From Narratology to Narrativity, and Back

Assessment and perspectives of Greimassian theory

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Appraisal

Narrative semiotics: the forgotten subject of new narratology

- 1 More than any other, the concept of “narrativity” is emblematic of Greimasian semiotics¹. The analytical instruments derived from this theory appear today to rank among its undisputed achievements, at least for the researchers subscribing to it. Today, however, we are invited to reconsider the status of this concept for two reasons: one circumstantial and one theoretical. The first reason feeds into the second, leading us to re-examine the foundations of narrativity within the global framework of the principles that give semiotics its status as a linguistic science and explain how it has gradually become detached from narratology.
- 2 The circumstance giving rise to this analysis lies in the unexpected resurgence of this *narratology* in the debates currently agitating the field of humanities in France. The need to back up any promotional campaign with a strong narrative – in both politics and marketing – has long been a subject of study in English-speaking countries. But it is the success of “storytelling” as a watchword that has allowed this narratology to resurface in France. The word became familiar in France with the publication in 2007 of Christian Salmon’s book: *Storytelling: Bewitching the Modern Mind*. Rather than a theory per se, it is a moralist’s analysis of narrative illusionism and how it can be used to persuade and manipulate. The author observes that the development of the narrative

paradigm “is replacing rational thought” in all social, economic and political fields. He notes the triumph of this paradigm in a debate that goes back many years, since it was already the subject of fierce discussion in the linguistics community in the 1970s. It opposed two competing models, both providing a basis for intelligible and effective discourse: on the one hand the *argumentative model* based on rhetoric and revived by the work of Chaïm Perelman and the *Centre de recherches sémiologiques* in Neuchâtel (through Jean-Blaize Grize) among others, and on the other hand the *narrative model*, based essentially on Greimasian semiotics. The journal *Pratiques* has often indirectly echoed this *disputatio* by opening its pages to both narrativists (Greimassians or not) and argumentativists (whether or not followers of logicians such as Jean-Blaize Grize or pragmaticists such as Oswald Ducrot). In any case, according to Christian Salmon, the game is over and narration has won hands down, at least in the field of social communication. This success could even be considered, as stated in the introductory note to the book, as “an incredible hold-up targeting the human imagination”² and imposing nothing less than a “new narrative order”. In fact, the word “storytelling”, now used in French too, has become one of the key words of the ordinary metalanguage used in this second decade of the twenty-first century. It is a word used by everybody, from media columnists to communications consultants.

- 3 However, the return of narratology can also be seen, in a more academic form, through the organisation of international conferences on narrative, bringing together hundreds of speakers, one example being the “Narrative Matters, Narrative Knowing/Récit et Savoir” conference organised by the American University of Paris with Paris Diderot University, in June 2014. We could also mention the regular events organised by the *European Narratology Association*, or the *International Society for the Study of Narrative*. It is not clear whether “Narrative matters” should be understood as “Narrative materials” or as “The importance of narrative matters”. Probably both. In any case, the “Narrative Knowing / Récit et Savoir” conference was very much a cross-disciplinary event, bringing together researchers from the humanities and social sciences – psychology, psychoanalysis, sociology, anthropology, history, philosophy, linguistics, literary studies, feminist and gender studies, education, medicine, health and social work, biology, law, religious studies, computer science, visual studies, etc. – to discuss “the issue of the sometimes contested epistemic powers of narrative”. In short, the purpose was to acknowledge the pre-eminence of narrative over argumentation with respect to cognition. In this way, narrative would be accepted as an immediate, natural and spontaneous fact of discourse, casting the shadow – or light – of its matrix over all fields of knowledge.
- 4 The main theoretical reference cited is Donald Polkinghorne and his book *Narrative Knowing and the Human Sciences* (1988). The main argument of this book clearly indicates the orientation of his project in cognitive narratology. The author describes narrative as follows:

The core of the argument I make in this book is that narrative is a scheme by means of which human beings give meaning to their experience of temporality and personal actions. Narrative meaning [...] provides a framework for understanding the past events of one’s life and for planning future actions (*ibid.*, p. 11)
- 5 In fact, this argument takes up the main thesis defended by Paul Ricoeur in his monumental work *Time and Narrative* (Ricoeur, 1983, 1984, 1985). As we know, Ricoeur confers on narrative the phenomenological role of giving form, legibility and purpose to the miscellaneous events of experience that would otherwise be chaotic. At the same

time, he gives temporality and memory a host structure that makes them easier to grasp. The essential function of narrative is therefore as a “synthesis of the heterogeneous”. Through its ordered configurations (through their mere expression as signs – verbal or non-verbal), it has the constitutive power to “refigure” our experience of life, immersed in the aporias of time and thus to make it intelligible, by the ordering force of narrative discourse.

- 6 Now, and this is where the theoretical reason we mentioned earlier comes into play, this comeback of narratology mentions no territory, no kinship and no filiation, apart from indirect ties with Paul Ricœur, or with the research developed in Europe, and particularly in France, in the field of narrative theory since the 1960s and 1970s. It says nothing about the work of Roland Barthes, Tzvetan Todorov, Gérard Genette and, more particularly the – maybe less well known – work of Algirdas Julien Greimas. Clearly, the objective here is not to take a stand or to pass judgement on this absence or omission. The aim is not to condemn or to complain about the impenetrable nature of intellectual frontiers, which are as wide as an ocean, from a symbolic and epistemological standpoint. Rather, the aim is simply to understand the reasons. No doubt they can be found in a difference of approach in which the pragmatism of the effect (what does narrative do?) takes precedence over the immanentism of the form (how is narrative made?), where a *better understanding* takes priority over a *more detailed explanation*, where the philosophy of language in action dominates the linguistic and discursive structuralism. However, as the subject here concerns the “debate on theories of narrative”, we will focus more on the internal reasons that may have led semioticians, in the wake of Greimas, to abandon narratology in favour of narrativity, and narrativity in favour of a semiotics of sensitivity, enunciation and interaction.

