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MUSIC, FASHION AND THEATRE AS TRANSMEDIA DRAMATURGY IN WOODY ALLEN'S FILM BLUE JASMINE

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Abstract: The aim of this study is film representations in a comedy-drama *Blue Jasmine* (dir. Woody Allen, 2013). Bearing in mind the communicative and rhetoric performativity of film, a main character Jeanette "Jasmine" French (Cate Blanchett) is closely examined as a socialite fallen on hard times. Two hypotheses are put forward regarding the construct of her delusional identity: (h1) *vis-à-vis* "Blue Moon" melody, the figure flashback/analepsis depicts the character's focalized memories, at the same time enabling the viewer to travel in the film-time; (h2) *vis-à-vis* film/theatre transmedia relationship, fashion/costumes are included as the intertext and citations of a *mise en scène* from Tennessee Williams's play "Streetcar Named Desire" (dir. Liv Ullmann, 2009). The goal of the research is to show how the pseudoidentity representations are constructed through the dramaturgy tactics, which juxtapose intradiegetic and extradiegetic dramatized narratives, while the deixes in the semiosis (modes of references) engage the audience's critical view. Given that the film/theatre props are orchestrated in a way which conveys a specific message, narratological and semiotic analysis is further supported by the multimodal tools, which advocate for the close examination of the interplay of modes. Finally, a definition of the focalization in the critical narratology regards the subjectivity as a necessary methodological principle, which best describes how the plot carries some kind of character's knowledge of the world in the identity construct.

Keywords: *film/theatre; semiotics; fashion/costumes; transmediality; critical narratology; flashback/analepsis; pseudoidentity.*

1. Introduction

This research deals with Woody Allen's film *Blue Jasmine* (2013) in order to closely examine the narrative and non-narrative representations engaged in a pseudoidentity construct of a main character Jeanette "Jasmine" French played by Cate Blanchett. The film is a humour-dominated drama: after the death of her controversial rich husband, Jasmine has a nervous breakdown as her identity

transformations bring a tingle of a sad comedy. Once superb as a socialite of a New York jet set society, Jasmine is fallen on hard times and forced to give up her prestigious lifestyle in order to start a new humble life with her poor sister in San Francisco. In order to travel in the film-present and the film-past, the figure flashback/analepsis appears as both a literary and montage figure and is further explained. It is accompanied by a blues melody “Blue Moon”¹, which suggests a time travel to both the character and the audience (Chion, 1990), while at the same time establishes itself as a dramatized or a concrete narrative (Brown, 2005). Given that the flashback/analepsis implies Jasmine’s inner conflict due to constantly evoking her painful past-time memories, a delusional identity is additionally emphasized by the interplay of modes in the film. Fashion/costumes are in-built in the film text as the theatrical intertextual citations, hence the character’s pseudoidentity construct is suggested by the appearance of a lead actress Cate Blanchett, who plays both Jasmine in Woody Allen’s film and a main character Blanche DuBois in Tennessee Williams’s play “A Streetcar Named Desire”² directed by Liv Ullmann (2009). Altogether, the depicted scenes from *Blue Jasmine* perceived within such transmedia relationship show that the theatrical *mise en scène* from Ullmann’s play is both cited and intertextually represented.

Firstly, in the light of a critical narratology and the interplay of modes (sources), **Transmedia Narratology Within a Postclassical Methodology** explains how different aspects of the filmic narrative are dependent on the specific cinematic signs – hence a connection established between the formal aspects of the images and their ordering in relation to the multimodal semiotics (Machin and van Leeuwen, 2007), as well as in relation to the layers of the narrative (Bal, 1991, 1997). Thus, the story determines a rhetoric which has direct implications on the epistemological value of the text. Bordwell’s (1991) study *Making Meaning: Inference and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of Cinema* supports the scopes of the argument by systematically mapping different strategies for interpreting films in the realm of illustrating the meaning making examples. Secondly, **The Three-Fold Nature of Film Representation Tactics: Mapping the Subject Position or Can the Film Tell Itself?** proposes the way the events are ordered into a story. The way a fabula is framed or re-framed through the process of narration enables us to draw conclusions about the concerns which are embedded into the fictional world (Bal, 1991, 1997). Even when vision cannot be explicitly attributed to a specific agent, we still need to be aware of its implicit value, as Branigan (1992) brings together narration and the fiction in film. As for the transmedia narratology, in the simplest definition, transmedia means multi-genre narration, which supplements and interconnects different dramaturgical questions within different dramaturgical frameworks, precisely film and theatre. Textual transformations, the logic of production and a cultural reception marked the 20th century as the narrative

