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CHAPTER 2

The Configuration of Narrative Sequences

JOHN PIER

A CONCEPT FORMULATED by the Russian formalists, although with precedents reaching back to Aristotle, *sequence* has played a crucial yet evasive role in the development of modern narrative theory. Numerous researchers have regarded sequence as the *sine qua non* of narrative, constituting its chronological-causal substratum, while others, focusing more on the discursive qualities of narrative, have devoted less attention to the question. Those concerned with the "content" plane have generally sought to develop some form of model or formalization of sequence in contrast to those whose interest lies in the "expression" plane, where the tendency is to look more closely at questions bearing on narrative communication. More than thirty years ago, Gérard Genette described this situation as the division between two narratologies: a "thematic" narratology devoted to "analysis of the story or the narrative content" and a "modal" narratology devoted to the "analysis of narrative as a mode of 'representation' of stories" (*Narrative Discourse Revisited* 16). Even though the narratological landscape has evolved immensely in the intervening years, and even though the terms of the equation are no longer the same, as Gerald Prince's survey of the various conceptions of sequence attest, exploration of the interface between the two facets of narrative continues to be an important desideratum of research.

In this essay, I will be taking up the question of narrative sequence from a semiotic perspective. Contrary to much reasoning about this narrative category, which tends to frame sequence either as a preexistent or as an immanent structure, the present approach characterizes sequence as *prototypical*, on the one hand, and as *intersequential*, on the other. This means, among other things, that sequences are constituted in the course of narration as a communicative process: rather than a stable entity or a “deep structure” manifested on the textual surface, they play out in a “more-or-less” fashion in relation to other textual and discursive categories but also in relation to the various other instances or exemplifications of discourse. Prototypes, as Jean-Michel Adam (e.g., *Linguistique textuelle* 81–100; *Les textes* 19–59) has argued, are to be distinguished from text types or typologies of texts, for “texts” are too complex and heterogeneous to be adequately classified according to type. With reference, inter alia, to Mikhail Bakhtin’s article “The Problem of Speech Genres,” which is devoted to the “relatively stable forms” that serve as an interface between *langue* and *parole*, Adam considers that the interaction of texts or discourses with sociodiscursive formations and interactions influences all levels of textualization (compositional, pragmatic, syntactic, semantic) but that this does not yield a typology of texts.¹ He thus proposes a system of five “prototypical sequential schemas” in which a certain number of clauses are grouped together into “macropropositions” and then, through various “preformatted arrangements of propositions,” enter into the composition of sequences: descriptive, narrative, argumentative, explicative, dialogal (set out in detail in Adam, *Les textes*). A form of “textual schema,” the sequence is “a relational network” which can be broken down into elements constituting a whole, but it is also “a relatively autonomous entity” with an internal organization of dependence and independence in relation to the larger unit of which it forms a part, that is, the text (44; see Adam, *La linguistique textuelle* 161–202). As discourse, however, texts are not the sum total of a certain number of sequences, since in all but the simplest of cases (such as in the so-called minimal narrative) discourses are marked by the presence of various types of sequence. Compositionally speaking, prototypical sequences of different kinds tend to combine in varying distributions and dosages through succession, parallel assemblage, or embedding, and any one of them can serve as the “dominant” of a given discourse, leaving ample space, however, for hybrids and indeterminate cases.²

1. See figure 1 in Adam, *Les textes* 34.

2. The five prototypical schemas in question are not only sequences, of course, but also relate to genres. The hybrid mixture of genres in discourses—above and beyond the traditional literary genres—is studied under the concept of “genericity” in Adam (*Genres de récits*)

In the following pages, I will be offering a few reflections on the idea that (narrative) sequences, because of their prototypical nature, are a form of what C. S. Peirce called “diagrammatic iconicity” or “diagrams,” one of the three types of icon (together with image and metaphor) forming the second trichotomy of signs: icon, index, symbol. Like a grid upon which the days of any month can be indicated or the diagram of an electrical circuit, both of which exist by virtue of an analogy of relations but are restricted to representing no particular month and no specific electrical circuit (cf. the type-token relationship), the prototypical conception of narrative sequence is at the same time diagrammatic: a semiotic postulate, the narrative sequence serves to highlight the patterning of chronological-causal relations of transformation from an initial state to a final state, subsequently configured, in one way or another, to one degree or another, in any given narrative.