On meaning and narrative: the transformation

- 7 To shed some immediate light on this issue, we may usefully examine the composition of *Structural Semantics* (Greimas, 1966) and read the introduction to *On Meaning* (Greimas, 1970), the introduction of which is also entitled, *On Meaning*, as a sort of obdurate redundancy. The first work begins with the meticulous development of a scientifically reliable semic analysis. This is then extended, through an isotopy, to the dimension of discourse, leading to the discovery of “pluri-isotopy” as a prerequisite for the manifestation – if not for the existence – of this famous meaning that we are seeking to grasp and to describe. Finally, it is only in the third phase that the narrative structuring of this object makes its appearance, through a rereading of the *Morphology of the Folktale* by Vladimir Propp and the implementation, through a significant reduction of Proppian functions, of the celebrated actantial model (Sender-Subject-Receiver; Helper-Opponent). The narrative is therefore not an object given from the outset. Emerging little by little, it finally establishes itself as part of the logic underpinning an examination of the conditions in which meaning is understood.
- 8 The introduction to *On Meaning* – the second text – opens with this same question. This admirable text is a true cognitive narrative, in which the researcher is led to address an initial feeling of absence – “It is extremely difficult to talk about meaning and to be able to say something meaningful” (Greimas, 1970, p. 7) – by exploring various avenues, chancing multiple hypotheses, and facing trials that will inevitably lead to failure, through to the final discovery – uncertain, provisional, but nevertheless reasonably

firm – that meaning is contained in this word: “transformation”. From this will emerge narrativity, given that the syntactic heart of any narrative is the transition from one state to another, from poverty to wealth, from humiliation to glory, in short, a transformation.

- 9 Greimas was thus alone among his renowned fellow researchers in integrating the “structural analysis of narrative” into a broader theoretical framework and in recognising narrative as a general condition necessary to grasp meaning.

Narrativity plays a crucial role in general linguistics theory, far removed from the virtues of narrative alone in all its forms. If we reexamine the reference work *Semiotics and Language: An Analytical Dictionary* (Greimas & Courtés, 1979), we are immediately struck by the cross-cutting, almost invasive presence of narrativity in many of the entries – including those that have nothing to do with narrative at first glance. This is the case, for example, of the entry “Immanence”, in which the category *immanence/transcendence* is used, no doubt restrictively, to describe the status of the actants Subject (hero) and Sender (the authority giving the hero his mission and approving his actions) (Greimas & Courtés, 1979, p. 182, “Immanence”). But this is also the case for many other notions such as subject, modality, aspectuality, mode of existence, and enunciation itself, all of which are beholden to narrative impact in their definitions.

- 10 Here, then, the narrative emerges from a general exploration of meaning and the way in which it manifests itself. And here, in response to this question, it becomes the linchpin of a meaning that is experienced, perceived, understood and shared. For if meaning is transformation, the key transformation is clearly that of the narrative. It is this transformation that gives discourse its structure. It speaks to our imaginations, which it structures in return. Transformational grammar, the narrative syntax born of this transformational need, is therefore situated well in advance of the narrative itself. On the one hand, it comes into contact with the narrative intuitions and figurative portrayals present in the stories we tell ourselves; and on the other, it returns to the abstraction that is its home to become the modal, actantial structure underlying all discourse. In this way, we can discover the junction point of narrative semiotics with the phenomenology of time described by Ricoeur: the multi-faceted confusion of experience is ordered by emplotment, says the philosopher; it is ordered by narrative structures, says the semiotician.

An approach to discourse ordered by the narrative paradigm: the modal framework of narrativity

- 11 Viewed from the standpoint of its development, the construction of narrative grammar can be understood as a gradual deepening of the analysis starting from its Proppian functions, i.e. a long and progressive study on the abstraction, reduction and detachment of the figurative data from the fairy tale that was its founding corpus. The first step was to reduce the 31 Proppian functions, used collectively or as a combinatorial system for any narrative, to a narrative schema of four sequences (contract > competence > performance > sanction). These sequences are then further reduced to the three main semiotic spheres encompassing the manipulation (contract and development of the subject’s competence), the action (the heart of the transformation) and the sanction (positive or negative). The second reduction concerns the *dramatis personae* who, identified as actants, are both “characters” and language-

objects in their capacity as syntactic figures (subject/object and sender/receiver). The relationships of these actants, who are assigned positive and/or negative values, are modelled in elementary syntagms, the transformational “narrative programmes” (from conjunction to disjunction and vice versa). The framework of a general narrative grammar is thus put in place. And so narrativity was born, momentarily abandoning narratology and making it a specific branch of its field of study – that of the cultural variations of narrative, through the diversity of genres, forms and strategies.

- 12 This is where a further reduction takes place concerning the actants – the driving forces of narrative dynamics – through a process of modality. This modality, doubly inspired by the modal logic and the linguistic modalisation of which it is a synthesis, takes up a core position within the actant. The actant thus receives a definition that is no longer external and thematic – such as the sovereign god, the hero, the traitor, etc. – but internal and serving to define their status: the actant becomes purely a modal composition. On the simple definitional basis of modality as a change in the relationship between a subject and its predicate (through belief, will, duty, knowledge, power, and their negations), each actant in the discourse – whether a character in the narrative or a philosophical concept forming part of a bundle of predicates – is literally constituted by their modal equipment. In this way, the Sender is defined by factitivity: each actant who brings about belief, will, duty, knowledge, power, or ultimately action, receives the Sender’s cloak as the “manipulator”. This is immediately expanded: persuasive activity is one of the key attributes of the Sender and the rhetoric appears globally, through cognitive and pragmatic manipulation, as falling into this sphere. A comparable analysis, in modal terms, could be applied to the other actants, all of whom are changeable and modular, with each player being able to alternatively or simultaneously take on several actantial statuses. In this way, we can understand the reasoning behind the expression of a “modal structure of meaning” (Brandt, 1992).
- 13 The first in the Confucius *Interviews* (1987, p. 9) illustrates this extension of the narrative order of discourse beyond the strictly defined narrative genre:

The Master says: “Isn’t it a joy to study and then, when the time comes, to put into practice what you have learned? Isn’t it a joy to have friends who come from far away? And isn’t it an honest man who, ignored by the world, does not feel resentful?”
- 14 Irrespective of the content of each question, it is the succession of questions that forms the puzzle and constitutes a problem when reading this “interview”. Are the statements disjointed, separated by some profound semantic silence? If not, then what is the underlying principle that links the statements and ensures their coherence? If we take a closer look at the framework potentially linking the texts, their sequencing could be considered as being based on a narrative schema in the extended sense offered by semiotics. The first question refers to the contract and the values targeted through performance (“study and implementation”); the second presupposes the performance achieved, in the elementary form of movement through space and the obstacles that consolidate and intensify value (“friends who come from far away”); while the third relates to the last stage of the narrative schema, that of sanction, valued here also as a form of “renunciation” of glory and “serenity”, the ultimate wisdom. This is undoubtedly an analytical hypothesis, but it shows how the three questions are linked in an order that is none other than a narrativised proposal of a way of life.

