

Forces and Spaces – Maupassant, Borges, Hemingway.

Toward a Semio-Cognitive Narratology¹

Abstract:

The aim of a cognitive narratology, as I see it, is to develop the literary and generally semiotic study of narratives through cognitive modeling, and to develop cognitive studies of mind and meaning by integrating insights from literary scholarship. In this article, I first examine the concept of narrative discourse (versus descriptive and argumentative discourse); second, I discuss the principles for distinguishing narrative subgenres (realistic, fantastic, marvelous, grotesque, absurd stories); and third, I propose a model of the constitutive architecture of narrative meaning as manifested by ‘good stories’, stories that make sense by conveying a view of the human condition.

In order to develop and test the model, I analyze a selection of acknowledged literary masterpieces: three short stories by Guy de Maupassant (*Deux amis*, *La ficelle*, *La parure*), two by Jorge Luis Borges (*Emma Zunz*, *La otra muerte*), one by Ernest Hemingway (*A very short story*). Through these analyses, including succinct literary interpretations of the texts, a new view of narrative dynamics is outlined. Agents operate in spaces that have specific dynamic properties, in that they display characteristic forces determining acts and events. There is, I postulate, a canonical set of narrative spaces, each encompassing and contributing a significant part of the meaning of a story. The model distinguishes four such spaces, which are typically also staged as distinct locations; an initial conditioning space, a catastrophic space, a consequence space, and a conclusion space.

Forces are described as causal or intentional. The causal forces are either trivial (habitual, regular, default, whether physical or social) or ‘fatal’ (special, contingent, singular). The intentional forces are agentive (volitive and located in agents) or magical (supernatural and non-agentive but still volitive).

The scenario-framing, dynamically invested spaces are linked in a default diegetic order allowing forces to fire forwards and backwards, which explains how stories progress and end, and in particular, eventually, how they can mean what we report them to mean.

Interpretation and interpretability depend on the dynamic ‘logic’ of this spatial diegesis, more than on reader identifications in a story, or on ideologies ascribed to the narrator.

Keywords: narrative, cognition, causation, force dynamics, spaces, Maupassant, Borges, Hemingway.

¹ The term ‘narratology’ is due to Todorov (1969: 10). The expression ‘cognitive narratology’ is very recent and was first used, I believe, in the sense adopted in this article, by David Herman (2000). The term Semio-Cognitive refers to a recently developed line of research drawing particularly on semiotics (structural and philosophical) and cognitive semantics, see *Cognitive Semiotics. Multidisciplinary Journal on Meaning and Mind* (2007-) and Brandt 2004b.

1. Narrative discourse

If by ‘discourse’ we mean the whole of semantic properties that sentences must share in order to make sense, as parts of the flow of communication by language, we can distinguish types or genres of such discursive flows with distinct semantic properties.

It is thus possible to distinguish narrative, descriptive, and argumentative discourse,² on the grounds that these genres differ in terms of their basic semantics. Narrative discourse unfolds a spatial and a temporal continuity, and at least a certain continuity as to states, events, objects and characters, whereas descriptive discourse displays inventories of synchronic entities that simply share a specific space,³ and argumentative discourse essentially consists in deriving representations from other representations, whether narrative or descriptive, by combining the conceptual properties of their contents. Furthermore, it is evident that narratives can contain descriptions and argumentation; that you can argue about narratives and descriptions (this is what historical scholarship does); and that everything can be described (still, to describe a story is not to tell it, and to describe an argument is not to argue).

I would like to underscore an additional structural feature characterizing narrative discourse: it is the only discourse type that comes with a constitutive semantic duality in space representations, namely a split and a mapping between a perceptual and a conceptual representation of the same event space – in other words, between an experiencer’s proximal and ‘concrete’, phenomenological space-time and a narrator’s distal and ‘abstract’, knowledge-based version of the same space-time. By contrast, pure argumentative discourse is in principle only conceptual and distal (abstract), whereas pure descriptive discourse is in principle only perceptual and proximal (concrete). This double representation of the narrative space-time is operative in pragmatic narrative genres such as accounts of Navigation (typically: travel reports) and of Warfare (incl. strategic plans),

² In the sense of: discourses of telling, showing, and proving, respectively. Benveniste (1966) studied the structural differences of récit (story) and discours, essentially distinguishing the narrative mode and everything else.

³ The referential space of a description can be purely conceptual, notional, and in that case, the display of the notional distribution can of course be temporal. Examples include cooking recipes; such texts are not narrative just because the prescribed actions are not to be performed simultaneously.

where maps are central means of reference: to be “on” a map is to integrate a perceptual deixis and a conceptual geography. Double representation is particularly prominent in literary narrative, and constitutive of fiction in general, since fictive perception must take place in a context created by overt and playful conceptual manipulation of common knowledge.⁴

All manifestations of narrative discourse, the semiotic entities we call stories,⁵ whether fictive or ‘factive’ (e.g. documentary), present a core set of ‘persons’: subjective instances, including a primary series of (protagonist or observer) experiencers; a supplementary series of (agonistic and antagonistic) agents; and the voice of a (conceptual) narrator, transcending in principle the chain of events of the story but often embodied in a (primary or supplementary) subjective instance, thus giving rise to a specific ‘vantage point’.⁶ These instances, including the grounding narrative voice itself, only unfold in so far as they participate in or attend to one and the same chain of events, namely the story as such. There has to be a Story *an sich*, so to speak.⁷ This principle of a distinction between narration (voice-based) and story (event-based) is, I think, a cognitive presupposition of all narrative discourse, a condition of its making sense, of its cognitive

⁴ The fictivity of fiction is not our concern in the analysis of narrative event logic; this feature of well-wrought stories probably has to do with their closed structure – the impression of completion they convey. They make us think: *se non è vero, è ben trovato!* – However, fictivity is a semiotically and cognitively challenging phenomenon, difficult to explain. Personally, I think Roman Jakobson (1960) was on the right path when he proposed his concept of a poetic function based on self-reference of the ‘message’: if a story offers a structure so salient and compelling that it no longer matters if it is true, then it will be artfully told out of the context of true things, and typically transmitted in verse or writing etc. to be enjoyed by audiences with no knowledge of its referential circumstances. Its ‘artfulness’ makes it into a ‘meme’, you might say.

⁵ Turner (1996) uses ‘story’ in a broader sense of any state, event, or act involving a subject; his view eliminates the dramatic meaning of the term.

⁶ When the narrator is embodied in a primary subjective instance, we often feel that the ‘olympian’ narrator of the third person narration (as an unembodied, external voice) disappears; we get a first person narration. But it is equally justifiable to hear the latter as a discreetly polyphonic narrative: “It was a fine summer day in Cleveland. I was sitting on a bench in the park and having a beer, when suddenly...” – the first sentence still being ‘olympian’, whereas the second has an embodied narrator. The embodied voice does not necessarily erase the unembodied voice, hence the eventuality of a duo, or in general a plurality, of voices, one of which is staying unembodied.

⁷ This idea is by no means trivial or evident. Greimas (1966) proposed to situate his actantial narrative dynamics at a level between the deep level semiotics of pure oppositional ‘logic’ and the surface level of enunciatonal and rhetorically invested discourse, in a ‘generative’ semantic theory of meaning. Colm Hogan (2003) starts a chapter by stating: “A central distinction in narratology is that between story and discourse, what happens and the presentation of what happens.” What happens is what I call the story *an sich*.

and semiotic possibility, and therefore the natural starting point of a semio-cognitive narratology.⁸

Events are linked into a chain of events that constitutes a story to the extent that they take place in a temporal continuum forming a trajectory in a spatial continuum, and that some of these events are critical. A critical event is a ‘significant’ change of state occurring somewhere in this spatio-temporal continuum.⁹ I will try to show that it results from the work of forces creating states in spaces. A critical change results from a variation of the relative magnitude of locally conflicting and concurring state-maintaining forces, which induces other local variations of forces. The interesting consequence of this dynamic view is that represented spaces, as limited operative fields of forces that uphold and change states, must be ‘local’ and articulated, each ‘locality’ containing a setting that frames a characteristic unfolding of forces.¹⁰

⁸ I do not of course claim that narratology should be exclusively the study of story structure, only that the difference between the two main aspects of narratives must be acknowledged. While the study of narration, narrator styles, viewpoints, strategies of telling, etc., that is, the rhetorics of narratives, has been a central part of literary scholarship for a century, the ‘story’ part has been neglected to such an extent that it is now common to believe that there is no story structure to be found in narrative texts, just a narrating process and a corresponding process of on-going reception – a view that suits the empiristic thinking style of certain anglo-saxon scholars (the great David Bordwell (2008) would be a recent example). So a primary goal of the present article is to show that there is indeed a story structure, which independent of narrator styles, just as in linguistics, it is indeed possible to distinguish an *énoncé* from its *énonciation* (Benveniste 1966, Cervoni 1987). To be clear: that “there is a story” does not mean that it exists on a screen, a sheet of paper, in the materiality of the medium, just like the semantics of a sentence does not live in the materiality of the speech sounds. So where does it live? In the cognitive content of minds that semiotically share meaning in communication. – Can minds share meaning? Yes. – How? By following the semiotic instructions in the signs of the medium. What is a sign? That is a long story...

What if a story is passed on from a realistic narrator to a fantastic narrator, I am being asked. A story can of course undergo transformations such that it becomes fantastic, for example, if it has been realistic (or the inverse), but that is not a matter of changing narrator, though it is a matter of changing author! Please distinguish author and narrator. Realistic biography can thus become hagiography.

⁹ When is a change ‘critical’? Criticality in this context may be determined as the property of having effects that include contributing to the occurrence of other events, not necessarily immediate but happening in the spatio-temporal continuum of the story in question. A dynamic change is ‘critical’ if somewhere it induces another dynamic change. Some basic analytic ideas on criticality and the roles of causation in narration in terms of mental space blending were presented in Brandt 2004a, chapter 4.

