

Towards a Conceptual History of Narrative

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The basic idea of conceptual history is that all key social, political, and cultural concepts are both historical and, even when not always contested, at least potentially contestable.¹ The concept of narrative has become such a contested concept over the last thirty years in response to what is often called the “narrative turn” in social sciences (Bruner 1991; Kreiswirth 1992; 2000; 2005; Brockmeier & Harré 2001; Currie 1998; Richardson 2000).² The concept has successfully travelled to psychology, education, social sciences, political thought and policy analysis, health research, law, theology and cognitive science. “Now, narrative is everywhere”, as Richardson (2000, 168) observes, and, to quote Phelan (2005b, 210), we already have good reasons to be alert for “narrative imperialism”.

The original call for papers of the symposium, *The Travelling Concept of Narrative*, reflects the direction of this journey: “Over the last three decades, the concept of narrative has successfully travelled *from literature* into several new disciplines such as social sciences, law, psychology, theology and health studies” (italics mine). In this article, my primary purpose is to show that this interpretation is too straightforward regarding the narrative turn in social sciences. Secondly, a generally shared conviction – and a conviction I have shared until lately – is that the narrative turn has created a thoroughly interdisciplinary field of theory and research. Building on my answer to the first issue, I argue that there are at least two, relatively separate discussions on narrative theory and analysis. I will tentatively

1 This article is based on my larger project on the conceptual history of narrative, which I started during my term at the Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies, and have continued as an Academy Research Fellow at the Academy of Finland. I am grateful to Jens Brockmeier for his generous comments and suggestions.

2 As a matter of fact, Kreiswirth (2005) writes on the narrative turn *in humanities*, whereas my focus is on the particular narrative turn in *social sciences*, including psychology, education, law, and health research. I emphasize the difference of terms: the phenomena are seen differently, and the terms are in different use in the research literature.

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play with the distinction but not with the binary opposition between “narrative-turn theory” and “literary narratology”, and thereby locate the strand of “socio-linguistic narrative theory” (from Labov and Waletzky 1967 onwards) in a middle position between these fields.

Concepts change, but all possible changes should not be collapsed into a single level of “change of meaning”, as Quentin Skinner (1988; 1989) points out. He has himself identified three major aspects of conceptual change, which help to arrange my overall argument. The first aspect refers to the changing range of *criteria* of the concept; the second, to the changing *range* of reference of the concept, and the third, to the changing range of *attitudes* towards the concept. In what follows, I will argue that the narrative-turn theorists have only rarely discussed the definition, or criteria of narrative, whereas the theme has been acute in socio-linguistics and, in particular, in narratology.

The focus of this article is on the broadening range of reference, in the birth of narrative as a metaphor of life, and thus in the narrative-turn literature. I envisage the story of “narratological theory” firstly from the perspective of the narrative turn, as something that has almost always been neglected or marginalized, and then in terms of its own practice of inclusion-and-exclusion of the narrative turn in the written histories of narrative theory. The material of this study is focused on the English-language area, and will comprise the French and German literature only when these works have been published in English. This article reports on a work in progress. It is rather an outline of a long-term research project and its hypotheses than an attempt at conclusion.

Multiple Travels, Multiple Sources

The term “narrative turn” may entice us to envisage a homogenous movement of thought with a distinct lineage of ideas and a shared canon of essential works. However, even a tentative and limited survey on the sources and inspirations of the early narrative-turn authors in social sciences confirms that no such homogeneity of heritage exists. There is hardly any text, discussion or discipline that has inspired *all* the authors. This apparent polyphony resists, of course, the idea of a concept travelling straightforwardly from literature to social sciences.

As a matter of fact, only a few key authors of the narrative turn have discussed the ideas of literary narrative theory at any length. Within this group I include the philosopher Paul Ricoeur (1984; 1985; 1988) and the psychologists Donald Polkinghorne (1988) and Jerome Bruner (1986). Mark Freeman (1993), another classic of narrative psychology, has an interesting middle position: he reads both Jean-Paul Sartre and St. Augustine, refers to a number of literary theorists, yet receives his major theoretical ideas from other authors such as Paul Ricoeur and Clifford Geertz. In sharp contrast with these authors, the psychologist Dan McAdams (1988; 1993) hardly ever refers to any literary theory of narrative. Instead,

he draws heavily upon Erik H. Erikson's work on identity, and biographical studies in sociology and literature.

Narrative had yet another important entry into social research. Elliot Mishler's (1986) influential book on research interviewing brought narrative to the centre of collecting and evaluating data. But in Mishler's case, the source is not the narrative of narratology but the work of Labov, Waletzky (1967) and the whole *socio-linguistic* family. *Conversation analysis* and *biographical studies* have a prominent place in his work. He is well aware of the work done within cognitive psychology on "schemes" and "story grammars". Mishler as well as Bruner (1986) and Freeman (1993) quote early discussions on narrative and *psychoanalysis*. Suddenly narrative seems to sprout from numerous, discrete locations.

To add to the complexity of the scene, the theme on *personal narration* in connection with scholarly discourse appeared both from anthropology (e.g. Pratt 1986); and feminist (The Personal Narratives Group 1989) and sociological studies of auto/biography (Stanley 1992). Considering the rather scientific rhetoric of classical narratology (cf. Patron in this volume), this propensity for personal narration can hardly be understood as its direct effect.

The issue, indeed, seems not to be so much about the source *from* which the concept and theory of narrative travelled – because it suddenly appeared from various directions – but about what *invited* these complementary and competing theories of narrative. I suggest that at least one of the mobilizing forces was *narrative as metaphor*. In a very characteristic way, Bruner's (1986) erudite journey through narratological theory did not attract many followers. His results and theses were enough, and in particular, his essay *Life as Narrative* (Bruner 1987) became enormously influential. The acute epistemological crises in human and social sciences were an obvious reason for interest in these new metaphors: narratives and stories seemed to provide scholars with more complex and less objectivistic forms of knowing than the previous laws, experiments, and abstract theories (Ryan 2005, 344).

