Narrative Matters

Prototypes, Genres, and Concepts:
Travelling with Narratives

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Article abstract

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Travelling with Narratives

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The "narrative turn" is (too) often understood as a celebratory term indicating the growing importance and popularity of narrative studies. This article elaborates the merits of a more critical approach to the history of narrative theory. By discussing David Herman's idea of prototypical narrativity, the article suggests that there has been a longstanding contradiction between the abstract and universal notion of narrative and the narrow and particular Proppian prototype of narrativity. The article argues that "narrative" has primarily travelled either as a concept, metaphor, or prototype rather than as a full narrative theory or method. Instead of one, unitary narrative turn, the article argues for the existence of several diverse and partly contrasting narrative turns. The recent experiential turn in narrative studies and the consequent change of the prototype of narrative gives a strong impetus for a new wave of cross-disciplinary narrative theory.

More than twenty years ago, when I embarked on the study of narrative theory, I felt profoundly perplexed by the *contrasting attitudes* towards narrative suggested by different authors. During the years that followed this initial confusion, I have learned once and again that the mere usage of the same word, "narrative," does not always indicate the usage of the same or equal *concept* of narrative. This contradiction is already obvious in the famous volume *On Narrative*, edited by W. J. T. Mitchell (1981). Such contributors to the volume as Hayden White, Paul Ricoeur, and Barbara Herrnstein Smith, for example, locate their "narratives" differently and display different attitudes towards narrative.

There is, of course, much irony and difficulty invested in any attempt at writing a conceptual history of narrative, as I am supposed to do. Can such a fuzzy network of influences and retroactive movements across disciplinary boundaries, different academic cultures, and different fields of life ever be caught within a single story? Brian Richardson (2000) convincingly argues that the "actual evolution and development of

narrative theory cannot begin to be grafted onto the master narrative of critical theory as told by the poststructuralists. Indeed, the story of modern narrative theory does not fit well into the frame of any narrative history" (p. 172). I accept the worry and the criticism of the master narrative, yet at the same time I cannot fail to recognize a certain circularity in the argument. What do we think about "narrative" if we decide in advance that it is impossible to narrate this particular conceptual history? Richardson correctly criticises the representation of the history of narrative theory as a progression of narrative schools in the style of the old history of ideas (see also McHale, 2005). In order to complicate the picture, and open up some of its contingencies, I discuss the travels of "narrative" from the perspectives of the concept, metaphor, and prototype of narrative. In thinking about the possibilities of narrative in historiography in general, I tend to emphasize the necessary move from the structuralist *textuality* into contextual *storytelling* (Alber and Fludernik, 2010). The purpose of my narrative histories is not the search for fixed closures but an invitation to telling new stories from new perspectives.

Universality Contra Prototype(s)

David Herman (2009a) has recently suggested a new and obviously productive approach to defining narrative from the perspective of *prototype* in contrast to the more conventional strategy of identifying the minimal criteria for narrativity. (Tammi, 2006, and Richardson, 2000, provide useful summaries of bare minimum definitions). Herman's proposal helps the understanding of the history of narrative in two separate ways. First of all, it helps to foreground the profound transformations between structuralist and postclassical theories of narrative. In this article, secondly, I suggest another use of the same idea. I believe that a powerful prototype of narrative has been operative since the first narrative turn in literature. My tentative claim is that there has been an unresolved contradiction between an abstract and universal *concept* of narrative (Barthes, 1977; Fludernik, 2005; Ryan, 2005; Hyvärinen, 2006) and a particularly *narrow prototype* of narrative. If I am right, narrative theory has been a game played with two different packs of cards.

Cognitive theory assumes that prototypes simplify our thinking processes on the level of categorizations. According to the often used example, we tend to think of such birds as sparrows and robins as

representing the category of bird much better than emus or penguins (Herman, 2009a, 12–15). Within the concept of bird we can thus have both prototypical (robin) and marginal (penguin) cases. In the case of narrative, we can also envision different narrative genres (resembling the species in the case of birds) which can overlap or be marginal as regards the prototypes. My question, in this article, could thus be reformulated with the help of this analogy: have we earlier understood something, metaphorically speaking, like ostriches and emus as the prototypical cases of narrativity? The changed understanding of prototypical narrativity changes, of course, the use of the concept, but not necessarily on the level of the "bare minimum" definitions.