Narrative sequence in the sense set out above—prototypical and thus diagrammatic—bears on the textual organization of the events and actions portrayed. This being the case, however, what is the role of reading (or hearing/viewing) in the unfolding of stories, which also takes place sequentially? This is a question of considerable import, for as Meir Sternberg reminds us, narrative is generated out of the “gaps” encountered between two sequentialities: that of “the absolute dynamics of the causally propelled action” (*fabula*, rather than story) and that of “the variable dynamics of the reading-process” (governed by the *sjuzhet*, rather than by plot) (*Expositional Modes* 13). On this basis, sequence in narrative must be regarded through the lens of “intersequential relations, or dynamics, whereby gaps open between the order of the telling/reading (‘discourse’) and the told (‘action’)” (Sternberg, “Universals of Narrative” 612). Out of these intersequential relations between “actional and communicative, told and telling/reading sequence,” there develops an “interplay between temporalities [which] generates the three universal effects/interests/dynamics of prospection, retrospection, and recognition—suspense, curiosity, and surprise, for short” (Sternberg, “How Narrativity” 117).³ Triggered by suspense, curiosity, and surprise, the operations of prospection, retrospection, and recognition become so many “strategies” that serve as “basic

with regard to narrativity. For a case study, see his chapter 5: “Raconter en co(n)texte dialogal: le monologue narratif au théâtre.” A commentary on Adam’s discourse analysis can be found in Pier, “Is there a French Postclassical Narratology?” 351–56.

3. In his contribution to this volume, James Phelan maintains that *fabula* is concerned with the chronological sequence of events and *sjuzhet* with sequence in the narrative text; the relation between the two sequences yields “narrative progression.” For Raphaël Baroni (also in this volume), referring to Sternberg and Phelan, sequence is related to plot and, like progression, generates “narrative tension.”

sense-making operations [for] the construction of rival hypotheses with which to fill in the gaps opened up by the sequence about the world's affairs and whatever attaches to them by nature or art, which in narrative means everything" (Sternberg, "Telling in Time [II]" 531-32). The importance of these operations, which function through inferential reasoning on the part of the reader in response to intersequential relations (assumptions and conjectures about what will happen next, conclusions drawn as to why such-and-such has occurred, a configurational "seeing-things-together," etc.⁴), is such that, for Sternberg, working from a functionalist rather than from an objectivist perspective (most notably that of structuralism), it is these operations that are the defining features of narrative and not (as I would put it, in a synthetic generalization of Sternberg's argument) "the representation of events" or "the recounting of an event or a chain of events by an addresser to an addressee."⁵ In this approach, narrative can be defined only in conjunction with narrativity:

I define *narrativity* as the play of suspense/curiosity/surprise between represented and communicative time (in whatever combination, whatever medium, whatever manifest or latent form). Along the same functional lines, I define *narrative* as a discourse where such a play dominates: narrativity then ascends from a possibly marginal or secondary role . . . to the status of regulating principle, first among the priorities of telling/reading. (529)⁶

The crucial and pervasive role attributed to narrativity is reaffirmed in a recent critical overview of research on the topic: "'Narrative' hasn't yet gained a universal *sense* (distinctive features) and *reference* (class membership), which a well-defined concept of narrativity can alone provide" (Sternberg, "Narrativity" 508). In large part, the issue of narrativity flows from the refusal either to predicate it on event sequence or to regard it as a set of "optional features" to be appended to the "essential attributes" of narrative (the objectivist view); the emphasis, rather, is on the need to "conceptualize within narrativity itself the dynamic *intersequence relation* unique to the narrative genre" (634, cf. 507-8). On this view, then, sequence is assimilated into the broader question of intersequentiality and the dynamic relations occurring between the telling/reading and the told.

4. Cf. Pier, "After This" esp. 127-31.

5. The numerous variants of the objectivist focus on "the narrated sequence (eventhood, enchainment, experientiality) of the world-in-action" are examined in Sternberg, "Narrativity" 601 *passim*.

