

The Rhetoric of Meaning: Generative Anthropology and the Rhetorical Approach to Narratology

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Abstract

This paper compares rhetorical narratology to Generative Anthropology in order to point out important similarities between their underlying assumptions. It also shows how they can contribute to each other and together advance our understanding of narrative as a complex and heterogeneous genre of literature. The argument starts with situating the rhetorical approach to narrative theory in relation to other branches of narratology for the purpose of demonstrating its emphasis on the communicative character of narrative over its “content.” The communicative model of rhetorical narratology is similar in its underlying assumptions to the scene of representation in Generative Anthropology insofar as it presupposes a common cognitive environment or a shared ethical space. The paper further claims that although in practical terms, the method of reading employed by rhetorical narratologists does not need a minimal anthropological hypothesis to sharpen its interpretative focus, it would benefit from the intuitions of Generative Anthropology as an explanatory scaffolding to justify its praxis and theoretical observations. Thus Generative Anthropology’s originary hypothesis about the configuration of the scene can support two innovations by rhetorical theory: firstly, multiperspectivism engendered by narrative thinking, and, secondly, framing a rhetorical reading in terms of an oscillation between response and evaluation. In its turn, the rhetorical approach, which gives a great deal of attention to the dynamics of reader response, can prompt Generative Anthropology to contemplate whether or how individual paths to narrative closure affect meaning.

Keywords: rhetorical narratology, rhetorical approach to narrative theory, narrative multiperspectivism, narrative intentionality, reader response, narrative progression, narrative in Generative Anthropology, scene of representation.

Nobody knows what narrative is. We define it traditionally as the form of discourse that represents a series of events, but this definition lacks important specifics that would help us

make sense of narrativity as an affective, temporal, pedagogical, cognitive, performative, structural, and linguistic phenomenon. We can isolate its constitutive parts and effects, but it is very challenging to put them together as a unified concept.

Consider characters, to whom events happen. Having access to their thoughts, feelings, and desires, (a privilege we do not have with real people), we engage with the events they undergo and, as William Flesch puts it, *actively will* on their behalf or against them (2012, 6). Certainly, narrative's ability to draw us into the vicarious experiencing of these events is central to its meaning-making potential. But the experiential quality of the plot also affects our understanding. It is not just "a series" of events but a specific arrangement of this series. Plots have different shapes, and these shapes influence the way we construct meaning within a created framework of expectation. Then there is setting, which has more recently received more attention under the guise of *fictional world*. It is hard to know what it is exactly - an imaginary referential object, a cognitive environment, a scene on which characters act? Questions that surround it are those of how it can be delineated and how it shapes the story "contained" within it. Nebulous as the category is, it is helpful mental scaffolding, according to one view, for theorizing events: an event is a jump from one potential world to another.^[1] But on top of these ways of accounting for what is going on in the story itself, we cannot lose sight of the narrated aspect, the fact that the story does not exist as an artifact in itself but is told by a narrator to a narratee. The story and narration elements are heterogeneous to each other yet inseparable, both presupposed by narrative as a holistic concept. Even as we weave the events of our day together into a story in a constantly running, unstoppable process of what Peter Goldie, in an aptly named book *The Mess Inside*, calls "narrative thinking," we also narrate this story to ourselves: we are both the narrator and narratee. But even though it is hard to pinpoint what narrative is exactly, and even while those of us in Generative Anthropology occasionally disagree with others on whether animal communication can be called language, we would all agree that only human beings tell stories.

Generative Anthropology has dealt both with the story and narration aspects of narrativity as derivations from the originary scene. In *Originary Thinking* and his "Originary Narrative" article, Eric Gans focuses on the story and traces what we perceive as its suspense-generating drive toward closure to the origin of signification, which gives birth to the new dimension of verticality and creates the span of deferral ("the origin of language is also ... the origin of narrative"). Thus in *Originary Thinking*, Gans connects narrative temporality of to the emergence of the declarative sentence in the context of ritual. The declarative, according to his genealogy of the linguistic forms, came into being as a failed response to an imperative in order to express the absence of a requested object. But while in the profane, everyday context, the interlocutor is only interested in the descriptive information of where the object can be found, in the ritual context, the temporality of communication itself becomes important because the audience wants to "[maintain] the scene of ritual presence through which communal peace is preserved and reinforced ... as an awaiting" (97). This

state of awaiting is instantiated narratively as a series of predicates that tell the story of the “coming of the divinity,” beginning from absence to its full presence (97). The “Originary Narrative” article reformulates this in minimal terms by stating that the sign simply tells the story of its own constitution as it “translates” the horizontal gesture of appropriation into the vertical one of signification. What accounts for the temporality of the narrative form then is the pre-linguistic acquisitive movement being retrieved through the prolongation of sign toward its referent that symbolically substitutes for the object of appetite. It can be figured as a final resolution of a quest or a character’s accession to the center of significance or even the reader’s successful arrival at the meaning of the story.

