PURDUE UNIVERSITY

CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture
ISSN 1481-4374
Purdue University Press ©Purdue University

Volume 2 (2000) Issue 2 Article 6

Word, Image, and Sound from Comparative Points of View: A Review Article of New Work by Joret and Remael

Lieven Tack
Catholic University Leuven

Follow this and additional works at: http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb

Part of the Comparative Literature Commons, and the Critical and Cultural Studies Commons

Dedicated to the dissemination of scholarly and professional information, Purdue University Press selects, develops, and distributes quality resources in several key subject areas for which its parent university is famous, including business, technology, health, veterinary medicine, and other selected disciplines in the humanities and sciences.

CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture, the peer-reviewed, full-text, and open-access learned journal in the humanities and social sciences, publishes new scholarship following tenets of the discipline of comparative literature and the field of cultural studies designated as "comparative cultural studies." Publications in the journal are indexed in the Annual Bibliography of English Language and Literature (Chadwyck-Healey), the Arts and Humanities Citation Index (Thomson Reuters ISI), the Humanities Index (Wilson), Humanities International Complete (EBSCO), the International Bibliography of the Modern Language Association of America, and Scopus (Elsevier). The journal is affiliated with the Purdue University Press monograph series of Books in Comparative Cultural Studies. Contact: <clcweb@purdue.edu>

Recommended Citation

Tack, Lieven. "Word, Image, and Sound from Comparative Points of View: A Review Article of New Work by Joret and Remael." *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 2.2 (2000): <http://dx.doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.1073>

This text has been double-blind peer reviewed by 2+1 experts in the field.
The above text, published by Purdue University Press ©Purdue University, has been downloaded 706 times as of 11/07/14. Note: the download counts of the journal's material are since Issue 9.1 (March 2007), since the journal's format in pdf (instead of in html 1999-2007).

PURDUE UNIVERSITY UNIVERSITY PRESS <http://www.thepress.purdue.edu>

CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture

ISSN 1481-4374 <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb>
Purdue University Press ©Purdue University

CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture, the peer-reviewed, full-text, and open-access learned journal in the humanities and social sciences, publishes new scholarship following tenets of the discipline of comparative literature and the field of cultural studies designated as "comparative cultural studies." In addition to the publication of articles, the journal publishes review articles of scholarly books and publishes research material in its *Library Series.* Publications in the journal are indexed in the Annual Bibliography of English Language and Literature (Chadwyck-Healey), the Arts and Humanities Citation Index (Thomson Reuters ISI), the Humanities Index (Wilson), Humanities International Complete (EBSCO), the International Bibliography of the Modern Langua-ge Association of America, and Scopus (Elsevier). The journal is affiliated with the Purdue University Press monog-raph series of Books in Comparative Cultural Studies. Contact: <clcweb@purdue.edu>

Volume 2 Issue 2 (June 2000) Book Review Article
Lieven Tack,
"Word, Image, and Sound from Comparative Points of View: A Review Article of New Work by Joret and Remael"
<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol2/iss2/6>

Contents of ***CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 2.2 (2000)**
<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol2/iss2/>

Lieven TACK

Word, Image, and Sound from Comparative Points of View:
A Review Article of New Work by Joret and Remael

"Vous connaissez mon infirmité," writes Chopin in a letter to one of his students, de Rozières, "de ne pouvoir mettre 2 mots l'un à la suite de l'autre sans une véritable souffrance" ("You know my infirmity of not being able to write two words the one after the other without a true suffering"). How can this remarkable phrase, cited by Paul Joret from Chopin's correspondence, and that reveals a paradoxical relation to writing, illuminate Chopin's concept of musical semantics? How does film translation construct our visual perception of the often presumed universally readable stream of images in the movies? How are the relations between metaphorical language in music commentaries and the "exemplificatory" aspect (Goodman) of musical reference to be seized? How can ideological devices of language be visualized through a *close reading* of the word and image materiality in the avant-garde collage work of Picasso's *Au bon Marché*? What can the sociohistorical investigation into professional careers of *commedia dell'arte* actors tell us about the intersection between dramatic language and its setting for the stage in the Italian Baroque period? What is the discursive function of the blank space in texts and art works? What are the sociolinguistical and philosophical implications of today's postindustrial information society and its loss of the securizing factor of tradition on the way the individual lives up his relation to the (real?) world?

