NARRATIVE: EVENT, TEMPORALITY, SEQUENCE

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One of the central concerns of narratology, the discipline that studies the principles of constructing stories, is the nature of time, because story-telling takes time, and stories also represent the passage of time. However, it is particularly difficult to find adequate theoretical concepts that would help us put our finger on what narrative temporality is in its essence, so that we can say useful and more specific things about it. For a long time, the narrative theory was dominated by the structuralist paradigm. The temporal aspect of a story was approached through the analysis of plot and the use of the notion of event, leaving the latter rather vague. The plot is represented as a graph, and events are points on this graph. Since the plot graph is just a spatial representation, it is in the event – a node at which something happens – where one must look for the secret of narrative temporality. And indeed, events are central to our understanding of a narrative. As Gerald Prince writes in his 1982 *Narratology*, "Narrative, indeed universal and infinitely varied, may be defined as the representation of real or fictive events and situations in a time sequence"[1] . But how do we define an event? It has been suggested that an event should be seen as a change of state. Would any change of state then be considered interesting/significant enough to warrant analytical attention? If a character puts his drinking glass on the table or walks to the door and opens it, would this be an event? In some cases, it would, in others, it wouldn't. In response to quandaries like this, narratologists advance various criteria to help separate significant from minor events. Wolf Schmid, for instance, proposes a list of such criteria. One

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[1] Prince, G. 1982. *Narratology: The Form and Functioning of Narrative*. Berlin, New York, Amsterdam: Mouton Publishers, p. 1

of them is that an event is "real… in the framework of the fictional world"[2]. In some narratives, nonetheless, dreams constitute important events. Another one stipulates that the event must "[reach] completion in the narrative world of the text"[3]. Yet, as a counterexample, one can imagine a narrative that is organized by and around an impending event that is never reached. In terms of its content, an event must be relevant. Still, even though many people would agree on selecting relevant events, this criterion remains open to interpretation.

It is obvious that the question of eventfulness is contextual and cannot be answered in general terms. It is probably by keeping in mind the vexed question of *what is an event?* that narratologist Richard Walsh dispenses with events altogether and comes up with a definition of a narrative text that does not appeal to event and eventfulness. In "Narrative Theory for Complexity Scientists," he defines narrative as "the semiotic articulation of linear temporal sequence"[4]. The notion of sequence captures all that is essential to narrativity: it is "the most neutral term possible for the specific formal relation that narrative articulates. It represents a bare transition from formlessness to a specific (total) order"[5]. Events are problematic because the concept that expresses them is imprecise and confusing. Sometimes an event is thought of as a point of "content" within a sequence, and at other times as temporal structure containing a sequence. Walsh, who wants to step away from the idea that there is some independent content that narratives convey and sees "narrative as a primary sense-making process"[6] insists that events are post-constructions, a consequence of narrative thinking rather than stuff that makes it up. What corresponds to the eventful "content" is more accurately described as process-oriented "semiotic articulation." We are thus left with the notion of sequence. If "event" is vague, sequence seems

[2] Schmid, W. "Narrativity and Eventfulness." *What is Narratology? Questions and Answers Regarding the Statis of a Theory*. Ed. Tom Kindt and Hans-Harald Müller. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2003, p. 24.

[3] Ibidem.

[4] Walsh, R. 2018. "Narrative Theory for Complexity Scientists." In *Narrating Complexity*, edited by Richard Walsh and Susan Stepney, 11–25. Springer, p. 12.

[5] Ibidem, p. 13.

[6] Ibidem, p. 18.

concrete. We all know what a sequence is. But does it "house" temporality? Where does temporality "reside" within the narrative form? What gives rise to our sense of the "flow of time"?

In this paper, I propose that narrative sequence is a fundamental property of symbolic thinking. It is both a conceptual phenomenon of order and an experiential one of lived time (that we can think of as being eventful). Appealing to Generative Anthropology, a theory about the origin of language and symbolic thinking, I will show that our innate understanding of sequence corresponds to the anthropologically-motivated experience of deferral that is both a central feature of language and the original instability through which language emerged. Walsh calls *sequence,* in his definition, a neutral term, and it is true that we naturalize it as a logical relation that reflects an underlying (seemingly universal) cognitive bias. Yet, by tracing narrative sequence to deferral, I situate it anthropologically and conclude that symbolic thinking cannot be properly understood without the time dimension and without eventfulness.

