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## Chapter 6

# The Relevance of Irrelevance in Mimetic Narratives

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### GUESS WHAT . . .

In this chapter, I shall argue for a “local” form of relevance theory (RT), highlighting specific constraints linked to two general types of narrative that I consider opposed in function and design. My main claim will be that some narratives, which I shall call “mimetic” or “intriguing,” are designed to fulfill a specific purpose that invalidates almost all basic principles guiding ordinary language use, while others, which I shall call “configuring,” respect those principles, because they are designed to bring clarity and convey knowledge concerning past events. Based on this distinction, I consider it impossible to define what is *relevant* and what is *not* with reference only to some general principles, supposedly valid for all kinds of narrative discourse, as is often presupposed in relevance theory as well as in narratology.

However, before dealing with this problem on a theoretical level, I need to give a concrete illustration of the issues that I aim to discuss here. I shall intentionally not give the context of the following example, but I guess one can infer it from the discourse:

Hi dad! Guess what . . . Mother had a terrible accident today! Oh! by the way, I’m calling you from the hospital. Anyway, let’s start my story with the beginning. You remember when we woke up this morning. It was raining outside and mother had to take the car to go to work. Despite the weather, she looked so cheerful in her beautiful red dress, having no idea of what would happen next. She heard on the radio that there was a lot of traffic on the highway. So, she thought she would save some time by taking the bridge over the Hudson River. But you know, the visibility is terrible at this time of the year and the road was very slippery on this bloody bridge. Then . . . well, sorry! I have to hang up, there’s a lot going on around here. I’ll call you back in an hour or two. Bye dad!

Interpretations of this short piece will differ completely according to the narrative genre identified by the audience. If one sees the story as some kind of joke (let's say a Monty Python gag), he or she might find it quite funny, because it seems absurd that the son does not give the father the crucial information he is doubtless waiting for, namely: what is Mother's present condition? We infer from the genre that the tension between the expected information and its deferral would probably devastate the father, but it produces on the audience an anxiety blended with pleasure—a kind of enjoyable suspense. The cliff-hanger of the story's ending, associated with the unsolved mystery concerning the health of the mother, is a meaningful frustration. We are simply dealing here with an open ending that can be interpreted as a surprising conclusion, and we must admit that surprise is a good way to end a joke. Even the "red dress" should not be considered a useless detail. In fact, it is a crucial element of the story: it delays information in order to frustrate the audience, but it also helps the audience visualize the scene and immerse in its simulated reality. So, the red dress has a function in the story: Barthes would probably consider it a "catalysis" (1975, 248–49), or a diegetic element designed to achieve a "reality effect" (1989, 141–48). It increases the reader's empathy, postpones the resolution, and reinforces the dramatic effect of the scene.

On the other hand, if the text were the transcription of a real conversation, the narration would obviously transgress almost all conventions guiding a form of communication whose aim is to convey information as efficiently as possible. The most important items of information should have been given first, not adjourned to another conversation. We would expect the son to begin with what might be considered a spoiler if it were fiction. Something like: "Hi! Mom is alright, but she had a terrible accident today." Also, a detail like "she looked so cheerful in her beautiful red dress" would be superfluous, even scandalous in this context. According to the Gricean maxims (Grice 1989), the discourse might be true, but it violates all the other maxims: it is not as informative as is required for the purpose of the exchange, it is overly prolix and disordered, and some story elements, like the red dress, are simply irrelevant. The only way to interpret this conversation, if it were real, would be to infer that the son had sadistic intentions or some kind of sociopathic disorder.

The same text can, therefore, be considered relevant or irrelevant according to the *frame* we use to interpret it. Moreover, our inferences concerning the intentions of the narrator rely on *textual* as well as *contextual* information, especially knowledge of the genre and speech situation.<sup>1</sup> In fact, every reader can infer a context from my example, but in this artificial situation neither genre nor context can be determined with certainty, and the ambiguity can be resolved only if we have access to the *real context* of a *real discourse*. Actually, as long as it remains an artificial example, both interpretations are from a narratological point of view equally false, because the *real relevance* of a text must be linked to its *real context*, and real context includes the intentions

guiding the *real producer* of the narrative. The same applies to my own intentions here: the reader should understand that the story I cite above is intended to illustrate the dependence of *relevance theory* on the context of discursive interaction involved in a specific text. In this artificial case, what matters is not simply the intentions of the narrator but the intentions of the author who communicates implicitly behind the narrator's back.

