

Books by Roland Barthes

A Barthes Reader
Camera Lucida
Critical Essays
The Eiffel Tower and Other Mythologies
Elements of Semiology
The Empire of Signs
The Fashion System
The Grain of the Voice
Image-Music-Text
A Lover's Discourse
Michelet
Mythologies
New Critical Essays
On Racine
The Pleasure of the Text
The Responsibility of Forms
Roland Barthes
The Rustle of Language
Sade / Fourier / Loyola
The Semiotic Challenge
S / Z
Writing Degree Zero

A BARTHES READER

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not a sacred monument, and no taboo can forbid a commonplace life to develop there, but there can be no question, nonetheless, of a trivial phenomenon here; the installation of a restaurant on the Tower, for instance (food being the object of the most symbolic of trades), is a phenomenon corresponding to a whole meaning of leisure; man always seems disposed—if no constraints appear to stand in his way—to seek out a kind of counterpoint in his pleasures: this is what is called comfort. The Eiffel Tower is a comfortable object, and moreover, it is in this that it is an object either very old (analogous, for instance, to the ancient Circus) or very modern (analogous to certain American institutions such as the drive-in movie, in which one can simultaneously enjoy the film, the car, the food, and the freshness of the night air). Further, by affording its visitor a whole polyphony of pleasures, from technological wonder to haute cuisine, including the panorama, the Tower ultimately reunites with the essential function of all major human sites: autarchy; the Tower can live on itself: one can dream there, eat there, observe there, understand there, marvel there, shop there; as on an ocean liner (another mythic object that sets children dreaming), one can feel oneself cut off from the world and yet the owner of a world.

1964

Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives

THE narratives of the world are numberless. Narrative is first and foremost a prodigious variety of genres, themselves distributed amongst different substances—as though any material were fit to receive man's stories. Able to be carried by articulated language, spoken or written, fixed or moving images, gestures, and the ordered mixture of all these substances; narrative is present in myth, legend, fable, tale, novella, epic, history, tragedy, drama, comedy, mime, painting (think of Carpaccio's *Saint Ursula*), stained-glass windows, cinema, comics, news item, conversation. Moreover, under this almost infinite diversity of forms, narrative is present in every age, in every place, in every society; it begins with the very history of mankind and there nowhere is nor has been a people without narrative. All classes, all human groups, have their narratives, enjoyment of which is very often shared by men with different, even opposing,¹ cultural backgrounds. Caring nothing for the division between good and bad literature, narrative is interna-

From *Image-Music-Text*.

¹ It must be remembered that this is not the case with either poetry or the essay, both of which are dependent on the cultural level of their consumers.

tional, transhistorical, transcultural: it is simply there, like life itself.

Must we conclude from this universality that narrative is insignificant? Is it so general that we can have nothing to say about it except for the modest description of a few highly individualized varieties, something literary history occasionally undertakes? But then how are we to master even these varieties, how are we to justify our right to differentiate and identify them? How is novel to be set against novella, tale against myth, drama against tragedy (as has been done a thousand times) without reference to a common model? Such a model is implied by every proposition relating to the most individual, the most historical, of narrative forms. It is thus legitimate that, far from the abandoning of any idea of dealing with narrative on the grounds of its universality, there should have been (from Aristotle on) a periodic interest in narrative form and it is normal that the newly developing structuralism should make this form one of its first concerns—is not structuralism's constant aim to master the infinity of utterances [*paroles*] by describing the "language" [*langue*] of which they are the products and from which they can be generated. Faced with the infinity of narratives, the multiplicity of standpoints—historical, psychological, sociological, ethnological, aesthetic, etc.—from which they can be studied, the analyst finds himself in more or less the same situation as Saussure confronted by the heterogeneity of language [*langage*] and seeking to extract a principle of classification and a central focus for description from the apparent confusion of the individual messages. Keeping simply to modern times, the Russian formalists, Propp, and Lévi-Strauss have taught us to recognize the following dilemma: either a narrative is merely a rambling collection of events, in which case nothing can be said about it other than by referring back to the storyteller's

(the author's) art, talent, or genius—all mythical forms of chance²—or else it shares with other narratives a common structure which is open to analysis, no matter how much patience its formulation requires. There is a world of difference between the most complex randomness and the most elementary combinatory scheme, and it is impossible to combine (to produce) a narrative without reference to an implicit system of units and rules.

Where then are we to look for the structures of narrative? Doubtless, in narratives themselves. *Each and every* narrative? Many commentators who accept the idea of a narrative structure are nevertheless unable to resign themselves to dissociating literary analysis from the example of the experimental sciences; nothing daunted, they ask that a purely inductive method be applied to narrative and that one start by studying all the narratives within a genre, a period, a society. This commonsense view is utopian. Linguistics itself, with only some three thousand languages to embrace, cannot manage such a program and has wisely turned deductive, a step which in fact marked its veritable constitution as a science and the beginning of its spectacular progress, it even succeeding in anticipating facts prior to their discovery.³ So what of narrative analysis, faced as it is with millions of narratives? Of necessity, it is condemned to a deductive procedure, obliged first to devise a hypothetical model of description (what American linguists call a "theory") and then gradually to work down from this model toward the different narrative

² There does, of course, exist an "art" of the storyteller, which is the ability to generate narratives (messages) from the structure (the code). This art corresponds to the notion of *performance* in Chomsky and is far removed from the "genius" of the author, romantically conceived as some barely explicable personal secret.

³ See the history of the Hittite *a*, postulated by Saussure and actually discovered fifty years later, as given in Emile Benveniste, *Problèmes de linguistique générale*.

species which at once conform to and depart from the model. It is only at the level of these conformities and departures that analysis will be able to come back to, but now equipped with a single descriptive tool, the plurality of narratives, to their historical, geographical and cultural diversity.⁴

Thus, in order to describe and classify the infinite number of narratives, a "Theory" (in this pragmatic sense) is needed and the immediate task is that of finding it, of starting to define it. Its development can be greatly facilitated if one begins from a model able to provide it with its initial terms and principles. In the current state of research, it seems reasonable⁵ that the structural analysis of narrative be given linguistics itself as founding model.

I. THE LANGUAGE OF NARRATIVE

1. *Beyond the sentence*

As we know, linguistics stops at the sentence, the last unit which it considers to fall within its scope. If the sentence, being an order and not a series, cannot be reduced to the sum of the words which compose it and constitutes thereby a specific unit, a piece of discourse, on the contrary, is no more than the succession of the sentences composing it. From the

⁴Let us bear in mind the present conditions of linguistic description: "... linguistic 'structure' is always relative not just to the data or corpus but also to the grammatical theory describing the data," E. Bach, *An Introduction to Transformational Grammars*; "it has been recognized that language must be described as a formal structure, but that the description first of all necessitates specification of adequate procedures and criteria and that, finally, the reality of the object is inseparable from the method given for its description," Benveniste.

⁵But not imperative: see Claude Bremond, "La logique des possibles narratifs," *Communications* 8, 1966, which is more logical than linguistic. [Bremond's various studies in this field have now been collected in a volume entitled, precisely, *Logique du récit*; his work consists in the analysis of narrative according to the pattern of possible alternatives, each narrative moment—or function—giving rise to a set of different possible resolutions, the actualization of any one of which in turn produces a new set of alternatives.]

point of view of linguistics, there is nothing in discourse that is not to be found in the sentence: "The sentence," writes Martinet, "is the smallest segment that is perfectly and wholly representative of discourse."⁶ Hence there can be no question of linguistics setting itself an object superior to the sentence, since beyond the sentence are only more sentences—having described the flower, the botanist is not to get involved in describing the bouquet.

And yet it is evident that discourse itself (as a set of sentences) is organized and that, through this organization, it can be seen as the message of another language, one operating at a higher level than the language of the linguists.⁷ Discourse has its units, its rules, its "grammar": beyond the sentence, and though consisting solely of sentences, it must naturally form the object of a second linguistics. For a long time indeed, such a linguistics of discourse bore a glorious name, that of Rhetoric. As a result of a complex historical movement, however, in which Rhetoric went over to belles-lettres and the latter was divorced from the study of language, it has recently become necessary to take up the problem afresh. The new linguistics of discourse has still to be developed, but at least it is being postulated, and by the linguists themselves.⁸ This last fact is not without significance, for, although constituting an autonomous object, discourse must be studied from the basis of linguistics. If a working hypothesis is needed for an analysis whose task is immense and whose materials infinite, then the most reasonable thing is to posit a homological relation between sentence and discourse insofar as it is likely that a similar formal organization orders all semiotic systems, whatever

⁶André Martinet, "Réflexions sur la phrase," in *Language and Society*.

⁷It goes without saying, as Jakobson has noted, that between the sentence and what lies beyond the sentence there are transitions; coordination, for instance, can work over the limit of the sentence.

⁸See especially: Benveniste, op. cit., Chapter 10; Z. S. Harris, "Discourse Analysis," *Language* 28, 1952; N. Ruwet, "Analyse structurale d'un poème français," *Linguistics* 3, 1964.

their substances and dimensions. A discourse is a long "sentence" (the units of which are not necessarily sentences), just as a sentence, allowing for certain specifications, is a short "discourse." This hypothesis accords well with a number of propositions put forward in contemporary anthropology. Jakobson and Lévi-Strauss have pointed out that mankind can be defined by the ability to create secondary—"self-multiplying"—systems (tools for the manufacture of other tools, double articulation of language, incest taboo permitting the fanning out of families) while the Soviet linguist Ianov supposes that artificial languages can only have been acquired after natural language: what is important for men is to have the use of several systems of meaning and natural language helps in the elaboration of artificial languages. It is therefore legitimate to posit a "secondary" relation between sentence and discourse—a relation which will be referred to as homological, in order to respect the purely formal nature of the correspondences.

