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Seymour Chatman

Cinematic Discourse: The Semiotics of Narrative Voice and Point of View in *Citizen Kane*

Università di Urbino
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I start with the unoriginal suggestion that narrative structure is semiotic, that is, meaning-bearing in its own right, quite independently of any medium, whether visual (silent films, comic strips, mime shows), auditory (oral literature, musical narratives) or audio-visual (sound films). No matter how they are manifested, narratives uniformly operate in terms of an independent communicative system composed of a small but clearly definable set of signs. A paraphrase of C. W. Morris' definition of sign will suffice for our purposes: «Something is a sign (or signifier) of something else (technically a designatum or signified) to the degree that a user of the sign takes account of the designatum (signified) in the presence of the sign». (De Saussure has argued, convincingly, that «sign» should be used for both the signifier and the signified (*signifiant* and *signifié* in French)). There are several reasons for so gingerly offered a definition. For one thing, Morris recognized that the nature of the sign-user's behavior must not be too narrowly conceived: his «taking account of» could be no action at all, but simply a disposition to act. For instance, if on a mountain trail we read the sequence of linguistic signifiers painted on a tree «Watch out for rattlesnakes», we may continue exactly the same path at the same speed, simply keeping a sharper lookout. Or we may refuse to believe the sign. Thus the expression «taking account of» avoids enmeshing semiotics in an overly crude behaviorism. Note that there is no limitation whatsoever on the material nature of the signifier: it can be anything, literally, in the universe. The signified, on the other hand, is conceived of as a mental event, while the *referent*, the thing that the sign refers to, can be anything that exists. Thus a sign must have a signified, but it may have no referent — for example, «unicorn.» Nor is there any requirement that the interpreter of the sign be human or even animate: a machine could function as a sign-user, that is, it could be put into a state of «taking account of something by a second thing.» Finally, there is no restriction

on the whereabouts of the signified; though obviously the signifier must be present to the user's mind for semiosis to occur, the signified may or may not be co-present. In the case of the so-called indexical sign (an arrow above a door through which one is supposed to pass, for example), the signified is co-present; in most cases, however, it is not.

Why does it make sense — it it does make sense — to say that narratives are semiotic structures quite separate from the content of any given story? I take it, incidentally, that I do not have to defend the thesis that narratives entail *some* kind of structure or system: practically every high school and college textbook refers to point of view, voice, angle of vision, character and the like as «structural» or «systematic» properties of stories and novels. The only question is whether narratives are *semiotic* structures, that is, independent composites of meaning-bearing elements in their own right, quite abstracted from the medium in which they are communicated and the unique story-content which they communicate. It is to that question alone that I address the rest of my remarks.

E. M. Forster in *Aspects of the Novel* (and Aristotle, implicitly, in the *Poetics*) delimited the *event* or *action* as the basic unit of the narrative, and the chain or sequence of events as its skeleton. This is in clear contrast, for example, with the expository essay, where the basic unit is the *assertion* and the principle of organization of these units is logical, not temporal. I would argue that the narrative event is therefore a semiotic unit: a sign-user (reader of the novel, movie-goer or whoever) takes account of a designatum, that is, a narrative signified, namely the *event*, in the presence of and because of a diverse body of stimuli which constitute the *narrative signifier*. Now what makes this confusing, but only slightly so, is that the *narrative* signifier may be itself semiotic at the level of a *second*-order structure: that is, *its* signifiers are themselves already complete signs and combinations of signs at a lower or first-order of semiosis. Obvious narratives using a purely verbal medium are of this order. Take any example: from Hemingway's *The Killers*, «The door of Henry's lunchroom opened and two men came in.» Now each of the words in this sentence are signs at the lower, that is, the first or purely linguistic level: the sequence of letters (or sounds — depending on whether you're reading or hearing this narrative /d//ɔ//r/), constitutes a signifier whose signified is the class of wellknown constructions of wood, metal, glass or whatever by means of which we enter and exit buildings, rooms and so on. Now the whole sign, the signifier, that is the *word* «door», combined with the signified, this class of objects, is a component in the sentence, «The door of Henry's