Let us begin from the middle of the story, at a decisive juncture where preceding *interest* in narrative is translated into the language of a narrative programme—the first narrative turn in literature and humanities. The French structuralist literary critic and theorist, Roland Barthes (1977), opens his celebrated article "Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives," first published in 1966, with a number of brave claims:

> The narratives of the world are numberless. Narrative is first and foremost a prodigious variety of genres, themselves distributed amongst different substances—as though any material were fit to receive man's stories. Able to be carried by articulated language, spoken or written, fixed or moving … narrative is present in myth, legend, fable, tale, novella, epic, history, tragedy, drama, comedy, mime, painting … stained glass windows, cinema, comics, news item, conversation…. All classes, all human groups, have their narratives, enjoyment of which is very often shared by men with different, even opposing, cultural backgrounds. (p. 79)

The claim above is not simply that narrative is everywhere. The qualitatively new, almost revolutionary assertion is that the very *concept* of narrative is both present and relevant across these diverse fields of human life, arts, and communication. Helpfully, Barthes already emphasizes that narrative is "first and foremost a prodigious variety of *genres*" (emphasis added). Before this first narrative turn, "narrative" as a concept was used within a much more local setting, and it did not have such a theoretically prestigious place within conceptual hierarchies. This side of the story is fairly well known and often rehearsed. My proposal is that in contrast to this universalistic and abstract concept, a very particular

and generically narrow *prototyp*e of narrativity has guided the development of narrative theory, and that the aspect of genre differences has largely been neglected. In Barthes, this change takes place through his choice of *deductive* method before proper analysis of the multiplicity of narrative genres. In arguing for the deductive method, Barthes (1977) first resorts to Saussurean linguistics and then invites the shadow of the prototype:

> [The] Russian Formalists, Propp and Lévi-Strauss, have taught us to recognize the following dilemma: either a narrative is merely a rambling collection of events, in which case nothing can be said about it … or else it shares with other narratives a common structure which is open to analysis, no matter how much patience its formulation requires. (p. 80)

At this theoretical juncture, the Proppian fairy tales offer themselves as a narrative prototype. According to the widely shared understanding, the whole narrative turn in the humanities—first in literature and anthropology—was launched after and as a reaction to the first English translation of Vladimir Propp's (1968) *Morphology of the Folktale* in 1958 (Dundes, 1968). This book inspired Claude Levi-Strauss and other French structuralists, and it later generated a whole thread of theories on story grammars and plot structures (Propp, 1984; Pavel, 1988; Ronen, 1990). However, a closer look at the book itself hardly reveals any explicit theory of narrative at all. Furthermore, even the term "narrative" only has a secondary position among the wonder-tale, functions, roles, and theory of fairy tale. Propp himself later protested even against the term "folktale," claiming that it was all too broad for his study about wonder tales. *Morphology* first needed a radical conceptual translation before turning into a classic of narrative theory (Propp, 1984). Thomas Pavel (1988) considers this translation substantially misguided and believes that it fails to recognize the purposes of Propp's own project correctly.

The particular problem in reading Propp that I would like to highlight concerns the issue of *genre*. The Russian wonder tales were orally transmitted. As examples of highly conventional popular art, they were exceedingly sequential, chronological, and closed. A wonder-tale cannot leave the end of a story hanging; a wonder-tale cannot quite experiment with the form, content, or the ways the story ends. The limits of complexity are equally strictly set since the story must be easily

remembered and recounted, once and again. As for the themes, the world of the wonder tales is equally closed. The stories cannot introduce problems of the market economy or same-sex marriages, or other new phenomena. From beginning to end, they are about Tsars, princesses, heroes, witches, and other characters from romantic quest stories. They are heavily mythic. For these reasons, a wonder-tale radically deviates both from the properly oral everyday narratives and artistically experimenting forms such as novel, short story, or film. The linguist and literary scholar Monika Fludernik (1996) characterizes these stories aptly as pseudo-oral (p.14). Barthes (1977) recognizes this problem by maintaining that "some narratives are heavily functional (such as folktales), while others on the contrary are heavily indicial" (p. 93), yet these exceptionally functional and formulaic narratives continually work as primary evidence of the relevance of such functions and deep structures.

Barthes declared that narrative is "a prodigious variety of genres"; nevertheless, the wonder tales were persistently received as prototypes of narrative rather than as a peculiar genre. The anthropologist Misia Landau (2001) summarizes this prototypical understanding in the following way: "From the point of view of structuralism, narrative can be presented as a string of functional slots or paradigms. The significance of Propp's work, then, is that it provides a method which allows us to describe individual stories as variations on a basic narrative or deep structure" (p. 107). The sociologist Norman K. Denzin (1989) echoes this view: "A narrative as a story has a plot, a beginning, a middle, and an end…. A narrative relates events in a temporal, causal sequence" (p. 37). Partly because the semantic content in the wonder tales was less prominent than the recurrent form, it was understood that the study of the "story form" was the primary focus of narrative studies.

As Pavel (1988) observes, referring to Claude Bremond and Jean Verrier, Propp's model "claims to apply … in fact to only *one* type of tale, namely No. 300 of the Aarne-Thomson classification—*The Dragon Slayer*. The morphology of only one tale has thus served as the foundation of narrative semiotics of all stories, indeed of all meaningful phenomena" (p. 600). The study of one particular wonder tale with one hundred examples, therefore, gave the "method" and impetus to study all other stories "as variations on a basic narrative or deep structure" (Landau, 2001, p. 107). Jerome Bruner (1987) characteristically suggests that ordinary life stories may display a similar recurrent form as the

wonder tales do, more precisely to "reveal a common formal structure across a wide variety of content" (pp. 16-17).