¹⁰ We know force-dynamic schemas from cognitive grammar (Sweetser 1990, Brandt 1990, Talmy 2000, Geeraerts and Cuyckens 2007), but the force-dynamic semantics of causation and modality, which is now known to be lexically and syntactically expressed in sentences, has not yet been systematically studied in the framework of entire narratives. However, force-dynamics is evidently a default part of all source-path-goal schemas and all mediated subject-object relations. The role of forms and forces in human perception accounts for the cooperation of spatial and temporal cognition in immediate experience. Narrative cognition builds on this cooperation in perception and reactivates it in human imagination, especially in anticipation and preparation of acts and reactions. All experiences of time are dynamic. See Evans 2006.

It would therefore seem phenomenologically relevant to study and elaborate a representative typology of forces¹¹ occurring in reported experiences had by human beings in what philosophers call our Life World, *Lebenswelt*. These forces would form the natural cognitive inventory of forces likely to occur in narrative spaces, whether literary, religious, or otherwise cultural (e.g. mythological). Here we will venture a short list of immediately perceptible types supposedly active in the dynamics of everyday life.¹² There are the potentially conscious intentional forces that – by ‘mental causation’ – motivate the doings of embodied subjects, who so to speak ‘contain’ them as agentive, unless the subjects encounter them or manipulate them as magical forces of nature; both the agentive and the magical forces are intentional, in the sense that volition is involved, so magic is easily reembodyed in fairies, trolls, phantoms, and divinities of all kinds (but it does not have to). There are the ‘blind’ causal forces that these subjects count on or encounter in the physical and the social domains, some of which are trivial, that is, habitual, to be expected, inherent in things and states of affairs, and quasi-necessary in a given circumstantial space, while others by contrast are not to be expected: contingent, possible but rare, sudden, punctual, singular, and locally fatal, that is, in spite of their singularity and punctuality, decisive to the narrative course of events: , significant, critical.¹³

I intend to show that it is possible to meaningfully understand the event logic of stories in terms solely or mainly of such interacting forces, and thereby to circumscribe the core structures of basic narrative sense-making that all narrating presupposes, whether artistic or not. The artistic, literary form often proceeds from everyday episodic narrative

I have added a research note, “Letting, Making, and the Dynamics of Causation”, as an appendix to this article, just to offer a view of the way some cognitive or semiotic linguists are handling the dynamic semantics of causal language and thought.

¹¹ What I mean is simply the following. When something happens to us, we think: this was mainly because of X... That is, X represents some sort of force causing the thing that happened.

¹² Our episodic memory (Tulving 1983) is made of experiences of this kind. This does not mean that human beings experience their lives as a sustained narrative (Stafford 2007 protests against such existential pan-narrativism), but it does mean that narrative event logic is directly related to the episodic structuring processes of human memory, and thus that it is a phenomenon that belongs in our neuropsychological reality. Zacks and Magliano (2009) summarize very usefully a wide range of studies of narrative cognition in film and offer an updated neuroscientific perspective.

¹³ These fatal forces – cf. Baudrillard (1983), one of the most inspiring and challenging essays on human acts and motivation I have read – are experienced as ‘more contingent than the contingent’, so uncaused that they seem to express an underlying or overarching determination, destination or destiny. Example: the critically ill person’s address to Destiny, Fatum: “Why me?” The fatal becomes an attraction in ludomania. Should we discard such things in narratology? They are irrational, in so far as human cognition is (partly) irrational, but still semiotically rational, sense-making.

structure by supplying additional descriptive and argumentative accounts of the implied subjective experiences, or by describing or arguing about its own narrating; in general, the event logic remains the same.

2. Narrative genres

In order to understand and evaluate a story, we often implicitly decide which genre it represents. In the semiotics of stories, genres are the analogues of species in biology – we apply them for fast and useful categorization. However, here we are dealing with the human imaginary, and its semantic representations will follow the cognitive-semiotic format of things imagined, however ‘naturalistic’ or ‘creative’ they are. Narrative genres are spontaneously distinguished with respect to their dynamic properties; so, a ‘good’ hagiographic legend and a ‘good’ testimonial account given by a witness in court, both following a perfectly narrative format, are seldom ‘good’ or well-formed by the same criteria; the former often displays significantly more fatal and magical forces than the latter.¹⁴ If we perceive different narrative genres, such as fantastic versus socio-realistic stories, grotesque or absurd stories versus fairytales, as being distinct by their dynamic styles, their allowance or non-allowance of specific (force-driven) event types, we may further develop this view by conceiving a total narrative sequence of temporally linked and dynamically connected spaces as a world configuration, or the manifestation of a dynamically specific narrative world type. In some narrative worlds, intentional forces dominate, and magic is welcome, while the rest is trivial causality; in other worlds, non-trivial, historical, fatal causation dominates. And so on. The dynamic properties of distinct narrative genres would differ by the nature of the conceptual worlds to which their dynamic spaces pertain. The tone and temperature of the voice of the ‘olympian’, unembodied narrator may then be perceived as the mode of expression of a given narrative world.

The following is an elementary sketch of such a ‘world’-oriented account of narrative genres.

¹⁴ As mentioned above, our tentative classification of forces contains so far only the following: intentional {agentive versus magical} versus causal {trivial versus fatal}. This may turn out to be too simple. See the analyses below for an exemplification.

We can stipulate a neutral, naturalistic anchoring base, a plainly realistic world R, corresponding to the realm of ordinary human, macro-physical, mental, social, and pragmatic everyday life and cognition. This basic, realistic world can be narratively deformed in two directions, by addition or by subtraction of forces.¹⁵ We add narrative forces if we allow magic acts to co-occur with realistic causes in a given world; this increases its dynamic density, so to speak, and the result is either the fantastic genre (where magic is local) or the enchanted, marvelous genre (where magic is global).¹⁶ By contrast, if we instead subtract forces, we allow events and acts to occur that have no trivial causal or intentional reason to occur or to be executed; this decreases the story's dynamic density, so we get a 'crazier' world; this operation yields either the grotesque or the absurd genre. Here, the trivial and fatal forces are increasingly left alone on stage, while the intentional forces decrease; a conjuncture that often gives rise to humor or to impressions of 'madness' or incomprehensible occurrences and behaviors. Narrative realism can thus be deformed in two opposite directions, either towards the fantastic and the marvelous (increased dynamic density) or towards the grotesque and the absurd (decreased dynamic density). Magic is intuitively a marked form of intentional force (while agentic intentionality is unmarked, 'default'); and correspondingly, fatal causal force is marked (whereas trivial causality is of course unmarked). Realism is therefore the most unmarked genre; the marvelous and the absurd are the most marked.

The question of the status of genres in literature is of course much more comprehensive than the one we are discussing here; narrative genres are only sub-genres of the narrative genre and could be mistaken for arbitrary subdivisions of the former. But there are reasons to believe that the dynamical specifications are really operative in our cognitive organization of meaning in such a way that they 'generate' meaning differently: they are, so to speak, organically distinct. For instance, psychological specification of characters is decreasingly possible as magic increases, or as fatality increases. The very length of stories also tend to decrease by the same parameters: fairy tales and absurd

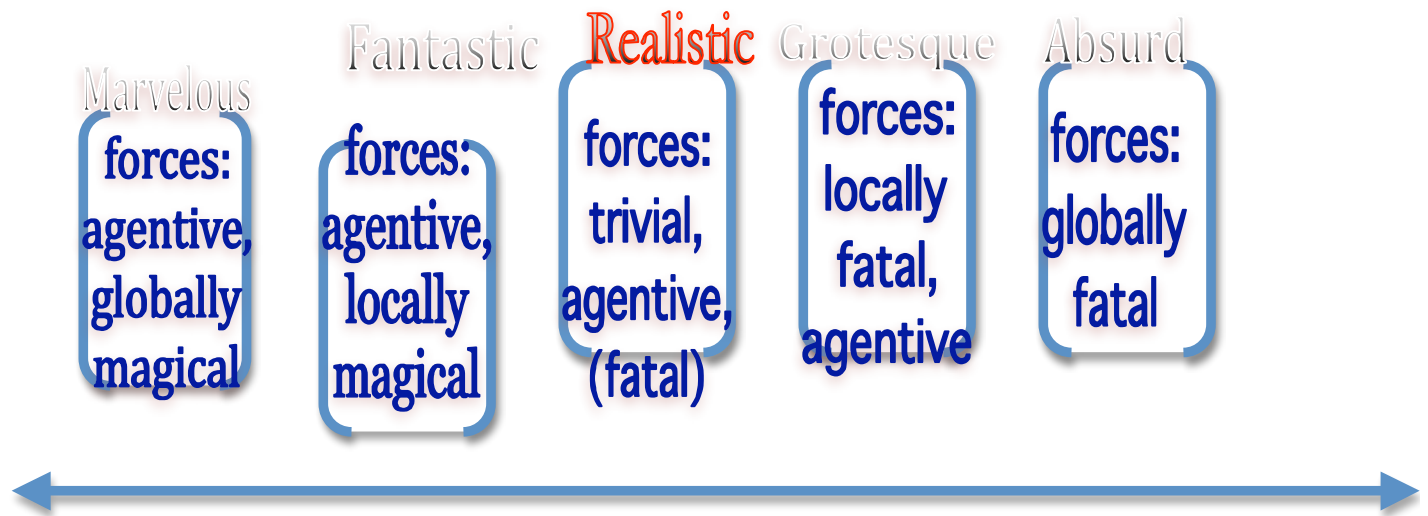
¹⁵ The idea of a variable dynamic density by 'addition' or 'subtraction' of forces is due to Line Brandt (forthcoming, and personal communication). The idea of a realistic starting point for variations and derivations goes directly counter to Roland Barthes' suggestion in a famous article, "L'effet de reel" (Barthes 1968), namely to conceive the realistic genre as built on a special descriptive 'effect', obtained by adding arbitrary details, thus seeing realism a particularly artificial construction.

¹⁶ The French term: *le merveilleux* refers to fairy tale worlds. Cf. Todorov 1970.

stories are typically short. Only cognitive references can explain such correlations, I think. Magical awe and absurd humor are short-time processes in the human mind.