In “New Thoughts on Originary Narrative,” Gans turns his attention to the narrational aspect, deriving it from the act of imitation. As he explains, “the originary analysis of storytelling conceives narration as an extension of the reciprocal exchange of the originary sign.” But even though the exchange is reciprocal, it is always prompted by someone who goes first and thus commands the group’s attention. This initiation of action is the impetus of the narrator-led and thus asymmetrical narrator-narratee dynamic. “Submission to the narrator is analogous to submission to the mimetic mediation of the first in the originary event, just as the desires we espouse under the narrator’s influence are analogous to the desire aroused by the originary central object.” In mediating the group’s mimetic desires, the narrator undertakes the deferral of the mimetic conflict. In other words, the aesthetic prolongation of the sign is contextualized by the ethical dimension of narrative. The aesthetic effects of the story are inseparable from the ethics of narrative communication.

In my own GA take on narrative, I focus on the interaction of the narrator and narratee on the scene of representation incorporating some important insights of narrative theory on the structure and dynamics of narrative communication.^[2] In the current article, I want to return to the topic of narrative communication from the dual perspectives of GA, on the one hand, and a particular branch of narrative theory called the rhetorical approach, on the other. Recent and relatively recent developments in this area show interesting similarities and convergences between rhetorical narratology and GA’s model of narrativity. My goal is to explore these similarities with the view toward situating relevant narratological concepts in the more minimal and explanatory context of GA, but also bringing more nuanced narratological forms of analysis to bear on the GA’s rather large-grained theoretical apparatus. Toward the end, I will consider the meaning of narrative temporality in light of both approaches.

Without trying to be comprehensive or historically and terminologically precise, I will give a brief background of how rhetorical narratology came to be and situate it among some other approaches. Until relatively recently, the study of narrative did not make the communicative aspect of narrative, that is to say, the fact that stories are told by story-tellers to their audiences, the centerpiece of its analytical pursuit. In trying to understand what narrative is, it focused on the story itself as the object of the study and dealt with the narrativity

aspect as a secondary phenomenon. Older, structuralism-inspired approaches to narrative theory mainly concerned themselves with the structure of the plot, the phenomenology of time, and the question of interpretation. For brevity's sake, I am bracketing a parallel line of inquiry into the reader's response to narrative, comprising investigations into the nature of suspense or identification with literary characters, which cut across these divisions but will return to it when I discuss rhetorical narratology. To resume then, the first of these research angles focuses on narrative elements, classifying narrative as a synchronous artifact, a narrative *langue*, and to this effect, systematizing plot types and articulating the grammar of narratives. The "building block" of a plot, according to this view, is a narrative event: a narrative is commonly understood as a succession of events.^[3] But event itself is notoriously hard to pin down. The usual definition, that of "an event is a change of state" type, does not bear close scrutiny. Would any trivial action by a character, such as getting up from a chair or walking toward the door, be counted as a change of state? In response to this criticism, some narratologists clarify that this must be a significant change of state, prompting the question of how to determine significance, a difficult question, which has not been answered satisfactorily.

The second line of questioning is motivated by a desire to capture the temporal nature of narrative as a cognitive phenomenon, drawing a distinction between the story as a chronological sequence of events and discourse, the order in which the events are actually narrated (which rarely follows strict chronology). Story in its chronological sense (also called *fabula* in Russian Formalism), is an atemporal object, a plotting of points along a time axis, that we can perceive at a glance. Narrative discourse (correspondingly, *syuzhet*), on the other hand, unfolds in time and mobilizes our faculties of anticipation and remembering. *Fabula* is commonly seen as ontologically prior to discourse insofar as fictional events, invented as they may be, "really" do happen in a given order in the fictional universe of a literary work). But in another view, less indebted to structuralism, the chronological sequence is a post-construction that comes into existence as a result of *syuzhet*-processing.

Yet another distinct emphasis of narrative theory has been on the narrated aspect rather than the story as the content or object of narration. Stories (even in non-literary media) are told from a narrative perspective or point of view, which guides us in our interpretation of what has happened. Concepts such as *narrator* and *focalizer* foreground what is being told vs. what is being seen, with both reflecting the two connotations of perspective (or point of view), the mental and the visual, respectively. This is when/why interpretation comes into play: we do not have direct access to the fictional world with its fictional "facts"; our knowledge is skewed and limited because we are getting a filtered version. The accuracy of our interpretation, in other words, is always at risk, which is known as the problem of an unreliable narrator.

But interpretative concerns encompass not only the classical problem of unreliability but also more recent, post-classical interrogations of ideology and narrative authority ("post-

classical" is the label for the late post-modern and post-millennial developments in narrative theory). In other words, we may trust the narrator's reporting but mistrust the overall perspective of the text which we may perceive as biased, uncongenial, intellectually unsound, or originating from a suspect source. This broader interrogation of perspective and interpretation receives a more nuanced treatment in the model of narrative frames, which re-conceptualizes the narrator and narratee. Previously, they were seen as regular elements of narrative among other elements, but now they are "elevated" as a cognitive bracket to form a narrative frame around the story. To put it another way, a story is not a self-sufficient artifact: it is a "missive" enclosed in a communicative "envelope" that designates the sender and receiver. The expanded version of this model conceives of a series of embedded envelopes or frames. The frames on the levels closest to the story are those reflecting the communication between the narrator and narratee. There could be more than one because we may be reading a story within a story, and so on... It is sometimes debated whether the narrator-narratee frame should always be presumed or imposed, given that an explicit narrative voice is often missing, and we hardly ever hear explicit invocations of a narratee of the "Reader, I married him" variety in contemporary novels. But those who argue that this layer is indispensable justify it by pointing out that an implicit narrative voice is inherent in the genre itself with its origin in oral tradition. Around this envelope, we find the one of the implied author vs the implied reader. The former could be seen either as a construct by the reader or, alternatively, the construct of the text, an index of its "designedness." The implied reader is what the reader construes as the implied author's intended audience. And finally, the outer envelope addresses the communication between the real author and real audience, which might become relevant in some cases of biographical criticism, textual ambiguities, or perceived ideological discrepancies between what the narrative suggests and our knowledge of the real author's opinions.