From Prototype to Definition

The Barthesian idea of narrative was formulated in universal and abstract terms, encouraging the study of the prodigious variety of genres. However, the model study and prototype that inspired scholars, from structuralist narratologists to many sociologists, was based on an exceptionally narrow, closed, and formulaic genre. The ideas about narratives as closed sequences of events with conventional types of agents motivated scholars who worked with all kinds of different stories. For example, what legitimates the imposition of the language of Romance, with all the heroes, villains, and princesses, onto the study of ordinary everyday narration?

The incongruence between the abstract conception of narrative and the particularistic prototype of narrative seems to lead to interesting tensions. In terms of definitions, structuralist narratology seems to disregard the critical test of the Barthesian "prodigious variety of genres," that is, to ask about relevant definitions from the perspective of different genres, and proceeds instead with the help of the Proppian prototype. The argument begins with the shared prototype, delves next into the presumed deep structure, and returns from there in a purified form of a *grammar* which is now theoretically resistant to all empirical genre differences. Seymour Chatman (1981), characteristically, writes in the epoch-making volume *On Narrative,* that "one of the most important observations to come out of narratology is that narrative itself is a deep structure quite independent of its medium" (p. 117). Despite the surface-level genre differences, the deep, prototypical narrative structure can prevail.

Following this prototype, the structuralist narratologists typically defined narrative more or less in terms of *a sequence of events*; saying for example that narrative is "the representation of at least two real or fictive events in a time sequence, neither of which presupposes or entails the other" (Prince, 1982, p. 49; see also Labov, 1972). The prototypical idea of narrative as a sequence of events was soon bolstered by formulations adopted from the Aristotelian theory of tragedy. While Aristotle quite explicitly discussed well-drafted tragedy, that is the arts, the triad of the beginning, middle, and end was soon transposed to narrative theory as the supposedly universal core definition of all narrativity—again an unwarranted move between distinct speech genres (see Hyvärinen et al.,

2010). In social research, the prototype typically worked another way round. Relatively few social scientists have embarked on discussing the concept of narrative or story, suggesting that we already know them from social practice. Without a theoretical discussion on narrative, the inherited prototypes have of course more or less free and un-reflected access to the argumentation.

Hayden White (1981), in his celebrated essay in *On Narrative*, undertakes this whole journey from universalism to particular Aristotelianism. Narrative, in other words, is both universal and extremely particular at the same time. After beginning with Barthes's universalist formulations, White continues that this "suggests that far from being one code among many that a culture may utilize for endowing experience with meaning, narrative is a metacode, a human universal on the basis of which transcultural messages about the nature of a shared reality can be transmitted" (p. 2).

It may require further discussion whether the term "code" above already suppresses the variety of genres into a deep, singular meaning. Be that as it may, White soon withdraws entirely from the universal and returns to the prototype. At the beginning of his last paragraph, questioning the value of narrativity "in the representation of real events," he arrives at an interesting discussion. Indeed, he notes, "the notion that sequences of real events possess the formal attributes of the stories we tell about imaginary events could only have its origin in wishes, daydreams, reveries" (p. 23). This is surely a most self-evident argument. White seems be saying that it would be erroneous to impose Proppian sequences or literary forms on the past events. However, while the paragraph begins from the universal level ("the value of narrativity"), the second sentence is already on the level of the particular prototype. The claim says nothing at all about *the stories we use to tell about real events*. Such an argument is not required, thanks to the shared presupposition of the Proppian-cum-Aristotelian prototype of narrative. Instead of addressing the tricky empirical questions of genre differences or genre blending, White takes the structuralist trip through narrative essence, and continues by asking: "Does the world really present itself to perception in the form of well-made stories, with central subjects, proper *beginnings*, *middles*, and *ends*, and a coherence that permits us to see "the end" in every beginning?" (p. 23; emphasis added). At this point, the whole Barthesian universalism has been replaced by Aristotelian particularism, with the help of the prototype. The variety of genres need not be addressed at all as far as the shared prototype provides the perspective into the "deep structure" and

"form" of narrative. The power of the one hundred wonder tales is enviable.

The Four Narrative Turns

I suggest that instead of one, unitary narrative turn, it might be helpful to distinguish among at least four different turns (Hyvärinen, 2010). My argument is constructionist rather than Aristotelian; the point is not rooted in categorical distinctions or in the exclusiveness of the model. The final number of turns does not even matter as long as the diversity of turns is recognized. The purpose of the exercise resides on the side of displaying important (dis)continuities and contingencies over and across the various narrative turns. The turns differ from each other as regards several key aspects, such as (1) timing; (2) research agendas and typical procedures; (3) attitudes towards narrative and narrative research; and possibly even (4) the success of the turn. My claim is not to disregard or downplay the existing interdisciplinary exchange but to argue that it has often been much more limited than proclaimed in more optimistic reports. However different the various turns have been, the Proppian prototype has been strong enough to persist throughout all of them.