In what follows, I do not aspire to build a hierarchic distinction between "literal" (or theoretical) and "metaphorical" meanings of narrative. I simply note that they have different practical effects within the discourse on narrative. Following Rorty (1989, 17), I see the pair "not as a distinction between two sorts of meaning [...] but as a distinction between familiar and unfamiliar uses of noises and marks [...]. Their metaphorical use is the sort which makes us get busy developing a new theory".

Metaphorical Turn

Barbara Hardy, herself a literary theorist, published a provocative essay on life and narrative in 1968. Her text is an early attempt to approach narrative in cognitive terms, seeing narrative skills "as a primary act of mind transferred to art from life" (Hardy 1968, 5). For her, the principal issue was to ponder the relations between

life and the arts: “What concerns me here are the qualities which fictional narrative shares with that inner and outer storytelling that plays a major role in our sleeping and walking lives. For we dream in narrative, daydream in narrative, remember, anticipate, hope, despair, believe, doubt, plan, revise, criticize, construct, gossip, learn, hate, and love by narrative” (*ibid.*, 5).

If we are to believe Gerald Prince (1992), the French novelists at least have studied the theme of life and narrative from Maupassant and Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary* onwards. In particular, Sartre’s *Nausea* has been discussed as a crucial theoretical argument among his critics (MacIntyre 1984; Freeman 1993; Randall 1995). However old this theme was in literature, in 1968 neither social scientists nor psychologists were yet receptive to this kind of talk. Hardy herself was also more interested in the study of literature. She wanted to understand the consequences of “seeing fictional narratives as continuous with narrative action and reaction” (*ibid.*, 7). For her, the important thing was to relativize the distinction between fantasy and reality. “The best fantasies, as we know from introspection or from [Flaubert’s] *Emma*, work in starkly realistic terms” (*ibid.*, 7).

By and large, the most important comment upon Hardy’s ideas came from the prominent philosopher of history, Louis Mink (1987, 59–60), in his essay *History and Fiction as Modes of Comprehension*, originally published in 1970. The comment at the end of the essay, barely more than one page, is a powerful piece and has had remarkable consequences. Mink says: “Stories are not lived but told. Life has no beginnings, middles, or ends; there are meetings, but the start of an affair belongs to the story we tell later, and there are partings, but final partings only in the story” (1987, 60). Mink comes to the discussion from an absolutely different angle from Hardy’s, and with a different agenda. As a historian, he is most worried about the idea of stories happening independently “out there”, in the world. His examples show in excellent fashion how the ex post facto narratives always add something to the original intentions and plans, something that he and Ricoeur have called the “configurational” aspect of narrative (Ricoeur 1984, 76–77). But as for the cognitive, emotional or intentional aspects of narrative, as outlined by Hardy, Mink gives hardly any answers, or in any case not convincing ones.

Hardy does not present any simplistic conception according to which “lived” and “told” narratives (the terms are now Mink’s) would somehow collapse into one another, to become the same thing. Neither does she maintain that historical, collective narratives would pre-exist as entities to be found by historiographers. I am inclined to think that most of Mink’s worried argumentation about narrative historiography could have been adapted to Hardy’s vocabulary. Last but not least, Hardy herself does not even use the idiom of “living narratives”.

Together, Hardy’s and Mink’s essays have one remarkable consequence. Both a literary theorist and a philosopher of history take a step beyond the conventional limits of their disciplines, and start discussing “life and narrative”. In particular, Mink’s move – as a reaction to texts theorizing literature and life – anticipates the setting of the 1980s just by assuming that there indeed is a joint field and a possibil-

ity of a joint debate on narrative. These crossovers create a perplexing situation for historians of narrative theory. Once again, the texts of Louis Mink and Hayden White are invited to take part in the debates of the narrative turn, and interpreted as moves within this discussion, notwithstanding the fact that strictly speaking, and primarily, their texts are comments on old-school narrative historiography.³ The context of argumentation, thus, is far from unambiguous.

Mink's formula and argumentation secured a salient role in the birth and growth of the narrative turn. Hayden White, his keen follower on this issue, published his essay *The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality* in W. J. T. Mitchell's celebrated volume *On Narrative* (Mitchell 1981), a publication which was said to launch the whole narrative turn (Bruner 1991, 5; Brockmeier 2004, 286). At the end of his essay, White asks:

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? Or does it present itself more in the forms that the annals and chronicle suggest, either as mere sequence without beginning or end or as sequences of beginnings that only terminate and never conclude (White 1987, 24; cf. Hyvärinen 2006)?

A certain polemical or even hyperbolic voice may be detected in formulations such as the contrast between "well-made stories" and "mere sequence". If there are narratives, they seem to always have "proper beginnings, middles, and ends". Either "life" is just a disorderly sequence of events or history is a well-made story, just to be found. If Hardy tried to deconstruct the obviously binary oppositions between fantasy (narrative) and the real on the one hand, and between life and narrative on the other hand, White undertakes to radicalize these oppositional settings. In order to do so, and in order to attach all the aspects of "fantasy" to narrative, he operates with the Aristotelian understanding of narrative.

In his recent work, White (1999, 9) has returned to the Minkian formula: "To emplot real events as a story of a specific kind [...] is to trope those events. This is because stories are not lived; there is no such thing as a real story. Stories are told or written, not found". In its polemical clarity, the statement offers further possibilities for puzzling questions. Why are the stories told or written, in the first place, if they are not meant to "be found"? What is, seriously speaking, the relevance of such a behaviouralistic "real" that is thoroughly devoid of narrative constitution, re-vision and contestation?