On this view, while unreliable narrators might have opinions we are not meant to endorse, the ultimate ethical ground of the text lies in the ideology we can ascribe to the implied author, deducing it from the gaps between what the narrator says and what the text suggests. Consequently, we may accept or reject the author's position. This is what is referred to as the ethics of narration. Another important distinction that should be made is one between the functions of the narrator-narratee vs. implied author-implied reader frames. The former is the function of communication, which both transmits the story and controls its rhetorical effects; the latter is the function of fictionality expressive of a fictional narrative's status as an invention. The following example could make this clear. Imagine that a friend, who is a talented story-teller, is telling you about something that happened in her work. Through her use of vivid language, gestures, and facial expressions, she can make her narration very engaging. She could also arrange the order of what is revealed in a very skillful way so as to entrap you in suspense and spring on you a surprising revelation. She might even be very explicit in her evaluation of the related events, with which you may or may not agree. But you would not be looking for themes or symbols in her story because these, among some other aspects of narrativity, belong not to communication but to

fictionality, the quality of being invented, i.e. intentional design.

All of these perspectives struggle in different ways to resolve the problem of narrative hybridity, the fact that narrative is both an object for cognition and a performative phenomenon. And in its heterogeneity, it is also subject to dual temporality: the temporality of the *told* (a story, which “represents” time) and that of *telling* (narrating that story “in” time). As a result, each approach runs into some kind of impasse and pivots around a point of undecidability or contradiction. Take the structuralist approach, which treats narrative as representation. While regular grammars work with well-defined objects, narrative grammars are based on (significant) events, which, as already mentioned, are difficult to identify and distinguish from trivial (non-)events. The crux of the problem is that significance depends on the framework of expectation that is being created in the course of narration. In other words, a structural analysis depends on a variable that belongs to narrative’s performative dimension. The same problem occurs within the *fabula* vs. *syuzhet* problematic. While *fabula* is a structural representation that visually plots the events of the chronology on the axis of time and can thus be grasped at a glance, *syuzhet*, again, is contextual and performative. The primacy of one vs. the other is ultimately undecidable since the two plot-related concepts belong to two incommensurate “ontologies” of narrativity. The same is true for the theorization of narrative perspective, which is also motivated by the incompatibility between the cognitive and performative dimensions of narrativity. The notion of perspective arises out of trying to “cognitivize” multiple instances of communication – dialogues between characters, narrators situated on different levels of embedded narration, as well as the position of the implied author. But bringing the discourse of narrators and focalizers into the structural analysis of story elements creates an unnatural yoking: the two do not belong within the same conceptual realm.

It is here where rhetorical narratology enters. I do not know whether rhetorical narratologists would agree with me—and there are, no doubt, different ways to derive the genealogy of the rhetorical approach from other concerns—but I connect the emergence of this model with a search for a new perspective that would resolve the uneasy balancing act of accounting for narrative heterogeneity, as outlined above. The rhetorical approach brackets the story as representation and an object of cognition and privileges the narrative process. James Phelan and Peter Rabinowitz define narrative as communication, namely: “Narrative is somebody telling somebody else, on some occasion, and for some purposes, that something happened to someone or something” (2012, 3).^[4] According to this definition, it is the act and context of communication that are foregrounded, with the story being blurred as “something [that] happened.” Stressing that it’s not the story as a static artifact that is the object of inquiry, Phelan elsewhere states that “narrative is itself an event—more specifically, a multidimensional, purposive communication from a teller to an audience” (2017, 5). Consequently, he subsumes all perspectival distinctions, such as those between focalizing characters, narrative frames, the implied and real authors under “multidimensionality.” Instead of specifying and juxtaposing different levels and sources of

perspective, the rhetorical approach “identifies a feedback loop among authorial agency textual phenomena . . . , and reader response” (2012, 5). In other words, all communication takes place between the author and reader and not between imaginary agencies: “texts are designed by authors to affect readers in particular ways” (2017, 6).

Phelan’s theory of the reader takes an innovative approach. Instead of postulating different kinds of abstract and concrete readers, both as things-in-themselves and as conceived by the author, he envisions all of these positions being occupied at the same time by real readers. For fictional texts, he identifies four distinct positions. The first one is the actual audience, real people reading the book in their own historical time. The second is the authorial audience, the people that the author has in mind because they are “the group that shares the knowledge, values, prejudices, fears, and experiences that the author expected in his or her readers” (2017, 7). The third type of audience is the audience addressed by the narrator, that is, the narratee. And the final group is the narrative audience, “an observer position within the storyworld. As observers, the members of the narrative audience regard the characters and events as real rather than invented” (2017, 7). The last two classes might appear similar, but Phelan and Rabinowitz clarify the difference, explaining that while “The narrative audience is a role that the actual reader takes on while reading; the narratee, in contrast, is a character position in the text, one that the narrative audience in a sense observes” (2012, 7). They use an example of the frame narrative in *Frankenstein* to illustrate the difference: “we do not pretend to be Mrs Saville, to whom Captain Walton is addressing his letters; rather we pretend to be a narrative audience that views her as a real person and that, in a sense, reads over her shoulder” (2012 7).

