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Audio-describing visual filmic allusions

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Audio-describing visual filmic allusions

Filmic allusions, and especially different types of visual allusions, have become a staple of many film genres today. However, a systematic methodology for studying such allusions in film appears not to have been developed. The present study therefore makes use of terminology and concepts from literary studies to analyse how specific references or markers in one film refer to marked items in another, older film, creating meaningful but often indirect links between the two productions. Using the audio-described version of a French parody film that abounds with allusions in different forms and combinations, *Astérix et Obélix : Mission Cléopâtre* (Chabat, 2002), the study goes on to investigate how the audio-described version, which makes audiovisual products accessible for blind and visually impaired audiences by verbalizing the productions' visual narration, tackles these allusions and their indirect referencing system.

Keywords: audio-description – cinematic allusions – parody – intertextuality

1. Introduction: filmic allusions and audio-description

Filmic allusions are a form of intertextuality that offers film-literate audiences a richer filmic experience by evoking earlier films in the film they are watching through the use of different types of cues. Employed as a device to activate the memory of a film seen in the past while watching a new film, allusions also prompt the audience to interpret the current film on the basis of their knowledge of the evoked film.

In recent years *filmic allusions* have become prevalent in many film genres. Such allusions, as well as the use of pastiche and filmic tributes to film classics or directors, the preference for non-linear story lines and self-reflexivity are often named in one breath as the quintessential characteristics of postmodern cinema. Classic examples of postmodern films making abundant use of allusions and other forms of intertextual references are the works of the Coen Brothers, David Lynch, Peter Greenaway and Quentin Tarantino.

In addition, the systematic use of allusions has greatly contributed to a specific filmic sub-genre within comedy, the parody film, as is amply demonstrated by the following random

examples of this often less artistically prestigious subgenre : *Casino Royale* (Guest, Hughes, Huston, McGrath, & Parrish, 1967), *Airplane!* (Abrahams, Zucker, & Zucker, 1980), the *Austin Powers*-films (Roach, 1997, 1999, 2002), the *Shrek*-sequel (Adamson, Asbury, & Vernon, 2004; Adamson & Jenson, 2001; Miller & Hui, 2007; Mitchell, 2010) and the subversive work of the Monty Python comedy team. Next to these two loosely grouped types of productions, the postmodern film and the parody film, there are scores of others that regularly allude to their precursors, often in the form of parodies. However, they cannot be considered either major classics or genuine parody films. As Sturtevant writes,

[Parody] can be used to define an entire film, such as *Airplane!* (1980), which is a parody of the disaster movie. But the word can also be used to describe any technique by which one film references another for humorous effect. (2007, p. 261)

When allusions are key elements in cinematography, reference to them may be crucial in audio-description (AD), which makes audiovisual products accessible for blind and visually impaired users. AD translates the visual mode of, for instance, fiction films (our present topic), into an aural-verbal narration that makes use of the original verbal-aural and non-verbal aural modes of the film, i.e. its dialogues, sound effects and music, to produce a new coherent, purely aural target text. However, studies devoted to the way in which AD handles intertextuality are limited. Maria Valero Gisbert (2012) has described a number of examples of audio-described filmic intertextuality in Tom Burton's *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (2005). Ivona Mazur and Agnieszka Chmiel (2011) briefly mention an example of a filmic allusion to *Pretty Woman* (Marshall, 1990) in a Polish film with AD within the context of a study into reception research. In addition, the guidelines that were the outcome of the European project 'Audio Description. Life-Long Access for the Blind' (ADLAB, www.adlabguidelines.eu) contain a chapter on 'Intertextual references', stressing the importance of paying attention to intertextuality when writing an AD script, and giving a

number of concrete examples.

Generally speaking, however, not much attention has as yet been devoted to this specific challenge for AD in scholarly publications. That is why it seemed appropriate to undertake a first more systematic analysis of the way in which AD deals with visual allusions to previous films. In order to ensure that sufficient relevant cases would be forthcoming, we chose a test-case film with AD that was likely to yield numerous concrete examples of described filmic intertextuality.

2. Theoretical concepts

A definition of what exactly we understand by the concept of *allusions* is required, since different terms, often with slightly different meanings, occur both in the literature on different types of intertextual allusions generally and in the specialized literature within a filmic context.

2.1. Allusions, parody, pastiche and satire

Terms such as *filmic quote* (Mamber, 1990), *filmic quotation* (Zanger, 2006), *cinematic quotation* (Horton & McDugal, 1998) and *cinematic allusion* (Biguenet, 1998) are used almost indiscriminately to refer to visual allusions, i.e. allusions referring to the images proper, allusions to dialogues, allusions to the sound track, or allusions to the titles or themes of other films.

In addition, it is important to remember that most studies dealing with allusions are an integral part of more comprehensive studies and theories on parody, satire and intertextuality, the latter sometimes with an ironic slant.. On the whole, such studies underline that allusions are a textual local phenomenon; one that is often used within the framework of satires and/or parodies, but that can also be no more than a neutral rather than a satirical reference to another film.

Turning to film studies, it becomes apparent that even though there are a considerable number of studies devoted to allusions, satire, intertextuality, parody and reflexivity (Biguenet, 1998; Feuer, 1997; Horton & McDugal, 1998; Hutcheon, 1990; Iampolski, 1998; López, 1990; Mamber, 1990; Metz & Deane, 2010; Sorin, 2010; Stam, 1992), there is little or no agreement on the appropriate terminology for naming these different intertextual forms nor on the way the different variants should or can be distinguished from one another.