The following is a tentative, slightly simplified graphic summary of this view of narrative genres (worlds are brackets):

(Fig. 1)



In this view, a narrative scenario, an episode, a sequence of events and acts, any diegetic unit, is a part of a ‘world’ characterized by a specific ‘mix’ of dynamic properties, realistic or deformed in either direction. Some stories can even change ‘world’ in the course of lengthy developments comprising important amounts of scenarial spaces, such as García Márquez’ *Cien años de soledad* or Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass*, which oscillate radically on the ‘world’ axis from the marvelous to the absurd.¹⁷ Authors have ‘world’ preferences by which we often know them (Kafka: grotesque; Kharmis, Ionesco: absurd; Cortázar, Borges, Poe: fantastic; Breton, Aymé: marvelous. This is probably a matter of writers’ general cognitive profiles; but evidently, the same author is not bound to only one genre.

¹⁷ Cf. “Curioser and curioser”. In Brandt (1994 and 1995).

Narrative subgenres are important to the interpretation of stories, because they determine the way in which narratives make sense to us: a grotesque or fantastic story does not make us believe that life is grotesque or fantastic; it may make us laugh or shiver, while we extract life-relevant meaning from its world, which we distinguish from our own world. Our cognitive minds essentially enjoy visiting non-realistic, marked worlds. Paradoxically, such worlds are felt as more meaningful as the plain, unmarked life world.

This was the first main point of this article. The second main point is the following hypothesis: In each story, a narrative world is instantiated in terms of a sequence of event spaces, that is, more or less clearly defined places set up by locative indications or descriptions, where characters are actively or passively connected to the play of conflicting forces of different types and affected by these forces through narrated time. The interconnection of spaces and forces, allowing us to detect a canonical diegetic series of dynamic spatio-temporal stances through which a story makes sense, is the central idea of this hypothesis. Please note that event spaces are not ‘mental spaces’; a mental space is a part of a network anchored in actual semiosis (cf. Brandt 2004), whereas an event space is a spatial frame of a narrative content situated in the diegesis of a story. A semiosis can contain a diegesis, namely as a narration contains a narrative. Maybe it will take a new initiative, the building of a consistent semiotic and cognitive text theory, to further determine this relation and articulation; discourse semantics as in so-called Text World Theory (Gavins 2007) would offer a significant contribution to such a project but still lacks the interest in the immanent dynamic structures of narrative causation that is the main concern of the present paper.

We will illustrate our approach by presenting a brief sequence of space-and-force models intended to extract the basic narrative meaning of short stories by Guy de Maupassant (*The Diamond Necklace*; *Two Friends*; *A Piece of String*); Jorge Luis Borges (*Emma Zunz*; *The Other Death*); Ernest Hemingway (*A Very Short Story*). Let me stress that in an analytic enterprise like the following, mistakes are likely to occur; I am therefore prepared to discuss and revise any details in the findings I will now report.

3. The specific force-dynamics of narrative structure

3.1 Guy de Maupassant's *The Diamond Necklace* [La parure]¹⁸ is a sad story about humiliation, and the absurd cruelty of destiny, letting a misunderstanding destroy a life. Mathilde, of a modest family, but who dreams of luxury, is married to a poor ministerial clerk. When her husband gets an invitation to a ball at the Ministry, she manages to get him to pay her a new gown; she finds that she also needs jewels and somewhat reluctantly goes to her wealthy friend, a former schoolmate, and asks her to lend her something. Adorned with a diamond necklace, she goes to the ball with her clerk husband and enjoys a great personal success. At a very late hour, the couple leaves the ballroom, hastily so as not to be remarked for their lack of elegant coats, and arriving at their modest home discover that the necklace has disappeared. The following week they panic; at last they find a similar necklace that they cannot afford, but use a heritage, borrow a fortune, and buy the adornment. The couple spends the next ten years living miserably and working several jobs, day and night; Mathilde's youth and beauty wither away. Then suddenly she meets her former friend, walking with a child, still looking beautiful, on the Champs Elysees. She tells her story, to explain why she has changed so much that she was not even recognized. She learns that the necklace was an imitation, paste, worth very little.

The story sets up an initial space, A, presenting the protagonists at home and summarizing the initial conditions of the events to happen: the modest situation of the couple, the ambitions of the young woman, then the opportunity, and the preparations for the ball.¹⁹ The second space, B, the scenario of the ministerial ball, contains the metamorphosis materializing the desire of the female protagonist and the fatal catastrophe that ends it. The third space, C, is a time-space of ten years, unfolding the consequences of the preceding states, events, and acts. Finally, the forth space, D, contains the fortuitous meeting and the revelation concerning the value of the object whose loss so massively influenced the life of the protagonists.

Four spaces or stances are articulated.²⁰ Let us take a look on their dynamic inventories and connections.

¹⁸ Maupassant (1974: 1198). *Le Gaulois* 1884.

¹⁹ The structure is evidently analogous to that of the fairy tale of Cinderella (Aarne-Thompson, type 510A).

²⁰ By spaces I mean either concrete geographical places or less concrete socio-géographical habitats. The terms for their designation proposed below are generic; the term *catastrophe* refers to René Thom's so-called 'catastrophe theory' (Thom, 1980; Brandt, 1992): a catastrophe is dynamically induced, significant change in a reference situation.

A: The modest middle-class life space-time.

A1. The *agentive intentional force* of Mathilde, her desire of luxury and glamour.

A2. The *trivial causal force* of the social condition she comes from and has married into.

A3. The *fatal causal force* of the invitation to the glamorous ball.

A4. The *agentive intentional force* of the ball preparations, incl. the borrowing of the necklace of Mme Forestier. $A2 \rightarrow (A3 \rightarrow A4)$.

B: The ministerial ballroom.

B1. The *trivial causal force* of the actual joy and glamour of the ball, matching A1.

B2. The *fatal causal force* of the loss of the necklace, supplemented by the permanence of A2.

C: The social space-time of many years of economical hardship.

C1. The *trivial causal* consequence of B2, the incurring of important debts.

C2. The *trivial causal* consequence of C1, ten irreversible years of hard work and misery.

D. The space of the encounter, Les Champs-Élysées.

D1. The *trivial causal* consequence of C2, the attrition of Mathilde.

D2. The *fatal causal* encounter of Mathilde and the lender (A4).

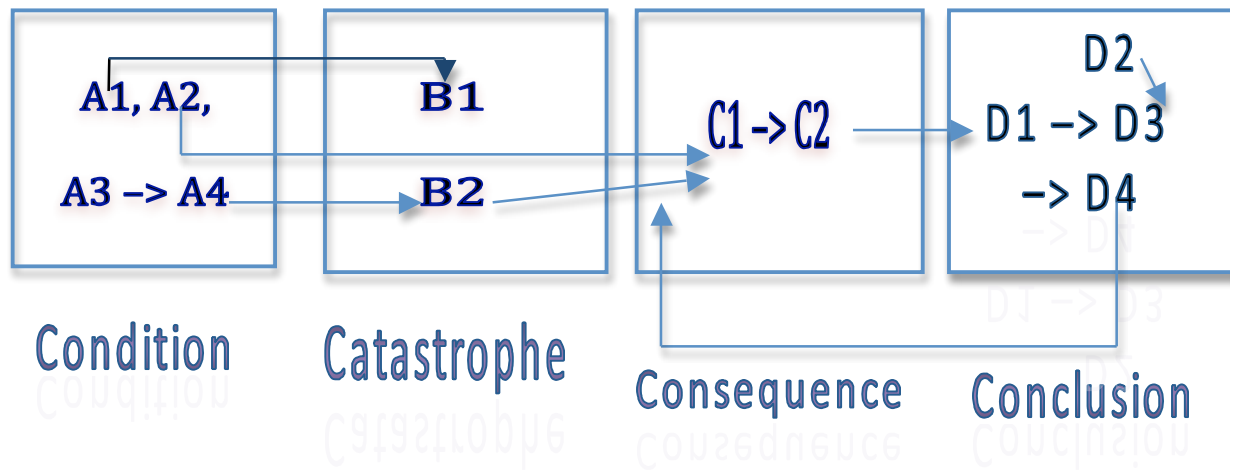
D3. The *trivial causal* consequence of D1, that Mathilde is not recognized and has to tell her story to Mme Forestier.

D4. The *fatal causal force* of the discovery by Mathilde, that $B2 \rightarrow C1$ was based on a misunderstanding, which persisted because of $A2 + A1$ (Mathilde was ashamed of her condition and did not want to see Mme Forestier). The content of D4, the misunderstanding, invalidates $B2 \rightarrow C1$ but after $C1 \rightarrow C2$. A classical case of tragic, Aristotelian, *anagnorisis*.²¹

We will here call A a *Condition Space*, B a *Catastrophe Space*, C a *Consequence Space*, and D a *Conclusion Space*. These narrative spaces are displayed as distinct experiential locations, here clearly in B and D, whereas A and C are more vaguely described, but still clearly distinct from their neighboring spaces. The entire spatio-causal network can be summarized and visualized (fig.2)²²:

²¹ D4 is mentally fatal to the protagonist, since it tells her that all her sufferings were meaningless. What you don't know and what you then get to know by chance or accident, instead of not knowing it and be happier in the middle of misery, is fatal but does not change anything in the event logic, only in the conclusive reflection of the protagonist and the empathic reader. Well, it lead to an epistemic event: the understanding that much of your life is spent on consequences of misunderstandings, that is, expensive nonsense.

²² The suite of spaces – instantiated directly as places of variable extension – is canonical, I claim, and it can thus be compared to the classical rhetorical models (exposition, complication, climax, resolution..., cf. Gustav Freytag's 1863 analysis of Greek dramas; and in modern poetics, Sternberg 1993) but this suite is



The anaphoric arrow from D4 to the linking arrows between B and C would seem to counterfactually cancel the content of C altogether. A3, B2, and D2 are fatal events. Only the Consequence Space, typically, has none. The feedback from D4 leads our attention back to A2 and from there to the sad fragility of the moment of dream realization (A1/B1), triggering the ensuing social humiliation (A2 and C, D).

