Introduction

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Narratology, the formal study of narrative, has been conceived from its earliest days as a project that transcends disciplines and media. In 1964 Claude Bremond wrote: "[Story] is independent of the techniques that bear it along. It may be transposed from one to another medium without losing its essential properties: the subject of a story may serve as argument for a ballet, that of a novel can be transposed to stage or screen, one can recount in words a film to someone who has not seen it. These are words we read, images we see, gestures we decipher, but through them, it is a story that we follow; and it could be the same story."[1] This statement has remained in theoretical hibernation for over forty years—occasionally contested by opponents of the form and content dichotomy, which it seems to imply, occasionally invoked as inspiration for concrete comparative studies, but never developed into a full-scale transmedial narrative theory. Nearly forty years later, in a period of swelling interest in both comparative media studies and narrative (the latter demonstrated by the so-called narrative turn in the humanities), the question of how the intrinsic properties of the medium shape the form of narrative and affect the narrative experience can no longer be ignored. The study of narrative across media is not the same project as the interdisciplinary study of narrative: whereas one project directs us to the importance of narrative in mostly language-based practices, the other focuses on the embodiment, that is to say, the particular semiotic substance and the technological mode of transmission of narrative. Its categories are language, image, sound, gesture, and, further, spoken language, writing, cinema, radio, television, and computers rather than law, medicine, science, literature, and history.

Even when they seek to make themselves invisible, media are not hollow conduits for the transmission of messages but material supports of information whose materiality, precisely, "matters" for the type of meanings

that can be encoded. Whether they function as transmissive channels or provide the physical substance for the inscription of narrative messages, media differ widely in their efficiency and expressive power. In the words of Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, their built-in properties "open up possibilities and impose constraints which . . . shape the narration, the text, and even the story" (160). The present collection of essays takes a close-up look at some of these constraints and possibilities—which we may call, following the psychologist J. J. Gibson, "affordances"—with a broader question in mind: what does it mean "to narrate," and what kinds of stories can be told in different medial environments?

To prepare for this journey, let me attempt to package *narrative* and *media* into transportable definitions. It is not my intent to develop a formula that captures the position of all the contributors to this volume, but in the process of working my own definition I hope to give a reasonably comprehensive view of the options that underlie my decisions. The parameters that make up this field of possibilities should provide a common denominator for the comparison of differing individual positions. The definitional considerations will be followed by a survey of some of the milestones of media studies, from which we should get a clearer idea of what needs to be done to turn its flirtation with narrative theory into a productive partnership for both parties. This introduction will not include a survey of narratology, mainly because the field is too vast to be presented in a limited space but also because several essays in this book involve a discussion of key narratological concepts: those in particular by David Herman and Wendy Steiner. For a presentation of the individual essays and an overview of the state of narrative research in each area, the reader should consult the specialized introductions to the individual sections.

Narrative: What It Could Be

The phenomenon of narrative has been explored in many terms: existential, cognitive, aesthetic, sociological, and technical. These explorations range from broad considerations about the nature of narrative to narrow definitions. The existential type (represented by Paul Ricoeur and Peter Brooks) tells us that the act of narrating enables humans to deal with time, destiny, and mortality; to create and project identities; and to situate themselves as embodied individuals in a world populated by similarly embodied subjects. It is in short a way, perhaps the only one, to give meaning to life. Through narrative we also explore alternate realities and expand our mental horizon

beyond the physical, actual world—toward the worlds of dreams, phantasms, fantasy, possibilities, and counterfactuality.

Whereas existential approaches try to capture what it means for us to produce (or receive) narratives, it belongs to the cognitive approaches to describe the operations of the narrating mind. Mark Turner opens an ambitious program for both narratology and cognitive science when he writes: "Narrative imagining—story—is the fundamental instrument of thought . . . It is a *literary* capacity indispensable to human cognition generally" (4–5; emph. added). Why is narrative so fundamental to cognition? Because to notice objects or events in our perceptual environment is to construct embryonic stories about them: "Story depends on constructing something rather than nothing. A reportable story is distinguished from its assumed and unreportable background. It is impossible for us to look at the world and not to see reportable stories distinguished from background" (145). It may seem strange that a capacity as essential as narrative to cognition should be labeled literary, as if narrative were necessarily an aesthetic object and as if thought were an exclusively language-based process, but for Turner "the literary mind is not a separate sort of mind. It is our mind" (v). Turner labels the mind literary to suggest that we apply similar interpretive principles when we read a text and when we engage in the activities of everyday life.

Whereas Turner regards narrative as *the* instrument of human thought, Jerome Bruner, more cautiously, describes it as one of two fundamental ways of thinking, the other being the argumentative, or paradigmatic, mode: "A good story and a well-formed argument are different natural kinds. Both can be used as means for convincing another. Yet what they convince of is fundamentally different: arguments convince one of their truth, stories of their lifelikeness" (11). The narrative mode is the mode of the particular; it deals with "human or human-like intentions and actions and the vicissitudes and consequences that mark their course." The argumentative mode, on the other hand, "deals in general causes, and in their establishment, and makes use of procedures to assure verifiable reference and to test for empirical truth." It "seeks to transcend the particular by higher and higher reaching for abstraction" (13). It is easy to recognize in the argumentative mode the scientific way of thinking, but the domain of the narrative mode is less clear. Bruner seems to associate narrative with fictional stories when he writes that it is not judged by criteria of truth and verifiability—but where in this dichotomy should one fit such genres as history, news reports, and, above all, courtroom testimonies, which deal with the particular, and do so in an obviously narrative way, but at the same

time make a very direct truth claim? In addition to regarding narrative as typically fictional, Bruner associates it with aesthetic qualities: "In contrast to our vast knowledge of how science and logical reasoning proceed, we know precious little in any formal sense about how to make good *stories*" (14). Neither Turner nor Bruner thus attempts to distinguish the properly narrative element from a group of features that yields what is certainly the most diversified, but by no means the only, manifestation of narrative: literary narrative fiction.

The aesthetic approaches deal with more concrete textual phenomena than either the existential or cognitive ones. This should, in principle, give them a better shot at a definition. But their chances at developing the formula of narrative are hampered by their integrationist stance. I call "integrationist" an approach that refuses on principle to isolate "narrativity" from other layers of meaning and from the total textual experience. This approach regards narrativity, fictionality, and literariness (or aesthetic appeal) as inseparable features. For many literary critics the quintessential narrative text is the novel, a proteiform genre that encompasses not only action-filled tales but also the psychological narratives of modernism and the plotless or self-reflexive texts of postmodernism. To the integrationist aesthetician, a satisfactory definition of *narrative* should gives equal status to Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* and Flann O'Brien's *At Swim-Two-Birds* or to James Joyce's *Dubliners, Ulysses,* and *Finnegans Wake.* One of the most extreme forms of this approach is the concept of narrative proposed by Philip Sturgess. In *Narrativity: Theory and Practice* Sturgess criticizes available attempts at defining narrative, particularly those of Gerald Prince and of the story-grammar school on the ground that they presuppose a deep-structural, preverbal armature to which the text owes its narrativity (14). For Sturgess there is no such thing as nonverbalized narrativity, nor are there nonnarrative elements in a narrative text: narrativity is a global effect toward which every single textual element conspires, and it is inseparable from the "verbal and syntactic" progress of the text. "Narrativity," Sturgess writes, "is the enabling force of narrative, a force that is present at every point in the narrative" (29). The inevitable consequence of this rather tautological definition is that narrativity becomes indistinguishable from aesthetic teleology, or, as Sturgess puts it, from the consistency with which every text uses its devices (36). Since aesthetic teleology is unique to each text, so is narrativity. For the most radical versions of the integrationist position, narrative is just too deeply entangled with the verbal fabric of the text to be definable at all.

Sociological approaches shift the focus of investigation from narrative

as a text to the performance of this text as what we may call, with David Herman (in this volume) a "contextually situated practice." The study of the contexts in which narration takes place is an important project, but it is not conducive to a general definition. Even if we remain within the domain of verbal narration, the common denominator of social events as diverse as conversational gossip, the presentation of news on television, the play-by-play broadcast of a sports event, the oral performance of a traditional epic by a bard, the retelling of the plot of a movie to a friend, the confession of sins to a priest, or the writing of a novel resides neither in the concrete circumstances nor in the particular social function of the narrative act but in the context-transcending nature of this act. This leads us back to square one: for we cannot define the act of narration without defining the object created through this act.

The technical approaches are the most inclined to isolate narrativity from both context and other textual features. We may therefore call them "segregationist." By technical approaches I mean not only narratology proper, a structuralist project that recruits most of its troops from literary theory, but also work done in folklore, experimental psychology, linguistics, and discourse analysis. Since the technical approaches tend to favor language-based narrative, I propose here to examine some of the difficulties encountered by the project of defining narrative as a discourse-theoretical object. This investigation should pave the way toward a medium-free definition.

