics”, an encounter not based on alterity – a vexed concept that implies an unmentioned “self” – but on groping towards affective understanding, against all odds of circumstance and history. This is how Davoine rewrites [14] the novel as an account of a training analysis, mutually set up between Don Quixote and Sancho Pança. If such a literary work has achieved and retained the world-wide status as a masterpiece it has, it is first of all because it has not lost any of its actuality. Not coincidentally, the novel is based on what the great specialist of Cervantes, María Antonia Garcés, has called, in the subtitle of her edition of a contemporary witness statement [15], “an early modern dialogue with Islam”. Formerly, in deep history, things happened that still happen, or happen again, today. Hence, “formerly is today”. With the research group at the Linnaeus University in Växjö, Sweden, we could call it “concurrences”, temporal as well as geographical – a crystal of time moving in the opposite, centripetal direction.

Every epoch knows of such situations that push human beings out of humanity. The novel carries not only the traces of the absurdity and madness that suggest the inevitably traumatic state in which its creator must have been locked, upon his return to Spain, as transpires symptomatically in the stories told. But it also foregrounds this consequence of war and captivity in the madness of its literary form. It takes a firm narratological analysis to notice how it does and does not comply with the structural characteristics. Chapter I, viii ends on a cliff-hanger: who will win this battle, Don Quixote or the Basque? Leaving that question hanging as irrelevant, the next chapter reflects on the question of history and truthfulness, and only after this part that stages a first-person narrator, can the battle continue and be more or less concluded. The sheer-endless stream of “adventures” makes all film adaptations more or less hopeless endeavours. One can barely read, let alone watch all those pointless attempts to help others, the repercussions of which involve cruelty and pain. If I nevertheless seek to make an audio-visual work based on this novel, it is because the aftermath of violence, of hopeless stagnation in situations of which the end is not in sight, needs and deserves exploration. Thus, through being touched by the installation’s form, viewers can learn from it for dealing with their own experiences of the violence contemporary society can generate, their own as well as those hinted at by others in their surroundings, in order to repair what Cervantes called in the Prologue to *Persiles* the “broken thread” of memory, and I add following Davoine [14], social connectivity²³.

This project pertains to what is today most frequently called “artistic research” – a search and analysis through artmaking. We have called the specific genre of video production in other works, “theoretical fictions”; and this is the genre here as well. This is the deployment of fiction to understand difficult theoretical issues, and even to develop theory through what fiction enables us to imagine. The challenge to make a video project based on *Don Quixote* appeals to two ambitions. First, the current situation of the world makes a deeper, creative reflection on trauma and its assault on human subjectivity, an urgent task for art. The insights the novel harbours uniquely connect to other experiences of war, violence, and captivity. Second, a well-thought-through video project can explore and transgress the limits of what

can be seen, shown, narrated, and witnessed, specifically in relation to trauma, which is itself notoriously un-representable. This exposes the limitations of narratology, but precisely for that reason, makes that theory indispensably illuminating.

As a mostly narrative medium, film seems the least apt to do justice to the turbulent incoherence, repetitiveness, and incongruous “adventures” told in the novel. All films, including Terry Gilliam’s recent one (2018), remain within the classical interpretation, leaning on ridiculing the mad knight. Yet thanks to its capacity for audio-visualization, a video installation consisting of different, non-linear episodes may instead be more effective in showing, rather than representing, not the moment trauma occurs but violence-generated traumatic *states*. Wittgenstein’s ending of his *Tractatus* (1921), “Of what one cannot speak, one should keep silent” was modified later into “Of what one cannot speak, one can still show”. The importance of showing is to enable *witnessing* as an engaged activity against the indifference of the world.

In order to do justice to the peculiar, cyclic, perhaps even “hysterical” form of the novel while pursuing these two goals, only an equally “incoherent”, episodic artwork can be effective. But this artwork must exceed a plain similarity of form. In view of the need for witnessing, such a form enables and activates viewers to construct their own story, and connect it to what they have seen around them. This is where focalisation and temporality can join forces to compel active witnessing as a mode of reading. Thus, we aim to turn the hysteria of endless story-telling into a reflection on communication beyond the boundaries that madness draws around its captive subjects, and instead, open up their subjectivity.

To achieve this, we expect that the creation and production of singular installation pieces facilitates experimenting with the episodic nature of the literary masterpiece. These pieces, presenting “scenes”, will be presentations of situations. The scene of Marcela is an example of this (non-)structure. To give insight into the stagnation that characterises the adventures, these pieces are predominantly *descriptive* – that stepchild of narratology, yet imperative part of all narrative. Any attempt at narrative will be “stuttering”, recurring, without any sense of development, and often, the images will not match the dialogues.