In the present study we will therefore use the term *allusion* systematically to denote a relatively easily identifiable and demonstrable local reference to another film. As indicated above, such allusions can rely on different media and modes: images, dialogues, parts of text (titles, credits, ...), music, sounds or leitmotifs and content-related themes. Since many allusions refer to other concrete artistic or semi-artistic media, such as (literary) texts, newspaper articles, publicity slogans or spots, songs, films etc., a characteristic that is also typical of parody more generally, it would appear that allusions can be studied most efficiently within the framework of parody.

However, the next question that then arises is: how does one distinguish parody from pastiche? In her in depth study of filmic parody and pastiche, grounded in Gérard Genette's *Palimpsestes* (1982), Cécile Sorin points out why parody and pastiche are not the same:

Le nature de la cible [nous] permet de partager sans équivoque la parodie du pastiche, la première s'attaquant à un corpus singulier et le pastiche à un corpus pluriel. La parodie se caractérisera comme une transformation, détournement d'un œuvre singulière et le pastiche comme une imitation, synthèse stylistique et thématique déformante, d'un genre ou de tout autre corpus pluriel pouvant par son principe d'homogénéité s'offrir à cette pratique. (p. 33)

[The nature of the target allows [us] to distinguish parody and pastiche unequivocally The first targets a specific representative of a corpus whereas pastiche targets a larger, multiple corpus constituted of several items. Parody involves a form of transformation, the manipulation of a single work of art whereas pastiche involves imitation, stylistic

synthesis and the distortion of a theme, typical of a genre or of another larger corpus that is sufficiently homogeneous to lend itself to such practice.]

Nevertheless, one of the remarkable conclusions of Sorin's study is that when specific examples of allusions in films are examined, it is often quite difficult to determine which ones are instances of parody and which are instances of pastiche. It is virtually impossible, for instance, to produce a pastiche of the western genre without making use of allusions to specific, clearly identifiable westerns. In other words, parody is often used even in pastiche. We will therefore use the term *parody*, which has the widest applicability, as the umbrella term for the type of effect achieved by allusions to both specific films and to film genres.

Similarly, theoretical publications about the different forms of reflexivity discussed so far, have also encountered great difficulty in trying to distinguish between parody and satire. The most generally accepted view regarding the difference between these two concepts is that

[l]a distinction entre la parodie et la satire réside dans la 'cible' visée. La satire est la forme littéraire qui a pour but de corriger certains vices et inepties du comportement humain en les ridiculisant. Les inepties ainsi visées sont généralement considérées comme *extratextuelles* dans le sens où elles sont presque toujours morales ou sociales et non pas littéraires. (Hutcheon, 1981, p. 144)

[the distinction between parody and satire resides in the intended 'target'. Satire is the literary genre that aims to correct certain human vices and ineptitudes in human behaviour by ridiculing them. The shortcomings it targets are generally considered to be *extratextual* ones, in the sense that they are almost invariably shortcomings of a moral or social nature, not literary ones.]

Films, however, can rarely be studied independently from the society in which they are played out and/or were made in. That is why filmic parodic allusions are often satirical allusions as well.

Parody is frequently connected to satire, a form of comedy that emphasizes social criticism. While the target of parody is a text or set of texts, the target of satire is the society that produced those texts. Because genres, stars, and cinematic conventions

express social values, these two forms of comedy intersect in significant ways.
(Sturtevant, 2007, p. 261)

The film used as the starting point for the present study, *Astérix et Obélix : Mission Cléopâtre* (Chabat, 2002), plays a parodic game with other films, whereas it also contains a number of elements that aim to mock specific aspects of contemporary (French) society. The allusions it contains therefore serve both satiric and parodic purposes.

2.2. Allusions and markers

Film studies often offer very elaborate analyses and descriptions of specific allusions (Biguenet, 1998; Feuer, 1997; Horton & McDugal, 1998; Iampolski, 1998; López, 1990; Mamber, 1990; Sorin, 2010; Stam, 1992; Sturtevant, 2007) but do not formulate a genuine *theory of allusions*. That is why the present piece of research will use Ben-Porat's study of literary allusions as its theoretical starting point. The author writes that

The literary allusion is a device for the simultaneous activation of two texts. The activation is achieved through the manipulation of a special signal: a sign (simple or complex) in a given text characterized by an additional larger "referent". This referent is always an independent text. The simultaneous activation of the two texts thus connected results in the formation of intertextual patterns whose nature cannot be predetermined.
(1976, pp. 107-108)

We feel that the definition of what constitutes a 'literary allusion' in the above quote can be extended to allusions connecting other text types as well, and most certainly to filmic allusions. Ben-Porat explains that:

The reader has to perceive the existence of a marker before any other activity can take place. This perception entails a recollection of the original form of the marker, and in most cases leads to the identification of the text in which it has originally appeared. (pp. 109-110)

The said marker can be a specific textual element or a pattern. A given film can, for instance, refer to *Hamlet* directly, but a parodically marked line of dialogue voiced by a character could also ponder on whether ‘*to pee or not to pee, that is the question*’. These two types of reference also demonstrate that some markers can be literal (and in that case, the marker in the alluding text is identical to the marker in the evoked text) whereas others can be distorted (in which case the viewer recognizes a pattern or marker in the alluding text that is similar to a pattern in the evoked text without being identical to it).