One of the main concerns of the technical approaches is the place of narrative in a comprehensive discourse theory: is it a speech act, a genre, or a type of sentence? Several theorists have proposed definitions of narrative that suggest a speech act—for instance, Barbara Herrnstein Smith, who writes, "we might conceive of narrative discourse most minimally and most generally as verbal acts consisting of *someone telling someone else that something happened*" (228). One of the basic assumptions of speech act theory, as formulated by Searle, is the relative independence of illocutionary force (a technical term for *speech act*) from the propositional content of an utterance. While the relation between illocutionary category and propositional content is governed by constraints (you cannot, for instance, mean "I will kill you" as advice or use "The weather is nice" to christen a ship), an illocutionary category cannot be entirely predicted on the basis of prepositional content. A proposition made of the subject *the dishes* and the predicate *washed* can be used to make an assertion ("The dishes are washed"), a question ("Are the dishes washed?"), a command "Wash the dishes!"), the condition for a threat ("The dishes had better be washed by noon, or you'll

be in trouble"), and so on. At first sight Smith's characterization divides neatly into an illocutionary category (someone telling someone else) and a propositional content (something happened). To narrate, then, would be one of the several speech acts that one can accomplish with a propositional content of the type "something happened," but what can one do with a collection of propositions that describe events besides narrating them? And what is narrating, if not asserting these propositions either seriously or in make-believe (for example, fictionally)? The so-called speech act of narration thus turns out to be an assertion that concerns a particular type of meaning. This suggests that narrativity is a matter of propositional content, not of illocutionary force.

If narrating is not a technically distinct sort of speech act, one that stands on par with assertion, command, question, or promise, could narrative be a genre? It all depends on whether we interpret genre in an analytical or a cultural sense. (This distinction is from Dan Ben-Amos.) In the analytical interpretation, genre (or analytical category) corresponds to any kind of criterion that can be used to build a discourse or text typology. In the cultural sense, by contrast, genre designates text types not merely drawn by theorists but enjoying widespread recognition in a given community. Within the medium of language the genre system of Western cultures correspond, for instance, to traditional literary labels, such as the novel, poetry, drama, essays, and short stories. Other media also have their culturally recognized genres: comedy, action, drama, and pornography in the cinema; historical scene, landscape, portrait, and still life in painting; symphony, concerto, sonata, fantasy, intermezzo, and nocturne in music. To return to verbal texts, the notion of genre is much more problematic outside the literary sector, but a case could be made for scientific discourse, history, law, self-help books, song lyrics, and recipes as genres of contemporary Western cultures. Insofar as they form reasonably well-defined categories, cultural genres are defined by unique sets of analytical features, but a given feature can be shared by several genres: for instance, "being fictional" is common to novels and drama, while "being about past events" characterizes both history and historical novels. *Narrative,* however, does not seem to possess the recognition of a cultural genre. People go for novels, biographies, self-help, or for the subgenres romance and science fiction, but nobody would walk into a bookstore and ask for a narrative. Yet, as a property of texts, narrative enters into the definition of many genres, in combination with other features that operate further distinctions. It is, therefore, a prime example of an analytical category.

This diagnosis of narrative as a concept broader than genre—whether we call it an analytical category, discourse type, text type, or macro-genre—does not solve the problem of its definition. The description of discourse-theoretical concepts usually begins with the identification of the categories that operate on the same level, but in this case there is no consensus about what other categories provide a useful contrast: Chatman opposes narrative discourse to persuasive and descriptive; Fludernik's model comprises narrative, argumentative, instructive, conversational, and reflective ("Genres," 282); and Virtanen envisions five basic types, including narrative, description, instruction, exposition, and argumentation. Moreover, as all these authors recognize, narrative intervenes both on the macro and the micro level: a persuasive text, such as a political speech, will use narrative anecdotes; a descriptive text, such as an account of the behavior of wildlife in a certain area, will almost inevitably resort to mini-stories. Conversely, a narrative text includes description or argumentation on the micro level. A typology that resorts to the same categories on different levels is a dangerously tangled hierarchy.

Since narrative appears on two discourse levels, its macro-level manifestation could be regarded as the extension of a micro-level feature. Would it be possible to associate narrativity with small discourse units, such as a specific rhetorical or semantic type of sentence? Here the rival categories might be description (again), evaluation, generalization, commentary, judgment, argument, or metatextual comments. This interpretation of narrative supports the intuitive notion that, within a novel, not every sentence moves the plot forward. The narrativity of a text would be born by sentences that imply the temporal succession of their referents, as is the case with the evocation of events and actions, as opposed to those sentences that refer to simultaneously existing entities, to general laws, to static properties, or to the narrator's personal opinions. The degree of narrativity of a text could thus be measured by the proportion of properly narrative sentences. A fairy tale or conversational narrative of personal experience would be much higher in narrativity than a nineteenth-century novel rich in descriptions or philosophical passages, even if the latter has a more intricate plot, because a summary would retain a higher proportion of the information contained in the text.

While the idea of degrees of narrativity indeed seems promising—it enables narrative theory to recuperate most of postmodern literature—the assimilation of narrative to certain rhetorical or semantic sentence types puts excessive restrictions on the reader's representation of narrative meaning. In our mental image of a plot, expository statements ("Little Red Riding Hood was a little girl") and at least some descriptive ones ("She was

named that way because her mother made her a red cap") coexist with propositions reporting the actions of characters. It would make no sense to commit to memory sequences of action without including in the picture the identifying properties of the individuals involved in those actions. Moreover, as David Herman has argued in *Story Logic* (chap. 7), narrative is a spatio-temporal construct: it reports actions that take place in a world, and the evocation of the spatial layout of this world requires descriptive sentences. Explanatory and evaluative sentences are no less constitutive of narrative meaning than state-reporting discourse: the former are needed to make explicit causal relations between events (for example, "Grief caused the queen to die"), while the latter are used to state the importance of events for the protagonists ("It totally changed her life"). Without denying the privileged connection between narrativity and action-reporting, clock-moving sentences, we cannot, therefore, exclude a priori any kind of sentence from a text's narrative layer.[2]

All of these attempts at fitting narrative within a formal discourse model encounter the same difficulty: we cannot identify positively the other elements of the presumed system. Since we have a clearer intuitive idea of what narrative is than of what it contrasts to, the Saussurean program of defining the units of language differentially fails in this case for a lack of neighboring elements. The alternative to regarding narrative as a member of a linguistic paradigm is to define it as a type of meaning and to do so in positive terms. By advocating a semantic approach, I am not denying that narrative involves both a signified and a signifier (what narratologists customarily call "story level" and "discourse level"), but I am making the claim that its identity resides on the level of the signified. In contrast to the approach that attempts to link this meaning to a specific type of sentence, I propose to regard narrative meaning as a cognitive construct, or mental image, built by the interpreter in response to the text. Gerald Prince has attempted to describe this construct through an elaborate formal grammar.[3] Here I would like to propose an informal characterization of the representation that a text must bring to mind to qualify as narrative.

1. A narrative text must create a world and populate it with characters and objects. Logically speaking, this condition means that the narrative text is based on propositions asserting the existence of individuals and on propositions ascribing properties to these existents.
2. The world referred to by the text must undergo changes of state that are caused by nonhabitual physical events: either accidents ("happenings") or deliberate human actions. These changes create a temporal dimension and place the narrative world in the flux of history.
3. The text must allow the reconstruction of an interpretive network of goals, plans, causal relations, and psychological motivations around the narrated events. This implicit network gives coherence and intelligibility to the physical events and turns them into a plot.

When a text fulfills these conditions, it creates what I shall call a "narrative script." This definition does not take into consideration what enables a narrative script to capture the interest of the audience: a complete narrative theory would need to complement minimal conditions with what discourse analysts, following William Labov, call "principles of tellability." It would also need principles of efficient presentation, such as Labov's structural analysis of conversational narration into five components: abstract, orientation, complicating action, evaluation, result or resolution, coda. But narrativity is a type of meaning that transcends aesthetics and entertainment, as anybody who has been forced to listen to a boring, self-absorbed, rambling conversational storyteller realizes. A narrative that falls flat is still a narrative.

How compatible is this formula with nonverbal forms of narrative? Rather than locating narrativity in an act of telling, my definition anchors it in two distinct realms. On one hand, narrative is a textual act of representation—a text that encodes a particular type of meaning. The definition remains unspecific about what type of signs are used to encode this meaning. On the other hand, narrative is a mental image—a cognitive construct—built by the interpreter as a response to the text. Once again, this representation may be induced by various types of stimuli. But it does not take a representation proposed as narrative to trigger the cognitive construct that constitutes narrativity: we may form narrative scripts in our mind as a response to life, which is definitely not a representation (though, of course, we experience it through cognitive processes that produce mental images). To describe these two modalities, I propose to make a distinction between "being a narrative" and "possessing narrativity." The property of "being" a narrative can be predicated on any semiotic object produced with the intent of evoking a narrative script in the mind of the audience. "Having narrativity," on the other hand, means being able to evoke such a script. In addition to life itself, pictures, music, or dance can have narrativity without being narratives in a literal sense.

