Critical Policy Studies

The uses of narratology in social and policy studies

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SPECIAL FEATURE

The uses of narratology in social and policy studies

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This article suggests possible multiple uses of narratology in social and policy studies. It starts with a brief history of the narrative turn in social sciences. The structure of the remainder of the text follows the trajectory of a research project. First there is a suggestion that researchers may learn from narratologists how to monitor the construction of narratives in the field of social practice, how to look for narratives in documents, and how to encourage narratives when conducting interviews. Then I look at how narratologists can teach social scientists various techniques of close reading, useful in analyzing field material. There follows an examination of the multiple models of writing that narratology and literature have on offer. The article ends with a reflection on the difference between the genres of literary and scholarly writing.

Keywords: narratology; narrative turn; sensemaking; storytelling; explication; explanation; exploration; mimesis; emplotment

Narratology is the theory and study of narrative and narrative structure and the ways they affect our perception. In principle, the word can refer to any systematic study of narrative, though in practice the use of the term is rather more restricted (…). It is an Anglicization of the French word *narratologie*, coined by Tzvetan Todorov in his *Grammaire du Décaméron* (1969), and has been retrospectively applied to many studies that were described otherwise by their authors. Although a lineage stretching back to Aristotle's *Poetics* may be traced, modern narratology is most typically said to begin with the Russian Formalists, and in particular with Vladimir Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale* (1928).[1]

The travels of narratology

It is usually assumed that it was Lévi-Strauss' interest in myths that led him to Propp's work, which was consequently translated into French, and in 1968 into English. But it may be that in order to trace the origins of the fascination with narratives in the humanities and social sciences one should go further back and recall the British psychologist Fredrick Bartlett, whose dissertation from 1914 was published in 1932 as a book that soon became famous: *Remembering: A Study in Experimental and Social Psychology.* Although he was mostly interested in the process of repetitive storytelling (his experiments are often referred to as the study of gossip), he too was greatly interested in folk tales.

In the 1970s more and more authors applied narratological methods in their research. As early as 1967 Labov and Waletzky, who read Propp's original work in Russian,

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espoused and improved on Propp's formalist analysis, suggesting that sociolinguistics should analyze simple narratives in order to construct devices for the analysis of the structure and function of complex narratives. In education it is usual to evoke Burton R. Clark's (1972) study of three US colleges (Reed, Antioch and Swarthmore), all of which had a circulating story that was rooted in the college's history, claimed the college's uniqueness, and was held in warm regard by the group who was telling it. Hayden White (1973) announced that there can be no discipline of history, only of historiography, as historians emplot events into histories, rather than 'finding' them. The US sociologist Richard Harvey Brown (1977), in a peculiar act of parallel invention, spoke of 'a poetics for sociology', unaware that the Russian post-Formalist Mikhail Bakhtin has postulated it before him (1928 [1985]).

By the end of the 1980s narratology was everywhere. US political scientist Walter R. Fisher (1984, 1987) pointed out the central role of narrative in politics, and of narrative analysis in political science. Polkinghorne (1987) did the same for the humanities, and especially psychology, where Bruner (1986, 1990) initiated a strong narrative interest. McCloskey (1990a) scrutinized the narrative of economic expertise. By the 1990s, the narrative analysis had become a common approach in science studies (see e.g. Silvers 1995).

This 'narrative turn' in the humanities and social sciences was legitimated, in the first place, by a claim that narrative knowledge, all modernist claims notwithstanding, is the main bearer of knowledge in contemporary societies (Lyotard 1986). Although its main competitor, the logico-scientific kind of knowledge, has a higher legitimacy status in modern societies, the everyday use of the narrative form is all-pervasive. Graduate students read mountains of books on method, but when they want to submit their first paper to a refereed journal, they ask a colleague who has already published, 'How did you go about it?' The proliferation of method books has been accompanied by growing numbers of biographies and autobiographies, and these are richly illustrated with stories.

Secondly, it is useful to think of an enacted narrative as the most typical form of social life, as was pointed out MacIntyre (1990, p. 129). This is not an ontological claim; life might or might not be an enacted narrative, but conceiving of it as such provides a rich source of insight. This suggestion is at least as old as Shakespeare, and has been taken up and elaborated upon by Burke (1969), Geertz (1980), Mangham and Overrington (1987), and many others.

Thirdly, narratives are a common mode of communication (Fisher 1984, 1987). People tell stories to entertain, to teach and to learn, to ask for an interpretation, and to give one.

Therefore, a student of social life, no matter in which domain, needs to become interested in narrative as a form of knowledge, a form of social life, and a form of communication. It is no longer controversial to claim that narrative knowledge is ubiquitous in all social practices. Politicians and managers write stories and tell stories to one another and to interviewers, be they researchers or journalists. So do doctors and patients, teachers and pupils, salespersons and customers, coaches and football players. The genre of autobiography – personal and organizational – is steadily growing in popularity, while the older types of stories – folktales, myths and sagas – acquire new forms, thanks to new technologies and new media.

A student of social practices re-tells the narratives of a given practice and constructs them herself, first- and secondhand. Nevertheless, she cannot stop there, as by doing so she will be barely competing with the practitioners themselves, and from a disadvantaged position. She must go further and see how the narratives of practice unfold. This interest can lead her to a stance espousing the ideas of logico-scientific knowledge, as formalism

and structuralism tended to do, but this is not a stance represented in this text. The analyses I intend to present are closer to the poststructuralist edge of the spectrum of narratology. Such an analysis does not look for chains of causes and effects but for frequent ('usual') connections between various elements of a narrative. It does not search for laws, but for patterns and regularities, which do not reveal a deep structure – either of the world or of the mind – but which are affixed to a text by the writer and the reader alike. The reader is able to see how a text was made not because she divines the writer's intentions, or comprehends universal human nature, but because reader and writer are both producers and consumers of the same set of human institutions.