In June 2003 I had a discussion with Mark Freeman on the issue of the narrative turn. We both located the turn in the early years of the 1980s, following the publication of *On Narrative* (Mitchell, 1981). Mark even went on to locate the nexus of the turn in the University of Chicago, where Paul Ricoeur was teaching in those days. Jerome Bruner (1991), who uses the term "paradigm shift" instead of narrative turn, locates the phenomenon at the same point of time (p. 4).

However, David Herman et al. (2005) pose the whole issue differently in the introduction of the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory*. They write that "the 'narrative turn' gained impetus from the development of the structuralist theories of narrative in France in the mid to late 1960s" (p. 1). Narrative was not, automatically or historically, even the key concept of literature. In France, the narrative turn in literature and anthropology took place as early as in the 1960s; in North America the turn accelerated in the 1980s. "Ironically, the narratologists embraced structuralist linguistics as their pilot-science just when its deficiencies were becoming apparent in the domain of linguistics," Herman (2005) notes (p. 30). This key position of Saussurean linguistics meant that the structuralist or classical narratology was not primarily a hermeneutical enterprise; rather, its purpose was to proceed towards a

rigorous, neutral, scientific and descriptive model about the conditions of possibility to generate narratives. The formal and scientific attitude towards linguistic research generally embodied a neutral and curious attitude towards narratives as well. However, Barthes already in 1966 had introduced skepticism towards some narrative genres when he said categorically that "'What takes place' in a narrative is from the referential (reality) point of view literally *nothing*; 'what happens' is language alone, the adventure of language, the unceasing celebration of its coming" (p. 124). No wonder then that this argument was soon translated into full scale skepticism towards the role of narrative in historiography.

In historiography, secondly, the *narrativist* turn may best be located in the 1970s and 1980s, following the publication of Hayden White's *Metahistory* (1973), even though Louis Mink had already published some of his key essays in the late 1960s. White, and Mink (1987) before him, rendered historical narratives problematic by foregrounding the cognitive shaping role that narratives bear upon the contingent facts and details of the past. In contrast to the huge success of narratology, the narrativist historians never gained access to the mainstream of historiography. In contrast to the narrative scholars in social sciences, the narrativists never encouraged the collection and use of stories in writing historiography. Their focus of interest was rather the criticism of narrative in history writing. Instead of moving towards narratives and narrative historiography, some of the narrativist scholars have moved away from historiography towards the narrativist philosophy of history (Jenkins, 1995).

White (1987) himself points out that "narrative is not merely a neutral discursive form that may or may not be used to represent real events in their aspect as developmental process but rather entails ontological and epistemic choices with *distinct ideological and even specifically political implications"* (p. ix; emphasis added). It is clear that White is not thinking here of just any everyday, open, experience-oriented narrative but assumes the Aristotelian, closed and conventional—that is, the Proppian—narrative as his prototype. The first paragon of White's particular "narrative" might indeed be the Platonic *diegesis*: a didactic story presented in simple past tense by a single narrator, with a strong closure and without any disturbing "imitation" or discourse (cf. Plato, 1937, pp. 872−879; and White, 1981). "Narrative," within this mode of thinking, is a distinct and clearly defined sub-system of language with essential and pre-determined qualities. Within this theory, speakers do not use the language but the language system uses the speakers.

The *third*, broadly *social scientific and philosophical turn* is possibly the narrative turn that is most often recognized and celebrated in literature. Beginning from the early 1980s, narrative travelled into psychology, sociology, education, social work, theology, business and management, therapy, and medicine. In stark contrast to the structuralist narratology, this movement was characteristically hermeneutical in orientation, interpreting the meanings of the most various narratives. Whole research paradigms were revolutionized. Shaking up the reign of the experiment (psychology) and survey interview (sociology), the most various life narratives and recordings of storytelling in everyday situations became integral parts of research. "Although rarely mentioned, developments in technology were important in making narrative research a subfield in qualitative inquiry. Miniature recording technologies made detailed studies of everyday speech possible," as Catherine Kohler Riessman notes (2008, p.15). Inspired by Jean-François Lyotard's (1993) critique of the "grand narratives," many scholars theoretically justified the collection and research of small and local narratives. The collection of stories from marginalized and suppressed groups was thus supported by the socio-political idea of "giving a voice" to these non-hegemonic groups. Departing sharply from the two earlier waves of the narrative turn, the narrative scholars typically understood their approach as more deeply humanistic than that of their predecessors' work and the collection of stories, as such, was a useful and ethically valuable thing.