The general language [*langue*] of narrative is one (and clearly only one) of the idioms apt for consideration by the linguistics of discourse⁹ and it accordingly comes under the homological hypothesis. Structurally, narrative shares the characteristics of the sentence without ever being reducible to the simple sum of its sentences: a narrative is a long sentence, just as every constative sentence is in a way the rough outline of a short narrative. Although there provided with different signifiers (often extremely complex), one does find in narrative, expanded and transformed proportionately, the principal verbal categories: tenses, aspects, moods, persons. Moreover the "subjects" themselves, as opposed to the verbal predicates, readily yield to the sentence model; the actantial typology pro-

⁹ One of the tasks of such a linguistics would be precisely that of establishing a typology of forms of discourse. Three broad types can be recognized provisionally: metonymic (narrative), metaphoric (lyric, poetry, sapiential discourse), enthymematic (intellectual discourse).

posed by A. J. Greimas¹⁰ discovers in the multitude of narrative characters the elementary functions of grammatical analysis. Nor does the homology suggested here have merely a heuristic value: it implies an identity between language and literature (inasmuch as the latter can be seen as a sort of privileged vehicle of narrative). It is hardly possible any longer to conceive of literature as an art that abandons all further relation with language the moment it has used it as an instrument to express ideas, passion, or beauty: language never ceases to accompany discourse, holding up to it the mirror of its own structure—does not literature, particularly today, make a language of the very conditions of language?¹¹

2. Levels of meaning

From the outset, linguistics furnishes the structural analysis of narrative with a concept which is decisive in that, making explicit immediately what is essential in every system of meaning, namely its organization, it allows us both to show how a narrative is not a simple sum of propositions and to classify the enormous mass of elements which go to make up a narrative. This concept is that of *level of description*.¹²

A sentence can be described, linguistically, on several levels (phonetic, phonological, grammatical, contextual) and these levels are in a hierarchical relationship with one another, for, while all have their own units and correlations (whence the necessity for a separate description of each of them), no level

¹⁰ See below III.1. Greimas's own account can be found in *Sémantique structurale*.

¹¹ Remember Mallarmé's insight at the time when he was contemplating a work of linguistics: "Language appeared to him the instrument of fiction: he will follow the method of language (determine it). Language self-reflecting. So fiction seems to him the very process of the human mind—it is this that sets in play all method, and man is reduced to will." It will be recalled that for Mallarmé "Fiction" and "Poetry" are taken synonymously.

¹² "Linguistic descriptions are not, so to speak, monovalent. A description is not simply 'right' or 'wrong' in itself . . . it is better thought of as more useful or less," M. A. K. Halliday, "General linguistics and its application to language teaching," *Patterns of Language*.

on its own can produce meaning. A unit belonging to a particular level only takes on meaning if it can be integrated in a higher level; a phoneme, though perfectly describable, means nothing in itself: it participates in meaning only when integrated in a word, and the word itself must in turn be integrated in a sentence.¹³ The theory of levels (as set out by Benveniste) gives two types of relations: distributional (if the relations are situated on the same level) and integrational (if they are grasped from one level to the next); consequently, distributional relations alone are not sufficient to account for meaning. In order to conduct a structural analysis, it is thus first of all necessary to distinguish several levels or instances of description and to place these instances within a hierarchical (integratory) perspective.

The levels are operations.¹⁴ It is therefore normal that, as it progresses, linguistics should tend to multiply them. Discourse analysis, however, is as yet only able to work on rudimentary levels. In its own way, rhetoric had assigned at least two planes of description to discourse: *dispositio* and *elocutio*.¹⁵ Today, in his analysis of the structure of myth, Lévi-Strauss has already indicated that the constituent units of mythical discourse (mythemes) acquire meaning only because they are grouped in bundles and because these bundles themselves combine together.¹⁶ As too, Tzvetan Todorov, reviving the distinction made by the Russian formalists, proposes working on two major levels, themselves subdivided: *story* (the argu-

¹³ The levels of integration were postulated by the Prague School (vid. J. Vachek, *A Prague School Reader in Linguistics*, Bloomington 1964, p. 468) and have been adopted since by many linguists. It is Benveniste who, in my opinion, has given the most illuminating analysis in this respect; op. cit., Chapter 10.

¹⁴ "In somewhat vague terms, a level may be considered as a system of symbols, rules, and so on, to be used for representing utterances," Bach, op. cit.

¹⁵ The third part of rhetoric, *inventio*, did not concern language—it had to do with *res*, not with *verba*.

¹⁶ *Structural Anthropology*.

ment), comprising a logic of actions and a "syntax" of characters, and *discourse*, comprising the tenses, aspects, and modes of the narrative.¹⁷ But however many levels are proposed and whatever definition they are given, there can be no doubt that narrative is a hierarchy of instances. To understand a narrative is not merely to follow the unfolding of the story, it is also to recognize its construction in "stories," to project the horizontal concatenations of the narrative "thread" onto an implicitly vertical axis; to read (to listen to) a narrative is not merely to move from one word to the next, it is also to move from one level to the next. Perhaps I may be allowed to offer a kind of apologue in this connection. In "The Purloined Letter," Poe gives an acute analysis of the failure of the chief commissioner of the Paris police, powerless to find the letter. His investigations, says Poe, were perfect "*within the sphere of his specialty*";¹⁸ he searched everywhere, saturated entirely the level of the "police search," but in order to find the letter, protected by its conspicuousness, it was necessary to shift to another level, to substitute the concealer's principle of relevance for that of the policeman. Similarly, the "search" carried out over a horizontal set of narrative relations may well be as thorough as possible but must still, to be effective, also operate "vertically": meaning is not "at the end" of the narrative, it runs across it; just as conspicuous as the purloined letter, meaning eludes all unilateral investigation.

A great deal of tentative effort is still required before it will be possible to ascertain precisely the levels of narrative. Those that are suggested in what follows constitute a provisional profile whose merit remains almost exclusively didactic; they

¹⁷ See T. Todorov "Les catégories du récit littéraire," *Communications* 8, 1966 [Todorov's work on narrative is now most easily accessible in two books, *Littérature et signification; poétique de la prose*. For a short account in English, see "Structural analysis of narrative," *Novel* I, 3, 1969.]

¹⁸ [This in accordance with the Baudelaire version of the Poe story from which Barthes quotes; Poe's original reads: "so far as his labors extended."]

enable us to locate and group together the different problems, and this without, I think, being at variance with the few analyses so far.¹⁹ It is proposed to distinguish three levels of description in the narrative work: the level of "functions" (in the sense this word has in Propp and Bremond), the level of "actions" (in the sense this word has in Greimas when he talks of characters as actants) and the level of "narration" (which is roughly the level of "discourse" in Todorov). These three levels are bound together according to a mode of progressive integration: a function only has meaning insofar as it occupies a place in the general action of an actant, and this action in turn receives its final meaning from the fact that it is narrated, entrusted to a discourse which possesses its own code.

II. FUNCTIONS

1. *The determination of the units*

Any system being the combination of units of known classes, the first task is to divide up narrative and determine the segments of narrative discourse that can be distributed into a limited number of classes. In a word, we have to define the smallest narrative units.

Given the integrational perspective described above, the analysis cannot rest satisfied with a purely distributional definition of the units. From the start, meaning must be the criterion of the unit: it is the functional nature of certain segments of the story that makes them units—hence the name "functions" immediately attributed to these first units. Since the Russian formalists,²⁰ a unit has been taken as any segment of the story which can be seen as the term of a correla-

¹⁹ I have been concerned in this introduction to impede research in progress as little as possible.

²⁰ See especially B. Tomachevski, "Thématique" (1925), in *Théorie de la littérature*, ed. T. Todorov. A little later, Propp in *Morphology of the Folktale* defined the function as "an act of a character, defined from the point of view of its significance for the course of the action."

tion. The essence of a function is, so to speak, the seed that it sows in the narrative, planting an element that will come to fruition later—either on the same level or elsewhere, on another level. If in *Un Cœur simple* Flaubert at one point tells the reader, seemingly without emphasis, that the daughters of the Sous-Préfet of Pont-l'Évêque owned a parrot, it is because this parrot is subsequently to have a great importance in Félicité's life; the statement of this detail (whatever its linguistic form) thus constitutes a function, or narrative unit.

Is everything in a narrative functional? Does everything, down to the slightest detail, have a meaning? Can narrative be divided up entirely into functional units? We shall see in a moment that there are several kinds of functions, there being several kinds of correlations, but this does not alter the fact that a narrative is never made up of anything other than functions: in differing degrees, everything in it signifies. This is not a matter of art (on the part of the narrator), but of structure; in the realm of discourse, what is noted is by definition notable. Even were a detail to appear irretrievably insignificant, resistant to all functionality, it would nonetheless end up with precisely the meaning of absurdity or uselessness: everything has a meaning, or nothing has. To put it another way, one could say that art is without noise (as that term is employed in information theory):²¹ art is a system which is pure, no unit ever goes wasted,²² however long, however loose, however tenuous may be the thread connecting it to one of the levels of the story.²³

²¹ This is what separates art from "life," the latter knowing only "fuzzy" or "blurred" communications. "Fuzziness" (that beyond which it is impossible to see) can exist in art, but it does so as coded element (in Watteau for example). Even then, such "fuzziness" is unknown to the written code: writing is inescapably distinct.