It is possible to see various uses of narratology in social science studies as extending from the field of practice studied by the researcher to the field of theory, that is, of research practice. Following the chronology of a research project, a list of such uses might look as follows (adapted from Czarniawska 1999, p. 22):

Field of practice as a site of narrative production:

- watching how the stories are being made;
- collecting the stories; and
- provoking story telling.

Reading narratives from the field:

- re-telling the stories (what do they say?);
- analyzing the stories (how do they say it?); and
- deconstructing the stories (unmaking them).

Writing narratives of the field:

- mimesis (re-presentation); and
- emplotment (theory construction).

In what follows, I shall provide examples of all these uses.

Field of practice as a site of a narrative production, circulation and consumption

How stories are being made

Boje (1991) took inspiration from studies of Sacks (1992) and his followers, who investigated the occurrence of stories in conversations. One context especially rich for the story-carrying conversation was, he observed, a work organization. Boje thus set out to record everyday conversations in a large office-supply firm that he was studying in order to capture spontaneous storytelling episodes. His findings concerned two aspects of storytelling: how they occur in conversations, and in what way they are used.

As far as the first aspect is concerned, Boje discovered that storytelling in contemporary organizations hardly follows the traditional pattern of a narrator telling a story from the beginning to the end in front of an enchanted and attentive audience. Narrators told their stories in bits and pieces, were often interrupted, sometimes for the purpose of complementing the story, and sometimes for aborting the storytelling. As to the uses to which stories were put, Boje classified them into pattern finding, pattern elaboration and pattern fitting. This classification exemplifies well Weick's (1995) insights concerning sensemaking.

A story is a frame – a frame that emerges and is tried out, a frame that is developed and elaborated, or a frame that can easily absorb the new event.

Boje's studies (1991, 2001) show that the line between 'story making' and 'story collecting', topics of two separate sections in this article, is very thin if it exists at all. Also, although Boje's studies were done in workplaces, storytelling is not limited to such sites. Family is an obvious site for telling stories, as are playgroups and various associations, not to mention official speeches. Stories can also be told after work, as is the case in Orr's (1996) ethnography of the work of technicians who repair copying machines. While employed by a big corporation, the technicians practically ignored it. They conceived their job as a work practice rather than a relation of employment and hierarchy, and consequently as an individual, challenging task, made possible by a supportive community. The community was a context where work stories were swapped, and where the collective knowledge was produced, maintained and distributed.

The technicians' stories were not 'organizational stories', that is, stories that told of organizing events that had already reached completion; they were 'stories that organized' (Czarniawska and Gagliardi 2003), that is, stories that were a part of the organizing effort. 'Organizational stories', like those encountered by Clark (1972), seem to be meant for a general audience and – although no doubt fulfilling multiple functions – can hardly be of practical use for a problem at hand. Yet it is undoubtedly so that, as organizing proceeds, stories become more complete too (for the analogy between action and text, see Ricoeur 1981). How do 'stories that organize' become 'organizational stories'?

White's studies of historiography taught me how to recognize a story in the making. In contrast to Boje and Orr, I find narratologists' distinction between a narrative and a story (see e.g. Todorov 1990, White 1987) very useful. A narrative is a set of events, or actions, put together chronologically; the story is emplotted, that is, a logical (in the widest sense of logic) connection is introduced. Like the Europeans who, in writing down their history, went from simple annals to chronicles to an emplotted history, people in organization use the minutiae of everyday events as a material – first for reports, as organizational chronicles are usually called, and then for stories, sometimes of heroic dimensions.

There was a clear analogy between these three forms of historiography and the story making that I was able to watch during my study of the city of Stockholm (Czarniawska 2004a). The register of my direct observation resembled annals, even if contemporary metrology permits a more detailed measure of time. Field notes, like annals, simply register what is happening at any given time. However, many of these seemingly disconnected events and actions were related by a common theme: the reform of city administration. Interviews with people engaged in carrying the reform through resembled chronicles: they reported the chronological and causal chains of events, but did not have a point, or a plot. After some time, however, complete stories of reform begin to emerge, as the actors and the observers connect separate events and actions into a plot leading to a point. In doing so, they replace chronological time with kairotic time (that is, time punctuated by meaningful events; Czarniawska 2004b).

I have observed this process many a time in my fieldwork. It confirms that sensemaking (Weick 1995) is a retrospective process, requiring time, but the question remains, *how* is the narrative actually woven from disparate events? Marie-Laure Ryan (1993, p. 150) succeeded in locating what she calls 'a factory of plot': live radio broadcasts of sports events. There, 'the real life situation promotes a narrative tempo in which the delay between the time of occurrence of the narrated events and the time of their verbal representation strives toward zero, and the duration of the narration approximates the duration of the narrated' (Ryan 1993, p. 138). A broadcast is constructed around three dimensions:

the chronicle (what is happening), *the mimesis* (how does it look, a dimension that allows the listener to construct a virtual picture of the events) and the *emplotment* (introducing logical structure which allows making sense of the events).

It is obviously the chronicle that is central to a sports broadcast; nevertheless, the broadcasts become emplotted as well. The broadcasters perform it using three basic operations: *constructing characters*, that is, introducing legible differences between the actors (a hero and an opponent); *attributing a function* to single events; and *finding an interpretive theme* that subsumes the events and links them in a meaningful sequence ('near success', 'near failure', etc.; Ryan 1993, p. 141).

The close analogy between sports events and organizational performance in contemporary societies has been extensively commented upon by Corvellec (1997), who studied the notion of organizational 'performance' from a narratological perspective. The spectators (in his study, the municipal politicians) insist on seeing the chronicle of events ('last year's performance indicators'), not least because they want to have an opportunity to make their own emplotment. Although the real interest concerns the plot ('why didn't you do better?'), the loosely espoused principles of logico-scientific knowledge that characterize the genre of performance indicators turn the attention away from the operation of emplotment. Plots are given (in the form of scientific laws of economics), so the only activity required is to recognize their pattern in the chronicle.