The narrativisation of enunciation

- 15 Enunciation was temporarily rejected – for methodological reasons and by virtue of the principle of immanence – from the semiotic approach to meaning (Greimas, 1996, pp. 153-154), -154)³. However, it has actually made a major comeback to the problem as a whole, particularly through its narrativisation. Before giving an example that is well known in the history of literature, let's say a few words on the main parameters of enunciation, from a semiotic standpoint.
- 16 First of all, individual enunciation, that of the word in action, is linked to the collective enunciation that makes it possible: it emerges from the speaking subjects who shape, across the generations and through a multitude of enunciative acts, the language we inherit and that we will pass on, after inevitably modifying it ourselves. This “enunciative praxis” gives rise to forms that settle and become fixed. This is what we call usage. Each individual enunciator draws upon these forms, bringing into play the automatic reflexes of language slowly acquired through learning and uttered from mouth to mouth, from phraseology and commonplace expressions to generic expectations. The creators of language – individual in the case of an idiolect, collective in the case of a sociolect – reject these products of usage to “invent” new forms. Gilles Deleuze recalled what Marcel Proust once said about literature being written in a “sort of foreign language”.
- 17 The act itself is analysed as part of a twofold operation, referred to as disengagement – the production of “he/she, elsewhere, another time” – and engagement – the production of “I, here, now”. Engagement – the first-person discourse in autobiographical narratives as well as in the lyrical register – presupposes, in ontogenesis, the existence of disengagement: we learn the “he/it” before the “I”, and being able to use this is even a condition of first-person discourse. The quip made by Greimas is well known: “After the horse, “it” is one of man’s greatest victories”.
- 18 Finally, on the third floor of the enunciative edifice, every discourse in action, like perception itself, must submit to the constraints of *perspective*. It is perspective that places us on the path of the criminal or the policeman when reading a novel. From the standpoint of the subject, perspective is developed through the broad issue of *point of view* and, from the standpoint of the object, through the no less complex issue of *focalisation*. This is the dual imperative of perspective. Owing to the inherent constraints of textualisation – the iterative enunciation relating to the spatio-temporal linearity of all textuality – perspective opens a vast strategic space for the author, one which determines our condition as readers.
- 19 At this point, we may turn to one author in particular, Miguel de Cervantes, to illustrate, among these possible openings, the narrative field of enunciation itself. The adventures of *Don Quixote*, with its one hundred and twenty-six chapters in two volumes, is naturally a wonderful source for talking about narratology. As part of an infinitely recurring *mise en abyme* effect, all the novels of chivalry are fed into this novel with the tale of the hero and his squire. At the same time, it tells the tale of the niece and the housekeeper, the priest and the barber, the innkeeper and the mass of “normal” people, who reveal, in their meetings or discussions, more or less the same narrative madness as the hero himself. Now, the immutable foundation of countless interspersed narratives, recounted by equally numerous narrators, borrowing in prose or in verse all the narrative genres available at the time, even going so far, in the case

of the canon encountered by chance, to engage in a critical and learned metadiscourse on the novel of chivalry, both berated and praised in turn (Vol. 1, chaps. 47 and 48), this foundation is quite simply the canonical narrative schema. Simply by reading the description of Don Quixote's dream in chapter 1, we can see the immutable sequences: a qualifying, decisive and glorifying ordeal or (self-)manipulation - action - sanction (positive, of course).

"The strangest thought ever conceived by a madman came to him. he had the strangest thought any lunatic in the world ever had, which was that it seemed reasonable and necessary to him, both for the sake of his honour and as a service to the nation, to become a knight errant and travel the world with his armour and his horse to seek adventures and engage in everything he had read that knights errant engaged in, righting all manner of wrongs and, by seizing the opportunity and placing himself in danger and ending those wrongs, winning eternal renown and everlasting fame." (Cervantès, 1997, p. 57)

- 20 At the same time, however, another far more complex narrative universe, also with multiple strands, is taking shape. This is the universe of narrative enunciation itself, referring to the derision of the narrative, and the derision of any narrative speech.
- 21 The voice expressing this festival of illusions is unassignable. More specifically, it employs all possible means to escape assignation. *Don Quixote* is the tale of a narrator who constantly ducks and dodges, denying his enunciative position and passing it on from one enunciator to the next. From this viewpoint, his text has a fractal structure: plunging into the recursive machinery of speech in action. The *Prologue*, which the author admits to being powerless to write, is taken over by a benevolent friend who explains the techniques of plagiarism. In the second part, the manuscript having been lost in a battle – against the “brave Biscayan” – the Spanish text relies on the translation of some old notebooks in Arabic, found in a market in Toledo, and written by “Cide Hamete Benengeli, Arab historian”. The “I” of the engaged enunciator emerges here and there, as if by accident. More often than not, the narrative word is delegated by any means possible to somebody else, to anybody else. What is more, in the second volume, editorial reality becomes entwined with fiction. In 1614, a year before the publication of the second volume of the adventures of Don Quixote and several years after the publication of the first volume in 1605, a forger in Tarragona published a book with the same title, presenting it as the second volume in the adventures of the celebrated knight. In the prologue to the second volume, the author, if it is indeed he, talks to the reader, saying: “Thou wouldst have me call him ass, fool, and malapert, but I have no such intention”. And he makes the plagiarised character part of the new adventures. Don Quixote meets readers of the plagiarised book, or decides against going to a particular town because his fictitious double had stayed there...
- 22 This dizzying text within a text, a *mise en abyme* of enunciation, metadiscursive from beginning to end, constitutes a plan of enunciative composition targeting not what is said, but the way it is said with its narrative constraints. For this continuous evasion in the enunciation of the narrative, an inexorable source of illusion, can only continue the process of enunciation by consenting, against all odds, to the immanent constraints of narrativity. To define this regime of immanence, we will say that it means not being under any illusions about illusion. Through its very recursivity, it finds itself in the dizzying circle of a narrative illusionism from which there is no escape.