What seems especially promising and original in this approach is the above theoretical move of postulating the reader’s multi-perspectivism. Of the four audiences, only the actual reader and the narratee within the text are determinate; the other two are ideations that an actual reader will or may adopt. Real readers are free to inhabit the authorial position if they find it congenial; but they may also choose to reject it if they see the author’s worldview as hostile or incompatible with their own. In the case of joining the authorial audience, real readers become what Phelan calls *rhetorical readers*, those who now possess “the double consciousness that allows [them] to experience the events as real and to retain the tacit knowledge that they are invented” (2017, 8). Once they have joined the authorial audience, they must, by default, join the narrative audience, as well. But even here, they are in a double position because they are free to either take the narrative account as authoritative or disbelieve it as naive, ignorant, or ethically problematic. In this way, Phelan’s (and Rabinowitz’s) rhetorical approach can incorporate the communicational frames model but without a strict separation between perspectival levels and positions. All perspectives exist within the purview of the reader, who could inhabit them simultaneously, or jump between them in the course of reading, as Phelan shows through multiple examples in *Somebody Telling Somebody Else*.

Perspectival instability emphasizes another important point that the rhetorical approach makes. The author-audience interaction forms a dynamic *progression* of the reader's journey along the cognitive, affective, ethical, and aesthetic axes of responses. All of these levels of responses can be hypothetically activated in concert, creating a polyphony of reading experiences. These reading progressions are brought together with the textual dynamic, what we normally think as the unfolding of the story, but can often "trump . . . the logic of event sequence or of telling situations" (2017, 4). The reading-dynamic progression is central to rhetorical narrative analysis, which conceives of reading as a two-step process: "rhetorical readers . . . [are invited to] evaluate [their] experiences. . . . Indeed, rhetorical readers do not complete their acts of reading until they take this second step" (2017, 8).

While Phelan and Rabinowitz subordinate the story to communication in their analysis, Richard Walsh's take on the rhetorical approach is even more radical. Situating his model in the pragmatics of communication, Walsh appeals to the relevance theory of Dan Sperber and Dierdre Wilson to argue that communication does not need to be referentially grounded to be relevant. Relevance theory is itself rooted in the model of conversational implicature by H.P. Grice, according to whom relevance attaches itself to the overall context of communication constructed through inferences or implicatures. In other words, speech acts "fulfil the appropriateness conditions of relevance . . . not by being informative, but by being exhibitative-by being tellable" (2007, 21). Sperber and Wilson, as quoted in Walsh, articulate this as a communicative intention, an intention to "inform . . . of one's informative intention" or to "manifest an intention to make something manifest" (2007, 24). The informative content itself (explicature) cannot be isolated from the implicatures inherent in the act of communication. It is the chain of implicatures or inferences that maintains the context of relevance. From the perspective of GA, it is interesting that Sperber and Wilson refer to the behavior that manifests an intention to manifest as "ostension" or "ostensive behaviour," formulating their principle of relevance in the following way: "Every act of ostensive communication communicates the presumption of its own optimal relevance" (qtd. In 2007, 25).

In applying these insights to fiction, Walsh takes issue with some conventional views of fictionality. Thus he criticizes a common enough view of a fictional story as a speech act that has a fictional referent, something like a fictional world, objecting that this "desire to treat fictions as ontological wholes, as worlds, transforms the communicative process of inference from the implicatures of an utterance into a quite different process of ontological extrapolation" (2018(a), 3). He also argues with another wide-spread misconception (according to him), namely that fiction is a pretense or make-believe speech. Not so, he says, fictionality is a mode of a serious, non-referential, speech act that is simply light on information, or "indirectly rather than directly informative" (2018(a), 11). "The distinguishing feature of fictionality," he claims, "is not its relation to falsehood, then, but its independence from directly informative kinds of relevance" (2018(a), 2). Instead, "the direct informative relevance of the narrative instance is superseded by the second-order

relevance it affords when considered *as* such a narrative instance” (2018(a), 13). This second-order relevance refers to filling in the reader’s expectations with contextual inferences in the direction of the overall increase of relevance. In this light, “narrative closure figures less as the resolution of plot in itself . . . than as the resolution of the evaluations of relevance,” such that “The narrative force of fiction depends upon assumptions carried forward, enriched, modified, reappraised, overturned in the process of reading” (2007, 30-31). The narrative pressure that is built up by the pursuit of relevance carries the rhetorical force of cumulative aesthetic and cognitive effects. Walsh thus sees fictionality as a rhetorical resource attaching itself to the communicative act itself rather than its fictional referent; in other words, a feature of the communicative act rather than its product. What the rhetoric of fictionality aims at is a kind of “re-orientation of communicative attention . . . in the shared cognitive environment between communicator and audience” (2018(a), 10).