lunchroom opened and two men came in.» This has its own meaning in English, quite independent of the story; from it many others can be derived: Henry has a lunchroom, the lunchroom has a door, there were two men, these men opened the door, they came into Henry's lunchroom and so on. This sentence *as* sentence operates at the purely linguistic or first level of semiosis. But though complex at this first *linguistic* semiotic level, this sentence is a simple unit at the second or *narrative* semiotic level: it is the *narrative* signifier of the *narrative* signified, the whole of which constitutes the narrative *event*. The sentence means, narratively, *event*. So is the sentence which begins another famous narrative, *Wuthering Heights*: «1801 — I have just returned from a visit to my landlord — the solitary neighbour that I shall be troubled with.» But the following sentence does *not* constitute, in and of itself, an event at the secondary, narrative level, even though it begins the novel *Pride and Prejudice*: «It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife.» Nor does the following: «All happy families are like one another; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way» (from *Anna Karenina*). These are, rather, assertions, and might just as easily begin expository essays on social conditions or whatever: it is only later sentences in these novels that establish the temporal chain of events, hence the narrative structures of these texts. Thus we can recognize only retrospectively that these first sentences were in fact pronouncements by pontificating narrators. Or take a sequence in *Citizen Kane*: Kane breaks up the furniture in Susan's bedroom, throws her things around, tears her bed apart, and so on, and ends up by stumbling off clutching the crystal ball with the snow scene inside. This clearly constitutes an event in the narrative of *Citizen Kane*: since nothing is said there is no first level *linguistic* code forming the signifiers for the events as signifieds. The signifiers are more directly mimetic, or as semioticians say, iconic, at least in an illusionistic way. That is, though they are literally shadows cast on a screen by a projector, the images closely resemble (in outline, movement and so on) bodies and events depicted in the story. But from our point of view this event is a narrative sign in precisely the same way as are the events evoked by the sentences from *The Killers* and *Wuthering Heights* above. Thus, the narrative sign is an entity which may be abstracted by the semiotician from any particular story regardless of the medium in which it is embodied.

Now you may very well argue at this point that if it is a semiotic structure, as I claim, the narrative must be a very peculiar one, since it has a veritable infinity of signifiers, but apparently only one signified, namely *event*. This isn't true, since events cannot occur without agents

to perform them and patients to be affected by them. So there must be at least one other class of signifieds, namely what can be called *existents*. In *The Killers*, the two men are existents, or more precisely that sub-class we call *characters*, while in *Wuthering Heights* the «I» is a character and the landlord-neighbor, who of course turns out to be Heathcliff, is also one. Kane too is a character. And there is another sub-class of existents, namely objects or people in the *setting*, which helps spatially to situate the significant agents and patients: the door, the lunchroom, the estate called *Wuthering Heights*, etc. So we have at least three possible kinds of signifieds in narratives: events, characters, and objects in the setting. Still not a very great number. But there is no inherent need in semiotic theory for there to be a great numer of signifieds, nor complete parity between signifiers and signifieds. Think of the relatively small number of signifieds in the traffic-sign system: stop, go, turn, slow down — one cannot think of many more. Think also of the variety of different signifiers that can be used to represent a single signified: for «stop,» for instance, we can have our hexagonal stop sign, or a red light, still or flashing, or a policeman's hand held palm out, or a lowered barrier at a railroad track, or white lines painted perpendicular to the right of way with pedestrians walking between them, or a variety of temporary barriers, yellow cones, for instance, placed by street repairmen, and so on.

A further crucial distinction, which in another sense is only a refinement of what I have already said: every semiotic system has two basic dimensions, or *planes* as they are usually called, a plane of content and a plane of expression. So far we have identified only the set of elements that constitute narrative content at the abstract level, namely events and existents. Let us call narrative content *the story*. We have noted on the other hand that the *expression* of these content or story elements can be very diverse — that, for instance, the medium may be itself a semiotic system operating at a lower level, as in verbal narrative, or that it may be more strictly iconic, as in a silent movie sequence, or a comic-strip without dialogue bubbles or captions. The same story, say Jack and Jill, can be «translated» so to speak from one to another medium. But common to all narrative media is the plane of narrative expression, which is called the narrative *discourse*, again in imitation of a French structuralist term, namely *discours*. Now just as there are large abstractable signifieds of story, like events and existents, there are large abstractable signifiers of the narrative discourse which operate across and often quite independently of the medium. One is the presence or absence of a *narrative voice* — that is, an audible or audiblizable teller of the story. Some narratives, like Renoir's *The River*, or the

novel *Great Expectations* and its movie adaptation, present the voice of a narrator quite distinctly — in these cases one who had been a character in the events retrospectively depicted by him or her. Now obviously there is a material difference between the way Pip the narrator of *Great Expectations* communicates to us in the novel and in the film: in the novel all the words we read purport to be transcriptions of his words, and even the speeches of other characters are supposedly communicated to us through his memory and voice alone, while in the film we hear him as a voice-over on the sound-track. (The fact that his voice is continuous in the novel and only intermittent in the film is of both esthetic and narrative-theoretical interest but one too complex to go into here). In a comic strip, still another convention is used to indicate that what we read are narrator's words: the words are placed, not in a dialogue bubble, but as part or whole of a single frame, separated from the story drawings by a horizontal line.

In other or so-called «narratorless» narratives, on the other hand, there is a substantial effort to *avoid* the impression that anyone is telling the story. It seems simply to transpire before us; in a metaphor that is a bit confusing to the broader semiotic perspective, they are sometimes called «camera-eye» stories. *The Killers* is usually offered as a standard example: Hemingway, all critics agree, wanted to give us the impression that the events just happen, that there is no one who is recounting them. Most films follow this practice, so examples needn't be cited.

