Figures of Chance II
Chance in Theory and Practice

Chapter 1

Chance, causality, temporality

Edited by Anne Duprat

With Mark Currie, Elie During and Sophie Vlacos
With a counterpoint by Philippe Carrard

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Introduction

The first chapter of this second volume deals with the relationships between art and chance, beginning with a logical conundrum: the narrative in its classic sense—that of a finished work—leaves no room for chance. This is primarily, of course, because all the propositions, sequences and images contained in a completed novel, film, comic book or series are, by default, the product of authorial intent, whose boundaries are explored by aleatory poetics, collective creative forms and, more recently, computer-assisted creations that attempt to introduce some leeway into the entrenched principle of intentionality; several of this book's chapters are devoted to such experiments. But it is also, from the standpoint of the narration, because the traditional story is, by definition, finished; in theory, all aspects of the tale being told have already taken place.

 As Marcel Conche reminds us, the word "aleatory" (random) "applies to that which is dependent on the course of time: not that which is and may no longer be, but that which cannot not have been" (Conche 1999, 22). Strictly speaking, chance only applies to the future: the past event may be contingent (i.e. not "necessary"), but, like the naval battle Aristotle uses as an example of the contingency of future events, it ceases to be random the moment it occurs. This is why counterfactual reasoning is a quintessentially narrative form of argumentation because it involves artificially projecting ourselves into a time in the past where we would still have been unaware of how events would unfold, in order to recount the alternative and necessarily imaginary course that these events might have taken. Whatever lesson we learn from counterfactual reasoning, in particular regarding the contingent or non-contingent nature of the events in question, this artificial process is unable to provide the past with access to randomness because, by definition, it presupposes that what's done is done. It only allows us to appreciate the interplay of causalities that intervene in the way the events unfold, providing us with the opportunity to

measure the distance between the path they might have followed had the initial conditions been different and the one they did, in fact, follow. The finished structure of the traditional narrative is what the creators of open-ended, ergodic or gamified narratives try to step beyond, the idea being to reintroduce not unexpectedness—which the traditional mimetic narrative has no problem embracing—but indeterminacy, which is characteristic of the experience we have of the way events happen in real life.

This means that nothing more effectively highlights the difference between stories and life than the theoretical impossibility of encountering true chance in a finished work.[1] Since the late nineteenth century, this is what has motivated the efforts of modern and postmodern art to free writing, film and painting from this inherent limitation to its specific temporal structure, as well as leading criticism and literary theory to focus on open-ended forms whose aim is to overcome the theoretical inability of the traditional narrative to (re)produce the random occurrence of events in the present. It is nonetheless useful to examine our day-to-day experience of the narration of events presented as random in fiction, films and TV series in order to understand how our habitual use of storytelling, however linear and mimetic it may be, actually exemplifies several of the fundamental paradoxes that characterize our real-life perception of time.

As we have just seen, the first of these paradoxes concerns the way the narrative relates to the past and, more precisely, the twofold position—at once retrospective and prospective—in which the work places its readers and audiences: what remains to be read or seen has theoretically not happened yet, although it has already been written down or recorded. The remainder of a narrative precedes not only its discovery by its audience but also, in theory, the moment of its narration, in other words the point at which it comes into existence. While the artificial temporal status of the narrated event clearly differs from that of the real-life occurrence (except if we believe that our history is stage-managed by a creative power), the experience of reading and its attendant paradoxes supply our intuition with a model that helps us to understand how our day-to-day understanding of our experience of time leads us to turn it into a story—and indeed, cannot do otherwise. The fact that, over the last 20 years or so, studies in narratology have assigned an increasingly central role to the activity of readers and spectators in the narrative process has provided tools for such analysis. Post-classical narratology, especially in its various strands inspired by the cognitive sciences, has shifted critical attention from narrative-as-object towards narrativity-as-process, opening up fresh avenues in the analysis of the complex and constantly evolving participation of receivers of narrative in its construction (Phelan 1989, 2007; Fludernik 1996). Analyses of the attitude of the reader/viewer in the way the temporal structures of the written, drawn or filmed narrative are perceived and investigations of the active

role the reader/viewer plays in the constitution of these structures have benefited from these new perspectives. Examples are studies by Raphaël Baroni—after Kermode ([1967] 2000), Margolin (1999), Herman (2002) and others—on the intrinsically narrative nature of time (Baroni 2009), in particular his reading of Paul Ricœur, which leads him to assert, in contrast to the author of *Time and Narrative*, that time "does not rely on narrative mediation to become human; […] it is always narratively articulated already" (Baroni 2010, 379). This narrative articulation of time is never more visible than in the way chance is always apprehended in the form of stories, even when they are reduced to the simplest of anecdotes (Aristotle's moneylender, Bergson's roof tile, etc.).

In Chapter 1, Mark Currie connects what narratological analysis says about the reader's dynamic perception of the occurrence of events in stories to the history of philosophical approaches to narrative representation involving the "as if", from Kant to Peter Brooks (1984). Examining Gary Saul Morson's contention that, in novels, what is not yet known is implicitly treated "as equivalent to what is still undetermined" (Morson 1994, 165), Currie shows that it is precisely the dissimilarity, in this regard, between reading and life that allows the literary experience to shed light on our relationship with chance. It's the habit we develop of adopting a dual perspective as we read, at once immersed in the story's temporality and hovering above it, that allows us to construct our real-life experience of time as a story in which the present moment constantly and gradually reveals coming events as parts of a meaningful continuum. This narrative understanding of time concurs with the principle that Ricœur established and whose profound consequences, in particular on the possibility of history, he studied in *Time and Narrative*: "Time becomes human to the extent that it is organized after the manner of a narrative; narrative, in turn, is meaningful to the extent that it portrays the features of temporal experience" (Ricœur 1990, 3). Currie shows how this narrative constitution of human time affects our perception of chance: experiencing the unfolding of time as a story does not prompt us to consider that the succession of events that make up the story is, in itself, necessary; instead, it allows us to think, as S. Žižek suggests, that the necessity of the story is itself contingent (p. 28–29).

Whether or not we adhere to recent philosophies of chance (Malabou [(1996) 2012], Žižek [2012], Meillassoux)[2] on this point, it is undeniable that our awareness of an intrinsically narrative perception of time, rooted in our experiences of fiction and history, turns out to be essential to our understanding of chance. It shows us that the contingent occurrence of events can be understood from the perspective of its relationship with time, even before being examined with regard to its relationship with truth.

Another aspect of this relationship with time configured by our narrative competencies involves the part the latter play in our attitudes to chance

as a form of the future event, as Ricœur theorized when he stated that "narratives have acting and suffering as their theme" (1983, 85). By restoring the importance of practical situations in which the configuring imagination on the one hand and will and action on the other intervene, Sophie Vlacos endeavours to reinstate Ricœur's engagement with the treatment of chance as a form of the involuntary. She shows that chance, though barely mentioned in Ricœur's notoriously syncretic work,

> exerts a noteworthy influence, not only by way of narrative's extension to the real-life realms of action and ethics (mimesis 1 and 3), but also, conceived as a formal constituent of Aristotelian emplotment, as a qualifying feature for narrative's hermeneutical and ontological expansion.

Emplotment involves configuring the play of contingencies in the domain of the action, giving it the ethical dimension without which it would remain devoid of meaning. In real life, and more precisely in history, the narrative treatment of chance allows the experience of suffering to be transformed into practical wisdom when faced with the disfiguring, inscrutable violence of contingency as a negation of human will.

Here again, the impact of narrative on the intelligibility of the world appears to be directly connected to our understanding of time, in other words to the way our narrative competencies shape contingent sequences of events into stories. Dealing with this transformation from the precise perspective of the treatment of contingency by and within the narrative, as this chapter does, helps to shed light on the nature of the link between creation (emplotment), hermeneutics (the reader's journey) and the extension of narrative into the real world (the domains of action and ethics). Our use of narratives, particularly literary ones, constructs real-life space as a space of the possible—not only at the level of the intelligible, insofar as our reading leads us constantly to compare what is with what might or might not have been in terms of the truth of things, but also at the practical level, insofar as it allows us to envision the advent of events in time and to make them into *our* adventure.

Applying our understanding of contingency to the temporal structures of narrative highlights a third essential aspect of our relationship with time concerning the present—our own present or that of the characters in a story—as the intangible point, always still to come and always already there, at which events come into being. The literary narrative materializes the paradox of their advent, especially when several events occur at the same time: the novel dramatizes such coincidences and makes them meaningful in the form of "encounters". Unlike spatial representations of the world, which allow us to grasp the causal system responsible for such coincidences, and in addition to Aristotelian narratologies showing how

emplotment efficiently articulates events leading to the same *dénouement*, Elie During turns the spotlight on the role of time in the poetic and cosmological process that allows us to conceive of simultaneity. An essential disconnection or loosening of the configuration of the elements that make up the world makes it possible for several events to happen at the same time. Elie During shows the reciprocal connection between two questions often asked in different types of inquiry: how must things happen in the real world so that such encounters may occur in stories, and, in return, how must stories be constructed so that they shed light upon the way in which things happen at the same time in the world? More than just a model, the narrative, with its setbacks, its obscurities, its areas of disconnection and coexistence, its meaningful delays and its different ways of conveying information, thus functions as an "incubator or catalyst of chance" in that it allows us to grasp the special texture of a physical world that is no longer the full universe of classical physics, where everything is felt mechanically and logically by everything else, but an Einsteinian world where, on the contrary, "connections take time" (p. 49).

The essays that comprise this chapter thus show what happens when we study the way narrative configures time, not from the perspective of the novelistic or historical concentration created by emplotment, which allows no wayward thread to escape from the tight logical and semantic knot it ties, but instead from the complementary perspective of its relationship to that which is contingent, unmotivated, involuntary and inessential. Viewed from this angle, the novel, the play, the series or the film, because they are closed, finished works, appear first and foremost as spaces of dispersion that allow their users to grasp the partial process, the semi-constrained coexistence and the relative state of independence in which real-life events circulate, organize themselves and convey meaning. A number of fundamental paradoxes inherent in the way we conceive time are highlighted in this way: how the random progression of a life can nonetheless constitute a story; how a story can affect what has not yet happened to us; and how a finished work can testify to the imperfect connection between the elements that make up the world. Looking at the narrative treatment of chance from the perspective of the temporal structures of the story rather than focusing on the question of truth or engaging in ontological inquiry allows us to show the extent to which this apprehension of chance depends on language, here in the form of writing—including the writing of history.[3]

Last but not least, the investigations carried out in this chapter may help to shed light on an aspect of the problem raised, as André Comte-Sponville remarked, by Marcel Conche's mobilist theory of chance (1999): does chance concern the present or the future? "It is true", replied Conche in his preface to the new edition of *L'Aléatoire*, "that there is no more randomness if nothing more is to come. But both that which is to come

and randomness are part of the composition of the present" (1999, 15). The following three essays invite us to study the role narrative plays in this composition.