"Stories are not lived; there is no such thing as a real story", is also a slightly perplexing argument. If stories were "real", could we then live them? What would it mean to live a story? The argument is made in a way that it presumes someone

³ By "narrative historiography" I refer to the un-reflected and rather 'positivistic' way of telling historical narratives. Both the French *Annales* School, Louis Mink, and particularly Hayden White can be seen as critics of this natural story-telling in historiography (Ricoeur 1984, 91–225).

to believe in real, authentic stories that are lived and then – almost passively – represented in the form of narrative. The obvious target of criticism still resides in conventional narrative historiography. It may thus be all too hasty and too frustrating to posit Hardy and White as participants of one and the same debate. Hardy theorized the cognitions, emotions, and intentions of *one single person*, whereas White transports us immediately to the *level of history*, or events within a human plurality (Arendt 1958). Are we doomed to two separate discourses, or can these levels be integrated in one and the same argument?

Nevertheless, White defends his radical constructivist position by resorting to the most traditional conception of narrative, the Aristotelian one. He does this by resisting all metaphorical broadening of the range of narrative reference. Yet it is remarkable that he moves from a highly polemical attitude towards narrative (White 1987) to a more balanced position in his later work (White 1999). Even then, the temporal order of things is clear: events of the world come first, and narratives follow as a representational form. Narrative means configuration, thus its counter-concepts are chaos and contingency: the real events.

Living Out Narratives

The academic influence of Mink's idiom might have been narrow, had it not been for his opponents and adversaries. Barbara Hardy had not yet said anything to the effect that we would be "living" narratives; the idiom came from Mink. It was surely an idiom that, in its boldly negative form, almost invited its reversal. It was Alasdair MacIntyre, who first turned the idiom upside down in his *After Virtue*, originally published in 1981, the year in which the narrative turn in social sciences was said to have emerged. The metaphorical emphasis is palpable:

Unpredictability and teleology therefore coexist as parts of our lives; like *characters* in a fictional narrative we do not know what will happen next, but nonetheless our lives have a certain form which projects itself towards our future. Thus the *narratives we live out* have both an unpredictable and a partially teleological character (MacIntyre 1984, 216; italics mine).

A few lines later, MacIntyre adds a new metaphorical level by maintaining that "man is in his actions and practice, as well as in fictions, essentially a story-telling animal" (*ibid.*, 216). However popular this slogan became in legitimating the narrative turn, the next metaphor was more powerful in terms of consequences. He argues that bare psychological traits do not account for personal continuity over time. He again returns to novels – this time to *The Count of Monte Cristo*, not to *Nausea* – and concludes: "Thus personal identity is just that identity presupposed by the unity of the character which the unity of a narrative requires" (*ibid.*, 218). But what, exactly, is this unity that narrative requires? This is apparently one of the questions which,

in order to get properly covered, would require a closer investigation into narratology and narrative theory, tasks that MacIntyre leaves aside.⁴

It is noteworthy that MacIntyre's classical introduction of the themes of narrative identity and the metaphor of living out narratives, that is to say, the whole metaphorical breakthrough if you like, takes place with practically no references to literary or socio-linguistic theories on narrative. Narrative, character, and novel were themes extensively discussed in narratology. This is not to argue that MacIntyre *should* have discussed narratological theories, it is only to recognize how superficially the key metaphorical terms were theorized and opened up in the first place. The concept of narrative thus does not travel from literary theory; it enters the discussion as an everyday term.

However, MacIntyre does not only elaborate Hardy's point, he takes one decisive new step. By using the speech act theory as his model, he attaches literary genres like tragedy, comedy and farce to conversations. The argument continues:

For it is not just that conversations belong to genres in just the way that plays and novels do; but they have beginnings, middles and endings just as literary works. They embody reversals and recognitions; they move towards and away from climaxes (MacIntyre 1984, 211).

It is here that MacIntyre attempts a sort of high-wire act by fitting the discourses of Mink and Hardy into the same picture. He admits that beginnings and endings in history require signification, and are thus negotiable, but they are still not nearly as random as Mink thinks. However, he extends the range of intentional action further than Mink or White would ever accept: "What I have called history is an enacted dramatic narrative in which the characters are also the authors" (*ibid.*, 215). From Mink's and White's point of view, of course, this is outrageous. Yet, a certain disparity, which does not equal a direct opposition, remains between their arguments. One could speculate that MacIntyre is more concerned about what *animates, motivates* or *projects* individual persons and their collectives, whereas Mink and White focus strictly on what is actually happening.

To sum up, MacIntyre's remarkable contribution to the conceptual history of narrative resides almost entirely on the level of *radicalizing the range of reference* of narrative. Narratives became something to be lived out individually and collectively; became something attached to our very identities. These changes meant, of course, that narratives gained huge potential for integrating human lives, lending them more profound unity. In that way, also the vision of a healing, benevolent narrative was generated. MacIntyre has one exceptionally poignant sentence to

⁴ In his important and polemical essay, Galen Strawson (2004) argues for a distinction between "narrative" and "episodic" persons. He maintains that MacIntyre, Jerome Bruner, and many other narrative theorists generalize the psychological traits and ethics of "narrative" persons in an unwarranted way. This may well be true but even MacIntyre, a prominent advocate of narrative unity, grounds this unity on the metaphor of the character of a novel. Novels, as Strawson himself sees and argues, often portray "episodic" characters. Thus, the distinction may be more blurred and complex than Strawson suggests.

launch the positive appreciation of narrative: “Deprive children of stories and you leave them unscripted, anxious stutterers in their actions as in their words” (*ibid.*, 216). At the same time, however, MacIntyre operated with a more or less traditional or everyday conception of narrative. There was nothing at all in the concept itself needing revision.