¹ The “Blue Moon” melody by Richard Rodgers i Lorenz Hart (1934) belongs to the blues musical directin, as supported by Allen’s statement: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jdoDlfWk5Xw> (12/12/2021).

² “A Streetcar Named Desire”, BAM Strong, Eisenhower Theatre, 2009.

practice moved beyond the strictly controlled literary theories towards various interdisciplinary fields intertwined and situated within a new and adjustable methodology (Herman, 2005; Chatman, 1980). Duly, the film text is perceived as a composition of different transmedia indicators, while their arrangement determines the way the narrative and non-narrative elements are used to construct an identity. Thirdly, **Transmedia Dramaturgy Tactics** presents two chapters. The first is **Music and Flashback/Analepsis as a Movement within the Film-Time**. It is shown how the film representations in *Blue Jasmine* depict the figure flashback/analepsis as the means of discursive narrative tactics (Genette, 2006; Genette, 1995; Lakoff and Johnson, 2015). The figure invites the audience to problematize the character's ambiguous identity by travelling back and forth in the film-present and the film-past, as well as emphasizes a time-related conflict within Jeanette/Jasmine. As the melody leads both the protagonist and the audience within the time frame, the music dramatizes itself, i. e. becomes a "concrete" narrative. This thesis is further supported by Chion (1990) and Brown (2005), who established how music in a film could be seen as either an intradiegetic or an extradiegetic narrative. For example, an orchestra may or may not be represented (shown) in the scene, thus be a part of either the intradiegetic or the extradiegetic narrative. The second chapter is **Fashion and Theatre as the Intertext Citation**. Here, the identity ambivalence is analyzed through the theatrical/film props, such as a famous designer's bag used as a transmedially positioned mode bearing the intertextual significance. In the words of Fischer-Lichte (2015), costumes are perceived as a strong representation of a class, group or a general lifestyle value orientation. Since the character is torn between the present and the past, or rather between the two opposite lifestyles, such intertext becomes a semiotic reference to her ambivalent identity.

The **Conclusion** sums up the analysis of Jasmine's pseudoidentity construct – a delusional perception of the character's *self*. A two-fold nature of the construct is represented in a film diegesis by forming a juxtaposed projection of Jasmine's habitus (what she *is* in the present), and the status she wishes to obtain (what Jasmine *used to be* in her past). As Bal (1991) claims, the subject is implicated in diverse features of narrative semiosis, or rather, in a "complex body of semiotic events, which it is possible to analyze in terms of its elements" (p. 158). Bal (1997) believes that the structuring of subjectivity is bound up with the structuring of a narrative, including the fact that interpretation itself is subjective and susceptible to cultural constraints and framings (p. 11). Therefore, this paper brings to light a dramatic citation of a well-known Williams's play through a lead role: Cate Blanchett as Blanche DuBois. Given that the film is both relied on and concerned of spectators' engagement with the text, with their capacity to recognize cognitive schematas, or rather narrative schemas, which help them to process the data, the transmedia dramaturgy enhances the film's intelligibility (Branigan, 1992) and engages the viewer in a sensory and cognitive sense.

