

# Mediativity, Mediageny and Modality as Discursive Strategies of the Real in Comics

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**Abstract:** The coexistence in comics of elements such as iconic and linguistic signs allows this medium to stage its own codes. This relationship between the image and the writing is the result of a balance of power. Through this, the comic strip questions its own linguistic mechanisms, its semiotic codes or the properties of its medium. This medium, which exploits one or other of these possibilities to construct meaning, establishes the relationship between mediagenicity and mediativity. Mediativity concerns the nature of the signs mobilized by each medium, its semiotic configuration. It integrates the study of modalities and questions the sources of knowledge conveyed by an utterance as well as the modes of access of the speaker to these sources, and therefore to this knowledge. It manifests itself, therefore, through the media's ability to seize subjects or themes borrowed from other sources. Mediagenic describes the ability of a narrative project, or even of a genre, to come to fruition by choosing the media partner that best suits it. It designates the media's ability to find the "right shape". Modalization produces a mark or a set of formal marks by which the subject of the enunciation expresses his greater or lesser adherence to the content of the statement. Mediativity, mediagenics and modalisation identify the mechanisms, strategies and the way in which meaning and reality are constructed in discourse. Thus, in this work, the problem in which we are interested is that of the adequacy between the imaginary and the expressive possibilities of the media, considered in their own physicality and which participates in the construction of meaning and reality.

**Keywords:** Comics, Mediativity, Mediagenics, Modalisation

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## 1. Introduction

Comics are a paraliterary genre that is full of many expressive possibilities. It deploys for its operation, iconic and linguistic signs and borrows from other arts, means of expression. This leads us to question the adequacy between the imagination and the expressive possibilities of the media it offers. This reflection undoubtedly leads to questions of an aesthetic nature relating to the specificity of the arts and the media, the particularity of forms and their intersection, the separation or regrouping of media imaginaries. Mediativity, mediageny and modality become discursive strategies that generate meaning. They carry within them networks of meaning that virtualize or actualize reality. In this work, the analysis will focus on the content of the comic strip. A few titles will serve as illustrations. We will define in a theoretical framework the concepts of mediativity, mediagenics and modality and then we will show how they are expressed in comics.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

To clearly understand the problem, the theoretical framework will focus on three (3) aspects: the narration of the image, the mediativity and the mediagenic narration and the discursive modalities in the comic strip. The objective is to show how these elements, as discursive strategies, reflect reality.

### 2.1. The Narration of the Image

Any image can be read as a story. It then becomes narrative developments that go beyond it. Philippe Marion [3] establishing the relationship between the pictorial image and the caricature affirms: "the graphic icon does not have this referential transparency, its semiotic identity passes by an irrepressible effect of trace, of signature. If, in photography, the referential effect is irreducible, the effect of

subjective interpretation of reality is equally so in drawing” P. Marion [3]. He maintains that to describe the image, to verbally translate the represented, “it would be difficult, if not impossible, to dissociate descriptive and narrative” P. Marion [4].

Gauthier, for his part, presents the image as a model endowed with both a character of “introdetermination” and “extrodetermination”. The introdetermined model considers the image “as a closed world, self-sufficient, expecting no contribution from off-screen (...), no external stimulus”. G. Gauthier [2].

The extrodetermined model, on the other hand, posits an image that “exists only through a continual external stimulus, whether potential or realized. The field is perpetually open to the off-screen, an inexhaustible source of renewal ». G. Gauthier [2].

In his article entitled *Some semiotic reflections about acting*, Georges Hani [11] declares: “The resemblance between the two frameworks would then encourage us to see in them a kind of semantic analogy, reinforced above all by the common semes between “unstable” and “change”, “unstable” being defined as that which is changing.”