²² At least in literature, where the freedom of notation (in consequence of the abstract nature of articulated language) leads to a much greater responsibility than in the "analogical" arts such as cinema.

²³ The functionality of a narrative unit is more or less immediate (and hence apparent) according to the level on which it operates: when the units are

From the linguistic point of view, the function is clearly a unit of content: it is "what it says" that makes of a statement a functional unit,²⁴ not the manner in which it is said. This constitutive signified may have a number of different signifiers, often very intricate. If I am told (in *Goldfinger*) that *Bond saw a man of about fifty*, the piece of information holds simultaneously two functions of unequal pressure: on the one hand, the character's age fits into a certain description of the man (the "usefulness" of which for the rest of the story is not nil, but diffuse, delayed); while on the other, the immediate signified of the statement is that Bond is unacquainted with his future interlocutor, the unit thus implying a very strong correlation (initiation of a threat and the need to establish the man's identity). In order to determine the initial narrative units, it is therefore vital never to lose sight of the functional nature of the segments under consideration and to recognize in advance that they will not necessarily coincide with the forms into which we traditionally cast the various parts of narrative discourse (actions, scenes, paragraphs, dialogues, interior monologues, etc.) still less with "psychological" divisions (modes of behavior, feelings, intentions, motivations, rationalizations of characters).

In the same way, since the "language" [*langue*] of narrative is not the language [*langue*] of articulated language [*langage articulé*]²⁵—though very often vehicled by it—narrative units will be substantially independent of linguistic units; they may indeed coincide with the latter, but occasionally, not systematically. Functions will be represented sometimes by units higher than the sentence (groups of sentences of varying

situated on the same level (as for instance in the case of suspense), the functionality is very clear; it is much less so when the function is saturated on the narrational level—a modern text, weakly signifying on the plane of the anecdote, only finds a full force of meaning on the plane of the writing.
²⁴ "Syntactical units beyond the sentence are in fact units of content," A. J. Greimas, *Cours de sémantique structurale*, 1964. The exploration of the functional level is thus part of general semantics.

lengths, up to the work in its entirety) and sometimes by lower ones (syntagm, word, and even, within the word, certain literary elements only²⁵). When we are told that—the telephone ringing during night duty at Secret Service headquarters—*Bond picked up one of the four receivers*, the moneme *four* in itself constitutes a functional unit, referring as it does to a concept necessary to the story (that of a highly developed bureaucratic technology). In fact, the narrative unit in this case is not the linguistic unit (the word) but only its connoted value (linguistically, the word /four/ never means "four"); which explains how certain functional units can be shorter than the sentence without ceasing to belong to the order of discourse: such units then extend not beyond the sentence, than which they remain materially shorter, but beyond the level of denotation, which, like the sentence, is the province of linguistics properly speaking.

2. Classes of units

The functional units must be distributed into a small number of classes. If these classes are to be determined without recourse to the substance of content (psychological substance for example), it is again necessary to consider the different levels of meaning: some units have as correlates units on the same level, while the saturation of others requires a change of levels; hence, straightaway, two major classes of functions, distributional and integrational. The former correspond to what Propp and subsequently Bremond (in particular) take as functions but they will be treated here in a much more detailed way than is the case in their work. The term "*functions*" will be reserved for these units (though the other units are also functional), the model of description for which has become

²⁵ "The word must not be treated as an indivisible element of literary art, like a brick in building. It can be broken down into much finer verbal elements." J. Tynianov, quoted T. Todorov in *Langages* 6, 1971.

classic since Tomachevski's analysis: the purchase of a revolver has for correlate the moment when it will be used (and if not used, the notation is reversed into a sign of indecision, etc.); picking up the telephone has for correlate the moment when it will be put down; the intrusion of the parrot into Félicité's home has for correlate the episode of the stuffing, the worshipping of the parrot, etc. As for the latter, the integrational units, these comprise all the "indices" (in the very broad sense of the word²⁶), the unit now referring not to a complementary and consequential act but to a more or less diffuse concept which is nevertheless necessary to the meaning of the story: psychological indices concerning the characters, data regarding their identity, notations of "atmosphere," and so on. The relation between the unit and its correlate is now no longer distributional (often several indices refer to the same signified and the order of their occurrence in the discourse is not necessarily pertinent) but integrational. In order to understand what an indicial notation "is for," one must move to a higher level (characters' actions or narration), for only there is the indice clarified: the power of the administrative machine behind Bond, indexed by the number of telephones, has no bearing on the sequence of actions in which Bond is involved by answering the call; it finds its meaning only on the level of a general typology of the actants (Bond is on the side of order). Indices, because of the, in some sort, vertical nature of their relations, are truly semantic units: unlike "functions" (in the strict sense), they refer to a signified, not to an "operation." The ratification of indices is "higher up," sometimes even remaining virtual, outside any explicit syntagm (the "character" of a narrative agent may very well never be explicitly named while yet being constantly indexed), is a paradigmatic ratification. That of functions, by contrast, is

²⁶ These designations, like those that follow, may all be provisional.

always "further on," is a syntagmatic ratification.²⁷ Functions and indices thus overlay another classic distinction: functions involve metonymic relata, indices metaphoric relata; the former correspond to a functionality of doing, the latter to a functionality of being.²⁸

These two main classes of units, functions and indices, should already allow a certain classification of narratives. Some narratives are heavily functional (such as folk tales), while others on the contrary are heavily indicial (such as "psychological" novels); between these two poles lies a whole series of intermediary forms, dependent on history, society, genre. But we can go further. Within each of the two main classes it is immediately possible to determine two subclasses of narrative units. Returning to the class of functions, its units are not all of the same "importance": some constitute real hinge points of the narrative (or of a fragment of the narrative); others merely "fill in" the narrative space separating the hinge functions. Let us call the former *cardinal functions* (or *nuclei*) and the latter, having regard to their complementary nature, *catalyzers*. For a function to be cardinal, it is enough that the action to which it refers open (or continue, or close) an alternative that is of direct consequence for the subsequent development of the story, in short that it inaugurate or conclude an uncertainty. If, in a fragment of narrative, *the telephone rings*, it is equally possible to answer or not answer, two acts which will unfailingly carry the narrative along different paths. Between two cardinal functions however, it is always possible to set out subsidiary notations which cluster around one or other nucleus without modifying its alternative nature:

²⁷ Which does not mean that the syntagmatic setting out of functions may not *finally* hold paradigmatic relations between separate functions, as is recognized since Lévi-Strauss and Greimas.

²⁸ Functions cannot be reduced to actions (verbs), nor indices to qualities (adjectives), for there are actions that are indicial, being "signs" of a character, an atmosphere, etc.

the space separating *the telephone rang* from *Bond answered* can be saturated with a host of trivial incidents or descriptions—*Bond moved toward the desk, picked up one of the receivers, put down his cigarette*, etc. These catalyzers are still functional, insofar as they enter into correlation with a nucleus, but their functionality is attenuated, unilateral, parasitic; it is a question of a purely chronological functionality (what is described is what separates two moments of the story), whereas the tie between two cardinal functions is invested with a double functionality, at once chronological and logical. Catalyzers are only consecutive units, cardinal functions are both consecutive and consequential. Everything suggests, indeed, that the mainspring of narrative is precisely the confusion of consecution and consequence, what comes *after* being read in narrative as what is *caused by*; in which case narrative would be a systematic application of the logical fallacy denounced by Scholasticism in the formula *post hoc, ergo propter hoc*—a good motto for Destiny, of which narrative all things considered is no more than the “language.”

It is the structural framework of cardinal functions which accomplishes this “telescoping” of logic and temporality. At first sight, such functions may appear extremely insignificant; what defines them is not their spectacularity (importance, volume, unusualness or force of the narrated action), but, so to speak, the risk they entail: cardinal functions are the risky moments of a narrative. Between these points of alternative, these “dispatchers,” the catalyzers lay out areas of safety, rests, luxuries. Luxuries which are not, however, useless: it must be stressed again that from the point of view of the story a catalyzer’s functionality may be weak but not nil. Were a catalyzer purely redundant (in relation to its nucleus), it would nonetheless participate in the economy of the message; in fact, an apparently merely expletive notation always has a discursive function: it accelerates, delays, gives fresh impetus

to the discourse, it summarizes, anticipates and sometimes even leads astray.²⁹ Since what is noted always appears as being notable, the catalyzer ceaselessly revives the semantic tension of the discourse, says ceaselessly that there has been, that there is going to be, meaning. Thus, in the final analysis, the catalyzer has a constant function which is, to use Jakobson’s term, a phatic one:³⁰ it maintains the contact between narrator and addressee. A nucleus cannot be deleted without altering the story, but neither can a catalyst without altering the discourse.