I will start with the above-mentioned, so-called, doubleness of narrative temporality. First, there is time as represented: "once-upon-a-time…," or "during the Napoleonic Wars…," or "in the current reality somewhere…" something is taking place. These events are taking place in a given order. They may be related to us out of order, but we should theoretically be able to order them correctly, and the order should hold in the "reality" of a given story: first this character does something, then that one, then a natural catastrophe strikes, and so on… This is static temporality, the temporality of ordered plot events or fabula. However, the unfolding of the story is also temporal; it is happening in real time[7]. We are reading it or someone is telling it, fast or slow. We are at a certain place in the narration, which is our "now". What is to follow, is our future, toward which we look forward with a sense of suspense. What has been told is our past, which we must retain in our

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[7] This distinction has been variously addressed as the dichotomy between the fabula and the syuzhet or story and discourse. In his canonical *Narrative Discourse*, Gérard Genette refers to it as the split between *story* and *narrative*: "*story* [stands] for the signified or narrative content" and "narrative for the signifier, statement, discourse or narrative text itself". Genette, G. *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method.* Tr. Jane E. Lewin. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1983, p. 27.

memory in order to integrate it with what is to come. The former type of temporality is often referred to as the temporality of the *told*, and the latter as that of the *telling*. Paradoxically, it is these two senses of temporality to which, despite their intuitiveness, philosopher John McTaggart appeals in order to argue that time is not real. How could this be if time both in the sense of "now" and as a representation of chronology are such familiar concepts? In the next section, I will briefly show how McTaggart arrives at this conclusion and, from this failure to prove the existence of temporality, derives the idea of "pure" sequence, which I am pursuing in this paper.

In his article "The Unreality of Time", McTaggart works with the concept of a "series". He starts off by saying that the when it comes to the flow of time, we can most intuitively render it in two ways, as two kinds of series. The first, which he designates as the A-series, can be represented as "positions running from the distant past through the near past to the present, and then from the present to the, near future and the distant future"[8]. In contrast to it, the B-series is "[the] series of positions which runs from earlier to later"[9]. In other words, the A-series would describe the narrative temporality of the *telling* since the present, past, and future are always moving and relative, while the B-series would be applicable to the plot temporality of the *told*, where events assume a permanent order and are compatible with what we think of as chronology. The A-series privileges the present whereas in the B-series all times exist concurrently.

McTaggart then asks whether for time to be real, all events need to belong to both series (a given event is either in the present, past, or future, and it is, at the same time, happening either before, simultaneously, or later than another event). While this way of placing events in time seems intuitively correct, and while indeed "it is clear… that we never observe time except as forming both these series"[10], he surprisingly concludes by showing that this way of characterizing temporality is, in fact, illusory. His original premise is that time is characterized by change, and time can only exist if change exists. But the B-series does not admit change; its order is permanent: once an event

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[8] McTaggart, J. "The Unreality of Time." Mind, New Series. Vol. 17, No. 68, Oct. 1908, p. 458.

[9] Ibidem.

[10] Ibidem.

is earlier than another event and later than a third event, it will remain so. World War II will always be after World War I. As for the A-series, it would itself trigger a contradiction because each event on a timeline would, at some point, be in the future, present, or past. Yet, "past, present, and future are incompatible determinations"; all three must be true for a given event at the same time, "all the three incompatible terms are predicable of each event", which is contradictory[11]. The A-series seems logically impossible.

Thus, McTaggart concludes that since the conceptual models we apply to time are problematic, each in its own way, time cannot be real. But something must be real since we claim to experience the passage of time. What is this phenomenon then that we surely perceive and still cannot describe rigorously? To help us approach it, he offers yet another, non-temporal, type of series he calls the C-series, which is simple ordering. The English alphabet would be an example of it. Letter A will be placed before K, which, in turn, will be placed before Z. But this alphabetical sequence has nothing to do with time. The main difference between it and the temporal series is that "[a] series which is not temporal has no direction of its own, though it has an order"[12]. That is to say, the A- and B-series have an implied direction, from the past to the future, because time flows only in one direction. The C-series does not need to "go" in any direction; it does not indicate a "movement" from A to Z: the order is just a helpful mnemonic device for sorting information. And while time is not real, and neither A- nor B-series really exist, the idea of the C-series, according to him, is philosophically sound and contains no contradictions. The C-series really exists; moreover, it is possible that whenever we think we perceive a time-series, we, in fact, observe the non-temporal C-series. Thus when we pick out a year from a chronological timeline, let us say 1388, we are not taking a snapshot of the flow of time, we are making a determination on the basis of numerical ordering, where 1388 comes after 1387 but before 1389.