What defines relevance in a narrative pertains, additionally, not only to *what* is being told but also to *how* it is told. In other words, when applying relevance theory to a narration, we are not only concerned with the *tellability* of the story, its *eventfulness*, *newsworthiness*, or *completeness*: it is equally important to relate the story content to the way it conveys information. In some cases, feelings of suspense, curiosity, or surprise can be considered the real core of the narrative, or even the basic function of narrativity<sup>2</sup>. However, in other cases—for example, when we share some hot news in a conversation or on information media—we expect that the narrator will avoid creating narrative tension. When the tension is already inherent in the context, our only concern is to understand as clearly as possible and as quickly as possible what happened in order to resolve our anxiety.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, a chronological narration may not necessarily be the most relevant way of telling a story, because this form of linear progression usually arouses suspense, which may well not suit the type of situation described. When the audience needs to know the result of an unexpected event first, the Gricean maxim "be orderly" should be understood as: "Don't respect the chronology of the events; don't start your story from the beginning; give first what you consider to be the most important information." William Labov and Joshua Waletzky (1967) have shown that oral narratives usually require an abstract in the opening sequence, and this may even be a preliminary condition for being allowed to begin a narration at all.

Before giving a more precise account of what might be called a "local" relevance theory specifically designed for mimetic narratives, the main convergences and divergences between narratology and relevance theory must be clarified; for there are not only opportunities but also risks and challenges, in seeking to mix two different theoretical traditions.

## CONVERGENCES

Relevance theory shares some fundamental epistemological principles with recent narrative theory, especially if we consider how the latter has evolved since its formalist heyday. On the one hand, as stated by Sperber and Wilson,

Relevance theory may be seen as an attempt to work out in detail one of Grice's central claims: that an essential feature of most human communication, both verbal and non-verbal, is the expression and recognition of intentions. . . .

In developing this claim, Grice laid the foundations for an inferential model of communication, an alternative to the classical code model. (Sperber and Wilson 2002, 249)

This approach has proved particularly useful for deciphering the workings of irony, implied meaning, and other figures of indirect communication that cannot be explained otherwise. On the other hand, narratology has experienced a parallel evolution: for the structuralist pioneers, authorial intention and discursive communication seemed out of the perimeter of their investigation, but later, narrative theory has also undergone a “pragmatic revolution,” firstly by exploring the principles guiding “narrative cooperation” in the context of “reception theory” (Eco 1979). Thus, as stated by Umberto Eco, the “*fabula* is the result of a continuous series of abductions made during the course of the reading” (1979, 31), and the text must consequently be considered a lazy machine that requires the bold cooperation of the reader in order to fill the gaps in the narrative world (Eco 1985, 29). In this sense recent cognitivist models consider the story not simply as encoded by the author and then decoded by the reader, but as an unstable matrix of virtualities progressively elaborated in the readers’ mind through a complex network of inferential procedures.

Secondly, for rhetorical narratology, readerly progression can be coupled with an investigation of the effects the author seeks to achieve, for example, to preserve the interest of the story, to deal with ethical issues, or to create irony.<sup>4</sup> It is in this context that, following Wayne C. Booth, rhetorical narratologists have investigated the communication between an “implied author” and her or his “authorial readers.” Just as in relevance theory, they also consider that interpretation is channeled by recognition of an implied intention.

Karin Kukkonen has recently highlighted the connection between the rhetorical interpretation of “unreliable narration” and relevance theory:

Booth sees unreliable narration as an instance of irony, in which the (implied) author and the reader communicate behind the narrator’s back. . . . Uncooperative narration can be seen as a mimetic representation of someone breaking the maxims of communication and “jeopardizing the CP” (Pratt 1977, 217). As a mimetic representation in literary narrative, breaking the maxims contributes to the characterization of the narrator, while the actual Cooperative Principle between the reader and the author remains intact. (209)

I was using relevance theory in a similar way when I suggested that the story of the accident, if identified as fictional, must be understood either as a joke or as a meaningful illustration of a theoretical problem involving not only a sadistic narrator but also an ironic author. We may conclude that an irrelevant speech act on the level of the *fabula* may nevertheless be considered a relevant speech act with reference to the implied communication between author and audience.

Another factor that helped build bridges between relevance theory and narratology was a methodological shift. Relevance theory was mainly focused on everyday communication, while narrative theory, in its classical period, was generally confined to the analysis of fiction, with a strong emphasis on the poetics of decontextualized literary works. But, beginning in the mid-1970s, there have been growing attempts to widen the scope of narratology to an investigation of the bonds between what was labeled “natural narratives” and their “artificial” siblings. This led to the more recent development of what Monika Fludernik (1996) has called “natural narratology”: a theory encompassing oral as well as literary narratives, and any other kind of media that can elicit the construction of a storyworld.