As for the other main class of units, the indices, an integrational class, its units have in common that they can only be saturated (completed) on the level of characters or on the level of narration. They are thus part of a *parametrical* relation³¹ whose second—implicit—term is continuous, extended over an episode, a character or the whole work. A distinction can be made, however, between *indices* proper, referring to the character of a narrative agent, a feeling, an atmosphere (for example suspicion) or a philosophy, and *informants*, serving to identify, to locate in time and space. To say that through the window of the office where Bond is on duty the moon can be seen half-hidden by thick billowing clouds, is to index a stormy summer night, this deduction in turn forming an index of atmosphere with reference to the heavy, anguish-laden climate of an action as yet unknown to the reader. Indices always have implicit signifieds. Informants, however, do not, at least on the level of the story: they are pure data with immediate signification. Indices involve an activity of de-

²⁹ Valéry spoke of “dilatory signs.” The detective novel makes abundant use of such “confusing” units.

³⁰ [For the scheme of the six factors of verbal communication and their corresponding linguistic functions—emotive, conative, referential, phatic, metalinguistic, and poetic—see R. Jakobson, “Linguistics and Poetics” in *Style in Language*, ed. T. A. Sebeok.]

³¹ N. Ruwet calls “parametrical” an element which remains constant for the whole duration of a piece of music (for instance, the tempo in a Bach allegro or the monodic character of a solo).

ciphering, the reader is to learn to know a character or an atmosphere; informants bring ready-made knowledge, their functionality, like that of catalyzers, is thus weak without being nil. Whatever its "flatness" in relation to the rest of the story, the informant (for example, the exact age of a character) always serves to authenticate the reality of the referent, to embed fiction in the real world. Informants are realist operators and as such possess an undeniable functionality not on the level of the story but on that of the discourse.³²

Nuclei and catalyzers, indices and informants (again, the names are of little importance); these, it seems, are the initial classes into which the functional level units can be divided. This classification must be completed by two remarks. Firstly, a unit can at the same time belong to two different classes: to drink a whiskey (in an airport lounge) is an action which can act as a catalyzer to the (cardinal) notation of *waiting*, but it is also, and simultaneously, the indice of a certain atmosphere (modernity, relaxation, reminiscence, etc.). In other words, certain units can be mixed, giving a play of possibilities in the narrative economy. In the novel *Goldfinger*, Bond, having to search his adversary's bedroom, is given a master key by his associate: the notation is a pure (cardinal) function. In the film, this detail is altered and Bond laughingly takes a set of keys from a willing chambermaid: the notation is no longer simply functional but also indicial, referring to Bond's character (his easy charm and success with women). Secondly, it should be noted (this will be taken up again later) that the four classes just described can be distributed in a different way which is moreover closer to the linguistic model. Catalyzers,

³² In "Frontières du récit," *Communications* 8, 1966 [reprinted in *Figures III*], Gérard Genette distinguishes two types of description: ornamental and significant. The second clearly relates to the level of the story; the first to that of the discourse, which explains why for a long time it formed a perfectly coded rhetorical "piece": *descriptio* or *ekphrasis*, a very highly valued exercise in neo-rhetoric.

indices, and informants have a common characteristic: in relation to nuclei, they are *expansions*. Nuclei (as will be seen in a moment) form finite sets grouping a small number of terms, are governed by a logic, are at once necessary and sufficient. Once the framework they provide is given, the other units fill it out according to a mode of proliferation in principle infinite. As we know, this is what happens in the case of the sentence, which is made up of simple propositions endlessly complicated with duplications, paddings, embeddings, and so on. So great an importance did Mallarmé attach to this type of structure that from it he constructed *Jamais un coup de dés*, a poem which with its "nodes" and "loops," its "nucleus words" and its "lace words," can well be regarded as the emblem of every narrative—of every language.

3. Functional syntax

How, according to what "grammar," are the different units strung together along the narrative syntagm? What are the rules of the functional combinatory system? Informants and indices can combine freely together: as for example in the portrait which readily juxtaposes data concerning civil status and traits of character. Catalyzers and nuclei are linked by a simple relation of implication: a catalyzer necessarily implies the existence of a cardinal function to which it can connect, but not vice versa. As for cardinal functions, they are bound together by a relation of solidarity: a function of this type calls for another function of the same type and reciprocally. It is this last relation which needs to be considered further for a moment—first, because it defines the very framework of the narrative (expansions can be deleted, nuclei cannot); second, because it is the main concern of those trying to work toward a structure of narrative.

It has already been pointed out that structurally narrative institutes a confusion between consecution and consequence,

temporality and logic. This ambiguity forms the central problem of narrative syntax. Is there an atemporal logic lying behind the temporality of narrative? Researchers were still quite recently divided on this point. Propp, whose analytic study of the folk tale paved the way for the work going on today, is totally committed to the idea of the irreducibility of the chronological order: he sees time as reality and for this reason is convinced of the necessity for rooting the tale in temporality. Yet Aristotle himself, in his contrast between tragedy (defined by the unity of action) and historical narrative (defined by the plurality of actions and the unity of time), was already giving primacy to the logical over the chronological.³³ As do all contemporary researchers (Lévi-Strauss, Greimas, Bremond, Todorov), all of whom (while differing on other points) could subscribe to Lévi-Strauss's proposition that "the order of chronological succession is absorbed in an atemporal matrix structure."³⁴ Analysis today tends to "dechronologize" the narrative continuum and to "relogicize" it, to make it dependent on what Mallarmé called with regard to the French language "*the primitive thunderbolts of logic*"; or rather, more exactly (such at least is our wish), the task is to succeed in giving a structural description of the chronological illusion—it is for narrative logic to account for narrative time. To put it another way, one could say that temporality is only a structural category of narrative (of discourse), just as in language [*langue*] temporality only exists in the form of a system; from the point of view of narrative, what we call time does not exist, or at least only exists functionally, as an element of a semiotic system. Time belongs not to discourse strictly speak-

³³ *Poetics*.

³⁴ Quoted by Claude Bremond, "Le message narratif," *Communications* 4, 1964 [Claude Lévi-Strauss, "La structure et la forme," *Cahiers de l'Institut de Science Economique Appliquée* 99, March 1960.]

ing but to the referent; both narrative and language know only a semiotic time, "true" time being a "realist," referential illusion, as Propp's commentary shows. It is as such that structural analysis must deal with it.³⁵

What then is the logic which regulates the principal narrative functions? It is this that current work is actively trying to establish and that has so far been the major focus of debate. Three main directions of research can be seen. The first (Bremond) is more properly logical in approach: it aims to reconstitute the syntax of human behavior utilized in narrative, to retrace the course of the "choices" which inevitably face³⁶ the individual character at every point in the story and so to bring out what could be called an energetic logic,³⁷ since it grasps the characters at the moment when they choose to act. The second (Lévi-Strauss, Jakobson) is linguistic: its essential concern is to demonstrate paradigmatic oppositions in the functions, oppositions which, in accordance with the Jakobsonian definition of the "poetic,"³⁸ are "extended" along the line of the narrative (new developments in Greimas's work correct or complete the conception of the paradigmatic nature of functions).³⁹ The third (Todorov) is somewhat different in

³⁵ In his own way—as always perspicacious but left undeveloped—Valéry well expressed the status of narrative time: "The belief in time as agent and guiding thread is based on *the mechanism of memory and on that of combinatory discourse*," *Tel Quel* (my italics); the illusion is precisely produced by the discourse itself.

³⁶ This idea recalls Aristotle: *proairesis*, the rational choice of actions to be undertaken, is the foundation of *praxis*, the practical science which, contrary to *poiesis*, produces no object-work distinct from its agent. Using these terms, one can say that the analyst tries to reconstitute the praxis inherent in narrative.

³⁷ Such a logic, based on alternatives (*doing this or that*), has the merit of accounting for the process of dramatization for which narrative is usually the occasion.

³⁸ ["The poetic function projects the principle of equivalence of the axis of selection on to the axis of combination." Jakobson, "Linguistics and Poetics."]

³⁹ See A. J. Greimas, "Éléments pour une théorie de l'interprétation du récit mythique," *Communications* 8, 1966.

that it sets the analysis at the level of the "actions" (that is to say, of the characters), attempting to determine the rules by which narrative combines, varies, and transforms a certain number of basic predicates.

There is no question of choosing between these working hypotheses; they are not competitive but concurrent, and at present moreover are in the throes of elaboration. The only complement we will attempt to give them here concerns the dimensions of the analysis. Even leaving aside the indices, informants, and catalyzers, there still remains in a narrative (especially if it is a novel and no longer a tale) a very large number of cardinal functions and many of these cannot be mastered by the analyses just mentioned, which until now have worked on the major articulations of narrative. Provision needs to be made, however, for a description sufficiently close as to account for *all* the narrative units, for the smallest narrative segments. We must remember that cardinal functions cannot be determined by their "importance," only by the (doubly implicative) nature of their relations. A "telephone call," no matter how futile it may seem, on the one hand itself comprises some few cardinal functions (telephone ringing, picking up the receiver, speaking, putting down the receiver), while on the other, taken as a whole, it must be linkable—at the very least proceeding step by step—to the major articulations of the anecdote. The functional covering of the narrative necessitates an organization of relays the basic unit of which can only be a small group of functions, hereafter referred to (following Bremond) as a *sequence*.