The range of possible appraisals thus changed with this third narrative turn. The psychologist Mark Freeman (1993) writes about his disappointment with formalist narratology and mainstream psychology because of their technicality, and outlines narrative studies as an existentialist counter-force to positivism. Jerome Bruner (1987, 1990) similarly criticizes the cognitive science of his time for focusing on mere information processing instead of the cultural workings of the human mind, positing his narrative approach as an alternative to this narrowly scientific cognitivism. The sociologist Ken Plummer (2001) shares the same orientation in outlining his project: "A major theme haunts this book. It is a longing for social science to take more seriously its humanistic foundations and foster styles of thinking that encourage the creative, interpretive story telling of lives—with all the ethical, political and self-reflexive engagements that it will bring" (p. 1). Carolyn Ellis, one of the pioneers of autoethnography, similarly explains her initial motivation: "My interest was in bringing the lived experience of emotions to social science research and doing research that was relevant to people's

everyday lives" (Davis & Ellis, 2008, p. 283). Jens Brockmeier and Donal Carbaugh (2001) express this new attitude in a more philosophically-tuned language when they point out that "we can conceive of this anti-Cartesian (narrative) orientation as part of an even more general post-positivist movement" (p. 9). At this point narrative has, over its travels, diametrically changed its position as regards *positivism* and *scientist* rhetoric.

Nevertheless, it was not only the attitude towards narrative scholarship but towards narrative itself that was changed. From Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue* (1984) onwards, narrative was often recognized as *a healing entity*, a method to resist the moral and personal fragmentation in modern life. "All too often," Paul Atkinson and Sara Delamont (2006) complain, "narratives are collected and celebrated in an uncritical and unanalyzed fashion. It is a common failing, for instance, to imply that informants' voices 'speak for themselves'" (p. 166). Atkinson and Delamont, of course, document by their example both the expanded range of possible attitudes and some risks of assuming a too celebratory attitude. As they emphasize, "narratives are social phenomena. … Our stance towards such forms and genres of social life should be analytic, not celebratory" (p. 165). The other end of the continuum is aptly argued by James Pennebaker (1995), who says that "when individuals write or talk about emotional events, important biological changes occur. During confession in the laboratory, for example, talking about traumas brings about striking reductions in blood pressure, muscle tension, and skin conductance during or immediately after the disclosure" (p. 6). While encouraging the analytic attitude, narrative scholars need nevertheless to remain open to the option that narratives as such may, after all, have healing effects, at least on some occasions.

This picture of several overlapping and contrasting narrative turns becomes even more complex if we, *fourthly*, consider changed attitudes and changed narrative practices outside research work. Lyotard (1983/1993) already suggested the crises of such neutral and objective regimes of knowledge that professions and experts previously entertained. Contemporary media is full of narrative accounts of health and illness; correspondingly, the ads for alternative treatment most typically portray a photograph of an exposed person, a short story of his or her exposure to illness, and the miraculous recovery with product details. Media equally familiarize abstract public issues by asking concerned individuals to tell their personal stories on the issue. It should be justified to recognize such larger cultural and social trends and consider possible interdependences,

without subscribing to any kind of sociological reductionism. Jennifer Pierce (2003) argues that the "contemporary resurgence of interest in personal narratives dates from the 1960s and 1970s, originating in the Civil Rights movement and, even more powerfully, in second wave feminism. … Feminist sociologists, especially those who had been active in the second wave of the women's movement, became interested in using personal narratives in their research as a way to give 'voice' to women's experiences" (p. 307; on this, see also Riessman, 2008, pp.15−16). The growing interest in narrative studies, obviously, does not originate exclusively from the developments of narrative theory, nor is there one single origin or story-line available for narrative studies. Commercial media interest, technological innovations, and emancipatory social movements have thus equally contributed to the advance of the third narrative turn.

Thus far I have argued for the differences of attitudes and research orientations among the different narrative turns. It may be worth noticing that there has not been any strong methodological continuity between structuralist narratology and social research on narrative. For example, Gérard Genette's (1980) sophisticated model of narrative modalities comprising the levels of *narration*, *story*, and *narrative discourse*, hardly ever travelled to the social sciences. There is still a characteristic difference of orientation between the literary scholars, who work with fiction, and social scientists, who work with non-fictional narrative materials. Literary scholars typically and predominantly identify themselves as narrative *theorists*—however "empirical" their work with fictional texts is—whereas social scientists more typically talk about narrative as a method or describe their own activity as "narrative analysis." This obvious difference made more sense during the hegemony of formalist and structuralist theories in literature, when social scientists trying to make sense of the social world with the help of narratives were more or less alienated from the formalist focus on forms and narrative as mere textuality. Currently, this unwarranted division of work rather materializes in the form of the under-developed theory of narrative in social research. The old adversity to formalism, in turn, encourages ideas of reducing narrative analysis into various forms of content analysis.

