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Narrating Narrating: Twisting the Twice-Told Tale

1. Introduction

Language rests on silence, but it is a meaningful silence that is broken by words. The world is meaningful; nonetheless we speak, to draw attention to some aspects of this meaning, or to draw upon this previous meaning to articulate a more complex one. Narrative, likewise, is built on silent or presupposed narratives, it is always retelling what is told in order to extract further meaning, or to make it mean otherwise, to change the story (as is the case of counternarratives). Sometimes, the same events are retold by a different narrator so that a new significance or perspective emerges, and sometimes the initial act of telling is itself narrated and a peculiar doubling is produced. There are stories which narrate the way some events were told by someone—narrated narrations. I am aware that the story of “the story within the story” is itself a twice-told tale, but nonetheless I will tell it again, hoping to make it yield some additional meaning—if my initial contention is right.

A close examination of such narrated narrations should go hand in hand with a theoretical emphasis on the interactional value of narrative. I think they may help illuminate some aspects of narrativity insofar as a key dimension of narrative is its communicative function as *an interactional intertext*. A narrative is often a transformation of a previous narrative: already narrativized elements are reinterpreted, reconfigured and retold. Alternatively, a narrative may rework quasi-narrative patterns of experience, i.e. patterns of experience which have been pre-structured by narrative schemata. Narrativity therefore involves, to a greater or lesser extent, *repetition*—a reworking of previous experience to produce new experience, a retrospective reconfiguration of previously available signs which

are combined with new ones in a new articulation.¹ Doubling effects, such as represented speech, therefore add semiotic density and increase narrativity, because the interactional value of the utterance, or the narrating, is added to its narrativization of the events: we thus have both the events told by the narrative and the event of its telling, which in turn is reelaborated for the present retelling. As in the case of rereading, retelling produces an intensification of meaning.² Communicative interaction is meaningful, and thus a more complex meaning is articulated whenever two sequences of reading are confronted or whenever a represented telling is set against its representational process.

2. Telling

In order to examine narrativity and retellings, we will proceed first through a reexamination of "telling" as a concept at the crossroads of the interactional and configurational aspects of narrative. "Telling" is giving an ordered account of something, and in many languages the concept of telling (like the word "account") has both an arithmetic and a linguistic-narrative sense.³ A "teller" is someone that counts—figures and money, or, in some languages, events.⁴ In Spanish, *contar* has this double sense, to count and to narrate. The same sense lurks etymologically under French *conte* and *raconter* (cf. the verbs *conter*: "tell"; *compter*: "count"; *compte*

¹ Cf. Ochs (1997): in everyday conversation, we often narrate something in order to rectify or restructure another person's account.

² See Galef (1998) for an account of rereading.

³ Compare Shakespeare's image in the Prologue to *Henry V*, alluding to the actors staging the play: "let us, ciphers to this great account / On your imaginary forces work."

⁴ According to Melanie and Mark Crowley's etymological website,

Teller is a derivative of the verb *tell*. While *tell* has its source in Old English, *teller* came about in the late 15th century. *Tell*'s original sense was 'to mention in order', and the 'order' sense of the original meaning stuck with *teller*, while *tell* kept simply the 'mention' meaning. Some other examples of *tell*'s original 'count' sense are all told and to tell one thing from another.

In Old English *tell* was *tellen*. It came from the Proto-Germanic root **taljanan* 'tell'. Some cognates were Old Frisian *talja*, *tella* 'tell', Old Saxon *telljan* 'tell', Middle Dutch, modern Dutch, Middle Low German, and modern Low German *tellan* 'count, reckon', Old High German *zellen* 'tell' (modern German *zahlen* 'reckon, count'), and Old Icelandic *telja* 'tell, count' (Swedish *talja*, Danish *taelle* 'count, reckon'). *Tale* comes from the same source (*Take Our Word for It*)

http://www.takeourword.com/et_t-z.html#teller; retrieved Jan. 31, 2006.

rendu: "report," "account," "review"). This double sense, though, is not present, to my knowledge, in their etymological root in Classical Latin, *computo*, which is purely numerical, with only the root *puto* providing a link with 'thought' in general. And in English, you cannot "count" a story, but only "recount" it—"retell" it, as it were.⁵ On the other hand, "tell" is also a (partial) synonym of "say" or "speak" in the sense of "make known through language." But there are some important differences: we tell (not say) a story, and we say (not tell) "hello"; or again: "He says, 'Open the door,'" which becomes in indirect speech: "He tells me to open the door." Note that the sense "to express thoughts by means of the pronunciation of words" is closer to "say" or "speak" than it is to "tell," although "to speak one's mind" could of course be used metaphorically for non-verbalized communication. It is significant that Percy Lubbock proposes "showing" and "telling" (not "saying" or "speaking") as modern English equivalents to Plato's *mimêsis* and *diêgesis*. Still, "telling" discloses the other person's mind, so that the result of "telling" something is that something which was not known to someone, or which was implicit in someone's mind, is revealed through communicative exchange. And of course we also "tell" the facts, what happened; telling does not relate primarily to expressing our thoughts.

From another perspective, the numerical order associated with "tell" comes to light in the sequential ordering of discourse, as in "Tell me first what you decided; we can go over the details later..." In narrative, "tell" applies most adequately to a logical cause-and-effect sequence of parts—an action sequence—in which the effect follows the cause as naturally as '2' follows '1',⁶ although the order of presentation may well be altered, as it is for the figures in this sentence, or as in stories that begin in medias res. As we have seen, "tell" also suggests that there exists something

⁵ Ann Banfield notes the etymological link between "counting" and "recounting": "Narrative," Banfield (1982: 268) argues, "does not 're-present' the passage of time, it 're-counts' it, segmenting it into countable and orderable narrative units" (quoted in Fleischman 1990: 101). In *Webster's Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language*, to "recount" is given a double entry: on the one hand "1. to count again"; on the other, "1. to relate or narrate; tell in detail; give the facts or particulars of. 2. to narrate in order. 3. to tell one by one; enumerate. [ME *recount(en)* < MF *recont(er)*, equiv. to *re-* RE+ *CONTER* TO TELL, COUNT¹]"—Syn. 1. describe. See *relate*." The etymological connection between *relation* (story) and *relation* (connection, association) also emphasizes the configurational power of narrative.

⁶ This is not to suggest, though, that in mathematics as a formal system the sequence of numbers is based on cause and effect.

which is to be disclosed and of which the discourse will be the disclosure: the discourse returns to what is hidden and brings it to light, as in "I have something to tell you." The element of repetition implicit in "tell" (in the sense of "disclose") converges with the element of ordered sequence, also present in the word, so that the use of the verb "to tell" foregrounds the narrativity of what is told, its being brought to light in an orderly or sequential way.