Mink’s influence is even more tangible in the work of David Carr (1986). Starting from a phenomenological, strictly Husserlian, point of view Carr wanted to demonstrate how narrativity and the whole narrative organization grow from human experience and action. Passive listening to a melody already requires a temporal structure of the immediate past (retention), present and immediate future (protention). From experience he moves on to “actions” (serving in tennis is his primary example, in the style of analytic philosophy) in order to point out a teleological means–ends structure. Smaller “actions” can later be seen as the means for bigger actions (like winning a set in tennis). Therefore, structures such as means and end, departure and arrival, problem and resolution characterize action and experience. He then directs his criticism towards Mink and White:

But the more serious mistake is the one which identifies the beginning-middle-end structure exclusively with the narration in the first place. As we have seen, this structure belongs just as surely to the human events – experiences and actions – about which stories are told, and more important, it belongs to them whether or not a story, in the sense of a literary text, is told about them at all (Carr 1986, 51).

Finally, the whole of human existence seems to be embedded in this overall narrativity:

...narrative form is not a dress which covers something else but the structure inherent in human experience and action (*ibid.*, 65).

But no elements enter our experience, we maintain, unstoried or unnarrativized (*ibid.*, 68).

While Hayden White was a radical in moving the reference of narrative from literature to historiography, and in questioning the dividing line between historical and fictional narratives (see Pihlainen 1998; 2002), he nevertheless wanted to keep narrative strictly in the field of representation. Carr instead makes *all* human experience and action narrative. Critics may find this range of reference of the concept far too extensive to be useful, but this problem does not seriously enter the author’s discourse. If anyone, he is inspired by polemics: “Louis Mink was thus operating with a totally false distinction when he said that stories are not lived but told. They are told in being lived and lived in being told” (*ibid.*, 61). Carr may be correct in criticizing Mink’s rather sterile opposition between life and narrative. The other issue remains as to how helpful his opposite conflation of experience and narrative actually is, and what is lost by his insistence on downplaying the independent role of narrative configuration, the interpretive reorganization of events, persons, and experiences in complex narratives.

Carr's explicit intention is to relate narrative and history. He begins with a similar cognitive and intentional vision as Hardy, but he immediately makes the vision more absolute by not allowing non-narrative experiences, and then finally extending this narrative organization into the field of history and "human plurality" (to quote Hannah Arendt 1958). However, as he ponders the terms of applicability concerning a narrative perspective on history, his vocabulary already propels him away from Mink and White. If the relation of time and narrative is relevant in history, he concludes, "something needs to be said about the temporality of *groups*, and about the manner in which narrative organization can be said to characterize that temporality" (Carr 1986, 117, italics mine). Therefore, he suggests, the move from the phenomenological perspective of "I" to the perspective of "we". Following Husserl's thought, he concludes: "Every face-to-face encounter seems in this sense to establish a *we*-relationship and a *we*-subject shared among its participants" (*ibid.*, 132). In the post-Holocaust world, this ubiquity of "we's" and group-like collectives tends, in my view, to erase the whole problem of the other, at least any forms of radical otherness, and the relevance of human plurality.

However systematically Carr tried to discredit Louis Mink's ideas, Carr remains in his shadow on one crucial issue. If Mink maintains that "life has no beginnings, middles, or ends" (Mink 1987, 60), Carr volunteers to write a whole book to demonstrate that life indeed is full of teleology, beginnings, middles, and ends. At no point in his argumentation does Carr try to challenge the relevance of the Aristotelian concept as a *definition* of narrative. Once again, the beginning-middle-end triad passes as the explication and model of "narrative structure".

Ricoeur: Metaphors Re-examined

The extensive work of Paul Ricoeur creates an exception to my story and generates problems for any hasty interpreter. For one thing, Ricoeur might be said to personify the whole narrative turn. He is indeed one of the key authors in the 1981 collection *On Narrative* (Ricoeur 1981), and his three-volume *Time and Narrative* shaped the discussions and studies since the mid-1980s (Ricoeur 1984; 1985; 1988). For him, narrative was never just an everyday term: he knew the professional discussions on narrative historiography, as well as the debates of narratology. In his *Time and Narrative*, he makes a long journey from philosophy to literature and historiography, an example that very few have repeated. Yet even he did not cover the whole field of narrative theorizing, due to the gap in the socio-linguistic line of narrative. Characteristically, he set definite limits for the metaphoric uses of narrative and never subscribed to the idea of living out stories.

The experience of temporality is a key element of narrative in Ricoeur's theorizing. But from the beginning, it is clear that his temporality is far from any orderly linearity, thus also far from any neat beginning-middle-end continuity (1981; 1984; 1990; 1995). For him, narratives are always working backwards from the end to the

beginning, and forwards from beginning to the end. Time may be circular, memory works backwards, and the events of a story may potentially lead in many directions. In addition to these aspects, there is the “configurational” aspect of temporality at work in narratives, grasping together heterogeneous elements. Because of this “sense of the ending” (Kermode 2000), “the entire plot can be translated into one ‘thought’” (Ricoeur 1984, 67).

Ricoeur’s conceptions of narrative would deserve an independent study far exceeding my resources and space here. Now, however, I will merely limit myself to recording a few preliminary observations. When most of the discussants above have followed Mink’s lead, and the often drastically simplified Aristotelian heritage, by repeating the beginning-middle-and-end as *the* narrative structure, Ricoeur instead posits St. Augustine and his “aporias of time” as a balancing force in regard to the overly concordant and unifying image of Aristotelian narrative. His formulations of narrative as “concordant discordance” or “disconcordant concordance” emphasize the elements of conflict, surprise, openness and relativity of order (Ricoeur 1984, 42–43). It is debatable how much his emphasis on the ending of narrative as a privileged perspective on its whole meaning brings him back to Aristotle; nevertheless, he keeps pondering the messy and contradictory aspects of narrative.