A sequence is a logical succession of nuclei bound together by a relation of solidarity:⁴⁰ the sequence opens when one of its terms has no solidary antecedent and closes when another

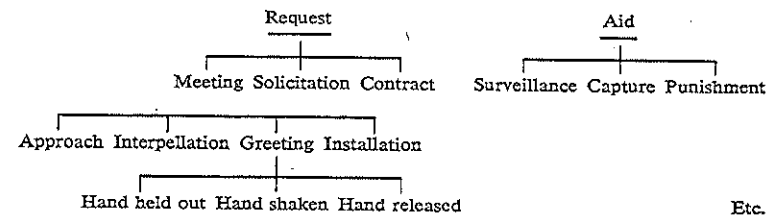
⁴⁰ In the Hjelmslevian sense of double implication: two terms presuppose one another.

of its terms has no consequent. To take a deliberately trivial example, the different functions order a drink, obtain it, drink it, pay for it, constitute an obviously closed sequence, it being impossible to put anything before the order or after the payment without moving out of the homogeneous group "*Having a drink*." The sequence indeed is always nameable. Determining the major functions of the folk tale, Propp and subsequently Bremond have been led to name them (*Fraud, Betrayal, Struggle, Contract, Seduction*, etc.); the naming operation is equally inevitable in the case of trivial sequences, the "micro-sequences" which often form the finest grain of the narrative tissue. Are these namings solely the province of the analyst? In other words, are they purely metalinguistic? No doubt they are, dealing as they do with the code of narrative. Yet at the same time they can be imagined as forming part of an inner metalanguage for the reader (or listener) who can grasp every logical succession of actions as a nominal whole: to read is to name; to listen is not only to perceive a language, it is also to construct it. Sequence titles are similar enough to the *cover words* of translation machines which acceptably cover a wide variety of meanings and shades of meaning. The narrative language [*la langue du récit*] within us comprises from the start these essential headings: the closing logic which structures a sequence is inextricably linked to its name; any function which initiates a *seduction* prescribes from the moment it appears, in the name to which it gives rise, the entire process of seduction such as we have learned it from all the narratives which have fashioned in us the language of narrative.

However minimal its importance, a sequence, since it is made up of a small number of nuclei (that is to say, in fact, of "dispatchers"), always involves moments of risk and it is this which justifies analyzing it. It might seem futile to constitute

into a sequence the logical succession of trifling acts which go to make up the offer of a cigarette (*offering, accepting, lighting, smoking*), but precisely, at every one of these points, an alternative—and hence a freedom of meaning—is possible. Du Pont, Bond's future partner, offers him a light from his lighter but Bond refuses; the meaning of this bifurcation is that Bond instinctively fears a booby-trapped gadget.⁴¹ A sequence is thus, one can say, a *threatened logical unit*, this being its justification *a minimo*. It is also founded *a maximo*: enclosed on its function, subsumed under a name, the sequence itself constitutes a new unit, ready to function as a simple term in another, more extensive sequence. Here, for example, is a micro-sequence: *hand held out, hand shaken, hand released*. This *Greeting* then becomes a simple function: on the one hand, it assumes the role of an indice (flabbiness of Du Pont, Bond's distaste); on the other, it forms globally a term in a larger sequence, with the name *Meeting*, whose other terms (*approach, halt, interpellation, sitting down*) can themselves be micro-sequences. A whole network of subrogations structures the narrative in this way, from the smallest matrices to the largest functions. What is in question here, of course, is a hierarchy that remains within the functional level: it is only when it has been possible to widen the narrative out step by step, from Du Pont's cigarette to Bond's battle against Goldfinger, that functional analysis is over—the pyramid of functions then touches the next level (that of the Actions). There is both a syntax within the sequences and a (subrogating) syntax between the sequences together. The first episode of *Goldfinger* thus takes on a "stemmatic" aspect:

⁴¹ It is quite possible to identify even at this infinitesimal level an opposition of paradigmatic types, if not between two terms, at least between two poles of the sequence: the sequence *Offer of a cigarette* spreads out, by suspending it, the paradigm *Danger/Safety* (demonstrated by Chegllov in his analysis of the Sherlock Holmes cycle), *Suspicion/Protection, Aggressiveness/Friendliness*.



Obviously this representation is analytical; the reader perceives a linear succession of terms. What needs to be noted, however, is that the terms from several sequences can easily be imbricated in one another: a sequence is not yet completed when already, cutting in, the first term of a new sequence may appear. Sequences move in counterpoint;⁴² functionally, the structure of narrative is fugued: thus it is this that narrative at once "holds" and "pulls on." Within the single work, the imbrication of sequences can indeed only be allowed to come to a halt with a radical break if the sealed-off blocks which then compose it are in some sort recuperated at the higher level of the Actions (of the characters). *Goldfinger* is composed of three functionally independent episodes, their functional stemmas twice ceasing to intercommunicate: there is no sequential relation between the swimming-pool episode and the Fort Knox episode; but there remains an actantial relation, for the characters (and consequently the structure of their relations) are the same. One can recognize here the epic pattern (a "whole made of multiple fables"): the epic is a narrative broken at the functional level but unitary at the actantial level (something which can be verified in the *Odyssey* or in Brecht's plays). The level of functions (which provides the major part of the narrative syntagm) must thus be capped by a higher level from which, step by step, the first level units draw their meaning, the level of actions.

⁴² This counterpoint was recognized by the Russian formalists, who outlined its typology; it is not without recalling the principal "intricate" structures of the sentence (see below V.1).

III. ACTIONS

1. *Toward a structural status of characters*

In Aristotelian poetics, the notion of character is secondary, entirely subsidiary to the notion of action: there may be actions without "characters," says Aristotle, but not characters without an action; a view taken over by classical theoreticians (Vossius). Later the character, who until then had been only a name, the agent of an action,⁴³ acquired a psychological consistency, became an individual, a "person," in short a fully constituted "being," even should he do nothing and of course even before acting.⁴⁴ Characters stopped being subordinate to the action, embodied immediately psychological essences; which essences could be drawn up into lists, as can be seen in its purest form in the list of "character parts" in bourgeois theater (the coquette, the noble father, etc.). From its very outset, structural analysis has shown the utmost reluctance to treat the character as an essence, even merely for purposes of classification; Tomachevski went so far as to deny the character any narrative importance, a point of view he subsequently modified. Without leaving characters out of the analysis altogether, Propp reduced them to a simple typology based not on psychology but on the unity of the actions assigned them by the narrative (*Donor of a magical agent, Helper, Villain*, etc.).

Since Propp, the character has constantly set the structural analysis of narrative the same problem. On the one hand, the characters (whatever one calls them—*dramatis personae* or *actants*) form a necessary plane of description, outside of which the slightest reported "actions" cease to be intelligible;

⁴³ It must not be forgotten that classical tragedy as yet knows only "actors," not "characters."

⁴⁴ The "character-person" reigns in the bourgeois novel; in *War and Peace*, Nikolai Rostov is from the start a good fellow, loyal, courageous, and passionate, Prince Andrei a disillusioned individual of noble birth, etc. What happens illustrates them, it does not form them.

so that it can be said that there is not a single narrative in the world without "characters,"⁴⁵ or at least without agents. Yet on the other hand, these—extremely numerous—"agents" can be neither described nor classified in terms of "persons"—whether the "person" be considered as a purely historical form, limited to certain genres (those most familiar to us it is true), in which case it is necessary to leave out of account the very large number of narratives (popular tales, modern texts) comprising agents but not persons, or whether the "person" is declared to be no more than a critical rationalization foisted by our age on pure narrative agents. Structural analysis, much concerned not to define characters in terms of psychological essences, has so far striven, using various hypotheses, to define a character not as a "being" but as a "participant." For Bremond, every character (even secondary) can be the agent of sequences, of actions which belong to him (*Fraud, Seduction*); when a single sequence involves two characters (as is usual), it comprises two perspectives, two names (what is *Fraud* for the one is *Gullibility* for the other); in short, every character (even secondary) is the hero of his own sequence. Todorov, analyzing a "psychological" novel (*Les Liaisons dangereuses*), starts not from the character-persons but from the three major relationships in which they can engage and which he calls base predicates (love, communication, help). The analysis brings these relationships under two sorts of rules: rules of *derivation*, when it is a question of accounting for other relationships, and rules of *action*, when it is a question of describing the transformation of the major relationships in the course of the story. There are many characters in

⁴⁵ If one section of contemporary literature has attacked the "character," it is not in order to destroy it (which is impossible) but to depersonalize it, which is quite different. A novel seemingly devoid of characters, such as *Drame* by Philippe Sollers, gets rid of the person to the benefit of language but nonetheless retains a fundamental play of actants confronting the very action of discourse. There is still a "subject" in this literature, but that "subject" is henceforth that of language.

Les Liaisons dangereuses but "what is said of them" (their predicates) can be classified. Finally, Greimas has proposed to describe and classify the characters of narrative not according to what they are but according to what they do (whence the name *actants*), inasmuch as they participate in three main semantic axes (also to be found in the sentence: subject, object, indirect object, adjunct) which are communication, desire (or quest), and ordeal.⁴⁶ Since this participation is ordered in couples, the infinite world of characters is, it too, bound by a paradigmatic structure (*Subject/Object, Donor/Receiver, Helper/Opponent*) which is projected along the narrative; and since an actant defines a class, it can be filled by different actors, mobilized according to rules of multiplication, substitution, or replacement.