The fullest form of narrativity occurs when the text is both intended as narrative and possesses sufficient narrativity to be construed as such,

though the story encoded in the text and the story decoded by the reader can never be extracted from the brain and laid side by side for comparison. But the properties of being narrative and having narrativity can be dissociated in a variety of ways. The standard case of dissociation occurs when the story is so poorly presented that the audience cannot reconstrue the proper script. In this case the text is a narrative of low narrativity. I alluded earlier to the opposite case, of a life situation rationalized in narrative terms. The property of being a narrative is much more clear-cut than the property of having narrativity, but it becomes fuzzy when the text uses narrative scripts in an instrumental way—for instance, when sermons or philosophical works resort to parables and narrative examples on the micro-level or when computer games rely on story to lure the player into their world, even though the story does not form the focus of interest once the player is immersed in the strategic action. A game, after all, is not "a narrative" in the sense that a novel or a film can be. The question "Is it a narrative?" is even more problematic when the text embodies the artistic intent to both arouse and frustrate narrative desire. Many postmodern texts present themselves as bits of pieces of a narrative image but prevent the reader from ever achieving the reconstruction of a stable and complete narrative script. This may explain why narrative theory has never been comfortable with either including or excluding postmodern literature.

But, if the distinction between being a narrative and having narrativity allows the extension of the concept of narrative beyond verbal artifacts, it does not entirely solve the thorny problem of the relationship between language and narrative. It seems clear that of all semiotic codes language is the best suited to storytelling. Every narrative can be summarized in language, but very few can be retold through pictures exclusively. The narrative limitation of pure pictures stems from their inability to make propositions. As Sol Worth has argued, visual media lack the code, the grammar, and the syntactic rules necessary to articulate specific meanings. A propositional act consists of picking a referent from a certain background and of attributing to it a property also selected from a horizon of possibilities. Whereas language can easily zero in on objects and properties, pictures can only frame a general area that contains many shapes and features. To convey the idea that Napoléon was short, for instance, a picture would have to represent the height of the emperor together with many of his other visual properties, and there would be a significant risk that the spectator would be more impressed by one of the other features than by the height itself. Pictures may admittedly find ways around their lack of propositional ability to suggest specific properties (for instance, through caricature), but there are

certain types of statements that seem totally beyond their reach. As Worth argues, pictures cannot say "ain't." Nor, as Rimmon-Kenan observes, can they convey possibility, conditionality, or counterfactuality (162).[4] Being limited to the visible, they are unable to express abstract ideas, such as causality. Only language can make it explicit that the queen died of grief over the death of the king or that the fox stole the cheese from the crow by fooling him into believing something that was not the case.

The narrative limitations of music are even more blatant than those of pictures, since sound waves (or tones and rhythms) are not in themselves semiotic objects. As Seymour Chatman writes, "Music offers no consistency of reference between each of its elements—notes, phrases, movements—and something else in the real or an imagined world so that we may think of the first as signifier and the second as signified" (*Coming to Terms* 8). Pure sounds can be used to evoke mental images, some of which may resemble stories, but they possess neither a context-independent, stable core of signification definable by "lexical" rules nor an immediately perceivable iconic meaning.

All of these observations seem to support the conclusion that verbal language is the native tongue of narrative, its proper semiotic support. Without denying the unsurpassed narrative ability of language, however, I would like to defend a more nuanced position. If we define *narrative* in cognitive terms, it is not a linguistic object but a mental image. While it may be true that only language can express the causal relations that hold narrative scripts together, this does not mean that a text needs to represent these relations explicitly to be interpreted as narrative. As David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson have argued, the seemingly disconnected sequence of cinematic images "A man tosses and turns, unable to sleep. A mirror breaks. A telephone rings" can become a narrative sequence if the spectator supplies common agents and logical connections (55). Brian Richardson proposes the following narrativization: "The man can't sleep because he's had a fight with his boss, and in the morning is still so angry that he smashes the mirror while shaving; next, his telephone rings and he learns that his boss has called to apologize" (170). The visual track may be unable to explicate causal relations—this is why some people who are used to books have difficulty following cinematic narratives—but what matters in this case is the spectator's ability to infer them from the text. Even purely verbal texts, which are perfectly able to say, "The queen's grief over the king's death caused her to die," usually dispense with such explanations.

Although the ability to infer causal relations is essential to narrative understanding, readers' mental images of stories could be as elliptic as the texts

themselves. It seems unlikely that narratives will be internalized as fully connected networks of logical relations. The mind is notoriously capable of emergent behavior—of creating new connections and of forming new patterns of ideas in response to certain stimuli. It is much more efficient to store an incomplete version of a given narrative and to flesh it out when the need arises than to clutter memory with all the details of its logical armature. What is left out and what is included in this image depends on the individual interpreter. The complete and explicit representation of a story is an ideal, somewhat Platonic version toward which readers work, as they fill in their cognitive blueprint of the story.

A model that defines narrative as a cognitive construct remains uncommitted about what this construct is made of. Since no CAT scan can reveal the contents of the brain, we can only speculate in this domain, but cognitive research suggests that the mental representation of a story involves various types of images (the term is taken here in the broadest possible sense, as an informational pattern stored in the mind).[5] It seems safe to assume that propositions abstracted from the text, rather than reproducing it, are the dominant element, but certain aspects of narrative could be stored as words (for instance, the memorable replies of characters) or as visual images (the setting, the appearance of characters, the map of the narrative world, and some striking actions and situations, such as Emma Bovary making love to Léon in a carriage storming in full gallop through the streets of Rouen). It is not inconceivable that moods and emotions will be associated with rhythms and melodies. Conversely, pictures can be remembered either in visual terms or as propositions: we may, for instance, be able to tell that in the background of a painting is a mirror, though we cannot remember its exact shape.[6] The cognitive representation that I call narrative could thus be the mental equivalent of a "multimedia" construct. While its logical structure is probably stored as propositions, which in turn can only be translated through language, other types of images, and consequently other "mental media," enrich the total representation in ways that remain inaccessible to language. Yes, language is the privileged medium of summaries because it can articulate the logical structure of a story; yes, language all by itself can support a wider variety of narratives than any other single-track medium, not just because of its logical superiority but also because only words can represent language and thought. But this does not mean that media based on sensory channels cannot make unique contributions to the formation of narrative meaning. There are, quite simply, meanings that are better expressed visually or musically than verbally, and these meanings should not be declared a priori irrelevant to the narrative experience.

To capture the ambiguity of the relationship between language and narrative, we need to distinguish theory from practice. Theoretically, narrative is a type of meaning that transcends particular media; practically, however, narrative has a medium of choice, and this medium is language. This explains why narratology tends to treat the types of narration exemplified by novels, short stories, news, history, and conversational storytelling as the unmarked, standard manifestation of narrativity: telling somebody else that something happened, with the assumption that the addressee is not already aware of the events. But, if narratology is to expand into a medium-free model, the first step is to recognize other narrative modes, that is to say, other ways of evoking narrative scripts. What should we understand under this concept of modes? I propose to include the following pairs in what I regard as an open list. In each case the left term can be regarded as the unmarked case, because the texts that present this feature will be much more widely accepted as narrative (at least by theorists) than the texts that implement the right-hand category. To take only one example: those narratologists who define narrative as "telling somebody that something happened" exclude all instances of mimetic narrativity.

Diegetic/Mimetic: This distinction goes back to Plato's *Republic.* It is also discussed in Aristotle's *Poetics.* A diegetic narration is the verbal storytelling act of a narrator. As the definition indicates, diegetic narration presupposes language, either oral or written; it is, therefore, the typical mode of the novel, conversational storytelling, and news report. A mimetic narration is an act of showing: a "spectacle," as David Bordwell characterizes it (*Narration* 3). In forming a narrative interpretation, the recipient works under the guidance of an authorial consciousness, but there is no narratorial figure. Mimetic narration is exemplified by all dramatic arts: movies, theater, dance, and the opera. But each of these two modes can intrude into a narration dominated by the other. The dialogues of a novel are islands of mimetic narration, since in direct quote the voice of the narrator disappears behind the voice of the characters, and, conversely, the phenomenon of voiced-over narration in cinema reintroduces a diegetic element in a basically mimetic medium.[7]

Those theoreticians who regard the presence of a storyteller performing a verbal act of narration as an essential condition of narrativity recuperate mimetic narrative by ascribing these forms to a nonhuman narratorial figure, such as the ghostly "grand-image-maker" of film theory.[8] But the narrativity of mimetic forms could also be defended by regarding them as virtual stories. When we retell a play, we produce a standard diegetic narrative. The *possibility* to retell as a story would then be the condition of

narrativity, and the narrativity of a given text would stand whether or not the possibility is actualized.

