

Media narratives and reality. The notion of narrativization as a theoretical tool for the analysis of the media construction of meaning

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Abstract

The present text submits the notion of narrativization as a theoretical tool that permits the explanation of the way in which media stories develop senses of reality. For this, a critical analysis of the differences between fiction and non-fiction narratives, which are frequent in the media universe, was performed. It commenced with a theoretical journey through Paul Ricoeur's philosophy of narration, contrasted with Hayden White's critique of historical texts. Based thereupon, three levels of analysis were proposed, with which to create media narrative meaning: the selection, plot, and event tropologization. The notion of narrativization is supported thereupon.

Key words: Narration; Narrativization; Media; Reality; Media Culture.

1. Introduction. Pondering events

The distinction between fiction and non-fiction work has been re-evaluated (Papalini, 2010). These differences seem to be imminently marketing-based, as they seem to serve no other purpose than to separate historical novels from "remaining" literary work on bookshop shelves, such that the buyer can more easily locate a text that interests them.

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In the film marketing world, this distinction seems similarly useless. The warning that stories have been based on real events is simply a way to ignite audience interest, as it calls attention to the remarkability of something that “really happened”. However, those with the most minimal knowledge of film production know that all tales pass through a dramatic recreation process, in which verosimilitude significantly alters their real nature.

Common sense affirms that the media manipulates reality, and tends to stray from the truth. It’s not that the media intends to mislead with lies or manipulation to misrepresent reality. The attainment of reality is, in and of itself, an impossible task (Watzlawick, 1979). Knowledge of all happenings is beyond our abilities (Lippmann, 2003). Nonetheless, media narratives help to diminish the distress brought on by the inability to know everything that happens around us. Narration exists for this reason, as explained below.

As historian Hayden White (2003) has indicated, contemporary film work mocks the differentiation between fiction and reality. This may owe to his training as a historian, as White became interested in the crisis to which events themselves are subject today, a central nucleus of historiographic work. This concern is expressed clearly in the quote below:

The dissolution of the event, as a basic unit of temporal occurrence, and as a constitutive block of undermines history, the concept itself of factuality, and threatens the distinction between realistic discourse and that which is merely imaginary. The event has been reduced to an undermined basic pre-supposition of occidental realism: the opposition between fact and fiction (White, 2003, p. 218).

The primary reason for said reduction, according to White, is an excess of narration that is submitted to reality and the present, due to the actions of means of communication. Never before, in the history of humanity, have the facts been registered and followed in such detail as occurs now, with all of the technological resources available. This, in his opinion, makes it nearly impossible to create a unique and complete story of that which has transpired, and impedes the historiographic practice.

However, while historians must tolerate this fragmentation of reality that makes its narration impossible, journalists, on the contrary, enjoy it, as the business work of informative production is supported thereby. The porous distinction between fact and fiction has sustained journalistic work in the modern context, in good part (González- Gorosarri, 2017). Journalistic work is understood to be those texts which seek to inform and orient about daily events, and which are disseminated in society by way of means of mass communication, and on various platforms (Rincón, 2006, p. 118).

In order for the informative industry and journalistic work to achieve their goals, they must narrate. Its most sterile definition characterizes journalism as that which affirms reality (Rincón, 2006, p. 118). For example, the basic paradigm of news creation, known as 5W, is itself a narration, in which an individual does something with an apparent objective (González, 2017). In narrative terms, it is an individual in action.

It should not be supposed that the narrative journalistic dimension is only present in various relational forms between it and literature. These could be the maximum expression of the narrative principle of journalism (Chillón, 1999). However, informing on the daily happenings, whether in news or chronicle form, will always require the combination of factual and fictional writings (Chillón, 2006, p. 15), such that reality acquires form and meaning for the reader (Burgos, 2016).

Thus, in response to White, it is not that the explosion of events produced by the mediation of media narrative instrumentation inhibits the materialization of a story. Conversely, said mediation has converted all facts into events that may be incorporated into a story (White, 2010). By way of this same mediation, all mediatically-registered facts may be simultaneously real and imaginary. This tension has been called *post-fiction* (Chillón, 2006, p. 16). This proposal is based upon post-fiction, or the ways in which fiction modifies the facts, in an effort communicate them such that they seem real. This is, paradoxically, a product of fiction.

