

NARRATING THE FILM. NOVELIZATION: FROM THE CATALOGUE TO THE TRAILER

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Crossings, migrations and rewritings. From the cinema to the page, from the screen to the television or monitor, from the image to the written, even spoken, and narrated word. Since its origins cinema has been a privileged place in which numerous and various forms of passages across different media have taken place.

The cinema adaptation, in the most common sense of the term (the cinematic transposition of literary works), is undoubtedly one of the most practised research fields. The opposite trend, from the cinema to literature, is much less researched. The progressive increase of exchanges across different media, alongside this “U turn,” is extremely significant. The term novelization can be applied to all the processes that follow this trend of adapting the cinema and television product into the most different and disparate narrative forms.

Alongside the by now well established (and in some cases even forgotten) forms of novelization, such as the novel or the Cinéromans, there are numerous other no less significant phenomena of transmigration of the narrative and linguistic forms from the “film environment” to numerous other “narrative environments:” action figures, radio, comics, videogames and the Internet. Naturally non-narrative environments (or not exclusively narrative) can also feature migration between different media. We can in fact hypothesise that some forms of novelization (the catalogue and the trailer for example) function on the basis of a process of selection/isolation of heterogeneous and crucial sections of the film, that are re-arranged and presented according to a logic that might not always be narrative. Udine’s XII International Film Studies Conference is dedicated to the broad and complex panorama of novelization.

Up to now there has been no historical and theoretical systemization of the argument, even though the phenomenon has occurred in a multiform and continuous manner throughout the history of cinema ever since its beginnings. Forms of novelization have been, for the most part erroneously, considered as operations that flatten, simplify and minimise the cinematic material and therefore subject to very little research and consideration by cinema studies. The vastness of available material, along with the continuous renewal of the forms and ways in which the passage between different media occurs, opens the field today to an investigation that can reveal original results both on the historiographic and on the theoretical and methodological fronts. Particular attention will be given to early cinema, as is customary for the conference, without forgetting new aspects suggested by contemporary situations.

Some possible ideas:

Novelization and trans-textuality. Intersection/Overlap

Can novelization be studied through the application of categories (intertextuality, paratextuality, metatextuality, architextuality, hypertextuality) developed by Genette to study the relations between texts? Can we consider novelization in the same way as a meta-text? Which are the specific/distinctive elements of forms of novelization in respect to paratextuality and specifically epitextuality?

Novelization and intermediality

In the broad context of forms of crossing different media can novelization provide a specific perspective capable of producing new results? Certain elements evidently stand out, such as the migration of characters, settings, linguistic strategies from the big screen to other forms of narrative: the novel, naturally, along with the comic or the Cinéromans, but also the radio novelization in its most disparate forms, from reviews to the promotional launch including cinema programs. The migration towards other forms of image driven narrative seems extremely relevant, in the contemporary context, such as the ones favoured by the small screen, often consisting of serial products.

The catalogue

In the context of early cinema, the catalogue is undoubtedly one of the fundamental epitextual components. As well as outlining and identifying the films through the title, the catalogue presents and “represents” them by providing, as well as certain essential information (price and length of the film, for example), a first re-elaboration of the contents in the form of a brief synopsis. The catalogue is therefore the privileged inaugural place for novelization. What are its specific characteristics compared to subsequent forms of novelization? What are the presentation/exhibition strategies employed? And, more specifically, which ones of these are beyond a narrative logic?

The trailer

If the catalogue of the origins “sold” the film to the exhibitor/tradesmen, the trailer is aimed directly at the spectator. Even if they share the same promotional function, they differ in terms of whom the communication is aimed at. The enunciative dimension must be stressed to stimulate the spectator directly, with a subsequent dissemination of strong modes of address. The enunciative dimension is, therefore, stronger, than the narrative integration, in the organization of the contents in a markedly “attractive” process of repeated spectator stimulation (probably accentuated, today, by the need to make the trailer stand out from the indistinctive television production). Selection of the information, destructuring meaning, processes of re-combination and re-elaboration: these are the fundamental syntactic operations in the construction and spreading of the meaning of the trailer, supported by different strategies that can play on the appeal of the author, the star, belonging to a genre and to the expectations that this can

generate. But if the narrative is not the structuring principle of the trailer, it can constitute its subject: the trailer thematizes and promises the narrative act, producing and inducing an authentic “narrative desire.”

Novelization/Author/Genre

How do cases of “genre novelization” and “author novelization” differ? Do they carry out different functions? What type of role can they have in terms of the expressive forms of different media? What specific usefulness can the study of novelization have in terms of understanding the poetics of an author or the mechanisms of a genre?

Novelization and reception theories

Novelization can be seen as an opportunity for a negotiation between the audience and the filmic text. It can reveal the skills of the popular audience and can be considered as a sort of “active reading,” that produces meaning and it can have a pedagogic function too: that of learning the cinematic language. The forms of novelization multiply vertiginously, especially in the contemporary media situation, thanks also to the potentials offered by new media that guarantee a diffusion and a facility of (active and passive) access, that were unthinkable just a few years ago. In this context extremely relevant phenomena, such as the fan fiction, are still to be explored.

Stories for the spectator/The stories of the spectator

The cinema critic seems to take on the role of privileged spectator since his “story of the film,” as against the one of the common spectator, assumes a unique importance by obtaining a widespread diffusion: what is, therefore, the role of the critic towards the reception of a film? Does the “story of the film,” from the critical point of view, contribute to determining the success or failure of a film? What happens when alongside the story of the film there is a “moral” assessment, as is the case with the pastoral assessments produced by the Italian Centro Cattolico Cinematografico? Can similar experiences be found in other social/cultural contexts?

Even the spectator’s stories offer interesting ideas: in what forms can they be traced? Can the narrations of the bonimenteur from the origins of cinema be included? Is the bonimenteur a “privileged spectator” too? Even if today it seems possible to access numerous channels that allow, a somewhat limited, “visibility” to the spectator’s stories (Internet, pages dedicated to reviews by readers on specialised magazines, etc.), what diffusion did this form of film narration have in the past? Which are the privileged forms of its circulation?

The playbill

The playbill is a hybrid case that boasts a direct hereditariness from the customs and

traditions of the theatre and opera. It sits halfway between the trailer (and all that is relevant to the film's promotional and launch strategies) and the studies on reception. What are the differences and analogies between the catalogue and the trailer? What type of information can we glean from them about the practices and modes of film enjoyment and consumption? As they are aimed not so much at a potential spectator but rather to one that is already "conquered," can they be considered a promotional tool of the movie house rather than the film? Alongside an informative function (as well as a plot that often wants to have a strong aesthetic and literary significance, the playbill shows photos from the set, anecdotes on the making of and stars' biographies) and celebratory (of the value of the film, author and star), the playbill also has an absolutely crucial "emotional" function: that of stimulating and managing the memory of the film. The playbill not only prepares the spectator for the viewing but also provides him with elements to manage the parting from the show that he has just seen.

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