Anne Duprat

1   Contingency and narrative temporality

The concept of contingency, routinely connected in philosophical circles to the idea of truth, cannot be unyoked from time. This is partly because, in certain discursive domains such as the law, the primary meaning of contingency is a future event which may or may not happen, or the provision for such an event, so that, as a noun, a contingency can be understood as an instance, an event perhaps, of the more general condition of uncertainty. This definition is a basic one that I want to carry through the discussion of narrative because it derives a certain clarity from its singular reference to a future event. In fact, the word contingency is more commonly encountered in academic discourse, in an abstract form: not as *a contingency*, a particular kind of event, but contingency in general, as an abstract noun or quality. In philosophical contexts, contingency tends to refer to the status of statements which are neither necessarily true nor false, (such as Aristotle's famous "future contingent" proposition, "There will be a battle at sea tomorrow") perhaps but not only because those propositions refer to the future. This logical meaning of necessity spreads into something ontological: that a contingent event is one that is not governed by necessity. It may or may not happen in the future, or could have happened otherwise in the past: contingency, in other words, is a property that attaches equally to past and future events.

The idea that contingency can have either a past orientation or a future orientation is well established in the theory of narrative. We might think, for example of the fictional counterfactual, which might be defined as a reflection on a hypothetical alternative to the actual past (see Carrard below p. 51–58). Counterfactuality is a mode of causal reasoning that, in its default setting, speculates about what could have happened if things had been different. It is a hypothetical alteration of the past that serves to speculate about the alternative fates and outcomes that would have ensued if this virtual, hypothetical past were actual. Counterfactuals find their way into fiction in the form of biographical and autobiographical speculations, which take the form of a thought experiment "What would have happened if…?": "Various types of biographical counterfactual can be articulated in narrative fiction either by one character speculating about another's life trajectory, or by a heterodiegetic narrator speculating on the possible alternate fates of characters" (Dannenberg 2008, 54). In the autobiographical counterfactual, the speculation takes the form of a reflection on one's own

story. Interestingly, for my purposes here, a canonical example offered in Dannenberg's discussion is that of Robinson Crusoe reflecting on his extreme good fortune that the ship and its contents were not entirely lost to him in the wreck:

> Then it occurred to me again, how well I was furnished for my subsistence, and what would have been the case if it had not happened, which was an hundred thousand to one, that the ship from the place where she first struck and was driven so near to the shore that I had time to get all these things out of her. What would have been my case if I had been to have lived in the condition in which I at first came on shore, without necessaries of life, or necessaries to supply and secure them? Particularly, said I aloud (tho' to myself), what should I ha' done without a gun, without ammunition, without any tools to make any thing, or to work with, without clothes, bedding, a tent, or any manner of covering?
>
> (Defoe 1965, 80–81)

This is a "downward" counterfactual, since the consequence of the counterfactual world here is very much worse than the actual state of affairs, and it was escaped only by an outrageous improbability that brought the wreck near the shore. The alternative outcome envisaged in this hypothetical mode is one of greater suffering, and its avoidance is translated, by further reflection, from the language of probability to that of providence:

> Another reflection was of great use to me […] and this was, to compare my present condition with what I at first expected it should be; nay, with what it would certainly have been, if the good providence of God had not wonderfully ordered the ship to be cast up nearer to the shore, where I not only could come at her, but could bring what I got out of her to the shore.
>
> (Defoe 1965, 141)

The key to this kind of thinking, according to Dannenberg, is that it partakes of two different varieties of causal reasoning, the first of which she calls progenerative causation, which expresses "paths by which things in the world, the mind, and behaviour, spring from one another", while the second is manipulative causation, which involves someone, such as a providential god, directly manipulating events and objects (Dannenberg 2008, 26). Both the counterfactual reflection itself and the species of manipulative causation by which Crusoe convinces himself of the hidden necessity of events are, according to Dannenberg, devices that enhance the illusion of reality. A counterfactual, Dannenberg argues, "can perform an important authenticating function in the realist tradition" because it

"encourages the reader to think of the actual events in a narrative world as 'real' in contradistinction to the 'less real' counterfactual sequence" (54). In the realm of causal-progenerative reasoning, what is improbable or random is used as an explanation that camouflages the "ultimate causal manipulative level of the author": as for Crusoe, the narrative explanation substitutes a different causal agent (God) for the real one (an author) while retaining the basic causation type. For Dannenberg, then, the phenomenon of counterfactuality, with its modes of hypothesis and its different species of causality, is part of the apparatus of the realist tradition, contrasting the virtual to the actual and hiding the real manipulative agent. Crucially, the core characteristic of the counterfactual is that it is a hypothesis about the past, and in contrasting the virtual to the actual, it makes a realist assumption that the past can be known and understood as unalterable fact.

As many critics and philosophers of the literary counterfactual have argued, this species of reasoning can be sustained over the whole length of a novel, whether as alternate history or "what if" science fictions (e.g. Gallagher 2018; Prendergast 2019). For Dannenberg, counterfactual reflections are moments of speculation with an orientation towards the past within a larger narrative—a hypothesis which offers an alternative to what actually happened in the past. There can be no counterfactuals that refer to the future, because there are, as yet, no facts about the future—no actuality against which a hypothetical alternative can establish itself. It might also be thought that something more complicated, less theoretically tidy, comes into view in the example from Defoe. What sense does it make for a Crusoe to reflect on the idea that his present could have been much worse if things had happened otherwise, and at the same time to believe that events were orchestrated by divine providence? His good fortune, it would seem, is rooted in contingency and in necessity: that things could have been otherwise and that they could not. If Dannenberg regards the collision of two different kinds of causal reasoning (the pro-generative and the manipulative) as an authorial trick designed to divert attention from the real manipulative agency of authorial control, I am going to propose a different answer: that written narratives project the past-orientation of the counterfactual onto events that have not yet taken place. This proposition is then the basis on which it is possible to prise the concept of contingency from the question of truth and attach it instead to the structures of narrative time.

To make this argument I will begin from two observations that come from Gary Saul Morson's *Narrative and Freedom*, a study of contingency and freedom in Russian fiction published in 1994. The first observation is straightforward: that "in a novel, the future in fact is there, already written; we need only skip a few pages. It has the full substantiality of a past

event" (Morson 1994, 50). The second proposition is more complicated: "Novels depend on an implicit convention according to which what is still unknown will be treated as equivalent to what is still undetermined" (Morson 1994, 175). This first idea requires some qualification because what lies a few pages ahead, already there, may or may not be thought of properly as the future, or, to be more exact, it might be the textual future and not the future of the story sequence. There is a sense in which the second proposition addresses this qualification by suggesting that the future of the linguistic sequence of a novel may in fact be the disclosure of knowledge of the past rather than the disclosure of future events. In classical narratology, for example there is a distinction between a kind of suspense orientated towards the future and one orientated towards the past. Summarizing Roland Barthes's discussion in *S/Z* (1970), Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan expresses the distinction as follows:

> The future orientated type consists in keeping alive the question 'what next?' (and is thus related to Barthes's proairetic code) [...] In order to increase the reader's interest and prolong itself, the text will delay the narration of the next event in the story [...] The past-orientated delay consists in keeping alive questions like 'what happened?', 'why?', 'what is the meaning of all this?' Here story-time may go on, but the reader's comprehension of the narrated events is impeded by the omission of information (i.e. the creation of a gap) about the past or the present.
>
> (Rimmon-Kenan 1983, 125–126)

In other words, a reader's orientation towards the textual future may not be an orientation towards future events in a storyworld, and our surprises may come in a form closer to the revelation of something we did not know about the past than the disclosure of what happened next. When we put Morson's two propositions together, we might then recognize that the classical opposition between what we do not yet know and what has not yet taken place is difficult to uphold: there is a sense in which all the events of a novel have already taken place, but the reader experiences the always-already of the written text as the not-yet of the narration. This, according to Morson, is a way of understanding the difference between living and reading: "The most important way in which novels are unlike our lives is that novels are over" (Morson 1994, 174).

This convention, according to which what is still unknown will be treated as equivalent to what is still undetermined, is, for Morson, the basis on which a novel, or a narrative more generally, can simulate the contingency of living in the present. What we think of as the future of the story is unlike the real future in being already over, but for a reader these two futures are equivalent because this knowledge will arrive from the textual future.

In thinking about the contingency of the future in a narrative, it is clear that we need to ask the question, "whose future?" At very least, we need to think about the difference between the future of the linguistic chain when read in the right order, the future of the storyworld it represents, the future of any participant in the story, the future of the narrator, the future of the reading process, and the future of a given reader more generally, inside which all of these are folded. Morson is convincing on the topic of a doubling of temporal standpoint that happens in the process of reading, as when we watch *King Oedipus* in the theatre apprised of the plot before the story begins: we know everything that is going to happen; we see the whole picture from a vantage point alongside the gods, but we also imagine what it is like to be Oedipus and not to know. This is also the situation when we read a story for the second time and experience the necessity of the already written at the same time as we imaginatively relocate to a situation that has all the appearance of contingency as it would for a character or first-time reader—anything can happen. For all that a narrative might strive to re-produce the either-or potentiality of lived experience, for all that the open future is simulated by the condition of not knowing what will happen, the reader might know the whole picture in advance, or at very least know that it is ineluctable for the character because it is already written.

This is why the futural meaning of contingency presents special problems for narrative time. We can sense the difference between events that may or may not happen in life and those that merely appear open in narrative, and sometimes we sense the difference because we are in full possession of future events that carry with them, as Morson says, the full substantiality of past events. The "problem of future contingents", as we know it from Aristotle and Leibniz, claims that statements that refer to the future (such as "There will be a battle at sea tomorrow") have no truth value and must wait until tomorrow before their truth can be ascertained. But in written narratives of all kinds, there can be no equivalent of the problem of future contingents because the future is already there, whether we know it or not, written and waiting for us to reach it.

If narratives often require readers to occupy different temporal stand-points at the same time, in a way that is impossible in the lived experience of temporal becoming, this might seem to present an insurmountable obstacle to the faithful imitation of lived temporality by narrative tempora-rality. Temporal mimesis would, in other words, fall foul of drastic differ-ences between the temporal properties of living and reading that are not surmounted by Morson's notion of equivalence. The gap between lived and narrative temporality is best expressed by two propositions: that in reading, the present is not the present but somebody else's past, and that in written narrative, the future is already there. In what follows, I will offer three accounts of the theoretical basis on which this gap can be closed, and

on which the possibility of the narrative representation of contingency can be reestablished, which I discuss below under the headings of Dissimilarity, the As If, and the Owl of Minerva. Wittgenstein liked to claim, in writing and outside of it, that philosophical problems are simplified if they are thought of as questions about the meaning of words and phrases, and this is one way of defining my question here: what does Morson mean when he says "equivalent"?