2. Fiction, narrativization, meaning

2.1. A dissection of the differences between fiction and non-fiction

The distinction between fiction and non-fiction seems meaningless when informational media system productions are analyzed. There is a theoretical framework that permits news, and by extension, the different journalistic media products, to be considered fiction, or those that allude to questions that may really occur (García-Noblejas, 2005, p. 85).

Informative media products, such as the news, are not mirror images of happenings, nor are they reflections of reality. This is true in two regards: the perceptual and symbolic. Firstly, news is the result of reality perception schemes, with which journalists approach the facts, evaluate them, and convert them into something newsworthy that, simultaneously, is similar to a group of reality perception schemes shared by the public (Lippmann, 2003 p. 277). News, and by extension, non-fiction and informative media products constitute a repertoire of stereotypes with which the breadth of social life is reduced to comprehension schemes in which matters dear to specific interests are transacted.

In terms of the symbolic, when humans decide to tell stories, they employ established ways to understand the human action that are translated into narrative schemes, which then result in the genres and diverse story structures that permit intelligibility, order, and purpose to human experiences. García-Noblejas, on the topic, states that:

Neither life itself, nor all of its meaning can appear on television [...], on television, many individuals appear, who artificially unite something that naturally appears in the physical cosmos and in life in society, such as the complex and unavoidable real relationship, in human life, between feelings and habits, bet-

ween sensory material and supersensible spiritual forms, because it is impossible to know everything (2005, p. 87).

Thus, by way of stereotypes and allegories, fiction and non-fiction media narrations, human realities may be represented. Therein, a distance between media narration and that which is real immediately appears, such that it cannot be established, when the media relates stories, even in non-fiction structures, whether they are mirroring or reflecting reality.

Media narratives are figurative and truthful representations of that which occurs in the world (García-Noblejas, 2005). This is because it communicates that which comes from or is related to human action, and the facts communicated therein are considered relevant because they somehow affect existence, for which reason they may be considered events (García-Noblejas, 2005, p. 86). As previously explained, this event quality is fundamental to the comprehension of the fictional character of media narratives.

Or representations of events that the human reality narrates are translatable into actions that aspire to improve existence. Thus, fiction and non-fiction products resemble each other. In both, said aspiration is represented, since narration is the deployment of events, as if from existence itself, known as the *mimesis* of action (Ricoeur, 2007). In order to better understand this, it is necessary to explain that which is understood for narration, and thus clarify the differences between fiction and non-fiction, such that one may advance toward the explanation of the media narrative as a way to create meaning for reality.

2.2. The plot and the dramatic unity of non-fiction work

The central matter of narration is that, independently of whether stories are fiction or non-fiction, they all operate the same way. On this topic, Ricoeur states that: "When the temporal quality of the experience is treated as a common reference for stories and fiction, one by one, same problem occurs in fiction, history, and time (Ricoeur, 2000, p. 191). He says that fiction and non-fiction narration both work with the temporal configuration of the human experience. In other words, the human experience is understood temporally only because it is narrated. Narration is a fundamental element that lends meaning to the human experience (Burgos, 2016).

This occurs by way of the principle narrating function, plotting, or what Ricoeur, together with Aristotle, calls *mythos*. This plotting action consists of the selection and disposition of the events in a complete story, that contains a beginning, middle, and end (Ricoeur, 2000, p. 191). From there emerges the idea that all events are such if they can be integrated into a story and facilitate its telling. A plot is defined as: "...the intelligible unit that composes the circumstances, goals, means, initiatives, and unintended consequences" (2000, p. 192). It acts as this principle of composition that selects and orders story events, and causes them to seem as if these constituted a single question (White, 1992, p. 32).

This narrative shaping dynamic is described by Ricoeur as the dialectic between alignment and malignment, which is summarized in the concept of *synthesis of the heterogeneous*. The entire group of events, circumstances, turns, and unrelated actions that occur, and are percei-

ved as senseless, are linked by way of plot action, such that they appear aligned, or to make sense within the story (Ricoeur, 2006a, p. 181-182). For this reason, narration is considered a synthesis of the heterogeneous, understood as all that which occurs, and may occur, but is senseless without the plot.