Which brings us to the question of point of view. Point of view must be sharply distinguished from narrative voice as a semiotic concept. Narrative voice, as I have said, is an effect derived from a sense that we are being *told* something by somebody; it may or may not be present in a narrative. A narrative voice presupposes a living being outside the story though he may once have participated in it. Point of view, on the other hand, is the *stance* or position that someone takes in respect to the events of the story, and that someone may be a character or he may be the narrator (if there is one). Further, it is crucial to recognize that the term «point of view» has at least three separate senses: firstly, a literal sense, that is, the spot from which someone *perceives* something — by means of eyes, ears or whatever; secondly, a figurative sense, that is, «someone's world view, ideology, *Weltanschauung*, his general conceptual orientation»; and finally a transferred sense, that is, «someone's interest-vantage, his situation in respect to profit, welfare, well-being, quite independently of his awareness of them.» The following sentences, I hope, will clarify:

1. Perceptual point of view: From John's point of view standing at the top of Pike's Peak the panorama was magnificent.

2. Conceptual point of view: From John's point of view, the President's position on taxation was indefensible.

3. Interest point of view: Though he didn't realize it at the time, the divorce was a disaster from John's point of view.

To repeat, point of view is the stance or situation or orientation or condition from which things and events are perceived — they are not — repeat not — the *expression* of these things and events. And *most* importantly, the point of view (of whichever of the three sorts) and the expression of that point of view *need not* be lodged within the same person. A narrator may represent the point of view of a character, or the character may represent his own point of view, say in dialogue, introduced by words like «He thought» or «He said,» or his point of view may be simply represented, objectively, without the presupposition of a narrator's presence, as in the Stream of Consciousness convention, and so on.

These then are some examples of the complexities one can expect in the treatment of point of view. In the film medium the possibilities are extremely complex, although not all of them are totally utilized, certainly not in ordinary Hollywood products. The first and most obvious additional source of complexity is that films have not one but two immediate information channels, the visual and the auditory (and in the auditory, not only voices but music, natural sounds and so on). Further, not only can these occur independently (sound-track black screen, or full picture with complete silence), but they can be co-ordinated in various ways: the sound may be fully synchronized, as when a character's lips move and we hear his voice, or out-of-synchrony — as when the character's lips do not move yet we hear his voice — in which case the convention has it that we are hearing his unuttered thoughts. And the situation can be still more complex. There might be a voice-over and a voice-on running concurrently; it may even be the same voice, as in Bresson's *Diary of a Country Priest* where the voice-over is the voice of the priest's diary narrating (as *discourse*) the very action in which we watch him play his part (in the *story*). Or in Robert Altman's *Images*, where the voice-over of the distraught heroine runs along in obsessional composition — she's trying to write a children's novel about unicorns — at the same time that we see and hear her on the screen trying to maintain a humdrum conversation with her husband. The elaborations of point of view in films will, I feel, become even more complicated as the art develops.

Secondly, the point of view may be that of a *character* or that of *narrator*, or, if there is no narrator, that of the camera, that is the «implied author.»

Let us consider a character's point of view first: in the simplest situation, we have the bare visual record of what happened «out there,» as in *The Killers*. Now in a film, though it may move, the camera can only be shooting from some single point at a time. This point need not coincide with the perceptual point of view of any character. In that case, the movie is passing before us in a relatively pure visual objectivity. It is from the point of view of the implied author alone. The camera eye is that of an onlooker who is not in the story and is identified in no way with any character; whatever identification we may feel with a character results simply from thematic empathy, that is, *interest* point of view, perhaps merely from the fact that he tends, for story reasons, to be on camera more than anyone else.

But if a character's perceptual point of view is to be *explicitly* followed, several options are available: the actor can be placed in such a position in the frame as to underline our association with him, utilizing the depth of field effect, as in *Citizen Kane*, or expressly avoiding it, keeping the background a blur (as in *The Red Desert*) to show how distraught he is. The character's back or side profile may be placed on the extreme right or left margin of the screen, and as he looks into the background we look with him. The other or montage convention uses a simple match-cut: in the first shot, the character looks off-screen, either to right or left (or to front or back), and there is a cut to another set-up which was not visible in the first shot but one which can be imagined to be within his eyeshot. We assume that he has in fact seen that thing, from the perceptual point of view in which we left him. And we see it with him from that point of view. (Or vice-versa: we may see the thing first and secondly cut to the character who is looking at it.)

In either case, it is not completely determinate whether we have seen the object separately from the character, conjointly with him or through him. But there is a kind of perceptual sympathy — in the technical sense — between us and the character. An example from *Citizen Kane* occurs when Thompson, the reporter, arrives at the Thatcher Library. The scenario reads:

Fade in — interior library medium shot — camera shooting up to statue of Thatcher above — music playing — camera pans down to engraving on base — camera moving back (the legend:) WALTER PARKS THATCHER. Then the curator, Bertha, says off camera, «The directors of the Thatcher Memorial Library have asked me...»