2. Transmedia Narratology Within a Postclassical Methodology

The theoretical reviews of postclassical narratology and multimodal semiotics ascribe the general dominance to authors such as Seymour Chatman (1980), Mieke Bal (1991, 1997), David Herman (2002, 2005), Gérard Genette (1995), David Machin and Theo van Leeuwen (2007). Those and many more generally take position that narration is no longer defined merely by the dynamics between the fabula and the story, but is rather expanded to various media influences, modes interplay, all in all, to the mediation of the context and its possible interpretations. In the first place, an ideological determination forms a “certain vision” of a film as it involves the fabula dependent on critical concerns derived from the outer world. The theory of elements, which involves the layer of the fabula, as Bal (1997) asserts, “even more generally than that of the aspects, makes describable a segment of reality that is broader than that of narrative texts only” (p. 178). There are three levels we need to discern at the outset: the text, the story and the fabula, which correspond to Bal’s definition of narrative as composed of these three layers. She claims that “a narrative text is a text in which an agent relates – tells a story in a particular medium... a story is a fabula that is presented in a certain manner...a fabula is a series of logically and chronologically related events that are caused or experienced by the actors” (p. 5).

However, in the early 1990s the story was re-examined by Herman’s *Story Logic: Problems and Possibilities of Narrative* (2002), which explained the transfer from the term ”story“ to a ”story-world“. The answer to how the cultural and media theories may encompass such relations is provided by transmedia narratology. The term “transmedia” was coined by Henry Jenkins in 2003. It encompasses the compelling notion of moving characters from books to films, to theatre, to different and independent story-worlds. The approach reflects literary figures, which enable the transgression from media to media, platform to platform, thus bring the new dynamics and constructs. In the simplest words, transmedia means supplementing one interconnected story by involving a multiplatform, multi-genre and a storytelling approach; It involves multiple media (e. g. film, theatre or books), and orchestrates various modes (e. g. fashion or design). Transmedia dramaturgy inevitably calls for the audiences’ participation across successive platforms not only to heighten one’s enjoyment but also to evoke one’s critical perspective. Needless to say, the conveyed narratives are not perceived as adaptations in a sense of a classical narratology and storytelling, i. e. the transfer of one story onto multiple genres, but are incorporated multiple genres into one coherent narrative experience or environment.

The semiotic approach provides the analytical tools since it does not perceive the text as a purely linguistic phenomenon but argues that the similar understandings can be gathered from the communicative systems different from the language as such. The multimodal system implies the orchestration or *arrangement* of modes in the text. It is an engaging sign system, which draws attention to the realization of closely integrated meanings using a range of modes

in the image or the moving image, such as sound, speech, gaze, movement, costumes, colour, etc. The meaning production experience is based on narratives that are open for further critical expectations by different audiences. In short, the postclassical approach to the narrative puts the plot analyses in the background by foregrounding the rhetoric and semiotic relations of the juxtaposed (media, film) representations.

When taking into consideration the level of the text, the crucial concern is the identity and the status of the narrative agent – the narrator – the subject of narrating that constitutes a function, rather than a person, and that expresses itself through the signifiers that constitute the text. Since narrative presupposes a text, or more precisely, a specific medium such as film, in which a story is told, it is impossible for the spectators to perceive the narrated content directly. As Bal (1997) says, this content is subjectivized, presented, framed, or filtered through a certain vision. In that respect, as far as the status of narration is concerned “I” and “he” are both “I” (p. 21). The difference between the two involves the level of narration, because, technically speaking, it is always the “invisible” external narrator who delegates narration to a character, that is, to an internal narrator. Genette (1995) draws on narrative “representation,” or more exactly, narrative information that has its degrees: the narrative can furnish the reader with more or fewer details, and in a more or less direct way, and can thus seem (to adopt a common and convenient spatial metaphor, which is not to be taken literally) to keep at a greater or lesser distance from what it tells (p. 161-162). As far as filmic narratives are concerned, the signifiers that constitute the text are also expressed through framing, duration, angle, shot/reverse shot, or camera movement; or, more precisely, through the signifiers that are specifically cinematic. Thus, a connection needs to be established between the formal aspects of the image, as well as the ordering of images, and the three layers of the narrative.

The aspects of a filmic narrative are dependent on the certain cinematic signs, and conversely, the way these signs are expressed is dependent on the aspects and elements of narrative. To sum up, the way a narrating subject or “person” is expressed in a filmic text is closely related to the way the story is told, but is also dependent on the fabula, which typically conveys some form of understanding of the world, for example, that the hero needs to be goal-oriented, or that happiness entails a union of a heterosexual couple as is most often the case in the classical Hollywood cinema.