6. Also quoted in Sternberg, "Narrativity" 642.

The systems of sequentiality set out by the two theoreticians diverge in a number of ways but in ways that, I hope to show, throw further light on this pervasive aspect of narrative. Adam's approach to narrative sequence adopts criteria, a number of which have been called into question by Sternberg in his in-depth critique of objectivist accounts of narrative and narrativity, heavily invested in theorizing the content or "what" of narrative. Placing prime importance on intersequential relations, Sternberg, unlike Adam, subscribes to no particular theory or model of the narrative sequence, finding little need to specify the constituents of represented actions and their linkages independently from the discourses in which actions occur. This is because, functionally speaking, "the effect somehow finds or shapes or invents the cause" ("Telling in Time [II]" 529): within the teleological framework in which ends determine or explain means, suspense excites conjecture about "what still lies ahead"; curiosity triggers inferences about "gapped antecedents" in an attempt to "bridge" or "compose" them "in retrospect"; surprise "enforces a corrective reading in late re-cognition" ("How Narrativity" 117). Nevertheless, it is the case that out of the functionalist critique of narrative sequence there emerges a pattern of linkages that serves as an interface between the actional and the communicative. Although this pattern does not coincide with the relations identified by Adam for the narrative sequence, the two perspectives do share some common qualities in terms of their prototypicality.

Among the various intersecting and overlapping angles from which Sternberg examines objectivist positions on the modeling of actional structures, one in particular is of considerable interest in the present context: "*events linked into a causal chain*" ("Narrativity" 546–73; emphasis in original). This mimetic, actional norm dates back to Aristotle's holistic conception of stories as bounded by a "beginning → middle → end":

A whole is that which has a beginning, a middle, and an end. A beginning is that which does not itself follow anything by causal necessity, but after which something naturally is or comes to be. An end, on the contrary, is that which itself naturally follows some other thing, either by necessity, or as a rule, but has nothing following it. A middle is that which follows something as some other thing follows it. A well-constructed plot, therefore, must neither begin nor end at haphazard, but conform to these principles. (*Peri Poetikés / Poetics* 1450b)

With reference to a "rudimentary generic nucleus" representative of numerous definitions of narrative—"somebody did (and/or underwent) something, with reversal of fortune"—Sternberg identifies "five distinct event-organizing

parameters” or “wholeness coordinates” that have developed around Aristotle’s holism:

(vi₁) *Quasi-logical, action-logical (in effect, chrono-logical, because causal) enchainment throughout*, as superior to the looser, additive, “episodic” (in effect, chronological) “A, then B” deployment; or event sequentiality tightened in consequentiality.

...

(vi₂) *A minimum of three actional links*, “beginning → middle → end,” unlike (say) Forster’s two-link minimum plot, “The king died and then the queen died of grief.” . . . The “whole,” though corresponding to the modern *fabula*, extendible to any length, can also double as an abstract well-formed mini-sequence underlying all (poetic) *fabulas*, and so as the objective condition of narrativity.

...

(vi₃) *All three minimum actional links are dynamic*, in that they initiate or sustain or arrest change, exclusive of static (descriptive, “expositional”) premises (traits, setups, laws of nature, culture, existence, reality models, in brief). Cause and/or effect, each of those links forwards the action, makes an intelligible difference to the world.

...

(vi₄) *A stable endpoint*: the two cutoff points mark a former (un)happy stability undisturbed, to begin with, and established anew at the finish, in anti-polar shape [cf. *Peri Poetikés / Poetics* 1450b above].

...

(vi₅) *Strongest concatenation*. Throughout, the enchainment unrolls “by necessary or probable sequence”: the highest standard of mimetic likelihood, followability, and integrity at once [as in syllogistic logic]. (Sternberg, “Narrativity” 547–51; emphasis in original)

The most frequent of these defining postulates for narrative, from Propp to present and spanning a wide range of theoretical persuasions, has been (vi₅) logical concatenation. Curiously, one of the most radical adherents of this position is Roland Barthes (“Introduction” 10), who, in describing the *post hoc, ergo propter hoc* fallacy as “le ressort de l’activité narrative” [the main-spring of narrative activity], effectively claims that narrative is founded on a “logical error” and that the aim of narrative analysis is to “dechronologize” and “relogify” narrative (a position later abandoned in *S/Z* with the adoption of the “proairetic” and the “hermeneutic” codes). Barthes thus identifies a rich source of reflection on the topic of narrativity but, constrained by the criteria

of traditional formal logic, fails to appreciate its implications for the chronological movement peculiar to narrative—a situation I have sought to rectify (Pier, “After This” esp. 109, 114–15).