## 2.2. Mediativity and Mediagenic Narration

The relations between mediativity and mediagenicity become apparent when they constitute means of expression characterized by the same “media” element. Thierry Groensteen [1] finds it important to identify which of the elements that define a medium contribute most directly to endowing it with a “specific potential”. In this regard, Marion adopts the definition of Eliseo Veron, for whom each media is “a whole constituted by a technology plus the social practices of production and appropriation of this technology” P. Marion [3].

Mihaela Alexandra Tudor and Stefan Bratosin [12] argue: “the media participate in the construction of the social imagination. Like globalization, media coverage now designates a phenomenon on a global scale that both common sense and scientific research seize upon”.

For Camila Perez Lagos [13], “the media do not represent the event but participate in the operation of meaning of the event”.

For Philippe Marion, “the media refers to content, ideas, forms, characters, etc. who have a transmedia aptitude often accompanied by a propensity for intergeneric slippage: they easily spread from the written press to the cinema, from radio to television, from journalism to advertising, from reporting to soap operas, etc.” P. Marion [3].

Wolton argues that it is “a diaphanous solidarity that is established between individuals (...) creating a communication that is undoubtedly a little strange, but probably typical of our ‘mass individualistic’ society”. Wolton [7]. Media then becomes synonymous with consensual. Media is what offers the possibility of combining individual exposure to the message and simultaneous awareness of integration into the community.

hierry establishes the relationship between mediativity and

mediageny. He asserts: “Mediagenics, I said, can only be gradual, relative. Indeed, to postulate that there exists, for certain subjects at least, an “optimal way” of realizing themselves, this means that other ways are also open to them, but that their degree of adequacy is weaker. Similarly, it is easy to distinguish at least two degrees in the mediativity of a determined medium: on the one hand, what it authorizes or makes possible: the eventual and on the other hand, what it favors, that is to say, preferentially calls or arouses: the virtual in the strong sense of the term. One could think that there also exists an absolute degree of mediativity, which would be degree zero: what the media absolutely excludes”, Thierry Groensteen [1].

Médiativity and Médiagénie thus become narrative forms capable of being interpreted, as Ricœur [6], puts it “New narrative forms, which we do not yet know how to name, are already being born, which will attest that the narrative function can metamorphose, but not die. Because we have no idea what a culture would be like where we no longer know what it means to tell” P. Ricœur [6].

We therefore argue that mediativity and mediagenicity are significant forms in which content is capable of being interpreted. They both contribute to reporting reality. If they are similar by certain traits that unite them, they are also distinct by their own specificity. Each of them becomes a semiotic model capable of being grasped.

## 2.3. Modality

Linguistics deals with the problem of modality at two levels. It analyzes the concept of modality in a general way and seeks to specify what this term covers. It studies the phenomena and the markers of modalization in the different particular languages. It thus joins to a certain extent the traditional grammar which distinguishes, for example in French, the indicative mode (mode of the real) from the conditional (mode of the unreal). It also mentions, in addition to the adverbs of time, place, manner, etc., a category of adverbs of “opinion” (such as “certainly” or “perhaps”), called in certain grammars “modifiers”. “.

For Maria Holubowicz [14], “A demystification would therefore be a kind of counter-discourse, an alternative and essentially critical discourse on something, this something that could stem from a more or less tangible reality or from its putting into words, either from other speeches.

Julien Longhi [15] states: “The analysis in grammar of meaning (...) provides a good representation of the types of verbs, types of adjectives, etc., which constitute the style of the text.”

Nicole L. Q. defines modality as “the expression of the speaker’s attitude in relation to the propositional content of his utterance” Nicole [5]. It seems to be quite clearly opposed to those of temporality and aspect, its boundaries remain controversial. In addition to alethic, deontic, epistemic and appreciative modalities, some suggest intersubjective (order, advice, reproach), boulic (willingness), implicative (condition, consequence, etc.) or even temporal modalities; or include negation in this category.

### 3. The Discursive Strategies of Reality in Comics

Several strategies reflect reality in comics. They are embedded in the modalities contained in the written discourse as well as in the media and mediagenic narration. We will enumerate in the following lines.