Such are but some of the numerous fascinating questions addressed in a volume of selected papers from a three-day conference held at the University of Antwerp in April 1996. Let me add immediately in order to acknowledge the work done by the contributors as well as the editors that most articles are updated and longer versions of the papers presented at the conference. The volume edited by Paul Joret and Aline Remael, *Language and Beyond: Actuality and Virtuality in the Relations between Word, Image and Sound / Le Langage et ses au-delà. Actualité et Virtualité dans les rapports entre le verbe, l'image et le son* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1998). Nearly 500 pages of more often than not densely written articles -- thirty in total -- by both young promising scholars as well as internationally established scholars, all in some way dealing with multimodal or plurisemiotic cultural artefacts which explore the interpretive, systemic, or pragmatic potentialities and limits of linguistic and other media discourses in an artistically multilayered context. In a nutshell, that is the quantitative and qualitative material the book has to offer. The majority of the texts, seventeen, are in French; the thirteen remaining are in English. A very stimulating but somewhat difficult preface by the editors introduces the volume in both languages. The book is organized into five chapters, one that can have a rather loose ("Synergies, dimensions and materials"; "Pragmatics and Traditions") or a more tightly-knit ("Techniques, Media and Society"; "Music"; Letters, Images and Pluricode Intentionalities") relation to the actual objects of study and discussion. Musical scores of four songs by Jeremy Thurlow, an index of names, and biographical abstracts are included in the volume.

quot capita, tot sensus? Indeed, by way of necessity, the diversity in topics is paralleled by a wide variety of methodological options. Here is a quick grasp of theories and approaches: The (poly)system approaches of Itamar Even-Zohar and Siegfried J. Schmidt are discussed by Philiep Bossier, Lieven D'Hulst, Aline Remael, and Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek; Michael Halliday's systemic functional linguistics -- also called social semiotics in Paul Mercers's article -- is discussed by Terry Royce, the picture and image theories of Jean-Marie Schaeffer is discussed by Jan Baetens, approaches by W.T.J. Mitchell, Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen are discussed by Michael Windross, Terry Royce, and Paul Mercer; approaches in aesthetic philosophy and aesthetic semiology by Nelson Goodman, Gérard Genette, and Jean-Marie Schaeffer are discussed by Herman Parret and Bernard Vouilloux, respectively. Further theoretical frameworks and methodologies such as film theory, translation studies, narratology, founding texts of Gestalt psychology, poststructuralism, hermeneutics, critical theory, etc., are included and discussed in a number of other articles. The range of methodologies employed is that large that by way of

boutade a challenge could be played: you name it and there is a chance you will find some traces of it in one of the articles.

As regards the structure of the articles, most papers seem to adopt an analogous formal pattern: a more or less elaborate theoretical and methodological exposure is followed by a concrete case study, a discussion, and concluding remarks. Bibliographical references are in general very accurate; the bibliographies of the separate articles often offer a relevant overview of the specialized publications on the topic presented. This indicates that the editorial work has been carried out with great care, scholarly thoroughness, and technical scrutiny. The result of this is that the book offers both in-depth case studies as well as general presentations of theoretical frameworks. The general impression, after the reader worked through the articles is both one of great intellectual satisfaction (you will have learnt something on the semiotic interpretation of the construction and demolition of Stalinist sculptures as well as on television realism and Bible narratives for children) and stimuli of curiosity for the further exploration of the theories and methodologies presented. In a condensed but illuminating manner, some main theoretical insights by Goodman, Habermas, Halliday, Even-Zohar, Schmidt, etc., are presented and their usefulness for actual analysis of concrete cases illustrated. In short, the articles are both empirico-descriptively as theoretically instructive. Now, you may well ask, is there a price to be paid for all this wealth of information and critical perspectives? In the end, one cannot but admit that the diversity of topics, authors, academic disciplines, and intellectual traditions contributes to the further fragmentation of a research field which any reader in want of clear schematic conclusions would like to see synthesized. But synthesizations of interartistic (or "transesthetic" see Vouilloux 256) interferences will always be reductive in relation to the historical diversity of experienced relationships between different semiotic systems, codes, media, and audience and/or the reading public and reception. The extraordinary heterogeneity of these relations, well represented by this volume, is a scientific reality the interdisciplinary researcher will have to live with. So, beware, this book is for patient readers who will not shy away from spending time to read and to reflect.