Where Sternberg finds a potential for resolving some of the issues of the objectivist approach is in (vi₂) *a minimum of three actional links*, with its possible extensions to (vi₁) *quasi-logical, action-logical enchainment* and/or (vi₃) *all three minimum actional links are dynamic*. Revealing difficulties arise with the nature of the links and, more precisely, with what it is that is linked together. According to Gerald Prince:

A minimal story consists of three conjoined events [e.g., “He was unhappy, then he met a woman, then, as a result, he was happy”]. The first and third events are stative, the second is active. Furthermore, the third event is the inverse of the first. Finally, the three events are conjoined by the three conjunctive features in such a way that (a) the first event precedes the second in time and the second precedes the third, and (b) the second event causes the third. (Prince, *A Grammar* 31; quoted in Sternberg, “Narrativity” 557)

For Aristotle (as Sternberg points out in “Narrativity” 558), the beginning of a story cannot be equated with a self-generated event, much less a “stative” event, but is, more fluidly, “that which does not itself follow anything by causal necessity, but after which something naturally is or comes to be” (*Peri Poetikés / Poetics* 1450b); much the same obtains for the end (once married, the prince and the princess might not of necessity live in a state of happiness ever after). The minimal story thus turns out to be one event poised between two (inverted) states—as subsequently acknowledged by Prince himself in redefining the concept as

a narrative recounting only two states and one event such that (1) one state precedes the event in time and the event precedes the other state in time (and causes it); (2) the second state constitutes the inverse (or the modification, including the “zero” modification) of the first. (*Dictionary* [revised ed.] 53)⁷

7. This definition partially coincides with Genette’s definition of the minimal narrative: “For me, as soon as there is an action or an event, even a single one, there is a story because there is a transformation, a transition from an earlier state to a later and resultant state” (*Narrative Discourse Revisited* 19; cf. *Narrative Discourse* 30). Both definitions conflate Aristotle’s beginning/end with “states,” while Genette adds “action,” but without distinguishing it from “event”; moreover, no reference is made here to “recounting” (or “narrating”), thus revealing a gulf in Genette’s modal narratology between action/event and narrating and, as a result, leaving unaddressed the question of intersequential relations.

More amenable to narrative logic than *state* or *stative event* are the terms *equilibrium* and *disequilibrium*. Disequilibrium implies (but need not specify) an antecedent (state of) equilibrium and is thus brought about by an intervening, but not necessary, causal intervention; moreover, disequilibrium may be succeeded by a new (state of) equilibrium, but it does not, in itself, cause or logically entail such an equilibrium (an equilibrium which, in any case, remains contingent). Neither equilibrium nor disequilibrium constitutes an event, and consequently the succession equilibrium-disequilibrium-equilibrium proceeds additively, not causally: A, then B, then C. "All three of them," points out Sternberg,

can be states that differ from one another, but they do not in themselves provide any of the intermediate events necessary for the change of state ($A \rightarrow B$) and its changeful arrest ($B \rightarrow C$), unless reinforced with these necessities by further stipulations (or in the finished story). ("Narrativity" 560)

Or to put it another way, an equilibrium may be "disturbed" by an external "force," as explained by Tzvetan Todorov (82; also quoted in Sternberg, "Narrativity" 560):

An ideal narrative begins with a stable situation which is disturbed by some force. From this there results a state of disequilibrium: by a force directed in the opposite direction, equilibrium is re-established.⁸

This definition (which also applies to sequence) confirms the idea that the causative force of change remains distinct from the stable (though potentially unstable or destabilizing) situation, that change is initiated from without. Thus in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, for example, the stable situation (the feud between the Capulets and the Montagues) is disturbed by the fortuitous meeting of Romeo and Juliet, producing a disequilibrium (a love affair which is totally taboo between members of the feuding families); a new equilibrium is established (a decision by the families to put an end the feud) as a result of the lovers' tragic death. Seen in this way—and in contradistinction with much theorizing on the topic—the Aristotelian trio is (re)defined not with the inclusion of causes (a causal link binding together beginning, middle, and end) but, dispensing with causal enchainment (ending the feud is neither the necessary nor the probable