However, if we cannot interpret order in temporal terms, what other philosophical meanings can we imbue it with? In his later work, McTaggart returns to the C-series and considers a couple of possible interpretations. In "The Relation of Time and Eternity", for example, he continues to explore

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[11] Ibidem, p. 468.
[12] Ibidem, p. 462.

the idea of time as an illusion, still holding to the premise that the subtending reality is timeless and eternal. If this is so, what then is this illusion of seemingly real time? Why does time appear real to us even though it is not? If time is synonymous with change, what is it that changes for us as we move from an earlier to a later state on an imaginary timeline and how does this change conjure up the sense that time is real? McTaggart responds to these questions by explaining that our sense of temporality comes from the way we perceive ordering in terms of progressions, because grasping a particular instantiation of an ordering sequence requires moving through it progressively (more on this later). Namely, the way in which, at any moment of time, we regard existence is more or less inadequate. And it seems to me that the relation of time to Eternity depends on the relative inadequacy of our view of reality at different moments of time. The decisive question… is whether there is any law according to which states in time, as we pass from earlier states to later ones, tend to become more adequate or less adequate representations of the timeless reality.[13]

His answer, in summary, is that descriptions or representations of states in the C-series become progressively more adequate or "full". In other words, what we call the progression of time is, in fact, the progression of knowledge or the progression of the adequacy of representation, which continues until it reaches some hypothetical last stage – the perspective of timeless eternity. On this view, "the last stage", the perspective of eternity, should not be thought of in temporal categories. We are not to equate it with the idea of the ultimate future; it is outside of time, and the progression represented through the C-series is, correspondingly, not a temporal but rather a cognitive progression, which asymptotically approaches the state of perfect adequacy, clarity, and knowledge. For example, the perspective from the point of reaching the largest positive integer, which exists only hypothetically as the idea of infinity, is one instance of such absolute adequacy: we have run the gamut of all possible numbers and completed the number series, but this is not a temporal completion.

In his later book, *The Nature of Existence*, McTaggart continues his investigation of the meaning of the C-series and refines his idea of progression.

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[13] Ibidem, p. 351.

How would we bring into correspondence ordered positions within the C-series with the "earlier"-"later" positions within the B-series without thinking of the former temporally? While not temporal, the C-series positions must be "transitive and asymmetrical" to be a progression[14]. The same applies to the B-series, which is also a progression (the "later" position will always be later with regard to all earlier positions). In *The Nature of Existence*, McTaggart dismisses his earlier model of progression as the growth of adequacy because he recognizes that human cognition is subject to error, and we may not expect a constant growth of adequacy; our knowledge and understanding instead may be obscured or may oscillate in clarity rather than progressively and constantly increase. In its stead, he chooses a less psychological and more Abstract idea of inclusion. That is to say, any two positions in the C-series are related to each other as "included in" vs "inclusive of". Thus the numerical sequence that goes up to 1388 includes in itself the sequence that goes up to 1387. The state of inclusiveness increases as we proceed in the direction analogous to "later" in the B-series such that the ultimate perspective of all-inclusiveness corresponds to the position of God as the absolute being or of eternity or of some asymptotic future point seen through a temporal lens. The last position is all-inclusive rather than the most adequate. McTaggart labels this theoretically perfected idea of order the *Inclusion Series*.

Can we import this elaborated conception of order into narrative theory? Would the C-series be a helpful theorization of narrative sequence? Even though Richard Walsh uses the word "temporal" in his definition, he treats temporality as a largely intuitive category, acknowledging that "approaches to narrative grounded in phenomenology have emphasized that our senses of time and narrative are dependent upon each other and mutually reinforcing... [and] our experience of temporality is broader and more fundamental... than our narrative grasp of it"[15]. Though, insofar as narrative sequence could be conceived as a "discursive movement from point to point"[16] that is

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[14] McTaggart, J. *The Nature of Existence*. Ed. C.D. Broad. Vol. 2. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1921, 1968, p. 233.

[15] Walsh, R. op. cit., p. 15.

[16] Ibidem.

"semiotic[ally] articulate[ed]"[17] as it unfolds, it could be adequately modeled by the C-series, I believe. The latter, as we remember, describes a progressive development representing a gradual expansion and/or perfection. This way of thinking of progression seems to me applicable to narrative, if we think of stories as progressions, progressively unfolding and revealing their overall design. The reader's understanding of a narrative becomes fuller and more accurate as he or she is supplied with more details, expanding until the narrative reaches its conclusion. In the end, all the intended information has been included by the author; thus we can see the final point as all-inclusive in relation to available knowledge. Alternatively, we can say that the reader's understanding of the story becomes more and more faithful to the author's conception, such that at the conclusion, the reader's interpretation can become perfectly adequate to the meaning that the author intended (this is an idealization, of course: I am making a number of simplifying assumptions here about the nature of reading and interpretation). It is not surprising that narrative theorists recognize that narratives are structured teleologically. The narrator/author, who already knows what happens, arranges his or her story for a greater effect. As a result, it is later events that "cause" earlier events through the logic of composition, or, as Gerald Prince says, events, which occur later in the story, act as a "magnetizing force" and the "organizing principle"[18]. Since the final point embodies the full realization of the meaning of the text, the latter can be said to "propagate" from the all-inclusive final point toward the beginning.