1.1 Dissimilarity

The first theory is rooted in the notion of a mimesis not based on similarity, simulation, verisimilitude or fidelity to temporal becoming, but which anchors itself to the opposite concept of dissimilarity. At first this might seem like an unpromising approach to the meaning of equivalence, but many theorists of narrative have openly or implicitly approached narrative imitation in terms that are closer to dissimilarity than similarity. Paul Ricœur, for example makes the argument in *Time and Narrative* and *Oneself as Another* that the relationship between a text and a reader is a kind of "struggle", by which he means that the act of processing a narrative text always involves the reconciliation of some fundamental dissimilarity between the time of life and the time of narrative. The emphasis on dissimilarity is important. We tend to assume some basic likeness between life and literature and to think of literary narrative in particular in terms of imitation and resemblance, but for Ricœur, it is the contrast between literary narratives and life histories that assures their complementarity, just as it is the struggle between a reader and a text that establishes a fruitful exchange between them. There is a significant departure here from the Aristotelian model of mimesis, in which human action comes first, primary in terms of time, and logically prior to its aesthetic representation, which aims to simulate it. Ricœur rearranges the mimetic relation into a circle, which he breaks down into three parts: Mimesis$_1$ is "prefiguration", and represents the kind of preunderstanding that we bring to a narrative and that helps us to make sense of it; Mimesis$_2$ is "configuration", which is the shaping of events by a plot; and Mimesis$_3$ is "refiguration", or the modified understanding with which we emerge from a narrative (see Vlacos below, section 2). These three parts of mimesis form a circle because the refigured understanding produced when we grasp a plot becomes part of a more general understanding of life and human action, an understanding which in turn modifies the preunderstanding that we bring to narrative in the first place. The notion that human action is self-standing and primary is lost in this account of a circulation between art and life that has no beginning or end. Perhaps more importantly, if mimesis were to be understood only on the basis of similarity, nothing would be modified, altered,

inflected or changed by the turning of this circle. It is only because of some fundamental dissimilarity that this circle turns at all between human action and its alteration by emplotment. Whatever similarity might pertain between life and literature, it is the dissimilarity that produces this continuous, mutual reshaping.

1.2   The as if

The dissimilarity of narrative to life may have many aspects, but its most pervasive feature is temporal dissimilarity: in the act of reading, the present is already past. It is a quasi-present, basically unlike the present of lived experience in being someone else's already past present that we experience *as if* it were unfolding before our eyes. It is this "as if"—the notion of the quasi-present in particular—that offers us a second theoretical approach to the disjunction between lived contingency and its representation in narrative. In fact the *as if* occupies a central place in Ricœur's discussion of mimesis: "With Mimesis$_2$ we enter the kingdom of the *as if*" (Ricœur 1984, 64). The *as if* combines an element of comparison (as) with a hint of hypotheticality (if), established most systematically in the "as if" sections of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason,* which establish the idea of speculative reason as that kind of thought which must act as if appearances were realities, or, in its theological context, "that the things of the world must be viewed *as if* they received their existence from a highest intelligence" (Kant 2003, 550). The Kantian notion of "heuristic fiction" is not in itself a theory of fiction but a universal condition that follows from the logical impossibility of knowing the world in its reality: we must behave as if our systems of thought and our mental models correspond to the world. This is a philosophy that gives special place to the idea of fiction, or to what Hans Vaihinger, in *The Philosophy of As If* called "fictionalism", a position that holds that untrue ideas might still be valuable to us for their practical importance and that the category of the "consciously false" might offer a pragmatic solution to the inaccessibility of the noumenon, or a mind-independent reality.

   In the Kantian tradition, "heuristic fiction" is not closely connected to narrative fiction. For Kant, the *as if* is basic to all thinking, and fiction is the mode of speculation that all thought must adopt. In literary criticism, however, this line of thinking about Kant's *as if* was always also a way of positioning literary fiction on the topic of knowledge. Frank Kermode's *The Sense of an Ending* is one, quite unusual, place where the work of Vaihinger crosses the boundary from philosophy into narrative criticism: "literary fictions", Kermode claims, "belong to Vaihinger's category of the 'consciously false'". Without reference to Vaihinger's Kantianism, however, the notion of the *as if* figures in some quite prominent studies

of fiction and the theory of fiction, for example in the work of Emma Kafalenos (2006), Dorrit Cohn (1999), John Searle (1969), Wolfgang Iser (1978), Kendall Walton (1990) and Gregory Currie (1990). In the theory of fiction, the *as if* has been valued for its ability to offer an account of mimesis which tugs in two directions simultaneously: it posits a similarity between reading and life and contains a counter-suggestion that life and reading are not alike, or only appear to be alike. It is my conviction, however, that the dynamic of the *as if*, the tension between similarity and dissimilarity, becomes infinitely more interesting when the question of truth is transposed into the question of time. If the critical interest in the *as if* has been concerned with positioning the novel on the question of knowledge, to locate the literary fiction, as Kermode would have it, in the category of the consciously false, I prefer a framework focused not on truth but on the temporal properties that pertain between fictional narrative and lived experience (see Currie 2018). The interest of this alternative, then, lies not in the notion that knowledge is always a kind of fiction, nor that fiction develops some special kind of knowledge through imaginary comparisons and hypotheses, but rather that reading and making sense of fiction alters our conceptualization and our experience of time.

The notion of the quasi-present, the past experienced *as if* it were present, is one example of the commingling of different temporal positions and properties that is at work in the struggle between a reader and a text. When the past is experienced as a kind of present, it is given a kind of immediacy that the past cannot really possess, and reciprocally, we install in the present a retrospectivity that is not available in the existential moment. Many theorists of narrative have remarked on this relation between retrospect and presence, though not many have analysed it systematically. In 1984, Peter Brooks argued in *Reading for the Plot* that "retrospectivity" is at the core of our conception of narrative, and that Walter Benjamin argues the most extreme version of the concept when he claims that "what we seek in narrative fiction is the knowledge of death which is denied to us in our own lives" (Brooks 1984, 22). According to Brooks, this conviction stands behind a whole tradition of thinking about narrative, in which the distinction between living and telling is assured by the fact that "in telling everything is transformed by the structuring presence of the end to come". This tradition, which for Brooks includes Walter Benjamin, Frank Kermode and Jean-Paul Sartre, is to be opposed to a different kind of thinking which argues that the "preterite tense used classically in the novel is decoded by the reader as a kind of present, that of an action and a significance being forged before his eyes, in his hands, so to speak" (Brooks 1984, 22). There are, in other words, two different ways of thinking about retrospect in narrative fiction: one which asserts the difference between living and telling on the basis of an ending, a perspective that arrives with

death, or a position in the future from which events will be understood differently, and another which merely decodes the past as presence, or as quasi-present, traversing the gulf between narrative and life with a casual *as if*. I am not at all convinced that these are different traditions of narrative theory or criticism, and I would argue that the decoding of the past as present is merely the readerly experience of the structuring presence of an ending that describes the opposing tradition. Rather than identifying opposing strands, Brook's discussion merely shifts from an approach focused on the storyteller or producer of narrative to one concerned with the reader or consumer of narrative, and, though understood from different viewpoints, the relation between presence and retrospect remains fundamentally the same. We can see this in the argument that Morson makes about Oedipus: that when our temporal standpoint is doubled, in the sense of knowing the whole story and imagining what it is like not to know, the effect is irony. But if we knew nothing about Oedipus, and if the chorus had not told us what would happen, this irony would merely be strung out in time, or sequenced, in the manner of what Wayne Booth calls "linear irony" or "retrospective irony". This is what Kermode means when he remarks that "Peripeteia, which has been called the *equivalent*, in narrative, of irony in rhetoric, is present in every story of the least structural sophistication" (Kermode [1967] 2000, 18; emphasis added). This view of narrative, as *this then that* rather than *this and that*, is shared by Ricœur in a way that directly relates to the dynamic of contingency and necessity. In a narrative, Ricœur claims, "chance is transmuted into fate" by the occurrence of unexpected events, which transform the feeling of contingency (that anything might happen or that anything that does happen could have happened differently) into the feeling of necessity (that it could not have happened otherwise). When we watch Oedipus, the *not yet* and the *always already* coincide, but in many narratives the dynamic of the not yet and the always already, contingency and necessity, unfolds in time and is revealed by surprising reversals, which, as Ricœur puts it, "inverts the effect of contingency, in the sense of what could have happened differently or which might not have happened at all, by incorporating it into the effect of necessity" (Ricœur [1990] 1992, 142).

1.3   *The Owl of Minerva*

If the 'as if' has a Kantian heritage, this dynamic of the not yet and the always already has a more obviously Hegelian background. We experience, when we decode narrative fiction, what Slavoj Žižek describes as "a kind of leap from the 'not yet' to the 'always already'" that is "constitutive of Hegelian dialectics". But this leap carries in it the same thematics of appearance and reality that characterize the 'as if' since, according to Žižek's

discussion of Hegel, contingency is nothing other than the appearance of necessity. The importance of this argument for narrative, and for an understanding of narrative in its relation to lived temporal experience, is paramount. At its core, this is a question of what we mean when we say that lived experience is an experience of contingency. "The trouble with contingency", Žižek says,

> resides in its uncertain status: is it ontological, i.e. are things in them-selves contingent, or is it epistemological, i.e., is contingency merely an expression of the fact that we do not know the complete chain of causes which brought about the allegedly "contingent" phenomenon?
>
> <div align="right">(Žižek 1993, 153)</div>

Because our knowledge is incomplete, things that are necessary might seem open and capable of happening otherwise, and in this sense, contingency might just be the appearance of a hidden necessity that will be revealed to us later. According to this argument, things in themselves are not contingent but appear contingent to us mainly because our knowledge of the chain of causes is not complete. But the retroactive glance might enable us "to discern the contours of inner necessity where the view immersed in events can only perceive an interplay of accidents" (155). When we watch a production of *Oedipus* and find ourselves positioned doubly, as Morson describes it, immersed in events in our position of identification with Oedipus and external to events because of our godlike perspective, which is to say our knowledge of what is to come, an important part of our experience is involved with the perception it affords us of the hidden necessity that lies behind the appearance of contingency. As such, narrative is capable of combining in the same moment two perspectives which cannot coincide in life, since the present moment of immersion in events cannot coincide with the retroactive glance.

The significance of this leap from the not yet to the always already, and its interplay of contingency and necessity, for narrative is never far from the surface of Žižek's argument, and at times becomes an explicit framework. One example of this is in his discussion of Gerard Lebrun's writings on Hegel, where the retroactive reversal of the not yet into the always already is discussed under the subtitle "A Story to Tell". Speaking of the idea that a life is made up of contingent temporal decisions, Žižek turns to Lebrun's example of Caesar's crossing of Rubicon:

> It is not enough to say that crossing Rubicon is part of the complete notion of Caesar. One should rather say that Caesar is defined by the fact that he crossed Rubicon. His life didn't follow a scenario written in the book of some goddess: there is no book which would already have

contained the relations of Caesar's life, for the simple reason that his life itself is this book, and that, at every moment, an event is in itself its own narrative.