8. Todorov's definition continues, "The second equilibrium is quite similar to the first, but the two are never identical." Similarity is a relative notion, however, and it can be objected that in many narratives the second equilibrium might be quite dissimilar from the first.

outcome of the lovers' death), constitutes a "three-implying-five" minimum: a sequence in five parts inferable from the actualized text and that applies, to variable degrees, to stretches of discourse varying in length. The imbrication of (states of) equilibrium/disequilibrium and external forces joins up with suspense, curiosity, and surprise, thus with the effects generated between the telling/reading and the told that incite readers to engage in inferencing forward (having fallen in love, what will Romeo and Juliet do next?) and backward (had Friar Lawrence not committed certain blunders, the lovers' death would have been avoided), but also to re-cognize and configure (the realization that the lovers' destiny and reconciliation between the families are inextricable).⁹

The approach to sequentiality adopted by Adam is focused more on the constitution of the sequence itself—a "textual schema"—one variety of which is the narrative sequence. Working within a text linguistic and discourse analytical framework, Adam also draws on Aristotle's beginning, middle, and end, emphasizing, as already mentioned, the prototypical nature of the sequence. Key to his conception of the narrative sequence is Paul Larivaille's quinary model of the narrative sequence, born out of a "double ternary structure" organized into five "functions" combining before, during, and after with the three phases of a transformative process:

[I.1] *Before* the process [equilibrium], [II.3] *the Process* itself, [III.5] *After* the process [equilibrium], on the one hand, and, on the other, the breakdown of the actual *process*: [2] *Beginning* (also called the "beginning" in Aristotle), [3] *Unfolding* (Aristotle's "middle"), and [4] *End* (also the "end" in Aristotle). (Adam, "Narrative Sequence")

Adam amends this model firstly by reformulating its five "moments" (or "time images") as psycholinguistic text units called "narrative macropropositions" (Np). The second and fourth Nps are renamed, respectively, "complication" and "denouement" (the traditional terms rather than Larivaille's "exciting force" and "sanction"). The middle term, "process/action," is replaced by "(re)action" and "evaluation" (the latter corresponding roughly to the character's mental action).¹⁰ Finally, "state" becomes "situation": initial (orientation or exposition, which can be delayed) and final (the "consequence" of the denouement-Np4).

9. Note here that linkages are *inferable*, meaning that while sequences are not constructed as causal necessities or through entailment, nor are they devoid of nontemporal connectedness, as Prince would have it: "Narrative is the representation of *at least two* real or fictive events or situations in a time sequence, neither of which presupposes or entails the other" (*A Grammar* 4; emphasis in original). Prince ("Narrativehood" 19) gives "implies" rather than "entails."

10. Complication-Np2 and denouement-Np4 are associated, respectively, with Tomaszewski's ("Thematics" 72) "exciting force" and "climax," and (re)action/evaluation-Np3 with

It is noteworthy that these three perspectives on sequence are comparable, and in some regards complementary, but that they are not assimilable. Concerned with the textual composition of sequence, Adam distributes the five Nps—each comprising several clauses or, for longer stretches of discourse, representing a hierarchy of propositions—along a single plane. In part, this reflects the historical precedent of sequence in the triad of classical dramaturgy: beginning/exposition → complication/development → conclusion/denouement (cf. Adam, *Genres de récit* 74). The quinary model, by “staggering” the sequence into temporal progression (before, during, after) and the phases of process (initiating, action, closing), opens up a space of negotiation between the temporal and the processual in the unfolding of the actional dimension. Sternberg’s “three-implicating-five” series is distinguished from the other two schemes in that it is organized around an equilibrium → disequilibrium → equilibrium, closely allied with actional dynamics, in its intersequential relations with the communicative dynamics engaged in the reading process.¹¹