- 23 So it is that, owing to the enunciative pluralisation of the narrative positions, Cervantes' *Don Quixote* ends up being subjected to the imperative of narrativity within the enunciation itself, a condition that makes it possible for him to speak. As a result, the order of the novel draws upon two distinct narrative regimes: one based on the plane of narrative technique in which the sequences are placed, pure stereotypical products of the usage and culture of stories, and the other based on what Deleuze and Guattari (1991, p. 185) call "the plane of aesthetic composition", the one that works on the material – here the enunciative material – to make it a reality and impose the compound of sensitivity that forms "the matter of the expressive text"⁴. This is indeed what happens with narrative enunciation in the work of Cervantes. It takes him from critical narratology to irreducible narrativity. We can see that the technical construction of the narration extends back to the material that is the act of its enunciation, and that this becomes the focus of sensations for the reader. The act of writing and narrating (translating, copying, plagiarising, delegating, multiplying the simulacra of speech, creating a stuttering of narrative forms) is confronted by the implacable narrative constraints of meaning.

Narrative and passion

- 24 Whether it concerns the content enunciated or the events of the enunciation, narrativity is defined as transforming the status of things or people: poverty becomes wealth, the servant becomes queen. But the status of the subjects involved in the transformation is clearly not limited to the new form of static 'junction' of which it is the result. This status is itself moving, fluctuating and modular: the subject is made aware of this through the junction. Even after her rise to grandeur, Cinderella might still feel bitter about the humiliations inflicted on her by her step-mother and step-sisters. In *Toilers of the Sea* by Victor Hugo (1866), Gilliatt retrieves the steam engine from the ship *Durande*, after it runs aground on the rocks of Roches Douvres. He wins the hand of *Déruchette*, the girl he loves, as promised by Mess Lethierry, the girl's guardian and owner of the ship. He nevertheless shows abnegation, sacrificing his own happiness to that of *Déruchette* and her lover, before committing the suicidal act dictated by his despair. As we can see, passion springs from the story, it emerges from the plot or is at least co-extensive with it.
- 25 One of the originalities of semiotics is thus to closely associate the issues of emotion and passion with those of action and narrativity. To quote Paolo Fabbri (2008): "Narrativity is radically the act of configuring meaning through actions and passions". Far from reducing narrative to a sequence of actions, a principle long accepted as the key to all modelling in this field, semiotics encompasses the interlacing between passion and narrative. This implies that one cannot be thought of or articulated without the other, and that the affective devices are consubstantial with the narrative structure. The transformations of action affect the subjects and the passions of the subjects take shape only in the programmatic dimension of the narrative.
- 26 It is therefore the junction itself which, through its varied modes of existence, is sensitised, thereby forming the host structure for the passions expressed: impatience is an awareness of the expected conjunction, as yet virtual; nostalgia is the emotion of a conjunction that is irremediably past; obstinacy is the sensitive state of a subject suffering from a disjunction that becomes more pronounced as they endeavour to transform it; enthusiasm is to the most extreme intensity of the conjunction what

despair is, in the same way, to the disjunction... As broad as this approach may appear owing to the formal character of the description, it clearly indicates the place where sensitive, emotional and passionate dimensions can be taken into account, independently of any strictly subjective considerations. This place, in discourse, is that of narrative syntagmatic, the possible source of the paradigmatisation of passions and their typology.

- 27 In this way, the hypothesis of a “schema of passion”, subtly ordering the shaping and discourse of affective journeys, runs parallel to the well-known narrative schema. Greimas and Fontanille (1991) highlight this broad syntagmatic of passions, breaking it down into a series of four sequences: 1. *predisposition*, referring to the host structure in its virtual state, offered by the subject to a form of passion (cf. in psychology, “character” or “temperament”); 2. *sensitisation*, triggering this predisposition, on the occurrence of an event, a perception or even a sensation (think of the “slight agitation” experienced by the Princess of Cleves on catching sight of the Duke of Nemours); 3. *emotion*, the heart of the journey and the moment of crisis, when events are raging and the subject reveals the excesses of passion through agitation, paralysis, palpitations (cf. Phaedra ...): “I love... At the deadly name, I tremble, I shudder / [...] I saw him, I blushed, I paled at the sight”) (Racine, 1677, act 1, scene 3); 4. and last, *moralisation*, when the crisis is past, the subject again complies with the social order of measure, and their axiological world is again one of collective rules (cf. the ‘boorish’ behaviour of the lover at the end of *Swann in Love*: “To think that I wasted years of my life, that I wanted to die, that I felt my deepest love, for a woman who did not appeal to me, *who was not my type!*” – our emphasis) (Proust, 1988, p. 375). This final “moralisation” recognises the journey, in the same way as the “sanction” phase of the narrative schema, just as emotion constitutes the test, and *predisposition* and *sensitisation* coincide with the contract and the inception of the subject's competence.
- 28 But the most crucial form of this convergence between narrativity and its significance in passion concerns the “simulacra” generated by the perception and the enunciation of passion. Simulacra refer to the screens placed by the subject between themselves and the object, or rather how they feel about the object, on which they base their hopes or fears, their desires or dislikes. “Only consider, my love, how you have carried your lack of foresight to the point of exaggeration. You were betrayed and you betrayed me with false hopes...” laments the writer at the beginning of *Letters of a Portuguese Nun*, writing to her own feelings (Anonymous, 1993). Because the subject in their passion actantialises these forms born of their affect and transforms their simulacra into real characters, endowed with competence and capable of action. The moralisation of the simulacra interprets them as manifestations of the “blindness” inherent in passion. But they also constitute an essential narrative impulse.
- 29 In the book *In Search of Lost Time*, when the narrator is about to show his friend Robert de Saint-Loup a picture of Albertine, the celestial object of his passion, in the referential form of a photograph, he trembles as he thinks of the chasm between two possible perceptions. And he is not wrong:

“She is bound to be wonderful,” still came from Robert, who had not seen that I was holding out the photograph to him. All at once he caught sight of it, he held it for a moment between his hands. His face expressed a stupefaction which amounted to stupidity. “Is this the girl you are in love with?” he said at length in a tone from which astonishment was banished by his fear of making me angry. He made no remark upon it, he had assumed the reasonable, prudent, inevitably somewhat

disdainful air which we assume before a sick person – even if he has been in the past a man of outstanding gifts, and our friend – who is now nothing of the sort, for, raving mad, he speaks to us of a celestial being who has appeared to him, and continues to behold this being where we, the sane man, can see nothing but a quilt on the bed. (Proust, 1925, p. 30)

- 30 And the narrator then analyses the edifice he has built around the real person, enveloping them in a “stratification of sensations” inaccessible to his friend, a sensory and affective synaesthesia made up of odours, flavours and other more “indefinable” sensations, adding to the vision that makes Albertine for him, “like a stone round which snow has gathered, the generating centre of an immense structure which rose above the plane of my heart” (*ibid*, p. 31).
- 31 The simulacra of passion are the narrative products of these “sensations interposed between the face of the woman and the eyes of her lover – the huge egg of pain which encases it and conceals it as a mantle of snow conceals a fountain” (*ibid.*). On their formation and the configurations they generate depend not only the narrative course of the story with its strategies and antagonisms, but also, as the above quotation shows, the figurative arrangements of discourse, combining metaphors with actual representations, accumulating distortions, opening up new perspectives for reading and interpretation, associating registers, such as, for example, humorous distancing and the pathos of passion. This is the case, for example, of the encounter between the “celestial being” and the “quilt” – generating disjointed stories in their turn.

Perspectives

- 32 The Greimasian paradigm of narrativity, of which we have just summarised a few aspects that we consider to be essential, therefore appears to have been weakened with the development of the issues that came after it – that of enunciation, that of passions and that of perception – even though they were nourished by this very paradigm. Put simply, we could say that narrative, as a corpus of discourse, with the different genres and forms of narratology, no longer held its place at the centre of semiotic concerns.
- 33 This is because the dynamics of research generated by the Greimasian paradigm followed new paths. In the French field alone, and without prejudging any other theoretical developments in Italy, Belgium or the Latin American world, we can distinguish five major areas of semiotic transformation: tensive semiotics (Claude Zilberberg), semiotics of practices (Jacques Fontanille), semiotics of enunciative instances (Jean-Claude Coquet), semiotics of interactions (Eric Landowski) and semiotics of iconicity (Jean-François Bordron). Each field is attached to the name of a researcher who was particularly involved in its development. Despite their differences, and sometimes their antagonisms, all five areas are, to varying degrees, heirs to the “phenomenological turn” of this discipline at the end of the 1980s, i.e. the emergence of sensitisation (perceptive and emotional) in the grasp of meaning. Naturally, this paper cannot discuss them in depth. We simply wish to show, by localising them, how the approaches of two of them (tensive semiotics, semiotics of instances) fit into the narrative framework of meaning and enrich it. Far from pursuing an exhaustive discussion, therefore, we will mention only a few significant aspects, insofar as these paths also create openings and contribute to the analysis of narrative.

Tensive semiotics and the logic of the event

- 34 The reference work in this field is Zilberberg's essay, *Handbook of Tensive Grammar* (2006). The "tensive hypothesis", to use the preferred phrase of its advocate, is clearly part of the structural tradition and its founding positions. It recognises the primacy of difference and relations, but approaches it in terms of dependence, i.e. rection and therefore hierarchy. This hypothesis involves going beyond the understanding of discontinuity implied by the identification of categories – the well known Vs-versus – and posits the continuous character – moving, tensive and intensive – of meaning. It considers that the transformation begins with variations in intensity and that the break or change of valence – the radical switch from one state to another, for example – is only one possible scenario.
- 35 Zilberberg's initial question in this respect, which provided the title for one of his earliest articles, founding the tensive approach, was: "What is there behind the semes"? (Zilberberg, 1981). Since the seme is the smallest discrete unit in the semantic structure, the objective was to search for its underlying continuum. In doing so, in seeking modulation under the marks laid down in language, tensive semiotics postulates the primacy of affect and the experience of sensitisation. This last aspect, resulting from enunciative praxis, is already part of the lexicon. In French and in other languages, therefore, behind the opposition of hot/cold, we have gradual modulations referring to variations in heat (tepid, etc.), culminating in "burning hot" and "icy", implying not only the objective identification of a quality, but a relationship of sense with the skin-ego!
- 36 This semantic elasticity within the category led Zilberberg to identify sub-contraries and super-contraries, "atonic" terms and "tonic" terms. Now, and this is one of the most interesting original features of this approach in our view, the relationship, depending on the degree of intensity, implies different forms of rationality and, as we shall see, narrativity.. Thus, we have the classic opposition "open" versus "closed", identified as sub-contraries; with each term intensified as a super-contrary: on the one hand, "gaping", on the other "sealed".
- 37 However, the two orders of relationship point to two distinct logical approaches: the sub-contraries are united by the logic of implication, from the classic syllogism to "if... then". "If the window is open, then I can close it" and vice versa. 'Sealed' and 'gaping' do not fit the same logic: Francis Ponge tells us that "the oyster is a world that is stubbornly closed"... Sealed to the extent that it cannot be opened. In the same way, if a wound is gaping, it cannot be closed. This is where the other logic comes in, specific to super-contraries and – more broadly – to tonic positions: this logic is that of concession, which grammarians see as a non-operative cause (although..., though..., while..., even though..., despite... , nevertheless..., etc.). "Even though this wound is gaping, I am closing it," proclaims the brave surgeon. "Even though this cause is indefensible, I am taking it on," says the authoritative lawyer. Thus, the concessive is opposed to the implicative, as the happening to the becoming. The advantage of considering these two forms of reasoning at the same conceptual level is that it restores the sensitive to its place in the cognitive. Thus the problem of novelty appears in another light, resulting from a concessive gesture (it's unexpected but it happens!), and the passions of wonder (wonder, the sudden surprise of the soul, is according to

Descartes, let us remember, the first passion among passions). What is more, it is the status of the *event* itself that becomes clearer: in the daily mass of facts, how many can be isolated, selected and recognised as events, taking place among the dreary predictability of everyday life? Its foundation is concessive: even though we could never have expected it... And now it is changing the meaning of everything that preceded it and everything that follows it, now it is speeding up the tempo, now it is intensifying perceptions, now it is generating values and sensitising meaning to the point of transforming it into passion (fear, enthusiasm, despair, etc.).