3.2 In *Two Friends* [Deux amis]²³, we learn about the fate of two Parisian citizens, a watchmaker and a draper, who used to go fishing and enjoy nature and each other's company on idle days at the river Seine, but who under the siege of the city, caused by the French-Prussian war 1871-1872, are now blocked from going to their place at the river. On a winter morning, they happen to meet in the street, and after a couple of absinthes had in cafes, decide to brave the military lines and take up fishing. They get leave to pass and walk, bend, creep through the occupied terrain down to the Seine with their angling equipment. Soon they enjoy catching abundant glittering fish and "indulging in a pastime of which they had long been deprived". But they are soon discovered by a group of Prussian soldiers and brought to the small island in the river, l'Ile Marante. An officer explains to them that they are French spies and will be executed. He asks them for their password, promising them to let them go if he gets it. They do not answer. The officer

independent of rhetoric. It is inherently event-dynamic. It does not (like 'climax') describe the feelings of the hearer-reader, but instead the unfolding in space and time of the event logic involved in a story.

²³ Maupassant (1974: 732). *Gil Blas*, 1883.

ceremoniously asks them one by one and gets the same answer, silence. The two friends say goodbye to each other, are shot and thrown into the river. The officer orders the fish fried for him.

The story offers an initial space, Paris under the siege (A). Then a second space, the riverbank, where the protagonists enjoy the realization of their dream (B). The third space (C) is the island, where they have to assume the consequences of their act, namely to be formally identified as spies, even if the identification is only formal – the officer does not have to believe in the inherent truth of this attribution, he just states that according to their location and their provenience, that qualification is the result of a simple strategic calculus²⁴. So they have to die, whether they deliver a password or not; it does not even appear that they have one that they could have decided not to reveal.²⁵ The fourth space (D) is or includes the river, flecked by their blood.

Let us try to achieve a dynamic overview.

A: Paris besieged.

- A1. The *agentive intentional force* of the two anglers' desire to go fishing.
- A2. The *trivial causal force* of the wartime condition: urban famine, deprivation.
- A3. The *fatal causal force* of the fortuitous encounter of the two friends.
- A4. The *agentive intentional force* of their contacting the French officer and obtaining the leave to pass.²⁶ And A3 → A4.

B: Fishing by the river.

- B1. The *trivial causal force* of their happiness of fishing again, matching A1.
- B2. The *fatal causal force* of their being discovered by the Prussian soldiers.

²⁴ If the two friends were allowed to return to Paris, they would be able to tell the French army where their enemy was hiding; they would potentially, retrospectively, be scouts, hence spies. Anglers or spies – this depends on the viewpoint: to themselves, historically, they are anglers, as we know; to the player in the war game they entered, they now play a different role, as truthfully as they embodied the former.

²⁵ Greimas (1976), in his book (summarized in Brandt (1983), chap. 6, where *Deux amis* and *La ficelle* are reanalyzed) also entirely dedicated to the analysis of this short story, assumes that they had a real password (not only an oral or written license to pass), and that they were therefore, while staying silent under the interrogation, performing a heroic deed by opposing the “Stalinist” Prussian officer instead of saving their life, which would have been possible and likely to happen if they had disclosed that password. J.-Cl. Coquet (1997: 25-26) found this not to be a correct analysis of the situation, and I share his conclusion: They could not have saved their lives; they do not even have a password, and even if they had had one, it would evidently not have helped them, because the officer cannot let them go; they are not heroic combatants of resistance but simple human beings caught in the logic of place and power, finding themselves in a location where they should not be. It's war: they are spies, given *where* they are.

²⁶ “Ils se remirent en marche, munis d'un laissez-passer”. That is, undoubtedly, a piece of paper with their names on it, not a memorized password.

C: The Isle Marante.

C1. The *trivial causal force* of their being declared spies by the officer.

C2. The *trivial causal force* of their verdict: execution; the rules of war followed.

C1 → C2.

D. The river shore of the island, place of the death scene.

D1. The *agentive intentional force* of the two friends' dignified reaction to C2.

D2. The *agentive intentional force* of the officer's ritual interrogation of his 'spies'.

D3. The *agentive intentional force* of the two friends' mutual goodbye gesture.

D1 → D3.

D4. The *trivial causal force* of the execution itself, whose figurative aspects refer back to the A2–B2 complex that led to C1: the wartime rules; the annulation of interhuman rules of respect and solidarity (soldiers are not allowed to act according to ordinary ethics).

The dynamic network of *Two Friends* is formally²⁷ quasi-identical to that of *The Diamond Necklace*, in the sense that the forces are linked in exactly the same way, except for the link A4→B2 in the *Necklace*, but not in the *Friends*. The forces are not of the same kind, but they drive the same feedback result D4-to-C1, which in both cases directly generates the uncanny meaning of the story.²⁸ Humanity rendered precarious by social class separation or by war. Maupassant's prose offers a rich display of details supporting this reading.

3.3 In *A Piece of String* [La ficelle]²⁹, we are in Normandy, and the peasants, rich or poor, are going to the market-place in a small town.³⁰ Our protagonist, Maître Hauchecorne, arriving in town, picks up a little piece of string from the ground – a habit

²⁷ Well, in this story, the 'upper-cut event' D4 is trivial, whereas it was fatal in the former. The execution is trivial in the basic sense that it follows from the rules of the play – and this is precisely what feeds the tragical meaning: if you find yourself in the wrong place, no intentional auto-interpretation can save you from being allo-interpreted in accordance with that place.

²⁸ Since the force/space model turns out to yield a quasi-identical structural network in these two stories, our *figure 1* will cover both of them.

²⁹ Maupassant (1974: 1080). *Le Gaulois*, 1883. The editor comments (p. 1605): “ Un des plus célèbres contes de Maupassant n'évoque pas seulement la terre normande, avec ses coutumes et ses hommes, il montre aussi comment un homme devient prisonnier de sa propre mésaventure. Il y a là quelque chose de kafkaïen et de labyrinthique, au point que le conte ne peut se refermer que sur lui-même pour recommencer à nouveau : “ Les plaisants maintenant lui faisaient conter “ la ficelle “ .” Le conte ramené à son statut de pur objet fonctionne comme un piège de la conscience. ”

³⁰ “It all smelled of the stable, of milk, of hay and of perspiration, giving off that half-human, half-animal odor which is peculiar to country folks.” Naturalism summarized in one sentence; humans are still animals.

of his, expressing of course his peasant attitude to the economics of life. Then he discovers that he is being observed by a person he is on bad terms with, Maître Malandain, who stares at him from his doorstep. Overcome by shame at being seen picking up a thing almost without value, he pretends to look for something else without finding it, and finally walks off, embarrassed. In front of the inn, at noon, suddenly the drum sounds, and the public crier announces the loss of a pocketbook containing five hundred francs and business papers. A little later, the police corporal appears and asks for Maître Hauchecorne! He is there, answers, and follows the corporal to the mayor's office. The mayor declares that he was seen picking up the pocketbook in question. Malandain has reported on him. Hauchecorne shows the string he has picked up, and swears on God and his soul's salvation, but the mayor just adds that he was even seen to look for more money from the pocketbook. Malandain and Hauchecorne are confronted; nothing can be concluded. But the story spreads. Hauchecorne tells his version, which is not believed, and he is laughed at. He angrily keeps telling his story, and repeats it in his village. Nobody believes him. Next day, the pocketbook is reported found on the road and returned; the illiterate finder had carried it home and given it to his master, who finally delivered it to the owner. Hauchecorne triumphs and retells his story; he insists, on the roads, at the cabaret, in front of the church, to strangers. People listen jokingly, not convinced. In the town, he is even attacked physically and called a "great rogue". At last, during a nasty conversation in the tavern, he understands that he is accused of stealing, lying, and then having had the pocketbook brought back by an accomplice. He goes home and now has a confusing feeling of perhaps being capable of having done what he is accused of, including the boasting storytelling. The story grows longer and longer, and it exhaust him and weakens his mind and body. A winter day he takes to his bed, and in the ravings of his death agony recounts the story; he revives the scene where he explained to the mayor that it was only a little bit of string: "See, here it is..."

The sequence of spaces is rather clearly articulated – though geographically (A) includes (B), and (D) includes (A) and (C). The story starts on the road to the marketplace: this is the conditioning cultural space, amply unfolded (A). Then, the catastrophic place of the string and the fatal simulation (B). The mayor's office allows Hauchecorne to reveal the truth and be rejected (C). The rest of the narrative uses the

entire landscape to develop the consequences of his counterproductive story (D). In his final agony, he goes mentally back to C.

A: The road to the Norman market.

A1. The *agentive intentional force* of the protagonist's desire to profit from even extremely small advantages and findings.

A2. The *trivial causal force* of the local, mean-spirited peasant culture.

A3. The *trivial causal* circumstance of the market day: oral broadcasting.

B: The string scene on the road.

B1. The *fatal causal force* of finding and picking up the piece of string. A1→B1.

B2. The *fatal causal force* of being seen by a malevolent person, Malandain, and of Hauchecorne's subsequent simulating.

C: The mayor' office.

C1. The *fatal causal force* of the broadcast loss of the pocketbook.

C2. The *trivial causal force* of the report by Malandain to the mayor. B2→C2.

C3. The *trivial causal force* of the accusation of Hauchecorne by the mayor.
C2→C3

D: The entire rural community space.

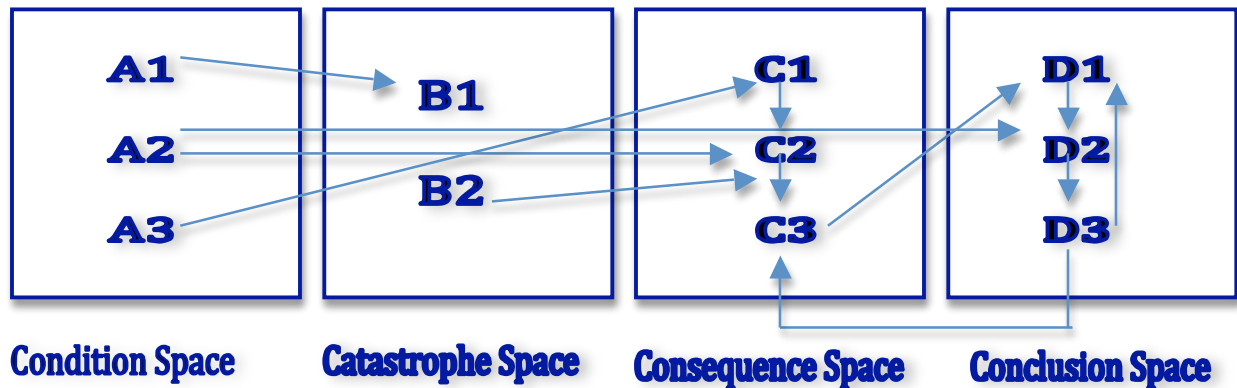
D1. The *agentive intentional force* of Hauchecorne's narrative response. C3→D1.