Now, it is not insignificant to note that Adam’s model of the narrative sequence is, in fact, developed within the scope of two somewhat disparate frameworks: prototypicality and narrativity.¹² A five-part structure in both cases, the prototypical version specifies five criteria for a definition of narrative, followed by the pragmatic features of narrative.¹³ Adopted mainly from Bremond, with reference to the relevant passages from Aristotle’s *Peri Poetikés / Poetics*, these criteria also correspond to those of the “basic narrative sequence”: (1) succession of events, (2) thematic unity (at least one actor-subject [S]), (3) transformed predicates, (4) process (integration of a single action into a whole with a beginning, middle, and end), and (5) causation. To this is added a sixth criterion: final evaluation (explicit or implicit),

“peripety”; this trio thus provides the basis for *mise en intrigue* [employment] (Adam, *Les textes* 107; *Genres de récit* 75).

11. Raphaël Baroni provides a detailed critique of the quinary model of sequence which he reproaches with being rooted in an actional logic that ignores the relations between the told and the telling and thus the forces of narrative tension experienced in the reading process. Ontologically, the quinary model is trapped in a tautology: “The story structures the narrative which structures the story” (197). To this model he opposes the “récit intrigant” [intriguing narrative] (note that French “intrigue” is “plot” in English). The present essay, by contrast, formulates sequence in terms of prototypicality (diagrammatic iconicity) and intersequentiality between the told and the telling.

12. The first was originally formulated in *Les textes: Types et prototypes* in 1992 and revised in 1997; the revised and augmented edition was published in 2011 (esp. 101–27). The other version of the narrative sequence is presented in *Genres de récits: Narrativité et généralité des textes*, published in 2011 (esp. 66–90). Cf. Adam, *Le texte narratif* 32–33.

13. Adam derives the pragmatics of narrative from Bakhtinian dialogism, Labov and Waletzky’s sociolinguistics, conversational analysis, and Umberto Eco’s textual pragmatics.

or “evaluative macroproposition” ($Np\Omega$). Not forming part of the sequence as such, the latter criterion nevertheless provides the sequence with a “configuration”—“probably one of the keys to the specificity of narrative” (Adam, *Les textes* 112).

When approaching narrative sequence from the perspective of narrativity, Adam redistributes these criteria, firstly, into the “semantic and compositional bases of narrativity,” broken down as follows:¹⁴

- (1) “representation of the becoming [*devenir*] in time of an anthropomorphic actor”: this includes the involvement of human interest, the presence of at least one actor, unity of action, change of fortune, and linking together of events according to verisimilitude or necessity (Aristotle’s “basis of narrativity”);
- (2) “a temporal, causal and intentional succession of actions and events”: with reference to the temporal nature of human experience (Ricœur) and to the teleology of human action, the idea that temporality (chronology) masks the “retrograde logic” of narrative (cf. *post hoc, ergo propter hoc*); the causal nature of events as opposed to the intentional nature of action;
- (3) “the structuring core of the plot: from ‘single action’ to narrative sequence”: this consists of the narrative sequence proper in the form of five narrative macropropositions, distinguished from chronological succession through the structuring force of *mise en intrigue* [emplotment].

Now, between these two conceptions of sequence, it appears to me that the prototypical version is preferable. There are various reasons for this, only a few of which can be singled out here—my point being that there is another way to explore the relevance of sequence as a prototypical concept for narrativity. To the extent that prototypical sequences are “schemas” composed of propositions that are “preformatted” according to various arrangements, there is no question of the narrativity of a narrative sequence, and Adam accordingly makes no mention of narrativity when speaking of sequence in this context; conversely, the second version of narrative sequence associates the concept with narrativity, and the term *prototypical* disappears. In the first case, a prominent role is played by configuration, a notion adopted by Adam

14. Not forming part of the narrative sequence, properly speaking, are the “pragmatic components of narrativity,” which act as an interface between narrative and sociodiscursive formations and interactions.