In probing the relations between action, life, and narrative, Ricoeur presents his three-level model of narrative *pre-figuring*, *con-figuring* and *re-figuring*. The pre-figuring, or cognitive level, implies that the sheer observation of human action, acting itself, and telling about the action basically use a similar “semantics of action”. Con-figuring is the proper field of narrative emplotment and coherence. On this level, separate events, persons, motivations, and temporalities are brought together. This is the actual level of narratives accounting for the past that both Mink and White are exclusively interested in. Re-figuring, instead, posits human beings as receivers and consumers of narratives, causing the stories to influence the receivers, and getting people to change their scripts, plans, and intentions (Ricoeur 1984, 64–77).

Ricoeur makes a distinction between a strict understanding of narrative as narration or Aristotelian *diegesis*, and a broad understanding “as the “what” of mimetic activity” (*ibid.*, 36). On my reading, configuring comes close to his “narrow” meaning of narrative, whereas the whole triad covers his broad definition.

In this discourse on the triple mimesis of narrative, he seems to occupy a rare middle position as regards the ideas of Mink, MacIntyre, Carr, and Hardy. To be exact, he never mentions Hardy at all, and mentions Carr only once, in a round-table discussion wherein Carr was his immediate commentator (Wood 1991). Mink and White, instead, are repeatedly and respectfully discussed, as is MacIntyre. What then constitutes his uniqueness? For one thing, he never accepts the metaphor of living out narratives; instead, he maintains that he might be “justified in speaking of life as a story in a nascent state, and so life as an activity and passion in search of a narrative” (1991, 29). He agrees with Mink and White on the configurational power of narrative, but he is not nearly as scandalized by the consequences of this observation for historiography (Ricoeur 2004, 238–248).

Ricoeur's advantage, in a way, is to combine the narrow and broad (or "elastic", as Rimmon-Kenan puts it in this volume) conception of narrative, without renouncing all the necessary distinctions. Distinguishing from Carr, he does not "hesitate to speak of a prenarrative quality of experience" (1984, 74). This limit of narrativity (as regards experience) actually radicalizes the aspects of configuration and re-figuration. If the contrary thesis advocated by Carr would be accepted, then the contribution of narrative as emplotment and configuration of past events and experiences would simply be reduced to that of refining an existing narrative experience. More than that, it would also marginalize the relevance of reading and receiving narratives as important moments of the potential re-arranging of one's experience.

Finally, it is useful to take a closer look at the role of the semantics of action. Monika Fludernik (1996) has advanced an idea of 'natural narratology', maintaining that the source of narrativity is in the 'naturally occurring' oral story-telling, which again is organically linked to human cognition. In other words, she shares Hardy's idea according to which narrativity is not only about representation but also about understanding the world. It is interesting how Fludernik (*ibid.*, 22–25) adopts Ricoeur's *Mimesis I* as a cognitive level of her analysis, and maintains that it "corresponds to the action-oriented parameters of frame theory" (*ibid.*, 23). Ricoeur writes:

Actions imply goals, the anticipation of which is not confused with some foreseen or predicted result, but which commit the one on whom the action depends. Actions, moreover, refer to motives, which explain why someone does or did something, in a way that we clearly distinguish from the way one physical event leads to another. Actions also have agents, who do and can do things which are taken as *their* work, or their *deed*. [...] On the other hand, every narrative presupposes a familiarity with terms such as agent, goal, means, circumstance, help, hostility, cooperation, conflict, success, failure, etc., on the part of its narrator and any listener (Ricoeur 1984, 55).

This vocabulary exceeds dramatically the simplicity of serving tennis or planned action of departure and arrival. Additionally, it exceeds the solipsistic horizon of "we-subjects" as suggested by Carr. This field of the *Mimesis I* anchors narrative to the understanding of *action*, and not to that of experience in general, save listening to a melody. Ricoeur also takes a clear distance from any form of behaviouralistic language ("...which explain why someone does or did something in a way that we clearly distinguish from the way one physical event leads to another"). In this harsh and open world of action, he maintains, the "whole history of suffering cries out for vengeance and calls for narrative" (*ibid.*, 75).

Ricoeur's particular merit might be the complexity of his concept of narrative; his insistence on discordance, and his effort to locate this complex concept within the context of complex action. He was able to include the distinct agendas of Hardy and Mink into his model, without making everything in human life narrative. Because of his complex style and sophisticated way of construing his arguments, he has never offered easy access to his readers. There have been at least two problematic strategies of receiving his work within the narrative-turn movement:

either he is simply located next to MacIntyre and Carr as an advocate of narrative studies (cf. Crossley 2000, 49–50); or instead his argument has been equated to that of Mink and White (a strategy that Carr forcefully suggests; and Randall 1995, 89–90, follows).