- 38 Now, it must be recognised that the concessive also covers two forms, one tonic – the one we have just suggested – and the other, atonic, as used in arguments and negotiation, and resulting from the fumbled sharing of values, in give and take: “True, certainly... but...”: I grant you that, I’m making concessions.
- 39 This logic of the concession (tonic) opens up broad perspectives, particularly in the narrative order.

We can understand the Greimasian narrative schema as a version that is clearly generalizable and maybe universal, of an imaginary view of the “meaning of life”.

But it is clearly based on the implicative logic of becoming: “you’ll be a man, my son, if... if..., if...then..., then... then...”. From contracts to skills to be acquired, from skills learned to trials overcome, then from trials to negative and positive sanctions, the future or even the achievement of the hero is formed little by little during the course of a programmed existence. The tonic concessive schema of events generates a completely different narrative schema, widely used in the universe of narrative (textual and cinematographic), in the political field as well as in media narratives. It provides one of the main rules in the genre of the short story and one of the main driving forces in the narration of catastrophes. It is also a hallmark of Hitchcockian cinema that is more than stylistic. We are talking about the violent wait for the unexpected, the hypertrophy of an event as a narrative pivot, the pattern of occurrence and suspense, with a pre-supposition only after the event, imposing improbable narrative catalyses based on what has happened (i.e. logico-semantic reconstructions of earlier sequences) and generating, in one way or another, novelty.

Semiotics of instances and infra-narrativity

- 40 The author of reference in this field is J.-C. Coquet, in particular with his book *Physis and Logos* (2007). Continuing with this same concept, we should also mention a special issue of the journal *Littérature* on the theme: “Comment dire le sensible? (Expressing sensitivity) Semiotic approaches” (Bertrand & Coquet, 2011).
- 41 It is difficult, here as before, to summarise this approach in a few words, but we can say that the common thread is to link the meaning to the enunciating instance. It therefore posits enunciation as its guiding concept and the work of Émile Benveniste as its main reference. In other words, it distances itself from the principle of immanence, considering it as an abstract construction cut off from the living experience of meaning in action, adopting instead the principle of reality. In this way, this approach assumes a double signifying condition, both linguistic and phenomenological: “Through enunciation, but also through perception we join with the world”. When he positioned

himself controversially in relation to Greimas, Coquet liked to describe his approach as “subjectal” as opposed to “objectal” semiotics. Unsurprisingly, the developments of this subject-centric approach have been particularly important in psycho-semiotics (based on the work of the researcher Ivan Darrault).

- 42 What interests us here above all is the system of enunciative instances that leads us to look at the narrative in a new way. Coquet develops an elementary actantial device (between the subject, object and third-party actant – or Sender) within which he distinguishes the subject from the non-subject. The subject is the actant who predicates and who assumes his discourse, the person who “calls *themselves* I”; the non-subject is the actant who predicates without assumption, who “recites a lesson” subject to the impersonality of the enunciation, or who enunciates automatically and carries out only those actions for which they have been programmed (like the wolf in the fable that tries in vain to tear itself away from the status of non-subject by seeking to put forward the reasons for its action, which are inevitably false). According to Coquet, the non-subject is also the passionate subject, subject to the imperious law of their objects, who can only be torn away from passion through the assumption that enables them to control it and to rehabilitate themselves as a subject (in this way, the semiotician renews the category passion/reason, from which the previous Greimassian approach had detached itself by highlighting the defining category of passion/action). By means of the non-subject of passion, the opposition between *physis* and *logos* makes its entrance. *Physis* refers to the somatic predicates of the sensitive subject, that of perception and emotion, through which the subject asserts their *hold* on the world. *Logos*, a cognitive concept, comes second to *physis*. It expresses an *adjusted hold*, one that is intellectually distanced, distorted and controlled by knowledge. “Somatic predicates (referring to reality) express the sensitive,” writes Coquet, “while cognitive predicates describe the world”.
- 43 In addition to this, in our opinion, we can see in the mechanism of enunciative instances, the thematisations of the actants (forming the basis of the “thematic roles”). Defined as a codification of these instances and, more precisely, as a way of inserting the individual into the collective – “father”, “mother”, “student”, “president”, “wolf”, “citizen”, etc. – these determine the status of the saying in each enunciation, from its praxemes and registers to its significant modulations (tempo, prosody, etc.).
- 44 Through the various complexities of enunciation in scenes of instances, the narrative universe is in turn enriched and refined. The scenography of instances burst onto the narrative scene with Nathalie Sarraute's *Tropisms* and the micro-dramas of infra-conversation. Distinguished according to their modes of existence, virtual or actualised, the instances compete for their manifestation. Such or such an instance, normally masked in a socially regulated thematic role-play, may unexpectedly appear in the form of a slip, revealing the instantial bubbling under the appearance of a controlled enunciation (see the regulated thematic space of political roles, for example, where slips appear). The regulation of these roles is the product of a long apprenticeship and patient codification of enunciative praxis.
- 45 To conclude and to illustrate the narrative scope of these plays of instances, we will take two examples of their architecture in the literary field. The XIXth century novel, as we know, placed great emphasis on science and technology.. Taking only novels relating to the Earth and the ocean, whether Edgar Allen Poe in *A Descent into the Maelström*, Victor Hugo in *Toilers of the Sea*, Herman Melville in *Moby Dick* or Jules Verne

in *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*, all of them draw upon the different fields of knowledge of their time and assume the primary discursive data: the paradigmatic application of classifications, taxonomies and typologies. Let us compare Verne and Melville on this subject.