(at this point the camera moves back to show Thompson standing in the foreground, Bertha sitting at her desk, holding the phone, talking — echoes are heard) [and so on].

I take it that the viewer here is supposed to feel a combination of awe, amusement, and slight depression by this spectacle of plutocratic self-adulation; and the camera moving back to reveal Thompson looking up at the statue seems to show that he feels this way too. But that's inevitably an inference; we *see* Thompson, just as we see the statue, though we are in some sense seeing the statue *with* him, we are *sharing* his perceptual point of view. And this odd phenomenon — having a character present who is both object of our vision and mediator of our vision — can only occur in a visual narrative, since in verbal forms only one or the other is possible. In other words, it is relatively easy to show perceptual association with a character in films and relatively hard to insure conceptual association, while the opposite is true in verbal narratives.

On the other hand, the director can, if he wishes, genuinely limit perceptual point of view, force us to see from a position not alongside the character, but from literally behind his eyes. This is the so-called subjective camera technique, employed continuously (as far as I know) in only that terrible movie called *The Lady in the Lake* (Robert Montgomery playing the hero often carried the camera strapped to his chest). The illusion is achieved in obvious ways: for example by eliminating any view of the character's body unless he is looking in a mirror, or showing extremities of his body at the edges and corners of the screen; having other characters who speak to him look directly into the camera; having objects that hit or touch his face, like fists and cigarettes, move directly into the lens, simultaneously obliterating all other images, and so on. If the character is moving forward, the camera will illustrate that by tracking forward, showing what is ahead of the character, usually utilizing hand-held techniques in jerky, uneven movements to simulate walking. Subjective camera is good for capturing interior monologue situations: it does not require a narrator, and the words spoken by the character's voice-over are easily interpretable as his thoughts, since no other character is responding to them.

The situation of narrated films is complex. Since the audio and visual channels can be discontinuous, several possibilities arise. One variable is that the narrator may be either on-screen or off-screen. If he is on-screen, he may either function as a narrator or as a character. In the first instance, the visual channel is a frame for a secondary narrative: the picture is of a narrator telling a story to someone (either another

character, or if the speaker is directly facing the camera, the audience). This, of course, is the case of most of the interviews in *Citizen Kane*: various characters — Leland, Susan, Bernstein — tell their part of the Kane story to the reporter Thompson. But the cinema's forte, of course, is its extraordinary capacity to reproduce the visual, and it is difficult to conceive of a movie being content to show nothing more than an act of oral narration. Indeed, although many films employ narrators, their use is almost always brief and introductory and/or transitional. *The Third Man*, by Carol Reed, is typical; the narrator is heard for only a minute or two, telling us something of what Vienna was like just after the war; but he yields to the action so quickly that people who otherwise remember the movie quite well usually forget his existence (and indeed it took me four viewings and a reading of the script to identify him — he's actually an ex-blackmarketeer, not the British police officer Callaway, as many people think). *Wild Strawberries* is very unusual in using the voice-over narration as extensively as it does, and even that use is only a fraction of the running time of the film.

