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Introduction: Sameness and difference in narratology

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Scholars from different fields of study have suggested that seemingly diverse phenomena such as humans' everyday thinking, short trivial reports about events, longer elaborated storytelling, and fictional works like novels and short stories share certain salient similarities. All these phenomena are said to be narratives. How “narrative” shall be defined and hence where one should draw the line between narratives and non-narratives is, however, debated. As a consequence there is a discussion among theoreticians about similarities and differences that concern both the putative object, narratives (what are the similarities and differences between phenomena regarded as narratives), and theories about this object: is there one or several theories, do all theories share certain basic assumptions, et cetera.

A central issue in this debate concerns the distinction of fiction and how fiction is handled by theories like narratology. Some scholars argue that narratology, due to an exaggerated focus on sameness, does not provide a valid description of what is often regarded as its prime object, narrative fiction. This discussion in turn generates questions concerning what is implied by the term “fiction” (does it refer to things made up or to generic fiction like short stories and novels); how we can distinguish between fiction and non-fiction; and how this distinction affects how readers interpret a narrative. Moreover, how does narrative fiction relate to readers' everyday lives?

Issues like these have kept coming back when Nordic and Baltic scholars interested in narratology have met at workshops and conferences.¹ Accordingly, when the research environment Narration, Life and Meaning at Örebro university,

¹ See for example the Nordic Network of Narrative Studies (<http://nordicnarratologynet.ut.ee>).

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with support from the faculty board of Humanities and Social Sciences as well as the Swedish Academy, got the opportunity to invite Nordic and Baltic scholars to a one-day symposium in November 2017 the theme was “Sameness and Difference in Narratology”.

Sameness and difference in narratology

The task of the version of narrative theory called narratology is, according to Gerald Prince, to examine “what all and only narratives have in common” (Prince 2003: 66). The editors of *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory* say that already the structuralists understood “that narratives can be presented in a wide variety of formats, media, and genres” and suggested a cross-disciplinary approach in which “stories” could “be viewed as supporting a variety of cognitive and communicative activities” (Herman et al. 2005: ix). The editors point out that this call has now begun to be answered. They explain that “[a]s accounts of what happened to particular people in particular circumstances and with specific consequences, stories have come to be viewed as a basic human strategy for coming to terms with time, process, and change”, and as a “cognitive schema and discourse type manifested in both literary and non-literary forms of expression, narrative now falls within the purview of many social-scientific, humanistic, and other disciplines” (ix). Given this situation there is, they argue, a need for the encyclopedia since it is “imperative for scholars, teachers, and students to have access to a comprehensive reference resource – one that cuts across disciplinary specialisations to provide information about the core concepts, categories, distinctions, and technical nomenclatures that have grown up around the study of narrative in all of its guises” (x). A main assumption in these descriptions is that “narrative” is an object that can be mediated in different forms, and that narratology studies this general object as well as its different manifestations.

However, this “sameness approach” has been challenged by the development of postclassical narratologies, by the so-called narrative turn in which concepts travel between different fields of study as well as by a tenacious critique according to which fictional narratives cannot be described in terms of a general understanding of narrative. The critique puts in question what narratology is a theory about, and if, and in such case how, it can be applied in the study of all the different putative types of narratives. Yet, despite a recent emphasis on difference, the sameness approach is still vital. Moreover, it has gained a new impetus through the cognitive turn and the suggestion that readers interpret fiction, non-fiction, and their everyday lives in the “same way” (cf. Herman 2011: 33, Hyvärinen et al. 2013: 4).