And yet my contention is that the model of non-temporal progression takes us half-way, but is not entirely adequate for describing narrative logic. My goal in the remaining part of the argument is therefore to locate the "temporal remainder" in narrative sequence. Namely, I would like to demonstrate that something else is going on, something irreducible to cognitive categories. In order to do this, I will look at *Happy End*, an experimental Czech classic by Oldřich Lipský from 1966, a film where sequence is disturbed, and this disturbance is thematized on several levels. I will go into some detail in describing this film and will dwell on some of its bewildering and humorous scenes at some length because I would like for the readers to

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[17] Ibidem, p. 12.
[18] Prince, G. 1982. op.cit., p. 157.

immerse themselves in the strangeness of a disordered sequence, something that cannot be easily conceived intellectually, but needs to be experienced.

The film tells the story of Bedřich, a butcher, who, in a fit of jealousy, murders his wife and her lover by stabbing and dismembering her and throwing him out of the window. When he tries to escape with her body in a suitcase, he is apprehended, then tried and executed. What is remarkable about *Happy End* is that the story is told from the end to the beginning: the film runs backwards even though it is shot forward. This makes it so that the characters walk and perform all the movements backwards, and the plot, of course, is reversed: it starts with the main character's head jumping on top of his shoulders followed by his being led back to his prison cell. The only exception to this reversed movement is speech. Sometimes the characters speak backwards, but on other occasions forwards.

The latter violation of the logic of presentation is an artistic choice to emphasize the humorous effect of the reversed order of dialog that the viewer would not have otherwise caught and appreciated. Here are some examples. At Bedřich's execution, there is the following dialog between two officials:

> "Has he got any children?"
> "15–17."
> "What time is it?"

Here is the exchange between Bedřich and the policeman during the interrogation:

> "What is your name?"
> "I don't have any."
> "Do you have any mental disorders?"
> …
> "And you killed the wife and her lover?"
> "I didn't notice it."
> "And the dripping blood didn't strike you?"
> …
> "And who put the corpse into your suitcase?"
> "The judge."
> "Who asked you?"

Our laughing at these snippets of reversed dialog is possible because we possess both protention and retention: we both anticipate what is to follow an utterance and can remember what is said earlier. When we come to "who asked you?" we can still remember that the correct answer, "the judge," was applied to the incorrect question of "who put the corpse into the suitcase?" and therefore appreciate the joke.

Nevertheless, the main reason the film is funny is because it is narrated by the so-called naïve narrator who, tragicomically, misunderstands everything. Without the running commentary, we would only be laughing at the unintentional spots of humor arising from the clash between our forward processing and the reversed action and dialog. But the main source of humor is the narrator's incongruous misjudgments and the false narrative he is telling. The film uses the cinematic narrator device as a voice-over, the first-person narrative "I" of Bedřich, who comments on the action and explains it. Here he performs the function of the so-called *unreliable* or, even more precisely and as mentioned above, the *naïve narrator*, which is a type of narrative consciousness that misconstrues the situation because it is missing some information or simply does not understand the situation, for whatever reason. In this case, it is because he is in the position of the viewer, seeing and interpreting the action forward, and making, therefore, hilariously inappropriate or misguided judgments. For example, he thinks that his wedding is the celebration of his divorce from his wife, who has cheated on him. But he misunderstands the meaning of the "following" (in the true chronology, preceding) courtship scenes. Instead of correctly perceiving himself as being in pursuit of his beautiful future wife, he thinks that he is unable to get rid of his former wife after their divorce as she keeps showing up. What is interesting is that there is a clear discrepancy between the narrator and Bedřich, the character, who interprets events and feels in accordance with his correct chronological position. When the wife, Julia, shows up in Bedřich's bachelor flat, we have the following exchange:

> "We are together again." (Julia).
> "That's terrible." (Bedřich)
> "My parents are against our love." (Julia)

Even more significantly, the narrator misinterprets the protagonist's actions toward Julia and her lover, Ptáček. In the true chronology, Bedřich,

who is vacationing with his wife, saves the lover's life when he is drowning. In retrospect, it is the husband's good deed that leads to the affair because this is how the wife and Ptáček first meet. But because the drowning scene comes, in the reverse chronology, after the lovers are found out, the narrator misunderstands the causal order and thinks that his saving Ptáček is, on the contrary, his killing his rival as revenge for seducing his wife. The same story dynamic is at play in Julia's case. In real chronology, Bedřich, who volunteers for the fire department, meets her when he rescues her out of a burning building. But the narrator-Bedřich thinks that he has finally gotten rid of Julia by throwing her into a fire.