#### 3.1. The Realistic Hero and the Anti-hero

Unlike the “superhero” whose strength and powers are always more or less supernatural, the classic hero always presents himself in the guise of a human being. It is embodied in the reality with which the public easily identifies. What characterizes him as a hero is a set of human qualities (boldness, courage, justice, etc.), brought to a high level of perfection in him. He is always inhabited by an ideal of generosity which pushes him to place himself regularly on the side of the weakest. He attacks injustice or tyranny (in all its forms), is on occasion a righter of wrongs, defender of the widow or the oppressed. Its qualities are truly put to the test, if the risks are higher.

The human being does not always give such a rosy image of him and his shortcomings or faults cannot fail to inspire certain authors who are particularly gifted in satire. That's when we have the anti-hero. After the hero, the most important character in an adventure comic book is usually its inevitable adversary: the villain, the anti-hero, formidable enough to put the hero in difficulty and so cast doubt on the outcome of their confrontation until the last pages of the story. What identifies him shows how much, we always grant to the creation of this essential character, the living image of the evil with which the hero will always be confronted. Incidentally, the characteristics are roughly similar to those of a hero, except that they are negative. Like the hero, the anti-hero has a strong personality, relating to negative character traits: delusional imagination, madness, treachery, dissimulation, tyranny, etc. Physically, it will be more or less worrying. His attire and his attitudes are always carefully chosen so as to reflect reality, to exalt or play down his evil personality. The Superman cinematic series initiated by Richard Donner's [9]. film in 1978 will be part of the standards of disaster and action films of the time much more than it will inherit the tone of the comics of the 1940s.

#### 3.2. Urban and Interior Decorations

Not all towns, all neighborhoods of a town, and all the houses on a street are alike. Each city, each district, each house, each building has its character, its charm, its atmosphere that the images of the comic strip must faithfully restore.

The interior decor always reflects the personality of its occupants. Most often, in comics, a particularly expressive angle of view and foreground almost always characterizes the setting. The cartoonist diversifies the setting by identifying it with reality. Hollywood films like *Prince Vaillant* (Henry Hathaway [8]), adapted from the boards of Harold Forster,

will move the narrative style towards the side of the great form: the decor, the space and the environment.

#### 3.3. The Forces of Nature

There are elements that contribute to the construction of the story. These are the natural elements. They bring atmosphere to the story. A landscape will always seem more or less melancholic. The rain will give an impression of joy, while the wind and the storm will always create an atmosphere of drama. The wind blowing at the crossroads of two streets animates the decor and gives it the atmosphere of reality.

#### 3.4. The Drawing of the Characters

The various emotions and feelings will be expressed throughout the story, by words but also by gestures or facial expressions. The drawing of the characters reflects this reality. Each character, if he is physically well characterized, has the head and physique of his role. Human beings appear physically quite different from each other. Certain proportions of the body vary somewhat according to the identical constitution of the individuals.

The muscular type is characterized by a tall, strong, and muscular physique. His rib cage is developed, the hips are narrow. He is energetic, active, full of vitality and always on the move. He is cool-headed, practical, and always optimistic.

The digestive type, meanwhile, is large, round, fleshy. In him the abdomen clearly predominates. The limbs are short. Very often in comics, he is the type of good living, loving his comfort. Open, sociable and realistic in the actions he takes. However, when the natural characteristics of this type are pushed to the extreme (immoderate taste for luxury, avid search for the pleasures of this world, laziness, etc.), the character will come to give a completely negative image of his type, the image of the decadent and materialistic man often used as the adversary of the hero.