Autonomous/Illustrative (or ancillary): In the autonomous mode the text transmits a story that is new to the receiver; this means that the logical armature of the story must be retrievable from the text. In the illustrative mode the text retells and completes a story, relying on the receiver's previous knowledge of the plot. Halfway between these two poles is the case of a text that offers a new, significantly altered *version* of a familiar plot.

Receptive/Participatory: In the receptive mode the recipient plays no active role in the events presented by the narrative: he merely receives the account of a narrative action, imagining himself as an external witness. In the participatory mode the plot is not completely pre-scripted. The recipient becomes an active character in the story, and through her agency she contributes to the writing of the plot. This mode has been practiced for quite a while in staged happenings, "improv" theater, and scripted role-playing games (for example, Dungeons and Dragons), but it has flourished with the advent of interactive digital media. In many computer games, for instance, the user is represented in the game world through an avatar. By solving problems in the real time of the game session, she determines whether the life story of this avatar will end in success or failure or how long the avatar will live.

Determinate/Indeterminate (or actual/virtual): In the determinate mode the text specifies a sufficient number of points on the narrative trajectory to project a reasonably definite script. In the indeterminate mode only one or two points are specified, and it is up to the interpreter to imagine one (or more) of the virtual curves that traverse these coordinates.

Literal/Metaphorical: What constitutes a literal or metaphorical narration depends on the particular definition given to narrative. Whereas literal narration fully satisfies the definition, the metaphorical brand uses only some of its features. The degree of metaphoricity of a narrative thus depends on how many features are retained and on how important they are to the definition. If we conceive narrative as the mental or textual representation of a causally linked sequence of events involving individuated and humanlike agents, the following relaxations of the definitions should be regarded as metaphorical: scenarios about collective entities rather than individuals (for example, the "grand narratives" of history or the "narratives of class, gender, and race" so dear to contemporary cultural studies); narratives about concrete entities deprived of consciousness (for example, Darwin's story of evolution); and dramatizations that attributes agency to abstract objects.[9] If we want to stretch the metaphor to its limits, we

can apply it to art forms deprived of semantic content, such as music and architecture. In the case of music the metaphor can be invoked to analyze the structure of the work in terms of narrative effects, such as foreshadowing and suspense, dramatic patterns of exposition, complication, climax and resolution, or even Propp-inspired narrative functions. In the case of architecture a metaphorical interpretation may draw an analogy between the temporality of plot and the experience of walking through a building. In a narratively conceived architecture—found, for instance, in Baroque churches, where the walk-through reenacts the stages of the Passion—the visitor's discovery tour is plotted as a meaningful succession of events.[10]

To sum up the previous discussion: The nature of narrative and its relation to language can be conceived in three ways. Each of them carries different implications for the project of this book:

1. Narrative is an exclusively verbal phenomenon. You cannot speak of narrative outside language-supported media (that is, media that not only include a language track but also rely on language as their principal mode of presentation). This position is incompatible with the study of narrative across media.
2. The set of all narratives is a fuzzy set. The fullest implementation of narrativiy is in its language-supported forms. The study of narrative across media is only feasible if one can transfer the parameters of verbal narration to other media. This means, generally, finding a communicative structure that involves a narrator, narratee, and narrative message, in addition to sender (author) and receiver (reader, spectator, etc.).
3. Narrative is a medium-independent phenomenon, and, though no medium is better suited than language to make explicit the logical structure of narrative, it is possible to study narrative in its nonverbal manifestations without applying the communicative model of verbal narration. The definition proposed in this introduction represents the third option. But option 2 is also compatible with a study of narrative across media, and some of the contributors to this volume implicitly or explicitly adhere to it.

What Are Media?

Ask a sociologist or cultural critic to enumerate media, and he will answer: TV, radio, cinema, the Internet. An art critic may list: music, painting, sculpture, literature, drama, the opera, photography, architecture. A

philosopher of the phenomenologist school would divide media into visual, auditory, verbal, and perhaps gustatory and olfactory (are cuisine and perfume media?). An artist's list would begin with clay, bronze, oil, watercolor, fabrics, and it may end with exotic items used in so-called mixed-media works, such as grasses, feathers, and beer can tabs. An information theorist or historian of writing will think of sound waves, papyrus scrolls, codex books, and silicon chips. "New media" theorists will argue that computerization has created new media out of old one: film-based versus digital photography; celluloid cinema versus movies made with video cameras; or films created through classical image-capture techniques versus movies produced through computer manipulations. The computer may also be responsible for the entirely new medium of virtual reality.

These various conceptions of medium reflect the ambiguity of the term. The entry for *medium* in *Webster's Dictionary* includes, among many other meanings more or less irrelevant to the present study (for example, "somebody in contact with the spirits"), the following two definitions:[11]

1. A channel or system of communication, information, or entertainment.
2. Material or technical means of artistic expression.

The first definition presents a medium as a particular technology or cultural institution for the transmission of information. Media of this type include TV, radio, the Internet, the gramophone, the telephone—all distinct types of technologies—as well as cultural channels, such as books and newspapers. In this conception of medium, ready-made messages are encoded in a particular way, sent over the channel, and decoded on the other end. TV can, for instance, transmit films as well as live broadcasts, news as well as recordings of theatrical performances. Before they are encoded in the mode specific to the medium in sense 1, some of these messages are realized through a medium in sense 2. A painting must be done in oil before it can be digitized and sent over the Internet. A musical composition must be performed on instruments in order to be recorded and played on a gramophone. A medium in sense 1 thus involves the translation of objects supported by media in sense 2 into a secondary code.

In his groundbreaking work on the "technologizing of the word," Walter Ong avoids the term *medium* as a label for the various supports of language because he objects to its sense 1:

> The term can give false impression of the nature of verbal communication, and of other human communication as well. Thinking of a "medium" of communication or of "media" of communication suggests that communication is a pipeline transfer of material called "information" from one place to another. My mind is a box, I take a unit of "information" out of it, encode the unit (that is, fit it to the size and shape of the pipe it will go through), and put it into one end of the pipe (the medium, somewhere in the middle between two other things). From the one end of the pipe the information proceeds to the other end, where someone decodes it (restores its proper size and shape) and puts it into his or her own box-like container called a mind. This model . . . distorts the act of [human] communication beyond recognition. (176)

If indeed communicative media were the hollow pipes that Ong caricatures, there would be little purpose in analyzing their narrative potential; any kind of narrative could be fitted into the pipe and restored to its prior shape at the end of the transfer. On the other hand, if we totally reject the conduit metaphor and the notion that meaning—in this case, narrative—is encoded, sent over, decoded, and stored in memory at the other end of the transmission line, if, that is, we regard meaning as inextricable from its medial support, medium-free definitions of narrative become untenable. What, then, would entitle us to compare messages embodied in different media and to view them as manifestations of a common semantic structure? To maintain the possibility of studying "narrative across media," we must find a compromise between the "hollow pipe" interpretation and the unconditional rejection of the conduit metaphor (which itself is a concrete visualization of Roman Jakobson's model of communication). The terms of this compromise are suggested, perhaps unwittingly, by Ong himself, when he writes that information must be fitted to the "shape and size" of the pipeline. This amounts to saying that different media filter different aspects of narrative meaning. Far from being completely undone at the end of the journey, as Ong suggests in his critique, the shape imposed on the message by the configuration of the pipeline affects in a crucial way the construction of the receiver's mental image.

Because of the configuring action of the medium, it is not always possible to distinguish an encoded object from the act of encoding. Consider the cinema: what it records are not autonomous artistic objects but a staging of action done for the express purpose of being filmed. It is the edited footage that forms the artistic object, not something that exists independently of the filming. In the live broadcasts of TV, similarly, the object to be sent is created through the act of recording itself. Moreover, if communicative media encode and decode messages, they do not strip them of any material

support at the end of the journey. After being decoded by the electronic circuits in the black box, TV signals are projected on a small screen in the middle of a family room. The experience is very different from watching a film on a large screen in a dark theater, and it calls for different forms of narrative. Insofar as they present their own type of material support, channel-type media can be simultaneously modes of transmission and means of expression.