But the greatest comedic "mileage" is derived from situations that have a clear arrow-of-time directionality. On the conceptual level, these are life-and-death story lines as well as irreversible material processes subject to the law of entropy. Thus, the protagonist's father-in-law makes an appearance in the middle of the film when he is "born," while Bedřich's and Julia's daughter gets smaller and smaller until she disappears. All one-way processes, thermodynamic, biological, or conventional, are reversed in a humorous way. Here are some examples. To entertain his daughter, the protagonist sucks air out of balloons. While Bedřich has to "pay" a large sum of money to the cashier at a race track, his little daughter can make money appears out of fire (in reality, she sets fire to some banknotes). While during a fishing trip, fish is thrown into the water, the same fish is being taken out of animals' mouths (when Ptáček and Julia illegally feed the seals in a zoo). There are other food jokes, as well. Cows "grow under [butcher Bedřich's] hands." When the little daughter becomes a baby again, she starts "giving" her family two liters of milk a day. And there is a hilarious scene when Julia serves Ptáček cookies on a platter. In the beginning, the platter is empty, and then as the lovers take cookies out of their mouths and put them down on the platter, the pile grows very high, and in the end, the dish is overfilled.

The funniest instance of misprision comes when, as the action moves back/forward in time, the protagonist "returns" home and opens his suitcase with his wife's body parts (in the correct sequence, he has already dismembered his wife's body and hid it in the suitcase). Frankenstein-like, he exclaims: "This was the first woman I ever met. I've got no instructions. She'll be the way I'll put her together. One little mistake, and I'll create a monster. She won't be able to go into the street." But when he "puts her

together" correctly – no surprise! – he is amazed: "I felt like a creator, like God! And then I made [up] my mind: I'll be a butcher", misunderstanding, of course, the correct sequence and meaning of butchering.

But the physical-comedy is also very important because, as the characters do everything backwards, their movements look disturbingly wrong, and not just in obvious ways. When we see them descending the stairs with their backs forward, it is clear that we are watching the reversal of their climbing the stairs: they are not leaving the house; they are arriving. When we see an ambulance reversing and coming to a stop, two paramedics taking out a stretcher with a body, setting it on the ground, and the still body suddenly coming to life and flying into a window upstairs, we immediately understand that we are watching the scene of somebody being thrown out of the window. But movements of hands while walking or cooking or posture of the bodies while kissing look much more ambiguous. In the direct chronology, Julia and Ptáček are undressing each other while kissing – but sometimes people can also kiss while getting dressed. People can also take food out of their mouths, and babies sometimes spit up milk. And on the conceptual level, potential reversibility is humorously exploited in the symmetrical endings in both directions: in both cases, the main character kills the wife and her lover, whether by stabbing or throwing into fire, or whether by drowning or throwing out of the window. (At the very end, Bedřich meets his previous girlfriend, a window dresser, and they recede into childhood, which is also symmetrical to the early scenes in prison, what the narrator misunderstood as his school years).

By using the humor of reversal, *Happy End* makes explicit the place of sequential thinking in the way we process information. What is emphasized by the hilarity of the reversed dialog is that our communication is dynamic. It has directionality and is ruled by the double movement of protention and retention. We do not just determine the semantic content of an utterance, we project and anticipate what should come next, and if the continuation does not make sense, we go back to the previous utterance and revise the meaning we have so far. Similarly, the interpretative blunders of the naïve narrator reveal to us the sequential nature of narrative. Normally, the first-person narrator's commentary is used to establish the protagonist's motivation, which would give the underlying cohesion to the narrative sequence of events as they are seemingly arranged by causal forces and

intentions. But the reversed order wreaks havoc with natural causality (to which we are desensitized), and in doing so awakens us to narrative progression. What I mean is that the framework of expectation is often embedded in a larger dynamic of progression. A love relationship becomes better and better, leading to a "happily ever after" story arc. Or a marriage is happy for a while until it gradually deteriorates and leads to a divorce, and when a relationship ends, it usually ends on a sour, not happy, note. In the same way, according to normal logic, a child is expected to eventually grow up and leave its parents' house not become smaller and smaller and disappear altogether. What we then see here is a carefully orchestrated counterpoint between the perceptions of Bedřich-the-character and Bedřich-the-narrator. The latter does not expect to keep running into Julia after their "divorce" and mixes up his feelings for his former girlfriend and Julia. While in the real chronology, the main character grows progressively more tired of the old girlfriend and more enamored with Julia, whom he has just met, the narrator inverts the two feelings and misattributes his feeling of love to the old girlfriend and hate to Julia.