Many prominent advocates of the third narrative turn read literary narratology extensively as well, the philosopher Paul Ricoeur's monumental *Time and Narrative* (1984-1988) being the strongest case in point. The interest in literary theory has also been shared by such authors as the psychologists Donald Polkinghorne (1988) and Jerome Bruner

(1987). Ironically, this third wave has actualized Barthes's abstract and universal notion of narrative—without subscribing to Barthes's deductive, structuralist mode of analysis. The long-term continuity was most compellingly built upon the prototypical understanding of narrative in terms of the Proppian wonder tales. One significant but slowly accepted exception was Paul Ricoeur (1981), whose contribution to *On Narrative* already included a poignant critique of Propp and the structuralist, sequential reading of narratives. The psychologist Dan McAdams (1993) later discusses Ricoeur's theory of human, narrative time, and then simply discards its complex understanding of time: "For many of us, time seems to move forward, and through its forward trajectory human beings change, grow, give birth, die, and so on. There is development and growth as well as death and decay" (p. 30). For Ricoeur, the great problem with Propp and structuralist theory of narrative was indeed the trivialization of time to a forward moving trajectory.

Narrative as a Metaphor

Social scientists and psychologists did not primarily inherit their narrative methodologies from literature. The socio-linguistic model of William Labov and Joshua Waletzky (1967/1997) inscribed the belief in sequentially ordered sentences as the defining element of oral narratives. Broadly speaking, it has been this socio-linguistic heritage that has introduced most of the methodological rigor into social research of narrative (see, e.g., Riessman, 1990; Bamberg, 2004; Georgakopoulou, 2007). As mentioned, in the social sciences there is a strong tendency to understand narrative only from the perspective of method. Within curricula, for example, "narrative analysis" typically appears as a slot within "qualitative research methods." A social phenomenon (e.g., illness or aging) is then studied by "collecting stories on the phenomenon" and then "doing narrative analysis." Jaber F. Gubrium and James A. Holstein (2009) take an explicitly different tack by theorizing the study of "narrative realities."

But narrative in social research was originally not simply a methodological approach. Beginning from Alasdair MacIntyre's (1984) influential *After Virtue*, narrative powerfully appeared as a new metaphor for phenomena of human life, mind, and action. For MacIntyre, "man" is "essentially a story-telling animal." Narratives are not, however, merely linguistic phenomena thanks to "the narratives which we live out" (p. 216). For Fischer (1987), humans indeed are "*homo narrans*" (p. xiii).

Jerome Bruner (1987) titles his famous article in terms of a metaphorical thought experiment, "Life as Narrative." Theodor Sarbin (1986) is most explicit in his approach and suggests narrative as the "root metaphor" for psychology. George Rosenwald and Richard Ochberg (1992) title their influential volume "Storied Lives," and Herman (2009b) moves the storied quality from lives to minds.

All these metaphors try to reshape our understanding of human life as an active meaning-making process. What the metaphoric approach argues, once and again, is that the cognitive tools in arranging past experience are not so different from the tools that are at use in planning the future or scanning the present moment. "Stories are not lived but told," as Louis Mink notes (1987, p. 60). White (1999) echoes with: "This is because stories are not lived; there is no such thing as a real story. Stories are written, not found" (p. 9). On the level of representation, these critical claims are almost self-evidently true, at least for every social constructionist thinker. Nevertheless, the categorical distinction between "life" and "stories" reduces the whole issue to simplistic representation, pushing stories curiously outside life, as if they were only the products of some spectator who remained on the outside of life. The opposite way of looking at the issue would be to portray narratives as a necessary method of "doing living," that is, trying to understand, in the middle of acting, thinking and feeling, what all of this is about (e.g., Bruner, 1990; Ricoeur, 1984; Freeman, 2010; Brockmeier, in press).

However, from another angle, this disagreement is far from being as dramatic as it may seem to be. White's comment can be found in an essay wherein he discusses *troping* as an unavoidable tool in approaching such ephemeral entities as the past—and "life" is notoriously such an indefinable entity. What he seems to argue is that cognition of abstract and intangible objects regularly proceeds through the variation of metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony. What White seems to suggest, broadly, is that the tropes as such are forms of cognition and not forms of the "real." This is again true if we think about fictional spectators, but if we look at the actual doing-of-everyday-life, the troping is always already there. Although these metaphors try to grasp something vitally important from a new perspective, there is always a significant residue, or a list of entirely unfitting issues. For these reasons, life is not *a* narrative, life is not reducible to "living out" a narrative, nor are minds or lives only and thoroughly storied. But the critics are probably wrong as far as they assume to have direct, non-metaphorical access to the "real," or even more so, if they believe in witnessing an un-storied "real."

However, the metaphorical discourse on narrative might benefit from discarding the unnecessary totalizing elements of singular nouns. It is a different thing to think of life as "a narrative" than to think of it as narratively organized. Narrative identity may turn out to be a more flexible frame of ideas, if it is no longer understood as an identity in the form of a finished narrative. For a similar reason, I think that the philosopher Marya Schechtman (1996, 2007) cannot escape the criticism against narrative totalization (Strawson, 2004) by connecting her ideas of narrative and the self too closely to the idea of "having a narrative" (2007, p. 160). Personally, I cannot connect my own experience of myself into any such singular formulation of having *a* narrative. The plurality of stories and narrative processes is much more easily accessible.