Teun van Dijk (1975) and Mary Louise Pratt (1977) pioneered this evolution by insisting on the common features of natural and artificial narratives. Most importantly, they based their reflections on the assumption that (using the words of philosopher Gregory Currie) “narratives are intentionally fashioned devices of representation that work by manifesting the communicative intention of their makers” (2010, xvii). For linguists like Labov and Waletzky, it was obvious that conversational narratives have to do with issues like “evaluation devices,” “tellability,” or “point,” because it is simply impossible to describe narrative structures without linking them to the function they play in discursive interaction. In the structuralist paradigm, however, it was far from obvious that the same was true for literary works: for Roland Barthes, who declared the death of the author, *texts* were autonomous from their context of production.<sup>5</sup> One of the main concerns of Mary Louise Pratt, when she applied the Cooperative Principle (CP) to literary discourse, was to challenge this idea and to close the gap between artificial and natural narratives: “Far from being autonomous, self-contained, self-motivating, context-free objects which exist independently from the ‘pragmatic’ concerns of ‘everyday’ discourse, literary works take place in a context, and like any other utterance they cannot be described apart from that context” (1977, 115). Nevertheless, Jim Fanto underlines that

Pratt’s . . . application of Grice’s theory to literature considerably extends the use intended by the speech act philosopher. She proposes that the Maxims count as genre rules for whatever type of discourse the fictional narrator is producing. When the narrator violates a Maxim, the reader must . . . interpret this act as an intentional flouting on the author’s part. (1978, 136)

It is therefore a question of taking the measure of the reorganization implied by this extension of relevance theory, and of evaluating how it must be reformulated in order to take account of the specificities of mimetic narratives.

## DIVERGENCES

Despite obvious convergences, there are enduring divergences between relevance theory and narrative theory, simply because some principles guiding ordinary language use do not fit the specific case of mimetic narratives. To begin with, it is obvious that the veracity of a narrative becomes irrelevant in most fictions. For instance, if the story of the accident is considered fictional, the question of its truth or falsehood will not arise, because the discourse does not consist of serious—in the sense of “factual”—assertions. This situation lifts a lot of the *pathos* from the narrative, or finds interest precisely in this *pathos*, whose value is converted from negative to positive. As noticed by Teun van Dijk: “First of all, artificial narratives need not respect a number of pragmatic conditions. Well known is the fact that such narratives need not be true, although they may be true” (1975, 291). Most importantly, as we have already seen, the fictional nature of artificial narratives opens the possibility of a multilayered channel of communication, since an uncooperative narrator may conceal the ironical intentions of an implied author. Nevertheless, mimetic narratives can also be factual, or even conversational: the main differences do not concern the content of the story but the way it is told. As stated by Jim Fanto: “When Grice formulated his Maxims and CP, he had in mind a conversation in which the participants *intend to communicate the maximal amount of information about the real world as efficiently as possible*. He did not, however, rule out other purposes for other discourse” (1978, 135). “Mary Pratt,” Fanto continues, “proposed a purpose for natural and literary narratives that differentiates them from other kinds of language” (135), which is why she had to widen the scope of the original CP and replace the general maxims with “special maxims.” More generally, this form of communication was seen to contradict one of the most basic principles of the relevance theory later developed by Sperber and Wilson: “In relevance-theoretic terms, other things being equal, the greater the *processing effort* required, the less relevant the input will be” (2002, 252). The classical tradition of hermeneutics, however, is based on exactly the opposite assumption: here the aesthetic value of a literary work is directly proportional to the processing effort it requires. This is the case not only with avant-garde literature or culturally distant writing but also, more trivially, with issues such as narrative progression, tension, surprise, curiosity, and suspense (Phelan 1989; Sternberg 2001; Baroni 2007, 2017; Toolan 2008).