It is interesting that the link, created by the plot between the events that have been selected to compose the story, is not necessarily chronological, but rather a logical-temporal link. This has nothing to do with theoretical logic, but rather practical logic, as it obeys the praxis of human action, that there is always a purpose. As such, the link with which the synthesis of the heterogeneous is generated has a double value: poetic and ethical (Ricoeur, 2007, p. 94)

The concatenation of events that generate the plot becomes a unit because the events are woven together in function of a goal considered possible, and lend meaning to the entire chain of events in the story. The story unit is given by an exteriority that is equivalent to the story's theme. All of the events come together in the end, and are put in order to refer to said theme, the subject of the story.

Here, the ethical is recognized, as this theme or practical logic that ties the events together holds value for the actions, such that they become schemes of intelligibility for future actions. Poetry is recognized in the images of events that emerge as schemes for action comprehension. This double dimension enables stories to teach and judge actions, in accordance with their goals, while helping to imagine possible innovative ways to resolve human situations.

As may be observed, were this configuring plot principle to operate for both fiction and non-fiction, the fiction-non-fiction distinction would undoubtedly become quite problematic. It has been assumed that the difference between these two types of texts is that the first alludes to real things, and the second to fantasies. Ricoeur responds to this by introducing the matter of referentiality. If, owing to the dynamics of ethics and poetry, the events in the story are plausible, it cannot be affirmed that fiction stories are entirely fantasy, as they allude to actions with logic, or the mimesis of actions performed by individuals in reality. In the same way, linking in non-fiction stories leads one to believe that reality is the result of said logical connection that creates verosimilitude (Ricoeur, 2007, p. 97). Reality is present in quantity in fiction, via the memesis of human action, and there is no reality that may be understood as such unless it has first been fictionalized, or plotted.

2.3. The tension between tradition and innovation

Once the fiction-non-fiction dichotomy has been overcome, an important element that concludes the configuration of narration must be added. Ricoeur defines this as the dialectic between innovation and tradition (2006b, pp. 13-14). It refers to the fact that, when narrating, two tendencies conflict: on one hand, the singularity that operates the plot provides a verosimilitude link to the events, such that said order appears innovative, with respect to the continuum of facts from which it emerges. On the other hand, it is clear that the narration occurs based on pre-established, inherited narrative forms that serve as basic composition

rules that cause a story to be recognized as belonging to a particular genre, for example, a novel, tragedy, or epic.

The narrative practice that occurs in communication media is more inclined toward the repetition of established formulas than the innovation that characterizes temporarily situation subjectivities. This is not an impediment to deduce whether preestablishment exists in the narrative forms used by the media to discuss reality. This should be situated in the homeostatic relationship between the possible textual world and the reader's world. If, owing of the need to win over the possible textual world, the author's identity loses its relevance, the narrative tradition, from which the plot is inscribed in media stories, must connect to its public with a common, shared past (Ricoeur, 2006c, p. 56-101).

García-Noblejas refers to this when they say:

That which we obtain with the visit of this possible world, together with its characters, is expressed in terms of habits and their procession of emotions. In other words, it refers to the interactive group of individual and social tendencies encompassed within the notions of human habits or virtues, together with their corresponding deficiencies (2005, pp. 246-247).

Ethical and poetic memesis is recognized in this interactive trend group, in all narration that confers unity or verosimilitude on the stories, as their subject is the human condition. Media narratives cannot be the exception, as the subjectivity to which it alludes is a collectivized subjectivity, through the use of narrative forms inherited to fix the plot to the mechanism. This is not an accessory, as they can compose an entire cultural matrix (Martín-Barbero, 2003, p. 152-175), that is irreplaceable or simply formal. It conforms the same social radicals of sociability. One example of this is that which occurs with the collective memory, which affects the construction of collective identity (Erl, 2012). Depending on the narrative form in which the memory is configured, the mood of the world created for the configuration of a town's identity is established (Mendoza, 2005). For this reason, many times, the past and future projects are processed via the allegorization of heroes or symbolization of epic action (Ricoeur, 1999, p. 198; 2002, p. 203-208; Erl, 2012, p. 229).

2.4. Event narrativization

Thus, the central mediation of the narrative is reached, with respect to reality, that had been hidden by the distinction between fiction and fiction media stories, Or the creation of the sense of reality. If there is anything that overcoming the dichotomy between fiction and non-fiction narratives indicates, it is that reality becomes imbued with meaning when narrated. This narrativization occurs within the tension that exists between the use of inherited narrative forms and the condensations of stereotypes and allegories with which a common collective experience is communicated.