D2. The *trivial causal force* of the community's reaction to this defense. A2→D2.

D3. The *fatal causal force* of Hauchecorne's (counterfactual) feeling of guilt, which supposedly contributes to causing his narrative overdoing, causes him to relive the fiasco of his defense in front of the mayor, and finally kills him.

Again we see a semiotic return from the Conclusion Space to the core content of the Consequence Space. This time it happens to the protagonist, at least in some confused mode, whereas it easily occurs to the reader that overdoing a defense is counterproductive; in a sense, the subject is again guilty of being where he is (in a place where any exposure or blunder can kill), not what he is (innocent). The tragedy is, as I understand it, based on the contrast between what the honest sharing of narrative experience should achieve among humans and what instead happens when the hyperbolic enunciation of this narrative is read as evidence to its falsehood. This is again an opposition of the global and the local, of global peaceful humanity and local hostility and cruelty.

This analysis translates into a dynamic network slightly different from the former (fig. 3):



This network is, as we see, extremely dense, which may be why we feel the intensity of its depressing meaning, experienced by the reader through the feedback (D3→C3) and the subsequent C-D loop that leads to the death of the protagonist.

3.4 Let us change century and take a look at another masterful story, Jorge Luis Borges' *Emma Zunz*.³¹ Emma is 19 years old worker at the textile factory run by Aarón Loewenthal, in Buenos Aires. One winter day, she receives a letter from Brazil stating that her father has committed suicide. He had worked for the factory as cashier but had been dismissed, accused of fraud six years earlier; before going into exile, he had confidentially told his daughter that the real culprit was in fact Loewenthal himself, then a manager, who became the co-owner of the company. Emma, in shock, decides overnight to take her just revenge on this fraudulent author of her father's death. She waits until Saturday afternoon after work, goes to the harbor and finds a sailor of a boat about to leave, offers herself to him as if she were a prostitute; whereas the story stresses her abyssal horror of sexuality. She accomplishes this feat, but tears into pieces the money left besides the bed by her 'customer' (as she had torn to pieces the letter); instinctively she regrets this impious act.³² As there is a strike looming at the factory, she calls Loewenthal on the phone and asks to see him personally, pretending to want to inform against her colleagues. Having

³¹ *El aleph*, 1949. An editor and critic of Borges, Marcos Ricardo Barnatán (1981: 149), writes that this text, one of very few in Borges containing a sexual reference, is in fact a double story, of a revenge and of a repetition of the suffering of the avenged beloved being.

³² The text says: "Romper dinero es una impiedad, como tirar el pan; Emma se arrepintió, apenas lo hizo. Un acto de soberbia y en aquel día...". My reading has to accept the narrator's comment on the tearing up of the money: it is a symbolic act and could have consequences, especially on such a day... Only if it does have magical consequences is the story fantastic; else it stays in psychological realism.

repeated to herself the words of accusation she was going to deliver, she enters his office, starts to talk to him, hesitantly, about her co-workers, then asks him to get her a glass of water, and while she is alone, takes the revolver known to be in the drawer of his desk; but instead of first telling him about God's Justice and her knowledge of his crime, disturbed by the urge to punish him for the outrage she has been through before coming, more than driven by the wish to avenge her father, she shoots him right away, twice. In his agony, he swears furiously, the guard dog starts barking, and finally Emma starts her discourse: "I have avenged my father and no one can punish me..." but the victim is already dead, probably without understanding. Then she disarranges the sofa, the clothes of the corpse, removes his blood stained lorgnet, and calls the police to give her story of what happened: a false call by Loewenthal about the strike, then the rape, and her legitimate defense. Her story is believed, because as the narrator comments, it is essentially true and told with conviction, as to the tone, the shame, the hatred, the outrage; false are only the circumstances, the times, and a couple of proper names.

Emma receives the triggering letter at home, where she also remembers her father's secret, and conceives her plan: a first, conditioning space (A). Then she is in the harbor tavern and the adjacent rooms upstairs, the space of her catastrophic experience (B). The consequence, thus prepared, is the visit to Loewenthal's office (and home, since he lives on an upper floor of the factory), the site of the murder (C). The last space (D) includes all of the juridical sites where she will repeat her plausible story.

A: Emma's apartment.

A1. The *agentive intentional force* of the remembered fraudulent act of Loewenthal.

A2. The *fatal causal force* of (the news of) the paternal suicide. A1→A2.

A3. The *agentive intentional force* of Emma's revenge plan. A2→A3.

B: The harbor.

B1. The *agentive intentional force* of the sexual sacrifice made by Emma.

B2. The *fatal causal force* of the ritual mistreatment of the money. B1→B2.

C: Loewenthal's office.

C1. The *agentive intentional force* of Emma's killing Loewenthal. A3→C1.

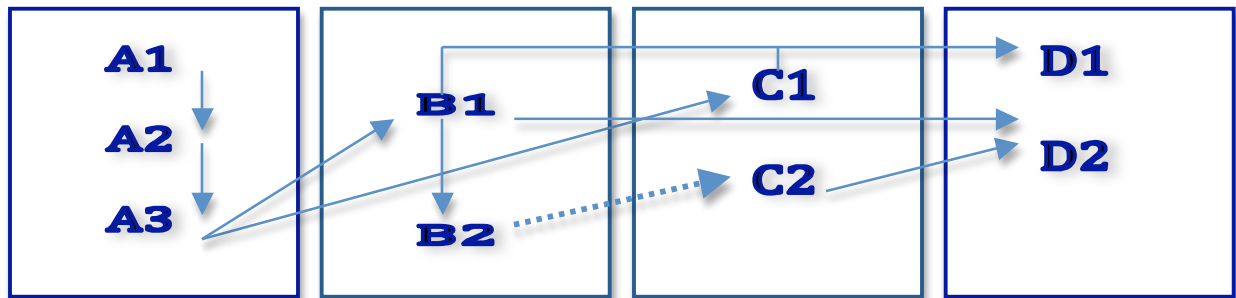
C2. The *fatal causal force* of her omission of the speech to give before killing, as the revenge act requires if the target needs information in order to decode its symbolic meaning.³³

D: Implied places: police office, courtroom, factory. The community.

D1. The *trivial causal force* of Emma’s coherent and successful explanation.

D2. The *trivial causal force* of her lasting frustration at the symbolically unsuccessful act, paid by her humiliation.

The dynamic network of this narrative is the following (fig. 4):



The plan is blessed with success, physically, and still cursed with bad luck mentally. Emma’s emotional frustration (D2) is due to the horror of B1, even worse for her than the grief at A2; and it is further fuelled by the incomplete symbolic act truncated by C2. One of the most ‘meaningful’ narrative themes in literature and life, revenge, the search for an-eye-for-an-eye Justice, ends in an utterly meaningless and painful state of affairs covered by triviality and frustration.

³³ The magical intentional feeling remains, that B2 can have caused C2, namely, if so, by *magic*. In that case (see note 22), one fatality causes another, since the first is additionally to be seen as negatively *magically intentional* – it offends a taboo, a (supernatural) intentional instance protecting symbolic items (money, bread...) from destruction. By B2 → C2, this story would qualify as fantastic.

3.5 The second story by Borges, *The Other Death* [La otra muerte]³⁴ is overtly fantastic.³⁵ The first-person narrator receives a letter from his friend Gannon, telling him that he is about to send his Spanish translation of the poem *The Past*, by R. W. Emerson, and adding that a person they both know has died of a lung inflammation: the peasant Pedro Damián, of Gualeguay, who had fought in the decisive battle at Masoller four decades ago, in 1904, with the Uruguayan rebel Aparicio Saravia (who was defeated in that battle and died of his wounds); in his fever-ridden agony, Damián had relived the bloodshed of Masoller. He had returned to his province after the battle and stayed in his lonely farm all this time. The narrator had met him and talked to him in 1942, but he was very taciturn. Gannon had sent him a photo of Damián, but now he has lost it (and would be afraid of finding it; we don't know why he says that). Then in Montevideo, some months later, the narrator goes to see the colonel Tabares, who had fought in the same battle, which interests the narrator for a fantastic story he is preparing. Tabares tells him about the horrors of the battles of this civil war, and with many details. He turns out to remember Damián, an Indian type who first makes him laugh and then stop; poor Damián had been boasting in the bars but turned out to behave embarrassingly cowardly in the fights themselves. The narrator had seen a possible hero in Pedro, but now he understands his solitude, silence, and reservation. He was Argentinean and should be a brave gaucho, fighting with the Uruguayans; Tabares despised his lack of courage and attributed it to the Argentineans. For the same reasons, still researching for the story resisting him, the narrator meets Tabares again some months later, in the company of another elderly gentleman, doctor Amaro, who also had been fighting in Saravias revolution, and the two are precisely talking about Masoller. After some anecdotes, Amaro mentions this young sheep-shearer, Damián, who had been in the valiant vanguard of the troops and died heroically from a bullet in his chest while leading an attack from his horseback, shouting “¡Viva Urquiza!”³⁶. Amazingly brave for someone no even twenty years old. Now the

³⁴ *El aleph*, 1949.

³⁵ It is also very complicated; so discussing it in this context is a challenge. Its argumentative aspect is overwhelming, compared to the reference narrative; it is a story about a story – the latter is the one we are focusing on.