Here again, I am emphasizing a major dimension of narrativity: retrospective configuration. For the purposes of this paper (definitions are always definitions for a purpose), I will define narrative as the sequential and retrospective representation of experience as an interpreted/evaluated series of events (i.e. the experiential sequence has been interpreted and evaluated and thereby forged into a sequence of events).⁷ This definition leaves open the possibility that events may preexist the actual linguistic configuration of a narrative. For instance, the events may exist as a cognitive tool to shape experience; having been narrativized to a greater or lesser extent before being represented by a given narrative, events may serve to shape experience cognitively. The definition also leaves open the possibility that a previous representation/telling/ evaluation (i.e. a previous narrative) may have been taken over, together with the events as such, by the narrative at hand.⁸ Such narratives are then "counter-narratives," with the differences in configuration articulating significant interpretations or a different evaluative stance with regard to the events on the part of the teller. Although for the teller himself these interpretations or

⁷ The definition fits in with a long tradition of similar though not identical definitions, both recent, such as Abbott's (2002: 3–11) or Schmid's (2003), and older, including Wordsworth's definition of poetry ("emotion recollected in tranquility") and Aristotle's definition of *mūthos* as the effective arranging of (previously known) events.

⁸ Many scholars see such characteristics as retrospection, factualness, and reference to a sequence of events as constituting the prototypical form of narrative (see e.g. Herring [1986], quoted in Fleischman [1990: 101]). The diagram which follows owes something to Fleischman's view of narrativization: "Narrativization appears to be a two-step process consisting of cognitive and linguistic operations. The first operation involves an unconscious segmentation of the seamless experiential continuum into cognitive units that we call 'events'. [...] The second operation—the linguistic encoding of these events as a sequence of predicates, and eventually of clauses, of various types—is one of linearization and perspectivization, the goal of which is to impose a particular order and coherence on the events and to render their configuration meaningful" (Fleischman [1990: 96]). Cf. also Wolf Schmid's comments on "Zeitliche Perspektive" (2005: 129–30, 262–63).

evaluations may well be implicit in those events, the ideological, interpretive or evaluative implications of the reconfigured retelling may need to be expounded metalinguistically (through conversational interaction, written criticism, etc.). And what a narrative finds "tellable" may well result from a reflection on what a previous narrative found worth telling, or it may reflect on the perceptual, emotional, ideological or intellectual limitations of a previous narrator.

Figure 1 represents some of these processes (it being conceded that any schema or figure, like any theory or any narrative, foregrounds certain aspects of a phenomenon and ignores others).

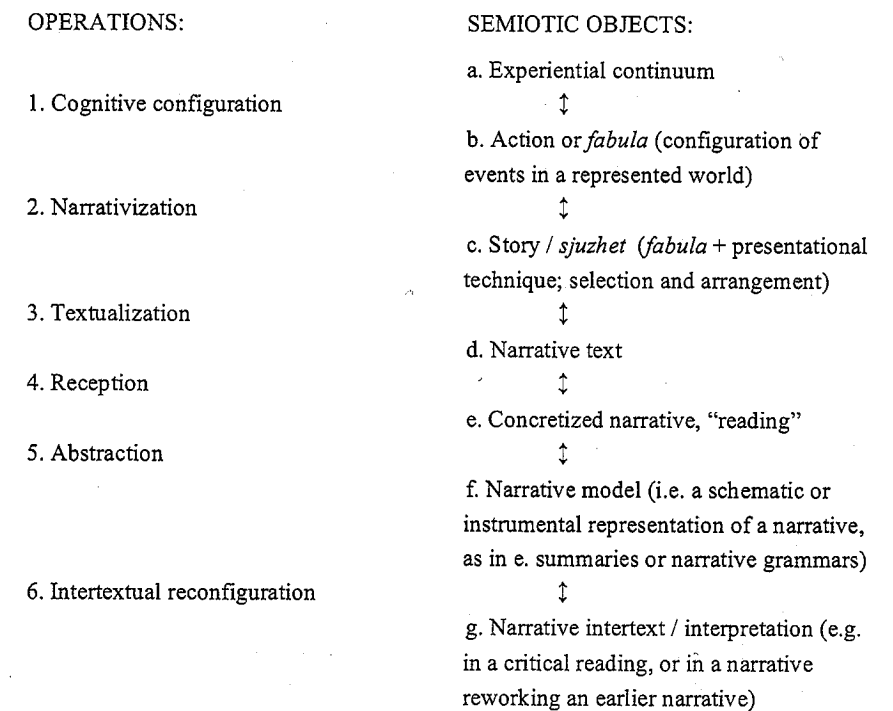


Figure 1: Narrative operations and semiotic objects

I will now comment the way in which these reflections bear on our conception of narrativity.

3. Narrativity

Traditional definitions of narrativity, deriving from Aristotle, presuppose as a minimum a mimetic relationship between a human action and its representation in the work. In Aristotle, the action (*praxis*) consists in a series of events (*pragmata*) caused and/or undergone by agents (*prattontes*). The plot, or *mûthos*, is the "arrangement of the incidents" effected by the poet: the events as they are presented in the work as a result of the poet's configurational activity of selection, choice of mode, and disposition.⁹

A classical narratologist's definition of narrative will likewise oppose *fabula* and *sjuzhet*, or story and discourse. For instance, Seymour Chatman relies on the concepts of plot and events in a recent definition: "all texts unfold temporally, but narratives alone possess a double chronology—the chronology of story (or *fabula*), and the chronology of discourse (or *sjuzhet*)."¹⁰ Some narratologists (e.g. Mieke Bal, or myself) prefer to speak of a *triple chronology*: the chronology of *fabula*, story, and text, in Bal's terms (1997 [1985]); or that of action, story, and discourse (*acción, relato, discurso*) in my own account (1998a), in which the concepts were understood roughly as follows:

Action: the series of events considered apart from its telling;

Story: the series of events as they are presented in the text;

Discourse: the story plus other materials provided by the narrating instance.

This threefold distinction would seem to be a minimum requirement in order to describe a configurational process: we need to oppose action, understood as non-configured series of events, to the discourse which represents it; and since discourse cannot be reduced to the mimesis of action, we also need the narratological concept of story as an interface between action and discourse. Discourse is of course a complex phenomenon, and some of this complexity is further specified in Figure 1: not just the author's discursive articulation, but also the reader's (re)construction of the author's discourse, and further intertextual processes (criticism, rewritings, etc.) which circulate the author's discourse, respond to it and transform it. Likewise, the three-level model incorporates "ac-

⁹ See esp. *Poetics* 1455b.

¹⁰ Chatman (1999: 318).

tion" as an ideal non-discursive pole, a narrative scheme; narrated action, however, is always mediated through discourse, for we always retell and reenact preexisting narratives. Thus, Figure 1 can be taken as a more detailed diagram of the configurational process described by the triad action/story/discourse.

The narrativity out of which emplotment is born can thus serve as a basis for the description of more complex narrative processes involved in intertextuality and discursive reconfigurations of narrative. Basic narrativizing processes attune us to seek out stories everywhere, even in the more complex process of discursive interaction: after all, if discourse is a mode of action, then the interpretation of discourse is a retelling of action. So, back to basics... What is a prototypical narrative anyway? What is the basic requirement for the perception of narrativity in phenomena?

Stein and Policastro conducted a statistical study on story recognition and concluded that as far as most individuals are concerned, "we can say that texts must include at least an animate protagonist and some type of causal sequence in order to be considered a story."¹¹ Their study merely provides statistical confirmation of the technical definitions of many narratologists and of the intuitive and commonsensical understanding of most individuals. Any study which contrasts a variety of views will have to allow a measure of relativism in the definition of "narrative" or "story." Stein and Policastro propose a prototypicality approach to the concept of story: some traits of phenomena that people consider to be narratives, but not necessarily all, will be found in the prototype.¹² There are, then, kinds and degrees of narrativity,¹³ some of which are more relevant than others for some specific context of reception. Prototypical narrativity, however, involves, at its most basic, connectedness and development through time.¹⁴ It has been emphasized that connectedness of the events is not

¹¹ Stein/Policastro (1984: 147), quoted in Mancuso (1986: 93).