A New Prototype?

Arguably the most important change taking place over the past 15 years may now be called the *experiential turn* in narrative theory. The Proppian prototype was challenged by such authors as Ricoeur (1981, 1984), Pavel (1988), Ronen (1990) and Meir Sternberg (1992), at the same time as it was fairly popular in social sciences. One of the most prominent critics of the Proppian formalism and the understanding of narrative simply as a sequence of events was Monika Fludernik (1996) in her *Towards a "Natural" Narratology*. Fludernik makes two bold claims. She firstly suggests that the ephemeral and partly chaotic nature of "naturally occurring" everyday narratives must be taken seriously as a key building block of the narrative theory. Secondly, she suggests that *experientiality* rather than the sequence of events should be taken as the key defining feature of narrative.

In literary studies, the "postclassical" fascination with experience has at least two equally relevant elements. On the one hand, pure formalism has been replaced by more openly interpretive approaches, be they rhetorical, cognitive, or "unnatural" (Alber & Fludernik, 2010). On the other hand, the representations and workings of the human mind have been under intensive study. Even though originally titled as "cognitive narratology," this orientation nevertheless has produced studies and questions with high relevance for the social research of narrative. Alan Palmer (2004) has theorized the representation of socially distributed minds in literature, challenging the idea of entirely private minds; Lisa Zunshine (2006) has written compellingly about the reasons to read fiction in her acclaimed *Why We Read Fiction*, and a number of authors

have explored the historical process of representing minds in literature (Herman, 2011). To give a crude summary, Zunshine seems to suggest that we read and attend to fiction (at least partly) in order to test and develop our mind-reading capacities in a fictionally safe environment. However, possibly the challenge is not at all limited to reading *other* minds. As Brockmeier has it,

> One of these assumptions is that the human condition is characterized by a hermeneutic imperative, to borrow Mark Freeman's term . Following this imperative we don't take our being in the world for granted but are continuously engaged in the business of making sense of it. (Brockmeier, in press)

Visiting and playing with fiction, therefore, may after all be less about reading other minds than working with and through our own minds, and testing new mental tools in doing-living. Be that as it may, both interpretations suggest the relevance of fictional narratives in shaping the everyday narratives and everyday interpretative capacities (Herman, 2009b).

A parallel discussion started a bit later in social research with the re-evaluation of the Labovian model of oral narrative. The sociolinguist Wendy Patterson (2008) criticizes the perspective of "narratives of events" and the focus on the sequence in the Labovian theory, and Corinne Squire (2008) accompanies her in the same volume by discussing "experience-centered" approaches to narrative. There is indeed a very perplexing paradox built into the Labovian model of oral narrative, a paradox that has been played out in contrasting ways in the history of narrative studies. Labov (1972) first foregrounds experience by claiming that "We define narrative as one method of recapitulating past experience… ." However, this functional interest in experience is next to marginalized by the straightforward claim for chronology: "by matching a verbal sequence of clauses to the sequence of events which (it is inferred) actually occurred" (p. 359). As Sternberg (1992) very poignantly comments, by this definition, most of the complex and non-referential narratives are excluded from narrativity. Rather than addressing the generic variety of narratives, Labov describes one particular sub-genre of narratives. The Labovian "narrative" was thus a good candidate for a new prototype of narrative.

The ambiguous contrast between "experience" and "sequence of clauses" matching "sequence of events" remains unresolved in the model.

"What, for example, makes chronology so critical that it becomes critical?" asks Sternberg (1992, p. 506). Even more so, the model affords very little interpretative power or analytic rigor to the study of "complicating action." The experience, potentially, is analyzable with the help of the element of "evaluation" and its linguistic markers. The very element that *defines* his narrative receives no particular discussion in his presentation of the model (Labov, 1972, pp. 354–396). Most days are full of sequences of events that remain un-narrated. As Sternberg (1992) has it, such dynamic (Aristotelian) elements as *surprise*, *curiosity,* and *suspense* are vital for narratives and narration, and should therefore replace the criteria of sheer chronology or sequence of events in defining narratives (pp. 506–507). Sternberg's terms cleverly introduce an intense understanding of temporality without suggesting anything like simple sequentiality.