³⁶ Anachronically so: Urquiza was a caudillo general who led the army that deposited the dictator Rosas in the battle of Caseros, 1852.

colonel gets confused; he is sure he has never heard about any Damián at all. Later, the narrator encounters in a bookstore his friend Gannon, who now denies ever having written about translating Emerson, and certainly not knowing anything about any Damián either. Then the colonel writes to him, no longer confused, and now clearly remembers the young hero Damián from Masoller. In the summer, the narrator happens to be in Gualeguay and wishes to interview the man who saw him die; he has died already in the fall. Damián's farm has disappeared. The narrator tries to find the photo of Damián he has; it turns out to be of someone else, a famous opera singer. He finally tries to find an explanation of these strange facts. There could have been two Damiáns; or the narrator could have dreamt the first one; a friend suggests that Damián could indeed have died at Masoller, but while praying that God let him return to his beloved place; God, who cannot change the past, can change the future, and has let his ghost return to Gualeguaychú, where his image finally faded like a shadow. Along this line, the narrator finds the solution after reading the treatise *De divina omnipotentia* by Pier Damiani (!), about God's power, discussed in Dante's *Paradiso*.³⁷ Damiani argued, against most others, that God can indeed change the past. – So the solution the narrator presents is that Damián turned out to be a coward at Masoller, survived, and dedicated the rest of his life to correcting this shame, back in his province, by his hard work. For forty years, he hopes and prays to get another chance to prove his courage, and he finally gets it in the hallucinations of his agony, in 1946. God at last hears him. He relives the battle and now is very brave; he dies in the attack, hit by a bullet in his chest, in the early days of 1904. In a sense, first he dies in 1946, then a second time, in 1904. God therefore has to correct the past. For example, he has to change the memories of all who remember him; and he has to kill the man who saw him die in 1946. Since the narrator has also met him, he too seems to be in danger! But he will, he hope, save his life by soon, around 1951, being convinced that the entire story was just an invention created by Emerson's poem, by the analogy of the names and by Damiani's arguments, in the process of writing a fantastic story. But poor Damián has achieved what his heart desired, albeit a little late, but maybe there is no greater happiness, the narrator concludes. And of course, we must agree, he has indeed written a fantastic story.

³⁷ Pier or Pietro Damiani, 1007 – 1072, theologian and saint, appears in the seventh heaven of Dante's Paradise, XXI, 112-126.

This narrative seems to insist on the epistemic research problems of a narrator who is a writer.³⁸ Nevertheless, it is easy to see that the reconstructed story itself yields the same cognitive characteristics as the former in our series. Pedro is a young Argentinean peasant living in Entreríos (Condition Space, A). He joins the Uruguayan rebels and fights at Masoller (Catastrophe Space, B). He then returns to his province and for the rest of his life ruminates the outcome of the battle in terms of his moral performance (Consequence Space, C). But in his agony his desire is heard by God who allows him (in the Conclusion Space, D) to return to Masoller, and to replay the decisive scene and this time have the glorious death he so intensely desires.

A: Gualeguay 1904.

A1. The *agentive intentional force* of the young and bragging Damián's wish to prove his courage.

A2. The *trivial causal force* of Damián's enrollment in Saravia's revolutionary army.³⁹

B: Masoller 1904.

B1. The *trivial causal force* of the violent battle. A2→B1.

B2. The *fatal causal force* of his psychological weakness in the moment of truth.

C: Gualeguay 1904 - 1946.

C1. The *trivial causal force* of the shame now filling Damián's entire life.

C2. The *agentive intentional force* of his dream-filled agony in which he relives the battle and fights.

C3. The *magical intentional force* of the omnipotent divine decision to let him have the death he has prepared for during these years and intensely desires.

D: Masoller 1904 revisited.

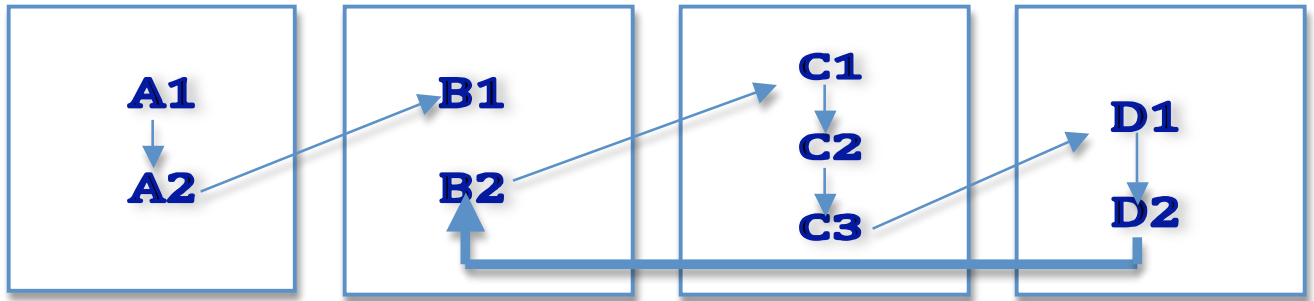
D1. The *agentive intentional force* of Damián's brave fighting and heroic death during the fierce battle. D1 revises B2.

D2. The *trivial causal force* of the ontological consequences of God's changing the past: erasure of traces and even human lives, incl. the first-person narrator.

³⁸ The effect on the reader of the epistemic mysteries of the narration is admittedly essential to the aesthetic force of this text. Reading is a process, and in the emotional display invited by this process lies much of the artfulness of a narrative of this kind, and in general, of fantastic stories (investing as they do in ambiguity). Nevertheless, the story must deliver a network of intelligible dynamic causal relations to reconstruct during the process in order to make sense, even as an (initial) mystery (an a terminal paradox). Without asking what 'really happened' the reader will not be sensible to the mystery.

³⁹ The text stresses sufficiently that the motive for his participation in the uprising is not political (Urquiza!).

Again, we can summarize this dynamic network in a spatio-temporal unfolding (fig. 5):



Magic is of course not always working backwards; we know however that the desire to change the past can be very strong even in contemporary minds, and it is, I think, such an intentional disposition that the – very scholarly developed – theme of this story exploits. As formerly mentioned, human cognition is dynamically generous: it allows a wide range of narrative deviations from the trivially real world, as philosophers and storytellers know or find out. Borges found his inspiration for this imaginary experiment in medieval theology.

3.6 Ernest Hemingway’s *A Very Short Story*⁴⁰ takes place during the First World War. A wounded American soldier in a hospital in Padua is taken care of by an Italian girl, Luz, and the two engage in an apparently serious love story. He is operated and tries to live up to his beloved.⁴¹ Before he – no name – returns to the front, the two enter the cathedral of Padua, Il Duomo, and pray. They would have liked to get married, but there is no time left, and they have no birth certificates; so the ceremony does not happen. A period of separation is bridged by Luz’ fervent love letters, which he opens after the armistice. Then he has to go home to the States. She refuses to follow him and asks him several things: to get a good job, to see no friends (!), and to not drink; these are her conditions for following him later, if he can pick her up in New York. They quarrel sadly about this on the train from Padua to Milan, where they part, and he leaves, via Genoa. Luz returns to

⁴⁰ *In Our Time*, 1925, 1930.

⁴¹ “He went under the anaesthetic holding tight on to himself so he would not blab about anything during the silly, talky time.” The reader wonders what to think here.

the North-East to work at a hospital in Pordonone and is lonely. But in the same sentence, she meets the major of a battalion of the arditi – “the daring” and glorious storm troops – who makes love to her. She is very impressed by this Italian relationship, so she writes to the States, Chicago, and tells our man it’s over, theirs was only a childish affair, and she is going to be married shortly.⁴² The major however turns out not to marry Luz. She gets no answer from Chicago; and the only ‘contract’ he gets, on the other side, is by contracting gonorrhoea from a girl while riding in a taxicab. And that is all.

Here the Condition Space is the hospital in Padua (A); then I propose that we have a Catastrophe Space (B), the Duomo, where the lovers do not get formally married. Here is where the decisive symbolization does not happen.⁴³ Third, there is an unfolding of the Consequence, the crisis in the train to Milan (C). Finally, they stop communicating, each in a separate country (D), both ending up absorbed in their respective misery, succinctly stated by the narrator. In terms of space-time logic, we thus have the following instances:

A: Padua. The hospital.

A1. The *fatal causal force* of love.

A2. The *trivial causal force* of trying to be a better person in order to protect a growing love.

B: Il Duomo.

B1. The *agentive intentional force* of seeking symbolic confirmation.

B2. The *fatal causal force* of the circumstances preventing marriage.

C: The train from Padua to Milan.

C1. The *agentive intentional force* of Luz’ categorical reservations.

C2. The *fatal causal force* of their unfinished quarrel: the train stops in Milan, the content of the quarrel is not settled.

C3. The *trivial causal force* of their separation.

D: Chicago and Pordonone.

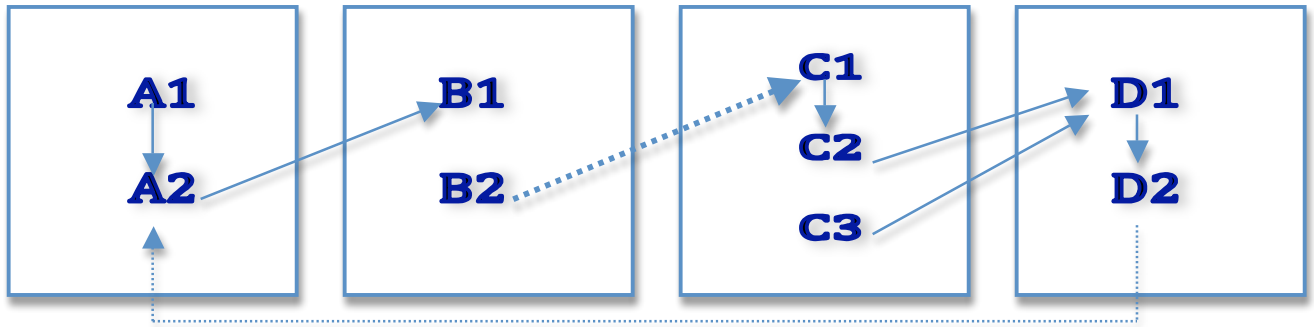
D1. The *fatal causal force* of Luz’ infidelity.

D2. The *trivial causal force* of the ex-soldier’s careless sex.

⁴² “She loved him as always, but she realized now it was only a boy and girl love. She hoped he would have a great career, and believed in him absolutely. She knew it was for the best.” The narrator’s mordant irony cannot be missed in sentences like these.

⁴³ “They felt as though they were married, but they wanted everyone to know about it, and to make it so they could not lose it.” The feeling as such is not sufficient, the symbolic ritual has to take place...