It is therefore especially important to remember that the term *allusion* is actually used for different types of operations. It can refer to ‘the activation of two texts’, i.e. the *relation* that can be established between them, to ‘the device which triggers it’, and, to the item the allusion refers to. That is why Ben-Porat (1976) proposes to use different terms, the *marker* to refer to ‘the marking elements as they appear in the alluding texts’ (p. 110), and the *marked* to refer to ‘the same elements as they appear in the evoked text’ (p. 110).

The process of the (literary) allusion is described by the author as typically involving four stages: (1) the recognition of a marker in an element of a given text, (2) the identification of the evoked text, (3) the modification of the initial local interpretation of the element in the evoking text (p. 110) and (4) the activation of the evoked text as a whole, in an attempt to form maximal intertextual patterns (pp. 110-111).

Since we are analyzing a parody film in the present paper, we are essentially interested in the first two stages and, to a more limited extent, in the third stage of the process. The clearly humorous aim of the parodic genre does not require a lengthy theoretical explanation of how its use of allusions may affect the meaning and the interpretation of evoking films, based on the different elements referred to in the evoked films. Viewers and readers of parody are sufficiently familiar with the general concept. In this contribution we will therefore focus on the analysis of a number of concrete features of both *marker* and *marked* in the filmic

allusions in *Mission Cléopâtre* in order to subsequently discuss their importance from the perspective of audio-description.

As we indicated above, the marker, which triggers the process of allusion, rarely is a completely transparent quotation. Quite the contrary, it is usually not explicit and can even be distorted. All the same, the allusion must be sufficiently overt for the first stage in the identification chain to take place and therefore markers must also remain sufficiently recognizable as special signs.

In the second stage, the audience must identify which film is evoked by the marker they have pinpointed in the evoking film. This stage may appear to be no more than the obvious and rather self-evident continuation of the first stage. However, this is not necessarily the case. Sometimes, the audience may be able to identify a marker but may not be able to link it to the intended evoked film. On some other occasions they may recognize a given sign as a marker, not because it refers to an element in a specific film, but because it refers to the recognizable characteristics of an entire film genre. This also occurs in the film that constitutes our corpus: many of its allusions cannot be traced back to one single evoked film but refer to film genres and their recurring genre-bound features; in our case, cartoons, westerns, musicals and war films. In short, although scholars normally start from the optimistic assumption that it should be possible for the audience to know the source text (Perri, 1978, p. 300), identifying visual allusions can prove to be rather difficult.

Moreover, the theoretical literature about the translation of humour, intertextuality, parody etc. often points out that the use, understanding and interpretation of such indirect textual elements are closely connected to the social habits, customs, and general cultural backgrounds of specific societies or societal groups. The functioning of these textual devices therefore depends on the shared knowledge of the said cultural and linguistic groups or communities (Díaz-Cintas & Remael, 2007, p. 221). In addition, the use of the said devices

may help to perpetuate or strengthen the bonds among the ‘insiders’ of a community and, conversely, to distance one community, the one that understands specific instances of humour and irony, for instance, from another, the one that does not understand them. (Hutcheon, 1994).

3. Allusions and the new AD target audience

To turn to the core target audience of AD, it is not easy to determine where and how to position the blind and visually impaired in all this.¹ On the one hand, AD is a form of intersemiotic translation that usually translates the visual mode of the film into a verbal narration in the same language as the source text dialogues. In that sense, the challenges of interlingual or intercultural translation in the strict sense do not apply - if we make abstraction of AD for multilingual films or foreign language productions. The difficulty for the blind and visually impaired audience resides in enjoying a product originally intended for a sighted audience through an adapted aural version. Likewise, in order to access filmic allusions, especially those (also) relying on the visual mode, the target audience can only rely on the links provided by the AD. It is known that blind and visually impaired audiences enjoy films and television (as ~~documented demonstrated~~ by the ADLAB project among others) and it is to be expected that they have at best, access to some of the commercial productions that the general audience also watches. Since today’s commercial cinema is still strongly dominated by Hollywood, this has also created a kind of international film culture, determined by

¹ The core target audience for AD is itself very heterogeneous. Some of its members, a minority, will have been born blind, some will have lost their sight early on in life, whereas the majority will suffer from a form of visual impairment related to age. This means that some visually impaired persons will still have some form of visual memory whereas others will even have access to part of the images. However, today AD caters for the group as a whole and must therefore function for those who are blind as well as for those who are partially sighted and might still recognize the marker of a filmic allusion.

American norms, or, a form of ‘transculturality’, defined by Welsch (1994) as the given that cultures in the modern world ‘are extremely interconnected and entangled with each other’ (qtd in Pedersen, 2011, p. 106), or as Díaz-Cintas and Remael (2007) write, referring to interlingual translation: ‘North American cinema has created an internationally known culture that limits the problems of comprehension at the target end’ (p. 216). It is to be expected that this also holds to some extent for the blind and visually impaired audience.