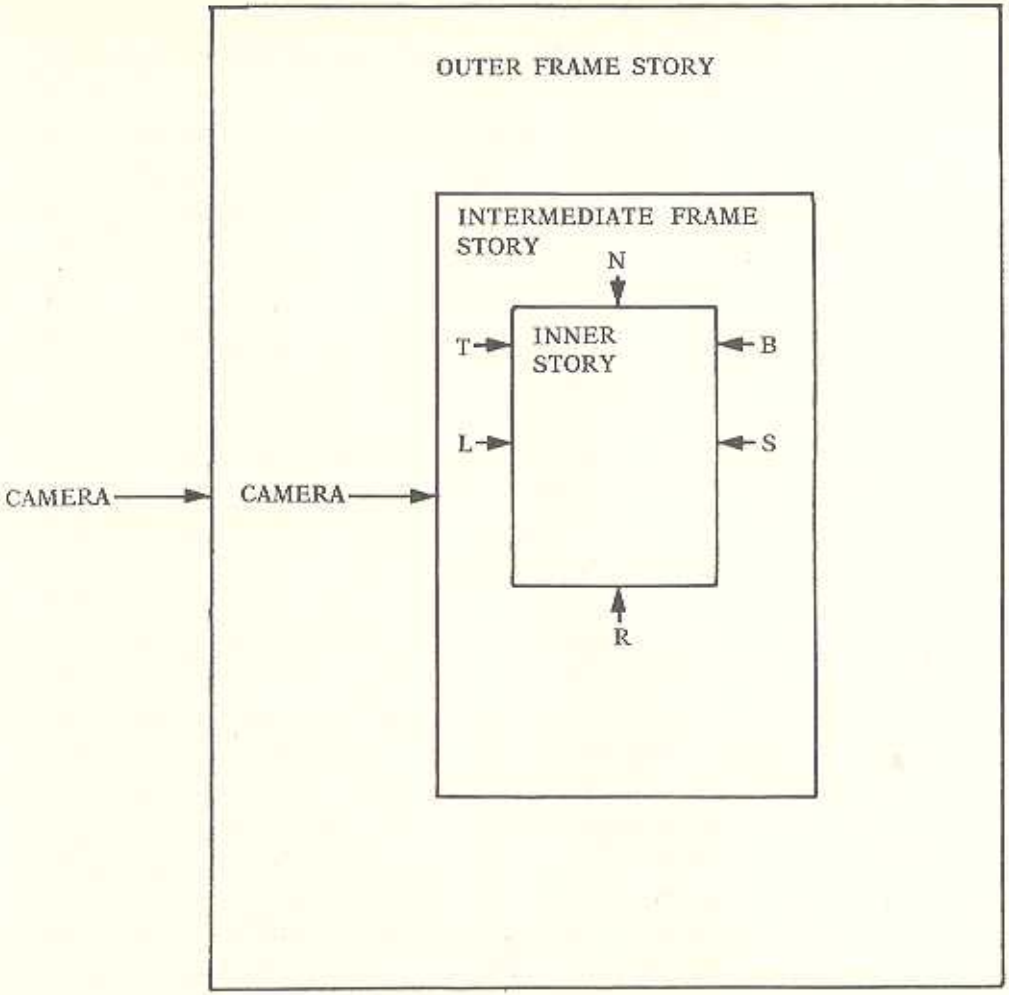
Off-screen narrators can either corroborate what is happening in the visual channel — in which case there is a virtual redundancy between the channels, the story being *both* told and shown — or they can provide information at odds with the visuals. The corroboration may be relatively straightforward, or it may be highly interpretative, explaining to the audience what would otherwise be enigmatic, say by providing information which is not visible (the motives of the characters, their hidden thoughts, their history, what is happening elsewhere and so on). Among narrations which do not corroborate the visible action — an option which one would like to see filmmakers experiment more with — one can distinguish between those which are unrelated to it in any obvious way and those which contradict it in some way: this is the cinema's version of the «unreliable narrator,» although, of course, the visible action can also be unreliable, even in the absence of a narrator. The filmmaker may wish the audience to «see things.» Or both camera and narrator may lie, as in Hitchcock's *Stage Fright*, a fascinating effect, which Truffaut prudishly disliked for some reason. And I've already mentioned the possibility of the co-presence of the narrator's image on-screen, that is, as a character, as in *Diary of a Country Priest*.

Various options used in verbal narratives are also possible for the off-screen narrator. The narrator may be a first person retrospective narrator, recounting events that occurred before, as does Pip in the film *Great Expectations*, or Professor Izak Borg, in *Wild Strawberries*. Both of these are the heroes of their narratives; but of course the narrator may instead be a witness, as in the novel and film *The Great*

Gatsby. Or the narrator can be an anonymous voice, the counterpart of the covert or effaced narrator in fiction. There is a whole school of semi-documentary films, like *Naked City*, that favor this technique.

Let us now see how some of these distinctions apply to *Citizen Kane*, a movie with a particularly strong and sophisticated narrative structure. The story of *Citizen Kane* — «story» always in the strict technical sense, the *what* of the narrative as opposed to the *how* of the discourse — is the set of events in their natural order that transpire in the life of the newspaper tycoon Charles Foster Kane, from the first moment the discourse picks him up, as he plays with his sled in the snow in remote Colorado, through his sudden inheritance, rise to fame as a crusading newspaper publisher, campaign for governor, disgrace and defeat, efforts to make his second wife an opera star, seclusion in the mysterious and bizarre castle in Florida called Xanadu, breakup with his second wife, and finally to his lonely death, with the word «Rosebud» on his lips. Second, it is the story of the unsuccessful efforts of the producers of a newsreel to find out the secret of Rosebud (and hence what made Kane tick). Finally, it is the brief but essential story of what happened after the news-team leaves Xanadu, namely the burning of the sled with the decal of a rosebud on it. The structure of the three stories is not linear but *nested* or Chinese-boxed by the discourse. The first or inner story is what is told and shown by the first version of the newsreel, what is recounted to Thompson, the *News on the March* reporter, by four characters, Bernstein, Leland, Susan Alexander Kane, and Raymond, Kane's butler, and what is read by Thompson in a diary kept by Kane's banker, Walter Thatcher. These six accounts constitute an intermediate frame story. Its duration is the brief period in 1941 immediately following his death. That intermediate story, the story of the search for Rosebud, is in turn enclosed in an outer-frame story in which the secret of Rosebud is revealed to the audience alone. There are concurrently three levels of discourse: first, the six-part narrative transmission of the inner story; second, the non-narrated, that is *shown* or camera-eye transmission of the *intermediate* frame story; and finally the non-narrated or camera-eye transmission of the outer frame story.