Anyhow, unlike Pratt, I would add that not all narratives obey the same rules. Instead, we can oppose two different prototypes whose differences rely precisely on the way they deal with the rules guiding ordinary communication. As I argued above, this difference does not correspond to the categories of the factual and the fictional, or to what other authors have labeled the

“natural versus the artificial.” As an alternative, I propose a dichotomy opposing the “intriguing function” typically associated with *mimetic narratives* to the “configuring function” that we find in other kinds of narrative representations (Baroni 2009, 27, 45–94). This opposition is based on the terminology Paul Ricœur uses in his analysis of the functions of emplotment in *Temps et récit* (1983–1985). I adopt this terminology in order to contradict the misleading conception of a supposed convergence in “emplotment” and “configuration” that often verges on the synonymous. Unlike Ricœur (1983–1985),<sup>6</sup> I would contend that narrative organization does *not* usually follow the same rules in historical books and in fictions. These two forms of discourse are not designed in the same way, because, functionally speaking, they are not meant to have the same effect on their audience.

Many factual narratives are intended to give a transparent and comprehensive representation of past events, and to do so, they need to maximize the *concordance*<sup>7</sup> of the representation, even when there is some unintentional limitation in the available sources of information. In contrast, most fictional narratives (but not only these) are intended to puzzle the audience, to imitate or simulate the rough experience of a character immersed in the storyworld, and to do so, they need, at least temporarily, to maximize the *discordance* of the representation. As stated by Juan Prieto-Pablos:

As recipients of a verbal message, we expect it to be transmitted promptly and clearly, in accordance with the principles of conversational cooperation outlined by Grice . . . ; if the message is to be of a certain length, we expect to be given a summary or abstract with the essential pieces of information, so that we can put all the pieces in the rest of the message together . . . Underlying these practices or expectations, there is a basic need to control the conditions of the transmission and reception of information. The kind of delay or concealment of information featured in suspense texts challenges this basic need and naturally produces anxiety. (1998, 100)

Accordingly, some narratives use summaries or abstracts, not only in our daily conversations but also, for example, in newspaper articles, or in other kinds of narrative communication where stories are addressed to an impatient reader. I will call these “configuring” narratives, because their main narrative purpose is to configure knowledge, to build an explanation concerning an event in a way that the processing of the information requires minimum effort from the addressee.

In the case of mimetic narratives—which are mostly fictions, but may also include autobiographies, autofiction, literary journalism, or vivid conversational anecdotes—we do not expect to receive straight information concerning events; we want to immerse ourselves in a dimension of

simulated experience. During its progressive actualization, the narrative representation will appear as the representation of real or invented events in a still-unresolved state, so that they look like some kind of (re)enactment of those events. To achieve this, the narrator will introduce apparently useless information, because it has the power to increase the reality effect of the scene and to delay its resolution.

Of course, even if they seem opposed, or almost contradictory, the two poles of the configuring and the mimetic are connected by a continuum. Most genres draw their effects from a blend of both principles—from what Marie Vanooost calls “the close interaction between the two functions of narrative, the intriguing and the configuring”:

Moreover, the role each function plays—or the way they are used—also varies, and not necessarily as one might expect. A narrative that largely uses temporary uncertainties to recreate a form of experience can nonetheless incline towards concordance through the way it shapes the events, even in its headline and its very first sentences. A very informative narrative about a rather dry topic such as science can be organized according to a plot and play on narrative tension. A narrative about a most outrageous story can allow some kind of nuance by respecting the complexity of people and life. (2013, 94)

Besides, as stated by Monika Fludernik, “experientiality includes this sense of moving with time, of the now of experience, but this almost static level of temporal experience is supplemented by more dynamic and evaluative factors” (1996, 29). The reader can, in other words, expect that the resolution will display some meaningful picture of the story as a whole, while simultaneously accepting “delays” and “concealment of information” (Prieto-Pablos 1998, 100) as an exciting challenge.

Nevertheless, there is a clear difference between a narrative whose primary purpose is to configure knowledge and a mimetic narrative: in the latter case, the narrator cooperates with the audience by doing everything possible to increase the tension of the discourse. And in the case of a novel, we could easily calm our anxiety by reading the last pages of the book, but we usually avoid doing so because we want to play the game according to the rules, which involve respecting a more or less linear narrative progression. Even when the story is over, the audience of a mimetic narrative can be satisfied with an ambiguous ending, because the purpose of the representation was not to give an explanation, or even to convey a clear and obvious message, but to achieve some immersive effects, leading to the production of a cathartic anxiety, empathy, or ethical perplexity. Mimetic narratives are usually open to an infinite process of interpretation: they were intentionally designed for that purpose, and the audience recognizes this intention as relevant in the ongoing interaction of the reading process.

## REDEFINITION OF CP AND RT ADAPTED TO INTRIGUING NARRATIVES

On these grounds, we can rephrase new rules governing discursive cooperation in predominantly mimetic narrative. In this case, the guiding principles of interaction seem to systematically contradict the Cooperative Principle outlined by Grice.