This type of internationalisation also has consequences for the scope film makers have for playing with filmic allusions, as is borne out by our film, *Mission Cléopâtre*, which contains more allusions to internationally renowned films (such as *Pulp Fiction* (Tarantino, 1994), *Titanic* (Cameron, 1997), *Forrest Gump* (Zemeckis, 1994), *Good Morning Vietnam* (Levinson, 1987) ...) than to films that are more likely to be watched by a French audience (*The Tall Blond Man with One Black Shoe* (Robert, 1972) and *Cyrano de Bergerac* (Rappeneau, 1990)). In either case an added difficulty for the blind and visually impaired audience is that the allusions described in this production may invite connections to films that were and are not available with AD. How do the describers of *Astérix et Obélix: Mission Cléopâtre* tackle this issue?

4. Sample and methodology

The film that constitutes our corpus, *Astérix et Obélix : Mission Cléopâtre* (2002) was broadcast by TF1 in an audio-described version that was put at our disposal on a non-commercial DVD.² Given the limited amount of research into AD and filmic allusion, it seemed desirable to conduct an exploratory study, using a carefully selected film, in order to identify trends and establish a basis for further research, in other words, a film teeming with

² We would like to thank TF1, Pathé, Artmedia and Mr. Alain Chabat for giving us the permission to use this audio-described version, which is not available on the market, for our research purposes.

allusions, available in an audio-described version. *Astérix et Obélix : Mission Cléopâtre* meets the requirements.

This film is representative of its genre and guarantees the presence of sufficient concrete examples for the present analysis to be able to draw a first map of the many different types of allusions featuring in the film as well as the way in which they are audio-described. We decided to use one rather than several films given the limited scope of this article and also to keep the different types of allusions manageable in these early stages of the research.

The story of *Astérix et Obélix : Mission Cléopâtre* is largely based on one of the most famous French comic strips, *Asterix and Cleopatra*, written by René Goscinny and illustrated by Albert Uderzo (1965). In both narratives we learn about the adventures of Asterix and Obelix who travel to Egypt in order to help the architect Numerobis build an entirely new monumental palace for Julius Caesar in no more than 90 days. *Astérix et Obélix : Mission Cléopâtre* was the second film in the series of Asterix film adaptations and the most successful one in France so far.³

Methodologically, we proceeded as follows. We identified the 16 scenes containing cinematic allusions in our film, consciously limiting the analysis to visual or combined filmic allusions⁴. We did not include any allusions to books or other art forms. Even scenes referring to names or dialogues in other films that do not make use of visual allusions were not included. Some scenes are very short, just a few seconds, some slightly longer. In order to facilitate further reference all the scenes have been given a name as well as a number. In each

³ See <http://www.allocine.fr/film/fichefilm-28537/box-office/> for more than 14 million reactions.

⁴ Scene is defined as follows: “Spatio-temporal continuity felt as being without flaws or breaks, in which the signified [...] is continuous, as in the theatrical scene, but where the signifier is fragmented into diverse shots.” (Stam, Burgoyne, & Flitterman-Lewis, 1992, pp. 40–41)

case, the name refers to the secondary text or texts which the allusion evokes. The time codes refer to the DVD we received from TF1. This is our scene list:

- (1) Pulp fiction - 02.11-02.44
- (2) Jurassic Park - 08.33-09.08
- (3) Titanic - 21.23-21.33
- (4) The Tall Blond Man with One Black Shoe - 25.14-25.20
- (5) I feel good / Good Morning Vietnam - 36.00 -37.20
- (6) Cartoon - In the Great Pyramid - 54.39-55.33
- (7) Cartoon - Growing palms - 1.00.00-1.00.20
- (8) Western / The Six Million Dollar Man - 01.13.00-01.13.15
- (9) The Empire strikes back - 01.14.54-01.15.06
- (10) Munchhausen - 01.20.37-01.20.41
- (11) Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon 1 - 01.22.05 – 01.23.59
- (12) Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon 2 - 01.25.21-01.27.08
- (13) Cleopatra -Mankiewicz - 01.30.22-01.30.30
- (14) Roman Army Cadence - 01.32.28-01.32.36
- (15) Cartoon - Constructing the palace - 01.32.54-01.33.01
- (16) Geisha - 13.13-13.18

Having selected the scenes, we transcribed the dialogues, audio-description and relevant information about the visual mode (e.g. setting) and sounds/music into an Excel file in a rather simplified multimodal transcription that fitted the purpose of our analysis. The transcription also contains information about the speaker or the speakers, and any narratively relevant information about the scene which is not contained in the AD. Even though our purpose is to focus on the AD of visual allusions, this must obviously be done with reference to all the different film modes that support the visual allusion since the AD will often times

rely on these, i.e. on the dialogues, sounds and music to convey its purely aural message. In audiovisual translation, the film modes are routinely listed as visual-verbal (text on screen), visual non-verbal (images), aural-verbal (dialogue, voice-over, ...) and aural-nonverbal (music and sound effects) (Remael, 2001).