In media theory, as in other fields, what constitutes an object of investigation depends on the purpose of the investigator. Here we want to explore media in terms of their narrative power. Hence, what counts for us as a medium is a category that truly makes a difference about what stories can be evoked or told, how they are presented, why they are communicated, and how they are experienced. This approach implies a standard of comparison: to say, for instance, that "radio is a distinct narrative medium" means that radio as a medium offers different narrative possibilities than television, film, or oral conversation. "Mediality" (or mediumhood) is thus a relational rather than an absolute property. To test the thesis of the relativity of mediality with respect to narrative, let us consider the respective status of the gramophone and of daily newspapers. From a technological point of view the gramophone stands as a prototypical medium. When it was developed at the end of the nineteenth century, it did to sound what writing had done to language. Thanks to the new technology, sound could now be recorded, and it was no longer necessary to be within earshot of its source to apprehend auditory data. From a narratological perspective, however, the purely transmissive medium of the gramophone does not seem to entail significant consequences. It wasn't until the development of wireless telegraphy that a long-distance, purely auditory type of narrative was developed, namely the radiophonic play. Daily newspapers represent the opposite situation: historians of technology would regard them as a manifestation of the same medium as books, since they rely on roughly the same printing techniques, but narratologists would defend their medium status with respect to books by pointing out that the daily press promoted a new style of reporting news, which gave birth to an autonomous narrative genre. Daily newspapers also differ pragmatically from other types of communication channels in that they must be delivered regularly at twenty-four-hour intervals. The coverage of a time-consuming crisis must therefore begin before the crisis is resolved, and the daily reports lack the completeness and retrospective perspective of other types of narrative. All these characteristics suggest that newspapers indeed support a distinct type of narrativity.

Where, however, does medium end, and where does genre begin? I would suggest that the difference between *medium* and *genre* resides in the nature and origin of the constraints that relate to each of them. Whereas *genre* is defined by more or less freely adopted conventions, chosen for both personal and cultural reasons, *medium* imposes its possibilities and limitations on the user. It is true that we choose both the genre and the medium we work in. But we select media for their affordances, and we work around their limitations, trying to overcome them or to make them irrelevant. Genre, by contrast, purposefully uses limitations to channel expectations, optimize expression, and facilitate communication: tragedy must be about the downfall of a hero and use the mimetic mode of narrativity; symphonies must comprise several movements (usually four), each with a distinct mood and tempo;[12] novels must be long, and novellas must be short, and both must possess some degree of narrativity (far more for the novella). These conventions are imposed as a second-order semiotic system on the primary mode of signification. Genre conventions are genuine rules specified by humans, whereas the constraints and possibilities offered by media are dictated by their material substance and mode of encoding. But, insofar as they lend themselves to many uses, media support a variety of genres.

The diversity of criteria that enters into the definition of *medium* makes it very difficult to establish a typology of media and to draw a dividing line between *medium* and *genre.* I will nevertheless give it a try, fully aware that my decisions will not meet with unanimous acceptance. If table 0.1 helps readers refine their own notion of medium and understand the complexity of the problem at hand, it will have reached its goal, no matter how many amendments they make to my taxonomy. I propose two main criteria for classifying a form of expression/communication as a narrative medium: (1) As suggested earlier, it must make a difference about what kind of narrative messages can be transmitted, how these messages are presented, or how they are experienced. (2) It must present a unique combination of features. These features can be drawn from five possible areas: (a) senses being addressed; (b) priorities among sensory tracks (thus, the opera will be considered distinct from drama, even though the two media include the same sensory dimensions, because the opera gives music higher priority than drama); (c) spatio-temporal extension; (d) technological support and materiality of signs (painting versus photography; speech versus writing versus digital encoding of language); (e) cultural role and methods of production/distribution (books versus newspapers). Table 0.1 uses spatio-temporal extension and sensory dimension as primary taxonomic categories. These criteria seem indeed more relevant to the issue of narrativity than distinctions relative to technological support, though the latter are

not negligible. The drawback of this prioritization of sensory dimensions is that a given technology or cultural channel needs to be listed twice when it is used to transmit different types of sensory data: digital writing is distinguished from multimedia applications of computer technology; silent film is distinguished from multisensory movie productions. Another problem with the division of media into temporal and spatio-temporal is that, if we apply strict criteria, the temporal column will be virtually empty. As Leonard Talmy remarks, a case could be made for putting all manifestations of writing in the spatio-temporal column, since writing requires a two-dimensional support and exists all at once for the reader (425–26). Books on tape would then be the only legitimate members of the temporal column.

Narrative Media Studies: A Very Brief History

Of the two definitions of the term *medium*—channel of communication or material means of expression—the first has been by far the more influential on the field of media studies. At U.S. universities most departments of media studies concern themselves with the cultural institutions and technologies of mass communication developed in the twentieth century: telephone, radio, TV, computer networks, and the press. As the theorist Joshua Meyrowitz observes, the majority of these studies focus on the content of the messages sent through the medium under study. Questions of social impact are primary: "Typical concerns centre on how people (often children) react to what they are exposed to through various media; how institutional, economic, and political factors influence what is and what is not conveyed through media; whether media messages accurately reflect various dimensions of reality; how different audiences interpret the same content differently; and so on." A different approach to media as instruments of mass communication has been promoted by Meyrowitz as "medium" (rather than media) theory. This approach focuses not on the content of messages but on "the particular characteristics of each individual medium or of each particular type of media. Broadly speaking, medium theorists ask: What are the relatively fixed features of each means of communicating and how do these features make the medium physically, psychologically, and socially different from other media and from face-to-face interaction?" (50). Here, again, the primary focus of studies is sociological: "On the macro-level, medium questions address the ways in which the addition of a new medium to an existing matrix of media may alter social interaction and social structure in general" (51). Working from the assumption that the development of technologies of communication is

Table 0.1. *A typology of media affecting narrativity*

Temporal			**Spatial**		**Spatio-Temporal**	
One Channel		Two Channels	One Channel		One Channel	Multiple Channels
Linguistic	Acoustic	Linguistic/Acoustic	Visual/Static		Visual/Kinetic	Acoustic-visual (kinetic):
Media of long-distance oral communication: Radio, Telephone	Non-texted music	Songs with lyrics, Sung poetry	Painting, Sculpture, Photography, Architecture(?)		Mime, Animated graphics, Silent movies without music	Dance, Silent movies with live music
Manuscript writing						Linguistic-visual (static): Comic strips, Artist's books, Children's books, Newspapers
Printing writing in various supports						
Digital writing: e-mail, Internet chat, Hypertext (text-only)						Linguistic-visual (kinetic): Fact-to-face oral communication
						Linguistic-acoustic-visual (kinetic): Cinema, Theater, TV, Opera
						Synthesis of all channels: Installation art, Interactive computer-mediated forms of expression: Web pages, Art CD-ROMs, Computer games, Virtual reality

one of the most decisive influences on the development of human societies, medium theorists postulate three (and more recently four) pivotal events in the history of civilization: the invention of writing; the invention of print; the development of electronic communications (TV, radio); and the development of electronic writing and computer networks. This sketch of history—inspired by the pioneering work of two Canadians, Harold Adams Innis and Marshall McLuhan—provides a solid theoretical foundation, and a vast program of research, to communicative medium or media studies.

The concentration of this book on narrative calls, however, for approaches based on the second definition. The comparative study of media as means of expression lags far behind the study of media as channels of communication in both academic recognition and theoretical maturity. We have well-developed analytical tools and methodologies relating to individual media, such as cinema, music, literature, and electronic art, but we do not have a comprehensive and widely accepted theory of the importance of the medium as material support for the form and content of message. From their origins in poetics, rhetoric, and aesthetics, semiotic media studies—as I will call this type of inquiry—have progressed bottom up rather than top down, as a series of individual case studies and not as the application of global principles. My brief overview of the field will, therefore, not be the outline of a unified theory but a sketch of some of the milestones in the emergence of medium as an object of semiotic inquiry. My preference will be given to those landmarks that bear upon the question of narrativity.

Awareness of a dimension of art and communication that translates into English as medium goes back at least to Aristotle's *Poetics.* After defining *poetry* as a "species of imitation," Aristotle mentions three ways of distinguishing various types of imitation: medium, object, and mode (2, 3).[13] Under *medium* Aristotle understands expressive resources, such as color, shape, rhythm, melody, and language (or voice).[14] He sketches a classification of art forms based on the media they use: "For example, music for pipe and lyre . . . uses melody and rhythm only, while dance uses rhythm by itself and without melody (since dancers too imitate character, emotion and action by means of rhythm expressed in movement) . . . The art which uses language unaccompanied, either in prose or in verse . . . remains without a name to the present day . . . There are also some arts which use all the media mentioned above (that is, rhythm, melody, and verse), for instance, dithyrambic and gnomic poetry, tragedy and comedy; these differ in that the former use them all simultaneously, the latter in distinct parts" (2.1, 4).

The second criterion, object, operates generic distinctions within imitations that share the same medium. Tragedy, for instance, imitates better people, while comedy depicts inferior ones. Aristotle invokes the third criterion, mode, to make distinctions between imitations that share both medium and object: "It is possible to imitate the same objects in the same medium sometimes by narrating . . . or else with all the imitators as agents and engaged in activity" (2.3, 5). Thus, tragedy and epic both deal with "better people" and do so through language, but tragedy imitates in what Plato calls the mimetic mode, while epic poetry imitates through diegesis. (I use here Plato's terminology instead of Aristotle's contrast between narrative and performing arts to avoid describing tragedy as nonnarrative.) When Aristotle claims that mode operates distinctions within the same medium, he forgets, however, that performing actors appeal to the sense of vision, while diegetic narration does not. Differences in mode inevitably entail differences in medium.