Practical reasons oblige me to restrict my commentaries to only some of the topics dealt with. I apologize in advance for this purely subjective selection. In fact, my comments restricts themselves to the presentation of a major methodological problem of which we can find traces in some of these papers. The major general observation to be made concerns the central position of language in the debates. This is so both on the object level (many authors discuss cases where discourse plays a prominent role, be it in an oral, textual, electronic, or the filmic mode), as on the methodological level. Undeniably, the study of visual, auditive, or, for that matter, tactile and olfactive (the two latter sensorial experiences are not discussed) cultural artefacts shows the marks of the historical evolution of humanities scholarship. In this regard, one can detect, however, a major dichotomy in this book about the status of language as either mainly convergent with the adjacent medium or mainly oppositional. The first tendency is manifested in a number of contributions which take for granted that the signifying potential of the images or the picture constitutes the central pictoral function. Here is an example: Jos van Winkel writes about *Au bon Marché* by Picasso: "Both white and black paint articulate the semiotic insight that signifying power does not coincide with the presence of the single sign as the material entity, but is 'located' in the difference between signs. Or, to be more precise, black and white paint are used in such a way, signifying while contesting realism, that their conventional, anti-material nature as signs is foregrounded" (19). Between the lines, one reads the Saussurian concept of language as negativity and thus Van Winkel's article highlights complementarian relational paradigms where ideological dimensions of language are stressed thanks to the material insertion of discursive fragments in the collage work. Also convinced of the validity of the application of originally linguistic models to intersemiotic relations is Terry Royce's article: "It has been recognized in recent times that developments in general linguistic theory can also inform the interpretation of other communication modes besides language" (157). He is concretely referring here to the work of M. O'Toole and Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen. His own approach is an application of Halliday's sociolinguistics to word-image relations in *The Economist.* Thus, he argues for the complementarity or convergence of language with other media.