Metaphor in Use: Narrative Inquiry

Next, I will proceed to study how the metaphoric discourse was appropriated in narrative psychology and narrative inquiry in social sciences. The psychologist Dan P. McAdams (1988, 17–18) sums up the purpose of his book *Power, Intimacy, and the Life Story* by saying that it “explores the possibilities packed within a disarmingly simple metaphor – the *story* metaphor. It is an individual’s story which has the power to tie together past, present, and future in his or her life. It is story which is able to provide unity and purpose [...] The story is the answer to the question ‘Who am I?’ and ‘How do I fit into an adult world?’ *Identity is a life story.*”

McAdams illustrates a number of open problems with the metaphoric discourse. Like Theodor Sarbin (1986) who suggested narrative as “the root metaphor for psychology”, McAdams explicitly assumes story as a metaphor. More than that, he presumes that it is “a disarmingly simple metaphor”, thereby of course ignoring narrative theory and adopting the term more or less directly from everyday language. This is exactly the point of the metaphorical attitude: narrative and story are not themselves the objects of analysis, instead they serve as metaphorical resources with which to observe something else. For McAdams, this something else is first of all identity. Characteristically, the story is in singular form: *one* story is to cover the identity. He assumes nothing less than the position James Phelan (2005a) later characterized as “narrative imperialism”: stories are *not just one* method to create identities, but “identity is a life story”.

Bruner (1987, 31) formulates the same metaphor in a slightly different way, as a cognitive process: “I believe that the ways of telling and the ways of conceptualizing that go with them become so habitual that they finally become recipes for structuring experience itself, for laying down routes into memory; for not only guiding the life narrative up to the present but directing it into the future. I have argued that a life as led is inseparable from a life as told – or more bluntly, a life is not “how it was” but how it is interpreted and reinterpreted, told and retold: Freud’s *psychic reality.*” His approach emphasizes the cognitive process of understanding life with a story. As mind is never free of precommitment, as he has it, “[o]ur precommitment about the nature of life is that of a story, some narrative however incoherently put together” (*ibid.*, 32). The language is that of phenomenological universalism, it is about “our” precommitments without distinctions.

There are many other highlights of the new metaphorical discourse. George Rosenwald and Richard Ochberg (1992) coined the succinct and inspiring term *storied lives*; Margaret R. Somers (1994) theorized *ontological narratives*, and

William Randall (1995) and Vilma Hänninen (2004) have discussed *inner* narratives. Freeman (1997, 175) discusses narratives “as being woven into the fabric of life itself”. All of these have served as important contributions to what might be named narrative social theory.

The metaphorical talk about narrative, of course, grounded the overall relevance of people’s stories and encouraged the collection and study of them. This reading is not strictly limited to the *living out* of the stories, but rather suggests the relevance of *living with* the stories in the way Hardy outlined two decades earlier. In principle, the genre allows for presuming one story or many stories; complete and unitary stories or unfinished stories. Regarding the whole flourishing field of narrative inquiry, the metaphor has worked excellently.

Where then is the problem? Paradoxically, right in the middle of the new wave of narrative studies, the concept of narrative has remained principally un-theorized or under-theorized for a long time. Story has provided a new heuristic perspective on life, psychology, identity, and action, but oddly enough the narrative itself has been left in shadow, out of theoretical considerations. The narrative-turn scholars have often been so determined to focus on the “content” of the stories that the narrative aspect itself has been at risk of being marginalized. Nevertheless, this under-theorizing of the concept easily leaves the term both amorphous (referring, for example, to text, hypothesis, talk, opinion, core of an ideology, and so on, see Rimmon-Kenan, in this volume) and shallow. The essentially metaphoric approach to narrative has also radically narrowed the import of theoretical and methodological ideas from literary theory of narrative (see, however, Mildorf 2002, and in this volume; Patterson 2002).

Galen Strawson’s (2004) recent criticism has revealed some unresolved dilemmas in the metaphoric discourse. Is a unitary, coherent, and complete life narrative, vis-à-vis fragmented and numerous stories, a value as such, as MacIntyre and McAdams suggest? Is the metaphor indeed descriptive, normative, or both? In other words, are people with well-thought-out and complete life narratives ethically better than people with shattered memories and representations?

Strawson’s distinction between “episodic” and “narrative” persons exposes another problem. Does the metaphoric discourse imply an idea of one, dominant, and covering life narrative, or does it rather suggest the relevance of *narrativity* as a cognitive resource in reassembling experiences into smaller or taller narratives? I suggest that there is, and has been, significant diversity in response to these questions, but not necessarily enough analytic acuity in theoretical formulations. To put it bluntly: it has been all too convenient just to list the advocates of narrative theory and their juiciest quotations rather than to look closer at the differences and nuances within this family of thinking. Harré (1997) has touched many of these ambiguities, and poses a fertile dilemma: “The story I tell may not have been the story I tried to live” (*ibid.*, 334). Wortham (2001, 1) takes distance from the overly totalizing theories by attempting “to make plausible the notion that the self *might* get *partly* constructed in autobiographical narrative” (my emphasis).

The emergence and success of empirical narrative studies, however, have brought back the dilemmas of the concept itself. One apparent hallmark publication was the 1997 special issue of *Journal of Narrative and Life History* (currently *Narrative Inquiry*), which was dedicated to the work of Labov and Waletzky (1997 [1967]). Both Elliot Mishler (1997) and Emmanuel Schegloff (1997) challenged the notion of a complete narrative, told and controlled by a single narrator (which, of course, corresponds to the Aristotelian completeness of narrative). Michael Bamberg (1997; also 2004) suggested a performative and positional reading of narratives, thus portraying narratives more clearly as *moves* in social interaction. This interactional and rhetorical dimension of narrative had already been outlined by Barbara Herrnstein Smith (1981), however, without much active response then.

The erosion of the self-evident, complete and coherent conception of narrative has an intimate connection with the growing interest in Mikhail Bakhtin's thought (and this undercurrent is vital for both families of narrative theorizing). The early, structuralist narratology was built on the Saussurean language theory, as Ginsburg and Rimmon-Kenan (1999, 68–69) argue. Following the distinction between the language system (*langue*) and its actual use (*parole*), and privileging the system, “narratology insisted on the study of the general laws taken to govern all narratives”. In this systemic thought, narrative is always a complete whole, distinct from other ways of using language, as the model of Labov and Waletzky (1997) leads us to understand.