For the sake of comparing the rhetorical approach to the GA theory of narrative, I will treat both Phelan’s and Walsh’s models as consistent with each other, and so will be talking about one rhetorical model even though there are differences between the two with respect to the contingency of referentiality. But for my purposes, they both present a novel and productive way of looking at narratives that shares important assumptions about the nature of communication and communication’s role in narrative discourse. Walsh’s conceptualization of narrative discourse apparatus is especially close to that of GA. It is easy to draw parallels between his re-orientation of the speaker and audience’s attention to a communicative intention in the common cognitive environment, on the one hand, and the sign users’ joint attention to the signifying center on the scene of representation, on the other. But Phelan’s approach too constitutes a radical departure from the tradition of making the story the main object of study. By conflating various positionalities and subsuming them under just two categories, those of the author and the audience, he loosens the rigidly stratified narrative communication model, which, despite its recognition of the communicative aspect, ends up putting the emphasis on the story, as well, because it directs attention to it by representing it as a framed object. By turning away from the literalist reading of the story or fictional world as referential objects, the rhetorical model transfers attention to the scenic aspect of discourse and the symbolic status of the central object.

From my disciplinary perspective, I interpret the emergence of rhetorical narratology as a harmonizing development that brings narrative theory and GA on a path of consilience. With its prioritizing of the communicative act over the representational object (Walsh 2018(a), 12), the rhetorical approach shows sensitivity to the performative dimension of narrative interaction underlain by something like a GA scene. It is more explicit in Walsh’s postulation of a shared cognitive environment. But it can also be inferred from Phelan’s description of the shared ethics of reading: “The ethics is based on reciprocity and trust: the author and the audience assume that narrative communication is a shared enterprise, albeit one in which the author takes the lead” (2017, 22)). The idea of shared enterprise strikes me as

implicitly scenic: the author and the reader are mutually aware of their common goal, but with the author being in the privileged position of firstness.[\[5\]](#)

But can we take this observation about compatibility further? Can GA fill some gaps in rhetorical narratology, and the other way around? In considering this question, I will, from this point on, refer only to Phelan's *Somebody Telling Somebody Else*, to limit my discussion to one particular work, which is convenient for my purposes because of its succinct model of a feedback loop between the authorial agency, textual phenomena, and reader response that is worked out for a great variety of rhetorical situations. One can start by saying that it is difficult to imagine ways in which Phelan's compelling and nuanced close readings could be improved. This, in a sense, serves as "the proof of the pudding" with regard to the question of whether rhetorical narratology "needs" GA's intervention. It seems to have all the necessary analytical tools to generate a rhetorical reading, which, according to Phelan, enriches and expands the reader's engagement with the cognitive, affective, ethical, and aesthetic dimensions of a literary work (2017, 9). These rhetorical registers are themselves produced as responses to the three types of readerly interests, namely, mimetic ("tied to the rhetorical readers' participation in the narrative audience" and "evolving judgments and emotions, their desires, hopes, expectations, satisfactions, and disappointments"), thematic ("interest in the ideational function of the characters and in the cultural, ideological, philosophical, or ethical issues being addressed by the narrative"), and synthetic ("interest and attention to the characters and larger narrative as artificial constructs") (10). Deploying these conceptual distinctions, *Somebody Telling Somebody Else* generates surprising and helpful insights into the workings of various rhetorical resources, showing, for example, how some types of narrative unreliability can, paradoxically, engender trust as a reader's response.

Where GA can intervene is in providing a more minimal explanatory model for the rhetorical effects Phelan is uncovering. There are three important claims that *Somebody Telling Somebody Else* makes that especially interest me and that I would like to re-articulate using GA's conceptual apparatus. The first one has to do with his theory's flexible use of positionality. For example, the real reader, as already mentioned, may choose to occupy the position of the authorial reader, that is the reader that the author is addressing, and as the authorial reader, he will also occupy the position of the narrative audience. In his turn, the author "relies (consciously or intuitively) on the authorial audience's unfolding responses to the narrative progression as he or she constructs new parts of the text" (32). In other words, the reader inhabits the position of the author as he conceives his reader, while the author can also occupy the position of the reader. This reciprocal "mind reading" can, for example, produce what Phelan calls the *crossover effect*: "readerly dynamics-rhetorical readers' unfolding responses to the progression-cross over into the textual dynamics and lend a logic to the events that is more powerful than the logic of external probability" (2017, 53). While Phelan calls this "empathic" ability to experience the other's position "double consciousness," in following his own analysis, we can ascertain that it is more than double.

Thus the reader, other than being himself, can occupy the authorial reader's position and become a member of the narrative audience, at the same time, while also inhabiting the consciousness of one or more characters. All of these positions are associated with different degrees of understanding: a character can be in the dark or know more than the narratee; the narratee may disbelieve the narrative; the authorial reader may agree with the author's moral position while the real reader may reject it and still be able to entertain it on the contingent basis of stepping into the authorial reader's shoes. This multiperspectivism is a distinguishing feature of narrative consciousness, usually talked about in connection to our relationship to characters as the phenomenon of identification. Rhetorical narratology takes a broader view and ascribes this proliferation of perspectives to a system of intentionality—a "larger system of thought" that governs narrative's "purposive design" (203). Instead of imputing individual perspectives and intentions to individual agents, the book locates intention in the authorial agency of the feedback loop between it, the textual phenomena, and reader response: "the intentionality of [the authorial] agency . . . is accessible through textual phenomena and . . . testable against reader response" (2017, 203). Put another way, our amazing competence in jumping between perspectives while keeping in mind different perspectives we are simultaneously embodying is contained in the understanding of narrative as something that someone tells someone else on some occasion and with some purpose.