According to Aristotle, the distinction between the mimetic and the diegetic mode does not affect the general structure of plot: "The component parts [of epic plots] are the same [as those of tragedy]: it too needs reversals, recognitions, and sufferings" (10.2, 39). But, because of their distinct mode (and consequently medium), tragedy and epic poetry implement this abstract structure in different ways: "one should not compose a tragedy out of a body of materials which would serve for an epic—by which I mean one that contains a multiplicity of stories . . . [E]veryone who has composed a Sack of Troy as a whole, and not piecemeal like Euripides . . . has either failed or done badly in the competitions" (8.7, 30). Epic plots and dramatic plots can be represented by the same summary, but dramatic plots are much more tightly woven, since their temporal frame must roughly correspond to the length of the performance, while epic plots can afford to stretch out the basic structure through numerous episodes that repeat one another. Not being tied to the here and now of the stage, epic poetry has an "important distinctive resource for extending [the length of the plot]": it is able to "imitate many parts of the action being carried on simultaneously" (10.3, 39–40). By presenting plot as a structure common to dramatic and epic poetry, while suggesting that the resources inherent to the medium make a difference about what kind of subject matters can be represented efficiently, the *Poetics* outlines an agenda for the cross-medial study of narrative: to find out how the medium configures the particular realization of narrativity.

The concept of artistic medium lay dormant until the eighteenth century, when G. E. Lessing published *Laocoön: An Essay on the Limits of*

Painting and Poetry (1766).[15] Neither *medium* nor *narrative* appears in the translation of the text, but Lessing's essay offers the first detailed comparative study of the narrative power of artistic media. The title refers to a famous Greek sculptural group that depicts an episode narrated by Virgil in the *Aeneid:* the Trojan priest Laocoön being devoured by sea serpents together with his two sons. The critics of the time wondered why Laocoön expressed an almost serene resignation in the face of such a horrible death. Against those critics who invoked an ethics of stoicism or a cultural taboo against the display of male emotions in Greek society, Lessing proposes an explanation entirely based on aesthetic principles. The face of Laocoön cannot be distorted, he argues, because sculpture is a work of visual art, and the purpose of visual art is to represent beauty. We may no longer accept Lessing's association of art with the beautiful—shortly after he wrote the "Laocoön" the work of Goya began to demonstrate the artistic power of horror—but, by insisting on the visual nature of painting, the essay represents a watershed in aesthetic philosophy. The art criticism scene of the eighteenth century was very much dominated by the philosophy captured in the saying of Simonides of Ceos: "painting is mute poetry and poetry a speaking painting" (4). Taken literally—and Lessing shows little understanding for figural language—the formula blatantly ignores the sensory and spatio-temporal dimensions of the two media: painting speaks to the sense of sight, poetry to the imagination; painting is spatial, poetry is temporal. These contrasts predispose painting and poetry to the representation of different ideas: "I reason thus: if it is true that in its imitations painting uses completely different means or signs than does poetry, namely figures and colors in space rather than articulated sounds in time, and if these signs must indisputably bear a suitable relation to the thing signified, then signs existing in space can express only objects whose wholes or parts coexist, while signs that follow one another can express only objects whose wholes or parts are consecutive" (78).

The spatial dimension of its signs enables painting to represent physical beauty, because beauty is an effect that results from the harmonious combination of various parts. Poetry cannot do so: it divides what should be perceived simultaneously into discrete elements and present them one at a time to the "eye" of the imagination. Homer's use of a simple epithet—"white-armed Helen"— therefore goes farther in suggesting beauty than lengthy descriptions. Conversely, because of its temporal nature, poetry excels at the representation of actions, while painting freezes processes into a single shot: "In the one case [poetry] the action is visible and progressive, its different parts occurring one after the other in a sequence of time, and in the other [sculpture] the action is visible and stationary, its different parts developing in co-existence in space" (77).

Should we conclude that poetry cannot describe and that painting cannot narrate? Even a series of paintings, Lessing argues, would not give an adequate idea of the plot of the *Odyssey* (71). Throughout the "Laocoön" Lessing admonishes painters and poets to avoid subject matters that do not take advantage of the strength of the medium. The subtitle of the work, on the *limits* of painting and poetry, is symptomatic of a prescriptive and separatist stance. To be an artist, in the classical age, is to learn to work within the limits of the chosen medium. Yet, despite his classical restraint, Lessing does not totally lack understanding for the artistic drive to push back the limits of media. One of the few descriptive passages in poetry that meets his approval is Homer's technique of narrativized description: "If Homer wants to show us Juno's chariot, he shows Hebe putting it together piece by piece before our eye. We see the wheels and axle, the seat, the pole, the traces, and the straps, not as these parts are when fitted together, but as they are actually being assembled by Hebe" (80). The description works, because spatial vision has been transformed into temporal action.

Conversely—I reserve here for the end of my sketch the concept for which the "Laocoön" is the most famous—painting can overcome its narrative limitations (or at least push them back) by turning its spatial display into the representation of what has become known as a "pregnant moment": "Painting can use only a single moment of an action in its coexisting composition and must therefore choose the one which is most suggestive and from which the preceding and succeeding actions are most easily comprehensible" (78). The representation of a fold in a garment, so dear to Baroque art, captures the trace of a moving body: "We can see from the folds whether an arm or leg was in a backward or forward position prior to its movement; whether the limb had moved or is moving from contraction or extension, or whether it had been extended and is now contrasted" (Anton Meng, qtd. by Lessing, 92). For Lessing the most pregnant moment in a process is the one that just precedes its climax: "Thus, if Laocoön sighs, the imagination can hear him cry out; but if he cries out, it can neither go a step higher nor one step lower than this representation without seeing him in a more tolerable and hence less intense condition" (20). Elsewhere in the essay Lessing writes that painting is strictly an art of the visible, which means that it is an art of the present, but through the pregnancy of the depicted moment painting can reach into the past and the future, thereby transforming itself from an art that speaks exclusively to the senses to an art that also speaks, like poetry, to the imagination. What is represented in

the fold of the garment and in the face of Laocoön is not arrested time but a virtualization of temporal movement: the passing of time is contained *in potentia* in the pregnant moment, as the tree is contained in the acorn. "To use the language of scholastic philosophy," writes Lessing, "what is not contained in the picture *actu* is there *virtute*" (100). Whereas poetry actually narrates, painting does so, when it does, in a virtual mode that leaves much more to be filled in by the interpreter. To use a pair of terms that Marshall McLuhan would propose two centuries later, we could say that poetry is a "hot" narrative medium and painting a "cold" one.

Let's fast-forward to the twentieth century. The technological explosion of the nineteenth century produced new artistic media, photography and cinema, and led to the development of a whole array of mainly transmissive media: gramophone, telephone, radio, and TV. Around 1930 the term *medium* entered language to designate channels of communication. In the midcentury two intellectual events took place that would alter the course of the humanities and lead to the birth of contemporary media studies. The first is the so-called linguistic turn in the humanities. After discovering Ferdinand de Saussure's linguistic theory, scholars working in various disciplines proclaimed linguistics to be a "pilot science" in the humanities and set out to fulfill the master's prediction that linguistics would soon be part of a general science of signs. The French version of this "science," known as "semiology," conceived its task as the extension of Saussure's conception of the linguistic sign to all areas of significations; doing semiology was, therefore, a matter of insisting on the arbitrariness of the relation between signifiers and signifieds and of discovering the system of relations—or play of differences—through which these signs acquire their phonic or semantic value. This branch eventually led to what is known as deconstruction, poststructuralism, or simply "theory," a critique of representation that originated to a large extent in a reading of media: written versus spoken language for Derrida; advertisement and photography for Barthes; TV and other mass media for Baudrillard and Virilio; the cinema for Deleuze. Meanwhile, a mainly American branch of the project known as semiotics, also joined by the Italian scholar and novelist Umberto Eco, relied on C. S. Peirce's division of signs into symbols, indices, and icons. In contrast to its French counterpart, this school did not try to impose a linguistic model on nonverbal media. In spite of their different theoretical inspiration, both schools ventured into hitherto neglected areas of signification, and both refocused the study of artistic media from the hermeneutic question "*what* does this work mean?" to the more technical issue: "*how* does it mean?" or "how does it *work*?"

The second event, which is mainly associated with the name of Marshall McLuhan (but Walter Benjamin and Roland Barthes also made significant contributions toward this development), is the emancipation of media studies from aesthetics, philosophy, and poetics. This emancipation meant the breakdown of the academic barrier between elite and popular culture. For McLuhan comic strips, advertisements, or the composition of newspaper front pages were no less worthy of "poetic" analysis than works of "high" literature. A mercurial, aphoristic thinker who loved to play with language in a way that anticipates French poststructuralist theory, McLuhan preferred puns, metaphors, parody, and the epiphanies of sudden jumps to the systematic, linear development of ideas. It is, therefore, poetic as well as philosophical justice that nowadays most people associate his name with a few catchphrases that lend themselves to free interpretation, such as "global village," "hot and cold media," or "the medium is the message."