3. The Three-Fold Nature of Film Tactics: Mapping the Subject Position or Can the Film Tell Itself?

Genette's (1995) concept of focalization can prove to be an important contribution in the development of film narratology, even though Bal (1991, 1997) intervenes into his discussion of the typology of narrative situations and distinguishes three types of narrative. The first type is the omniscient narrative, “vision from behind,” with the following formula: Narrator > Character (where

the narrator knows more than the character, or says more than any one of the characters knows). According to Genette (1995), this type, generally represented by the classical narrative, is a non-focalized narrative, or a narrative with zero focalization (p. 189). The second type has the formula: Narrator = Character (the narrator says only what a given character knows). This type is also described as the narrative with “point of view,” with “restricted field,” or “vision with.” This second type is a narrative with internal focalization. The third type has the formula: Narrator < Character (the narrator says less than the character knows), and it can also be described as “vision from without” (1995, p. 189). Hence, even if we are dealing with vision “from without,” or external focalization, that is, even when there is vision *on* the characters rather than *through* the characters, we cannot fail to acknowledge the *subject* of narration.

Following Genette, Edward Branigan’s *Narrative Comprehension and the Fiction Film* (1992) has translated his concepts for film, implying that he has retained the category of zero-focalization, which in fact proves to be the defining aspect of the classical Hollywood cinema in Branigan’s study. In the author’s view (1992), a narrator offers a statement about, an actor/agent acts or is acted upon, and a focalizer has an “experience of” (p.161-174). Having adopted Genette’s position that vision is restricted to the characters, Branigan likewise argues that, subjective vision is only expressed through, and can only be attributed to the *characters*. Hence, subjectivity is discussed in terms of the subjectivity of the camera, as opposed to the so-called objectivity of the camera, which he calls non-focalization. What is more, this implies precise borders between, for example, the “normal” state of the character and his drunken state, where the camera would simulate such a subjective experience, or between “reality” and fantasy, or between the state of being awake or dreaming. Even though Genette’s concepts have remained influential in film studies, Branigan asserts that if experiences are not attributed to a particular individual but rendered in the “third person,” we risk dissipating the distinction between narration and focalization. He (1992) principally defines focalization on the basis of *characters’ vision* - in fact, there is no risk involved here, certainly not for the one who is responsible for the world-view that is represented through the narrated content, for the film seems to be “telling itself” (p. 161-74). There is even less risk involved for the one who interprets the film, his or her personal vision is suppressed for the purpose of obtaining an “objective” analysis. Therefore, while they may function to explain the working of the classical narration, his concepts in a filmic text take into consideration distinctions between subjectivity and objectivity; The conflicting modes of telling; The correlations of formal features which spring from heterogeneous domains; The transgression of generic boundaries.

As a communicative phenomenon, film is best described as a trans-situational event, with possible implicit or explicit staging of interdiscursive clashes. In his critique of Bal’s concept, Branigan objects to her concept of the focalizer, because in his view a focalizer can only be a *character*, whose experiences we are to

share. The analysis of *Blue Jasmine* draws upon the focalization, the protagonist stylization and the overall transmedia dramaturgy tactics, as the transgression from media to media – film/theatre – outlines the methodological principle applied as an integral narrative, contextual consensus. In a cognitive sense (Branigan, 1992, Bordwell, 1991), the spectator is the central figure here, the one who “constructs the film” since he or she is cued to apply various schemas. Music, flashback/analepsis and a semiotic acknowledgement of costumes representations attribute to a theatrical *mise en scène*, which further enforces a viewer’s engagement in a critical observation of the story-word.

4. Transmedia Dramaturgy Tactics

4.1. *Music and Flashback/Analepsis as a Movement within the Film-Time*

Once the methodological foundations have been laid, one should be aware of the danger of the consequences to the approach that subjectivity appears to be a unified investment that is either visible or invisible. This has direct repercussions, not to say serious limitations, for the study of filmic narratives other than those of the classical Hollywood. For example, when we take into consideration the conflicting modes of telling, the correlations of formal features which spring from heterogeneous domains, the transgression of generic boundaries, or the staging of interdiscursive clashes, we can grasp how difficult it is to work with the concept of subjectivity. However, in this paper the risk is taken of considering unidentified or undramatized narrators, without ultimately letting go of the critical perspective, and not setting aside the question of what, why and how are we “cued” to think and, especially, to see the way we do. Most importantly, can we learn to see the world differently?