In a Bakhtinian study of language, the emphasis is always on a singular utterance in a concrete context of communication (Bakhtin 1986). The focus is not on a finished and distinct form (“narrative”) but on the *act of responding* and predicting future reactions. Elinor Ochs and Lisa Capps (2001) epitomize this change of perspective in narrative studies. They start by positing that “mundane conversational narratives of personal experience constitute the prototype of narrative activity rather than the flawed by-product of more artful and planned narrative discourse” (*ibid.*, 3). The shift of focus is radical: “Here the emphasis is on narrative activity as a sense-making *process* rather than as a finished product in which loose ends are knit together into a single storyline” (*ibid.*, 15). Narrative completeness becomes a contingency when “many of the narratives under study in this volume seem to be launched without knowing where they will lead” (*ibid.*, 2). In conversational practice, it becomes impossible to distinguish a pure form “narrative”; instead, the conversational narrative “routinely involves *questions, clarifications, challenges, and speculations*” (*ibid.*, 18). The *tellership*, or the control the narrator has over the emerging story, differs from situation to situation.

Jens Brockmeier articulates the profound consequences of this change of perspective for the concept of narrative:

In contrast with the traditional idea of narrative as cognitive, linguistic, or metalinguistic structure, I propose understanding it as a specific discursive practice [...] In this view, narrative is best thought of as a form and practice of communication (Brockmeier 2004, 288).

Yet this challenge to the complete, finished, and categorically distinct concept of narrative is far from precluding the metaphoric perspective. This is apparent already in the title of Ochs and Capps's book: *Living Narrative. Creating Lives in Everyday Storytelling*. Lives and stories continue to intermingle but in this new, Bakhtinian environment, both are open-ended. These stories are, most of the time and in most of the cases, in the plural. However, the rejection of narrative's essential completeness suggests new interpretations of the old metaphors and debates on metaphors.

Would "living out a narrative", on this horizon, also mean living out practices and continuities of communication, open and continually emerging, socially examined and fragmentary stories rather than clear teleologies with beginnings, middles, and ends? How much credit can we then grant to a holistic, autobiographical narrative told by a single individual?

The Play of Inclusion and Exclusion

If we change the perspective and look at the narratological family of theorizing, we can indeed recognize an unrelenting debate on the criteria of narrative (e.g. Abbott 2002, 12–24; Bal 1997, 5–7; Fludernik 1996; Herrnstein Smith 1981; Kafalenos 1999, 36–37; Morson 2003; Richardson 2000, 169–170; Rimmon-Kenan 2002b, 2–3; Ryan 1999, 117–118; 2005). Pekka Tammi (2005), in a talk wherein he criticized the overly metaphorical use of the concept in cultural studies, referring broadly to the field I have named narrative-turn literature, finds three general ways to conceptualize narrative:

1. *Narrative as a discourse* (type). As an example, Dorrit Cohn (1999, 12) presents a "fairly consensual definition [of narrative]: a series of statements that deal with a causally related sequence of events that concern human (or human-like) beings".
2. *Narrative as a speech act*. James Phelan (2005a, 18) suggests that "narrative itself can be fruitfully understood as a rhetorical act: someone telling someone else on some occasion and for some purposes that something happened".
3. *Narrative as a cognitive schema*. As an example, Tammi provides a formulation from William Nelles (1997, 116): "Narrativity [...] is the product of a tropological operation by which the metaphor of narration is applied to a series of words on a page [...] Narratological analysis is thus a performative discourse that makes a text it analyzes narrative".

Narrative, therefore, can reside either in text (1), in communication (2), or in reception of a text (3). Tammi displays nicely the general attitude of the narratological family: the *criteria* of the concept are vital for the theory and should be discussed; but the metaphoric extension of the range of reference is a rather problematic project. However critical he is towards the metaphoric augmentation of narrative, his own approach is interestingly inclusive: even the suspicious members of a family need to be discussed in the context of narrative theorizing. Marie-Laure Ryan (2005, 345) takes a slightly different path by asking ironically:

Should we design a definition [of narrative] that acts like semantic police, excluding all 'illegitimate' uses of the term 'narrative', but also endangering its theoretical vitality or should we bow to the current fashion, and work out a definition that accepts all current interpretation, at the price of losing some crucial distinctions between narrative and other forms or products of mental activity?

The limited exchange between narratology and the narrative-turn literature becomes obvious if we look at some of the numerous stories of narratology and its history. Above, my story of the narrative turn was told consciously from an exclusive perspective. The other story of narrative, as exclusive, may begin like this:

The narratological enterprise became systematic after the appearance of the English translation of Propp's morphological study of the Russian fairy tale (Propp 1958), and narratology took on many of the features of a discipline in 1966, with the publication of a special number of *Communications* (No. 8) entirely devoted to the structural analysis of narrative. In 1960, Lévi-Strauss [...] reviewed Propp's book and praised its remarkable achievements while criticizing its emphasis on (surface) form rather than (deep) structure, manifest message rather than latent content, and superficial syntactic relations than deep logico-semantic ones (Prince 1997, 39–40).

The list of decisive characters might then continue with Claude Bremond, A. J. Greimas, Roland Barthes, and Gérard Genette, as it does in Prince's story. David Herman (1999) recounts a slightly different, well-informed and consistently exclusive story of narratology. He reflects the theme of "crises of structuralist narratology" since the early 1980s, but concludes that now a new and broader version of narratology is alive and well. "Put otherwise, narratology has moved from its classical, structuralist phase – a Saussurean phase relatively isolated from energizing developments in contemporary literary and language theory – to its postclassical phase" (*ibid.*, 2). Although he purports to use the term narratology "quite broadly", the narrative-turn literature is excluded from the account.