In this reading (incl. B2→C1), which I do not pretend to defend as the only possible, the dynamic network would be as follows (fig. 6):

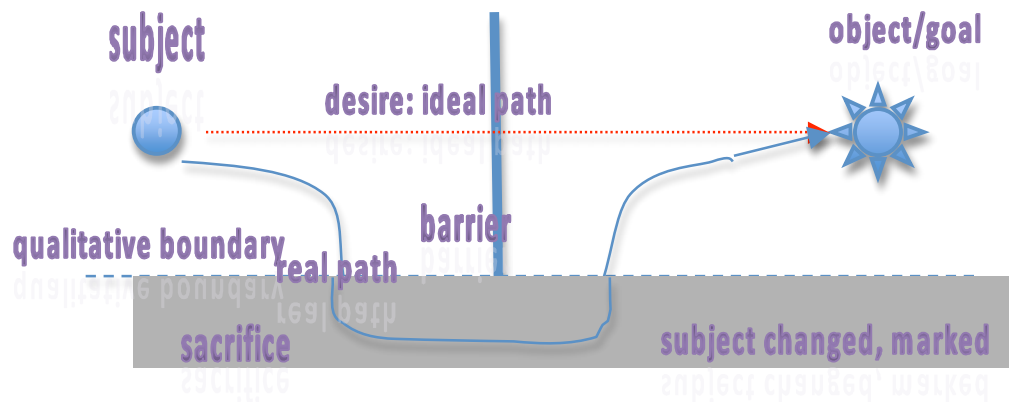


The feedback from D2 to A2 is a cruel retrospective way in which D2 resonates after A2 and thus lets us reread the story emotionally; cognitively, this theme of trying-to-be-a-better-person (‘shaping up’) or letting-go (‘shaping down’) is, I suggest, a universal of moral behavior as linked to love.

4. An overarching narrative dynamics schema

If we compare the event structures above, we can additionally grasp a cross-spatial dynamic pattern. There is a subject desiring something, then accessing and achieving it, but then having to pay a sad price for the access or achievement. The path to glamour (*The Necklace*), to hours of shared happiness (*Two Friends*), to lucky findings (*A Piece of String*), to vengeance (*Emma Zunz*), to honor (*The Other Death*), or simply to love (*A Very Short Story*) goes through misery, humiliation, life-long suffering, death right away, or other sacrifices; subjects in a sense get what they want but have to pay a price for it that might have modified, maybe cancelled) their initial desire, had they known it before experiencing it.

In terms of linguistic semantics, a special version of force-dynamics, the force-barrier schema, which is primarily used for analyses of causation, modality, and similar semio-syntactic phenomena in grammar (cf. note 9, above), may serve as a diagrammatic representation of this view (fig. 7):



The subject has to circumvent the barrier that makes the ideal path of desire impossible, and so has to cross a qualitative boundary beyond which life takes its toll; so, in retrospect, the subject will ironically have reached its destination, object, goal, in a ‘winged’ state, marked by the heavy price paid in terms of life span, dignity, etc.⁴⁴

There may be many different meta-stories underlying the diegetic spatio-dynamic products of human imagination, but this sacrificial format is at least a prominent one of them.

5. Conclusion

The reader will have worked through the preceding dynamic networks and will have had a chance to evaluate the particular relations established and postulated. These relational networks are at the core of the meaningfulness – the production of meaning, if you will – of these stories, in so far as they imprint themselves on the reading minds and challenge them in respect to their experiences of what can follow from what, and what feeling you can have of what happens and will happen.

In short stories like these, we may grasp an elementary narrative unfolding, a sort of narrative molecule, whose atoms are the dynamic spaces involved; the forces are then the particles of these atoms, to spin this metaphor. In larger narrative creations, we would

⁴⁴ The change occurring when the real path traverses a qualitative boundary affects the subject’s circumstances in many respects, and often determines other narratives involving the subject, as we clearly see in *The Necklace*. The Faustian motive – selling one’s soul to the devil – is another forceful example. Causal narrative links as those we have studied will then often correspond to whole arrays of interconnected force-dynamic scenarios. How come that we so easily and intuitively grasp these complex connections in the course of a story we read? I think the answer is the same as to the problem of our fast automatic understanding of the grammar and meaning of sentences: we use default cognitive formats.

expect to see overarching networks of such elementary networks, in parallel or in serial articulations. This generalization evidently calls for empirical examination.

However, the basic dynamic analysis is possible to the extent that active narrative forces⁴⁵ can be identified and localized spatio-temporally in a format allowing description and comparison. If the dynamic logic of narrative meaning we have sketched out is stable under generalization and empirical cultural variation, it may make it possible to eventually reach a level of analysis contributing both to a narrative phenomenology of natural human imagination – not only of perception (although perception is narratively impregnated⁴⁶) – and to an understanding of human cultures as more or less elegant, intricate, spiritual or humoristic ways of phrasing the intricate web of things we do and things that simply seem to happen to us, to our gods, saints, martyrs, heroes, colleagues, friends, and significant others – people we care about.

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⁴⁵ Again: by forces we mean all sorts of causal instances that narratives can refer to – eventually, we may therefore be able to find a rich set of force types in literature and then, for the sake of cognitive psychology, include these in the inventory of causes that the human mind can use in its explanatory thinking. It is already evident that this set is not reduced to trivial physical causation but includes at least three other types from the start, that is, without any metaphoric transfer. The mind is not physicalistic; it would be more accurate to see it as naturally ‘surrealistic’ in a broad sense. Hence a ‘naturalization’ of narratives (Fludernik 2005: 313), constructing “narrativity on the basis of real-world cognitive parameters (handled in a flexible manner)” will have to be flexible enough to understand that genuine, human, embodied experience is inherently full of magical wonders and absurd humor. However, I doubt that ‘naturalization’ will stay a suitable term for such a theoretical endeavor.

⁴⁶ Animal consciousness is dramatically narrative in the sense of offering an apparently constant, present, dramatically catastrophic space to the subject (Brandt 2007).

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Appendix:

Letting, Making, and the Dynamics of Causation

A brief note

Abstract

Force-dynamic modelling has been developed for grammatical expression of causation (Talmy 2000) and modality (Sweetser 1990, Brandt 2004) in various versions, either as balls-and-brakes or as paths-and-barriers. The present discussion examines a format of representation allowing the modeling of both the basic letting concepts and the basic making concepts. The result is a dynamic schema model that offers possibilities of further elaboration as a model of narrative event sequences, and eventually as a format for interactive and context-anchored cognitive robotics.

Keywords: forces, barriers, causation, modality, negation.

The forces-and-barriers model⁴⁷ offers a simple means of representing the relationship holding between a process or a project that we refer to and a circumstance that its realization depends on. In the case of a project, a 'path to realization'⁴⁸ leads through a stance of conditions to be fulfilled and circumstances to take into account. The condition or circumstance is cognized (conceptualized schematically) as a barrier that either does or does not **let** the process or project follow its course towards fulfillment. **Letting** something happen means not stopping it; it means lowering the barrier, or opening a gate in it; **letting** and **not letting** determine an axis of corresponding modal meaning values: the reference entity therefore **can/cannot** pass. This modal result (involving the verb **may**) also includes the deontic set permission/prohibition (of some act) and the epistemic set possibility/impossibility (of some event). This

⁴⁷ The standard force-barrier model works as follows. A mobile entity follows a path toward a goal but encounters a barrier in the middle; the resistance of the barrier to the movement of the entity determines what further happens. The barrier can be 'overcome', or it can 'stop' the moving entity, unless it instead follows a path around it. An opening in the barrier can let the entity pass. Making is not represented by this standard model. Talmy 2000, Sweetser 1990. Geeraerts & Cuyckens 2007 have a useful chapter on Force Dynamics.

⁴⁸ Source-path-goal schemas are inherent in all concepts of intention, volition, planning, projects, and conscious acts in general. This is why "LOVE IS A JOURNEY" in Lakoff's (1987) list of "conceptual metaphors". "Love", here, is a project and is conceptualized by a force-barrier schema; in the metaphor, the source is another project, the "journey".

axis is one of the semiotic dimensions of the dynamic square for causation presented below.

Letting is passive, whereas **not letting** is active. By contrast, **making** is active, whereas **not making** is passive. This striking phenomenon of inverse correlation of negative and positive values is due to the semiotic correlation between **letting** and **making**, a disposition that current literature on the subject has not considered. In fact, **making** (something happen) is an active, often even agentive concept, though its dynamic representation is far from being clear. By contrast, **not making** (something happen) is passive and equivalent to **letting** (something stay in its present state). The modal meaning values (involving the verb **must**) corresponding to the positive form of **making** include the deontic modal set obligation/facultativity and the epistemic modal set necessity/contingency.

Let us summarize, first using the verb **be** to refer to the states involved:

Making corresponds to *not letting be*; active (= changing), whereas:

Not making corresponds to *letting be*; passive (=leaving unchanged).

There are two more meanings to attend to in the basic group of **letting** effects. They appear if we instead apply the infinitive **do** and allow a paraphrase using the verb **stop** (in the sense of **prevent from**):

Letting do corresponds to **not stopping**; passive (=non-intervention).

Not letting do corresponds to **stopping**; active (=negative intervention).

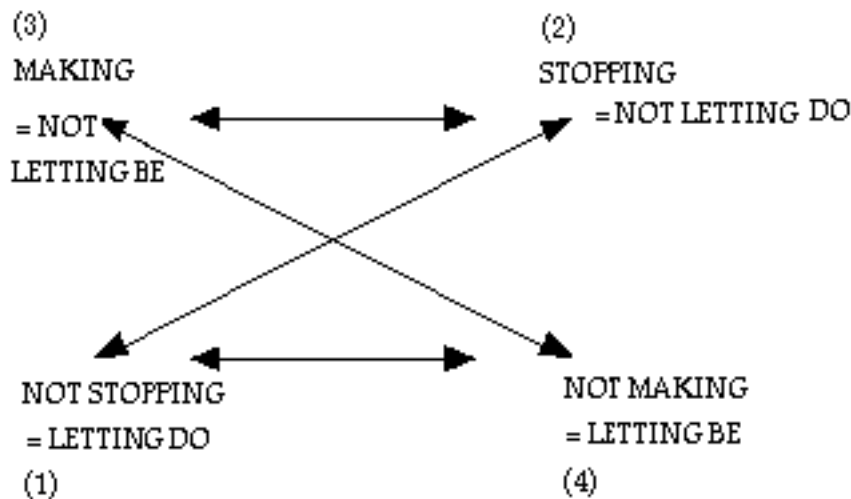
So we have four meaning values: **(not) letting be**; **(not) letting do**. Two active, two passive. Only the **letting do** forms have been taken into account in standard force-dynamic modeling. Adding the **letting be** forms solves the problem of modeling active **making** through force-dynamics.