A presentation of the eight articles

The first two articles present and advocate a “difference approach” in narratology. In his article “The critique of the common theory of narrative fiction in narratology: Pursuing difference” Tommy Sandberg refers to Sylvie Patron, Lars-Åke Skalin and Richard Walsh as well as to adherents of so-called unnatural narratology and argues that at least the three former scholars advocate a radical difference approach and criticize, what they hold to be, the common “sameness approach” of narratology. A basic tenet of their critique, according to Sandberg, is that narrative fiction is a specific practice and hence should be treated as *sui generis* and not as a variant of a more general narrative practice. Sandberg holds that the difference approach has been neglected in narratology and argues that if the critique were taken seriously it would change narratology and the theorizing about narrative fiction. Lars-Åke Skalin claims in “The art of narrative – narrative as art: Sameness or difference?” that narratology has tried to define narrative as if it were something like a material *thing* with its *intrinsic* definitional properties independent of semiotic representation. This tendency he sees as a mistake that has affected narratologists’ theorizing about narrative fiction. Skalin then contrasts narratology with an approach in which narrative fiction is compared with other arts rather than with non-fictional narratives in the sense of information about something that has happened. To illustrate the difference between these approaches he refers to the concept “representation” and argues that narratology has assumed “representation of”, that is, a two-plane reasoning in which narrative discourse refers to something that readers are invited to interpret (cf. a portrait of Venus). In the alternative approach, “representation” has rather been regarded as expression and assumed to be one-plane (cf. a Venus portrait). According to the latter model, readers are not interpreting entities they have been informed about as in non-fictional narratives or real life. Instead they are taking part of (following) the performance they are offered. When Skalin finally discusses the purpose of narrative fiction as art he refers to what he sees as the traditional concept of pleasure that has followed the idea of the appreciation of representational art. The pleasure-concept is something which recurs in several of the other articles albeit understood in different ways.

The next two articles criticize the difference approach, put the suggested dichotomy between a sameness and a difference approach in question and request a more nuanced discussion of similarities and differences. Matti Hyvärinen criticizes Andersson, Sandberg and Skalin in “Sameness, difference, or continuity?”. Even though he is concerned about “narrative imperialism”, rejects theoretical core concepts such as the obligatory narrator, and asserts that it, for example, is important not to apply terms from narratology indiscriminately in the study of oral storytell-

ing, or to consider all oral storytelling as instances of a single uniform category, he holds that Andersson, Sandberg and Skalin attack a straw man, that is, criticizes a position that no narratologists actually support. There is simply no sameness approach according to Hyvärinen. He argues for his cause referring to the history of narrative studies – he claims that for example Gérard Genette’s study of Proust must be distinguished from the universal claims of structuralism; he asserts that readers obviously make meaning in similar ways when reading fiction as when they interpret non-fiction and their everyday; he holds that scholars of course make conceptual and methodological loans; and he claims, referring to systemic functional language theory, that utterances always have many functions and thus questions Skalin’s argument that fiction do not consist of “telling that” clauses. Hyvärinen also implies that Andersson, Sandberg and Skalin tend to be as reductive about non-fictional narratives as they accuse their putative adversaries to be about literary fiction. In a similar vein Hanna Meretoja questions the sameness-difference dichotomy in “Beyond sameness and difference: Narrative sense-making in life and literature”, and says that it might conceal important similarities and differences both between narratives and between theoretical approaches. Meretoja does not, however, refer to Andersson, Sandberg and Skalin but to cognitive narratology (sameness) and unnatural narratology (difference). She holds that these positions tend to rely on “ahistorical, universalizing and empiricist-positivistic assumptions concerning factuality, raw experience and the non-referentiality of fiction”. The alternative she advocates is a narrative-hermeneutical approach. According to such an approach, all narratives concern not only events (traditional narratology) or experiences (cognitive narratology) but also sense making. Narratives thus offer new perspectives on the world as a space of possibilities. However, these similarities do not suppress the differences between non-fiction and fiction, which have different functions and are, she affirms, interpreted differently. Just like Hyvärinen she questions the suggestion that we read fiction for pleasure and argues that “literary narratives refer to the world on a different level than non-literary narratives. The truth claims of literary narratives are disclosive and not ones based on the idea of correspondence to a pre-given order to be found in the world”.

Per Krogh Hansen’s and Marianne Wolff Lundholt’s article “Conflicts between founder- and CEO-narratives: Counter-narrative, character and identification in organizational changes” attempts to illustrate the value of a sameness approach. Their object of study is changes in the master narrative of the Danish company Danfoss and resistance against these changes. In the article they introduce the concept of corporate narratives and the study of such narratives. Krogh Hansen and Wolff Lundholt’s article can be said to represent the narrative turn and the widening of the object of narratology as well as the application of traditional narratological concepts and more recently suggested concepts such as counter- and master

narratives in the analysis of specific non-fictional narratives. They thus base their study on the assumption that there exists an object such as narratives even though they also recognize important differences between for example corporate narratives and narrative fiction. Yet, in spite of these differences they argue that an application of narratology can enhance the analysis of corporate storytelling.