Collecting stories

Each family and each workplace has a contemporary and historical repertoire of stories. Any researcher who cares to spend some time with a family or at a workplace, listening to what is told and reading some of its textual production, will encounter such narratives. In formal organizations, sometimes such stories are spread abroad with a hope that they will reappear in a more legitimate form, for example via the mass media (Kunda 1992).

Gabriel (2000, p.23) has collected stories related to the use of computers and information technology in 10 organizations. Here is an example of a story that is worth repetition for its entertainment value, though it has nothing to do with computers:

> There was a chap driving a lorry and he hit a cat so he got out of the lorry and saw this cat on the side of the road and thought I'd better finish it off (…) smashed it over the head, got back in and drove off. A lady or a chap phoned the police and said I've just seen a Board lorry driver get out and kill my cat. So they chased after the van and found it and asked the driver whether he had killed the cat so he said he had run over it and couldn't leave it like that (…) it's cruel so I finished it off. So they said can we examine your van and he said yes by all means so they examined the van and found a dead cat under the wheel arch. So it was the wrong cat [he had killed] sleeping at the side of the road.

Gabriel points out that it does not make sense to check the veracity of the story, and treats it as an example of organizational folklore. I would like to point out that it contains many a message about the company he calls Board. It is not the plot (a comic road story involving a case of mistaken identity) but the *mimesis* that carries the message: we learn that Board drivers are people sensitive to the suffering of animals, and that the British police force reacts to even the most exotic complaint with exceptional thoroughness and alacrity.

Gabriel gathered an ample collection of stories during his fieldwork, and the analysis that follows elucidates several extremely important and otherwise often hidden aspects of social life. One such aspect is the role stories play in the drama of organizational power

and resistance. Another is that stories permit access to the emotional life of organizations. This topic has been taken up by other writers (see a collection edited by Fineman 1993), but Gabriel addressed a highly original aspect: stories as revealing the nostalgia present in organizations. A third aspect, closely related, is the religious side of organizing: Gabriel offered a compelling interpretation of the longevity of the leader-as-a-hero kind of plot: the leader is a kind of surrogate God in organizations. 'By highlighting the untypical, the critical, the extraordinary, stories give us access to what lies beyond the normal and the mundane' (Gabriel 2000, p. 240). Here Gabriel speaks in tune with Bruner (1990, pp. 49–50), who pointed out that '[t]he function of the narrative is to find an intentional state that mitigates, or at least makes comprehensible, a deviation from a canonical cultural pattern'. Thus stories might not tell everything about work-worlds, but they do tell a lot. Long-lived narratives are sediments composed of norms and practices, and as such deserve careful attention.

How to prompt narratives

> Telling stories is far from unusual in everyday conversation and it is apparently no more unusual for interviewees to respond to questions with narratives if they are given some room to speak. (Mishler 1986, p. 69)

An interview situation can easily become a micro-site for the production of narratives, or just an opportunity to circulate them, where a researcher is allowed to partake of narratives previously produced. In many cases answers given in an interview are spontaneously formed into narratives. This is usually the case with interviews that aim to elicit life histories (Linde 1993) or career descriptions, where a narrative is explicitly asked for and delivered. This is also the case with interviews aimed at obtaining an historical description of a certain process. When the topic for an interview is reform or reorganization, that is, a chain of events that unfold in time, there is nothing unusual in formulating a question that prompts a narrative: 'Could you tell me the story of the budget reform as you experienced it?' 'Can you recall when you first started to talk about reorganizing your department? And what happened next?'

This does not mean that research interviews always evoke narratives. Unlike spontaneous conversation, they may incite a conscious avoidance of narratives insofar as they are constructed as arenas where only logico-scientific knowledge can be legitimately produced. Both sides have to combat the shared conviction that 'true knowledge' is not made of narratives (Czarniawska 2002). 'What were the factors that made a reorganization necessary?' will be perceived as a more scientific question, prompting analytic answers. It is then the task of the interviewer to 'activate narrative production' (Holstein and Gubrium 1997, p. 123).

How to do it? Several options exist. Ethnomethodologist and the founder of conversation analysis, Harvey Sacks (1992), put emphasis on the way 'membership categorization' is used in construction of meaningful narratives. Switching from the vocabulary of ethnomethodology to that of narratology, one could say that membership categories are descriptions of characters, one of the necessary elements of every narrative. 'I' is just a personal pronoun, 'a woman of 35' a statistical category, but 'a mother of a family of five' is already the beginning of a narrative. Introducing a tentative membership categorization is a ploy that often works. A character must know his or her lines, and deliver them accordingly, or protest the categorization and offer an alternative account.

    The other element of a narrative that can be prompted is a *plot*. Narratives based on sheer chronology are of little use for further interpretation. The regular occurrence of Tuesdays after Mondays can hardly produce any profound insights into the nature of organizing, unless the construction of a calendar is being discussed. Although narratives always engage the *logic of succession* (albeit not always in a straightforward manner), stories also involve the *logic of transformation* (Todorov 1990). The minimal plot, said Todorov (1977, p. 111)

> … consists in the passage from one equilibrium to another. An 'ideal' narrative begins with a stable situation, which is disturbed by some power or force. There results a state of disequilibrium; by the action of a force directed in the opposite direction, the equilibrium is re-established; the second equilibrium is similar to the first, but the two are never identical.

The second equilibrium may resemble the first or reverse it. A municipality in trouble may reorganize and start attracting investors again, or it may apply for a loan from the state. A depressed person may recover after a successful therapy. The episode that describes the passage from one state to another can have one or many elements. There can be one single force that changes the state of affairs into another one ('a paradigm shift') or a force and a counterforce; the two latter often consist of an event and an action (a flood, and a mobilization). Usually, plots are complicated and contain chains of actions and events, oscillating states of affairs, apparent actions and wrongly interpreted events, as in suspense or mystery, but a minimal plot is enough to make sense of a narrative. Thus the other common way of invoking narratives is fishing for a missing element in the minimal plot. Even an apparently analytical question like, 'What were the factors that made the reorganization necessary?' is but a way of asking for the first element of the plot, the original state of affairs.

