

[Texte de présentation en anglais]

Nowadays, the word and image study is one of the essential concerns of human sciences. Paradoxically, few books are devoted to this subject in the current publications... What about editorial collections? To fill in this gap, the Research Group on Image and Text – Grit/Groupe de recherche sur l’image et le texte, founded at the Université catholique de Louvain by Pierre Massart (deceased in 2006) – offers a collection entitled “Texte-Image”. Directed by Jacques Carion, Laurent Déom, Jean-Louis Tilleuil and Catherine Vanbraband, it collects theoretical works on specificities, respective or combined, of text and image, along with studies on corpus that takes advantage of the semiotic diversity of these two languages: like comic books, illustrated books for children, cinema, advertisement...

Seventh volume of this series, “*Aire libre*”, *Art libre ?* expounds the analysis of five comic books from the current field of French-speaking *bande dessinée* (2002-4). To study a multicode message like comic strip, we elaborate an analytical method considering first the image, then the space of text, and finally the text itself. We apply this method to key sequences coming from the five comic books of the corpus (due to the duo Bailly/Lapière and to the authors Blutch and Stassen). This reading gives an original attention to the text of the comic strip. Considering this corpus, we want to describe rationally the move of aesthetical values which composes the contemporary French-speaking field of comics (2002-4). The selection of comic books is based on “Aire libre” collection, representative of the neutral production of this field and typical of the aesthetic place of “bourgeois art”. This prestigious comic book series is published by Dupuis, a well-known Belgian comics’ publisher, which belongs to the field of large-scale production and is traditionally dedicated to the middle-brow art. The narratological analysis (within the work) precedes a sociological analysis (outside the work), i.e. a study of relationships between institutionalized conditions, from the position that artistic creators occupy within the system of production and circulation of symbolic goods, and narratologic characteristics of the work produced from this position. In doing so, we distinguish the general stylistic characteristics of two types of narration, classical and avant-gardist. It turns out that the aesthetics of the comic books selected from the “Aire libre” collection establishes a compromise between the two previous types.

So few studies consider comics for what they truly are, i.e. as a complex sequential mix of images and words. This work may claim to this value because it takes into account the three narrative components – iconic, plastic and textual – of any comic strip. Another merit of this research is that it does not fall into the trap of a meaning closed upon itself, of an immanent sense confined within the formal limits of the work. To properly appreciate the results of the narratological analysis, we compare them with the conditions of the context of production, which has an effect on its significance. For the occasion, we identify this context to “Aire libre” collection, which has left its mark on the recent history of modern-day French-Belgian comic strip, and occupies from now on a strategic position in this cultural field of popular productions. By combining semiotic and sociologic aspects, within and outside the work, we elaborate an analytical method intentionally cross-curricular, which borrows concepts not only from comics’ studies, but also from film, literature and theatre theories.

The author, Benoît Glaude, is Ph.D. student of Languages and Literature at the Université Catholique de Louvain (Louvain-la-Neuve). He bases his research on the stylistic of comics’ dialogues, under the direction of Professor Jean-Louis Tilleuil.