¹² See the discussion in Robinson and Hawpe (1986: 112). For a discussion of the main definitions of "narrative" and "story," see the entries "Narrative" and "Story-Discourse Distinction" in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory* (Herman/Jahn/Ryan (2005). For additional approaches to narrative and textual prototypicality, see Chatman (1990) and Adam (2005).

¹³ Cf. Prince (1982: 145); Ryan (1992); Herman (2002: 84, 91).

¹⁴ Cf. Gergen/Gergen (1986: 25), who correlate these terms with the "selectivity" and "movement" in Scholes/Kellogg (1966). Varying degrees of connectedness have been distinguished at least since Aristotle (*post hoc* is not the same as *propter hoc*). The determination (or assignation) of causal relationships to a sequential process is a basic cognitive operation which occurs in narrativization (cf. operations 1 and 2 in Figure 1).

immanent, that events are not connected "in themselves," but "for someone," most notably for the teller, and that their connection is not merely a logical one, but an axiological one as well: "all events in a successful narrative are related by virtue of their containment within a given evaluative space."¹⁵ The connectedness of events in a plot, and the opposition between story and discourse, are constructed with reference to an evaluative space shared by the narrator and addressee. An ideologically attentive narratology would thus emphasize the interpretive and "manipulative" aspect of the narrator's activity.

The traditional definitions of narrativity, centered on plot and the representation of events, were subjected to negative scrutiny after the flourishing of structuralist narratology in the sixties and seventies. For instance, Fludernik (1996) has criticized plot-based definitions and emphasized the representation of "experientiality." McQuillan (2000) has claimed that any act of semiotic inscription or of communication is a narrative. And the possibly too schematic pair *story/discourse* has fared equally badly with poststructuralist theorists.

Fludernik's "experientiality," while a prominent component of literary narratives, seems to be logically subordinated to the more basic narrative dimension of "connectedness." As she defines it, experientiality is

the quasi-mimetic evocation of 'real-life experience'. Experientiality can be aligned with actantial frames, but it also correlates with the evocation of consciousness or with the representation of a speaker role. [...] Where the current proposal supersedes this setup [i.e. previous narratological accounts] is in the redefinition of narrativity *qua* experientiality *without* the necessity of any actantial groundwork. In my model there can therefore be narratives without plot, but there cannot be any narratives without a human (anthropomorphic) experiencer of some sort at some narrative level.¹⁶

It could be objected, however, that not just any representation of experience is narrative: a picture may represent the experience of a given color, but that experience is not necessarily narrative; thus, the (sequential) representation of *a sequence of experiences*, or *experience in its sequential dimension* seems to be a minimum requirement for prototypical narrativity.¹⁷ In fact, Fludernik makes it clear further on that "experiential-

¹⁵ Gergen/Gergen (1986: 26).

¹⁶ Fludernik (1996: 13).

¹⁷ Sternberg (2001: 122) considers Fludernik's attempt to base a definition of narrative on experientiality "odd" and refers back to a number of definitions based on the double temporal sequence (1992: 464ff.). Werner Wolf is also critical of Fludernik's attempt at

ity *includes* this sense of moving with time," the experience of "the flux of temporality."¹⁸ It would seem, then, that she should actually be claiming a redefinition of narrativity as *temporal* experientiality. On the other hand, the appeal-to-experientiality as a dimension of narrativity is related to the dramatic, emotional and evaluative dimension of narrative in the sense that vicarious participation in subjective experience creates an emotional involvement of the reader in the narrated events and strongly influences evaluation. For Fludernik, "Narrativity can emerge from the portrayal of dynamic event sequences which are already configured emotively and evaluatively, but it can also consist in the experiential depiction of human consciousness *tout court*."¹⁹ It is arguable, however, whether human consciousness can be depicted without any evaluative stance. Fludernik's theory downgrades "emplotment (with its emphasis on suspense),"²⁰ even though the most significant dimension of narrativity, or of "emplotment" in a wider sense, would not seem to be "suspense," but rather the interpretive and evaluative (re)configuration of events (as analyzed, for instance, by Paul Ricoeur).

McQuillan, for his part, proposes a wholesale extension of the concepts of narrative and narrativity. He, too, reacts against the traditional mainstays of narrativity—time sequence, causality, and plot—and sees in narrative instead "the fundamentally constitutive function of language" evident in "any minimal linguistic act." "Narrativity" is the process which constitutes that textual inscription of the inter-subjective context and the signifying chain"; "Narrative is both the minimal unit of meaning and the cognitive process which makes meaning possible"; "a narrative [...] is any minimal linguistic or verbal act."²¹ To me, McQuillan's definition commits the elementary fallacy of the undistributed middle: no doubt, narrative does effect that inscription, but so do other non-narrative processes. Thus, the notion of "textual inscription" cannot provide the definitional trait of narrative. Since every utterance is a narrative for McQuillan, there is no distinction between a narrative, a description, an argument and a dialogue. Moreover, it is also not clear why this expansion of narrative should stop at the boundaries of language, instead of encompassing any

"turning theoretical hierarchies upside down [...] in her otherwise illuminating book on 'natural' narratology" (2004: 84).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*: 29.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*: 30.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ McQuillan (2000: 9, 11, 12).

kind of semiotic inscription—but it is not clear from McQuillan's account that there can be any non-linguistic narratives at all; "events and existents' are not anterior to or knowable outside of language."²² This linguistic imperialism derives from the questionable assumption that any elementary processes of linguistic inscription which lend themselves to narrative description are in themselves narrative. To use a magnified analogy: the fact that a given action can be filmed and that someone may get to know it through a film, does not prove that the action is itself a film.

As to McQuillan's concept of narrativity, "It is now perhaps appropriate to define narrativity as the narrative-forming processes characteristic of the use of language,"²³—if it is indeed a definition, rather than an anti-definition or "leveling of limits"—it leads us in a potentially absurd direction: any linguistic sign is a narrative, and there is no semiotic specificity to (what used to be called) narratives, to say nothing of the absurd restriction of narrativity in the definitions just quoted to "the use of language," regardless of other media. The definition would seem to exclude non-linguistic narratives, while it begs the question of which linguistic processes are narrative-forming. Still, McQuillan's emphasis on *process* is perhaps salutary: narrative is the result of narrativization, of narrative-making; and it can be usefully approached as a process of configuration rather than as a static structure.

Perhaps a misunderstanding of the Aristotelian notion of *mimêsis* is at the root of these reactions against "mimetic" definitions of narrative. For Aristotle, a *mûthos* is a representation or *mimêsis* of an action through the arrangement of the events, an arrangement involving selection and disposition. It is clear in Aristotle that "mimetic" means "configurational" rather than "an identical copy of the original" ("photographic" as we sometimes say today—not that photographs are "photographic" in this sense either).²⁴

²² Ibid.: 7.

²³ Ibid.: 14.