It is, however, the phenomenology of movement in reverse, which is the most interesting level to contemplate. It is precisely because some movements are ambiguous and semi-symmetrical and take time to mentally reverse that we become aware of those that are clearly one-directional and irreversible. In contrast, it takes almost no time to figure out that the sprawled body on the pavement that lifts off the ground and flies into a window was pushed out in the correct sequence. We have an embodied knowledge of the sequence of movements that needs to be performed in transferring momentum to a heavy object so that it will fly projectile-like, break through a brittle barrier, such as glass, and subsequently fall toward the ground. Kinesthetically, our body, at each moment of movement, is in a state of imbalance, mobilized to project itself into the next phase of movement. It seems that our understanding of sequence is imprinted, on the most fundamental, most deeply rooted, level in our embodied cognition, our very sense of motility, which we interpret as progression[19]. Progression as movement has a felt momentum:

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[19]   This speculation appears to me compatible with a relatively new, though popular and productive direction of research in neuroscience, that on embodied cognition. Thus Kiverstein and Miller argue that cognition cannot be compared to the workings

as we follow it through to completion, we become consciously aware of the sequence of necessary steps.

I would like to return, for a moment, to McTaggart's claim that "[a] series which is not temporal has no direction of its own, though it has an order"[20]. What do we mean by distinguishing directionality from order? My contention here is that we imbue the asymmetry of the surrounding reality with a phenomenological and embodied sense of orientation, subject to external forces, gravitational pulls, and resistance. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson in their *Metaphors We Live By* isolate a basic class of metaphors of embodiment, which they call *orientational metaphors*: "these spatial orientations arise from the fact that we have bodies of the sort we have and that they function as they do in our physical environment"[21]. Because of this inextricable link to embodiment, conceptualizations of time, at least in English, are entangled with those of a moving body, which has a front and back. Consequently, time is conceptually blended with a moving object and itself is metaphorized as a moving object: "by virtue of the TIME IS A MOVING OBJECT metaphor, time receives a front-back orientation facing in the direction of motion just as any moving object would"[22].

Now, connecting this back to narrative temporality, the reason I have dwelt on *Happy End* in such detail is because its backward order on which a false narrative is imposed clarifies the intersection between the lived experience of temporality and its symbolic representation. Conceptually, pure order without direction still seems to require some kind of direction. If we take the English alphabet, which contains twenty six consecutive positions, as an example, its practical use as an indexical system would involve sliding

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of a computer; it is radically embodied in that thinking is underpinned by "patterns of action readiness that manifest in the body in the form of states of arousal and valence"(7). This idea of *action readiness* seems to me to describe something very similar to what I mean by embodied motility, still, I am not aware of any research on the neuroscience of sequence and progression.

[20]   McTaggart, J. "The Unreality of Time." *Mind, New Series*. Vol. 17, No. 68, Oct. 1908, p. 462.

[21]   Lakoff, G. and Johnson, M. *Metaphors We Live By*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980, p. 18.

[22]   Lakoff, G. and Johnson, M. Op. cit., p. 44.

our finger down the page or leafing through pages forward or backward in search of the needed position. We would, in other words, use this indexical system directionally. But perhaps this directionality is purely conceptual and does not involve temporality? After all, time is irrelevant to the procedure of finding an item within an alphabetical list. This is my claim, however: any sequence or order requires that we "live through it", moment by moment, position by position, muscle contraction by muscle contraction, micro-movement by micro-movement, in order to identify it as a sequence. Even in learning the alphabet, a purely conventional order lacking any phenomenological content, elementary school children are taught to sing it, say it in a verse form, incorporate it into various activities, and use other mnemonic devices that will help them internalize it kinesthetically and viscerally. What the reversed order in the film makes palpable is how narrative sequence is constructed by the succession of lived present moments, with each being a protracted experience, something we inhabit and dwell in, each connected to its neighbors through protention and retention. This succession as succession cannot be collapsed or "flattened" or abstracted as a concept without losing something essential to what it means to be symbolic thinkers, which combines representational and phenomenological aspects.

In this last part of my argument, I want to suggest that symbolic thinking is more than a semiotic system based on the triadic nature of the sign (as per C.S. Peirce, for example: "A sign is a conjoint relationship to the thing denoted and to the mind"[23]. There is another, temporal, dimension that is needed to satisfactorily explain such "living" and hard-to-pin-down phenomena as narrative form and the performative aspect of language. This temporal dimension has an anthropological foundation, according to the theory of Generative Anthropology, which advances a hypothesis about the origin of language. I am not, at the present moment, familiar with alternative theories that ground the representational and performative aspects of symbolic communication, and so I will use Generative Anthropology as my working model.

