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Introduction

Empirical Approaches to Narrative

Empirical approaches to narrative explore how interpreters make sense of stories and how specific narrative designs cue readers to respond to texts in predictable ways. This is a truly interdisciplinary project that calls for close collaboration between narrative theory, especially the domain of literary narratology, and the methodologies of cognitive psychology and discourse processing. The former combine intuitive knowledge drawn from aesthetic experience and introspection with insights gained from textual analysis and interpretation and engage in various forms of abstraction, classification, and generalization. The latter employ a wide range of methods and techniques, from questionnaires, physiological measurement, and eye movement monitoring to computer-aided tagging of texts. The core question is: How does narrative comprehension work, and what variables influence the cognitive processing of narrative material? Answers to these question will allow us to understand how stories affect the receivers of narrative, whether they are readers of written literature, viewers of film or television, or interlocutors in conversational storytelling.

This first special issue of *DIEGESIS* seeks to promote an interdisciplinary debate on empirical approaches to narrative. While many narrative scholars may be hesitant to engage with experimental studies and quantitative approaches in their own work, the benefits of evidence-based investigations are becoming increasingly obvious as more and diverse studies focus on key concerns of narratology. In particular, we believe that theoretical and empirical contributions are best viewed as mutually dependent rather than alternative ways of studying narrative. In fact, the potential advances inherent in combining literary, linguistic, and psychological takes on storytelling and story sharing will yield a more complete understanding of narrative communication.

"Empirical Approaches to Narrative" offers four contributions that represent the state of the art in empirical research on specific features of narrative and their potential effects on readers. In their joint paper, "Difficult Empathy: The Effect of Narrative Perspective on Readers' Engagement with a First-Person Narrator," Caspar J. van Lissa, Marco Caracciolo, Thom van Duuren, and Bram van Leuveren explore how the choice of narrative technique affects the degree to which readers adopt a character's perspective. Based on a combination of experimental and qualitative evidence, the authors argue that the perceived reliability of complex characters in heterodiegetic narratives exceeds that of homodiegetic narrators. Andrea Macrae's experimental study, "You and I,

Past and Present: Cognitive Processing of Perspective," investigates related phenomena, namely the impact of person and temporal deixis upon perspective taking. In this study, participants were presented with four variants of a short fictional text identical but for the narrative situation (first-person vs. second-person narration) and tense (past tense vs. present tense). A clever dependent variable allows Macrae to test the effects of these aspects of narrative structure on readers. The third paper, "Empirical Correlates of Narrative Closure" by Tobias Klauk, Tilmann Köppe, and Thomas Weskott, considers another reception phenomenon, the perceived ending of narratives. In order to identify the psychological reality of narrative closure, the authors use an experimental approach to isolate the features associated with the psychological feelings of closure. The final paper shifts the focus from fictional narrative to face-to-face communication. In "Narration and Escalation: An Empirical Study of Conflict Narratives," Evelyn Gius provides a careful methodology using a computer-aided analysis of narrative features in order to understand conflict narratives in the context of personal relationships.

These evidence-based investigations offer new perspectives on key concerns of narrative theory and the systematic study of factual narratives. By demonstrating how informative empirical evidence can be obtained both by means of experimental studies and by corpus analysis, the papers presented here also serve a methodological purpose, providing a demonstration of how the tools of experimental psychology and corpus linguistics can be applied to issues in literary theory. Conversely, by deriving research questions from narratological research, these empirical approaches also emphasize the critical role of literary theory for psychological studies of textual comprehension and reading. We hope, therefore, that this special issue of *DIEGESIS* will stimulate interdisciplinary debate and strengthen the ties between our disciplines, especially furthering the dialogue between literary theory and the study of cognitive processing.

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