(Lebrun 2004, 87)

This is an interesting assertion of the idea that there is no divine script, and yet Caesar's life is nevertheless a "narrative" in which the crossing of Rubicon is a definitive event. It may not belong to the realm of divine necessity, but Caesar's life is nevertheless imaged here as a book and therefore as completed writing in the same moment that it is advanced as the product of contingent decision, inflecting the contingency of the existential moment with the necessity that belongs to the domain of the *already*. Žižek distances himself from what he sees as a kind of structuralist primacy of the synchronic in this description of Caesar's decision and restores it instead to what he sees as the "properly dialectical paradox which defines true historicity":

> […] there is no substantial God who writes in advance the script of History and watches over its realization, the situation is open, truth emerges only through the very process of its deployment etc., etc.—but what Hegel nonetheless maintains is the much deeper presupposition that, at the end, when the dusk falls over the events of the day, *the Owl of Minerva will take flight*, i.e. that there always is a story to be told at the end, the story which ('retroactively' and 'contingently' as much as one wants) reconstitutes the sense of the preceeding process.
>
> (Žižek 2011, 213)

What Žižek upholds here is not the authority of actual retrospect but the "deeper presupposition" that this story will be told and that it will always be told after the event. The future tense is all important, and it "marks the passage from contingency to necessity":

> There is a story to be told *if* there is a story to be told. That is to say, *if* there is a story to be told (if, due to contingency, a story emerges at the end), *then* this story will appear as necessary. Yes, the story is necessary, but its necessity is itself contingent.
>
> (Žižek 2011, 213, his italics)

As we saw for the Kantian *as if*, here the properly Hegelian dialectic also hinges on the hypotheticality of the *if*, which in this case is the envisaged retrospect of a narrative to come or a story to be told. The Owl of Minerva, for Žižek as for Hegel, represents that species of knowledge that takes flight only at the end of the day, after the event, and yet it is present

in advance. This dialectical structure, the envisaged retrospect of a story to be told, gives us a different answer to the question of what Morson means by "equivalent". For Žižek, the idea that narrative might simulate contingency by substituting what is not yet known for what has not yet taken place can bring no enlightenment because the existential moment itself is nothing other than what is not yet known or not yet narrated.

These three theoretical approaches, arranged around the concepts of dissimilarity, the *as if* and the *not yet* all orbit the question of truth, and they all contain something of the modal bewilderment of Crusoe's counterfactual reflection on his good fortune. When the question of truth is displaced by the question of time, that bewilderment begins to look more like a recognition that contingency and necessity are inseparable from questions of temporal standpoint. Narratologists have always been alert to the distinction between story and discourse, and some have given this distinction a temporal focus. The topic of the story-future and the discourse-future is less trodden ground, despite its promise as a way of recognizing the contribution that narrative discourses have made to an understanding of futurity in general and the dependence of notions such as chance, contingency and event on temporal position, flow, and the asymmetry of time.

Mark Currie

2 The role of chance in Paul Ricœur's *Time and Narrative*: hermeneutical reconstruction and the imprint of narrative

Since its publication in the early to mid-1980s, Ricœur's *Time and Narrative* has been a central point of reference for narratological and phenomenological discussions about time. The work is well known for its meticulous treatment of other thinkers (Aristotle, Augustine, Husserl and Heidegger most prominently) and for the proposition of what Ricœur, informed by Aristotelian emplotment, as well as analytic philosophies of action, terms a triple or three-stage mimesis. "Time", Ricœur writes in the "Preface" to this work, "becomes human to the extent that it is organized after the manner of a narrative; narrative, in turn, is meaningful to the extent that it portrays the features of temporal experience" (Ricœur 1990, 3). Ricœur's model of a triple mimesis works to fuse these phenomenological and narratological dimensions within a single competency of understanding, reflective in its circularity and implied ontology, with the always-already proceeding model of hermeneutical understanding. In *Time and Narrative,* Ricœur situates narrative competency at the heart of understanding, arguing that it is our mimetic capacity for emplotment that bequeaths narrative unity to our experience. In this way the imprint of narrative delimits the field of intelligibility, confirming hermeneutical understanding's belated structure as "always already".

It is not immediately clear what role chance may play in *Time and Narrative* therefore, or where it may fit in Ricœur's hermeneutical account of understanding, an account which turns the lie of the self-grounding *cogito* into conditions for intelligibility and which takes its primary methodological cue from Husserl's model of questioning backwards (*Ruckfrage*). The proposition in *Time and Narrative* of a three-stage mimesis (pre-figuration [mimesis 1], configuration [mimesis 2] and refiguration [mimesis 3]) lends temporal and structural particularity to this method of *questionnement à rebours*, as well as a refinement to Ricœur's already critical affiliation to Heidegger's project of fundamental ontology.

In the radicality of Heidegger's undertaking—to demonstrate that the question of understanding "is the expression of the existential *fore-structure* of Dasein itself..."—Ricœur claims that he fails to incorporate methodological questions concerning the mechanisms by which Dasein comes to achieve historical understanding (Heidegger 2005, 195). Ricœur's hermeneutical response to Heidegger's "direct" ontology is his own "indirect" pathway backwards through the "derived" expressions of Dasein's understanding. Accepting Heidegger's ontological enlargement of the hermeneutical circle while claiming only "indirect" access to the structure of understanding its names, Ricœur's "ontology by degrees" begins in the analysis of language conceived as the ineluctable medium of our historically mediated understanding.

Time and Narrative enlarges upon this critical relation to Heidegger by claiming an intrinsic and universal reciprocity between temporal experience and narrative competency. In the essay "Narrative Time" he establishes a correlation between Heidegger's three basic modalities of temporality (Care, historicity and temporality) and the narrative model of temporal understanding named by triple mimesis. To Dasein's unreflective, everyday involvement with time, its Care (for instance our concerns and plans for the future), Ricœur aligns a mode of narrative reckoning with time. Characters in narratives for instance, reckon with time before they measure it. Mimesis 1 or *prefiguration* defines this form of pre-emptive temporality or temporal pre-understanding. This pre-understanding is informed by prior models of narrative *configuration* (mimesis 2), which describes our common capacity to configure events together into historically significant wholes, to emplot rather than simply list in the manner of succession. Mimesis 2 presents the dynamic core of temporal understanding, where time gets *figured out* in the manner of an active synthesis of disparate actions and events. Ricœur's final phase of narrative *refiguration* (mimesis 3) relates to Heidegger's treatment of temporality and marks a critical turning point in Ricœur's philosophy, away from language, towards the ethical realm of practical wisdom, or, to use the Aristotelian term, *phronesis*.

So time and narrative, according to Ricœur, are inseparable. There can be no narrative understanding without temporal understanding, and no temporal understanding without the capacity to narrate, organize and synthesize events within figures of succession and implied sense. Conceived as the ultimate *figure* of time, this treatment of narrative begins at the point where his previous work, *The Rule of Metaphor* leaves off—in commitment to a semantically productive vision of imagination, to an existence constrained by and configured through historico-linguistic mediation. Metaphor for Ricœur entails the apprehension of an initial "semantic clash" or "predicative impertinence", calling for a mode of synthesis akin to the schematism of categories and images in Kant's First Critique. The novel metaphor assimilates the anomaly on the basis of its homogenous elements, leading to the perception of a fictive or "split" reference, literally false but figuratively true. *Time and Narrative* extends this operation from the predicate to the level of entire narratives, justifying this expansion on the basis of Kant's "Transcendental Analytic" in the First Critique, where he names time as the ultimate figure for the understanding of the categories and their application in experience. Like every other figure of understanding, narrative for Ricœur implies schematism. The temporal schematism of narrative assimilates heterogeneous instances and events within a continuum homogeneous to our everyday intuitions about time, rendering manifest the experiences of time past, time passing and time future.

From this schematic description of time, narrative and imagination, Ricœur's reputation as a syncretic thinker perhaps feels justified, and the place for chance in his work remote. Indeed, Leonard Lawlor has described the gap between Ricœur and fellow poststructuralist Jacques Derrida as the gulf between imagination and chance, no less (Lawlor 1992).[4] Lawlor draws on Ricœur's treatment of Husserlian retention in *Time and Narrative* 3 to make the claim that in the final instance, "[i]mmediacy supports the entire Ricœurian edifice". "Like all dialectical phenomena", he writes, "inner-time consciousness and recollection […] function by means of the continuity of content. The content can always be made present 'once again'" (Lawlor 1992, 85–86).

Yet what this and the above schematic description both lack is an account of the practical situations in which the imagination operates. Ricœur's concept of triple mimesis corrects this by turning formal operations into instances of situated knowledge. While Ricœur uses the Aristotelian model of mimesis to support the idea of temporal schematism, by equating emplotment, the active component of the Aristotelian model, with the synthetic activities of imagination, his interpretation of mimesis as "structuration" (not copy) helps to emphasize the fact that continuity (of content or intent) always involves an imaginative or *creative effort* for Ricœur, and

that this effort to schematize finds its impetus within the realm of action and the thicket of contingency.

"In the final analysis", Ricœur writes early on in Volume 1 of *Time and Narrative*, "narratives have acting and suffering as their theme" (Ricœur 1984, Vol. 1, 56). Without this ethical and semantic insistence, triple mimesis, in which narrative prefiguration and narrative refiguration represent the opposing sides of a paradigmatically configurative act, would be empty formalism. Ricœur's phenomenologically and ethically enlarged model of narrative always implies a contingency beyond the unity of the text: a world of action constrained by historical circumstance on the one hand and a world of conduct spurred by the explosive forces of conflict on the other. So it is on the question of agency in the face of history and suffering that the Ricœurian circle of time and narrative sets its ultimate sights. My contention here is that chance, although referred to only occasionally in *Time and Narrative*, exerts a noteworthy influence, not only by way of narrative's extension to the real-life realms of action and ethics (mimesis 1 and 3), but also, conceived as a formal constituent of Aristotelian emplotment, as a qualifying feature for narrative's hermeneutical and ontological expansion. Pursuing Ricœur's Aristotelian leads and approaching chance as a species of the involuntary, these occasional references assume a weightier import.

2.1   *The involuntary*

In Ricœur's first major publication, a phenomenological treatment of the human will entitled *Freedom and Nature* (1950), the involuntary is treated as the ever-constant negative condition for freedom or volition. The voluntary and the involuntary exist in dialectical tension within all our modes of willing or choosing, so that when we make a decision to move our bodies or consent to something, our volition is necessarily shaped by involuntary factors, which comprise the contextual field from which we make our decisions. This is not yet the temporalized field of the subject's hermeneutical horizon, which Ricœur later thematizes in the context of Heideggerian historicity, nor is it the contextual constraints of semantics which later condition the operations of the productive imagination, but the volitional dynamics of the embodied self, with basic needs and physical constraints, habituated modes of being, emotions and desires. To the three categories of will identified by Ricœur, deciding, moving and consenting, he attaches a scale of diminishing freedom; where consent concerns matters about which we have very little room for volitional manoeuvre, things we may merely say "yes" or "no" to in the face of overwhelming involuntary forces, such as our own unconscious or the fact of our own existence, it is in the realm of decision-making and action that our greatest freedom exists, where the

involuntary operates as the basic matrix from which we compare, contrast, interpret or infer a course of action. Ricœur reprises the theme of contingency and action in the first volume of *Time and Narrative* in the context of action's legibility, what he terms the semantics of action. Key to his description here is the "intersignification" implicit in action of a "conceptual network" of agents, motives and deeds (Ricœur 1984, Vol. 1, 55). This field of action is circumscribed by involuntary circumstances, which delimit the agent's range of possibility in the manner of a closed physical system and by interactions with other agents, which, when combined with circumstance, describe the contingencies of the system. Ricœur identifies the legibility of the network and its terms with practical understanding and relates it to our narrative competencies:

> [A]gents act and suffer in circumstances they did not make that nevertheless do belong to the practical field, precisely inasmuch as they circumscribe the intervention of historical agents in the course of physical events and offer favorable or unfavorable occasions for their action.
>
> (Ricœur 1984, Vol. 1, 55)

Once again, the contingencies of circumstance provide the matrix for what is possible. What the earlier phenomenological model of descending freedom also indicates is a diminishing play of contingency and possibility, from the world of action with its many variables to the much starker contingencies of consent (for instance, "I will consent to this treatment in the hope that it will safe my life"). In this context, the lack of consent must mark the negation of contingency in the form of the inevitable. Hypothesizing and inferring from this scale, we find a distinctive place for chance in the realm of the absolute involuntary, where agency is denied, and where chance represents an absolute minimal degree of possibility; a last refuge of hope or an outlandish prospect. This understanding of chance as a species of the involuntary finds support in Aristotle, whose teleological framework leads to the characterization of chance as an accident encountered by humans in the pursuit of their goals. Although Aristotle's model of chance is subject to minor variation across his works, it is deemed sufficiently consistent for exegetical reconstruction, so much so that the classicist John Dudley takes the reconstruction of chance's development across the Aristotelian corpus as a means for dating parts of its contested chronology. For Aristotle, Dudley tells us, chance is not without cause, but since the cause is unknown, it is meaningful only to the extent that it contributes to or takes away from the achievement of a person's goals. This contrasts with non-teleological accounts of chance in terms of the concurrence of two separate causal chains (Cournot, J.S. Mill) or events with unknown causes (Voltaire, Russell) (see Dudley 2012, 365–366). We can add therefore

that chance appears to Aristotle as a negation of agency and intention (*praxis*), as a punctual or arresting moment within a teleologically situated causal chain. And it is this conception of chance (as surprised and denuded agency) that Ricœur uses to ultimately legitimize narrative's paradigmatic role within understanding and to sanction the hermeneutically expanded model of narrative named by triple mimesis.