In *Blue Jasmine* the analysis depicts on this question by taking a position that film representations reflect a construct of identity within a narrative. As stated before, Blanchett plays Jeanette “Jasmine” French. The plot thickens after her rich husband dies and leaves her with nothing. Jasmine, once a rich socialite, experiences a nervous breakdown who is forced to leave a New York jet set lifestyle and to move in with her sister in San Francisco. The conflict between the present and the past plays a crucial role in the making of the character’s pseudoidentity as Jasmine’s ambiguity reflects in her constant dwelling upon the past, while simultaneously she is seemingly unaware of her present.

The first hypothesis is that one of the functions of the flashback/analepsis is to put forward a blues melody “Blue Moon” to serve as the punctuation within the framework of time. The melody is a deixis of the time-travel scenes, meaning it navigates both a subject/main protagonist and the audience. According to Lehman and Luhr (2008), film representations may be motivated by a music narrative, which can be both fictional and factual (p.70-71). Chion (1990) explains what this means: generally, music narratives may or may not belong to particular scenes as an in-built narrative, which contributes to our perception. Such status may be

ambivalent because music-as-narrative can be an intradiegetic element (heard and *seen* in the film scene) or an extradiegetic one (heard but *not seen* in the scene). In this case, the film is motivated by the travel back and forth in time *via* the flashback/analepsis figure. As for the melody, it appears as both intradiegetic and extradiegetic narrative, depending on a scene. Hereby, the figure and music further induce the construct of Jasmine's ambivalent identity. On the one hand, in the film-present the music narrative is extradiegetic, thus reflects a mental projection of Jasmine's memory: she "hears" the melody in the present scene and so does the audience. The melody serves as a punctuation or a signal that Jasmine is "remembering" her past, thus it somehow prepares the audience to "travel" back in the film-time. On the other hand, the melody is also intradiegetic, as in the flashback scene we travel to her past where we clearly see the band playing as a part of an in-built scene. As explained by Genette, the figure juxtaposes what is *represented* to what is *motivated* by the music narrative (2006, p. 100). In the transmedia sense, the figure is both *literary* (discursive) and *montage*, since it positions the protagonist as well as the audience between the two different time frames. In the words of Machin and van Leeuwen (2007), the interplay of modes establishes new meanings when the narrative becomes concrete, or, as Brown (2005) says, as the music narrative becomes dramatized and achieves its legitimization in the narrative. In the depicted scenes the concretization is achieved by the film-time development because the melody proves to discursively (narrative) and formally (montage) connect sequences, hence simultaneously contribute to the causality of the film.

Picture 1 shows Jasmine in the present time, while Picture 2 shows her in the flashback/analepsis scene. Both scenes are accompanied by the same "Blue Moon" theme: in Picture 1 it is heard by the audience as a projection of Jasmine's present state of mind (extradiegetic narrative). In Picture 2 the melody is heard, but there is also an orchestra which actually plays the melody as a part of a flashback scene (intradiegetic narrative).



Picture 1. Present-time and extradiegetic melody



Picture 2. Flashback/analepsis scene and intradiegetic melody

4.2. Fashion and Theatre as the Intertext Citation

As the analysis has shown, the melody bears a three-fold function:

- a) it causally connects the narrative events;

- b) it functions as the punctuation between the present and past;
- c) it is not only the deixis for the audience between “then“ and “now“, but it also juxtapositions the character’s lifestyle with her state of mind in two different time frames.

