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Verbal and Pictorial Narrativity – a Case of Intermediality

The presentation intends to focus on those aspects of the visual arts that bear a *storytelling potential*, on analogy to verbal texts. My interest lies mainly in the field of artistic semiotics, that is in those texts produced in the verbal and visual media that are marked with aesthetic qualities. The attention will go mainly to *figural painting* due to its potential to show events as evolving in time. Thus, I intend to consider the manner in which *narrativization* as a widely recognized cognitive propensity of the human mind to impose structure upon reality is applicable to pictorial representations and how it takes part in the construction of *visual possible worlds/text worlds*.

The degree of *storification/emplotment* (White 1987), or in cognitive parlance the imposition of the SOURCE-PATH-GOAL pattern on scenarios (Lakoff 1987, Johnson 1987), related also to the phenomenon of *tellability* (significance and newsworthiness of the story matter, cf. Labov 1972, Bruner 1991), postulated originally for verbal texts and extrapolated onto visual narratives, will differ according to the genre of representation and the *narration unit* it exemplifies. Such units, on analogy to the units suggested for verbal texts, run incrementally from 1) *narrative images* (single scenes, with the often quoted Paleolithic “hunting incident” from Lascaux as one of the earliest pieces of painted narrative, cf. Bandi *et al.* 1961). They epitomize what in linguistics is known as *implied scenarios* (Langacker 1987) and in literary theory as *minimal* or *micro-narration* (Wolf 2005, Filar 2013). Next come 2) *narrative sequences* (e. g. hagiographical paintings and Passion scenes in the tradition of Western and Orthodox religious iconography; painted and sculpted medieval retables; in contemporary European art for instance J. Duda-Gracz’s Passion series “Częstochowa Golgotha” or Robert Devriendt’s (2015-16) synecdochically fragmented sequences of miniature oil paintings that invite the viewer to fill in the lacunae in narration in the manner close to reconstructing filmic sequences. Narration culminates in 3) full-blown *worlds* (present in rich pictorial *cycles*, e. g. M. Chagall’s oeuvre, cf. Chrzanowska-Kluczevska forthcoming).

Narrativity, almost automatically, participates in the (re)construction of a *possible world/text world* (Eco 1979/1994). Such world supports an artwork that strives to render temporality and causality in its own unique medium, in addition to presenting a set of individuals and their configurations. It can be claimed that *visual worlds* come into being at level 2) of narrative sequences. The most controversial (from the narrative point of view) level 1, on analogy to non-epic poetry, is supported by scenes rather than worlds proper. In turn, series in the style of Duda-Gracz produce *hybrid* worlds, in which religious and real-life elements co-exist. The concept of a *text-world*, associated primarily with verbal texts, can thus find its extension to encompass fictional or hybrid worlds of the visual arts. Hence, a broadly (semiotically) conceived *text-world* may become an *integrational category* uniting various artistic media. The discussion on the narratively-induced world-creating potential of texts realized in various artistic media and the manner in which they are interpreted in perceptually and culturally individualized contexts in the process of *concretization/actualization* should bring together phenomenological, cognitive and semiotic studies on verbal and non-verbal art criticism (cf. Ingarden 1937/1973, Sonesson 1997, Crowther 2009).

An additional methodological issue is whether the “natural narratology” postulated by M. Fludernik (1996) for verbal fictional texts can be extrapolated onto pictorial figural texts. Specifically, an important cognitively-oriented query is whether the interpreters faced with pictorial narrativity turn to so-called *naturalization scripts* (Culler 1975, Fludernik 1996) that



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have direct recourse to human experiential (real world) patterns, related to, among others, the interpreters' embodiment, emotionality and dependence on the environment. *Naturalization scripts* are the "reading" strategies particularly useful in solving textual inconsistencies and in construing more complete world stories.

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