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## Exploring the Forms and Functions of Film, Comic Book, and Video Game Narration: A Transmedial Approach to Narratology and Contemporary Media Culture

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### Abstract:

Jan-Noël Thon's transmedial approach in *Transmedial Narratology and Contemporary Media Culture* (2016) provides a synergistic analysis of how narration in films, comic books, and video games works. Focusing on the three aspects of storyworld, narrator, and subjectivity, it sheds light on the forms and functions of these elements and their representations in contemporary texts. It thus also facilitates the comparison and transmedial application of many narratological theories.

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Thon, Jan-Noël: *Transmedial Narratology and Contemporary Media Culture*. Lincoln/London: University of Nebraska Press, 2016 (Frontiers of Narrative). 558 pages, 49,99 EUR. ISBN: 978-0803277205.

### Abstract:

Jan-Noël Thon's transmedial approach in *Transmedial Narratology and Contemporary Media Culture* (2016) provides a synergistic analysis of how narration in films, comic books, and video games works. Focusing on the three aspects of storyworld, narrator, and subjectivity, it sheds light on the forms and functions of these elements and their representations in contemporary texts. It thus also facilitates the comparison and transmedial application of many narratological theories.

In contemporary culture, the influence of narrative media beyond literature – of films, comic books, TV series, video games, and podcasts, to just name a few – has increased significantly over the last decades. Naturally, these fields of study have captured the attention of many narratologists and spawned analyses of the media-specific properties of these works and their modes of narration. However, the diversity of narrative media has also resulted in the fragmentation of narratologies and therefore the impeded comparability and transferability of theories – a fact which, in turn, necessitates a transmedial narratology.

The transmedial approach of Jan-Noël Thon's work *Transmedial Narratology and Contemporary Media Culture*, which is a revised and shortened version of his PhD thesis, aims at providing „a *method for the analysis* of particularly salient transmedial strategies of narrative representation as well as a *theoretical frame* within which medium-specific approaches [...] may be systematically correlated, modified, and expanded" (p. xix, original emphasis). In order to achieve this, Thon's work strives to

abandon the realm of strict media-specificity and offer a „media-conscious“ (p. 31) approach instead, which, in terms of a truly transmedial narratology, aspires to „examine a variety of strategies of narrative representation across a range of conventionally distinct narrative media while at the same time acknowledg[e] [...] both similarities and differences in the ways these media narrate“ (p. 31).

*Transmedial Narratology and Contemporary Media Culture* consists of three main parts and these are subdivided into three sections, analyzing contemporary films, comics, and video games. Following the introductory chapter „Toward a Transmedial Narratology“ (pp. 1-31), which both provides an overview of the accomplishments of narratological research and enunciates the above-mentioned goals, the first main part of the book deals with the concept of the storyworld. Thon’s work elaborates on various theories concerning this aspect and brings them together before aiming at elucidating „some prototypical characteristics of [...] [films’, comics’ and video games’] multimodal configurations and the storyworlds they represent“ (p. 70), focusing on texts like Quentin Tarantino’s *Pulp Fiction* (1994), Art Spiegelman’s *Maus* (1980-91) and BioWare’s *Dragon Age: Origins* (2009).

The second part of *Transmedial Narratology and Contemporary Media Culture* is dedicated to the analysis of „Narrators across Media“ (p. 123). After illustrating and commenting on various concepts of narratorial representation, Thon deduces that the narrator is a „decidedly transmedial concept“ (p. 166) and that „it is neither the mode of representation that is used to represent the narratorial representation [...] nor the question which narratorial role its narrator fulfills [...] but rather the combination of narratorial and nonnarratorial representation that primarily defines the medium-specific forms and functions of narrators across media“ (pp. 163-164). Subsequently, Thon applies this transmedial concept of narrators to contemporary works like Tom Tykwer’s *Run Lola Run* (1998), Craig Thompson’s *Habibi* (2011), and Ubisoft Montreal’s *Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time* (2003), whilst putting special emphasis on the conception of unreliable narrators in films, comics, and video games.

The last of the main parts of the book focuses on subjectivity across media. Striving to elucidate „how contemporary films, comics, and video games may employ a variety of transmedial and medium-specific markers of subjectivity“ (p. 325), this chapter analyses strategies of subjective representation across media in examples like David Fincher’s *Fight Club* (1996), Neil Gaiman’s *The Sandman: Season of Mists* (1992) and Frictional Games’ *Amnesia: The Dark Descent* (2010).

*Transmedial Narratology and Contemporary Media Culture* is an extremely valuable contribution to the efforts of achieving a truly transmedial perspective without losing sight of the media-specific aspects of texts. Its structure may seem needlessly repetitive at first glance. However, a closer look shows that the outline’s uniformity regarding the recurrent analysis of films, comics, and video games allows for

the compatibility and comparability of approaches – a *sine qua non* of transmediality. Thon's book makes use of a large body of contemporary texts and offers consistently comprehensible and well-informed analyses of these examples with regard to the application and transmedial comparison of narratological theories. While the conclusion could have been more detailed and could have focused more on bringing the developed narratological strings together instead of merely offering an overview of „Roads Not (Yet) Taken“ (p. 327), Thon's approach to transmedial narratology is nonetheless invaluable, mastering the balancing act of media-specificity and transmediality with excellence.

**German Abstract:**

**Einblick in die Formen und Funktionen der Film-, Comic- und Videospieldnarration: Ein transmedialer Ansatz zur Narratologieforschung und zur Medienkultur der Gegenwart**

Jan-Noël Thons transmedialer Ansatz in *Transmedial Narratology and Contemporary Media Culture* (2016) bietet eine synergetische Analyse der Film-, Comic- und Videospieldnarration. Der Fokus der Arbeit liegt dabei auf den drei Aspekten der Storyworld, des Erzählers und der Subjektivität. Damit bringt sie Licht ins Dunkel der Formen und Funktionen dieser Aspekte bzw. ihrer Repräsentationen in Gegenwartstexten. Darüber hinaus wird dadurch sowohl der Vergleich als auch die transmediale Anwendung vieler narratologischer Theorien ermöglicht.

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