    Once characters and a plot are in place, a story has been constructed. Before I move to the possible ways of reading it, another comment on characters is due. Unlike membership categories, they do not have to be human. For example, many organizational narratives have as important characters a computer, a city administration, or an equality program. Also, the accounting aspect of a narrative does not have to be explicit: the very way of structuring the elements of the plot may serve as an explanation or justification. Narratives mix together humans with non-humans, causes with reasons, explanations with interpretations. This makes them difficult but also interesting to interpret.

How to read a narrative?

As there are many ways of reading a narrative, a look at the 'hermeneutic triad' formulated by Hernadi (1987) may be helpful. It conceptually separates three ways of reading a text (simultaneously present and intertwined in the practice of reading), and is composed of explication, explanation and exploration.

The difficulty of explication

Explication corresponds to a stance that the Italian semiotician Umberto Eco (1990) called that of a naive, or *a semantic reader*. It is guided by an ambition to understand a text, and here Hernadi used Frye's (1990) insight, showing that it implies a humility on the part of the reader: *standing under* the text. The traditional rendering of this operation consists of the researcher writing 'the one true story' of what 'really happened' in a clear, authoritative

voice. This procedure is nowadays considered an anathema, but this is misleading. After all, there are many good reasons to make up a consistent narrative – out of many partly conflicting ones, or out of an incomplete, or fragmented one. The justice or injustice done to the original narrative depends on the attitude of the researcher and on the precautions he or she takes.

The main problem of rendering somebody else's story in one's own idiom is the political act of totalizing that it entails. This problem became acute in anthropology as literacy increased in previously oral societies (Lejeune 1989). The Other, who before was just 'described', took on the task of self-description and of questioning the descriptions of the anthropologists. Yet when a field of practice under study is highly literate, the re-descriptions undertaken by the researchers are open to practitioners' comments and questions. The status of science, especially the social sciences, does not stifle the protests and critiques any more. As I pointed out at some length in a different context (Czarniaw-ska 2004a), the 'voices of the field' reported in organization studies are as literate and eloquent as those of the reporters, and often have greater political clout.

This does not release the researchers from their responsibility for what they write and their duty to respect their interlocutors. But this responsibility and respect do not have to be expressed in a literal repetition of what has been said. A researcher has a right, but also a professional duty, to do a 'novel reading', in an apt expression coined by Marjorie DeVault (1990): an interpretation by a person who is not socialized into the same system of meaning as the narrator, but is familiar enough with it to recognize it as such. At any given time and place, she continues, there are *dominant and marginal readings* of the same text and, I may add, there are a number of narratives reporting the same develop-ments but plotting them in a different ways. Some plots are dominant while others are con-sidered marginal, but it is not necessary that the researcher subscribe to the dominant plot. Agreement is not always the best way of expressing respect. The researchers' duty is, however, to take the authorial responsibility for the narrative they have concocted, and also to admit the existence of opposition from their interlocutors, if they are aware of it.

There are many other ways of paying respect to one's interlocutors. One is a multi-voiced story, recommended by many anthropologists (see e.g. Marcus 1992). There is then not one, but many narratives; as in a postmodern novel, all tell their story and the researcher does not have to take a stand on which is 'right' and which is 'wrong'.

One has to point out, however, that polyphony in a text is but a textual strategy (Czarniawska 1999). 'The voices of the field' do not speak for themselves; it is the author who makes them communicate, on his or her conditions. Therefore it is more accurate to speak, in line with Bakhtin (1985), about the 'variegated speech' of the field, about leaving traces of different dialects, different idioms, and different vocabularies, rather than to homogenize them into a 'scientific text'. Again, this textual strategy is not as drastically different from one authoritative story as it may seem. Pasting together fragments of narratives taken straight from an interview protocol may decontextualize them; but, in return, it also recontextualizes them (Rorty 1991). It is not a question of 'quoting literally'; it is a question of a recontextualization that is interesting ('novel'), credible and respectful.

Explanation

Explanation sets the reader above the text. The innocuous question, 'What does the text say?' is replaced with an interruptive, 'How does it say it?' (Silverman and Torode 1980). This equals the stance of a critical, or *a semiotic reader* (Eco 1990). Hernadi's triad is egalitarian in that it puts all explanatory efforts on the same plane: be they semiotics,

criticism, structural or rhetorical analysis, deconstruction – they all attempt to disassemble the text to see how it was made.

Explanation is often set in contrast to interpretation, but the latter can be seen (indeed, interpreted) in a pragmatist way, in the sense of all inquiry, of recontextualization. When this happens, interpretation combines explication with explanation, asking the question, 'What does this text say? And how come?' Eco (1992) pointed out that interpretations are indefinite but not infinite. They are negotiations between the intention of the reader (*intentio lectoris*) and the intention of the text (*intentio operis)*. They can end with a first level reading (typical of a semantic reader) or an overinterpretation, a reading that ignores the text (a tendency of the semiotic reader). Most of the readers live somewhere between those two extremes, and different readers have different interpretation habits.

What is a 'reasonable interpretation' and what is an 'overinterpretation' is negotiated not so much between the text and the reader, as among the readers. In that sense, *intentio operis* seems an excellent device, to be treated pragmatically. It is impossible, however, to establish the *intentio operis* of a given text once and for all. Intentions are being read into the text each time a reader interprets it. Again, this does not mean there is an unlimited variety of idiosyncratic interpretations. As DeVault (1990) pointed out, in any given time and place there will be dominant and marginal readings of the same text, which makes the notion of interpretive communities very useful (Fish 1989). It is within such communities that negotiations about 'reasonable interpretation' take place.