Generative Anthropology was developed by Eric Gans from the mimetic theory of René Girard, who hypothesized that the natural instinct

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[23]   Peirce, C.S. "Of Reasoning in General." The Essential Peirce. Ed. Nathan Houser et al. Vol. 1. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992–1998, p. 225.

of imitation, which he characterized as a mimetic mechanism, led to the originary murder, an initiating event of human culture. In contradistinction to this, Gans claims that when imitation became acute among the proto-humans (imitation characterizes primate behavior, but becomes more strongly expressed in higher primates), an event of hominization took place, which, compressed to a singularity, marked the recognition of the incipient danger that mimetic violence may bring. Gans hypothesizes a so-called minimal scene, on which a group of prehistoric hunters gathers around a killed animal and are each poised to appropriate it individually. In a primate society, the division of food is never chaotic because of the hierarchical order that puts an alpha animal on top. But according to Generative Anthropology's originary hypothesis, this hard-wired hierarchical order was weakened in the proto-human society, whose members became more prone to imitate others and less inclined to follow a hierarchical order. The event of human origin was one of an incipient mimetic (imitational) crisis as each member was poised to fight the others over the cadaver. What prevented a potential conflict was the birth of specifically human consciousness. With violence looming on the horizon, the members of the group thought that it was best to abort their gestures of appropriation. As a result, the gesture of appropriation became one of designation, or the first sign. That is, instead of appropriating the object for individual possession, each participant acquired an equal ability to "appropriate" it symbolically by naming it. Thus language emerged to defer (delay or even cancel, on some occasions) violent behavior. We even know this on the level of everyday psychology: in a nascent conflict, judicial and timely words of propitiation can soothe fraying tempers and diffuse the situation.

What is especially relevant for my investigation of temporality is Generative Anthropology's unique model of the so-called *scene*. Namely, it postulates that language does not exist in some Abstract representational space or as embedded in some theoretical system of signification. Rather it is "suspended" (ready to be deployed) on the *scene* of representation. What makes the scene of representation a scene and not a space or domain is its tension-filled differentiation between the center and periphery. On the periphery, we have language users gathered in the attitude of joint attention around the center, which once held the appetitive object. Now, the object having been evacuated, the center is inaccessible and designated by

the first sign as the *name-of-God*. In this capacity, the center is the locus of significance and sacrality. As significant, it grounds linguistic signs; as sacred, it both attracts and repels, being interdicted to individual appropriation. This ambivalence, experienced as an oscillating attitude, creates a tension between the center and periphery, which is constitutive of a scene. In a scene, things *happen*, not *are*. As Gans puts it, "the human has from the beginning constituted itself around scenic events"[24], specifying that "*every* use of language must be understood as an event"[25]. It is important to inject here that it is not only communication or dialog that are scenic. Narrative, as a "use of language", is a quintessentially scenic act, wherein the narrator communicates with the narratee about the story, with the latter acting as the central and significant object of joint attention[26].

I believe that what underlies our sense of eventfulness on the scene is the originary anthropological category of deferral. Deferral is a specifically human category: only a human being, who possesses language and representational consciousness, has a capacity to represent to itself that which is absent but deferred. As Gans explains, "language and culture emerge not simply as products of our superior intelligence but with the explicit function of momentarily preventing or *deferring* an outbreak of violence"[27]. Originally, deferral is the literal moment of hesitation that precedes the abortion of the gesture of appropriation. Apparently, this is the moment when the consciousness of imminent danger dawns on the group of hunters, and representation is born with the emergence of the first, designating, sign. Within language, deferral becomes a constitutional feature designating 'a ‚sacred' difference between a significant object and the rest of the universe"[28].

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[24] Gans, E. *A New Way of Thinking: Generative Anthropology in Religion, Philosophy, Art*. Aurora, Colorado: The Davies Group, 2011, p. xi

[25] Gans, E. *The Origin of Language*. New York City: Spuyten Duyvil, 1989, 2019, p. 10

[26] For more on narrative as a scenic phenomenon, see Eric Gans's "New Thoughts on Originary Narrative".

[27] Gans, E. *The Scenic Imagination: Originary Thinking from Hobbes to the Present Day*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2008, p. 2

[28] Ibidem.

Functionally, deferral enables the existence and recognition of symbolic patterns and pattern-processing. Thus when we read a sentence, we need to defer our understanding of it until we come to the end. Similarly, when we read a story, we rely on our familiarity with certain narrative patterns (is it a comedy? melodrama? a hero's-journey epic?) in order to project what is to follow, but defer our understanding of the overall pattern until we come to the end. Importantly, deferral creates/requires an ordering capacity because it allows us to keep in mind what was deferred and where it was deferred: we project forward an anticipated continuation of a pattern while memorizing the place where we left off so that we can come back to it. If we have an embedded pattern that needs to be parsed, we may have several levels of deferral and remember all of our jumping-off points in the correct order. What I would like to claim here is that it is because deferral is a fundamental cognitive feature of symbolic thinking that we are able to conceive of something like a C-series, an order that accumulates in significance until its full meaning is revealed at the end.