²⁴ That so-called "factual" narratives are not mechanical transcriptions of experience need hardly be reiterated; I will only quote Erving Goffman's view on self-narratives as private dramatic scripts for self-consumption and interaction:

What is presented on the stage did not happen that way in fact—except (to a degree) in the case of biography. But what is presented by the individual concerning himself and his world is so much an abstraction, a self-defensive argument, a careful selection from a multitude of facts, that the best that can be done with this sort of thing is

To go back to Figure 1, we might argue that each of the operations in the left column involves a configurational activity. The most prominently "narrativizing" operation is of course *narrativization* proper (3), i.e. the configuration of an action sequence into a story; but there are configurational operations involved in the perception of an action sequence amid an experiential continuum (1), in the construction of a narrative model or scheme (5) on the basis of a reading, and indeed in any of the semiotic steps which make and remake narrative structures out of previous narrative structures and additional material.

4. Retrospection and Configuration

These narrativizing processes involve a dialectical (and sometimes paradoxical) relationship between the preexisting semiotic object and the retroactive force of the configurational operations. For many narratologists, mimesis understood in the configurational sense of acting on a preexisting material plays a central role in narrative. Suzanne Fleischman provides a particularly forceful statement of the backward-oriented dynamics in narrativization. For her, narratives are "verbal icons of experience, real or invented": "Narration," she states, "is a verbal icon of experience viewed from a *retrospective* vantage"; "stories are one of the most basic of our acquired constructs for organizing and making sense of the data of experience."²⁵

Both Roland Barthes and Aristotle denounce the fallacy of mistaking chronological sequence for causal relationship, although each, in his own way, recognizes in it an essential source of narrative/narrativity: for Barthes, "narrative would be a systematic application of the logical fallacy denounced by Scholasticism in the formula *post hoc, ergo propter hoc* [...]."²⁶ This fallacy is perhaps just one aspect of the more comprehensive phenomenon called *hindsight bias*, or (for us here) *the narrative fallacy*.²⁷ The configuration effected by narrative is imaginatively projected back-

to say that it is a lay dramatist's scenario employing himself as a character and a somewhat supportable reading of the past. (Goffman 1986 [1974]: 558)

²⁵ Fleischman (1990: 1, 23, 94).

²⁶ Barthes (1977 [1966]: 94); see Aristotle, *Poetics*, chap. X. See also John Pier's discussion of the issue in his contribution to this volume.

²⁷ In two recent papers (2004), (2005a), I discuss other critical aspects of the narrative fallacy.

wards and transformed into the reified structure of experience before it is narrated—and before it unfolds, actually.²⁸ Narratologists have been alert to the far-reaching consequences and multiple facets of this phenomenon. Jonathan Culler (1981) saw here a “double logic” of narrative which involved in a paradoxical relationship the definitions of *fabula* and *sjuzhet*. More recently, Phelan and Martin have noted the necessary “incoherence” of first-person narration, divided between the narrated I’s and the narrating I’s perspective: “homodiegetic narration, even in the realistic mode, does not require—indeed, we would go so far as to say cannot require—full coherence between the character-narrator’s dual roles.”²⁹ This division of roles is, I think, one more consequence of the hindsight bias. Gary Saul Morson’s *Narrative and Freedom* (1994) is a milestone in the analysis of this phenomenon, which he terms “backshadowing.” Morson notes an interesting surreptitious effect of the retrospective lens—that in narration, generally, “[w]hat for the character may be a mere accident may be for the reader a sign. Countless forms of narrative irony depend on this divergence of perspective.”³⁰ Let us note one further context where this retrospectivity is surreptitiously active: narrative film. A film, due to the absence of a reminiscing narrator and past-verb tenses, seems to be unfolding freely into the future, while in fact it has been configured by an implied authorial figure and is thus working under what Philip Sturgess (1992) would call “a logic of narrativity”—a logic which is inherently retrospective. Who would think of this while caught in the forward-driven process of watching a film, least of all in the grips of suspense, the quintessential filmic experience? Suspense in narratives is a simulation of real life contingency, but it is a make-believe contingency under the control of a retrospectively narrating narrator, as has been noted by a number of theorists.³¹ And

²⁸ Although within a different framework, this problem is also debated by Hamburger (1973 [1968]) and in the controversy over the *episches Präteritum* beginning in the 1950s.

²⁹ Phelan/Martin (1999: 93). This “incoherence” is inherent in the narratological opposition *Erzähl-Ich* vs. *erzähltes Ich*, going back at least to Lämmert, or to Spitzer’s *erzählendes Ich* vs. *erlebendes Ich*. In French narratology, it is also generally recognized that the *sujet de l’énoncé* is distinct from the *sujet de l’énonciation*. An interesting formulation specific to narrative is given by Jean Bessière, who argues that narrative effects a “paradoxical decontextualization” in presenting the past as actual—to which a further decontextualization, a cutting-off from validating or competing narratives, is added in the case of narrative fiction (2005: 285).

³⁰ Morson (1999: 285).

³¹ See, for example, Ricœur (1984: 157ff.); Goffman (1986 [1974]); Vuillaume (1990).

the control must be disguised. Fleischman, for one, notes one aspect of this self-erasure of narrative processes in verbal narratives:

A major goal of effective storytelling, I submit, is to mask the inherent retrospectivity of narration; and among the principal linguistic tools for accomplishing this task are tense and aspect.³²

One can only note that film manages to erase its own narrative processes in ways which are even subtler: the whole film is already inscribed on the DVD, as it was pre-inscribed even before it was made, in the intentions and in the storyboards of the filmmakers, the narrative strategists who designed the film by, as it were, playing it backwards. All designers of stories concur to some degree with Edgar Allan Poe’s dictum that one must first determine an effect, and a conclusion, and then carefully design all the elements of the work, and of the narrative structure, that will lead to that conclusion and effect.

One of the earliest lucid discussions of retrospection in narrative was provided by Schlicher in his study of a rather specific topic, the use of certain Latin tenses in narrative. Schlicher draws from here a wholesale semiotic theory accounting for the phenomenological distinctness of past and present experience. The passage, which I discovered in Fleischman, is worth quoting in full:

The experience of the mind in dealing with things which are in the process of happening is essentially different from its experience in dealing with events of the past. In the former case it is led along from one detail—act or occurrence—to the next, taking them in as well as it may, but with only a limited opportunity to judge them individually or grasp them in their relation to one another or their connection with other things outside of those just taking place. [...] Whereas present experience is largely a mere suggestion of events, the past is a pattern in which [...] details have found their place according to their significance to [the speaker]. The individual act in the past may be seen as completed or continuing, as independent or as related to some other act. All this is possible because these acts can be passed in review at will, appraised and com-

³² Fleischman (1990: 131). Since it is a prototypical feature of narrativity, the inherent retrospectivity of narratives is of course implicit in most classical and modern analyses of narrative and narrativity. Take for instance Hamburger’s discussion of the epic preterit, or Genette’s observation that “it seems evident that the narrating can only be subsequent to what it tells” (1980 [1972]: 216), before he goes on to note the marginal cases of predictive or simultaneous narrative. Note that even these cases are in general discursively subordinate to a retrospective stance.

pared—a thing quite impossible or only partially possible at the time when they are taking place.³³

The conclusions drawn by a number of philosophers of history from this fact are best expounded by Ricœur in *Time and Narrative*. The consequences of assuming a retrospective vantage point noted by Schlicher are also crucial for Fleischman's analysis of the relationship between tense and narrative structure.