The Inner story is first transmitted by the newsreel (N), its visuals and its accompanying commentator; then by the quaint handwriting of Thatcher (T), transformed, transvisualized if you will, in a standard conventional way; then, similarly, transvisualized vocal accounts of Bernstein (B), Leland (L), Susan (S), and Raymond (R) — narrators of the inner story as characters in the intermediate story. They *had been* characters in the inner story when they were younger, of course,



just as Pip *is* narrator and *was* character. Thompson, the reporter, however, is a character in the intermediate story only, not in the inner. The transvisualization of all six voices is achieved by an inner camera which has a kind of figurative existence: the conversion of words into images is a convention whose metaphorical or *as-if* nature should not be overlooked, despite its commonplaceness.

So all the letters — N, T, B, L, S, R — add up to «Inner figurative camera communicating the words spoken by the narrators to Thompson.» The intermediate story of the search for Rosebud, in turn, is transmitted by the camera alone; but this is a real camera — we literally see its registrations; it is intermediate since its authority ends with the de-

parture of the news-team from Xanadu. The outer frame story, finally, is transmitted by the profounder, truly omniscient (or better omnispective), or outer camera.

The director could have elected simply to show Kane's whole history; or to have it told by one narrator. What he does rather is to have it both shown (in brief passages at the beginning and end), *and* told — told by a series of six narrators — first by a newsreel voice, then by Thatcher, his guardian and banker, but through his journal, not *viva voce*, then by two old friends, Bernstein and Leland, then by Susan Alexander, his second wife, and finally by Raymond, his head butler. The discourse is a kind of communal focussing on the same set of events; Welles himself called it «prismatic» — it's a good term for a common design in twentieth century fiction and cinema (*Rashomon* is another brilliant example). It works particularly well here, given the controversial nature of the character and the enigma of his dying word, which remains an enigma to the news syndicates and thus to the world in the story, but not to us in the real world.

The riddle — the prologue sequence — and its answer — the epilogue — are shown rather than told. The camera shows us what no one in the fictive world knows, now that Kane is dead, not even the man who has tossed the sled into the fire, namely that the expensively sought-for word «Rosebud» is inscribed on it. At that moment the camera is not the only instrument of the implied author's revelation; the music helps point it up too: the same kind of lugubrious music is used in both prologue and epilogue, tying them into a unity. Thus, it too is a sign in the composite narrative. After the camera moves back and up away from the departing news-team, it scans the pile of objects, Kane's legacy, first from a relatively high level, and then lower down, accompanied all the while by quiet nostalgic music; but, as the sled is reached and picked out of the scatter, the music suddenly turns sombre, then still more dramatic and heavy as the workman throws the sled into the fire, and it begins to burn. Here music, as often in films, provides not only atmosphere, but also commentary and even plot information. In this instance it is what converts the shot from a mere random survey of Kane's accumulated scraps into a search, a search for the *key* object. Suddenly we see the solution to the mystery from the perceptual point of view of the camera, that is, of the implied author. But it is the audio-channel that tells us that what we see is in fact the solution. «Rosebud» is a sled; Kane died thinking about that tie to his past, and we are left to speculate about how childhood experiences affect an entire

life, despite Thompson's remark, «I don't think any word can explain a man's life.» Music is a tool of the implied author, not of any of the narrators. It is like italics: it tells us nothing directly, but it instructs us to pay special attention to certain aspects of what is being shown. The point of view expressed in this sequence is not that of any of the characters in the film. It is the implied author who «lets» the sled «appear» in close-up at the end. «Lets appear» would be precisely the limit of his powers if this were a verbal narrative. But there is also the underlining of the music, which informs us what to make of that appearance. The implied author of a film has more channels of communication open to him than does the implied author of a literary narrative. But still the information imparted along these channels is of a connotative, rather than a denotative character. The lugubrious music in the prologue and epilogue of *Citizen Kane* has the same function as an expression like «bare branches» in the following sentence from *The Killers*: «Outside the arc light shone through the bare branches of a tree. Nick walked up the street beside the car tracks and turned at the next arc light down a side street.» The bareness of the tree branches is gratuitous to *The Killers* as far as plot is concerned, but it corroborates, connotatively, the mood evoked by the story, the context of the inescapable imminence of an anoymous murder. It cannot be attributed to the narrator, since there is «no» narrator (i. e., the story is «minimally narrated»). Naturally, description in literary narrative and music in cinematic narrative, like other connotative devices, are more heavily dependent on context than are denotative elements — the narrative events in their causative chain; indeed, it is the plot itself that establishes the context against which connotative elements take on their meaning.