Although the work of McLuhan defies summarization, his own interpretations of the slogan "the medium is the message" allows a glimpse into the nature and style of his contribution to media studies. In this postmodern age the interpretation of the slogan that immediately comes to mind is the self-referentiality that pervades both avant-garde art and popular culture, but McLuhan has broader phenomena in mind: "This revolution [that is, electric modes of moving information] involves us willy-nilly in the study of modes and media *as forms that shape and reshape our perceptions.* That is what I meant all along by saying the 'medium is the message,' for the medium determines the modes of perception and the matrix of assumptions within which objectives are set" (*Essential McLuhan* 188; emph. added). In his book *The Gutenberg Galaxy* McLuhan develops the idea that media affect perception and consequently thought by linking oral and written communication to different types of brain activities. The oral communication of preliterate societies relies on an "acoustic space" in which sound comes to us from all directions and in which all the senses contribute information. McLuhan associates this effect with the right side of the brain. With the development of writing technologies, emphasis shifts to the left side: now all information comes to us through an act of vision that scans the book linearly, one letter at a time.[16] This is why print culture favors logical, abstract, and controlled thought, at the expense of spatial perception and of the artistic, holistic, metaphorical, or musical types of imagination. But in the development of electronic media, which offer data to all the senses, McLuhan sees a chance to reverse what for him is an impoverishing trend for the human mind: "Today, our universal environment of simultaneous electronic flow, of constantly interchanging information, favors the sensory

preferences of the right hemisphere. The First World is aligning itself, however gradually, with the Third World" (*Global Village* 56).

The second interpretation of the formula suggests, in vaguely Saussurean fashion, that media form a tightly connected system, in which every element functions through a network of connections with other media. But the relations, rather than being purely differential, consist of a chain of positive substitutions: "The 'content' of any medium is always another medium. The content of writing is speech, just as the written word is the content of print, and print is the content of the telegraph. It is asked, 'What is the content of speech?' it is necessary to say, 'It is an actual process of thought, which is in itself non-verbal' " (*Essential* 151). Or further: "The content of a movie is a novel or play or opera" (159). This statement could be taken to mean that writing is a mere translation of speech, speech a mere translation of thought, and so on. Such an interpretation would clash, however, with another of McLuhan's probes into the meaning of his own slogan: " 'the medium is the message' because it is the medium that shapes and controls the scale and form of human association and action" (152). How, then, can a medium form the content of another medium, without becoming interchangeable with it? I would suggest that McLuhan's self-interpretation ought to be read in the light of C. S. Peirce's definition of signs. According to Peirce, a sign is "anything which determines something else (its interpretant) to refer to something to which itself refers (its object), the interpretant becoming in turn a sign, and so on, ad infinitum" (303).[17] To "understand" a medium in formal and cultural terms is thus to think of another medium, which itself necessitates interpretation through yet another medium. Because "interpretation" is always a partial fit, this chain of substitutions highlights the particularities of each medium much more than it negates their differences.

It was left to much more systematic and less cryptic thinkers than McLuhan to cultivate the seeds that he casually scattered in the furrows of the new field. Walter Ong, McLuhan's one-time student and colleague, undertook a thorough investigation of the effect of the passage from oral/aural to chirographic/typographic cultures for consciousness, perception, and cultural life. More important for the present project, he reconnected media studies with literary theory by studying the impact of the material support of language on narrative form. To summarize Ong's observations: the contrast oral/written is felt in three areas: the pragmatic, or cultural, role of narrative; the shape of the plot; and the narrative themes, especially the presentation of characters. In oral cultures narrative used to be the sole vehicle of knowledge. Since stories deal with particulars, this affects

the kind of knowledge being transmitted: "Oral cultures cannot generate [scientifically abstract categories], and so they use stories of human action to store, organize, and communicate much of what they know" (140). Moreover, by creating a sense of community, oral narrative "serves to bond thought more massively and permanently than other genres" (141). In his discussion of the shape of the plot Ong reinterprets the differences observed by Aristotle between epic poetry and drama in terms of the contrast oral versus written. Even though it is designed for oral performance, drama represents the written pole: "The ancient Greek drama . . . was the first western verbal art form to be fully controlled by writing" (148). The written origin of tragedy explains the carefully crafted rise and fall in tension known to drama theorists as the "Freytag triangle." Such a structuration necessitates a global overview of the plot that is only possible in a writing situation, for (as McLuhan fails to see) writing creates a space that frees the author from the linearity of language. Whereas tragedy is constructed top down by an author, epic poems are created by the storyteller bottom up, moment by moment, through the concatenation of relatively autonomous episodes: "Having heard perhaps scores of singers singing hundreds of songs of variable length about the Trojan War, Homer had a huge repertoire of episodes to string together, but, without writing, absolutely no way to organize them in strict chronological order" (143). "If we take the climactic linear plot as the paradigm of plot, the epic has no plot. Strict plot for lengthy narrative comes with writing" (144). Rather than denying plot to epic poetry, we might say, with Janet Murray, that oral epic has a multiform plot: each performance results in a particular linearization, which creates a different plot, at least within certain limits. Ong's "medial determinism" also accounts for the birth of the novel, a genre whose origin has been a topic of lively speculations among literary critics. "Print . . . mechanically as well as psychologically locked words into space and thereby established a firmer sense of closure than [manuscript] writing could. The print world gave birth to the novel, which eventually made the definitive break with episodic structure" (149). The novel comes into its own, after the eighteenth century, by developing a compromise between the loose structure of oral epic and the tight climactic organization of drama: a compromise that expands the global pattern typical of written composition to epic dimensions. In the area of characterization, finally, Ong associates oral narrative with "flat" characters who delight the reader by "fulfilling expectations copiously" (151); and written narrative with an attention to mental processes that results in the creation of unpredictable, psychologically complex individuals—what E. M. Forster called "round" characters.

Both McLuhan and Ong predicted that the advent of "the electric way of moving information" would create a cultural turning point. Electronic technology would challenge the supremacy of print as a channel of mass communication and open an alternative to the linear mode of thinking associated with writing. Thinking principally of TV, radio, and the telephone, all diffusers of talk, Ong calls this new stage in media history "secondary orality." But by the late 1980s the talk media had been supplanted, in terms of novelty, by the digital way of moving information. Reversing the trend observed by McLuhan and Ong, the development of computer networks meant to some extent a secondary literacy: e-mail, Internet chatrooms (where chatting is done by typing on a keyboard), and the World Wide Web now contend with the telephone, radio, or TV for both personal contacts and as a way to keep informed of current events.

The media explosion that followed the so-called digital revolution gave a tremendous boost to media studies. There were not only brand-new artistic media and modes of communications to investigate—hypertext, computer games, art CD-ROMs, Web pages, e-mail, chatrooms, virtual reality installations, all media that depend on digital support—but also old media to revisit. These old media did not live in a digital environment, but, as they began to use the computer as a mode of production, they were able to achieve entirely new effects. From drama to film, photography to painting, architecture to music, virtually every "old medium" has a new, digital twin, though whether or not this twin counts as an autonomous medium is a debatable question. (It will, according to the criteria adopted in this book, if it makes a difference in terms of narrative expressivity.) Moreover, by introducing new species competing for survival in what was increasingly becoming known as the "media ecology," the digital revolution placed old media in a different context, both in terms of their cultural function and in terms of how they were approached. In need of a standard of comparison, the study of digital writing turned, for instance, back to the codex book and discovered features that had until then been taken for granted: the advantage of a bound spine over loose leaves; the possibility to access pages randomly, despite the linear reading protocol of most printed texts; the escape from sequential reading offered by footnotes; and the importance of indexes as "navigational aide"—a concept that would have been unthinkable until the development of hypertext and of the World Wide Web.

Not to be left behind, literary criticism caught the medial tide wave by turning its attention to the proliferation of media in the twentieth century and on the effect of this proliferation on the literary imagination. Led by

Friedrich Kittler, John Johnston, Donald Theall, Michael Wutz, and Joseph Tabbi—the latter two editors of the collection *Reading Matters: Narrative in the New Media Ecology*—this school dedicates itself to such questions as reassessing the role of literature in a changed medial environment (a question that echoes the concerns of Meyrowitz's "medium theory"); analyzing how different technologies—manuscript, typewriter, or word processor—affect the practice of writing; and describing the new narrative techniques developed by modern and postmodern novelists (especially James Joyce and William Burroughs) in an attempt to simulate the resources of other media. But, in its tendency to read texts through the theories of Jacques Lacan, Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari, and other beacons of postmodern thought, the "media ecology" school often practices a top-down approach that is alien to the spirit of the present volume: here the bottom-up movement from data to theory will receive precedence over the top-down application of ready-made theoretical models.