The second hypothesis puts forward the identity construct concerning the two functions of fashion/costumes in the film/theatre transmedia relationship. One is, a famous fashion brand “Fendi” is represented as the intertext on a symbolic level. The other is, the theatrical citation transmedially interconnects two media, a film and a theatre, thus brings together two different story-worlds in the same environment. To begin with, Picture 3 shows the scene in which Jasmine and her sister shop together. Jasmine French, as the name suggests, has an upscale taste and experience, therefore she chooses a famous designer’s bag. The change of a name from Jeanette to Jasmin stands as the entity of her social rank. Therefore, metonymically speaking, if one should say Here comes Fendi, in this context one would use a fashion-related intertext – a famous designer’s bag – to stand for Jasmine’s represented lifestyle. However, if one should say Here comes Janette, referring to the character’s real name, one would be recalling the fall of the character on a social scale. Moreover, the “Fendi” bag is used as a theatrical prop, a mode which points towards the specific identity construct. In the ethics of fun, the symbolic representation of such fashion citation reflects not only a desired lifestyle but also a larger cultural concept of pseudoidentity – Jasmine’s disillusioned character.

Furthermore, whether audiences realize it or not, there are many elements in films that help guide their attention. For example, semiotic deixes typically bring viewer’s attention to the *mise en scène*. The character and her performance style are a crucial part of it. One of the ways the characters are typically represented is through costumes or clothes actors wear. Costumes are effective as they should reconcile with the design suited to the actor playing the part, as well as with the production design.



Picture 3. Jasmine shops a designer’s bag for her sister

More importantly, in the words of Fischer-Lichte (2015), costumes are inherent to a specific social rank by their dramatic representation and audience identification with the character (p. 255). Even as a single part of a costume may bear a visual significance of an intertextual citation, as well as a cultural representation (Bordwell and Thompson, 2004, p. 87). What is interesting, Blanchett embodies a main protagonist in Allen's *Blue Jasmine*, as well as the lead in Williams's "A Streetcar Named Desire". In the film and the play both protagonists come to live with a sister of a lower social rank and both act in a similar delusional way, which directly intervenes in the way one would approach to the narrative analysis. As previously stated, Jasmine travels through time with a nostalgic melody, which signals a flashback figure and her longing for the past. Similarly, in the play Blanche too longs for the dreamy lifestyle, which is proven by her well-known exclamation: "I don't want realism, I want magic!" Picture 4 shows Blanchett in both of her roles. The scenes show the arrival of the both protagonists to live with her sister. In the end, the theatrical mise en scène citation of the play is acknowledged in the film through the character's intertextual citation.



Picture 4. Cate Blanchett in "A Streetcar Named Desire" and *Blue Jasmine*

5. Conclusion

In this analytical approach to a film, critical narratological and semiotic tools are used in order to examine, show and determine the codependent relationship between the film (cinematic) signifiers and a narrative subject. The aim was to establish how film representations transmedially use the discursive characteristics to portray a lead protagonist within the politics of identity. This paper takes position that in the depicted scenes the event is internally focalized as Jasmine is a narrator telling her story, which even more so enables the audience to acknowledge her pseudoidentity as a distinguishing feature in comparison to other possible narrative constructs.

Bringing together a literary and a montage value, the first hypothesis has been confirmed as it is shown how two different time frames are represented by the figure flashback/analepsis. The figure does not only serve as a temporal

procedure or interpunction (Chatman, 1980), but also assists in a clear distinction between the character's delusional world and the "reality" of the film-world. It has also been explained how the music narrative, once it acclaims its concretization in the context, may become a deixis to the different time frames. The second hypothesis has been confirmed since the modes of fashion/costume in the film/theatre dramaturgy clearly show how the intertexts and the citations transmedially attribute to the identity construct within a story-world. Orchestrated through the character's stylization, the *mise en scène* modes ensemble additionally provides for the construct of Jasmine's psychological anamnesis. This notion is further acknowledged by the fact that there is a same lead actress, Cate Blanchett, in both of the roles of Jasmine/Blanche.

To sum up, the meanings are constructed and represented within the three-fold nature of the film:

- a) *narratology* (story-world);
- b) *semiotics* (multimodal signifiers);
- c) and *figures* (literary/montage performative and rhetoric devices).

In conclusion, this research confirms that the orchestrated modes function within a dramaturgy fabrication; The dramaturgy is established by both the intradiegetic and extradiegetic narratives, which show how the pseudoidentity is constructed with different narrative and non-narrative elements. In the end, by providing the film textual evidence, such ethics of narration invites for the interpretation as the audience becomes actively engaged in the critical visual and auditory stimuli.

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