What French psychoanalyst and theorist of madness, Françoise Davoine, calls, citing historian Fernand Braudel: “dust of events” (“poussières d’événements”) [6; pp.43-44] adequately characterises this work’s form: sprinkling situations, moments, over the stage or throughout the gallery space. Thus, the tenuous line of a single narrative yields to an installation that will put the visitors in the position of making their own narrative out of what is there, on the basis of their own baggage, while witnessing events without a pre-established chronological linearity. This is adequate to the state of trauma presented in the pieces and in the juxtapositions among them, and to the need to stretch out a hand to, instead of turning away from people hurt so deeply. The trauma incurred by Cervantes after being held in captivity as a slave without any sense of an ending to his disempowered state and his suffering, has been beautifully traced, narrated, and explained by Colombian literary historian scholar María Antonia Garcés [16]. This traumatic state looms over the entire project, and determines its form. Therefore, we want to try something we never do: completely merging the author’s biography, the main character’s ostensive and much commented-upon madness, and the main character of the one narrative unit we select for a narrative element, “The Captive’s Story”, as three incarnations of the desperate attempt to recover from the world’s most horrid crime: to destroy the subjectivity of others by captivity [16].

The form of these pieces will be experimental in many different ways, so that a contemporary aesthetic can reach out to, and touch, a situation of long ago that, as befits the stilled temporality of trauma, persists in the present. Where possible, long, enduring shots will

predominate. Sound-wise, some are quiet, some loud. This allows the simultaneity, the proximity, and even the superposition of different scenes. But as in the novel, reading is the beginning. This is Don Quixote's primary transgression, defect, or seduction; not necessarily the cause of his madness. As Flaubert implied in *Madame Bovary*, the novel constantly *insinuates* that reading is maddening, without demonstrating it without reasonable doubt. Although reading is not usually seen as an action, especially not compared to Don Quixote's hectic adventures, here, in this "primal scene", reading consists of (tiny) actions. These infra-actions hint at another aspect of reading: captivating, it captures, confines, holds the reader. Thus, it becomes a discreet, barely visible metaphor of captivity. The act of reading is the birth of the character and, according to traditional interpretations, of his particular kind of madness. But this remains ambiguous. Is it reading that drives him mad, or is he hiding in reading to at least imagine himself free? Captivity generates the desperate need to free oneself.

The scene will show how Don Quixote changes during reading, his facial expressions and body language displaying how he transforms from sane but passive to mad and back; from mad to sad, and reviving. Without uttering a word, he enacts horror, relief, loneliness, and the desire to be heard; announcing or recalling the situations of the other pieces. The scene is not suggesting to limit this transformation to reading alone – the suggestion is, instead, that there is an impossibility to remain the same when one is surrounded by the snippets of cultural and political "noise". In a second sequence, reading has become much more intense. Sometimes bursting out laughing, he fights with the books, destroys part of his environment, before he leaves.

The duration of this scene, which is endless, is enacted by subtle changes of light, from daylight to dark; from candle light to daylight. The figure will be invoking another person, who fails to appear. In an armchair and in bed, he is surrounded by, that is, drowning in books. Mumbling some words, sometimes screaming, laughing out loud, he responds to worlds described to which visitors have no access. The scene ends with Don Quixote slowly getting up, falling back into his chair. Then, quite suddenly, he interrupts his reading, closes the book, shuffles aside the other books, and gets up to go out.

While the reading is going on, behind, somewhat blurred, an action continues, mainly done by the priest and the housekeeper. It is a pantomime between them, worrying about Don Quixote's sanity; an embedded focalisation. Looking at the books, roughly taking out anything that seems dangerous, they fill a shopping bag with an ironic slogan of emotional capitalism: "Your life has never been so well filled". But, asks the housekeeper, books of entertainment can do no harm, can they? On the contrary – what if he decides to become a shepherd, or worse, a poet, which is contagious and incurable²⁴?

Another experimental form concerns the dynamic relationship between visibility and invisibility, image and writing. A frequent deployment of voice-off without synchronicity with the images – also a novelty in our work – will foreground this tension. The actor Mathieu Montanier will be visible, but so will, sometimes, the letters of inscriptions, in association with other texts, to foreground the nature of *video-graphy* as a form of writing. We will also experiment with different combinations of sequences, including mounting multiple images on a screen; this, also, for the practical purpose of facilitating the project to travel and to be combined with other artworks. Hence, through experimenting with possible forms of the art of video, we seek to invent new forms for the formlessness of trauma, confronting these with the classical narratological structures.