In *Time and Narrative* 1, the configurating impetus of the Aristotelian emplotment works as a counter to the Augustinian experience of time's dispersal (the psychical figure of *distentio animi*). For Ricœur, the intentional configuration of an ordered sequence and the present's dispersal within the present instant are the antinomies upon which the dialectic of time and narrative sets sail. Yet it would be wrong to assume this Aristotelian solution to *distentio animi* flows seamlessly from one temporal situation to the other (or that language merely smoothes over the paradox in the form of a superficial dressing). Rather, it is Aristotle's emphasis on the *logical sequence* of the action, at the expense of chronology, that, for Ricœur, renders Aristotle's model of tragic *muthos* "the inverted figure of the Augustinian paradox" (Ricœur 1984, Vol. 1, 38): "The accent" he writes, "[…] is therefore put on the absence of chance and on conformity to the requirements of necessity or probability governing succession" (39).

Events governed by logical necessity rather than simple succession; this logic of internal necessity cuts to the heart of tragedy's powers for ethical instruction (practical wisdom / *phronesis*) and measures the distance separating mimesis as *phronesis* from mimesis as the replication of what exists: "one because of [dia] the other" rather than one after [meta] the other (52a1822)", as Ricœur glosses Aristotle. In the *Poetics* it is the reversal of fortune proper to the tragic *muthos,* which makes it ethically exemplary and paradigmatic for emplotment. This is because the tragic figures of reversal/*peripeteia* and recognition/*anagnoriris* present the most controlled and distilled expressions of the disruption or the necessary discordance inherent to all drama. And it is here, in the achronic context of Aristotle's "discordant concordance", that chance presents its opening qualification for the Ricœurian dialectic of time and narrative. "Discordant concordance", writes Ricœur,

> is intended still more directly by the analysis of surprise. Aristotle characterizes it by an extraordinary expression in analcoluthic form, which is lost in English translation: "when they come unexpectedly and yet occur in causal sequence in which one thing leads to another [*para tēn doxan di'allēla*]" (52a4). The "marvelous" things (*to thaumaston*) (ibid.)—the height of the discordant—*are those strokes of chance that seem to arrive by design.*
>
> (Ricœur 1984, Vol. 1, 43. Emphasis added)

While the elimination of chance ("design") is a logical description of the necessity proper to concordance, 'surprise' is not itself synonymous with chance, so Ricœur's use of the word here bears the weight of an interpretation. The affective connotations of surprise conform to Aristotle's teleological account of chance as an involuntary accident befalling the will. Moreover, surprise summons the important ethical work attributed by Aristotle to this orchestrated play of chance via what he calls pitiable and fearful incidents. As Ricœur explains it, the key issue is that the pathos and purgative qualities so closely identified with Aristotelian tragedy are only possible on condition of that apparent play of necessity and contingency. "By including the discordant in the concordant, the plot includes the affecting within the intelligible […] So poetry conjoins these terms that ethics opposes" (44).

Following Aristotle, Ricœur invests narrative configuration (mimesis 2) with the ethical task of *animating* the play of contingency proper to human action (see also Chapter 4, p. 199–200). By reducing the range of possible outcomes, the closed system of emplotment reduces contingency in order to *magnify* the appearance of chance and to bring our own condition into relief. "[L]iterary works depict reality by *augmenting* it with meanings that themselves depend upon the virtues of abbreviation, saturation, and culmination, so strikingly illustrated by emplotment" (Ricœur 1984, Vol. 1, 80). Through his reading of Aristotle, therefore, Ricœur links chance to the paradox of a necessary contingency within emplotment, and it is on the basis of this paradox that he claims Aristotle to present a dialectical inversion of the spirit's temporal dispersal in the Augustinian figure of *distentio animi*. So it is that the calculated appearance of chance helps to sanction the dialectical inversion upon which *Time and Narrative* first turns. Perhaps more significantly, this orchestrated appearance of chance serves to underscore its distance from lived experience as well as its mediating role within action. Where a semantics of action provides analytic clarity and helps to account for the role of a narrative preunderstanding informed by the figures of emplotment within everyday practice, it cannot account for the indeterminacy of lived experience. And yet it is the texture of contingency which fiction, through the logic of its emplotment, must animate. In volume 2 of *Time and Narrative* Ricœur focuses upon the literary experience of time and the figures of possibility created by narrative structure and voice. But it is in the context of history, and historical suffering especially, that the ethical importance of this animation resurfaces most clearly.

2.2   *"The shock of the possible" and "uniquely unique events"*[5]

Throughout *Time and Narrative,* Ricœur makes frequent recourse to the epithet of "acting and suffering". "In the final instance, narrative has action and suffering as its theme"; "poetics transposes human action and suffering

into a poem"; and "It is the task of hermeneutics […] to reconstruct the set of operations by which a work lifts itself above the opaque depths of living, acting, and suffering..." (see Ricœur 1984, Vol. 1, 46, 53, 55). As far as action "can never be ethically neutral", the ethical charge of narrative can only be suspended on pain of a temporary abstraction of the kind favoured by literary structuralism (Ricœur 1984, Vol. 1, 59). Structuralism's suspension of reference and reception, acting and suffering, is a source of methodological strength and philosophical limitation for Ricœur. By contrast, the Aristotelian model to which he subscribes implies a temporalized principle of structuration, that can only be completed in the act of reception by the spectator or reader. Without this dynamic and receptive model taken from *The Poetics*, the circle of time's narrative configuration could not turn. "From the beginning", Ricœur writes, "the term *poiesis* puts the imprint of its dynamism on all the concepts in the *Poetics* and makes them concepts about operations" (48). In *The Rule of Metaphor*, it is the "dynamism" of Benveniste's semantic model of signification that enables him, via his tensive theory of metaphor, to propose a semantic reworking of the Kantian productive imagination. Here at the beginning of *Time and Narrative*, Ricœur's stress on the dynamism of Aristotelian structuration (*dunamis*) pre-empts narrative's poetic response to the aporia of time consciousness as a work of imaginative *schematism* expanded to the level of the plot. Historicity is thus lodged within the work of imaginative emplotment and on the side of reception, so that the interpretation of plot can never be a simple decoding or reconstruction of what once was. In this way, mimesis does not name a copy of something pre-existent, "*but rather the break that opens the space for fiction*" (45, Emphasis added). Repeating the formula of Hans Vaihinger, Ricœur glosses poetics as the invention of "the as-if". "And in this sense", he continues, "the Aristotelian mimesis is the emblem of the shift [*décrochage*] that, to use our vocabulary today, produces the 'literariness' of the work of literature" (45). The experience named here is the space of literature, the experience of the literary as that which is ultimately distinct from what exists, as that which invites the comparison to what exists through the combinatory logic of schematism; the experience of the imagination put to work in that process of structuration.

But from Ricœur's naming of this gap as the space of an imagination providing positive figures for thought and action, we can argue for a negative correlative on the side of history and suffering (as Ricœur theorizes them), whereby the experience of the shift, of *décrochage*, names an experience of passivity and a breach within the narrative imagination. This is the negative correlative of that surprise issuing from the concordant discordance and of what, in the context of fictional reference and literature's power to subvert reality, Ricœur terms "the shock of the possible" (Ricœur 1984, Vol. 1, 79). From the surprise and shock, which for Ricœur name

the space of literariness or *décrochage* as a positive crossing point between imaginary and actual, whereby the fictive affects the real, we can infer the negative expression of *décrochage* as a spacing or unravelling within the real. This is the uncanny experience of life as if it were fiction, a structure of affect sanctioned by experience and by the ambivalence that marks all dialectical relations as cutting both ways.

This negative correlative lodges chance at the intersection of time and narrative once again. In the previous section I drew attention to the way the appearance of chance within the tragic *muthos* works to bring our condition of contingency into relief through the paradox of discordant concordance, those "strokes of chance that seem to arrive by design". These strokes of chance imbue the action with a *pathos* defined by Aristotle in terms of its passivity (Ricœur 1984, Vol. 1, 43). In this way, the plot provides a privileged view of the precariousness and contingency of life while generating the force to affect life through the interchange from *pathos* to practical wisdom (*phronesis*). The literariness inheres within the tension between chance and design. But in the transposed situation, where life is itself reduced to a pure chance occurrence, design is precisely what is lacking. An experience of life "as if" it were fiction describes the rupture or gulf between the ordinary continuum of causal relations and contingency (the ordinarily legible semantics of action guided by narrative understanding) and the radically aleatory. It marks the negation of agency in the realm of the purely involuntary.

A remarkable event in Ricœur's own life provides a resonant example. According to his biographer, Charles E. Reagan, Ricœur's active participation as a soldier in World War Two was minimal. He was captured as a prisoner of war early and spent much of the war interned along with fellow philosophers, soldiers and academics. But shortly before he was captured, he experienced chance in its most radical expression when the officer to whom he was talking in close proximity was shot in the head and killed. Coming from a distance, the bullet could not have known its target, and it could so easily have been him. Reagan notes that from that point on, Ricœur never forgot the fragility of life (Reagan 1996, 57). Yet the most significant aspect in the context of chance and Ricœur's philosophy is how chance in its most radical form is so humanly reductive, how it takes no account of the trajectories or horizons informing a person's situation, strips them of agency and reduces their field of Care (to use Heidegger's term for our day-to-day reckoning) to numerical probability. Stripped of agency, chance installs itself as rupture, as if life were a fiction controlled by authorial hands. Now the shock of the possible, a phrase used by Ricœur to describe literature's agency in the world, denotes the sense of literariness accompanying a lack of agency in the world. By stalling our narrative capabilities, the shock of chance underscores our

customary imaginative configurations, confirming emplotment's mediating role between experience and imaginative projection in life.