Perhaps the quasi-inclusive version of the narratological story is still the most telling one. Mark Currie (1998, 2) notes the growing interest in narrative: "[t]here has been a recognition that narrative is central to the representation of identity, in personal memory and self-representation or in collective identity of groups such as religion, nations, race and gender". After this thematically inclusive opening, Currie's story of narrative theory is exclusively the story of literary narratology. Richardson (2000, 168) even notes that now "narrative is everywhere", but after this promising opening, he withdraws from an inclusive strategy back to an exclusively literary story of narrative theory. Fludernik (2005) exhibits a similar play of inclusion (new themes and areas) and exclusion (authors) in her erudite and, in many ways, extremely helpful history of narratology.

The divide between the two narrative stories is indeed profound, and the distance is realized on both sides of the barrier. More important are thus the rare border-crossings. Rimmon-Kenan (2002b, 143), for example, posits herself and her new phase of study in the broader story of narratology and the narrative turn. The

recognition of the narrative-turn themes goes even further in her article on illness narratives. She notices the work of MacIntyre, Ricoeur, Bruner and Widdershoven, and concludes: “I also share their general contention [...] that we lead our lives as stories, and our identity is constructed both by stories we tell ourselves and others about ourselves and the master narratives that consciously or unconsciously serve as models to us” (Rimmon-Kenan 2002a, 11). The delicate emphasis on the intentional (“we *lead* our lives”; thus taking up Bruner’s idiom) aspect above is worth noticing. The article documents well the virtues of crossing the borders of the two narrative families. Brockmeier and Harré (2001), Patterson (2002), and Mildorf (2002) belong to the few other examples of conscious border-crossing I currently know of.

Two recent, outstanding publications seem, however, to complicate this picture remarkably: *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative theory* (Herman, Jahn & Ryan 2005) and *A Companion to Narrative Theory* (Phelan & Rabinowitz 2005).⁵ Both volumes reflect the history of narrative theory in rich and sophisticated ways. Both volumes are edited by literary theorists, yet both of them reach out towards the narrative-turn theories. *Routledge Encyclopedia*, in particular, includes entries such as “Psychological approaches to Narrative”, and “Narrative Therapy”. Martin Kreiswirth (2005) documents how relevant areas of narrative-turn theorizing have remained unnoticed on the side of literary theory of narrative.

The contributions of Herman (2005, 24) and Ryan (2005, 344) disclose an inner paradox in the division of fields. Herman (in the context of Russian formalists) and Ryan (in the context of early narratologists) note that the whole theory of narrative and the abstract notion of narrative itself (vs. theory of the novel, for example) are based on the comparison of many sorts of narratives. The almost unending travelling of the concept may thus be part and parcel of the original abstraction itself. Ryan also suggests an elegant solution to the tension between metaphoric and conceptual discourses on narrative: “The narrative potential of life can be accounted for by making a distinction between ‘being a narrative’ and ‘possessing narrativity’” (*ibid.*, 347).

Finally, Brian McHale (2005) touches the dilemma of writing any history of narrative. He is astonished how both Herman (2005) and Fludernik (2005), in their otherwise systematic accounts, dismiss the role of Bakhtin, who “is certainly the most ubiquitous of narrative theorists of the last quarter of the twentieth century, and arguably one of the most influential” (*ibid.*, 60). Waves of reception, circulation and production may indeed be astonishingly complex. A parallel case on the narrative-turn side is the reception of Hannah Arendt (1958), whose work on narrative has inspired many thinkers (Cavarero 2000; Dish 1994; Guaraldo 2001; Kristeva 2001; Whitebrook 2001). Yet, she was discovered decades after her work was published in English, and literary theorists have hardly noticed her existence at all.

⁵ Unfortunately, both publications are too recent and encompassing to receive full recognition in this article.

For further study, there are few fields as interesting as narratives of law and medicine. These fields are interesting, in particular, because they have been approached independently by both narrative families. For example, narrative and law has also been studied by Peter Brooks (Brooks and Gewirtz 1996) and Jerome Bruner (Bruner and Amsterdam 2000). Do these “mutual crossings” exhibit similar dialogues between narrative theories as Rimmon-Kenan (2002a) displayed? The narrative interest in the fields of law, medicine, nursing, psychoanalysis and education indicates a sociological point of interest: the narrative reorganization of *professions*.

Crossing the Borders?

This article has endeavoured to outline and justify a research program on the conceptual history of narrative. I have pointed out at least two relatively independent families of narrative theory. The few cases the theories have intermingled seem both theoretically and pragmatically relevant. Reading the story of the narrative turn by using the perspectives of conceptual history enables the display of a strong and wide-ranging commitment to a simple version of Aristotelian narrative featuring a complete narrative with a strong sequence between a beginning, middle and end. Irrespective of theoretical differences, authors from Mink and White to MacIntyre and Carr established their debates on a fairly similar concept of narrative.

However important it is to recognize the virtues of more broadly interdisciplinary work, this article does not suggest any new consensus in the larger field of narrative studies as such. In most cases, the narrative-turn literature focuses more on the content of the stories, even to the point of illustrating naiveté as regards the narrative form. Often, the political and cultural mission has been to introduce new, previously silenced voices to the reading public. The different agendas between the narrative families may indeed be celebrated rather than downplayed. Yet the almost total ignorance about theoretical and methodological developments on the other side of the theoretical divide can hardly be the most fertile point of departure. Yet the understanding of the interplay between “narrative modes” (Rimmon-Kenan 2002b, 145) of perceiving, living, knowing, communicating and telling requires more extensive theoretical interchange than is now occurring.

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