In a discussion much informed by the hermeneutic philosophy of history, Fleischman defines narrative as "a retrospective verbalization of experience that is packaged *post hoc* into 'events', chunks of *completed action*," and she goes on to draw a number of compelling conclusions on the consequences of this default retrospective quality of narrative for the use of tense and aspect forms in narrative, which is the main object of her treatise.³⁴ Here, I am more interested in her emphasis on the constitutive role of retrospection in the generation of events and thus in the workings of prototypical narrativity. An event comes into being *retroactively* when it is interpreted as one in the course of a narrativizing cognitive process. The event is

a cognitive construct that mediates between experience and language, yet belongs strictly to neither domain [...], a hermeneutic construct for converting an undifferentiated continuum of the raw data of experience, or of the imagination, into the verbal structures we use to talk about experience: narratives, stories.³⁵

Fleischman refers us to Shuman's (1986) contention that events should not to be confused with experiences: events are ways of categorizing experiences.³⁶ Events are experiences that have been related to their consequences, or to other experiences, which have been evaluated. Following Mink (1970) and Gallie (1968), Fleischman argues convincingly against the notion "that experience offers itself up to us already packaged in the form of 'events', which a narrator then arranges in a text."³⁷

Arguably, however, we always narrate "standing on the shoulders" of previous narratives that have already packaged events for us: we don't

³³ Schlicher (1931: 48–49), quoted in Fleischman (1990: 32).

³⁴ Fleischman (1990: 74): "In narrative, past time reference is a given and need not be reiterated in each sentence. Where it is redundant, the primary temporal voice of a tense-aspect form may be muted, allowing the secondary aspectual voice to be heard."

³⁵ *Ibid.*: 99 (emphasis in the original).

³⁶ Cf. *ibid.*: 100.

³⁷ *Ibid.*: 95.

constitute events all the time—we *retell* them. And in doing so, we may give the story a new twist. While acknowledging the cogency of the views of the critics who emphasize the cognitive importance of the narrativization of experience, we can perhaps explore further complexities in the way these theories deal with prenarrative reality. In the process of hunting for this mythical beast, these theories may turn into their own antitheses and perhaps lead us to a further and no doubt provisional synthesis. So, can we really oppose narrative to non-narrativized reality?

It would seem to be a truth universally acknowledged for many theorists that narratives exist only in our minds, not in objective reality. To quote Walter Ong, S. J.:

Reality never occurs in narrative form. The totality of what happened to and in and around me since I got up this morning is not organized as narrative, and as a totality cannot be expressed as narrative. To make a narrative, I have to isolate certain elements out of the unbroken seamless web of history with a view to fitting them into a particular construct which I have more or less consciously in mind.³⁸

And, according to P. N. Furbank:

To think that narrative can 'copy' or 'imitate' life is to forget an all-important fact once put forth by Louis Mink with great conciseness. 'Stories', he said 'are not lived but told'. There are no stories 'out there' in the world, waiting to be told. They have to be invented. We are so familiar with the act of storytelling and perform it so often ourselves in our daily lives that we tend not to reflect on its nature or remember that (even in its most banal form) it is a creation *ex nihilo*: it is not a 'copy' of anything, except perhaps another story.³⁹

An interesting qualification is provided in the last sentence. Against the preceding views, we might oppose a perhaps more conventional kind of wisdom: that there are no creations *ex nihilo*; that matter, including the matter of stories, is not created or destroyed, only transformed—into energy, for that matter. This is also the case with narrative, in a way, for the matter of a narrative may provide the energy, or dynamic transformation, of this narrative into another one. No narrative is completely invented, and indeed it is not in vain that scholars have sought to identify and analyze mythical, narratological, and other structural patterns. A narrative is recreated, transformed, retold, but with a difference, from a different standpoint (e.g. "But why always Dorothea?" asks George Eliot in *Middlemarch* [1871–72] before going on to offer her husband's viewpoint). Such an

³⁸ Ong (1982: 12).

³⁹ Furbank (1999: 131); the quotation is from Mink (1970).

alternative standpoint was perhaps only waiting to be teased out from its previous avatars under another title. And of course, there are plenty of stories 'out there' in the world—not in the world of lifeless matter, perhaps, but in the world of human energies and interaction. Stories are indeed lived, and not just told: we are stories and we inhabit stories, to paraphrase Emerson.⁴⁰ It is our own stories we inhabit, indeed—not the ones others will tell about us, which is probably what Mink was driving at. Our stories will be retold and reshaped by others—but that doesn't mean that there is anything wrong with them: they have their own complexity—for we have reshaped previous stories to suit our purpose.

5. Intertextual Narrativity

There is, then, an important intertextual dimension in narrativity, especially when it is understood as a process of narrative production. Roland Barthes understood intertextuality as a process of production, a dynamic view of textuality in general as intertextuality and as production. "What founds the text is not an internal, closed, accountable structure, but the outlet of the text onto other texts, other signs; what makes the text is the intertextual."⁴¹ Thus, a narrative is a work done on previous narratives and a response to previous narratives. Which ones, specifically, is a matter to be negotiated by the narrator, the reader and their interlocutors.

In her critique of structuralist narratological approaches, Barbara Herrnstein Smith noted that what we have called narrative models do not preexist narrative, but are rather *a posteriori* constructions effected on actual narratives: the supposedly objective structural analysis of a story into its basic constituents is for her nothing but a retelling of the story, a refiguration of the same for a given interactional aim (in this case, a disciplinary approach to analysis):

⁴⁰ We might adapt Emerson's views on symbols, word-making and the origin of current words in "fossil poetry" in order to describe the nature and origin of narratives and world-making: just as the poet is the word-maker *par excellence*, narrators are world-makers *par excellence*; the constant activity of poets and narrators is needed because symbols appear and disappear, are abandoned or used to make other symbols: "The quality of the imagination is to flow, and not to freeze; [...] all symbols [read 'narratives'] are fluxional; all language is vehicular and transitive" (Emerson [1971 (1843): 552]).

⁴¹ Barthes (1981 [1973]: 137). On intertextual narratology, see Pier (2004).