The literary theorist David Herman (2009a) has recently reconsidered both Fludernik's and Sternberg's proposals and has furthermore formulated his position in terms of prototype theory. According to Herman, there are four equally basic elements of prototypical narrativity: (1) the situatedness of the narrative representations; (2) the sequence of events that is "cued" by these representations; (3) the aspect of world-making, world-disruption, and surprise in the narrative representation; and finally (4) the experience of living through this world disruption (p. 14). The situational aspect already locates the highly conventional wonder tales within a marginal area in terms of this prototype, and the fourth aspect of experientiality highlights many psychologically oriented narratives with a minor emphasis on sequence. The aspect of world disruption, already theorized earlier on by Jerome Bruner (1990, 1991) in terms of canonicity and breach, points out that mere sequence without the element of surprise and chaos does not constitute deep or prototypical narrativity. One could even argue that too straightforward a sequence in the wonder tales downplays the role of "cuing," that is, the active role of the reader. What is remarkable in this new and theoretically explicit prototype is that it does not presume any literary precedence: that is, the claim that all narratives were transmutations of inherited literary or conventional modes. While the old prototype more or less directly suggested that all narratives are like wonder tales, Herman's analytically refined prototype suggests that there can be all kinds of less-prototypical narratives (for example, by minimising the prominence of one or more basic elements independently).

In terms of narrative genres, the model is relatively open and flexible. Most definitely, it is not built on either one hundred wonder tales (Propp) or on *one* category of oral narratives (Labov); instead, Herman's basic argument claims that these elements characterize both fictional and everyday oral narratives. Because all four elements in the model can vary from thin to thick narrativity, the resulting combinations may equally be used to characterize narratives and narrative genres that deviate from the prototype in their individual ways.

Although this prototype includes a number of unanswered problems—such as the possible interconnectedness of these prototypical elements—it provides some substantial merits in comparison with previous prototypes, Proppian or Labovian. Firstly, it undeniably meets Monika Fludernik's criterion for relevance since the model addresses key features of narrativity instead of playing with technical sequences of narrative clauses with minimal narrativity.

A further merit of the model resides in its capacity to foreground different types and categories of narrativity instead of presuming that "narrativity" is a qualitatively homogenous phenomenon. For a long time now, narrative theorists have emphasized the idea that "narrative" is not simply a yes-or-no phenomenon but benefits from understanding it from the perspective of more or less thick or thin narrativity (e.g., Fludernik, 1996; Abbott, 2002). Herman's prototype now suggests that it is entirely possible to envision qualitatively different kinds of narrativity. News reports, for example, typically foreground the third element of surprise and world-disruption but often leave the element of experience thin or entirely contingent. Even the individual elements may possibly lead to different kinds of narrativity. The second element, Herman says (2009a), implies that the representation "cues interpreters to draw inferences about a structured time-course of particularized events" (p. 14). How much emphasis shall we put on the "cuing" and how much on the "structured time-course"? It is not uncommon that people usually write life stories which proceed in a strict temporal, chronological order, while on many occasions, the orally rendered or more artistic stories proceed in a much more chaotic and fragmented order. The old, sequential understanding emphasizes the higher narrativity of the first case, while Herman's wording suggests that the mental challenge constituted by merely "cuing" the order might itself be an important element of experience of thick narrativity—at least for many of us.

Aspects of Travel

I set out to question the overly general and easily too optimistic figure of one narrative turn. The metaphor of travel, in its all potential rambling multiplicity and possibility to visit the same sites several times, and as a different person, serves my analytic purpose particularly well. The multiplicity of travels and travellers is at the core of my argument. Deviating from my earlier use of the figure "travelling concept" of narrative (Bal, 2002; Hyvärinen, 2006), I have introduced two other significant travellers: the prototype and the metaphor of narrative. Ironically, the most reluctant traveller has arguably been the theory of narrative, and concomitantly the theoretically grounded and rounded concepts of narrative.

Two other travellers, instead, obviously have performed much better. Some extensively read and discussed narrative studies seem to have had a prototype effect, contributing to prototypical ideas about what narratives at root more typically are. These prototypical models—for example, the Proppian wonder tales and the Labovian oral narrative—have characteristically travelled swiftly across disciplinary boundaries. In particular, the Russian wonder tales were able to epitomize the narrative essence and the access to the narrative grammar, and even sponsor many of the structuralist definitions of narrative as representations of sequences of events.

The successes of these prototypical travels—both the Proppian and Labovian versions—indicate a theoretical failure to meet Roland Barthes's (1977) old call to understand narrative as "a prodigious variety of genres" (p. 79). Historically, one of the hardest problems has been to accept the variety and fragmentation of everyday oral narration (Hyvärinen et al., 2010; Georgakopoulou, 2007). Decades-long debates on the narrative genres of historiography, and the overall difficulty in balanced analysis of the potential ideological implications that different narratives (may) have, suffer gravely from the continuous replacement of the nuanced theory of narrative genres by the overly abstract and essentialist arguments which find their point of departures in the inherited narrative prototypes (see, e.g., Strawson, 2004; Hyvärinen, 2012).

In the language suggested by Hayden White (1999), these arguments and studies once and again mobilize the mental figure of *metonymy* by inviting one quite narrow category of narrative to represent all narratives and narrativity in general. The move I suggest—the more nuanced study of narrative genres as a cure to this problem (again

following White's discussion of tropes)—mobilizes a more rounded, synecdochic understanding of narrativity in all of its boundless variety.

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