While the nature of identification and perspectivism has been disputed, and the notion of intentionality has been controversial in literary analysis until relatively recently (reclaimed by theories such as rhetorical narratology, which recognized that we attribute intentionality to acts of communication), Generative Anthropology has accounted for these phenomena by deriving them from the origin of symbolic representation. Our ability to align ourselves with and ascribe intentionality to multiple agencies can be connected to our paradoxical double position on two scenes, at the same time, the communal scene with the shared center of symbolic significance and the individual scene on which each participant imagines acceding to the object individually. On this individual scene, as Gans explains in "The Paradox of Desire and Art," "desire 'feeds on itself,' deferral making the object of appetite significant/sacred within the individual's own scene of representation. The intentionality this gives rise to in the individual, unlike the expression of significance through the sign, makes him aware of his independence from the community." I would also add that intentionality makes itself manifest on the private scene of representation, which gives rein to the acquisitive desire. Within his private space of imagination, the participant wants to be alone to possess the appetitive object, and, at the same time, also wants to know what others intend to do about it: will they abstain from the object or do they plan to deceive others who defer appropriation by breaking the agreement of the collective scene (and thus going for the object illegitimately). Intentionality is a feature of language and symbolic representation that has its genesis in the origin of the sign: our scenic consciousness always wants to know what others think and intend, and this is something that is thematized by the narrative form.

Multiperspectivism, as categorized and exemplified by Phelan, follows from our interest to ascertain the others' intentions by aligning with their points of view. The proliferation of positionalities on different levels is enabled by the generativity of the scene and our ability to occupy different scenes at the same time. Just as we can align ourselves with characters, being engaged, say, in dialogue with other characters on the imaginary scene of the fictional world, and perceive the conversation from their perspective, we can also distance ourselves from the story and characters' interests and join the narrative audience addressed by the narrator on the scene where the narration is taking place. While the two scenes are distinct, they both belong to the imaginary scene. At the same time, the reader understands that the communication on the imaginary scene is initiated by the author on the real/communal scene of authorial communication that we attribute to the fictional aspect of narrative. On the level of authorial communication, however, we read for symbolic rewards such as thematic meaning or stylistic flourish instead of more vicariously appetitive rewards of a satisfactory plot closure. To sum up, Generative Anthropology provides a theoretical foundation for the feedback-loop model and even a justification for viewing rhetorical narratology as a theoretical advancement in the study of narrative for the reason that its insight into communication as a larger system of [narrative] thought is more anthropologically astute than those of the earlier theories.

Phelan's other bridge to GA comes at the end of his book, where he considers the value and larger significance of his approach. What is the motivation behind this type of analysis, he is asking. Since the communication between the storyteller and audience is the main focus of this approach, we would need to answer this question from both ends. "The motivation for the somebody who tells is not far to seek: to come to terms with some aspect of human experience; to communicate ideas, attitudes, values, and convictions to anyone who will listen; to create something of lasting beauty" (2017, 258). As for the opposite perspective, "The goal of rhetorical poetics," he says, "is to help individual readers to perform [the] two-step process as skillfully as possible" (2017, 258). This two-step process was already mentioned; namely, to engage with the affective, cognitive, ethical, and aesthetic dimensions of narrative experience, followed by the step of evaluating this experience. Engaging with these experiences would involve "giving oneself over to mimetic, thematic, and synthetic components of the teller's communication" (2017, 258-259). And then the second step, to evaluate, means to assess the truth or trustworthiness or moral soundness of what the author communicates. In this step, the readers would ask themselves whether they trust the report by a character or the narrator, and if they trust the facts, whether they trust their evaluations of the facts, but ultimately, whether they trust the author's values, judgments, worldview, and ideology (thus "assessing the teller's mind, emotions, values, and sense of quality" 2017, 259)).

In couching this second step in the language of GA, we might say that the readers are asking themselves whether they would join the scene where they have been invited. As already mentioned, in "New Thoughts on Originary Narrative," Gans points out that

narrative communication is mediated by mimetic desire, expressed as the firstness of the narrator: "the first user of the sign must persuade his fellows that his gesture is no longer an act of appropriation but a sign, or in other words, that his relationship to the central object of desire is the newly invented/discovered relationship of signification." It would not be far-fetched to equate the first step, that of giving oneself over to narrative experience, to the mimetic mechanism of succumbing to the pull of attraction exerted by the narrator as the model of imitation, the persuasive attraction of the first. But the second step is a move away from being seduced, an awakening, perhaps, to one's state of being in thrall to mimetic desire. It will have to come second because one must already have succumbed to being successfully interpellated by the narrator before one can even question whether to stay on this scene. But there is no definitive reason to stop there. One can go back and forth between being swayed by the rhetoric of persuasion and rejecting it. The dynamic of this oscillation is structurally similar to that of the oscillation between the communal scene mediated by the sign and the private scene of desirous imagination. In this sense, GA can provide an explanatory model of why the "rhetorical readers do not complete their acts of reading until they take this second step."