In order to include, while questioning it, the narrativity that is, after all, the novel's primary mode, "The Captive's Tale" (I, 39-41) is developed in three scenes. It is the one "captivating" story of captivity; an embedded novella, with a plot of sorts, of a soldier taken in slavery, clearly based on autobiography, supplemented with dreams of wish fulfilment. The Captive is

played by the same actor who plays Don Quixote. This allows viewers to reflect on, and decide, how they consider narrative itself. The research question of this project touches on the point of narratology: how can museums and theatre together help in the current situation of the world – mass migration, dictatorships, religious and nationalistic strife – to counteract violence and its assault on human subjectivity, resulting in trauma? The question will be researched on the basis of video installations and their theatrical display as an interdisciplinary case study, anchored in critical reflection and experimental art-making (“Artistic Research”). The project seeks to deploy art in museum practice to affect spectators with the otherness of a socio-cultural state of violence-induced “madness”. Empathy: “the capability to ‘think in the mind of another’, to anticipate the reactions of another human being” [17] is not easy when that other is strange to us because “mad”. Through empathy, though, the figure of Don Quixote, the classical “mad knight” will be transformed into a “sad knight”.

This project is part of a larger one, which comprises three museum exhibitions in 2020-2023, in the Jan Cunen Museum in Oss, Netherlands, curated by dr. Jeroen Lutters, who conceived the educational method called “art-based learning”. The exhibitions will cohere together as presenting three elements of the state of the world subjected to violence.

The exhibitions focus on the three related issues that, together, refine narratological categories:

- *violence* – an event (that happens),
- *trauma* – a state (that results),
- *empathy* – an attitude (that enables).

It is to the extent that trauma stirs the fixity of such categories that narratology can remain useful and culturally productive. These exhibitions emerge from a project that shifts form from *activist* to *activating* art.

Images of violent events conducive to trauma are considered informative (“the news”). The rationale of this shift is the insight that the trauma and the powerlessness that result are not inherent in the violent events. As analytical psychiatry has diagnosed and cultural analysis has studied, it is the impossibility to process, even experience extreme violence that generates the trauma and obstructs its representation [6, 18-21]. Violence is an *event* inflicted on people; trauma a resulting *state*, in the victims.

To avoid confusion between event and state, and doer and victim, we make the non-evenemential, enduring situation of *captivity* central. But what happens to us, the beholders of images that stage such situations? This question is also inherent in narratology. Through their graphic explicitness and their recurrent appearance, these pictures of the news are confined to historical insignificance, even oblivion. The abundance of representations of traumatogenic events in the electronic media generate forgetting of their historical and psychological impact. The far-too-many, the surplus, is produced by, and produces *consumption*. Our project designs an intervention in that cultural attitude, by inflecting “activist” art, addressing specific issues and events, into “activating” art, public-oriented, for a more general change of attitude²⁵.

If narratology continues to have a point, purpose, or academic as well as social usefulness, it is because it reminds us that its primary concepts cannot be wished away simply because we think we have moved beyond them. The assumption that we have betrays an attitude towards time as naively linear, and a denial of the complexity Deleuze so adequately expressed in his concept of “crystals of time” [12], Rothberg in his concept of multi-directional memory [11], and Cervantes and Davoine together in that moving metaphor of repairing the broken thread of the social bond. This bond is, in the end, what matters.

REMARKS

¹I find “posthuman” objectionable in its imprecision. What is mostly meant is “post-humanist” and “post-anthropocentric”, two different alternatives that at least do not disavow the fact that the speakers are human, after all.

²Much of this discussion was present in my paper at the conference in Zagreb, a text that has since been published [22].

³“se le secó el cerebro de tal manera, que acabó perdiendo el juicio” [23; pp.40-41]. I quote from the most widely used English translation by J.M. Cohen [23], and given the many editions of this, I refer to part I or II and chapter only. For the Spanish I use the excellent modernized edition by Andrés Trapiello [24].

⁴More on trauma below. The best backdrop for a discussion of trauma is Ernst van Alphen’s article [21].

⁵The following paragraphs revise some segments from my book in interdisciplinary methodology [25].

⁶The factual violence on three historical moments is not the issue here; the memory of it, or its forgetting, is the impulse Malani brings to making her shadow plays. See my book on these works [26].

⁷See Bryson’s introduction to *Looking In: The Art of Viewing* [27]. This text, in fact, was one of the reasons that I became more acutely aware of the importance of concepts. Silverman offers an excellent, indeed, indispensable, discussion of the gaze in Lacanian theory [5].

⁸See [4] for a distinction between the “gaze” and the “glance” as two versions of the look. On Malani’s shadow plays, see also [9]. The title of her 2012 work, shown at Documenta that year, resonates with the subtitle of Spivak’s book [1].