from two sources: (1) Louis O. Mink, for whom configuration is the mode of comprehension peculiar to narrative, whereby a series of elements is "seen together" in an act of judgment as a "single and concrete complex of relationships"; and (2) Paul Ricœur (*Time and Narrative* vol. 1, chap. 3; vol. 2, chap. 2), where configuration, inspired partly from Mink, is the second of three forms of mimesis, the locus of textual composition but also of emplotment: a succession of actions is organized into a whole with a beginning and end (cf. Adam, *Les textes* 118).¹⁵ In the version geared to narrativity, sequence is defined as "a transformation of a number of actions into an inclusive [*englobant*] unit, conferring on them, semantically speaking, a relational value of moments m_1 , m_2 , m_3 , m_4 or m_5 " (74). Here, however, the principle of configuration does not appear but rather that of emplotment, resulting from the combination of sequences through succession, parallel assemblage, or embedding. Although space does not allow me to develop the question in detail, I contend that while sequence—a sort of "grid" through which a series of utterances is patterned as a narrative, an argument, an explanation, and so on—is pertinent in the sense of textual composition, it is not the locus of configuration as a mode of comprehension such as Mink had in mind.

As suggested earlier in this essay, narrative sequence as prototype can be considered what Peirce called a *diagram*, one of the three types of iconic sign (a sign which "represent[s] its object mainly by its similarity, no matter what its mode of being"; *Collected Papers* 2.276) alongside image and metaphor. The diagram is defined as a form of icon "which represent[s] this relation, mainly dyadic, or so regarded, of the parts of one thing by analogous relations in their own parts" (*Collected Papers* 2.277). I have argued elsewhere ("Versions of the Iconic") that narrative categories in general operate as diagrams, but I would now add that this is the case particularly of sequence. Some of the features specific to the interest of diagrams in this connection that are worthy of further investigation in narrative research are that diagrams are relatively independent in relation to their objects; they are abstractions established according to criteria of relevance; they offer the possibility of generalization; they are conventional; they possess creative potential; they are indispensable in formal reasoning (cf. Johansen 31–33 *passim*).

Central to the question of sequence is the problem of linkages. Do the five stages of sequence proceed by logical necessity, by cause and effect, randomly, or in some combination thereof? These problems are complex, and the plethora of positions adopted with regard to narrative linkages, ranging from the

15. For a brief commentary on configuration in Mink and in Ricœur, see Pier, "Narrative Configurations" 241–42.

formal and syllogistic to the fully deconstructed, have rarely been framed or formulated with an informed view of the underlying logical issues (cf. Sternberg, "Narrativity" 565–73). In one way or another, of course, all of this goes back to Aristotle's dictum that the end must follow "some other thing, either by necessity, or as a rule" (*Peri Poetikés* / *Poetics* 1450b), subsequently specified when it is stated that "the proper magnitude is comprised within such limits, that the sequence of events, according to the law of probability or necessity, will admit of a change from bad fortune to good, or from good fortune to bad" (1451a).¹⁶ The issues are blurred, however, by the observation that "it is probable . . . that many things should happen contrary to probability" (1456a).¹⁷ This hesitation between the probable (*epi to polu*) as a statistical concept and the verisimilar (*eikos*) resulted, starting in Renaissance and neo-classical poetics, in a certain assimilation of the probable into the verisimilar, with long-lasting effects in the history of literacy theory.¹⁸

One possible resolution to the difficulties produced by this mixed heritage lies in renouncing the application of the criteria of formal logic to the workings of narrative and to discourse generally as well as in taking account of the inferential nature of the sign and semiosis as developed in Peircean semiotics. Based partly on Eco's adoption of the fact that, for Peirce, the necessary and sufficient elements of the sign—deduction, abduction (hypothesis), inference—form the basis of the abductive reasoning at work in textual communication, I have attempted to show how this system of reasoning constitutes a fundamental departure from a number of the tenets of structuralist narratology ("On the Semiotic Parameters"). In place of the much decried "binarisms" of structuralism, this form of reasoning operates through a variety of intertwining *abductions*: *overcoded abductions* (more or less automatic quasi-deductive inferences—as when on reading the incipit "Once upon a time . . ." it is assumed that the ensuing story will be a fairytale); *undercoded abductions* (an inferential walk outside the immediately available possibilities in quest of a plausible alternative: "Is *Oedipus Rex* a story of detection, incest, or parricide?"; Eco 28); *creative abductions* (a formulation of new hypotheses to account for the heretofore unexplained); and *meta-abductions* (empirical "testing" of a new hypothesis in light of what is known). I have further argued ("Narrative Configurations") that such abductive reasoning forms a textual basis for what Mink described as the "configurational mode of comprehension" peculiar to

16. The Bywater translation proposes "probable or necessary sequence of events."

17. See the French translation of 1451a: "une série d'événements enchaînés selon le vraisemblable ou le nécessaire"; and of 1456a: "il est vraisemblable que beaucoup de choses se produisent aussi contre le vraisemblable."