*Quantity:* Give either too little or too much information, so that your audience has to guess what is happening or what will happen next.

*Relation:* Increase the processing effort of the audience; enhance the difficulty of making inferences about the story, at least until its final sentences.

*Manner:* Avoid clarity; be prolix, disordered, and at all costs obscure and ambiguous.

In some popular fictions, like adventure stories, Gothic novels, horror, fantasy, or science fiction, there may also be an inverted “maxim of quality” that could be rephrased as:

*Quality:* Tell, as if it were true, what you know to be false, impossible, incredible, or even unthinkable.

Concerning the guiding principles underlying the relevance theory outlined by Sperber and Wilson, we would also have to redefine the most important parameter:

Other things being equal, *the greater the processing effort required, the more relevant the narrative will be.* The implied meaning of the story should never be easy to find, and if there is one, it should remain at least partially ambiguous. The story can, then, be open to a plurality of interpretations.

When the meaning of a story is too obvious, it loses most of its mimetic qualities. The reason for this is often either that the author is untalented or that the story serves a different level of argumentation, as in educational fables, political discourse, or propaganda. In fact, the flouting of the rules guiding mimetic discourse makes sense only if the narrative serves some other kind of discourse whose purpose is dominant in the interaction.<sup>8</sup>

Some authors have tried to use the “normal version” of relevance theory in order to explain the functioning of narrative suspense, but in order to do so they had to interpret it as a retrospective effect, which seems absurd. The case is obvious, for instance, if we look at the explanation given by Seiji Uchida:

To put the reader in a state of suspense means to increase his or her processing effort. However, given the presumption of relevance, no unjustifiable effort

should be demanded: there should be contextual effects to offset the processing effort though they might be a delay in the availability of these effects. . . . This effect would often be retroactive . . . : when readers find the answer and are set free from the state of suspense, they will return to the point where they initially entered suspense and interpret the text again in the light of the newly obtained perspective. (1998, 164)

Uchida concedes that suspense increases the “processing effort” of the reader, but in order to save the relevance of this apparently uncooperative way of telling a story, he postulates that “no unjustifiable effort should be demanded,” that suspense is not “long lasting,” and that, eventually, the reader will be rewarded by a retroactive “contextual effect” (168). I would rather argue that suspense does not have to serve any other purpose than the enjoyable anxiety it immediately provokes, nor does it have to be resolved. Mimetic narratives aim to elicit the experience of a storyworld, and to immerse the audience in *medias res* in an unpredictable action, which necessarily involves increasing their “processing efforts.”

Suspense is *per se* proactive, not retroactive; it doesn’t have to *become* meaningful at a later stage of the reading; and its resolution is not necessary for the reader, because delayed information is often meaningless or simply disappointing. In adventure stories, even though we know that the hero must prevail, we appreciate the challenge of an intentionally complex narration. Referring back to my artificial example, even if we still don’t know the health condition of the mother by the end of the story, we can still appreciate the puzzling—and in that sense meaningful—structure of the narrative. The interpretation that the narrator is sadistic or crazy is secondary compared with the experience of suspense and surprise that the narrative immediately conveys. In more complex mimetic narratives, suspense is not only a way to play with the audience, but more profoundly, it is a way to imitate the temporal orientation of the unresolved events of life, and in doing so to learn how to cope with this inevitable dimension of human existence.

If we restrict the concept of *narrativity* to a quality that transforms a merely narrative account into a mimetic one, I would agree with Monika Fludernik that we should focus on experientiality and not on the logical structure of the fabula. In accordance with this restricted definition—which does not include what I have called “configuring narratives”—Fludernik considers that “historical writing and action reports are not actually narrative in the fullest sense” (1996, 26). My own definition, however, postulates that “mimetic narratives,” as opposed to “configuring narratives,” should be considered a kind of “uncooperative discourse.” Yet, on another level, they are cooperative, because they follow specific rules. These rules are similar to those we find in jokes or role games: they correspond to the sort of playful, and sometimes openly deceptive, use of language that Jean-Marie Schaeffer calls “intended playful pretense” (“feintise ludique partagée”) (1999) or the economy of “costly signs” (“signaux coûteux”) (2009).