This inversion of chance's paradigmatic imaginative role in *muthos* to its *disfiguring* force in life draws on the dissimilarity and reflexivity that the split names. This is the same imaginative spacing described in *The Rule of Metaphor* in terms of the fictive or "split reference" of the live metaphor, which, predicatively speaking, both "is" and "is not" and which, through its rule-bound transgression, *iconically augments* our perceptions of the world, providing new figures of possibility. At the level of time and narrative and the figure of the Aristotelian *muthos*, surprise is the affective expression of the schematism dictated by the emplotment, while shock conveys the possibility of the plot's transgressive potential for life. Following Ricœur, their negative expression on the side of experience, as denuded agency, underscores the poetic operations subtending our day-to-day reckoning with time and the causal calculations this entails. This flipside to the literary experience confirms the space of fiction by redoubling the creative effort inherent to Ricœurian understanding, so that the *rupture* of narrative configuration acts as an imperative to think more.

As with metaphor, the creative possibilities of narrative arise from the liberation of a second-order reference from the ashes of language in its prosaically referential, technical, or, to use Heidegger's terminology, instrumental capacity:

> When this interest and the sphere of signification it commands are suspended, our profound belonging to the life-world is allowed to be and the ontological tie of our being to other beings and to being is allowed to be said by poetic discourse. What is thus allowed to be said is what I am calling the second-order reference, which in reality is the primordial reference.
>
> (Ricœur [1986] 1991, 175)

For Kant, the schemata mediate categories and appearances by placing the categories under the "figure" of time, making their application evident in the realm of the sensible. While every category possesses its correlative schema, the function of every schema is to "make capable a representation", which in every instance is a "determination of time" (Kant 1998, 272). The primordial reference of narrative—time—is the interplay of the three temporal modalities of Heidegger's *Being and Time*, which together comprise the horizon of *Dasein*'s understanding and to which Ricœur loosely enjoins the circle of triple mimesis. Narration's

> referential force consists in the fact that the narrative act [...] applies the grid of an ordered fiction to the 'manifold' of human action. Between

what could be a logic of narrative possibilities and the empirical diversity of action, narrative interposes its schematism of human action.

(Ricœur [1986] 1991, 176–177)

With the liberation of narrative's fictive referent, Ricœur's circle of mimesis completes itself in the process of *refiguration*. Plot is reconfigured in view of the reader's own historical horizon in the manner of an imaginative projection. It grants a vision of what has been compared to what might have been, and a vision of what can or ought to be in the future.

Literature and history, as the dominant modes of modern narrative, both have acting and suffering as their themes. Ricœur locates the development of practical wisdom (*phronesis*) in the play of manifold possibilities (the "free-play" of the Kantian imagination) presented by these narratives, claiming an essential "interweaving" between the resources of fiction and history. From history, fiction borrows its capacity to render "events reported by the narrative voice [as if they] belong to the past of that voice" (Ricœur 1984–1988, Vol. 3, 190). The simulation on history's side of an actual past must likewise draw on fictional resources, which help to "concretize" and individuate the otherwise explanatory chain of cause and effect. The history of what Ricœur terms "uniquely unique events", such as the Holocaust, commands both explanation and the individuating resources of fiction in the service of commemoration. History's duty to its victims involves the narrative animation of chance conceived as human possibility and the perception that things could have happened differently, and, through explanation, the negation of chance as pure singularity.

This latter duty, to refuse historical randomness or pure evil, is perhaps the motivating ethos for Ricœur's philosophy of imagination, marking the creative effort to understand more and to reconfigure human potential.[6] On the issue of causal imputation in history, Ricœur quotes Raymond Aron. "Every historian, to explain what did happen, asks himself what might have happened" (Aron, *Introduction to the Philosophy of History*, quoted in Ricœur 1984, Vol. 1, 183). Evil, as Ricœur presents it in later works such as *Fallible Man*, is a misuse of freedom and a constant possibility to which history seeks to respond by way of explanation and figurative commemoration. Contingency is the spur to this creative effort in *Time and Narrative*. The reality and pathos of pure chance are not lost on Ricœur either. Indeed, one of the most striking passages in this long, closely read and wide-ranging work involves a detour, or, to use Ricœur's own phrase in a different work, a "tragic interlude" from the business of the methodological analysis of history. A discussion not strictly required by the evaluation of the Annales School of history to which it belongs, Ricœur's reflection upon the circumstances surrounding Marc Bloch's *The Historian's Craft*, written we are told "far from any library and interrupted two-thirds of the

way through by a Nazi firing squad" focusses upon the sad confluence of life and writing; on history intervening as cause at the very point at which Bloch's work poses cause as a question:

> These insightful views make all the more regrettable the violent interruption of this work at the moment when it was beginning to discuss the formidable problem of causal relations in history. The final sentence is all the more precious in that it is left unfinished: 'In a word, in history, as elsewhere, the causes cannot be assumed. They are to be looked for...'
> (Ricœur 1984, Vol. 1, 101)

This focalization on the tragic circumstances surrounding Bloch's *The Historian's Craft* and on history's chance intervention in the disclosure of its process speaks volubly about chance as it relates to pathos for Ricœur, and, by extension, to *Time and Narrative's* imaginative riposte to pathos.

Biographical interpretations of philosophy are often vilified as simplistic or reductive. But in the case of Ricœur, whose life was an exercise in conscious and understated habituation, punctuated by randomness and drama (orphaned as a boy, he went on to experience imprisonment, professional humiliation as the Dean of Paris Nanterre in May '68, and later, the tragic loss of a son), a biographical reading of his philosophy, as creative effort in the face of contingency, is most compelling.

Sophie Vlacos

3   Chance and simultaneity: a cosmological reading of the narrative plot

What must the world be like if, by an "amazing coincidence", two such "singular" individuals as Rogozhyn and Prince Myshkin can find themselves facing one another in the third-class carriage of a train travelling from Warsaw to Saint Petersburg? This question, hinted at in the *incipit* to Dostoevsky's *The Idiot*, might well be addressed to scientists and philosophers as well as fiction writers, if indeed their activity—symbolically configuring reality—leads them to wonder about the relationships of coexistence and concomitance between individual trajectories and actions—in other words, their *simultaneity*.

The problem is at root a *cosmological* one: it concerns the structural conditions that link the production of this kind of chance event—where chance is presented and staged as such—to the mode of connection of things in general, i.e., the relative density or dispersion that characterizes the environment in which such connections are made, and the degree of independence enjoyed by individuals or processes that are likely to interact in this way. Tackling the issue philosophically would require questioning

the categories of causality, time and space, but in our example the question crystallizes around a particular issue, that of the *encounter*. It is from this perspective that the question of chance has, over the past two decades, been set within new conceptual frameworks and approached through concepts developed in the fields of aesthetics and narratology, with a focus on the forms of narrative causality (Richardson 1997; Carroll 2003; Velleman 2003; Kafalenos 2006) and coincidence (Dannenberg 2008), the contrapuntal dynamic of narrative paths (Rabinowitz 2005, 181–191), or on the cognitive dimensions of the narrative configuration of space (Ryan 2009, 420–433).

Semiotic and narratological approaches had already inventoried various modes of narrative simultaneity: "narrative anachronisms" (Genette 1972, 1980) such as analepses, ellipses and paralipses (lateral omissions), shifts of focus, parallel narration, the "alternate syntagm" (Metz 1966, 121), etc. The oft-quoted example of the agricultural fair scene in *Madame Bovary* is paradigmatic in this regard, as is, on another level, the epic genre as a whole, where a multitude of episodes generally take place in parallel or overlapping in time. However, the tools that function so effectively when applied to the modern novel, the *Iliad* or the Icelandic sagas do not exhaust the different ways in which the universe of fiction sets up a *space of coexistence*. The problem is that the backdrop of relationships of simultaneity—whether proximal (co-presence) or distant (coexistence proper)—against which the chance intersections of the characters' trajectories are staged in a fable or a fictional world is most often *tacit*. The space of coexistence itself remains hidden, as if taken for granted by the various devices that support the narrative. The latter include the synchronization of concurrent actions or episodes with respect to the timeline of a master narrative; the presence of a witness (a chorus, a lookout) able to embrace a number of distant places and activities all at once; the use of completive analepses ("returns") and of alternating or interwoven narratives, with or without hiatuses; as well as the "simultanist" tropes found in modernist prose. Each of these "figures of simultaneity" suggests a solution to Lessing's famous dilemma, according to which the sequential or linear nature of verbal discourse fails to capture the impression of completeness conveyed by visual simultaneity—except in the exceptional cases where the graphic materiality of the text allows for a synoptic view (see, in particular, Zielinski 1999, 317–327; Sternberg 1990, 901–948; Sternberg 1992, 463–541; Margolin 2012). But in all such examples, narrative logic implicitly relies on a cosmological framework—a framework that is inseparable from the very endeavor of incorporating the "evental" character of randomness and chance in fictional worldmaking.

There are of course limit-cases where the very "form" of the work itself, abstracted from the logic of the plot and its narrative implementation, serves

as a projection or even as a substitute for such a cosmological framework. Twentieth-century literary experiments provide ample evidence of this possibility. But the theoretical discourse about "form" generally conveys an excessively broad idea of simultaneity, one that loses the intrinsically *temporal* character which the word "coexistence" perhaps highlights more effectively. Simultaneity tends to be identified with the synchronic properties of an invisible structure that the reader can only feel dimly but that ideally lends itself to be grasped at once, *tota simul*, through some sort of mental inspection. Such structural epiphany involves digging ever deeper into a monumental or vertical temporality which is sometimes directly thematized by the narrator (e.g. Proust). Variations on this theme of "spatial form" can be identified in the work of Joseph Frank, Jean Ricardou or Gérard Genette, to name but a few. They amount to a gradual dissolving of simultaneity into a synchronic, atemporal structure—a trend criticized by scholars who want to bring the dynamic and temporal mechanisms of the plot back out into the open. The truth is that it requires the scope of a mediaeval saga (or perhaps a choral TV series), with several parallel plots constantly interrupting one another, to effectively exhibit the "synchronic idea" typically associated with the theme of destiny, and allow it to develop in the reader's mind from one episode to the next, like a living hologram. When this happens, it is as if a four-dimensional hyper-volume, hovering over the entire narrative, transmitted to each narrated segment the throbbing pressure of the action taking place in parallel plotlines (see Chapter 3 "Simultaneity" in Clover 1982).

The pressure exercised by simultaneity generally plays a crucial role in the affective dynamic of plot-making with its three characteristic modes of exposition: suspense, curiosity and surprise (Sternberg 1978). Suspense deals with the question of whether and when an expected event will occur, but this question naturally hinges on uncertainty about what is happening *now, but elsewhere*: what is still in the making, what will or won't affect us in the future, with the possibility that all sorts of hitches and delays may compromise a *dénouement* that is envisaged and sometimes hoped for. Beneath the curiosity that makes us eagerly turn the pages to find out what comes next is a more diffuse form of curiosity about what Frank Kermode, in a different context, called "the dark side of the plot" (he was talking about Alain Robbe-Grillet's novel *Les Gommes*). This interest in the dark side of the plot can develop into a pathological curiosity mystique of the "enigma", but its milder versions stem from the general realization that the narrative is forced to gloss over a virtually infinite number of things simply because the narrator is unable to say *at the same time* what (s)he actually says and what (s)he otherwise might want to say, especially about characters who are currently "off-screen" and whose lives the narrative has temporarily put on hold.