One can, however, continue explanation through an analysis proper, and one traditional way of analyzing a narrative is that of a structural analysis, an enterprise close to semiology and Formalism (see e.g. Propp 1968, Barthes 1977, Todorov 1977, Greimas and Courtés 1982). Almost before this method acquired legitimacy in the social sciences, it was swept away by poststructuralism. It makes sense, however, to follow Selden's (1985, p. 72) suggestion that 'poststructuralists are structuralists who suddenly see the error of their ways'. This statement is especially convincing when we observe that the figures central to poststructuralism were, in fact, leading structuralists or Formalists: Barthes, Bakhtin, Todorov. 'The most fundamental difference between the structuralist and poststructuralist enterprises can be seen in the shift from the problematic of the subject to the deconstruction of the concept of representation' (Harari 1979, p. 29).

This shift led to a problematization of the 'deep structure' concept; the move from structuralism to poststructuralism meant abandoning the depths for the surface. Structures can no longer be 'found', as they are obviously put into the text – by those who read the text, including the author. (After all, reading is writing anew). This meant abandoning the ideas of the universal structure of language, or of mind, and accepting the idea of a *common repertoire of textual strategies* (Harari 1979), which are recognizable to both the writer and the reader. This relaxation of basic assumptions leads also to the relaxation of the technique: as there is no one true deep structure to be discovered, various techniques can be applied to structure a text and therefore permit its novel reading.

An extension of poststructuralism is deconstruction; a technique and a philosophy of reading characterized by a preoccupation with desire and power (Norris 1988). Used by Derrida (1987) for reading philosophical texts, it becomes a kind of philosophy in itself (Rorty 1989). Used by gender scholars, it becomes a tool of subversion (Johnson 1980). Used by education policy scholars, it becomes a perspective from which to question the contemporary university (Mansfield 2005, Peters 2007). Deconstruction is a hybrid: it contains elements of close reading, of rhetorical analysis, of dramatist analysis, of radical rewriting. Therefore, it does not make much sense to speak about 'proper deconstruction'

or the 'correct use of structural analysis': the literary techniques should serve as a source of inspiration, not a prescription to be literally followed.

Exploration, or all together now

Exploration, or standing in for the author, might be seen as more sparingly used in scholarly texts, a genre that does not encourage existential enactment, or readers bringing their lives and preoccupations into the text. Yet it can be found in most readings: in the conclusion of a positivist scholar, in the confessional remarks of an ethnographer (Geertz 1988, Van Maanen 1988), in standpoint feminism (Smith 1987) and in the empowerment ambitions of a narrative analyst (Mishler 1986). An excellent example of an analysis that offers an explication, explanation and exploration in one is John S. Nelson's (2008) analysis of a realist political style accomplished by constructing an analogy with film *noir*. The very choice of analogy already suggests the stance of the author – both political and methodological. Here is how he justified his enterprise:

> (…) popular genres in mass media are good places to theorize about post-modern and post-western politics. These genres are modes of practical action, because they remake the political myths we live every day. The theories articulated in popular genres are often as good or better than political theories in more scholarly form because they are more vivid in evoking present phenomena, past sources and future prospects. They are better, too, because they can attain greater accuracy, insight, and effectiveness for politics in everyday situations where most of us live the rest of our lives, political and otherwise. The overall method here is to move back-and-forth among contrasting genres, to parse their politics through myriad comparisons among their characters, settings, and events. (Nelson 2008, p.11)

Thus while both US politics after the Second World War and the two chosen films have first to be explicated to the readers, their comparison stands for explanation, and 'analyzing noir films can help us explore political dynamics of realism as a family of styles in our everyday lives' (Nelson 2008, p. 12).

In my rendition, narratology does not have a 'method'; neither does it have a 'paradigm', a set of procedures to check the correctness of its results. It gives access to an ample bag of tricks – from traditional criticism through the formalists to deconstruction – but steers away from the idea that a 'rigorously' applied procedure would render 'testable' results. A source of inspiration, not of prescriptions. The next question, then, is whether or not narratology can be of use in scholarly writing.

Narrative approach to writing

Mimesis, or how to represent the world

A common-sense answer to the question: 'How to represent?' is: 'Faithfully'. Reality should be re-created in the text. A scholarly text should reflect what it describes, hopefully in a one-to-one correspondence. This should not be any problem, as 'facts speak for themselves', and texts can be rendered with fidelity to the intentions of the authors.

That this is possible at all was called into question by the Impressionists in art, and by, among others, Jorge Luis Borges in literature, and finally in the human sciences. The following problems emerged:

- the incompatibility of worlds and words (Rorty 1980, 1989): how can words be compared to that which they (purportedly) describe? A one-to-one correspondence

is impossible if the media are different. It is therefore sensible to think of representation of an object as involving *production* of another object 'which is intentionally related to the first by a certain coding convention which determines what counts as similar in the right way' (Van Fraassen and Sigman 1993, p. 74). Representation does not reflect; it creates;

- the politics of representation (Latour 1999): considering that there are always competing versions of the world in circulation, who has the right to judge them, and by what criteria? This second problem is already a search for the solution to the first one: if facts do not speak for themselves, who will speak on their behalf? How do conventions of coding arise? Who has the right to judge what is 'the right way'?

As these are complex queries, let me begin from the opposite end and ask, 'What is the purpose of skillful mimesis in a scholarly monograph?' The common (academic) sense answer is: in the case of field material, *to make readers feel as if they were there, in the field*; in the case of a literature review, *to make readers feel as if they have read the literature themselves*. How to achieve these effects, if facts refuse to speak for themselves, and a truly faithful rendering of somebody else's text is a plagiarism?