My last landmark in this survey of media studies develops the metaphor of media ecology—itself a transposition of McLuhan's vision of a media network—into the most ambitious account we have so far of the nature and history of both old and new media. This landmark is Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin's concept of "remediation." The authors define *remediation* as "the formal logic by which new media refashion prior media forms" (273). Every medium, they argue, is developed as an attempt to remediate the deficiencies of another medium. Remediation is thus "*the mediation of mediation:* Each act of mediation depends on other acts of mediation. Media are continually commenting on, reproducing, and replacing each other, and this process is integral to media. Media need each other to function as media at all" (55). According to the authors, this chain of substitutions describes not only the development of media but also their intrinsic function: "What is a medium? We offer this simple definition: a medium is that which remediates. It is that which appropriates the techniques, forms, and social significance of other media and attempts to rival or refashion them in the name of the real" (65). In this definition the appeal to reality functions as the end condition that puts a stop to what would otherwise be an endless recursion: at the beginning was reality; then medium 1 attempted to mediate some of its features; medium 2 remediated the deficiencies of medium 1; and so on. The narrative of progress implicit to this definition is obviously better suited to transmissive technologies than to artistic media. Given the postulation of "the desire to achieve the real" as the force that drives the process of remediation (53), it seems strange that Bolter and Grusin propose two "strategies" of remediation: one is *immediacy,* the

attempt to make the medium disappear; the other *hypermediacy,* "a style of visual [*sic*] representation whose goal is to remind the viewer of the medium" (272). How could the opacity implicit in hypermediacy help the user "achieve the real"—unless it is the reality of the medium itself?

These reservations notwithstanding, the concept of remediation is a powerful tool of media analysis. The versatility of the concept is particularly useful in framing questions that fall within the concerns of transmedial narratology. Let me, therefore, enumerate some of the various possible interpretations of remediation and translate each of them into a narrative topic. In the list that follows, narrative implications are entered either as examples or as topics of investigation formulated as questions:

1. "Medical" remediation: the invention of a medium to overcome the limitations of another medium. Bolter and Grusin's examples: "writing makes speech more permanent"; "hypertext makes writing more interactive" (59).
   Narrative application: Cinema remediates the spatial limitations of drama by making the setting infinitely variable. What are the consequences of this freedom to travel on the thematic content of movies as well as on their presentational techniques?
2. Change in the technological support of a type of data. Example: the evolution of writing from manuscript to the typewriter, from the printing press to the word processor, or from clay tablets to scrolls, codex books, and electronic databases.
   Narrative application: The questions addressed by Walter Ong: how did these changes affect narrative plot? what was the role of the invention of the printing press in the development of the novel?
3. The phenomenon captured by McLuhan's formula: "The content of a medium is always another medium." This formula is literally applicable to cases such as the written transcriptions of oral performance or books on tape.
   Narrative application: Investigating the differences between actual conversation and the conventions of dialogue representation in fiction. Examining a novel as an instance of oral confession (for example, Camus, *The Fall*).
4. A medium taking over the social function of another. Example: television replacing radio as the main source of news and replacing movie houses as the main channel for the transmission of film.
   Narrative application: What happens to movies when they are made for TV? How does narration differ in radio and TV news programs?

5. The representation of a medium within another medium by either mechanical or descriptive means. Mechanical examples: the photographic reproduction of paintings, TV broadcast of classic film, the digitization of all artistic media. Descriptive examples: the verbal evocation of music; the musical depiction of a story or painting.
   Narrative application: Ekphrasis in novels (verbal description of artworks); the representation of performance arts or TV shows in movies (for example, *The Truman Show*).
6. A medium imitating the techniques of another. Example: digital manipulations of photographs that apply the "Van Gogh," the "Monet," or the "Seurat" filter.
   Narrative application: Cinematic or musical techniques in novels; literary collage; voiced-over narration in movies.
7. Absorption of the techniques of a new medium by an older one. Example: the use of digitally produced special effects in movies.
   Narrative application: What is the effect on movie plots of digital manipulation? (Possible answer: a move away from psychological drama and toward action and the fantastic.)
8. Insertion of a medium in another. Example: text in paintings, movie clips in computer games; photos in novels.
   Narrative application: How do these inserts enhance a work's ability to tell stories?
9. Transposition from a medium into another. Example (from Bolter and Grusin 273): commercial "repurposing" of products, such as the creation of a soundtrack CD, a Broadway musical, a Saturday morning cartoon, or a line of toys and actions figures out of the Disney movie *The Lion King.*
   Narrative application: This is the richest area of investigation: transpositions of novels into movies, novelizations of film or computer games, computer games based on literary works (the shooter Alice), illustrations of stories.[18]

Narrative across Media: Framing the Project

How does one do media studies? How does one do *narrative* media studies, or transmedial narratology? Here I would like to warn the fledgling field of three dangers. The first is the temptation to regard the idiosyncrasies of individual texts as features of the medium. For instance, just because many hypertext authors were influenced by postmodern aesthetics, does it mean that digital media inherently embody these ideas and that the relation is

necessary? Since media present themselves only through individual texts, the problem of passing from observations gathered from the text to principles that describe the medium as a whole is one of the greatest challenges of media studies. The second danger is what Liv Hausken describes, in the concluding essay of this book, as media blindness: the indiscriminating transfer of concepts designed for the study of the narratives of a particular medium (usually those of literary fiction) to narratives of another medium. Hausken's prime example is the postulation of a narrator figure for all narratives, including those realized in mimetic media, such as film and drama. The third caveat is what I call "radical relativism." It resides in the belief that, because media are distinct, the toolbox of narratology must be rebuilt from scratch for every new medium. Radical relativism involves two types of blindness. The first is blindness to narrative universals. Many of the concepts developed by structuralism—for instance, Propp's functions, Bremond's modalities, or Greimas's semiotic square—describe narrative on a semantic level, and, though these concepts have been mainly tested on literary texts, they are not limited to verbal narrative. Radical relativism is also blind to the fact that different media often incorporate common tracks or semiotic systems. Print and electronic writing may rely on different material supports, which open different possibilities, but, insofar as they both involve language, they share many properties. Radical relativism would also prohibit what has been one of the most productive practices of narratology: the metaphorical transfer of concepts from one medium to another. To take a few examples: the optical notions of point of view, of focalization, of camera-eye narration, and of cinematic montage have provided insights into literary narrative that could not have been reached by limiting the investigator's analytical toolbox to strictly language-based concepts. Metaphorical borrowing is a standard practice in the narrative investigation of music, precisely because musical narration is itself restricted to the metaphorical mode (unless, of course, one adds a language channel).

Between medium blindness and radical relativism there is room for a diversified program of investigation. I envision this program as follows (each item on the list is followed by the name of the contributors who address it in their essay).

1. Critique the narratological models developed for literature; assess the applicability of their categories for media other than written language; when necessary, adapt these tools or develop new ones. (Aarseth, Bordwell, Cassell and MacNeill, Hausken, Herman)

2. Define the conditions under which nonverbal media can tell stories. (Steiner, Tarasti, this introduction)
3. Catalog the "modes of narativity." (This introduction)
4. Identify and describe narrative genres, devices, or problems that are unique to a medium. (Young, Freeland)
5. Explore phenomena of remediation, especially the problem of transferring a narrative from one medium to another. (Elliott, Steiner)
6. Explore "what can medium *x* do that medium *y* cannot" and ask how media can push back their limits. (Implicit in many essays, for example, Steiner, Ewert, Elliott, Rabinowitz)
7. Study the contribution of the various tracks to narrative meaning in "multimedia" media. (Cassell and McNeill, Rabinowitz, Ewert)
8. Ask if the properties of a given medium are favorable or detrimental to narrativity. (Ryan, Aarseth, Lunenfeld)

The organization of the volume reflects two choices. First, literary narrative, arguably the fullest form of narrativity, does not form the object of a special section but is treated, instead, as the implicit frame of reference of the entire collection—the standard against which the narrative potential of other media can be measured. The literary manifestations of narrative are simply too diverse to be adequately covered in two or three essays. And, second, rather than representing as many media as possible through one essay each, a policy that would give the reader a false sense of the authority and unchallenged status of the selected approach, the book restricts the breadth of its coverage to five areas—face-to-face narrative, still pictures, moving pictures, music, and digital media—in order to represent each of these areas through a cluster of articles. This policy led, unfortunately, to the exclusion of various types of performing arts—theater, mime, and ballet—but it also made it possible to give a voice to different, sometimes competing positions within a given area.

Whether we call it "narrative media studies" or "transmedial narratology," the study of narrative across media is a project from which the understanding of both media and narrative should benefit. Media studies will gain from the focus of this book on narrativity a point of comparison that should expose the idiosyncratic resources and limitations of individual media more efficiently than single-medium investigations can do, while narratology, an enterprise so far mainly concerned with literary fiction, will gain from the consideration of nonverbal forms of narrative an opportunity to rethink its object and to rejuvenate itself.