I would like to suggest that what unites this first group of approaches is the notion semiotic expansionism characterized by the extension of the referential logic of linguistic and semantic signification to other domains of human perception (visuality, auditivity, etc.). The same approach remains unexplored as it effectively supports the legitimation of the extralinguistic validity of some basic semiotic hypotheses such as the semiotic-functional relation between a formal level of expression and a level of content. More recently, it seems that the challenge contained in the "pictoral turn" of W.T.J. Mitchell in reaction to the dominance of language as the sole representational paradigm of knowledge did not question the presupposition that images and pictures have to signify, have to refer to something else, and that they have to adopt a signifying way of life. It is partly to question this a priori assumption that Bernard Vouilloux proposes to rename the term "interartistic" by "transesthetic": "pas seulement pour lever l'hypothèque attachée à la notion de signe ... aussi parce que ce terme a en outre l'avantage ... de s'appliquer aussi bien aux cas où la relation s'établit d'un art à l'autre qu'à ceux où elle procède par changement de medium à l'intérieur d'un art donné (256). Vouilloux's article is a critical contribution to the Goodmanien theory of reference and exemplification in the arts and his argumentation takes into account the social embeddedness of the interpretation of transaesthetic relations and the complex nature of linguistic referenciation in itself, which is not a nomenclature or a fixed unequivocal stock of items as Goodman would have it. Further problematization of the linguistic paradigm is carried out by Maruska Svasek's article "The Dialectics of Materiality and Interpretability" about the complex interferences between types of (anti)communist discourse and the materiality of a Stalin monument. The author states that "it is insufficient and one-sided to analyse material objects solely from the point of view of their interpretability. We should also study material objects as economic goods *and* as things which consist of matter" (43). Svasek nuances this position in respect to the possibility to analyze the embeddedness of material culture in political power structures: "If objects are defined as visual signifiers which convey meaning within different discourses, then interpretation processes can be analysed and underlying power struggles can be highlighted. These kinds of process cannot be analysed if objects are merely regarded as pieces of matter. However, it should be remembered that as things which may be touched, smelled, heard, and tasted, objects do have qualities that cannot be comprehended within a purely linguistic framework" (47). One wonders why the consideration of the materiality of things would imply a reduction of them, as the author appears to suggest. In my opinion, the opposite would be true: to analyse them within a linguistic framework would be an attitude of epistemological reductionism. The counter argument may not only be justified but a necessary non-homologation of linguistic analytical tools when applied to the extralinguistic sphere of objects and sounds. In other words, this alternate approach does not preclude the pertinence of analyzing the relations between material objects and their interpretative or surrounding discourse. The representational paradigm is further challenged by Anne-Marie Christin's text on the eloquence of the blank space in writing and painting. Christin argues that it is not representation that is constitutive of the image; rather, it is the image that is defined in the first place by the materiality of the surface and the white spaces in between the imagistic figures. An analogous reservation towards the universalist explanatory paradigms of linguistic models is made by Giselle de Nie in her article on the knowledge construction in early medieval narratives by Gregory of Tours. Knowledge is not the sole matter of language because in those texts meaning is "associatively moving from one image to another" via "a movement along affective, assimilative congruences rather than differentiating logical [i.e., discursively linear] structures" (101).

Joret's presentation of Chopin's esthetics of music via his correspondence further illustrates how, on the level of the lived experience by the artist, the discursive and the musical modes of expression were felt as opposite and conflicting. Chopin testifies to the ambivalent relation to written discourse where he both manifests a great prolixity and an aposteriori inhibation and depreciation of what he says. He both feels the necessity of an endless discourse to say all he had to say and a dissatisfaction with the fixation of meaning in written discourse. The ambiguously indirect capacity of music to make sense would therefore, suggests Joret, make up the great attractive power of music for Chopin (298). Puccini, Cocteau, pictoral allusions in Aloysius

Bertrands's *Gaspard de la Nuit* and *Fantaisies à la manière de Rembrandt et Callot*, synaesthesia, popular oral culture in Russia, painting and Claude Simon, social responsibility and authorship, etc., are further topics discussed in the volume. For sure, for anyone interested in interarts comparativism, this volume is a stimulating and good reading in the best tradition of comparative literature, as well as comparative cultural studies, where the disciplines' theoretical focus is maintained while paying attention to matters popular in cultural studies but there without the said theoretical knowledge (in cultural studies per se). One may regret, as I do, that the theoretical implications of interdisciplinarity are not always fully developed. But this does not make the book a less interesting example of the state of the art.

Reviewer's Profile: Lieven Tack teaches French literature at the Catholic University Leuven. In his research he concentrates on French literature, translation studies, and interartistic comparativism and has published "La stratégie de la traduction chez Valery Larbaud. Interprétation fonctionnelle de 'The Way of All Flesh'" in *Revue de Littérature Comparée* (1999), "L'entre-deux de la Voix. Questions sur la Sprechstimme dans *Pierrot Lunaire*" in *Les Puissances de la Voix. Corps sentant, cordes sensibles.* Ed. Sémir Badir and Herman Parret (2000), and "L'objet musico-littéraire. Pour une analyse théorique de l'interférence" in *Revue Belge de Philologie et d'Histoire* (1998). Tack is member of an interdisciplinary research team at Leuven that studies the relationship between word and music in Arnold Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire* and its wider cultural historical background of the interferences between poetry and music at the turn of the century. More generally, Tack is working on a historical discourse analysis of the Pierrot figure in its textual, hermeneutical, metafictional, theatrical, and interartistic functions in European literature and culture. E-mail: <lieven.tack@arts.kuleuven.ac.be>.