There can be no normative answer to this question, only a descriptive one: I can tell readers how some authors try to achieve this effect. Words cannot be compared to non-words, only to other words. This means that, as Hayden White (1999) put it, all descriptions of historical objects (and social objects are historical), are necessarily *figurative*. In order to evoke in a reader an image of something they have not seen, this image must be connected to something that they have already seen, and *tropes* – figures of speech – are the language means to achieve just this effect. The word *metaphor*, which in Greek means a transport from one place to another, means exactly that in authorial practice: the reader is moved from 'here' to 'there', be it to another physical setting, or another book. Also, not for nothing are tropes *figures* of speech: they are the means to visualize, 'to paint with words'. How can such painting be done?

The most frequent description of a setting for a field study follows the theatrical convention: stage instructions plus the cast of characters (often collective rather than individual: a group of employees, a profession, a social stratum). The influence of television series brought in another descriptive element: 'the story-so-far' (a historical background).

Another kind of introduction to a setting is typical of sociological ethnographies, Chicago-style. The authors borrow from naturalist fiction, introducing the reader 'as if a stranger or an outsider, in the fashion of a guidebook' (Atkinson 1990, p. 32):

'Welcome to Technology Region – Working on America's Future', proclaim the signs along Route 61, the region's main artery. It is early, but the nervous, impatient energy of high-tech is already pulsating through the spectacular countryside. Porsches, souped-up Chevies, Saabs, indeterminate old family station wagons, motorcycles, company vans, lots of Toyotas – the transportational variety is endless – edge their way toward the exit ramps and the clusters of 'corporate parks', engineering facilities, conference centers, and hotels that are the place of daily congregation for the region's residents. As their cars jerk along, some drivers appear engrossed in thought, a few may be observed speaking into tape recorders or reading documents from the corner of their eyes. In the 'region' the future is now; time is precious; and for many of the drivers work has already begun.

The parking lot in front of High Technologies' Lyndsville engineering facility is rapidly filling. (Kunda 1992, p. 1)

A great many details, but not a complete list. Neither fictive accounts nor ethnographic reports aim at 'a literal description or transcription of people, places or events' (Atkinson 1990, p. 40). Such a description would appear absurd, and indeed has been used to create the effect of absurdity in fiction (by e.g. Alain Robbe-Grillet and Nicholas Baker). A skilful description depends heavily on metonymy and synecdoche, on deleting information in the hope that the readers will fill in the blanks, which should also increase their engagement in the reproduction of the text (Atkinson 1990, p. 52). Kunda assumed that his readers were familiar enough with car types to picture them; he attempted to re-create an atmosphere, not to give instructions on how to get to Lyndsville by Route 61.

Yet another literary device used to describe the setting is throwing the reader into the midst of the events, creating a puzzle to be solved – by adding more material, and by the subsequent analysis:

> *5 min.* John enters and goes into his office. He says something very quietly about having made a bad mistake. He has sent the review of a paper. … The rest is inaudible. (Latour and Woolgar 1986, p. 15)

Both guide-like instructions and 'throwing the reader in at the deep end' anecdotes often employ a rhetorical device known as *hypotyposis*, 'the use of a highly graphic passage of descriptive writing, which portrays a scene or action in a vivid and arresting manner' (Atkinson 1990, p. 71). They are realistic in the sense that they aim at a description that is rich, abundant and colorful (Stern 1973), a 'thick description' (Geertz 1973). Mimesis aims at a description that is both vivid and credible (the two aid one another), that is, a description that persuades.

It lies in the rhetorical tradition to differentiate between mimesis (a description) and emplotment (an arrangement). But this differentiation makes only an analytical sense: it is obvious that each description must be arranged. This arrangement can be coherent with the arrangement of the whole text, or incoherent with it. In other words, mimesis can corroborate the plot, or oppose it. Although it is possible to think of a mimesis opposing the plot, and therefore contributing to some kind of a meta-plot, it is safe to assume that, in a scholarly monograph, a strive for coherence is still a virtue. I will suggest further that description should be subordinated to the requirements of the plot, not least in its volume: the descriptive material that is not needed in this function can be saved in an appendix. From all this it is obvious that, in my eyes, emplotment is the crucial part of writing a scholarly monograph – and the most difficult.

Plot, or how to theorize

Emplotment (a term introduced by Hayden White 1973) means introducing structure that allows making sense of the events reported. Traditionally, it answers the question: 'Why?' where, in a positivist view, the answer should be formulated in terms of causal laws; in a romantic view, in terms of motives; in post-positivist, post-romantic discourse (Brown 1989), it assumes a form of showing 'How come?' where laws of nature, human intentions and random events form a hybrid mixture.

Polkinghorne (1987, pp. 18–19) dedicated much attention to the role of the plot and its possible uses in the human sciences: 'The plot functions to transform a chronicle or listing of events into a schematic whole by highlighting and recognizing the contribution that certain events make to the development of the whole'. But not only that: a plot can weave into the story the historical and social context, information about physical laws and

thoughts and feelings reported by people. 'A plot has the capacity to articulate and consolidate complex threads of multiple activities by means of the overlay of subplots' (Polkinghorne 1987, p.19). This is an important property from the point of view of field researchers, faced often with the fact that, as many things happen simultaneously, a simple chronology is not sufficient to tell a story. And this analogy is not accidental: 'The recognition or construction of a plot employs the kind of reasoning that Charles Peirce called "abduction", the process of suggesting a hypothesis that can serve to explain some puzzling phenomenon. Abduction produces a conjecture that is tested by fitting it over the "facts".' (Polkinghorne 1987, p.19). Lastly but most importantly, '[m]ore than one plot can provide a meaningful constellation and integration for the same set of events, and different plot organizations change the meaning of the individual events as their roles are reinterpreted according to their functions in different plots' (Polkinghorne 1987, p.19) A lavish party has a different meaning in the story of a success than in the story of a bankruptcy.