- 46 In the Nautilus commanded by Captain Nemo, the enunciative register assumed is both didactic and fictional. The world of marine biology is therefore the subject of multiple descriptive inventories based on scientific tree structures and the classification of genera, species and families in these interminable pages illustrated by artistic plates that seem to come straight out of the *Grand Larousse* dictionary: a dizzying list! The didactic discourse is provided by a specific instance, which is precisely that of a non-subject, in the person of Conseil, the servant of the narrator-hero – the scientist Aronnax. Conseil recites his lesson with unflappable calm, becoming a sort of puppet or comic character. But this distinction between enunciative instances, relating to the specific identity of the different characters in the story, and co-extensive with them in a seemingly fixed distribution of roles, limits the thematic and narrative depth of each one: one character equals one instance.
- 47 This is not the case in *Moby Dick*, in which the Pequod commanded by Captain Ahab is in pursuit of the white whale. Just as in *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*, the narrator plays a part in the story: his thematic role is that of a sailor. But he plays a role encompassing both action and knowledge, fiction and interpretation. He adopts a variety of instances of discourse in his sole person, as we shall see. In this way, through its very enunciation, the tale of *Moby Dick* becomes the focus of an analysis of language and knowledge and their meaning. For a good example of this phenomenon in a comparative perspective, the narrator engages in a cognitive exercise similar to that of Conseil, applied to the classification of cetaceans alone: cetology.
- 48 A few years later, Victor Hugo was to begin *Toilers of the Sea*⁵ with a long and astonishing prologue entitled “The Archipelago of the Channel”. Included in the novel at a late stage (two decades after the first edition), this scientific text of some sixty pages does not appear to have a clear narrative status, and as its link with the novel was not clear to the first publisher, it was simply left out. Presenting itself as an archipelago of knowledge, resembling the syllabus of a prestigious university or college, it brings into play and presents all the disciplines of the humanities and social sciences (philology, religious history, political science, history, etc.) as well as the exact sciences (botany, meteorology, geology, biology, technology, etc.), each with its own specific chapter. But the discourse is not only scientific, it is the enunciation itself that proves to be narrativised. Thus, another enunciative instance overtakes the cognitive instance, that of the writer or poet. The reader observes that the writing itself forms an object in its own right, transversal to the domains of content of which it is the vehicle. Following an inaugural chapter of mythical tone, we witness the birth of a language: the next chapter is made up solely of short noun phrases; the next one of independent clauses with elementary verbs (copulative verbs and modals); the next one of more complex sentences and verbs of action; the next one of quotes; the one after that of local characters and dialogue... Thus, from one chapter to the next, the language develops to accompany the birth of this insular world discovered by the exile, who makes it the centre of his universe. The language-material becomes tribute-material for purposes of glorification. It is a dedication forming a junction with the novel itself, the welcome extended by the inhabitants of Guernsey to the man exiled by “Napoleon the

little". Thus, the narrative becomes part of the writing, and it is the enunciation itself, with its play of enunciative instances, that forms the scene. This property, which consists in returning to the language and displaying its material, typically based in literary action, is very different indeed from the referential discourse which Jules Verne uses, methodically interweaving it, but never mixing it, with the fictional discourse.

- 49 Similarly, Melville also develops a dialogue between literature and science in *Moby Dick*. This is particularly true in chapter XXXII of his novel, mentioned above, which is entitled "Cetology". In this chapter, as a good naturalist and disciple of the scientist Lamarck, he presents a detailed taxonomy of cetaceans, against the backdrop of the theory of transformism, ahead of the work of Charles Darwin (*On the Origin of Species*, published in 1859, which first introduced the theory of evolution,). However, in an apparently surprising way, the criteria on which this taxonomy is based refer to the world of books and publishing – and thus, as a backdrop – to language itself. Borrowing an analogy from publishing, the book classifies cetaceans by decreasing size – from the great sperm whale to the modest porpoise – based on how paper is folded for the making of books: folio, octavo or duodecimo. Each of these main classes defines "books" that are subdivided into "chapters" for the types and species. Cross-cutting knowledge, relating to writing and communication. Nature enters the order of language through its modest material grammar, that of book-making.

The folding of the paper can then be understood as a metaphor for the lexicon and the stories deploying the names.

- 50 Or rather: nature is folded into our language. And this folding is so strong and so decisive in Melville's writing that it leads, on the conclusion of the taxonomy, to a question concerning the folding of the world through words and their essential relativity. The Leviathan brotherhood in fact extends beyond the classes and types known and identified up to now in the taxonomic schema adopted. On this point, the narrator says:

"From Icelandic, Dutch, and old English authorities, there might be quoted other lists of uncertain whales, blessed with all manner of uncouth names. But I omit them as altogether obsolete; and can hardly help suspecting them for mere sounds, full of Leviathanism, but signifying nothing". (Melville, 2006, p. 170)

- 51 Pure signifiers, therefore. Opening onto the ocean of the unnamed and unspeakable world, on the surface of which float our precarious little lexical flags. And the scientific chapter, which has imperceptibly turned into a great epistemological narrative, ends on an incomplete note, identified as the very condition of the work itself. Here again we find semiotics: readers of Greimas's *The Perfection of Imperfection* will easily make the connection between the two texts, which come together in an aspectual analysis of the imperfective as an aesthetic condition, two texts that are almost 150 years apart.

"But I now leave my cetological System standing thus unfinished, even as the great Cathedral of Cologne was left, with the crane still standing upon the top of the uncompleted tower. For small erections may be finished by their first architects; grand ones, true ones, ever leave the copestone to posterity. God keep me from ever completing anything. This whole book is but a draught—nay, but the draught of a draught. Oh, Time, Strength, Cash, and Patience!" (Melville, 2006, p. 170)

- 52 As with Victor Hugo, the poetic is the ultimate reason of meaning, clearly illustrated by this Rimbaudian impulse closing the chapter. This indefinite opening to the meaning of

the work is undoubtedly more modest, expressing a touch of humour and self-mockery. Nevertheless, proclaimed in this way, it has a model in the indefinite opening of language. The first talks about the second, inexorably: “You cannot end meaning”. Literature opens a void in language, or opens language to the void, and this is its primary narrative. As has often been said, from Proust to Deleuze, the writer writes in a kind of foreign language, as a nomad of language. Maybe it is this ultimate – slightly dizzying – adventure that the reader wishes to share with the writer, through all the instances developed.