These three conceptions have many points in common. The most important, it must be stressed again, is the definition of the character according to participation in a sphere of actions, these spheres being few in number, typical, and classifiable; which is why this second level of description, despite its being that of the characters, has here been called the level of Actions: the word *actions* is not to be understood in the sense of the trifling acts which form the tissue of the first level but in that of the major articulations of *praxis* (desire, communication, struggle).

2. The problem of the subject

The problems raised by a classification of the characters of narrative are not as yet satisfactorily resolved. Certainly there is ready agreement on the fact that the innumerable characters of narrative can be brought under rules of substitution and that, even within the one work, a single figure can absorb different characters.⁴⁷ Again, the actantial model proposed by

⁴⁶ *Sémantique structurale*.

⁴⁷ Psychoanalysis has widely accredited these operations of condensation.

Greimas (and adopted by Todorov in another perspective) seems to stand the test of a large number of narratives. Like any structural model, its value lies less in its canonic form (a matrix of six actants) than in the regulated transformations (replacements, confusions, duplications, substitutions) to which it lends itself, thus holding out the hope of an actantial typology of narratives.⁴⁸ A difficulty, however, is that when the matrix has a high classificational power (as is the case with Greimas's actants) it fails adequately to account for the multiplicity of participations as soon as these are analyzed in terms of perspectives and that when these perspectives are respected (as in Bremond's description) the system of characters remains too fragmented. The reduction proposed by Todorov avoids both pitfalls but has so far only been applied to one narrative. All this, it seems, can be quickly and harmoniously resolved. The real difficulty posed by the classification of characters is the place (and hence the existence) of the *subject* in any actantial matrix, whatever its formulation. *Who* is the subject (the hero) of a narrative? Is there—or not—a privileged class of actors? The novel has accustomed us to emphasize in one way or another—sometimes in a devious (negative) way—one character in particular. But such privileging is far from extending over the whole of narrative literature. Many narratives, for example, set two adversaries in conflict over some stake; the subject is then truly double, not reducible further by substitution. Indeed, this is even perhaps a common archaic form, as though narrative, after the fashion of certain languages, had also known a *dual* of persons. This

Mallarmé was saying already, writing of *Hamlet*: "Supernumeraries, necessarily! for in the ideal painting of the stage, everything moves according to a symbolic reciprocity of types amongst themselves or relatively to a single figure." *Crayonné au théâtre*.

⁴⁸ For example: narratives where object and subject are confounded in a single character, that is, narratives of the search for oneself, for one's own identity (*The Golden Ass*); narratives where the subject pursues successive objects (*Madame Bovary*), etc.

dual is all the more interesting in that it relates narrative to the structures of certain (very modern) games in which two equal opponents try to gain possession of an object put into circulation by a referee; a schema which recalls the actantial matrix proposed by Greimas, and there is nothing surprising in this if one is willing to allow that a game, being a language, depends on the same symbolic structure as is to be found in language and narrative: a game too is a sentence.⁴⁹ If therefore a privileged class of actors is retained (the subject of the quest, of the desire, of the action), it needs at least to be made more flexible by bringing that actant under the very categories of the grammatical (and not psychological) person. Once again, it will be necessary to look toward linguistics for the possibility of describing and classifying the personal (*je/tu*, first person/second person) or apersonal (*il*, third person), singular, dual, or plural, instance of the action. It will—perhaps—be the grammatical categories of the person (accessible in our pronouns) which will provide the key to the actional level; but since these categories can only be defined in relation to the instance of discourse, not to that of reality,⁵⁰ characters, as units of the actional level, find their meaning (their intelligibility) only if integrated in the third level of description, here called the level of Narration (as opposed to Functions and Actions).

IV. NARRATION

1. Narrative communication

Just as there is within narrative a major function of exchange (set out between a donor and a beneficiary), so, homo-

⁴⁹ Umberto Eco's analysis of the James Bond cycle ("James Bond: une combinatoire narrative," *Communications* 8, 1966) refers more to game than to language.

⁵⁰ See the analysis of person given by Benveniste in *Problèmes de linguistique générale*.

logically, narrative as object is the point of a communication: there is a donor of the narrative and a receiver of the narrative. In linguistic communication, *je* and *tu* (*I* and *you*) are absolutely presupposed by one another; similarly, there can be no narrative without a narrator and a listener (or reader). Banal perhaps, but still little developed. Certainly the role of the sender has been abundantly enlarged upon (much study of the "author" of a novel, though without any consideration of whether he really is the "narrator"); when it comes to the reader, however, literary theory is much more modest. In fact, the problem is not to introspect the motives of the narrator or the effects the narration produces on the reader, it is to describe the code by which narrator and reader are signified throughout the narrative itself. At first sight, the signs of the narrator appear more evident and more numerous than those of the reader (a narrative more frequently says *I* than *you*); in actual fact, the latter are simply more oblique than the former. Thus, each time the narrator stops "representing" and reports details which he knows perfectly well but which are unknown to the reader, there occurs, by signifying failure, a sign of reading, for there would be no sense in the narrator giving himself a piece of information. *Leo was the owner of the joint*,⁵¹ we are told in a first-person novel: a sign of the reader, close to what Jakobson calls the conative function of communication. Lacking an inventory however, we shall leave aside for the moment these signs of reception (though they are of equal importance) and say a few words concerning the signs of narration.⁵²

Who is the donor of the narrative? So far, three conceptions

⁵¹ *Double Bang à Bangkok* [secret agent thriller by Jean Bruce, 1959]. The sentence functions as a "wink" to the reader, as if he was being turned toward. By contrast, the statement "*So Leo had just left*" is a sign of the narrator, part of a process of reasoning conducted by a "person."

⁵² In "Les catégories du récit littéraire" Todorov deals with the images of narrator and reader.

seem to have been formulated. The first holds that a narrative emanates from a person (in the fully psychological sense of the term). This person has a name, the author, in whom there is an endless exchange between the "personality" and the "art" of a perfectly identified individual who periodically takes up his pen to write a story: the narrative (notably the novel) then being simply the expression of an *I* external to it. The second conception regards the narrator as a sort of omniscient, apparently impersonal, consciousness that tells the story from a superior point of view, that of God:⁵³ the narrator is at once inside his characters (since he knows everything that goes on in them) and outside them (since he never identifies with any one more than another). The third and most recent conception (Henry James, Sartre) decrees that the narrator must limit his narrative to what the characters can observe or know, everything proceeding as if each of the characters in turn were the sender of the narrative. All three conceptions are equally difficult in that they seem to consider narrator and characters as real—"living"—people (the unfailing power of this literary myth is well known), as though a narrative were originally determined at its referential level (it is a matter of equally "realist" conceptions). Narrator and characters, however, at least from our perspective, are essentially "paper beings"; the (material) author of a narrative is in no way to be confused with the narrator of that narrative.⁵⁴ The signs of the narrator are immanent to the narrative and hence readily accessible to a semiological analysis; but in order to conclude that the author himself (whether declared, hidden or withdrawn) has "signs" at his disposal which he sprinkles through his work, it is necessary to assume the existence between this

⁵³ "When will someone write from the point of view of a *superior* joke, that is as God sees things from above?" Flaubert, *Letters*.

⁵⁴ A distinction all the more necessary, given the scale at which we are working, in that historically a large mass of narratives are without authors (oral narratives, folk tales, epics entrusted to bards, reciters, etc.).

"person" and his language of a straight descriptive relation which makes the author a full subject and the narrative the instrumental expression of that fullness. Structural analysis is unwilling to accept such an assumption: *who speaks* (in the narrative) is not *who writes* (in real life) and *who writes* is not *who is*.⁵⁵

In fact, narration strictly speaking (the code of the narrator), like language, knows only two systems of signs: personal and apersonal. These two narrational systems do not necessarily present the linguistic marks attached to person (*I*) and non-person (*he*): there are narratives or at least narrative episodes, for example, which though written in the third person nevertheless have as their true instance the first person. How can we tell? It suffices to rewrite the narrative (or the passage) from *he* to *I*: so long as the rewriting entails no alteration of the discourse other than this change of the grammatical pronouns, we can be sure that we are dealing with a personal system. The whole of the beginning of *Goldfinger*, though written in the third person, is in fact "spoken" by James Bond. For the instance to change, rewriting must become impossible; thus the sentence "he saw a man in his fifties, still young-looking . . ." is perfectly personal despite the *he* ("I, James Bond, saw . . ."), but the narrative statement "the tinkling of the ice against the glass appeared to give Bond a sudden inspiration" cannot be personal on account of the verb "appeared," it (and not the *he*) becoming a sign of the apersonal. There is no doubt that the apersonal is the traditional mode of narrative, language having developed a whole tense system peculiar to narrative (based on the aorist⁵⁶), designed to wipe out the present of the speaker. As Benveniste puts it: "In narrative, no one speaks." The personal instance

⁵⁵ J. Lacan: "Is the subject I speak of when I speak the same as the subject who speaks?"

⁵⁶ E. Benveniste, *op. cit.* [especially Chapter XIX].