“Imaginary scenarios: On the use and misuse of fiction” by Marina Grishakova, Remo Gramigna and Siim Sorokin aims to “unpack and revise the concept of ‘scenario’ from the perspective of fictional narratology [...], by considering it as a type of imaginative modeling that blurs the fictional/factual divide”. The article can hence be said to exemplify a trend among narratologists to refer to theories from different fields of study, and also to focus on the concept of fiction rather than the concept of narrative when discussing sameness and difference. The authors suggest that the division between fact and fiction could be seen as a continuum, referring to Genette’s terms “fiction” and “diction” where fiction refers to the made up while diction refers to non-fictional texts in which the literary is so foregrounded that the non-fictional function is subdued. The latter might lead to a blurring of distinctions, a blurring which comes with a risk but also with possible benefits. The authors argue that certain modes of representation must be evaluated not in terms of referential truth but in terms of use and function, and suggest that for example scientific and fictional modeling have distinct but similar functions. They then turn to scenarios as a fictional model and a heuristic “what if” structure. Scenarios are said to manifest the formal features of fictional narratives and fictional narratives can be described as scenarios. Grishakova, Gramigna and Sorokin illustrate what this could mean referring to Gene Weingarten’s “Pearls before breakfast”.

In “TITLE”, Mari Hatavara and Jarkko Toikkanen focus on how fiction affects readers’ everyday lives. The authors hold that narrative studies is a large and diverse field and have therefore chosen to focus on “the question of how fiction interacts with other realms of our lives or, more specifically, how reading fiction both involves and affects our everyday meaning making operations”. Hatavara and Toikkanen refer to recent trends in narratology that focus on immersion, readerly orientation and perceptual positioning in relation to the notion of a story world and suggest that a sameness approach have “systematized the reading process by analogy to real-life experience”. Focusing on minds and mindreading they argue that the influence goes both ways, but that they concentrate on the issue of how narrative modes and sense making in fiction may affect readers “everyday experience and understanding of the world”. After an analysis of “The scar” they suggest that the story displays the uncertainty of mind reading. This worries the characters as well as the readers and affects their everyday lives: “Fiction claws into the everyday and contaminates it, and vice versa”.

Anniken Greve takes a new hold on the sameness-difference distinction in her article “‘I will teach you differences.’ A meta-theoretical approach to narrative theory”. Based on a model consisting of six questions she suggests a distinction between three *research acts* in narrative theory: the act of explanation, which focuses on why and how questions, the act of defining focusing on what-questions, and the act of interpretation. Given this structure she argues that both Monika Fludernik and Jan Alber, for example, perform the act of explanation, while Gerald Prince and Lars-Åke Skalin are involved in the act of defining. Hence, what distinguishes Fludernik’s and Prince’s approach from that of Alber and Skalin respectively, do not concern the research act but the fact that Fludernik and Prince seek maximum comprehension while Alber and Skalin focus on what they hold to be important distinctions. Based on her model, Greve both suggests important distinctions – she distinguishes for example between historical, logical and pragmatic definitions within the act of defining – and how different research acts could be evaluated. Greve holds that it is difficult to point out what is *differentia specifica* for literariness or fiction but still appears to agree with difference theoreticians that fiction does not inform and moreover, that fiction communicates through the way the entire text is organized. However, she holds that the latter also might be true for non-fictional texts. She emphasizes the act of interpretation and thus relates to the issue of why we read fiction and how fiction relate to humans’ “meaning-making”.

We are grateful to the editors of *Frontiers of Narrative Studies* for the opportunity to act as guest editors. We also want to thank the scholars who have contributed to the symposium and to this issue. It is our hope that the articles will further the discussion about issues that is a concern not only for theoreticians but also relate to for example literary education, by providing some theoretical clarifications as well as highlighting important methodological differences in the approach to concepts such as literature, narratives, fiction and sense making.

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