For any given narrative, there are always *multiple* basic stories that can be constructed in response to it because basic-ness is always arrived at by the exercise of some set of operations, in accord with some set of principles, that reflect some set of interests, all of which are, by nature, variable and thus multiple.⁴²

To many narratologists, this may seem to beg the question of a distinctively narratological approach. Smith may be neglecting the circularity and recursivity of this process leading from narratives to narrative schemata and to further narratives, as indicated in our diagram above. But still, the emphasis on interaction is useful, for it can readily be seen that there is some truth in her view for our purposes here. The salutary relocating of critical debate within communicative interaction that we find in this quotation can be extended to that other aspect of narrativity we have just been discussing: the identification of textual networks. Such networks both "preexist" the text in a sense and are "constituted" as theoretical objects through communicative interaction by narrators, readers, and critics.⁴³

Narrative is currently considered by psychologists as an instrument of cognition: narrative well-formedness is one of the dimensions of cognition (it being noted, however, that the well-formedness of a discourse may vary from one type of situation to another: a story which is "too good to be true" is not well-formed in the contextually adequate sense I mean). Part of the functioning of narrative explanations consists in their improving on the narrativity of previous explanations, as noted by Robinson and Hawpe: "most instances of narrative thinking involve efforts to get from an inadequate story to a complete and convincing story."⁴⁴ This is related to our concerns here, as it involves, in fact, *retelling* an existing story. Narrative explanations "strike the most useful balance between alternatives on several cognitive dimensions" (i.e. economy, selectivity, familiarity), so that in a satisfactory explanation "[a] story provides the right balance between uniqueness and familiarity."⁴⁵ This balance between uniqueness and generality is the result of a hermeneutic dialectic between what Schleiermacher would call a "grammatical" norm and a "stylistic" or individual case.⁴⁶ Narrative interpretation likewise involves a circular movement in time between the individual case or event and its place in an

⁴² Smith (2000: 144).

⁴³ See e.g. my comments on Borges's notion of influence and predecessors (García Landa [1998b]) or, for that matter, Culler's analysis of "double logic" (1981).

⁴⁴ Robinson/Hawpe (1986: 112).

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*: 113–14.

⁴⁶ Schleiermacher (1986 [1805–33]: 98ff.).

overall narrative configuration that transcends the presentness of the isolated phenomenon. There results, too, after the narrative reworking, an intertextual relationship between new stories and old stories. "The outcome of an act of narrative thinking is, of course, a new story. [...] Furthermore, new stories are often linked to prior experiences which may also have been cognitively structured into stories. [...] Narrative is a cognitively efficient compromise between uniqueness and generality."⁴⁷ Here, Robinson and Hawpe make narrative assume the same mediating role between uniqueness and generality that Schleiermacher assigned to the hermeneutic circle. The compromise must be an efficient and acceptable one for the narrator, firstly, but also for the addressee. Indeed, oral storytelling is frequently a collaborative activity,⁴⁸ and evolved versions of this phenomenon are to be found in the critics "doing things" with the classics.

Stories are constructed, both in literature and in everyday life, as interpretation of action and circumstances in order to forecast and guide action and to serve as modes of interpersonal communication and negotiation. The retroactive generation of causes starting from their effects, once commented by Nietzsche and by Jonathan Culler,⁴⁹ is applicable here: "What you do will depend upon what you conclude about the precipitating circumstances. As in any story then, the ending is foreshadowed in the beginning."⁵⁰ With the proviso that a beginning reread after the fact is no longer the beginning we had "in the beginning."

Many times, Robinson and Hawpe note, the rejections of stories by audiences is due to the failure of the narrative explanation implicit in the story. "The major test of a story is its acceptance by others."⁵¹ Acceptance has many dimensions: from tellability and floor-holding, through credibility of the action sequence, to acceptance of the teller's evaluative stance. Telling, then, is an interactional *risk-taking*, to introduce a dimension of the pragmatics of speech theorized by Michael Toolan:⁵² in many retold narratives, the risk of telling is shown to be one more aspect of the risk-taking inherent in eventful living.⁵³ We encounter here the *performance*

⁴⁷ Robinson/Hawpe (1986: 116, 118).

⁴⁸ Cf. *ibid.*: 116. See also Sacks (1995); Galloway Young (1987); Norrick (1997); Shepherd (1998).

⁴⁹ Culler (1982: 86–88).

⁵⁰ Robinson and Hawpe (1986: 118).

⁵¹ *Ibid.*: 121.

⁵² Toolan (1996: 66–67).

⁵³ Cf. Scheibe (1986); Goffman (1986 [1974]).

dimension of narrativity: a narrative effects a configuration of action *for someone* in a given speech situation, one which puts the narrator's face at risk—a double risk, involving both the interactional import of the "matter" or interpretation of events and the narrator's stylistic performance: "one of the (presumably unconscious) agendas speakers have in choosing narrative over other modes of reporting information is to 'display' and win approval for their own skill as storytellers."⁵⁴ The vertigo of risk may be more evident in face-to-face interaction; but that literature is a socially risky undertaking has been clear at least since Horace's *Ars Poetica*.

Narrated narratings import into the risky business of literature at least part of the risk of personal encounters—perhaps, indeed, as a red herring, to leave out of focus the author's risk by placing a fictional narrator at risk. There is some reason to believe that narrated narrating tends to be a naively manipulating form in this sense, one which seeks to contain and orient the readers' reactions. It is in this sense a closed form, a "poetic" one, to use Gary Saul Morson's opposition between poetics and tempics. Morson encourages us to appreciate open forms of tempics, and it is not surprising that part of his arguments are directed against rereading, in which he sees a way of retroactively foreclosing, if such a thing is possible, the meaning of a text.⁵⁵ Many a narrated narrating is offered to us, in effect, as already reread. In Phelan and Rabinowitz's terms, a narrative usually reserves incompleteness for the narrative audience, completeness for the authorial audience.⁵⁶ In narrated narratings, however, the narrative audience is also supplied with completeness and closure. Not surprisingly, hypercalculated works (e.g. Poe's mystery and detective stories, featuring Dupin) tend to favor embedded narrative situations.

The hindsight bias produced by narrative structures has been prearranged by the plotter, and thus for some minds, narrative gives rise to claustrophobic feelings: the openness and unpredicatability of unplotted reality is longed for and any narrative seems manipulative and vicious. Note, for instance, the tone of impatience in Goffman's account of personal narratives (and plays):

Tales, like plays, demonstrate a full interdependence of human action and fate—a meaningfulness—that is characteristic of games of strategy but not necessarily characteristic of life.

⁵⁴ Fleischman (1990: 102).

⁵⁵ Morson (1999: 291).

⁵⁶ Phelan/Rabinowitz (1994).

So, it can be argued that although individual projects and undertakings literally do occur, the individual's presented tales about these projects would seem to be more akin to drama than to facts. And since natural figures do not have a cast of trained actors at their disposal or much time to polish a script, since they merely have their own amateur capacity at recounting events, there is rarely any question as to which is more lifelike: the stage or what it is that private persons present to those whom they can get to listen.⁵⁷

Thus, for Goffman, theater and personal life narratives are both theatrical, but drama is more lifelike because it is performed with greater professional skill. I think this is not actually the case: life is more lifelike *because it is more dramatic*. We want life to be like that—a fluid drama with changing conventions. And life is more realistic, not because it is more mimetic, but because it is more metadramatic and allows a greater degree of supervenience and contingency, which is the stuff of reality, whereas (traditional) drama is always already scripted in advance. Maybe that is one reason why rehearsals and retellings, as doubly laminated events, sometimes provide more matter for reflection than the drama or the story itself—a circumstance which has of course been exploited at least since Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1595) or Buckingham's *The Rehearsal* (1671).

6. Repetition

When we *tell* that someone *told* us... whatever, what is told acquires an additional value by virtue of its being retold. If it was told once (perhaps not for the first time) and is going to be repeated *now*, there must certainly be something interesting, curious or valuable in it, at least something *tellable*: the story has some credit, and we are all the readier to add it to our personal account, as what has oft been told will perhaps be retold by us, to our credit. Narrative value increases with strategic repetition (it may also *decrease* if the story is too well known after all). Fictionalized (and controlled) repetition thus increases a story's narrativity, inasmuch as the interactional dimension of *tellability* is, too, a major component of narrativity.⁵⁸ Tellability ties up with the other elements of narrativity proposed

⁵⁷ Goffman (1986 [1974]: 559). But give *me* the stage of the world, any time!