In order to evaluate the relations between those different filmic modes, or constituent parts of them (e.g. an object in a given *mise-en-scène*) for the purpose of our analysis, we will make use of the concepts of *complementarity*, *redundancy* and *separability*, which have been proposed by Zabalbeascoa (2003, pp. 214-215) for the study of the translation of audiovisual screen irony. According to Zabalbeascoa *complementarity* occurs, '[w]hen the various elements (verbal, visual or whatever the combination happens to be) are interpreted interdependently, i.e. they depend on each other for a full grasp of their meaning potential and function(s).' Different filmic modes can also be *redundant*, which means that they involve '[r]epetitions (total or partial) that are regarded as unnecessary, superfluous or dispensable.' Finally, *separability* refers to cases in which filmic modes 'manage to function (better or worse) autonomously or independently from the AV text [...]'. (Zabalbeascoa, 2003, p. 215). In addition, we would like to point out that *redundancy* is a typical feature of cinema and one that does not necessarily have to be negative (which the above definition seems to imply); it actually functions as a form of complementarity when the same message is conveyed through different modes. The distinction between the two may therefore be difficult to make in some instances. Both *redundancy* between verbal and visual modes, and/or their *complementarity*, can stand audiovisual translators, including audio-describers, in good stead when they can rely on fewer filmic modes for getting the message across than the original production (Díaz-Cintas and Remael, 2007, p. 50).

5. Analysis

What is especially striking in the 16 scenes in our corpus is that virtually each one contains more than one allusion. Indeed, one and the same scene may contain subsequent allusions to more than one film or even film genre. One example is scene 8 (Western / The Six Million Dollar Man) which first alludes to the western genre and later to the American television series *The Six Million Dollar Man* (Johnson, 1974); another example can be found in scene 12 (Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon 2), which appears to parody the *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (Lee, 2000) film specifically and/or possibly the wuxia-genre more generally, but ends on an allusion to the cartoon genre. Since the scenes in our corpus often contain more than one allusion, the number of scenes in the corpus does not correspond with the number of allusions in that same corpus. In the analysis of our 16 scenes we focus on those allusions that allow us to formulate and draw up a tentative methodology for the study of allusions in audio-description.

On the basis of the theoretical and methodological framework defined above, and with our corpus in place, we can now reformulate our research questions in greater detail, including sub-questions:

- (1) All the scenes with allusions in our corpus contain allusions making use of visual markers, but they also contain markers referring to music, sounds effect and dialogues. Which one is the predominant one in a given instance, how does it interact with the others and how does the AD deal with this? Do the features of *complementarity*, *redundancy* and *separability* play a determining factor? (see 5.1.)
- (2) To what extent are purely visual allusions described and how? Is AD provided only when the visually impaired audience can make use of no other element to grasp the visual quote or is the allusion also described when auditive elements contribute to its identification? (see 5.2.)

- (3) When AD is provided, does it describe the marker only or does it also describe the link to the marked? (see 5.3.)

5.1. Visual allusions in combination with sounds, soundtracks and dialogues

Very often it is not only a visual element that functions as the marker for the filmic allusion. In 10 out of 16 scenes the visual allusion is supported by an allusion effected through another mode. In 8 out of 16 cases this is accomplished through the soundtrack, more specifically, the musical score. What is striking, however, is that in the majority of the cases the sound track of the evoked film is referred to through some form of distortion. Very often the music that is used is similar but not identical to the musical score of the evoked film, possibly for the sake of copyright. A few examples are given below.

Scene 5 (I feel good - Good Morning Vietnam) contains a very obvious allusion to the film genre of the musical through James Brown's song: *I Got You (I Feel Good)*, the rhythm of which is meant to motivate the Egyptian workers to complete the construction of Caesar's new palace at break-neck speed. Numerobis, the architect, sings along, and all the workers are dancing. The AD does not refer directly to either a specific musical or the musical genre,⁵ however, through its phrasing and choice of words, it does tell the audience explicitly that the dancing is choreographed, thereby implicitly suggesting musical genre features:

AD : Tous se dandinent au rythme. [...] Les ouvriers [...] dansent avec les blocs. Numerobis se trémousse devant sa maquette. Les travailleurs se lancent dans une chorégraphie élaborée. Des ouvrières font les pom-pom girls. [...] Les danseurs font une dernière pirouette devant le soleil couchant.

⁵ Film sound tracks have complex functions. The blind and visually impaired audience can access the sound track, however, its functions are often linked to visually conveyed information, and research into the amount of information that the AD needs to convey to clarify these, is inconclusive to date. (Fryer 2010, Remael, 2012).

[AD They all move to the rhythm [...] The masons dance with the blocks of stone. Numérobis wiggles in front of his model palace. The workers launch into an elaborate choreography. The female workers imitate cheerleaders [...] The dancers perform a last pirouette against the background of the setting sun.]

James Brown's song has, of course, been used in the sound tracks of many films. Specific elements from the visual mode of the present scene, however, which shows Numérobis dancing behind his model of the palace, also contain a very clear reference to a scene from *Good Morning Vietnam*, in which Adrian Cronauer (Robin Williams) makes funny dance moves from behind his mixing table to the energetic tune of the same James Brown song. The AD does not refer directly to the images from *Good Morning Vietnam*. It does suggest through the complementarity of its different modes that the scene mimics a scene from a musical. In addition, this scene teems with visual and other allusions and it is quite impossible for the audio-describer to incorporate all these markers into his or her script. The AD selects and verbalizes the most functional and symbolically relevant allusion, the reference to the genre of the Hollywood musical.

Scene 14 (Roman Army Cadence) shows how Roman soldiers retreat – but in a very disciplined manner – after a defeat. As they march off they cheer themselves on using the typical rhythm and intonation used in the Army Cadences which often occur in (mostly American) war films:

Centurion : C'est César qui m'a dit de rentrer.