But what about the author, what about the motivation of the first? Phelan provides a psychological explanation of what drives the author to tell his story, as quoted above, namely, to share human experience and communicate ideas "to anyone who will listen." The formulation is similar to Peter Brooks's description (of the producer's side) of narrative desire, which is not only a desire to hear a story and the desire to tell it. In his analysis of Balzac's *La Peau de chagrin*, he close-reads the scene in which the protagonist, Raphaël, is telling his story to an interlocutor who has fallen asleep. According to Brooks,

That Raphaël should be thus talking to the air makes more starkly clear the absolutism of the desire from which narrative as narrating is born: it is in essence the desire to be heard, recognized, understood, which, never wholly satisfied or indeed satisfiable, continues to generate the desire to tell, the effort to enunciate a significant version of the life story in order to captivate a possible listener. (54)

As we see, he words this desire to be a narrator in similar psychological terms as a desire to share, explain, and communicate. He also adds the motivation of reciprocity by using words such as "recognized" and "understood." Yet in the very next paragraph and throughout the chapter, he talks about narrative desire in terms of being a "motor," which is, in a way, the opposite figure to that of motivation.

This is indicative of some existing tension in our understanding of communication, an oscillation between its voluntaristic and mechanistic aspects. Are we forced by the charismatic narrator and suspense to listen to the end of the story in our expectation of closure or do we freely choose to "give ourselves over" to the thematic, mimetic, and synthetic interests? Do we consciously internalize our purpose in communicating to

someone that something has happened to us on some occasion, or are we blindly compelled to tell our story “to the air” because we are driven, zombie-like, by a narrative engine? To find some theoretical grounding for the narrator’s desire in mimetic theory we may invoke Girard’s observation that the person who is imitated starts to imitate his own imitator: “This person who is a mediator without realizing it may himself be incapable of spontaneous desire. Thus he will be tempted to copy his own desire” (1966, 99). But in this case, we would be saying that the narrator’s desire awakens after he becomes the narrator and gains his following of the narratees. Gans’s concept of the producer’s desire might be a better candidate as when he writes in *The End of Culture* “All desire is desire for significance. Producer’s desire aims at its unique possession and, in its most radical sense, can never be fulfilled” (160). Indeed, in the symbolic economy of language, jockeying for becoming a narrator is a bid for significance under its guise of the cultural centrality of firstness, which is the simultaneous expression of the creative desire to produce. Phelan makes a similar observation when he says that what the narrator wants is to “create something of lasting beauty.” Another hypothesis is advanced by me in my 2019 presentation at the Narrative conference, where I speculate that the narrator and narratee are entangled as a “system,” and as such, we cannot meaningfully disentangle consciously-willed action and a drive-like behavior of compulsion. “This [entangled interdependence] serves as the basis of what I see as the narrator-narratee “system,” whereby the narratee and narrator exist inseparably from each other in the performative moment of now. That’s what being on the scene means: a performative situation is both coercive and ethical, ensnaring its participants into engaging with each other, bringing them together as a collective agency, so that the passive-active narratee can be seen as the initiator who elicits the story from the active-passive narrator.” Whatever the case may be, the anthropological foundation of the narrator’s desire needs to be thought of more, in my estimation.

Finally, what I find interesting is Phelan’s final reflections on the “why?” question. Why engage in the rhetorical analysis of narratives? What is the pragmatic significance of this practice? What new knowledge is produced? Are there some lasting values that are discovered or reinforced? Phelan’s answer is that looking at stories through the lens of the rhetorical approach has a direct effect on how we live our lives. He writes that

rhetorical poetics wants to break down the border between reading and living. It believes that reading narrative, whether fictional or nonfictional . . . functions as a rich and rewarding way of living life. To be sure, reading narrative does not by itself constitute a full life, but it is a valuable way to spend time that can greatly enhance other ways of spending it. Thus, the better rhetorical readers we can become, the better lives we can lead. Consequently, the ultimate purpose of rhetorical poetics is to contribute to human flourishing. (258-9)

In thus reclaiming this long-unfashionable humanist belief in the beneficial influence that art can have on life, the rhetorical approach to narratology affirms its emphasis on ethics as

the cornerstone of human communication. The ethical aspect is certainly harder to isolate and theorize when the main focus of analysis is on the structural elements of the story itself, not on its communicative aspect. The interest in the ethics of communication is also something that rhetorical narratology shares with Generative Anthropology, which postulates the human scene as the source of ethical consciousness.