But in addition to the above sense of deferral, we must keep in mind that the concept of deferral has first and foremost a phenomenological content that magnifies the moment of the present. In deferral, we are acutely aware of being present to ourselves, suspended in limbo until some input is received. Deferral is what underlies the performative aspect of language, the feeling that communication is happening now, in real time, as it were. We can only defer meaning for so long: I cannot call you on the phone tomorrow to answer your today's "how are you?" question with "fine". In Generative Anthropology, deferral upholds the tension between the periphery and the center: "The violence is deferred, not eliminated; the central object, through the sacred interdiction conferred on it by the sign, becomes a focus of still greater desire and therefore of potential violence, which must in turn be deferred if the community created by the act of representation is to survive"[29]. In other words, it is the tension of deferral that consolidates the communal scene in a joint attention around the central object and in so doing makes it a scene, a site of performance and happening, and not a conceptual space.

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[29] Ibidem.

It seems reasonable to me to trace the concept of sequence, which is foundational for narratives, although not deeply examined, to the originary anthropological category of deferral and speculate that the former is rooted in it. If this is true then deferral is both conceptual and phenomenological[30], both at the root of our understanding of order and our experience of the present moment. This implies that the symbolic system of representation is more than a system based on signification, determined by relationships between parts; it has an irreducible temporal quality. We can call this temporality another dimension, except it should not be represented by another axis as the time-space in physics. This is a "lived" dimension of deferral, experienced as the moment of *now*. The temporality of deferral and, hence, narrative sequence is irreducible to spatial representation because, as already mentioned, we experience it as the sequence of these moments of now unfolding in time: now, then now, then now, and so on. I locate the intuition of eventfulness in the double – conceptual vs. phenomenological or cognitive vs. performative – nature of deferral. The first one is an event as a position within a series, or as Gans says, as a singularity, in the sense that "Every occurrence on the human scene, in distinction from the comings and goings of the animal world, is a unique event, a singularity that has its place in the series of singularities we call *history*"[31]. The second one is the experienced moment of expectation, projection, suspension (and suspense)

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[30]   Kiverstein and Miller mention the phenomenological aspect of, if not meaning e.g., when we take meaning to be a symbolic category, then, at least, relevance. For each organism, not just a human one, certain actions, movements, and orientations in space are more relevant than others, in terms of survival. Thus they write: "'Relevance' is determined by the organism in relation to what the phenomenological philosopher Merleau-Ponty described as the 'organism's proper manner of realizing equilibrium' with the environment'" (Merleau-Ponty, M. *Phenomenology of Perception*. Tr. Donald A. Landes. London: Routledge 2012, p. 7). While Merleau-Ponty writes about the equilibrium in its direct, motoric, sense in connection to the phenomenology of movement, Kiverstein and Miller also keep in mind the larger sense of maintaining homeostasis in order to adapt to one's environment. I bring this up to stress my point that the cognitive and the phenomenological are closely intertwined. Deferral can also be thought in relation to the concept of equilibrium: what has been deferred, must come back.

[31]   Ibidem.

in anticipation of an event as a happening. As a cognitive phenomenon, an event is always in the past, but as a performative phenomenon on the scene, it is something that is to come. Another way of saying this is that an event instantiates a paradoxical situation whereby the two sentiments, "everything has already happened" and "everything is still possible", are both true. This is why eventfulness is so elusive, so difficult to pinpoint and define. But I advocate following our intuition and keeping it as a core concept in narrative theory. I hope my argument was convincing in showing that event and sequence are mutually implicated and both integral to narrative as a *scenic* genre. If we retain the traditional definition of narrative as a sequence of events, we need to keep in mind that sequence and event are not separable. If we choose to define narrative as a sequence and drop the event, we need to keep in mind that this is not a traditional, order-related, idea of sequence we are talking about but sequence that arises for us in an eventful fashion.

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Abstract

A narrative is traditionally defined as a sequences of events. While narratologists may disagree on what a relevant narrative event would be, no one argues about what a sequence is. Sequence is taken to be a fundamental notion that is self-explanatory and directly given to our intuition. I suggest, however, that it is interesting to look more closely at sequence in order to understand narrative temporality, because there is a distinct sense that it is somewhere "within" sequence that temporality resides. In order to do this, I first try to isolate the concept of pure sequence with the help of John McTaggart's analysis of temporal and atemporal series and apply it to narratives. I then take a close look at an experimental film, *Happy End* by Oldřich Lipský from 1966, that runs backwards and thus reverses the normal sequence. By tracing how moments of confusion and disorientation on the part of the viewers arise in connection to this reversal, I speculate, firstly, that our grasp of sequentiality is deeply embodied, rooted in the phenomenology of movement with its predictive cognitive component; and secondly, that the phenomenological aspect is intrinsically bound up with the symbolic aspect of thinking in patterns, which is also predictive. In the last part of my paper, I introduce the theory of Generative Anthropology, which hypothesizes about the origin of language, and situate the phenomenological and symbolic components of sequentiality in the originary anthropological structure of deferral. Thus I show that sequence is not some a priori mathematical category of pure reason, but a concept that is inherent in language and symbolic thinking.