Légionnaires : C'est César qui nous a dit de rentrer.

Centurion : Donc on rentre parce qu'on est disciplinés.

Légionnaires : Donc on rentre parce qu'on est disciplinés.

[Centurion : It is Caesar who's told me to return.

Legionaries : It is Caesar who's told us to return. »

Centurion ; So we return because we are disciplined.

Legionaries : So we return because we are **disciplined**.*

Opmerking [A1]: Waarom staat hier een sterretje?

In scène 6 (Cartoon - In the Great Pyramid) Asterix, Obelix en Paroramix have been incarcerated in the great pyramid. When their torches give out on them, they find themselves in complete darkness, and to the viewers only three pairs of eyes remain visible, drawn in white on a black surface, cartoon-style. This image is accompanied by Yakety Sax on the sound track, mostly known from The Benny Hill Show (Hill, 1955). In itself, the music does not function as a marker for the genre of the animation film but due to its typical orchestration and the input of a few complementary sounds in the sound track, the chase scenes typical of the genre are evoked. The AD of this scene is exceptional in that it contains one of the very few explicit mentions of the allusion present in the scene when it says:

AD : La dernière torche s'éteint. Les yeux des Gaulois brillent dans le noir comme dans un dessin animé. (our emphasis)

[AD : The last torch extinguishes itself. The eyes of the Gauls sparkle in the darkness as in an animation film.]

We have no way of knowing why the audio-describer took this decision, nevertheless, the cartoon-like features of this scene are so striking that mentioning the genre may very well be the only way of accurately describing the scene, including its narrative-stylistic function, which is what AD tries to do as a matter of course.

When the construction site is attacked by the Roman army in scene 13 (Cleopatra - Mankiewicz), Cleopatra makes a personal appearance, commenting on Caesar's total lack of fair play. The scene alludes to one of the best-known scenes from Mankiewicz' *Cleopatra* (1963), and even though the original sound track has not been transferred to the current scene, the visuals and the loud trumpet sound that accompanies them refer to the genre of the epic drama, in another example of complementarity. In the AD, the combination of superlatives in the description, together with the same trumpet sound, achieves a similar effect:

AD : Un gigantesque char à têtes de cobra tiré par des dizaines d'esclaves arrive sur le champ de bataille. À son sommet, Cléopâtre, en grande tenue, est assise sur un trône et entourée de ses courtisanes.

[AD : A gigantic chariot adorned with cobra heads and pulled by scores of slaves arrives on the battle field. At its summit, Cleopatra, wearing a dazzling outfit, sits on a throne, surrounded by her maids of honour.]

In scenes 11 and 12 (Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon 1 and 2), which feature the kung fu fight between Numérobis en Amonbifis (the architect who did not get the commission) the sound track is used in a similar manner. There is no direct reference to the wuxia film genre but the allusion is clear all the same, through markers in the form of Asian-sounding cymbals and gongs. In addition, the scene also contains a playful allusion to a French dubbing habit: in an ironic linguistic inversion we suddenly hear a Japanese (and therefore incomprehensible) dialogue between the two fighters. Finally, and in spite of the clarity of the aural allusions, the AD also renders a number of markers explicitly:

AD : Amonbofis bondit et, en deux pirouettes, touche le sol. Les deux hommes se tournent autour en se jaugeant comme des combattants de kung-fu. Amonbofis fend l'air avec ses mains. (our emphasis)

[AD: Amonbofis bounces back and, performs two pirouettes, landing back on the ground. The two men circle each other, eyeing each other like kung fu fighters. Amonbofis cleaves the air with his hands.

In 3 scenes the allusions are created visually, through the musical score and through references to the dialogues of the evoked films. Scène 9 (The Empire strikes back) contains a clear reference to Irvin Kershner's film *The Empire strikes back* (1980). Not only do we hear the beginning of the John William's *Imperial March* (or *Darth Vader's Theme*), but when General Ceplus is about to try and strangle one of his Centurions, much in the way Darth Vader strangles Admiral Motti in the Star Wars film, he offers a comment that is an almost literal translation of Darth Vader's, "I find your lack of faith disturbing:

‘Je suis très déçu par votre attitude, centurion Affairedreyfuss.’

In addition to all these verbal and non-verbal aural elements, the scene also uses a visual allusion: the shape of general Ceplus’ helmet has clearly been inspired by Darth Vader’s. The AD, however, does not incorporate this visual marker.

To conclude this subsection, it seems that visual filmic allusions are very often combined with other types of allusions. In 10 out of the 15 cases these refer to sounds (4 occurrences), music (8 occurrences) and dialogues (5 occurrences) from other films or film genres. Scene 11 (*Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon 1*), one of the longest ones in our sample, as well as scene 9 (*The Empire strikes back*), which is notably shorter, actually combine 4 types of allusions, whereas three other scenes⁶ make use of a combination of three different types of markers. In other words, there is a high degree of complementarity between the visual and aural markers of the allusions, which is why AD, like other forms of audiovisual translation, can make use of the inherent redundancy of the multimodal filmic text to get its message across.

5.2. Audio-description of purely visual allusions

Six allusions in the scenes in our corpus, however, rely on purely visual markers. It goes without saying that in these cases AD is essential if the references are to be kept intact for the blind and visually impaired target audience.