- 53 In any case, the contemporary development of semiotics, formerly “narrative and discursive”, but now established, as here, in enunciative events, shows that, ultimately, it is a long way from deviating from the narrative. The conceptualisations of the sensitive, the passionate and the meaning in action renew its approach while enriching the narrative questioning of theoretical foundations that are at the same time maintained, renewed and deepened.

To conclude: semiotics, narrativity, narrative

- 54 It would of course have been possible, as we have done for tensive semiotics and for semiotics of instances, to search for the relationships entailed for the production, reading and analysis of narrative by research into the semiotics of practices, interactions and iconicity. A synthesis remains to be written, but will not be possible here given the volume of this already lengthy article.

- 55 We can however suggest some provisional conclusions.

1. Semiotics, which was formerly defined as “narrative and discursive”, has left the specific field of narrative by discovering that the laws of narrativity could be recognised as operative well beyond purely narrative genres and forms of writing. This generalisation underpinned the strength of its theoretical impact, but also its weakness: because if all discourse is narrative, then the word “narrative” no longer means anything.
2. By detaching itself from narratological research, semiotics has opened up to other fields of investigation – linked in particular to the plastic arts, anthropology and phenomenology – while remaining as close as possible to the concrete objects that form its field of analysis: discourse. These openings and investigations nevertheless provide new instruments with which to observe, analyse and better understand the specific field of narrative, literary or not, verbal or visual or gestural or other.
3. As we have tried to show, theoretical reflection translated into analytical capacity does not necessarily lead to a totalising conception – a fact for which semiotics has sometimes been criticised, not without reason. The “branches” that are forming today show first and foremost that the results of research are, by vocation, like the Cathedral of Cologne, and like the cetological system of Ishmael, Moby Dick's sole narrator, unfinished and incomplete.

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NOTES

1. The first didactic presentation of semiotics, by Joseph Courtés in 1976, was entitled *Introduction to Narrative and Discursive Semiotics*.
 2. Presentation of the publisher, published on the website of the online magazine *Fabula. La recherche en littérature*, 16/10/2007.
 3. The main text concerning this rejection is given below: “As we already know, any discourse presupposes a non-linguistic situation of communication. This situation is covered by a number of morphological categories, which clarify it linguistically while adding to the manifestation a parameter of subjectivity that is not relevant to the description and that must therefore be eliminated from the text (unless the analysis selects this parameter as the object of description). The categories to be eliminated are primarily: 1. The category of person [...]. 2. The category of tense [...]. 3. The category of deixis [...]. 4. All phatic expressions in general [...]”.
 4. The authors say (*ibid.*): “The technical plane is necessarily covered or absorbed by the plane of aesthetic composition. It is on this condition that matter becomes expressive: either the compound of sensations is realised in the material, or the material passes into the compound, but always in such a way as to be situated on a specifically aesthetic plane of composition.”
 5. Hugo’s novel *Toilers of the Sea*, was published in 1865, and Melville’s novel, *Moby Dick*, in 1851.
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ABSTRACTS

A surprise shook the world of Greimassian scholars in 2014: narratology was back in strength! Major international congresses were organised, bringing together American and European universities, to study the “fabulous powers of narrative”. Storytelling entered a new era, ensuring the success of Christian Salmon’s book well beyond the confines of academia. However, among the theoretical references of this research movement, largely based on Anglo-Saxon cognitivism developed in English-speaking countries, not the slightest allusion was made to “narrative and discursive semiotics”. And yet, it was under this title that Joseph Courtés, then assistant to Algirdas Julien Greimas at the School of Advanced Studies in Social Sciences (*École de hautes études en sciences sociales*, EHESS-Paris), published an introduction to semiotics in 1976. And ten years earlier, in 1966, Greimas had published the actantial schemata in *Structural Semantics*, his founding work. The formalization of narrative grammar and its development in modal syntax would become one of the key accomplishments of this semiotics. This was when *narrativity*, transcending the boundaries of narratology, was supposed to make its entrance into the humanities and social sciences. And yet it was apparently forgotten. What happened? Or rather, where was the Greimassian theory? Our purpose here is to review this conceptual story and put it into perspective. We will do so by discussing, at the end of our journey, the descending filiation of this theory, through some of the semiotic paths that it has produced. Not in order to present the labyrinthine conceptualisations but to suggest their respective contributions to a renewed reflection on the narrative.

Surprise dans le monde des greimassiens en 2014 : voici la narratologie de retour, et en force ! De grands congrès internationaux, réunissant des universités américaines et européennes, sont organisés et se consacrent à l'étude des « fabuleux pouvoirs du récit ». L'ère du *storytelling* se répand, assurant le succès de l'ouvrage de C. Salmon bien au-delà des frontières de l'université. Or, parmi les références théoriques de ce mouvement de recherche, pour l'essentiel issues du cognitivisme anglo-saxon, pas la moindre allusion à la « sémiotique narrative et discursive ». C'est pourtant sous ce titre que J. Courtés, alors assistant d'A. J. Greimas à l'École de hautes études en sciences sociales, publiait en 1976 chez Hachette un livre d'initiation à la sémiotique. Et dix ans auparavant, dès 1966, le schéma actantiel avait fait son apparition dans *Sémantique structurale* l'ouvrage fondateur d'A. J. Greimas : la formalisation de la grammaire narrative et son développement en syntaxe modale allaient devenir un des titres de gloire de cette sémiotique. C'est alors que la *narrativité*, outrepassant les frontières de la narratologie, devait faire son entrée dans les sciences humaines et sociales. Et voici qu'elle semblait oubliée. Que s'était-il donc passé ? Ou plutôt, où était passée la théorie greimassienne ? Notre propos est ici de faire le point sur cette histoire conceptuelle et de la mettre en perspective. Et nous le ferons en évoquant, en fin de parcours, la filiation descendante de cette théorie, à travers quelques voies sémiotiques qu'elle a enfantées. Non pour en présenter les labyrinthiques conceptualisations mais pour suggérer leurs apports respectifs à une réflexion renouvelée sur le récit.

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Mots-clés: narrativité, narratologie, sémiotique, Greimas (Algirdas Julien), modalité, énonciation, passion

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