Gestures and attitudes are never without reflecting more or less the moods of the characters. These are expressed through an infinity of expressions or gestures. Expressions and facial expressions, in comics, are seen very closely, in close-up, when the characters express their feelings or manifest their emotions with maximum intensity. The drawings of the faces of the characters are therefore particularly neat so as to establish apparent features with reality. The story of *The Adventures of Tintin: The Secret of the Unicorn* (Steven Spielberg, [10].) is exemplary of this kind of standardization of the graphic and rhythmic virtuosity of the designers. Tintin is characterized by the traits that define him: his courage, his curiosity and the ideal he defends.

#### 3.5. The Marks of Modalisation

The personal mode of the verb, in comics, implies the appreciation of the process expressed by the verb as real, certain, possible, achievable, desired, uncertain, unreal, etc. From this point of view, the modes are in opposition to each

other. The basic opposition is on the one hand, between the appreciation of the trial as real, certain and possible and on the other hand, virtual. The first attitude is expressed in French, by the indicative mode. It is present in the linguistic text contained in the bubbles. The other modes express the possible process in various hypostases: realizable, possible properly speaking (the subjunctive); conditioned, possible if a condition is met (the basic meaning of the conditional); possible but for the moment only desired (the optative sense of the conditional); possible, but for the moment only supposed (the hypothetical meaning of the conditional); possible but for the moment only requested (the imperative).

In addition to verbal modes that express either reality or virtuality, several other statements shape the narrative in comics. We distinguish them:

- 1) the alethic value (from *aletheia* "truth") which states logical truths, i.e. what falls within the domain of the possible/impossible, necessary/contingent, etc. Often, the statements are of a scientific nature expressing indisputable data (figures, general truths, physical laws, etc.). As an example we have: "All men are mortal";
- 2) the epistemic value considers the chances of realization of the predicative relation. The following statements illustrate this: "He must be late", "He can arrive today";
- 3) the deontic value appreciates the predicative relationship, positively or negatively, according to pre-established rules, a code of ethics. By way of illustration, we have: "You cannot park your car here" (moral impossibility but not formal prohibition), "If you want to have your exam, you must prepare for it";
- 4) the radical or intersubjective value, which relates to the relations between subjects. The enunciator orders, authorizes, etc. We have as an example: "You can leave" (permission), "You must be here before eight o'clock" (obligation).

All these stated modalities are discursive strategies that virtualize with the real. They construct significant modalities that account for meaning.

## 4. Conclusion

Comics offer readers a range of visual representations. These representations differ according to the aspects of the situation that they select, the degree of salience of these aspects, their level of abstraction, the point of view from which they are seen, etc. In this perspective, iconic and linguistic conventions aim to provide the expressions necessary for this structuring. This conception of media and mediagenic communication has the merit of agreeing on the experience of discourse. This is what we have shown in our work. A discourse that builds images, models of approach but also goes in the direction of the iconicity communicated by the language to reflect reality.

## 5. Recommendations

The comic strip is a paraliterary genre that uses several

modes of expression to reflect reality. Mediativity, mediagenics and modality are discursive strategies in this medium that contribute to the construction of reality. It is a reflection that gives clues in the light of semiotics. The article is therefore recommended to students, researchers and teacher-researchers working on comics. A few articles we have already published in this area might further guide readers. Those are:

1. Journal of the Interdisciplinary Center for the Study of Contemporary Discursive Forms *Interstudies*; Intertextuality in comics; pp 114-124, No 26, 2019, ISSN 2065-3204;
2. Scientific Review of Semiotique Yourou; The effects of temporality in the still images of comics; pp 125-136, No. 8, ISSN 2519-9919;
3. Journal of Letters, Languages and Sciences of Man and Society; The iconic image and meaning in the comic strip *Aya de Yopougon Tome I* by Marguerite Abouet; pp 99-114, N 10, Vol. 1, December 2020; ISSN: 2518-4237;
4. Review of Letters, Languages and Sciences of Education; The icono-linguistic sign and the implicit in comics; pp 90-103, No. 05, Vol. 2, February 2020, ISBN 978-9537299-3-1.

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