But *Citizen Kane* is also *told* by a series of narrators. Each of these has his own point of view (in the several senses of the term) and one of the best things about the film is the way these are co-ordinated and articulated, particularly in terms of sequencing and rhythm. The first, the newsreel, has the conceptual point of view of an editorial board, whose agent, the film editor, is to be imagined going through old newsreel footage to make some kind of coherent narrative of Kane's life. Thus he is «processing» raw history. What he works with are segments taken by a variety of newsreel cameras over the years, that is, the perceptual point of view of many anonymous and long-gone newscameramen who once stood close to Kane, as he performed his historical antics, to photograph him. The ideology and interest points of view in this section are the most distanced and superficial of the six accounts:

here is a quickie commercial product, aimed at a mass audience, stressing Kane's wealth, the enigmatic quality of his politics, the sensational sex scandal that led to his divorce and retirement from politics, the mystery of his later life at Xanadu. It is a sketchy outline for the real biography to follow. The prose is *Time-Life* style. The brisk announcer mouths grotesque sentences like: «For forty years appeared in Kane news-print no public issue on which Kane took no stand.» As Pauline Kael points out, prose and image are «processed» (slick and easily swallowed, like processed cheese). The slickness takes the form of a superficial kind of «logic» — the stance of the weekly newsmagazine like *Time* and its newsreel counterpart *The March of Time* is that it digests the news for you, arranges it under orderly categories. This makes it, of course, easier to swallow, but not because you the reader (or better, consumer) are too stupid to handle it in another form; rather that though an educated, well-organized, logical fellow, a business man or professional, who has things in perspective, you are so busy being successful that you want to spend the little leisure time at your disposal as efficiently as possible. So categories are sharply drawn and neat: first the wonders of legendary Xanadu (elephants, octopi, etc., «the loot of the world»); 2. the details of the funeral itself, with a transition montage of newspaper headlines from around the world; 3. a rapid sketch of Kane's financial empire (paper mills, apartment buildings, factories); 4. a history of the rise of that empire (shots of the Colorado Lode, of the original *New York Inquirer* building, etc.); 5. the anomaly of Kane's politics (Thatcher accusing him in a congressional investigation of being a communist, then quick cut to a Union Square radical accusing him of being a fascist, then, to cap things with a coy enigma, a quotation from Kane himself — «I am, have been and will be only one thing: an American» — (whatever that means), taking no overt political stance, but, in that typically «American» way, suggesting volumes about our «free enterprise system», «democracy», etc. At the same time, the newsreel shows (inadvertantly) that his politics were not really matters of conviction (in the American myth, no «great» man's are); 6. a series of shots showing that he was fond of hobnobbing with famous people: Kane and Teddy Roosevelt, Kane and Hitler; and so on. However, even the *News on the March* editor doesn't find the account completely convincing. Something, some main clue or key, is eluding his film. So he hits upon the idea of finding out what Kane's dying word meant. Welles has publically regretted the gimmick, but it was clearly one that the editor of a major news organ could

believably pursue, and it certainly is believable that the first thing that would occur to him would be a gimmick. More importantly, for our purposes, the gimmick provides the pretext for a full-scale reportorial inquiry, which leads in turn to the «prismatic» structure and the multiple narrators.

Thatcher is dead, so the reporter has to go to his memoirs to read aboud Kane. This first visual recreation of past events (unlike the others) has as its basis a written record; it is not the product of Thompson's questions. During the reconstruction of Thatcher's narrative, Thatcher is always on camera, suiting both the structure of the film in this early stage and the character of the tycoon. As the first of the narratives, it establishes the pattern for all the others — what happens at the moment after we read over Thompson's shoulder the words «I first encountered Mr. Kane in 1871 . . .» is the Hollywood-conventional dissolve into actual images — shot of the snow-bound Colorado home and a boy on a sled, and so on. This is the first intervention in the «frame» narrative, Thompson's search for the answer to the mystery, a *sign* by which the film says in effect «we will now show you visually the events and scenes that Thatcher's words recall.» At this moment the narration fades into the «events themselves.» Thus, dissolves and other transitional devices are here semiotic: they are signs of the transformation of the status of visual images.

In this first version of the story of Kane, there is careful attention to to the question of the authority of the perceptual attribution. Nothing is shown that Thatcher hasn't seen himself, that is, is *shown* seeing for himself; this also suits his character, because, clearly, unlike Leland he is a realist, not a man given to caring about what other people — particularly people like Kane — do in private moments. His — next to the newsreel's — is the most public view of Kane. The private moments are saved for Leland, for in the transformed cinematic «showing» of Leland's narration, intimate events are presented which he could not possibly have seen. And there is no explicit accounting for this knowledge; we can only infer that his friendship with Kane was so close that Kane would tell him the details of what transpired at his breakfast table on the morning after his honeymoon and at a variety of succeeding breakfasts. So by the time we get to Leland, narrative authority is handled much more freely. That is, Leland need not be an immediate witness to the dissolution of Kane's marriage for the summary to be attributed to him. As Jean-Paul Sartre recognized long ago, the brilliant montage-sequence of the breakfast table tied together by «speed pans» to represent elapsed time-intervals, is the cinematic counterpart of what