To summarize: On the one hand, if we want to apply relevance theory to mimetic narratives, we should accept that the general principles underlying relevance theory must be reset in order to correspond to the purpose of these specific “intentional-communicative artefacts” (Currie 2010, xvii). On the other hand, it would be reductive to restrict every kind of narrative representation to the purposes guiding mimetic narratives. Some configuring narratives mostly obey the ordinary rules defined by relevance theory. For example, when a witness is interrogated by a judge, not only is the truthfulness of her or his story crucial but also the strict observance of all Gricean maxims. Even implicit communication or irony should be avoided, as well as any rhetorical strategies that would increase the processing effort of the addressee. Otherwise, we can guess that the judge might react violently, and he or she would find ways to regulate the interaction by using authority.

We find an interesting example of uncooperative testimony in the novel *The Widow Lerouge*, by Émile Gaboriau. In the scene in question, Daburon, a judge seeking to elicit crucial information from the husband of the victim concerning the murder of Mrs. Lerouge, sets some explicit constraints on the discourse: “In what intrigues did your wife mingle?” asked he. “Go on, my friend, tell me everything exactly; here, you know, we must have not only the truth, but the whole truth.” (Gaboriau 1863, chap. xvii). Unfortunately, Mr. Lerouge, despite his goodwill, proves a poor witness. He tells his story “with difficulty, laboriously unscrambling his recollections,” and very often the “the worthy fellow” appears “lost in the midst of his recollections.” The magistrate, constantly obliged “to bring him back into the right path,” is “boiling over with impatience,” moving “impatiently in his chair” and constantly urging the narrator to “Go on, go on.” At the end of the testimony, the judge even responds to another digression of Mr. Lerouge’s with “a heavy blow of his fist on the table.”

If we admit that ideal testimony should produce a story that helps to clarify the past, or, in Ricœurian terms, that the narrative should be a configuration shaping a coherent story, we should regard Mr. Lerouge’s speech act as unsuccessful, because his narrative produces unintentional tensions in the interaction instead of resolving them. But as this story is embedded in a fiction, it in fact achieves the purpose of a mimetic narrative, and its “relevance” can be saved at a second level of interpretation, because the difficulties experienced by the judge appear intentional to the reader: they are the direct consequence of the emplotment decided by the author. The judge’s reactions can be understood as a diffracted mirror of the reader’s experience, the crucial differences lying in the connotation of the emotions. Thus we read that “M. Daburon was confounded. Since the beginning of this sad affair, he had encountered surprise after surprise. Scarcely had he got his ideas in order on one point, when all his attention was directed to another. He felt himself utterly routed. What was he about to learn now?” (Gaboriau 1863, chap. xvii).

The erratic progression through the story, involving the fundamental question “What are we about to learn now?” may be either frustrating or enjoyable. The best way to discriminate between judge and reader, between the role of relevance in configuring and in mimetic narratives, is probably to ask what determines . . . the tonality of the pathos of this question.

## NOTES

1. On the importance of framing operations for the interpretation of values, see Korthals Altes (2014).
2. See Sternberg (2001).
3. For instance, Weinrich (1973) defines narration (*Erzählen*) as a discourse produced in a quiet environment, whose aim is to compensate a situation of apathy by immersing the audience in a narrative world where internal tensions can be experienced. Conversely, Bronckart (1996) opposes this kind of “narration” (a type that I would call “mimetic”) to a more interactive form of storytelling (le “récit interactif”) that has direct implications for the actual situation of the narrator and his audience (159). In French, the opposition between “passé simple” and “passé composé” reflects this distinction. Accordingly, Fludernik opposes “report” to “narrative storytelling”: “Report is used simply to summarize or present facts of the case, to provide information” (1996, 71).
4. See Phelan (1989); or Booth (1983).
5. See the reflections on the “death of the author” in Barthes’ *The Rustle of Language*. Barthes later changed his mind on this point.
6. As I have shown (Baroni 2010; Baroni 2017, 25–36), Ricœur’s position concerning the possible convergence between emplotment in fictional narratives and configuration in factual narratives is very ambiguous and changes over time. In the third volume of *Temps et récit*, he actually insists on a divergence between the configuration of historical books (which integrate the subjective experience of time of the agents in the objective time of the calendar and the sources) and the plot of fictions, which is designed to reveal the aporia of philosophical meditations on time.
7. On the opposition between concordance and discordance, see Ricœur (1983–1985) or Baroni (2009).
8. On the hierarchy of prototypical heterogeneous sequences like argumentation, explication, or narration, see Adam (1997). Here I consider *configurational narratives* as a kind of “narrative explication,” where the explicative function dominates.

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