⁵⁸ Among other instances of such "dramatized narrations," note Marlow's narrative in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1900) or the "twice-told tale" in Jack London's "A Hyperborean Brew" (1901). London's "The Scarlet Plague" (1912) also contains an inter-

above—sequentiality, retrospection, interpretation and evaluation—by way of the latter: the events are tellable as part of an interpretive interactional endeavor, or they are evaluated as tellable in order to further the interactional purposes of the communicative encounter.⁵⁹

The reconfigurational value of narrative becomes more visible when its nature as narrative is foregrounded through a variety of reflexive devices. Narrated narratives, and most particularly narrated narratings, are one such device: a thematization of the interactional value of narrative (a hypothesis which will need further substantiation with more analyses of specific examples than I have been able to include in this paper).⁶⁰

The interactional value of narrated narratings is often instrumentalized, both in literature and in conversational narrative: it is subordinated to the aesthetic and communicational (interactional) dimension of the framing narrative. In literary narratives, writer-reader interaction often distorts and secretly interferes with the interaction between narrator and narratee. Therefore, the dynamics of second-degree narrative interaction (in prose fiction, for instance) cannot be equated with that of unmediated narrative interaction, although it does draw on many of the latter's protocols.

Some aspects of this phenomenon, narrated narratives, have been abundantly studied, most notably since Genette's account of metadiegetic narratives. Thus, Genette distinguishes six types of relationships between embedding and embedded narrative: analeptic explanation; metadiegetic prolepsis; purely thematic function; persuasive function; distractive function; obstructive function.⁶¹ Genette also mentions the more specific issue of narrated narratings with reference to *La Recherche*, when characters act as second-degree narrators and "the narrating instance is highlighted and

esting instance of narrated narrating, which I comment upon in "Overhearing Narrative" (2004b).

⁵⁹ In this connection, John Pier (personal communication) suggests the concept of "retellability": some stories are retellable, others not; tellable stories are to some degree retellable stories. Marie-Laure Ryan's entry on "Tellability" in the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory* (2005) provides an excellent overview of the issue.

⁶⁰ A terminological note: the concepts of "narrated narrative," "narrated narrating" and "narrated narration" parallel of course "narrative," "narrating" and "narration" as defined, for instance, in the *Routledge Encyclopedia* (thus, a "narrating" is the act of producing a "narrative," while "narration" can act as a synonym of both "narrating" and "narrative"). (Herman/Jahn/Ryan [2005: 338–39]).

⁶¹ Genette (1988 [1983]: 94). Genette's discussion of "transtextual" transformations of narratives (retellings, parodies, pastiche, imitations...) is also highly relevant in this respect.

competes in importance with the event being related";⁶² otherwise, Proust suppresses those hypothetical intermediary narratives, does away with explicit retellings, and entrusts all the telling to Marcel.⁶³ Genette's sections on the functions of secondary narratives are also relevant, as is his awareness of the discourse's reflexive dimension throughout (cf. Marcel's "invasion of the story by the commentary, of the novel by the essay, of the narrative by its own discourse"⁶⁴).

Narratological studies of the narratee are also crucial to approach the specificity of narrated narrating: "the existence of an intradiegetic narrator has the effect of keeping us at a distance, since he is always interposed between the narrator and us."⁶⁵ Thus, a narrated narrating is a reminder of a crucial interactive element in narrative, as the implied reader is placed explicitly in the position of an overhearer. As Genette says right at the end of his *Narrative Discourse*, quoting Bixiou's words from Balzac's *La Maison Nucingen*: "there are always people *off to the side*."⁶⁶ However, emphasis on overhearing and on the interactional dimension of narrative is not too evident in the rest of Genette's theory.

A grid could be developed to measure some of the effects of narrative doubling, with special attention to the dimension of narrated narrating. The following questions might be taken into account.

Questions on narrative interaction

- 1) Who tells the first narrative?
- 2) To whom it is told?
- 3) Who tells the metadiegetic narrative? (narrator 1? narratee 1? a new narrator? Is this narrative situation connected to the first one in any way?)
- 4) To whom it the story told? The story of the narrating may be told to another narratee or to the reader (more rarely to the original narratee or to the original narrator). Each of these choices will be bound up with specific representational, interactional or ideological factors.

⁶² Genette (1980 [1972]: 239–40).

⁶³ *Ibid.*: 241.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* My discussion of "narrated narratings" should be supplemented with many insights on narrative levels in Nelles (1997) and on metanarrative in Nünning (2004), as there is of course much common ground between these issues.

⁶⁵ Genette (1980 [1972]: 260).

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*: 262.

Questions of narrative level, medium and genre

- 5) Is the retold narrative present as a metadiegetic narrative, or as an intertext?
- 6) What is the medium of the first narrative? (written, spoken; interaction *in absentia* or *in praesentia*)
- 7) What is the medium of the prior and of the secondary narrative? Is there a difference in medium between the first narrative and the metadiegetic narrative? Does this give rise to any "remediations" or intermedial effects?
- 8) To what extent is the secondary narrative alluded to, quoted, narrativized, incorporated into the main narrative?
- 9) What is the genre of the first and of the second narrative? (literature, anecdote, report, etc.?) Is there a difference in genre between the first narrative and the metadiegetic narrative? Does this give rise to any inter-generic effects?
- 10) Is the metadiegetic narrative told at length or is it summarized? When, why and how?

Questions relative to the narrating and sequential processing

- 11) Is the narrating narrated (as well as the story)? To what extent and to what effect? Does the focus of attention fall on the narrative or on the narrating interaction? (it is of course not a question of either/or, but of more or less, when, and how)
- 12) What is the function of the telling in the main narrative? (a major event? a "filler"?)
- 13) Does the structural hierarchy of narrative levels correspond to the hierarchy constructed in reading, or does any surprising rearrangement take place as we read the story—such as frame-breaking?

I will discuss some of these issues in greater detail before moving my argument to a conclusion.

With respect to number 13, note that we may use the term "story" in the architectural sense as an analogy for metadiegetic narratives, building "a second story" on the first one. (Interestingly, both meanings of "story" have a common etymological origin in *historia*; see *OED* or *Webster's*). When someone leads us into a building we are not familiar with, we may remain all the time at ground level, or we may go up through a staircase from the ground story or first story to the second story, and so on; in order to get back to the street level, we must go down the stairs back to the first

story. (Sometimes, the person who has accompanied us into the building may suddenly leave us in the second floor; or we may discover we had been led into the building through a second floor that looked like a ground floor, and we discover the real ground floor as we get out through another door.) This image for embedded narratives is similar to Marie-Laure Ryan's image of "stacks" or "windows." Her observations on the cognitive level of attention demanded from the reader should be kept in mind: does the main story provide a coherent ground for the embedded stories figure, or is the foreground/background distinction lost, with the building left floating in mid-air as it were?⁶⁷ Is the story read for the sake of the little stories, or are they cognitively subservient to the main one?⁶⁸

The retold story may be given as a full narrative or as a summary (that is, the original narrativization may be kept or there may be a process of re-narrativizing, re-emphasizing and re-interpreting that narrative). This issue overlaps with the wider issue of *represented speech*: for example, the story being narrated by an intradiegetic narrator may be reproduced by the extradiegetic narrator in full and in the character's own words (direct discourse), or it may be transformed through various modes of filtering and reduction to free indirect rendering, indirect discourse or narrativized discourse, so that, purportedly, only the illocutionary or perlocutionary dimensions of the speech act are preserved. From a reader's point of view, retelling may be an actual retelling, or a conventionally summarized one in which repetition is avoided in one way or another.⁶⁹ In conversational narrative, it will be more usual to narrativize rather than quote the whole of the metadiegetic narration, although of course there is ample scope here for the use of fully narrativized rendering, indirect speech, free indirect or direct speech (which in this case is always "pseudo-direct" speech).