18. Cf. Dupont-Roc and Lallot 211–12.

stories, whereby the contingencies of forward references are cancelled out by the necessities of backward references: "To comprehend temporal succession means to think of it in both directions at once" ("History and Fiction" 553). These nondeductive, trial-and-error forms of reasoning, in which inferences may be valid with a greater or lesser degree of probability and are thus perfectly conducive to the logic peculiar to narrative, also underlie the process of prospective or "heuristic" reading and retrospective or "semiotic" reading (Pier, "Narrative Configurations" esp. 249-51; "After This" 124-30).

The interest of abductive reasoning for the problems of sequence appears to be at least twofold. First, there is a correlation between the more-or-less quality of sequence in any given text and the various degrees of inferential effort engaged in the four types of abduction outlined above. The more prototypical a sequence is, the less effort it will require to establish linkages so that the sequence will be processed with the use of lower-order (i.e., overcoded or undercoded) abductions; conversely, the less prototypical a sequence is and the less reliable lower-order abductions become, the more higher-order abductions must be entertained (i.e., creative and meta-abductions). The second point of interest of abductive reasoning with regard to the prototypical conception of sequence is that, in line with the principles of Bakhtinian dialogism, it is highly compatible with the processing of various types of sequence that occur heterogeneously in actual texts. Thus, on reading Plato's dialogues, we encounter prototypically dialogal sequences but also argumentative sequences; through the processes of overcoded and undercoded abductions, it will be determined that these dialogues are predominantly arguments and that, functionally speaking, dialogue remains subordinate. The case of conversational storytelling appears to be more ambiguous. Here, the prototypical features of narrative sequence are present, but given the conversational context, so are those of the dialogal sequence, as well as, possibly, those of the argumentative sequence, thus making it necessary to judge abductively, on a case-by-case basis, which sequence represents the dominant.

Now, to return to the question of probability, it will be noted that a special case is to be found in the *post hoc, ergo propter hoc* phenomenon, which is a fallacy in formal logic but which does not mark a fallacy in all cases. In narratives, coincidence between chronology and causality is assumed, if not as a matter of course, as theoretically the most "natural" account of events occurring in time. But once there is reason to think otherwise—as an effect of suspense or surprise, for instance—more intense inferencing and higher orders of abduction come into play with the aim of somehow reconciling the discordances between "forward" references and "backward" references and of configuring the narrative into a complex of relationships. It is this movement

that initiates the driving force of narrative—its narrativity: that B comes after A but might not be caused by A or that A is a noncause postulated as a cause does violence to the principle of narrative sequence, particularly when understood in the sense, mentioned above, of the succession of events, thematic unity, transformation of predicates, process, and causation.

The various arguments put forth in this essay are predicated on the idea that sequence is not a “given” of discourse but that, in the case of narrative sequence, at least, it exists by virtue of intersequence—that it is generated in the spaces or gaps opened up between the actional and the communicative. Such a conception differs substantially from the idea that sequences are built up from the smallest units (motifs, functions) that are integrated into successively higher-order structures, subsequently represented at the level of surface manifestation—a key principle and analytical procedure of structuralist narratology. Sequence as prototypical, serving as a diagram in the semiotic sense of an implicit regulating principle rather than as an immanent structure, is bidirectional in two regards, to the extent that, (1) triggered by suspense-driven prospection and curiosity-driven retrospection, (2) it is played out both top-down and bottom-up in the interaction between the actional and the communicative. This dynamic is captured quite neatly by the “three-implicating-five” imbrication of states and disturbing external forces. Both prototypical and intersequential, sequence is apprehended through the operations of abductive reasoning with which it correlates, according to degree of prototypicality and intensity of inferencing, while at the same time this form of reasoning also underlies judgments as to the relative weight of various types of sequence in any given text.

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