(under more or less disguised forms) has, however, gradually invaded narrative, the narration being referred to the *hic et nunc* of the locutionary act (which is the definition of the personal system). Thus it is that today many narratives are to be found (and of the most common kinds) which mix together in extremely rapid succession, often within the limits of a single sentence, the personal and the apersonal; as for instance this sentence from *Goldfinger*:

His eyes,	<i>personal</i>
gray-blue,	<i>apersonal</i>
looked into those of Mr. Du Pont, who did	
not know what face to put on,	<i>personal</i>
for this look held a mixture of candor,	
irony, and self-deprecation.	<i>personal</i>

The mixing of the systems is clearly felt as a facility and this facility can go as far as trick effects. A detective novel by Agatha Christie (*The Sittaford Mystery*) only keeps the enigma going by cheating on the person of the narration: a character is described from within when he is already the murderer⁵⁷—as if in a single person there were the consciousness of a witness, immanent to the discourse, and the consciousness of a murderer, immanent to the referent, with the dishonest tourniquet of the two systems alone producing the enigma. Hence it is understandable that at the other pole of literature the choice of a rigorous system should have been made a necessary condition of a work—without it always being easy fully to meet that condition.

Rigor of this kind—the aim of certain contemporary writers—is not necessarily an aesthetic imperative. What is called the psychological novel usually shows a mixture of the two sys-

⁵⁷ Personal mode: "It even seemed to Burnaby that nothing looked changed . . ." The device is still more blatant in *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, since there the murderer actually says *I*.

tems, successively mobilizing the signs of non-person and those of person; "psychology," that is, paradoxically, cannot accommodate itself to a pure system, for by bringing the whole narrative down to the sole instance of the discourse—or, if one prefers, to the locutionary act—it is the very content of the person which is threatened: the psychological person (of referential order) bears no relation to the linguistic person, the latter never defined by states of mind, intentions or traits of character but only by its (coded) place in discourse. It is this formal person that writers today are attempting to speak and such an attempt represents an important subversion (the public moreover has the impression that "novels" are no longer being written) for it aims to transpose narrative from the purely constative plane, which it has occupied until now, to the performative plane, whereby the meaning of an utterance is the very act by which it is uttered:⁵⁸ today, writing is not "telling" but saying that one is telling and assigning all the referent ("what one says") to this act of locution; which is why part of contemporary literature is no longer descriptive, but transitive, striving to accomplish so pure a present in its language that the whole of the discourse is identified with the act of its delivery, the whole *logos* being brought down—or extended—to a *lexis*.⁵⁹

2. Narrative situation

The narrational level is thus occupied by the signs of narrativity, the set of operators which reintegrate functions and actions in the narrative communication articulated on its donor and its addressee. Some of these signs have already

⁵⁸ On the performative, see Todorov's "Les catégories du récit littéraire." The classic example of a performative is the statement *I declare war* which neither "constates" nor "describes" anything but exhausts its meaning in the act of its utterance (by contrast to the statement *it is being declared war*, which constates, describes).

⁵⁹ For the opposition *logos/lexis*, see Genette, "Frontières du récit."

received study; we are familiar in oral literatures with certain codes of recitation (metrical formulas, conventional presentation protocols) and we know that here the "author" is not the person who invents the finest stories but the person who best masters the code which is practiced equally by his listeners: in such literatures the narrational level is so clearly defined, its rules so binding, that it is difficult to conceive of a "tale" devoid of the coded signs of narrative ("once upon a time," etc.). In our written literatures, the "forms of discourse" (which are in fact signs of narrativity) were early identified: classification of the modes of authorial intervention (outlined by Plato and developed by Diomedes⁶⁰), coding of the beginnings and endings of narratives, definition of the different styles of representation (*oratio directa*, *oratio indirecta* with its *inquit*, *oratio tecta*),⁶¹ study of "points of view," and so on. All these elements form part of the narrational level, to which must obviously be added the writing as a whole, its role being not to "transmit" the narrative but to display it.

It is indeed precisely in a display of the narrative that the units of the lower levels find integration: the ultimate form of the narrative, as narrative, transcends its contents and its strictly narrative forms (functions and actions). This explains why the narrational code should be the final level attainable by our analysis, other than by going outside of the narrative object, other, that is, than by transgressing the rule of immanence on which the analysis is based. Narration can only receive its meaning from the world which makes use of it: beyond the narrational level begins the world, other systems (social, economic, ideological) whose terms are no longer simply narratives but elements of a different substance (historical facts,

⁶⁰ *Genus activum vel imitativum* (no intervention of the narrator in the discourse: as for example theater); *genus enarrativum* (the poet alone speaks: sententiae, didactic poems); *genus commune* (mixture of the two kinds: epic poems).

⁶¹ H. Sorensen in *Language and Society*.

determinations, behaviors, etc.). Just as linguistics stops at the sentence, so narrative analysis stops at discourse—from there it is necessary to shift to another semiotics. Linguistics is acquainted with such boundaries which it has already postulated—if not explored—under the name of *situations*. Halliday defines the "situation" (in relation to a sentence) as "the associated non-linguistic factors,"⁶² Prieto as "the set of facts known by the receiver at the moment of the semic act and independently of this act."⁶³ In the same way, one can say that every narrative is dependent on a "narrative situation," the set of protocols according to which the narrative is "consumed." In so-called archaic societies, the narrative situation is heavily coded;⁶⁴ nowadays, avant-garde literature alone still dreams of reading protocols—spectacular in the case of Mallarmé, who wanted the book to be recited in public according to a precise combinatory scheme, typographical in that of Butor, who tries to provide the book with its own specific signs. Generally, however, our society takes the greatest pains to conjure away the coding of the narrative situation: there is no counting the number of narrational devices which seek to naturalize the subsequent narrative by feigning to make it the outcome of some natural circumstance and thus, as it were, "disinaugurating" it: epistolary novels, supposedly rediscovered manuscripts, author who met the narrator, films which begin the story before the credits. The reluctance to declare its codes characterizes bourgeois society and the mass culture issuing from it: both demand signs which do not look like signs. Yet this is only, so to speak, a structural epiphenomenon: however familiar, however casual may today be the act of opening a novel or a newspaper or of turning on the television, nothing can prevent that humble act from installing in us,

⁶² M. A. K. Halliday, op. cit.

⁶³ *Principes de noologie*.

⁶⁴ A tale, as Lucien Sebag stressed, can be told anywhere anytime, but not a mythical narrative.

all at once and in its entirety, the narrative code we are going to need. Hence the narrational level has an ambiguous role: contiguous to the narrative situation (and sometimes even including it), it gives on to the world in which the narrative is undone (consumed), while at the same time, capping the preceding levels, it closes the narrative, constitutes it definitively as utterance of a language [*langue*] which provides for and bears along its own metalanguage.

V. THE SYSTEM OF NARRATIVE

Language [*langue*] proper can be defined by the concurrence of two fundamental processes: articulation, or segmentation, which produces units (this being what Benveniste calls *form*), and integration, which gathers these units into units of a higher rank (this being *meaning*). This dual process can be found in the language of narrative [*la langue du récit*] which also has an articulation and an integration, a form and a meaning.

1. Distortion and expansion

The form of narrative is essentially characterized by two powers: that of distending its signs over the length of the story and that of inserting unforeseeable expansions into these distortions. The two powers appear to be points of freedom but the nature of narrative is precisely to include these "deviations" within its language.⁶⁵

The distortion of signs exists in linguistic language [*langue*] and was studied by Bally with reference to French and German.⁶⁶ Dystaxia occurs when the signs (of a message) are no longer simply juxtaposed, when the (logical) linearity is disturbed (predicate before subject for example). A notable form

⁶⁵ Valéry: "Formally the novel is close to the dream; both can be defined by consideration of this curious property: *all their deviations form part of them.*"

⁶⁶ *Linguistique générale et linguistique française.*

of dystaxia is found when the parts of one sign are separated by other signs along the chain of the message (for instance, the negative *ne jamais* and the verb *a pardonné* in *elle ne nous a jamais pardonné*): the sign split into fractional parts, its signified is shared out among several signifiers, distant from one another and not comprehensible on their own. This, as was seen in connection with the functional level, is exactly what happens in narrative: the units of a sequence, although forming a whole at the level of that very sequence, may be separated from one another by the insertion of units from other sequences—as was said, the structure of the functional level is fugued.⁶⁷ According to Bally's terminology, which opposes synthetic languages where dystaxia is predominant (such as German) and analytic languages with a greater respect for logical linearity and monosemy (such as French), narrative would be a highly synthetic language, essentially founded on a syntax of embedding and enveloping: each part of the narrative radiates in several directions at once. When Bond orders a whiskey while waiting for his plane, the whiskey as indice has a polysemic value, is a kind of symbolic node grouping several signifieds (modernity, wealth, leisure); as a functional unit, however, the ordering of the whiskey has to run step by step through numerous relays (consumption, waiting, departure, etc.) in order to find its final meaning: the unit is "taken" by the whole narrative at the same time that the narrative only "holds" by the distortion and irradiation of its units.