There is a structural/genetic continuity between the narrating of anecdotes in everyday conversation and the more complex forms of artistic narrative, with listeners gradually becoming an audience.⁷⁰ Literary stories which narrate narratings keep us aware of this continuity and build bridges between advanced literate and oral forms, re-appropriating orality for literature and constructing complex interactional forms precisely

⁶⁷ This is what happens in metalepsis; cf. Ryan (2005).

⁶⁸ Ryan (1999: 124–25).

⁶⁹ Cf. Genette (1980 [1972]: 232) on the *Odyssey*, Book VII: Ulysses refrains from retelling a story on the grounds of avoiding repetition—but the repetition would exist mainly for the reader who has read Book V, not for his intradiegetic audience.

⁷⁰ Cf. Goffman (1986 [1974]: 522).

through a return, with a difference, to the origins of narrative interaction. In "The Storyteller," Walter Benjamin expresses his appreciation for stories which evoke the voice of storytelling, the voice reaching back to before—the origin of written literature: historical-development "has quite gradually removed narrative from the realm of living speech and at the same time is making it possible to see a new beauty in what is vanishing."⁷¹ This voice is preserved and evoked, though not necessarily as an anonymous voice, by those genres which privilege embedded narratives (e.g. mystery stories told by a narrator to a fictional audience).

A narrated narrative does not necessarily foreground a narrated *narrating*. In many frame narratives (e.g. in most frames introducing a written metadiegetic narrative), the frame is merely a device to introduce a narrative which is clearly detached from its surrounding. Such is the case, for instance, with metadiegetic narratives set in frames, as in the *Canterbury Tales* (c. 1390), or in their slightly more integrated avatars in novels such as Potocki's *Manuscript Found in Saragossa* (1804, 1813). We may compare this phenomenon in written narrative to conventions regarding the use of voice-over or subjective point-of-view shots when introducing a first-person narrator in a film: usually, these markers of subjectivity disappear soon after the frame has been established and the filmic narrative then proceeds in the usual "objective" mode.

But many literary narratives (the case seems to be rarer in film) provide interferences of the framing within the framed story—"reminders" that there is a frame—and some (not many) may choose to emphasize the telling for its own sake as an event, not just as a convention to frame a metadiegetic story. In *narrated narrating*, the intradiegetic narrator's narrative activity is visible and foregrounded so that the story told may be frequently interrupted and so that narratees may be prominent and articulate. John Barth proposes a further degree of complication that may be achieved by some frame narratives:

Imposed upon the genre of *frametales*, an order of climax suggests the possibility of a dramaturgical relationship among the several degrees of narrative involvement: a narrative strategy in which the inner tales bear operatively upon the plots or plots of the outer ones, perhaps even precipitating their several complications, climaxes, denouements.⁷²

⁷¹ Benjamin (1969 [1936]: 87).

⁷² Barth (1981: 56).

Barth's own tale "Menelaiad" (in *Lost in the Funhouse* [1968]) is a spectacularly complex game and experiment with such possibilities.

7. Configuration and Retelling

Following Barbara Herrnstein Smith's critique of structuralist narratology, many recent theories of narrative have emphasized the interactional, communicative and situational origin of narrative concepts, favoring the study of narrative structure as a negotiation between different narratives, rather than as an operation confronting abstractive plot or story levels and a surface text. For McQuillan, for example, "all verbal and linguistic acts become narratives as articulations of the inter-subjective."⁷³ Sarbin, too, has emphasized the communicative and social-experiential basis of narrative.⁷⁴ And then there is Morris Zapp's Peircean dictum: "*every decoding is another encoding.*"⁷⁵ As I have indicated before, the interactional dimension of narrative should be taken into account when we speak of the narrative configuration of experience (in Ricœur's vein). We always configure something for some interactional purpose. Any configuration is actually a reconfiguration of elements that are already structured, a previous structure which, in turn, is often preserved or only partially displaced by the new configuration. And, crucially, we always reconfigure or reshape previous narratives. The experience we reshape is always already (to quote an iterable phrase) narrativized. Each narrative contains other narratives that it presupposes, counters, retells, uses or articulates in order to recycle the interactional import of those narratives and adapt them to its own purpose. This real-life process may be in turn fictionalized in artistic narrative: explicitly narrated narratings are just one way of emphasizing this dimension of narrativity.

A narrative may be analyzed in itself or as part of a wider interactional exchange, whether at an individual level or at the wider level of social semiotics. From this interactional perspective, it has been argued by McQuillan that

every narrative is also a counternarrative. This is not to say that neither a narrative nor a counternarrative is in itself representative of truth. Rather, as a condition of its pro-

⁷³ McQuillan (2000: 13).

⁷⁴ Sarbin (1986: 15).

⁷⁵ Lodge (1984: 25) (emphasis in the original).

duction a narrative will always initiate a counternarrative. Truth is the stake of the contest between these narratives.⁷⁶

We can perhaps speak of truth as "truth effects," as a local semiotic product which arises from and through interaction—quite a far call from the Thomist coincidence between object and mind. Consensus with other minds (and dissent from yet other minds) is crucial in the truth-and-error generating process. This would seem to be in general keeping with a symbolic interactionist approach to knowledge and meaning, as defined for instance by Blumer (1986).

As an instrument of cognition, narrative is a major instrument in the articulation of these truth effects. Kerby notes the truth claim which is implicit in narrative configurations of experience:

The truth of our narratives does not reside in their correspondence to the prior meaning of prenarrative experience; rather, *the narrative is the meaning of prenarrative experience*. The adequacy of the narrative cannot, therefore, be measured against the meaning of prenarrative experience but, properly speaking, only against alternate interpretations of that experience.⁷⁷

The adequacy of a narrative can be measured, for instance, against counternarratives, but also against critical deconstructions of that narrative's structure, or against other types of audience response which involve a negotiation of the meaning articulated by the narrative. All these phenomena may be considered elements of an interactional process in which the construction of the structural relationships of the story and the discourse, and the critical study of that construction, are just episodes in the ongoing story.

⁷⁶ McQuillan (2000: 23). The main lines of this interactional and open-ended conception of textual analysis were memorably theorized by Barthes (1981 [1973]). The interactional notion of truth I refer to below has a pragmatist ancestry, notably in William James (1911) and in George Herbert Mead (1929).

⁷⁷ Kerby (1991: 84).

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