The situation is comparable to the feeling we may have, in real life, of being fundamentally separate from what is happening somewhere else at a given moment. While post-Einsteinian physics has familiarized us with the idea that we actually only perceive *past* events—that *contemporary* events are epistemically inaccessible in the sense that they lie beyond our horizon of perception at the point when they occur—it is perhaps the epistolary experience that makes us feel this most acutely. Sartre testifies to this in his *War diaries*, in a passage that is doubtless one of the most compelling contributions to the metaphysical elucidation of the conditions underlying the experience of sheer simultaneity: "I imagine if one lived that simultaneity here in its full dimensions, one would spend one's days with a heart that bled like Jesus's. But many things screen it from us" (Sartre 1984, 65. See During 2018). The "unveiling of the terrible *simultaneity* which, fortunately, remains hidden from us most of the time", is described by Sartre as a "dagger-blow". It comes with the painful awareness of separation that eats away at real or imaginary relationships between distant individuals, and is the source of a form of transcendental curiosity or even jealousy. Proust provides a few famous variations on this theme, which is also one of the major mechanisms of narrative tension in epistolary fiction. The latter constantly plays with the effects of deferred action, time shifts, intermittences, ellipses and blind spots caused by the need for information to be passed on and for the action to develop not step by step but *at intervals*, with surprises cropping up every now and again in the obligatory waiting periods. Surprise, that other mode of narrative exposition identified by Meir Sternberg, is typified in the affect that habitually accompanies the random events and accidents involved in the plot, more especially the already mentioned motif of the chance encounter.

We have circled back to the question of coincidence or concomitance. Few better than Bakhtin grasped the range of its cosmological implications. He realized this by connecting it dialectically to the motif of separation, which is, in fact, its structural condition. His analyses of forms of time and the "chronotope" in the adventure novel and its modern avatars show how the twists and turns in such fiction typically take the form of obstacles and accidents that delay fortunate outcomes: the lovers are split up, lose track of one another and get back together, only to get separated again. But what characterizes the genre and fuels the pervading sense of ontological paucity, is the fact that the interruptions and hiatuses, punctuated by expressions such as "suddenly…" and "just as…" to introduce fortuitous coincidences, seem to happen in a sense *outside of time*. Thus, temporarily disjointed sequences remain virtually contiguous, and the effect of the palaver of separations and reunions is only superficial: it does not scar the characters or make them change in any substantial way (Bakhtin 1981, 92). Basically, the element of separation that structures their world has

no true temporal value and is only extrinsically and incidentally related to the general order of causality. Accordingly, this regime of coincidence casts chance as an omnipresent force (fortune or fate, destiny, magical or supernatural deeds, etc.) operating remotely from directly above the plane of human action: a force whose beam is focused at intervals as unfortunate or happy encounters occur along the road. The world traversed by the protagonists is almost uniformly unfamiliar, and the supremacy of chance knows no bounds. In this space as abstract as the Epicurean void, in this reversible temporality where nothing matures or ages, the spatial and temporal theme of the "encounter" has not yet crystallized, although it occupies a central position (Bakhtin 1981, 97). It gels at the time and place where the coincidence occurs—an event which, like everything else in this fictional world, seems disconnected and isolated from all the rest. In this state of almost complete dispersion, where, in the absence of a consistent temporal series, "the everyday world is scattered, fragmented, deprived of essential connections" (Bakhtin 1981, 128), everyone is, so to speak, alone in the world and separation has no substantive effect. This is why being separated and getting back together again are, formally speaking, the same event; they only differ in emotional terms. At this level of abstraction, concomitance has the same value of fortuitousness as the mishap that delays an encounter or prevents it from happening.

From this standpoint, the adventure novel is a figure that is symmetrical with—or perhaps is the negative image of—tragic drama as theorized in Aristotle's *Poetics*. From the teleological perspective of the "order of ends" and more specifically, within the *nexus* of the action, coincidence is never anything more than *co*-incidence. Even when it introduces an unexpected reversal, it still contributes to the overall reorientation of the dramatic situation, and its conjunctive value more than compensates for its disruptive value. All the threads of causality are tied at one end to the *dénouement*. Everything conspires and concurs towards it, as if a magnetic force exerted from the future, in a direction opposite to that of transitive causality, was pulling all the causal chains. This counterflow reversing the course of time typically points to the action of the *formal cause*, that is to say, the dramatic form as a whole, considered as a quasi-"substance"—"perhaps the most metaphysical object in the sublunar world", as Victor Goldschmidt boldly claims (Goldschmidt 1982, 415, 417). Accordingly, all modes of narrative simultaneity are sustained by a presentiment of how it will all end. They abide by the emotional beat that accompanies the temporal unfolding of the plot, despite all the accidents and complications that complicate—and by the same token confirm—the action of final causes (see Aristotle 2018, 29: *Physics* 196a–197b).

In this regard, it could be said that suspense is necessarily created to the detriment of the kind of "formal" curiosity relating to simultaneity.

In tragedy, the disruptive force of secondary, parallel or incidental actions is never strong enough to make the "dark side" of the plot appear for its own sake; to achieve this, one would need to assign to such actions a form of independence that they can only enjoy, and even then in a nuanced and controlled way, in the epic genre, where, as Aristotle points out, "many parts of the action being carried on simultaneously" can, by their combined effects, "make the poem more impressive" (Aristotle 1996, 39–40: *Poetics* 1459b). A special effort must be made to distract oneself from the main plot in order to glimpse, lurking behind all the narrative turning points, the space of coexistence that is the negative image of the tragic drama. This image is engraved at every moment by the loose *nexus* of centres of causality operating freely away from the epicentre of the action, waiting for an opportunity to strike unexpectedly, suddenly releasing their pent-up energy. Just as the feeling of improbability ("And then, the most amazing thing occurred…") is soon erased by the onward thrust of a well-crafted plot, the potential narrative space that feeds the counterfactual imagination (making the reader think "what if…") most often remains hidden, i.e., invisible *qua* space. The skill of maintaining narrative tension is all about constructing, despite all the possible plot developments that might be guessed at, a robust story arc straddling this field of separation and dispersion where countless mutually indifferent chains of causality potentially coexist. Unless it is directly thematized in the very act of reading, this dimly felt field will merely surround the action in progress with a halo of counterfactual trajectories projected by the reader.

The pragmatic handling of simultaneity in neoclassical theatre testifies to a desire to ward off the anxiety this negative space might cause by placing it within special boundaries. This not only involved using simultaneous sets or convergent performance areas representing different temporalities and locations (far-off lands, adjacent locales), but also presenting different modes of existence (parliament of the gods, dream scenes, etc.). The use of the wings, a stage device imported from Italy, suppresses simultaneity by literally staging the concealment of the actors. As Corneille states in his third *Discours* on dramatic poetry:

> It is not necessary that we know exactly what the actors are doing in the intervals which separate the acts, nor even that they contribute to the action when they do not appear on the stage; but it is necessary that each act leave us in the expectation of something which is to take place in the following one. If you asked me what Cleopatre is doing in *Rodogune* between the time when she leaves her two sons in the second act until she rejoins Antiochus in the fourth, I should be unable to tell you, and I do not feel obliged to account for her; but the end of this second

act prepares us to see an amicable effort by the two brothers to rule and to hide Rodogune from the venomous hatred of their mother.

(Corneille 1960, 118)

There could scarcely be a better way of describing how important it is to quell the distractive potential of being too interested in what the characters get up to when they're not on stage. Corneille reassures us that they don't go about their business but continue to work for him in silence, mutely contributing to the development of the overall action. But who will prevent the reader from filling in the yawning gaps they see out of the corner of their eye?[7] Feelings of fear and pity will not prevent their mind from wandering and entertaining the strange idea that elsewhere, at this very moment, life continues: things are running their course and will surprise us sooner or later.

The above is a particular case of a more general problem: under what conditions can simultaneity be highlighted for its own sake in fiction, beyond the limited role assigned to it in the Aristotelean model of drama? And in what sense is it an incubator or catalyst of chance? These questions are not limited to discussions on the tragic and epic genres or the way authors usually deal with narrative ellipses. The use of "simultaneous" or "alternate" narration in the modern novel, including under the banner of unanimism and simultanism, poses, *mutatis mutandis*, the same problem Corneille believed he had solved by wheeling out the maxim of unity of action. It remains to be seen whether the model of simultaneity tacitly mobilized in such modernist endeavours is not merely an extrapolation of proximal simultaneity or co-presence, which brings us back to the Aristotelean ideal of the plot as a compact arrangement of actions forming an organic whole (*holon*) whose parts are so well connected that virtually everything within it interacts. This ideal of extreme concentration can be transposed to the digressive interior monologue of a character in Joyce or Woolf: although it loses its unity and cohesion, the ideal of compactness and inseparability is preserved more often than we might think by the simple fact that no connection is, in principle, prohibited and that the most apparently isolated fragments of experience can ultimately converge and resonate in the narrator's stream of consciousness. It's not so easy to escape from the *principle of contiguity* that governs the classical idea of narrative configuration. Ricœur has shown the extent to which this idea could accommodate "discordance"; Aristotle already addressed the same issue when he explained how the extremely compact context of tragic drama could integrate the effects of chance.

These thoughts lead us, somewhat obliquely, to the recent writings of a difficult and subtle-minded philosopher on the idea of "aleatory space". As he meditates on the motif of the encounter as an intersection of independent

trajectories, Yogev Zusman begins by pointing out a misunderstanding of the "superimposition" that makes us interpret the intersection as an event resulting from the accidentally concurrent production of two unfolding lines of causality. To envision the situation as a whole, we actually project onto it a mode of description rooted in the local intuition of each line being drawn (Zusman 2021, 22). But by definition, a line cannot see beyond itself, and the space that structurally determines the encounter is unlikely to be revealed by simply superimposing a second line upon the first, i.e., by using additive or conjunctive devices. This means we have to get used to thinking about the point of intersection (the event of the encounter) as a "supplement": it does not inhabit either of the lines, nor is it an element or boundary that they have in common. Only when it is referred to the overall situation—a situation it "hovers above", so to speak—can the point of intersection testify to the reciprocal exteriority of the intersecting lines by "puncturing a 'hole' in each of the separate series" (23), so that what appeared to be "overdetermination" (a twofold causal determination) is actually a negative marker standing in for the still undetermined space where these lines can at least be considered in terms of their disjunctive coexistence. Thus

> it is only in and through the unique point of an accidental encounter that this exteriority or an 'outside' in general can at all be discerned. […] But this then also means that this 'outside', that the encounter and only the encounter reveals—i.e. the pre-existing multiplicity of independent trajectories—is prior not only to any encounter but also to *all* encounters.
>
> (34)

The highly speculative nature of the rest of Zusman's investigation would take us too far away from our immediate cosmological and poetic concerns, but we must take these remarks into account to avoid overhastily discarding the intimation of negativity introduced by the seemingly paradoxical idea of a *nexus* of independent causal chains.