My aim here is to show that these meanings can be represented within the framework of one and the same dynamic schema, accounting directly for their cognitive kinship, apparent in the fact that they share verbs of the **letting** type (Fr.

laisser, G. *lassen*, da. *lade*, Sp. *dejar*, Port. *deixar*,⁴⁹ etc.) characterized by their transitive constructions with verb-phrasal objects, by the examples (1) – (4):

- (1) The open cage door let the birds escape.
- (2) Paul never let anybody criticize him.
- (3) Mary let her boyfriend down. She made him unhappy.
- (4) Please let me stay with you. Let things be as they are.

The semiotic square⁵⁰ corresponding to these main forms is the following



(fig. 1):

This Greimasean presentation of two intersecting 'contradictory' values (2) – (1=non2) and (3) – (4=non3), forms an axis of 'contraries' (3) – (2) that opposes the strong, efficient, positive, active values, **making vs. stopping**, whereas the axis of 'subcontraries' only distinguishes two weak, concessive, negative, passive values (1) – (4). This semantic square summarizes the schematic structure of the involved dynamic concepts.

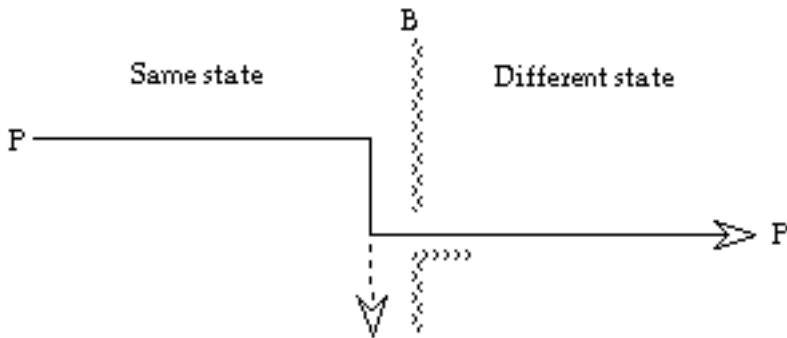
⁴⁹ Silva (Silva 1999 et passim) is no doubt the scholar most consequently immersed in the study of dynamic semantic aspects of grammar of contemporary literature.

⁵⁰ A semiotic square – *un carré sémiotique* – is a diagram proposed by A.J. Greimas (Greimas and Courtés 1979).

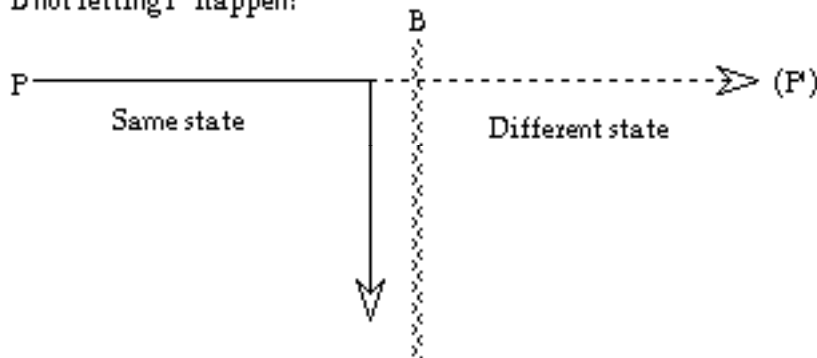
The corresponding, unified schematic representation – a force-barrier diagram – is based on four elements: (a) **P** – a process or a project, or simply an intentional agent driven by a goal and trying to ‘reach’ it; (b) a flexible path in space (or time) from an initial position of **P** and oriented toward the fulfillment, completion, or goal to be reached, namely the continuation of a process or state or the realization of a project; (c) a barrier **B**⁵¹ showing the particular circumstances affecting the path of **P**; and finally (d) a division of the dynamic space in two qualitative strata with a critical line separating the two parts, one in which movements, acts or events do not change the state of the agent: thus a stratum of Same state, and one representing a Different state.

In ordinary ‘letting’ causation, like (1) and (2), the barrier coincides with the critical line, and the passage through (across, around) this critical barrier leads from Same to Different state. The barrier **B** lets or does not let the process or project **P** happen, or lets the Agent reach his goal (fig. 2a and b):

B letting P happen:

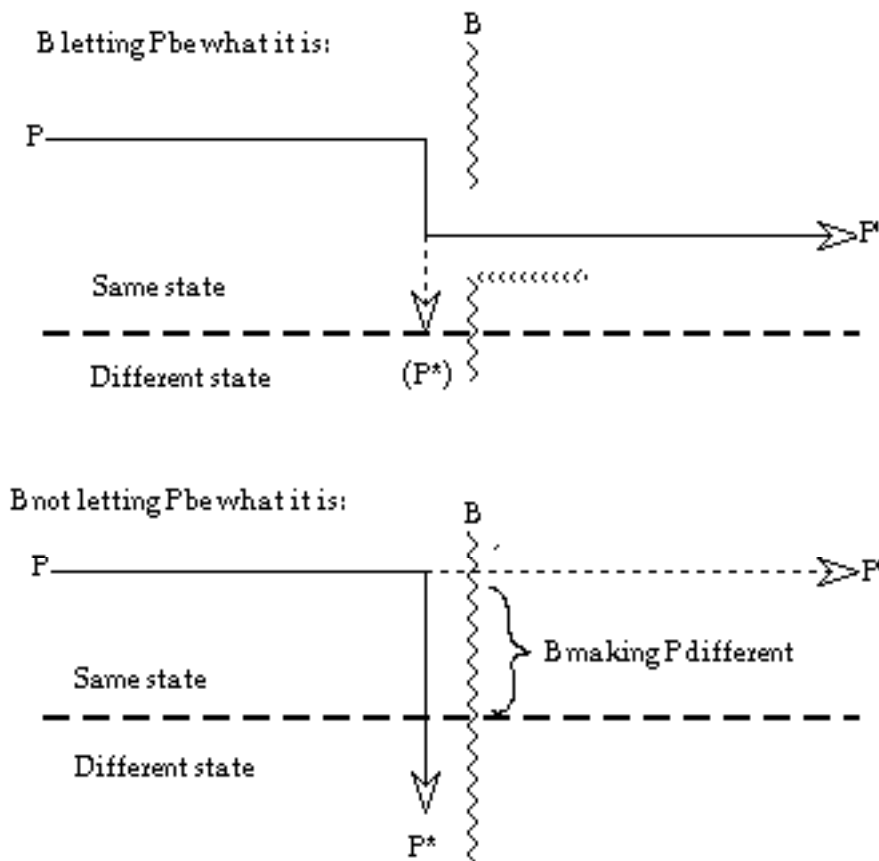


B not letting P happen:



⁵¹ The barrier can be interpreted as a physical obstacle (a mountain, a wall), as a social artefact (traffic lights and lines, locked doors), or as a person, interacting with **P** in communicational ways.

If by contrast the critical qualitative line crosses the barrier instead of running parallel to it, we are able to represent a transition from **P** to **P'** within one and the same state, when an open barrier **lets P** stay the same; a closed barrier can force **P** to go into a qualitative different state, so the actively impeding circumstance will be precisely the one changing or **making P** into a **P***, as in the following diagram (fig. 3a and b):



The 'harassment' of **P** by the barrier **B** corresponds to an active intervention that **makes P** go into a state determined by this dynamic circumstance. **B** changes **P**.

It had formerly been suggested (Brandt 2004) that a **making** schema includes a transforming instance, a multiple input into this instance, and a critical boundary that the process crosses before unfolding a result scenario that shows the change the input undergoes. This result scenario – e. g. a morphological

change such as: dividing, crushing, splitting, growing, shrinking, or the set of mereological changes: filling, emptying, ordering, disordering, etc. – would characterize **P*** as a figurative revision.

It is plausible that the **letting** and the **making** forms of causation are basic in human cognition. They should therefore be studied and modeled with particular care and accuracy. The present account only contributes to the elucidation of two important aspects of their behavior that have intrigued semantic research: how come they can use the same verb and in very similar constructions? And how can a barrier possibly **make** anything at all?⁵² The verb **let** unfolds with and without **negation**, **be** and **do** a variable dynamic scenario, an iconic representation which may be part of an elementary set of thinking tools of the human (and animal) mind. **Making** is what we **do** when we do **not let** things **be** what they already are.⁵³

In narrative unfoldings, **P*** can further achieve overcomings and reach goals that **P** could not do; one dynamic scenario can **make** the subject competent for overcoming a barrier in another scenario. The subject can thus be doing one thing in order to do another sort of thing, not because the goals are linked but because the first experience prepares the subject for the second task.

*

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⁵² If the Agent is intentional, that is, is internally driven by a tendency to move toward a goal, then a barrier forcing the Agent to take a detour, if this detour leads through a field of imprinting experiences, will affect and change the Agent; this change is **made** by the (closed) barrier causing the detour. **Making** in this analysis is thus a concept presupposing an entity undergoing the change which is intentional; even inanimate things ‘want to’ stay as they are and oppose our efforts to change them. This non-physicalistic, intentionalistic view is intuitively easy to understand, but has not been admitted in cognitive semantics.

⁵³ Curiously, Sigmund Freud had the idea that negation can not be imagined (so people had to imagine positively what was conceptualized negatively). Of course, an isolated operator called ‘**not**’ does not prompt us to imagine anything. But formal logic is not the format of elementary thinking; in life, it is easier to imagine negation as a door (or a factory) that closes – that’s negation in the human scale, the form that cognitively grounds abstract thinking. Admittedly, a static image does not open or close anything; modeling has to be kinetic and dynamic in order to account for our mental doings.

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