Most tales contain more than one plot, and these must be connected to one another. Such a combination of plots is usually achieved by one of two strategies: *linking* (coordination), i.e. adding simple plots to one another so they fit; and *embedding* (subordination), i.e. setting one plot inside the other (Todorov 1977). One can add, after White (1973, p. 6 footnote 5) that, like a historian, a field researcher confronts 'a veritable chaos of events *already constituted*, out of which he must choose the elements of the story he would tell'. Hence the necessity for two additional tactics: *exclusion* and *emphasis* (also, embedding can serve both combination and selection).

A poor storyteller hopes that chronology will stand in for causality; a clever storyteller trades chronology for causality (what happens earlier causes what happens next, see Bruner 1990). But even a clever storyteller cannot make chronology pass for causality in stories the elements of which are connected only by *succession* ('It rained on Monday. I bought a car on Tuesday.'); to become a plotted story, they also need to be related by *transformation* (Todorov 1990). This can be achieved only by adding a third element ('I have had enough of always getting wet biking'), by which consequent events (that is, the two first elements of a plot, an – assumed – normal state and a deviation) became a new state of affairs.

The text I chose as an exemplar – Albert O. Hirschman's *The Passions and the Interests* (1997 [1977]) – is usually classified as an essay in the history of ideas. But it could be claimed that it is also a field study – a monograph on the history of political and economic thought. I perceive such blurring of genres as very fruitful: indeed, from the point of view of crafting the research text, there is no crucial difference between a field of practice and a field of theory, when the latter is considered a practice.

Hirschman's book proposes a striking thesis (interpretative scheme) which it then proves: contrary to most contemporary thinking, interests are not the opposite of passions. Self-interest, that founding stone of capitalism, was chosen as the least wicked passion, able to curb others. Hirschman's characters are basically schools of thought, represented by, but not identical to, their spokesmen (no woman among them), famous writers.

The structure of the book is simplicity itself. It contains three parts: (1) How the Interests were Called Upon to Counteract the Passions; (2) How Economic Expansion was Expected to Improve the Political Order; and (3) Reflections on an Episode in Intellectual History (observe how the titles practically tell the story).

The first part is located in the Renaissance, as the epoch characterized by a new turn in the theory of the state. It had been felt that religion was no longer capable of restraining the destructive passions of human beings. Three alternatives were considered: coercion and repression, education (socialization, indoctrination), and fighting passions with

passions. Hirschman examines various circumstances that helped to establish the dominance of the last alternative in the seventeenth century, and Machiavelli is an important source in this context. The attention moved to defining a passion that would have such a benevolent effect, with the well-known result that 'One set of passions, hitherto known variously as greed, avarice, or love of lucre, could be usefully employed to oppose and bridle such other passions as ambition, lust for power, or sexual lust' (Hirschman 1997, p. 41).

The second part explains why this thesis attracted so little attention in the political sciences and economic thought of later ages. Hirschman shows that while Montesquieu in France, for example, developed the thought that economic pursuits will improve political governance, Adam Smith disconnected the two, giving an economic, no longer political, justification to the pursuit of self-interest. In Smith's view, 'politics is the province of the "folly of men" while economic progress, like Candide's garden, can be cultivated with success provided such folly does not exceed some fairly ample and flexible limits' (Hirschman 1997, p. 104).

In the third part, Hirschman briefly takes up the developments in economic and political thought that followed,[2] showing how different are the present views of market and economy from those that are claimed to be their antecedents. His reflection concerns, most of all, a phenomenon rarely focused on by other scholars: the intended but unrealized effects of ideas and decisions.

Several aspects of Hirschman's way of emplotment can be revealed. To begin with, although chronology is obviously an element in a historical essay, it does not have a structuring function here. The essay is structured by an outcome-bounded causality: the first part presents the first episode in political thought, which is the basis of the second episode. The second episode, however, changes the outcome and therefore the future plot. The second episode ends up in a transformation: what started as a way of solving a political problem ended by being a justification for the autonomy of economy. The third part makes this transformation obvious and ironic: 'In sum, capitalism was supposed to accomplish exactly what was soon to be denounced as its worst feature' (Hirschman 1997, p. 132).

How are the first two parts composed internally, if not sequentially? As Hirschman (1997, p. 69) said himself, in the first part he put his thesis together in 'the laborious way … from bits and pieces of intellectual evidence'. Once it had been assembled, he set it against various later schools of thought in the second part, to look for its traces. The plot tends toward Satire, though Irony is Hirschman's favorite trope.

There are several reasons for my choosing Hirschman's book as an example here. The most obvious is that Hirschman is a superb writer (an expression used by Amarthya Sen in a preface to the 1997 edition), and all his books can be recommended as models for aspiring social scientists. The second reason is that Hirschman is truly a social scientist – while practically all subdisciplines claim his belongingness, he himself does not see much reason to observe disciplinary borders. Thirdly, *The Passions and The Interests* has reacquired an uncanny relevance in times when it has become painfully clear that greed does not harness violence. Now that coercion and indoctrination have failed as well, are there any alternatives left? Are there any new ones emerging? Hirschman's text is important because of its contents and because of its form. Paying attention to the latter will only enhance the former.

What, then, is usually judged a successful plot? It is a plot that is coherent, that contains a basic plot structure, and then embroiders it: by complicating it, by introducing subplots and counter-plots. In other words, plot equals a well-thought theory, which in scholarly monographs, unlike in novels, is explicitly articulated (at the end or at the beginning).

Does it mean that the conventional structure needs to be abandoned? Not necessarily. My plea is that the writers understand the purpose of the conventional structure, and cease to treat it mechanically. Once understood, it can be followed, abandoned or circumvented: it may become a frame within which a well-plotted story is inserted.

Will narratology transform social sciences into literature?

A novel contains a fictive description of a social or psychic world; a scholarly monograph, a factual one. Science should keep to facts and logic, leaving metaphors and stories to literature. Yet, as McCloskey (1990a) pointed out, contrary to this received wisdom, the sciences can be said to be using a whole tetrad of rhetorical figures: stories, metaphors, facts and formal logic. *Belle lettres* or 'folk theories' mainly use stories and metaphors, but quite often facts, and sometimes even formal logic.