⁹Ernst van Alphen’s analysis of Charlotte Delbo’s writings is suggestively titled “Caught by Images” [28]. The phrase “the sense of an ending” alludes to Frank Kermode’s book on the subject [29].

¹⁰I am currently beginning a video project on Don Quixote, of which this episode is one element.

¹¹Mata un desdén, aterra la paciencia, / O verdadera, o falsa, una sospecha; / Matan los celos con rigor más fuerte / Desconcierta la vida larga ausencia; / Contra un temor de olvido no aprovecha / Firme esperanza de dichosa suerte./ En todo hay cierta, inevitable muerte;/ Mas yo, ¡milagro nunca visto! Vivo/ Celoso, ausente, desdeñado y cierto/ De las sospechas que me tienen muerto .../ ¿Se puede, por ventura, en un instante/ esperar y temer, o es bien hacerlo,/ siendo las causas del temor más ciertas? .../ Celos, ponédme un arma en estas manos./ Dame, desdén, una torcida sogá.

¹²¿Vienes a ver, por ventura, o hiero basilisco de estas montañas, si con tu presencia vierten sangre las heridas de este mísero a quien tu crueldad quitó la vida?

¹³A los que he enamorado con la vista, he desengañado con las palabras. [...] ‘Yo, como sabéis, tengo riquezas propias, y no codicio la ajenas; soy de naturaleza libre, y no gusto de sujetarme; no quiero ni aborrezco a nadie; no engaño a este ni solicito a aquel; ni tonto con uno ni me entretengo con el otro. La conversación honesta con las zagalas de estas aldeas y el cuidado de mis cabras me entretienen. ‘pero no me llame cruel ni homicida aquel a quien yo no prometo, engaño, llamo ni admito’ [124]. Tienen mis deseos por confin estas montañas ...’

¹⁴Marcelle affirme avec force n’offrir aucune prise aux idéologies politiquement culpabilisantes. ... Elle refuse d’être complice de discours de mort maquillés en discours utopiques, et s’érige contre l’arme politique de la culpabilisation Davoine [6; pp.147-149].

¹⁵Nadie, de ningún estado ni condición, se atreva a seguir a la hermosa Marcela, so pena de caer en mi furiosa indignación. Ella ha mostrado con claras y suficientes razones la poca o ninguna culpa que ha tenido en la muerte de Grisóstomo [...] (emphasis added).

- ¹⁶The scare quotes around the word express my protest against the use of the vexed preposition “post-”. The research centre “Concurrences” for colonial and postcolonial studies, dir. Johan Høglund, at Linnaeus University in Växjö, Sweden, has developed a different concept. A recent volume begins with this idea: “Concurrence offers a way of thinking about similarity and difference together, without necessarily privileging the priority of one over the other and without assuming the parameters of relationality in advance. To look for concurrences is not to assume either full equivalence across systems or the inferiority of one to another. These two options for comparative understanding have dominated much criticism to date, but alternative ways of thinking are now emerging, within which the idea of reading for concurrences is gaining ground” [30; p.3].
- ¹⁷I have been greatly inspired by Genette’s three volumes of *Figures*, especially the third volume translated into English as *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* [31]. When his response to criticism appeared, I understood how deep the cleft was between our conceptions of literature. The unsurmountable obstacle was that his view was a-political and mine political.
- ¹⁸For an elaboration of subjectivity networks, I must refer to my book *Death and Dissymmetry* [32].
- ¹⁹A key text in the background of this discussion remains W.J.T. Mitchell’s opening chapter “What is an Image?” in *Iconology* [33]. The word “envision” yields a tentative concept in Schwenger [34].
- ²⁰In Chapter 1 of *Travelling Concepts* I have discussed these two possible risks of interdisciplinary analysis, following Stengers [35].
- ²¹On cultural consequences of migration, see Mieke Bal & Miguel Hernández Navarro [36, 37]. For my films on migration, <http://www.miekebal.org/artworks/films>.
- ²²I use the phrase “act of memory” to foreground the active nature and present tense of memory, see [38]. On multidirectional memory, see Rothberg’s seminal study [11].
- ²³See esp. Davoine [14], a book on which Michelle Williams Gamaker and I based the video project *A LONG HISTORY OF MADNESS* (2012). This project was initiated by French actor Mathieu Montanier, who also co-wrote the first draft of the synopsis. In what follows, my use of the pronoun “we” indicates this collaboration, not a problematic universalizing plural.
- ²⁴I first saw the commercial slogan of “emotional capitalism” [39] quoted here, “votre vie n’a jamais été aussi bien remplie”, which is printed on shopping bags of the French chain Monoprix, on the bag filled with his meagre belongings of a beggar in a Parisian subway station.
- ²⁵The preceding paragraph is a paraphrase of Röttger [40].

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