The idea that narration is the primeval form of learning about the world is well-known (White, 1992, p. 16), and occurred before other forms of representation, such as the scientific form (Ginzburg, 1994, p. 138). As part of the ontological basis of world comprehension, it

is phenomenologically constitutive of the collective human condition. Therein, its being and meaning is expressed, its past is explained, and its future is staked. Narration is the universal form of comprehension of that which occurs. As such, owing to its nearness to human vitality (Ong, 1994, p. 48-52 and 138-144), it seems the natural way to explain things (Burgos, 2016). Narratives are so powerful that they configure the world in itself, explain it, and attribute cause and consequence to daily occurrences (Ricoeur, 2007, p. 39).

This achieves, via the construction of a plot that localizes, in a sequence of events, their revelation as the explanation for said events (White, 1992, p. 32). Reality is created via the narrativization of the events (White, 2003, p. 47), which take place at three times: the first is during selection, the second is the relationship via the plot, and the third is the appearance of reality that is generated in the tropologization process. Each of these is explained below.

- *Event selection.* For events to become narrations that discuss reality, they are selected from the indiscriminant group of occurrences that happen every day. Luhmann (2007, p. 41) provides a list of selection guidelines that lend narrative value to the events (Luhmann, 2007, p. 39-62). Within each list, one must consider, for effects of media analysis of reality, two bases. The first of these establishes that the selected actions must be those which indicate violations of established social norms, or events which express conflict with the existing order. These are always presented with a moral reflection (Luhmann, 2007, p. 48).

The second establishes that not only should one realize that the action took place, but also that someone is at fault. An individual and their actions become the focus, as a type of event intelligibility typification for the audience (Luhmann, 2007, p. 50-51). To summarize, the selection of some events instead of others indicates the existence of a criteria choice with a close relationship to the current moral order, in the context in which the stories are told (White, 1992, p. 37).

Event-plotting methods. The existence of the above selection criterion is insufficient to explain the significance of the events. These, once selected, are placed into the sequential structure that links them, such that they are presented as the revealers of a final meaning. The plot is created to lend form to reality (White, 1992, p. 30).

This indicates that the events acquire their significance in accordance with the mode in which a story's plot occurs. For said purpose, a type of fiction is employed that strings them together to reveal their final comprehension as if each episode were oriented to develop a resulting idea that completely explains the events (White, 2005, p. 16).

It is not that what is communicated does not correspond to reality, because effectively, each event is verifiable. Instead, it prints a meaning of the facts that becomes the remaining representation what happened, that which is real.

This reality represented is that which may vary, depending on the narrativization applied to the actions. The narration of events occurs in accordance with a particular type of fiction that may be romantic, tragic, comical, or satirical (White, 2005, p. 18-20).

- Romantic: when the events are told in function of the drama of a hero who must redeem a situation, place themselves against evil or adverse forces, and generate identification with themselves and their trajectory. When the events are plotted in romantic fiction, the story demonstrates the way in which each action transforms them into a hero, a state which seemed unchangeable.
 - Tragic: when the events are narrated such that they demonstrate that the forces external to the protagonist are greater than they, despite their struggle, and the illusion that, in time, the initial adverse state will change. At the end, the circumstances are imposed upon the hero's transformation attempts, demonstrating the inevitable, irreparable yielding to the laws of the events. For this reason, these stories acquire moralizing and agonizing tones.
 - Comedy: as in tragedy, in this genre, the events constitute forces against the hero, which they must overcome, but with the difference that there is a time during the narration in which these adverse forces momentarily resolve, feeding hope for the hero's triumph, which may or may not occur in the end. The important thing is to feed the illusion of a hopeful future, which occurs, although it may be just temporary and virtual.
 - Satire: when the events are narrated such that a resolution, in accordance with the way that the actions are shown to occur, is impossible. This generates a sense of frustration about the hero's action in the narration's tone, as well as resentment toward the adverse forces.
- *The tropological configuration of reality.* After the events are selected and plotted, in accordance with a type of fiction, they are analyzed within the tropology that reveals a particular type of configuration of reality. Tropes indicate the ways in which reality is imagined (White, 2003, p. 44), or the discursive ways that meaning may be constructed therewith. The basic tropes, with which reality is narratively represented are as follows: metaphores, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony (2003, pp. 42-45).
- Metaphor: a representation of reality based on this trope, shows events by way of similes or one's narrative analogy compared to another, by way of its differences or similarities, as if using descriptive logic through comparison.
 - Metonymy: a representation of reality in accordance with this trope shows events in cause-effect relationships, such that they are presented as functional parts of a whole to which they belong, and which they explain.
 - Synecdoche: a representation based on this trope shows the events as part of a superior whole, to which they belong, and which, more than explaining it, symbolize it, such that a transfer of qualities is performed of the whole in the part.
 - Irony: in this trope, the representation is shown as refined and realistic. Thus, the subtle plot of events may capture a reference which would not be expected of the logical