In the bulk of my analysis so far, I have tried to find common ground between the rhetorical approach to narratology and Generative Anthropology. In addition, I tried to situate elements of rhetorical analysis anthropologically with the help GA's conceptual apparatus. In my conclusion, I will turn in the other direction and use some insights by rhetorical narratology to uncover possible gaps in GA's approach to narrative that need to be filled in. I started out by saying that narrative is an odd and conceptually discordant aesthetic form consisting of several heterogeneous aspects, such as story, perspective, and temporality that are difficult to integrate into a coherent object for cognition. In describing the analytical method of rhetorical narratology, I focused on perspectival and communicative aspect and not so much on temporality, which is itself a complex, hard to grasp phenomenon, encompassing the incompatible aspects of the temporality of *telling* and that of the *told*. In privileging the communicative dimension, the rhetorical approach does not delve very deeply into the nature of narrative temporality except in its consideration of progression or narrative sequence. Progression is a question taken up by rhetorical theorists as a substitute for the earlier emphasis on the story. Thus Walsh writes that "Narrative is the semiotic articulation of linear temporal sequence" (2018(b), 12). Early in *Somebody Telling Somebody Else*, Phelan explains that "the progression of a narrative [is a] synthesis of textual and readerly dynamics. Textual dynamics are the internal processes by which narratives move from beginning through middle to ending, and readerly dynamics are then corresponding cognitive, affective, ethical, and aesthetic responses of the audience to those textual dynamics" (2017, 9). The rest of the text demonstrates the above statement by analyzing various types of narrative progression through tracing the unfolding of readerly dynamics with masterful detail. What these analytical instances make abundantly clear is that meaning is a journey, not the correct and final determination of some semantic value. One needs to travel through the crooks and bends of aesthetic and affective responses, be misled by false clues, surprised by late revelations, diverted by miscalculations, become attracted or repelled by characters and narrators, switch allegiances, undergo the vagaries of plot peripeteia, and so on, before one completes the two-step rhetorical process and arrives at the destination of, say, understanding a work of literature thematically. When a theme is defined as an idea, something important is lost. This point is eloquently made by Tolstoy, for example. When he was asked about the meaning of his novel *Anna Karenina*, he responded that his work was trying to express the "family idea." At the same time, in his famous letter to N.N. Strahov on the same topic, he writes: "If I wanted to express in words what I meant by my novel, I would have to write the novel—the same one I have written—from the beginning. And if critics feel they now understand it and can summarize it in a *feuilleton* then I congratulate them and can confidently assure them that *qu'ils savent plus long que*

moi.”

Generative Anthropology does address the important question of narrative temporality by connecting it to the memory of the temporally extended appropriative gesture and the early form of the ritual scene. In *Originary Thinking* Gans opposes the atemporal nature of the declarative form to the temporality of narrativity. While “The narrative element is provided by the presignifying temporality of the gesture, that is, by what has been abolished by its conversion into a sign,” while “The textual is the moment that contemplates this abolition of protective temporality as the source of the meaning of the sign” (105). On the profane scene, as already discussed, “the relative insignificance of the object” makes the temporality of the declarative insignificant: “We are not interested in hearing a story about the object’s absence” (97). But narrative retains the character of the ritual scene with its divine presence and strives to maintain this scene through which “communal peace is preserved and reinforced” (97). Gans reiterates this point in “New Thoughts on Originary Narrative,” where he says that narrative, which transforms the pre-linguistic temporality of the acquisitive gesture into the symbolic temporality of deferral, has an important ethical function. “The substitution of the sign’s formal temporality for that of worldly appropriation confirms the deferral of appetitive action and of the concomitant risk of mimetic violence.” Put another way, the temporality of deferral plays an important role in preserving and prolonging the scene and thus conferring on its participants a sense of safety. The re-temporalization of the sign in narrative has the effect of reenacting or revivifying the memory of the originary scene—an experience that we enjoy in its duration and want to see protracted. And it should not be overlooked that the very oscillating character of the scene, that is to say, the “oscillating attention of the peripheral participants between the reciprocally exchanged sign and its sacred central referent,” is a fundamentally temporal experience. That is so because the perception of alternation is predicated on a higher level of attention, no longer one of semiotic thirdness but a kind of “fourthness,” a metaperspective that can register periodic phenomena as the accrual of pulses along the fourth dimension, that of time.

But even though GA has a theory of temporality (in *Originary Thinking*, Gans even says “The originary sign, and by extension every sign, is only meaningful in the context of a temporal project” (105)), it does not explain how meaning is created by the “itinerary” of the journey we take toward narrative closure, commenting only on the “interlocutor’s awaiting the closure of the sign,” the fact of duration itself. Of course, it is entirely possible that the affective, cognitive, ethical, and aesthetic experiences we undergo are “epiphenomenal” to the semantic meaning formed by words and sentences. Perhaps they are merely physiological side-effects of the atemporal semiotic process that are irrelevant to its functioning. In this case, there is nothing intelligible we can say about them. I do think, however, that the reader response journey matters, not least because it mirrors and amplifies our interest in the dramatic structure of the plot and its typologies, which has been the central focus of narrative theory from the very beginning. And if so, the dynamic

character of meaning remains an important question for GA to investigate.

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Notes

[1] See, for example, Ryan's "From Parallel Universes to Possible Worlds."

[2] See Ludwigs, "From de Man to Gans."

[3] Richard Walsh dispenses with the idea of event altogether (although keeps "series" or sequence): "Narrative is the semiotic articulation of linear temporal sequence (2018(b), 12).

[4] Here and elsewhere I am removing the use of special fonts which are used for organizing the original text and is irrelevant to my analysis.

[5] In my article "Cringing and Other Desacralizing Affects of Post-Millennial Aesthetics," I do challenge this view by pointing out that some recent narratives explicitly reject the commonality of the ethical enterprise to create the aesthetic effects of distancing and betrayal. However, even in this case, it could perhaps be argued that the betrayal of trust is

not “real”: it playfully explores inserting another layer of representation as an aesthetic experiment; but the make-believe scene is still underlain by the assumption of trust and shared enterprise.