This generalized distortion is what gives the language of narrative its special character. A purely logical phenomenon, since founded on an often distant relation and mobilizing a sort of confidence in intellectual memory, it ceaselessly substi-

⁶⁷ Cf. Lévi-Strauss: "Relations pertaining to the same bundle may appear diachronically at remote intervals," *Structural Anthropology*. A. J. Greimas has emphasized the spacing out of functions.

tutes meaning for the straightforward copy of the events recounted. On meeting in "life," it is most unlikely that the invitation to take a seat would not immediately be followed by the act of sitting down; in narrative these two units, contiguous from a mimetic point of view, may be separated by a long series of insertions belonging to quite different functional spheres. Thus is established a kind of *logical time* which has very little connection with real time, the apparent pulverization of units always being firmly held in place by the logic that binds together the nuclei of the sequence. "Suspense" is clearly only a privileged—or "exacerbated"—form of distortion: on the one hand, by keeping a sequence open (through emphatic procedures of delay and renewal), it reinforces the contact with the reader (the listener), has a manifestly phatic function; while on the other, it offers the threat of an uncompleted sequence, of an open paradigm (if, as we believe, every sequence has two poles), that is to say, of a logical disturbance, it being this disturbance which is consumed with anxiety and pleasure (all the more so because it is always made right in the end). "Suspense," therefore, is a game with structure, designed to endanger and glorify it, constituting a veritable "thrilling" of intelligibility: by representing order (and no longer series) in its fragility, "suspense" accomplishes the very idea of language: what seems the most pathetic is also the most intellectual—"suspense" grips you in the "mind," not in the "guts."⁶⁸

What can be separated can also be filled. Distended, the functional nuclei furnish intercalating spaces which can be packed out almost infinitely; the interstices can be filled in with a very large number of catalyzers. Here, however, a new typology comes in, for the freedom to catalyze can be regu-

⁶⁸ J. P. Faye, writing of Klossowski's *Baphomet*: "Rarely has fiction (or narrative) so clearly revealed what it always is, necessarily: an experimentation of thought on life." *Tel Quel* 22.

lated according both to the content of the functions (certain functions are more apt than others for catalyzing—as for example *Waiting*⁶⁹) and to the substance of the narrative (writing contains possibilities of diaeresis—and so of catalyzing—far superior to those of film: a gesture related linguistically can be "cut up" much more easily than the same gesture visualized⁷⁰). The catalytic power of narrative has for corollary its elliptic power. Firstly, a function (*he had a good meal*) can economize on all the potential catalyzers it covers over (the details of the meal)⁷¹; secondly, it is possible to reduce a sequence to its nuclei and a hierarchy of sequences to its higher terms without altering the meaning of the story: a narrative can be identified even if its total syntagm be reduced to its actants and its main functions as these result from the progressive upward integration of its functional units.⁷² In other words, narrative lends itself to *summary* (what used to be called the *argument*). At first sight this is true of any discourse, but each discourse has its own kind of summary. A lyric poem, for example, is simply the vast metaphor of a single signified⁷³ and to summarize it is thus to give this signified, an operation so drastic that it eliminates the poem's identity (summarized, lyric poems come down to the signifieds *Love* and *Death*)—hence the conviction that poems cannot be

⁶⁹ Logically *Waiting* has only two nuclei: 1. the wait established 2. the wait rewarded or disappointed; the first, however, can be extensively catalyzed, occasionally even indefinitely (*Waiting for Godot*): yet another game—this time extreme—with structure.

⁷⁰ Valéry: "Proust divides up—and gives us the feeling of being able to divide up indefinitely—what other writers are in the habit of passing over."

⁷¹ Here again, there are qualifications according to substance: literature has an unrivaled elliptic power—which cinema lacks.

⁷² This reduction does not necessarily correspond to the division of the book into chapters; on the contrary, it seems that increasingly chapters have the role of introducing breaks, points of suspense (serial technique).

⁷³ N. Ruwet: "A poem can be understood as the outcome of a series of transformations applied to the proposition 'I love you.'" "Analyse structurale d'un poème français," *Linguistics* 3, 1964. Ruwet here refers precisely to the analysis of paranoiac delirium given by Freud in connection with President Schreber ("Psychoanalytic Notes on an Autobiographical Account of a Case of Paranoia").

summarized. By contrast, the summary of a narrative (if conducted according to structural criteria) preserves the individuality of the message; narrative, in other words, is *translatable* without fundamental damage. What is untranslatable is determined only at the last, narrational, level. The signifiers of narrativity, for instance, are not readily transferable from novel to film, the latter utilizing the personal mode of treatment only very exceptionally;⁷⁴ while the last layer of the narrational level, namely the writing, resists transference from one language to another (or transfers very badly). The translatability of narrative is a result of the structure of its language, so that it would be possible, proceeding in reverse, to determine this structure by identifying and classifying the (varyingly) translatable and untranslatable elements of a narrative. The existence (now) of different and concurrent semiotics (literature, cinema, comics, radio/television) would greatly facilitate this kind of analysis.

2. *Mimesis and meaning*

The second important process in the language of narrative is integration: what has been disjoined at a certain level (a sequence for example) is most often joined again at a higher level (a hierarchically important sequence, the global signified of a number of scattered indices, the action of a class of characters). The complexity of a narrative can be compared to that of an organization profile chart, capable of integrating backward and forward movements; or, more accurately, it is integration in various forms which compensates for the seemingly unmasterable complexity of units on a particular level. Integration guides the understanding of the discontinuous elements, simultaneously contiguous and heterogeneous (it is

⁷⁴ Once again, there is no relation between the grammatical "person" of the narrator and the "personality" (or subjectivity) that a film director puts into his way of presenting a story: the *camera-I* (continuously identified with the vision of a particular character) is exceptional in the history of cinema.

thus that they appear in the syntagm which knows only one dimension—that of succession). If, with Greimas, we call *isotopy* the unity of meaning (that, for instance, which impregnates a sign and its context), then we can say that integration is a factor of isotopy: each (integrational) level gives its isotopy to the units of the level below, prevents the meaning from "dangling"—inevitable if the staggering of levels were not perceived. Narrative integration, however, does not present itself in a serenely regular manner like some fine architectural style leading by symmetrical chicaneries from an infinite variety of simple elements to a few complex masses. Very often a single unit will have two correlates, one on one level (function of a sequence), the other on another (indice with reference to an actant). Narrative thus appears as a succession of tightly interlocking mediate and immediate elements; *dystaxia* determines a "horizontal" reading, while integration superimposes a "vertical" reading: there is a sort of structural "limping," an incessant play of potentials whose varying falls give the narrative its dynamism or energy: each unit is perceived at once in its surfacing and in its depth and it is thus that the narrative "works"; through the concurrence of these two movements the structure ramifies, proliferates, uncovers itself—and recovers itself, pulls itself together: the new never fails in its regularity. There is, of course, a freedom of narrative (just as there is a freedom for every speaker with regard to his or her language), but this freedom is limited, literally *hemmed in*: between the powerful code of language [*langue*] and the powerful code of narrative a hollow is set up—the sentence. If one attempts to embrace the whole of a written narrative, one finds that it starts from the most highly coded (the phonematic, or even the merismatic, level), gradually relaxes until it reaches the sentence, the farthest point of combinatorial freedom, and then begins to tighten up again, moving progressively from small groups of sentences (micro-

sequences), which are still very free, until it comes to the main actions, which form a strong and restricted code. The creativity of narrative (at least under its mythical appearance of "life") is thus situated *between two codes*, the linguistic and the translinguistic. That is why it can be said paradoxically that *art* (in the Romantic sense of the term) is a matter of statements of detail, whereas *imagination* is mastery of the code: "It will be found in fact," wrote Poe, "that the ingenious are always fanciful, and the *truly* imaginative never otherwise than analytic . . ."⁷⁵

Claims concerning the "realism" of narrative are therefore to be discounted. When a telephone call comes through in the office where he is on duty, Bond, so the author tells us, reflects that "Communications with Hong Kong are as bad as they always were and just as difficult to obtain." Neither Bond's "reflection" nor the poor quality of the telephone call is the real piece of information; this contingency perhaps gives things more "life" but the true information, which will come to fruition later, is the localization of the telephone call, Hong Kong. In all narrative imitation remains contingent.⁷⁶ The function of narrative is not to "represent," it is to constitute a spectacle still very enigmatic for us but in any case not of a mimetic order. The "reality" of a sequence lies not in the "natural" succession of the actions composing it but in the logic there exposed, risked, and satisfied. Putting it another way, one could say that the origin of a sequence is not the observation of reality, but the need to vary and transcend the first *form* given man, namely repetition: a sequence is essentially a whole within which nothing is repeated. Logic has here an emancipatory value—and with it the entire narrative. It

⁷⁵ "The Murders in the Rue Morgue."

⁷⁶ G. Genette rightly reduces *mimesis* to passages of directly reported dialogue (cf. "Frontières du récit"); yet even dialogue always contains a function of intelligibility, not of mimesis.

may be that men ceaselessly reinject into narrative what they have known, what they have experienced; but if they do, at least it is in a form which has vanquished repetition and instituted the model of a process of becoming. Narrative does not show, does not imitate; the passion which may excite us in reading a novel is not that of a "vision" (in actual fact, we do not "see" anything). Rather, it is that of meaning, that of a higher order of relation which also has its emotions, its hopes, its dangers, its triumphs. "What takes place" in a narrative is from the referential (reality) point of view literally *nothing*;⁷⁷ "what happens" is language alone, the adventure of language, the unceasing celebration of its coming. Although we know scarcely more about the origins of narrative than we do about the origins of language, it can reasonably be suggested that narrative is contemporaneous with monologue, a creation seemingly posterior to that of dialogue. At all events, without wanting to strain the phylogenetic hypothesis, it may be significant that it is at the same moment (around the age of three) that the little human "invents" at once sentence, narrative, and the Oedipus.

1966

⁷⁷ Mallarmé: "A dramatic work displays the succession of exteriors of the act without any moment retaining reality and, in the end, anything happening." *Crayonné au théâtre*.