we can imagine to be a verbal narrator's summary statements; hence, the montage sequence is a discourse-element, and is a semiotic, since meaning-bearing element (=«summary»). If this had been a novel Leland would probably have said to Thompson: «They were very much in love at first, but gradually they broke apart. A lot of things contributed: the odd hours Charlie kept, his attacks on the President, Emily's anti-semitism,» and so on. Interestingly, perhaps to offset this more daring treatment of authority, much is made *visually* of the story-telling process. Leland is placed on the left side of the screen; on the right side, a dark shadow on the hospital corridor floor turns into the Kane breakfast room for the first flashback; and the two images are superimposed for a long time — much longer than an ordinary flashback dissolve. It is almost as if Leland were an Elizabethan prologue to a play, sweeping the curtain away to reveal the actors within.

With the exception of Leland's part of the narration, the perceptual point of view is more generally handled in the objective manner used in the Thatcher sequence. That is, a character who starts by narrating a portion of the action soon gives up his narratorhood, i.e., his voice off-screen ceases and he becomes fully visible on the screen, as a character, whether in the midst of the action or on the edge of the frame; in the latter case his perceptual point of view is emphasized. As for Leland's conceptual position, that is generally limited to what we have heard him say to Thompson and what we can infer from his behavior towards Kane in the story itself. The narrators' ideologies do not impinge on the presentation of Kane's character; they simply complicate it, since their views are so much at odds with each other. It is thus that the enigmatic nature of the character is guaranteed. But for all the film's recourse to different narrators, the camera remains an independent objective recorder of the surface appearance of Kane's life, and its principle is the portioning out of what it shall show in a given narrator-character's memories of his association with Kane. Thus, the conceptual point of view of a given narrator is also invoked by the choice of which portions of the story are given him to tell (and «show»). Bernstein tells about the good old days when the *Inquirer* first got started (since he's an optimistic and loyal fellow); Leland tells about Kane's failure in marriage, politics, and as an opera impresario (since he's an alienated and embittered fellow); Susan tells about her marriage to Kane and his old age, since that affected her most, and so on. But once any narrator embarks on a portion of Kane's history, the camera takes over, the character being transformed from subject of the frame-story to object in the contained-story.

But there occur at least the rudiments of another possibility, something more subjective, in the course of Susan's part of the story. The usual pattern is followed at first: she starts talking and the camera takes over by means of a flashback dissolve. But then transpires what to me is one of the most brilliant sequences in the movie, and its treatment of point of view is quite startlingly different from anything that has come before — the montage-sequence recounting Susan's disastrous national opera tour, ending up with her attempted suicide. It consists of a phantasmagoria chiefly evoked by double exposures: headlines of the *Inquirer* newspaper in each of the cities of her tour superimposed upon the chaos of the stage, the flashing light warning that the curtain is about to rise (this keeps recurring, like the music), the angry face of her voice coach, Matisti, the cast milling about, and so on. And there is sound superimposition too: unlike a similar montage used previously in Leland's portion, Susan sings her aria, but the orchestra is not accompanying her; instead it plays an angrily discordant theme, evoking in relentless regularity of rhythm and repeated bass notes the drudgery of the tour and her failure everywhere. This is what the orchestra sounds like to *her*! The sequence ends with Susan's voice dying out as if on a rundown phonograph; and the spot-light finally switches off. Then darkness and heavy breathing, the breathing of a woman who has taken an overdose of sleeping pills. The effect of this sequence, I would argue, is subjective; for all intents and purposes we are in Susan's head, but not now as narrator but as character: the lights are flashing at us, Matisti is glowering at us, and the audience is snickering about us, even if, strictly speaking, they aren't directly facing the camera. I think the reason for our sudden sense that we are no longer onlookers, but are inside Susan's mind, looking out, despite the lack of the ordinary clue, the usual subjective camera, is precisely that the scene approaches the phantasmagoric. For some reason that I can't completely account for, it seems relatively easy for movies to evoke the subjective effect as soon as it deals in fantasy, when the camera stops recording strict visual reality and puts things together in terms of what contextually would be a character's illusions.

But that's only a minute or two in a movie the rest of which is objective in the strictest sense of the word. I don't know whether objectivity is inevitable in film. I doubt the validity of Siegfried Kracauer's thesis «... that film is essentially an extension of photography and therefore shares with this medium a marked affinity for the visible world around

us. Films come into their own when they record and reveal physical reality . . . And since any medium is partial to the things it is uniquely equipped to render, the cinema is conceivably animated by a desire to picture transient material life, life at its most ephemeral.» That may be historically true, but it does not seem to me essentially or innately true; it may very well be that filmmakers up to now simply haven't been experimental enough to challenge the thesis.

Seymour Chatman

University of California
Berkeley

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