Scène 1 (*Pulp Fiction*) features a domestic dispute between Caesar and Cleopatra. The topic of their rather passionate quarrel is the grandeur of their respective cultures and which one can be considered to be the greatest at the ‘present time’. The Egyptian queen is extremely proud of one of her people’s major achievements, the construction of the pyramids.

⁶ The scenes referred to are: scenes 6 [*Cartoon- In de Great Pyramid*], 10 [*Munchhausen*] and 12 [*Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon 2*].

Cléopâtre : ‘Jusqu’à nouvel ordre, ô César, ce ne sont pas les Romains qui ont construit les pyramides !’

AD : Il en dessine une dans l’air.

César : ‘Ces trucs pointus, là ?’

[Cleopatra : ‘In as far as I know, Caesar, it wasn’t the Romans who built the pyramids !’

AD : He draws one in the air.

Caesar : ‘Those pointy things, you mean ?’]

Caesar draws a triangle in the air that appears in white lines on screen as he speaks the last line ‘Ces trucs pointus, là?’. The visual refers to a scene from Tarantino’s 1994 cult film *Pulp Fiction* (1994), in which one of the characters, Mia Wallace (Uma Thurman), accuses another, Vincent Vega (John Travolta), of being a ‘square’, while also drawing a square ‘in the air’, which then appears in dotted lines on the screen.

Scene 2 (*Jurassic Park*) and scene 4 (*The Tall Blond Man with One Black Shoe*), also feature visual allusions to specific films, i.e. *Jurassic Park* (Spielberg, 1993) and *The Tall Blond Man with One Black Shoe* (Robert, 1972) respectively. In scene 2 a lamb is lowered into a pit of crocodiles in much the same way as a cow is lowered into a pit of Velociraptors in *Jurassic Park*, whereas in scene 4 Cleopatra’s dress has clearly been inspired by Mireille Darc’s dress in *Tall Blond Man with One Shoe* (Robert, 1972).

AD : Une trappe s'ouvre dans le plafond au-dessus de la fosse. Les reptiles lèvent la tête. Un agneau suspendu à un harnais de cuir est descendu au bout d'une corde. Tous suivent des yeux la descente de l'animal. La corde s'agite violemment, elle remonte avec les restes déchiquetés du harnais. La trappe dans le plafond se referme.

AD : Cléopâtre leur tourne le dos, la robe ouverte jusqu'aux fesses.

[AD : A hatch opens in the ceiling above the pit. The reptiles rear their heads. A lamb in a leather harness is lowered into the pit on a rope. All eyes are on the animal as it descends into the pit. The rope shakes violently and resurfaces with no more than bits and pieces of the harness attached to it. The hatch in the ceiling closes itself again.

AD: Cleopatra turns her back on them, the open back of her dress reaches to her buttocks.]

In all the above instances of purely visual allusions, the markers are audio-described. The AD supplies a verbal form of the visual information given by the film narrative. Without this additional verbal input, the scenes would not be accessible to the target audience. Whether it also manages to establish the intertextual link in these instances, or even aims to do so, remains an open question. The AD ‘simply’ describes what is happening on screen in the visual non-verbal mode of the film and in doing so automatically incorporates the intertextual markers. If they are recognized by anyone, that is a bonus – as is the case for the sighted audience.

The two next scenes in our analysis constitute an additional challenge. Both contain purely visual allusions to specific film genres, and yet the AD does not mention them. The reason for this may be that – even though this practice has been contested in the meantime – traditional AD guidelines advise against explicitly mentioning film techniques (see www.adlabproject.eu for a discussion of the issue), and the visual allusions in scenes 7 and 15 could be classified as such. Both in scene 7 (Cartoon-Growing Palms) and in scene 15 (Cartoon- Constructing the palace), standard feature filming is combined with animation whereby the animation appears to have been drawn over the ‘filmed’ version. The AD does no more than relate the events taking place without mentioning these technicalities:

AD : Le petit architecte pique des grains dans le sac et se met à semer autour de lui. Des palmiers jaillissent de terre dans le soleil couchant. Un des arbres remporte Numérobis qui se retrouve perché sur les palmes.

AD : Et pour la première fois, Romains et Égyptiens travaillèrent main dans la main à la reconstruction du palais.

[AD : The little architect grabs some grains from the bag and starts sowing them around him. Palm trees spring up from the soil in the setting sun. One of the trees lifts Numérobis from the ground and he finds himself perched on the top.

AD: And for the first time, Romans and Egyptians are working side by side, constructing the palace together.]

By way of conclusion, we can therefore say that of the 6 purely or predominantly visual allusions in our film, 4 are described whereas 2 are not. The 4 allusions that are described involve no more than the ‘literal description’ of what is visible on screen. The 2 allusions that are not described would have involved an ‘explanation’ or a reference to the use of film techniques.

5.3. *What the AD describes*

Having analysed instances of visual allusions supported by other filmic modes and filmic allusions that rely mostly if not exclusively on visual references, we can turn to the question of what exactly the AD describes. Does it describe the marker only? Does it describe the marked as well? Does it explicitly try to re-establish the connection between the evoking and evoked film?