On the other hand, scholars seldom use formal logic – in the sense of the particular mode of reasoning, because everybody uses logic in the sense of syntactic rules. What I want to emphasize is that 'science' is not separated from 'literature' by an abyss; over and above the publishers' classification, a work is attributed to a certain genre according to the frequency with which it uses certain rhetorical devices. As Hirschman said in a Preface to his *Shifting Involvements* (2002, p. xv):

> I am not sure that this book qualifies as a work of social science. It is so directly concerned with change and upheaval, both individual and social, that at times I had the feeling that I was writing the conceptual outline of a *Bildungsroman* (with, as always in novels, a number of autobiographical touches mixed in here and there).
>
> This blurring of genres does not bother me, but it exacts a price. I have tried to make the various turns and transitions, which stand in the center of the essay, as compelling as possible. But they admittedly fall short of carrying the conviction and of achieving the generality which social science likes to claim for its propositions. Then again, as many of these claims have proven excessive, perhaps I need not worry.

We recognize a scientific text not because of its intrinsic scientific qualities, but because the author claims it is scientific (and this claim can be contested) and because he or she uses textual devices that are conventionally considered scientific (and this convention is contested all the time). Following Latour (1992), one can try to distinguish between these two kinds of text by saying that stories evolve along the *syntagmatic* dimension, grounded in association, while scientific models evolve along the *paradigmatic* dimension, based on substitution. A narrative thus adds various events one after another over time, while a scientific model substitutes a group of particulars with a more abstract concept that covers them all. Generalization, and consequently prediction, operate differently in the two modes. Syntagmatic construction uses *metonymy*; i.e. it operates on the sense of part and whole (how things hang together). Paradigmatic construction, on the other hand, uses *metaphor*; i.e. it operates on the sense of like and unlike (similarity, analogy).[3] Turning to social scientific texts, one cannot help noticing that both constructions appear: there are elements of the syntagmatic and the paradigmatic, of metonymy and metaphor, of narrative and logic.

McCloskey's tetrad can be enriched by Latour's insight. Logic and stories can be put together on a syntagmatic dimension, as two modes of association, of establishing a connection – in actual time and space, hypothetically, or counterfactually. Facts and metaphors reside on a common paradigmatic dimension, as two kinds of substitution, a

dimension extended between the two modes of name giving. 'Facts' are names or assertions about which we tend to agree easily ('this is the recently acquired computer'), while metaphors indicate a stage of inquiry rather than consensus ('will it be a boost or a dead weight to your finances?'). The extremes would be proper names and metaphors (with similes and analogies in between).

Seen this way, 'science' is no longer a priori distinct from 'literature'. McCloskey's tetrad now denotes a space within which one could position various works, and it would be their proximity to other similar works that would establish their genre. For example, metaphors (or models) seem to be more frequent in economics than stories, which are very frequent, on the other hand, in the sub genre known as economic history (McCloskey, 1990a, 1990b). Geertz (1988) stressed the obvious importance of stories in anthropology but he also pointed out that there are more metaphors than one would expect.

Contrary to expectations, facts are seldom found in social science texts (Czarniawska 1999). As Knorr-Cetina (1981) pointed out, etymologically 'facts' (from *facere*) mean fabrications, and their production is a specialty of certain places such as natural science laboratories. Social scientists seem to be only marginally engaged in fact production; their attention is focused on *how the facts*, and the important societal fictions, *are produced* (Knorr-Cetina 1994).

This would bring scholarly texts (once more) closer to literature, where the status of facts is quite clear: 'Factual judgments as such die as soon as they are transformed into semiotic judgments. Once accepted as true, the factual judgment (…) dies as such in order to generate a stipulation of a code (…) Successful judgments are remembered as such only when they become famous ("the famous discovery of Copernicus"…)' (Eco 1983, p. 86). Facts, once successfully fabricated, are used in the production of further facts; their repetition does not bring any added value into a discourse. Metaphors, on the other hand, 'tend to resist acquisition. If they are inventive (and thus original) they cannot be easily accepted; the system tends not to absorb them' (Eco 1983, p. 86). Once accepted, they become redundant, and lose their attraction. Stories are allowed to be redundant: a narrative of a redundant nature, says Eco defending detective stories, offers a fastidious reader an opportunity to repose, to relax. Thus the combination of stories and metaphors seems to be invincible, but at the same time seemingly puts an end to the genre of scholarly monograph, which dissolves into literature.

Genre-reflection is, however, also a genre-construction, an institution building, and as such it invites policing attempts: somebody always takes on the duty of 'protecting the core'. As genre analysis in literature has shown, such policing leads to the suffocation of a genre in the worst case, and to the facilitation of genre blurring and crossing in the best (Hühn 1987). Neither paradoxicality nor conflict weakens a genre; on the contrary, they enhance its controlling power. The gray zones – blurred genres – host innovators, those who rejuvenate and reform genres.

What I therefore plead for here is not the replacing of one genre with another, but creative borrowing. 'To the few wooden tongues developed in academic journals, we should add the many genres and styles of narration invented by novelists, journalists, artists, cartoonists, scientists and philosophers. The reflexive character of our domain will be recognized in the future by the multiplicity of genres, not by the tedious presence of "reflexive loops"' (Latour 1988, p. 173). Traditionally, however, scholars have tended to ignore the form, insisting that it is the pure content that is being tapped. Latour's advice amounts to suggesting that we should make a virtue out of a vice, an art out of an unreflective behavior.

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Notes

1. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Narratology [Accessed 13 March 2010].
2. He then extended his analysis to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in his *Rival Views of Market Society* (1992).
3. Although metaphor goes beyond analogy. Analogy assumes continuity, metaphor assumes rupture. In other words, analogy *reports* similarity, metaphor *creates* it.

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