order in which these unfold. The absurd and paradoxical are the imaginary marks that this kind of representation leaves in the reality it reveals.

- The plot of events and their tropological configuration are codified in terms of the same moral order which guides selection, whether seeking to lend continuity to an aspect of said order, or seeking to transform something into the imaginary. Both are ways to manage the representation of reality from the media narrative. This narrativization of events process is that which lends meaning to reality. It is not a process that implies a calque or a reflection of the same. It is a process that lends meaning, that ends up being the path to understanding, processing, and locating oneself in reality.

3. Conclusions. Relevance of the narrativization notion

This theoretical journey has sought to add something more to the idea of relativity in the differentiation between fiction and non-fiction narratives, something beyond overcoming the relationships between journalism and literature (Chillón, 1999), or that would imply the consideration of media narratives as possible worlds (García-Noblejas, 2005). This is not because said approaches are broader or more limited, but because they have been able to access a group of new questions that must be outlined more concretely, and if you will, in a more operatively useful way, in function of future studies of analysis of media narratives.

The goal has been to advance toward the verification of the existence of a dramatic unit in non-fiction narratives, precisely establishing their differences and consistencies with fiction narratives. For this, the concept of narrativization has been constructed as that process that permits the dissection of structures that support the construction of meaning in reality, when this is narrated in the media.

The concept of events themselves has been discussed for this purpose, that which reality transfers to narration and to its being. As such, representation, not calque, alludes to the group of human experiences. A rapid trip led through Ricoeur's philosophy of stories, to introduce the concept of a plot as a principle of the ethical-poetic order, with which intelligibility is lent to narration. Thus, its representational function is attributed to a greater aspiration, such as the temporal configuration of the human experience.

Said interest in Ricoeur caused a review of the tension between pre-establishment and innovation as the neuralgical points for plot configuration, and toward the most singular question of the construction of meaning in reality, via the confluence of ways to tell stories, whether inherited or via media narration innovations.

The concept of event narrativization was created therefrom as a way to construct a sense of reality (Becerra & Burgos, 2015). For this, diverse concepts were articulated, which, from the perspective of the analysis of a historic tale, established by Hayden White, and from certain elements of the structural story analysis, posed three layers for the elaboration of meaning in narration: selection, plotting, and event tropologization.

Here, conclusions may be established about the mediation of narration in the creation of meaning for reality in media narratives. Firstly, it is necessary to move from the established differences between fiction and non-fiction toward an exercise in more productive differentiations between narration and narrativization. Narration, the action of telling a story, is the human illocutive act by which actions are connected. Narrativization is the field of analysis of media narratives, which leads not only to the revelation of the narrative structure, but also to inquiring into the way in which the sense of reality itself is managed. Thus, there is no sense of reality that does not pass through the narrativization process, or reality that develops independently, as it has been mediatically narrativized.

Secondly, this narrativization process, which has determined the three layers of the story (selection, plot, and tropologization of events) establishes forms of media representation of reality and the construction of collective realities that establish orientation in the present and projection of the future. This perspective prompts the consideration of a new way to address journalistic stories, not from their concerns about correspondence or lack thereof with reality, but assuming their mediation in the creation of social meaning, such that its role in the management of symbolic power is considered.

Thirdly, a fresh look at the concept of narrative tradition, from which the comprehension of genres has fossilized, is necessary in order to comprehend and work more with them, as films through which reality makes itself present in the enabling corporeality dermis, and as such, from the interdictive contact that accompanies the experience. Thus, the notion of narrativization is a theoretical tool that permits the decipherment of ways to extract meaning of reality, when communicated mediatically.

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