In the majority of the cases it is the marker that is described, as the reference to *The Tall Blond Man with One Shoe* demonstrates: ‘Cléopâtre leur tourne le dos, la robe ouverte jusqu’aux fesses.’ This is in compliance with AD guidelines which tell audio-describers to describe all the relevant action on screen as well as where and when it takes place. The relation between the marker and the marked and therefore the link to the evoked film is only described in 2 out of 16 allusions. As indicated above, this happens in scene 6 and in scene 11:

AD: La dernière torche s’éteint. Les yeux des Gaulois brillent dans le noir comme dans un dessin animé. (our emphasis)

AD : Amonbofis bondit et, en deux pirouettes, touche le sol. Les deux hommes se tournent autour en se jaugeant comme des combattants de kung-fu. Amonbofis fend l’air avec ses mains. (our emphasis)

In both cases the allusion is generic, which might make the more explicit mention inevitable. Even here, however, it could be argued that the main concern of the audio-describer still is to

translate the visually rendered information as accurately as possible. In order to do this, audio-descriptions often use metaphors and comparisons (as in the present case), aiming to create ‘verbal images’. Another scene that is slightly different but that should also be listed here because its allusion is generic, is Scene 5 (I feel good - Good Morning Vietnam) in which the choreographed style of dancing Egyptian builders is mentioned, suggesting a link to the musical genre. Nevertheless, the link is more tenuous than in the other two scenes and, again, may be the only way in which the AD could possibly provide an accurate description. If the description also renders the allusion, that is a plus and in this way the indirectly described reference works in a very similar way to the visual allusion itself.

6. Discussion and concluding thoughts

In our analysis we have used Ben Porat’s well-tried literary theory of allusions, for lack of equally elaborate film or visual-arts based theories, and her concepts of marker and marked, to study how AD handles textual allusions. We summarize our findings below.

When we consider all our examples, there appears to be a great degree of complementarity in the way filmic allusions function in *Astérix et Obélix: Mission Cléopâtre*, since in most cases the film relies on the support of non-visual filmic modes to support its visual narration and thereby also its visual allusions. This is in line with the general tendency of commercial films to be multimodal redundancy whereby one filmic mode complements and confirms the other. Of the 16 allusions we have studied only 6 rely on visual markers only whereas 10 also make use of another form of reference. If one considers the 10 combined allusions, there are 2 that use four types of markers simultaneously (scenes 9 and 11) and 3 that use three different methods (scenes- 6: visual, sound, music; scene 10 visual, sound, dialogue; and scene 12: soundtrack and dialogue). The remaining 5 make use of a double referencing system: in 1 case (scene 1) visual and dialogue, and in the other 4 case (scenes 5,

8, 13 and 14) visual and soundtrack. None of the allusions make use of visuals and sound only.

This high degree of complementarity is, of course, a blessing for the AD since it regularly entails a high degree of separability. The audio-describer can start working from the hypothesis that the blind and visually impaired audience will make the most of the sound track of the film and that the AD therefore does not need to include all visual markers. This is especially important in French cinema where dubbing is still the norm, at least on television and in most commercial cinemas.

The second important conclusion to be drawn from the present study is that in 12 out of the 16 visual allusions, the AD actually does incorporate a description of the crucial visual marker, even if this is sometimes done ‘automatically’ by describing the relevant action on screen. Only in a few cases does the inclusion of the marker of an allusion in the AD seem to be a deliberate decision, as in scenes 5, 6 and 11.(see 5.3). However, even here this remains a matter of perspective: the description is rather explicit but could be simply the best way to render verbally what the visual mode of the film shows.

Thirdly, there are two types of scenes in which the markers of allusions are not described at all. Two scenes are characterized by the high degree of complementarity of their filmic modes. In scene 9 (The Empire strikes back) four types of allusions are combined making AD superfluous, whereas in scene 14 (Roman Army Cadence), the visual allusion is actually subservient to the aural allusion and does not require AD either. Scenes 7 (Cartoon Growing Palm) and 15 (Cartoon, Constructing the Palace), however, are different since their visual allusions are not supported by allusions of any other type. As we pointed out above, our hypothesis is that the audio-describer, heeding traditional AD guidelines, decided not to render filmic effects explicitly. In addition, both scenes are very short: 47 and 20 seconds

respectively, and the visual allusion in scene 15 is accompanied by the voice of the off-screen narrator, leaving no room for additional aural text.

Finally, as we demonstrated above, the general conclusion that can be drawn even from a limited case study such as the present one, is that in the large majority of all the scenes the AD seems to start from the premise that to describe an allusion means to describe the marker of the allusion, not its relation to the marked. This approach is justifiable and in line with the literature about allusions more generally. If the AD limits itself to describing the marker it does not resort to unnecessary (and possibly patronizing) explanations. After all, the sighted audience can only rely on the visual (or other) marker of the allusion to establish the intertextual link and is not provided with additional explanations. There is no good reason for treating the blind or visually impaired audience differently, especially since there is no way for the describer to know if or how the evoked film has been described. In addition, the literature about intertextuality and allusions repeatedly points out that actively recognizing an allusion generates a positive feeling in the recognizer. Viewers or listeners who understand an allusion may even feel proud of themselves for having spotted the reference, and therefore for belonging to a group of intelligent and sophisticated persons. Rendering allusions explicit in AD would deprive the blind and visually impaired audience of that pleasure.

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