We recognize here one of Augustin Cournot's major themes: chance concerns "a mutually independent series of causes and effects that accidentally contribute to producing a particular phenomenon, lead to a particular encounter or determine a particular event, which for this reason is called 'fortuitous'" (Cournot 1872, 1–2). The idea that the universe is not contiguous, that it does not come in a single block, is the fundamental intuition of his cosmology. Connected in this way to the notion of causality, the concept of chance has the same formal character as in the Aristotelian doctrine. It even becomes more generally applicable by jettisoning Aristotle's order of "final causes" and by combining with several

new themes: the idea of a history of the universe involving "emergences"; the idea that causality operates on different scales and in different registers; and the fact that probability calculus can show regularity in a series of contingent events that are independent but repeatable. First and foremost, Cournot's cosmology aims to clarify how science effectively proceeds when it formulates causal explanations (in the form of laws, in the framework of strict or statistical determinism) by assuming the existence of approximately "closed" or "isolated" systems. Causal separation or independence is a structural condition without which no precise meaning could be assigned to the idea of "initial conditions".[8] We should not, however, too hastily conclude that chance is an artefact resulting from the way we have framed and disjointed things in order to explain them; the realist challenge for Cournot is precisely to account for the fact that nature lends itself so well to our explanations. Unlike Leibniz, we must assert that everything in the universe does *not* "conspire" with everything else. The rationale of science requires taking the heterogeneity of scales into account:

> It is not impossible that an event occurring in China or Japan may have an influence upon events happening in Paris or London. But, in general, it is certain that the program a Parisian lays out for his day will not be influenced in the slightest degree by what is then going on in some city of China where Europeans have never set foot.
>
> (Cournot 1851 §30, 40)

The universe is thus made up of "little worlds, in each of which series of causes and effects can be observed developing simultaneously which are not connected and which exercise no appreciable influence on one another" (40–41).

William James and Alfred N. Whitehead defended similar ideas in a more empiricist style. James, in *The Will to Believe*, explains that the philosophical gist of indeterminism involves stating that, in a particular world, "the parts have a certain amount of loose play on one another, so that the laying down of one of them does not necessarily determine what the others shall be" (James 1897, 150).[9] His polemic against British Hegelians, who supported the idea of a "block-universe", led him to provide a minimal definition of chance, which, compared to Cournot's, has the advantage of immediately highlighting the connection with the theme of time and of not overstating the scope of deterministic causality.[10] Chance, he says, "is a purely negative and relative term, giving us no information about that of which it is predicated, except that it happens to be disconnected with something else" (James 1897, 153–154). He asserts that chance can have "something in it really of its own, something that is not the unconditional

property of the whole. If the whole wants this property, the whole must wait till it can get it". Many people, he continues,

> talk as if the minutest dose of disconnectedness of one part with another, the smallest modicum of independence, the faintest tremor of ambiguity about the future, for example, would ruin everything, and turn this goodly universe into a sort of insane sand-heap or *nulliverse*, no universe at all.
>
> (154–155)

Whitehead would explore this idea in detail in several of his books (see for example Whitehead 1925, 177–178), returning to Einstein's redefinition of the space-time constraints affecting physical interactions. Thus, a *principle of locality* (or local action) rules the theory of relativity: all physical connections involving the propagation of a signal or information must be kept below a threshold set by the constant speed of light in a vacuum. Put simply, since there is no such thing as instantaneous action at a distance, *all connections take time*. This involves that infinitely many events—those Whitehead calls "contemporary"—are causally independent, or disconnected, in the sense that neither can be the cause or effect of the other. This separation reflects the topological order (the causal order or *nexus*), which forms the basis for the extensive continuum formalized by Einstein and Minkowksi in terms of a four-dimensional space-time with a pseudo-Euclidian metric. Therein lies the main difference between Whitehead and James, who preferred to talk about degrees of connection between things rather than acknowledge absolute disconnection. Nonetheless, their fundamental intuition was the same: the universe can be seen in one piece as what Whitehead calls a "unison of becoming" as long as there is some "elbow room" that allows certain events to coexist without influencing each other directly, thus intensifying the advent of contingent events. The principle of separation or mutual indifference defines the general form of the *nexus*; it is more fundamental, in this sense, than the principle of relativity, which gives up the notion of an absolute or privileged viewpoint, replacing it with a class of equivalent reference frames. It is the conjunction of the principle of locality and the principle of relativity that leads us to consider the very idea of simultaneity as relative to the choice of a reference frame and eventually to uncouple it from the notions of instantaneity and universality generally associated with the intuition of the "now".[11] A few years later, the philosopher of science Mario Bunge brought together the ideas of Cournot, James and Whitehead, showing that statistical phenomena "arise from the comparative independence of different entities, that is, out of their comparative reciprocal contingency or irrelevancy" (Bunge [1959] 1979, 100). There is nothing speculative about this

statement. It is based on a series of convergent clues, including the finite speed of propagation of causal influence and the attenuation of physical interactions with distance (or the square of the distance, where gravity is concerned). Bunge sees these factors as "the most effective looseners of the tightness of the block universe" (101).

This principle of mutual irrelevance breaks with a long metaphysical tradition summed up by Kant in the section of his first *Critique* titled "Third Analogy of Experience". The category of community or coexistence found its temporal configuration (or "scheme") in the reciprocal and simultaneous action of substances, reflecting the figure of the universe as a *plenum* where everything communicates. In contrast, the hollowed-out *nexus* inspired by the new physics provides the most general formal conditions for loose coexistence, with lines of action that are causally disjointed and thereby involved in the production of chance effects. Admittedly, this merely constitutes a general framework that each author will use to develop his own cosmology based on specific objectives and problems. Returning to fiction, especially of the literary kind, the only question is whether loose coexistence can be enriched, supplemented and complicated so that it unleashes its full fictional potential. How can it be a cognitive and poetic resource? How does it allow us to consider the operation of chance in a more sober, less mystifying way? The familiar figures of the encounter and the obstacle focus our attention on the evental or incidental character of contingency; this way of identifying chance to its occurrence often means seeing it exclusively from the standpoint of the formal unity of the plot, which it either confirms or unravels. But starting from the horizon of simultaneity that surrounds the action, rather than its actual twists and turns, means allowing the *nexus* to operate on its own terms, using its decompressive influence to loosen the dramatic tension of the plot.

As is often the case, Bakhtin turns out to be a proficient guide. We must take him seriously when, after so many others in the last century, he taps into the metaphorical potential of Einstein's relativity. The comparison, he points out, is an "artistic comparison" and makes no claim to "scientific analogy". And yet it gets to the heart of the "polyphonic" form he identifies in Dostoevsky's novels: "It is as if varying systems of calculation were united here in the complex unity of an Einsteinian universe" (Bakhtin 1984, 16). Under what Bakhtin calls "dialogism", there is a form of relativity in terms of the perspectives of the different characters, the disjunctive coexistence of their existential trajectories, and the absence of a super-reference frame—an author or narrator—accounting for local perspectives from a "surplus," overarching viewpoint (70). Yet, more importantly, the space of coexistence itself refers to a particular topology of simultaneity.

This topology typically takes the form of an extreme concentration of the action at certain "points" or *thresholds* that are indifferent

to the conventional distribution of domestic space. This is where crises, transformations, possible encounters and often explosive collisions between the characters are played out, with much unpredictable to-ing and fro-ing (Bakhtin 1984, 169). *Crime and Punishment* illustrates this very well. The spatio-temporal framework of this novel is a paradigm of local action, or action by contact; this explains why the impression we get of the somewhat unreal world of Saint Petersburg society is one of extreme compactness. But as we have seen, this principle is actually entirely compatible with the distribution of moments of spatio-temporal separation or causal disconnection as the action progresses. The punctured and patchy character of the causal fabric compensates for the frantic behaviour of the protagonists interacting on the thresholds. Raskolnikov's long naps, absences and cataleptic episodes are intervals that punctuate the continuous thread of a plot that slips through our fingers at the same time as it accelerates and increases in density. In these pockets of emptiness, simultaneity returns to the foreground as a principle of uncertainty and a repository of questions and enigmas swollen by a swarm of devoted but dubious intercessors. What might so-and-so be doing right now? What's he up to, as we are speaking? When the main character wakes up, things have happened without him, without his knowledge, behind his back. At other times, we, the readers, lag behind and have to work out the meaning of something that has started without us and precipitated the plot in unpredictable ways. Everywhere there is a sense of simultaneity, alive and opaque, replete with delays, jump cuts, ellipses and blind spots, which eat away at the plot even as they feed into it. The compresence that seemed to provide the model for the plot's spatial and temporal compactness is constantly eroded by the modal unreality of what is or may be happening somewhere else—an "elsewhere-now" that is vaguely felt and revealed only after the fact. In this essentially centrifugal narrative, open to what lies beyond it, the advent of the chance event owes as much to the coexistence of scattered perspectives as to the areas of turbulence where they seem to react locally to one another. Every encounter is the ambiguous sign of a space of dispersion that is the true principle of chance.

Elie During

4   Counterpoint. Historical discourse and counterfactual hypotheses: dismissing chance

If Napoleon, as Catherine Gallagher (2011) suggests in an oft-quoted article, had marched on Saint Petersburg after burning Moscow, what could have been the consequences of his decision? Historians frequently pose this type of question in order to explain how and why an event took place. Thus, they refuse to consider that this event, similar to the encounter

between Rogozhyn and Prince Myshkin analysed in this volume by Elie During (see *supra*, section 3), could be attributed to chance. True, they ask at times whether such or such an event might have had accidental causes. But they do not do so within the framework of a counterfactual hypothesis. Historians who turn to counterfactuals do so in order to imagine outcomes, not origins—that is, to consider the aftermaths which the choice of the alternative they have identified might have had. When interested in the epistemology of their discipline, historians even claim that a "what if" is present in every explanation, whether explicitly or implicitly. "Is it possible to understand how things happened as they did", writes Antoine Prost in the section of his *Douze leçons sur l'histoire* he devotes to "causal ascription", "without asking whether they could have happened differently?" (2010, 175).[12] For Prost as well as for numerous historians and philosophers of history—Prost quotes Raymond Aron and Paul Ricœur at length—this step is necessary, insofar as it is difficult to account for what *was* without asking what *could have been*.

In the introduction to the anthology on the use of "what if" in the social sciences that they edited, the political scientists Philip Tetlock and Aaron Belkin describe counterfactuals as "subjunctive conditionals in which the antecedent, for purposes of argument, is known or supposed to be false", on the model "if the United States had not dropped atomic bombs on two Japanese cities in August 1945, the Japanese would still have surrendered roughly when they did" (2020, 4). As Tetlock and Belin do, historians who use counterfactuals thus assume that the past includes moments that they label "turning points", "crossroads", or—adopting Borges's celebrated metaphor—"forking paths". Accordingly, they hold that it is imperative, to better understand what happened, to look closely at these "turning points", that is, to identify the choices the actors had at the "fork", before they decided to follow this "path" rather than that one. Let us stress, as Tetlock and Belkin do, that turning to counterfactuals has a function that is not only cognitive but also rhetorical. Historians ask the question "what if?" "for purposes of argument" in order to defend their interpretation of the events against a competing interpretation, in this instance, the thesis that dropping the atomic bomb prompted the end of the war.[13]

Depending on their format, texts that deal with counterfactuals can be divided into four categories:

a Entirely devoted to counterfactuals, works that trace the history, describe the different types, and theorize this mode of thought. Among recent books in this category, we should mention *Counterfactuals: Paths of Might Have Been*, by the British philosopher Christopher Prendergast (2019), and *Pour une histoire des possibles. Analyses contrefactuelles et futurs non advenus*, by the French historians Quentin Deluermoz

and Pierre Singaravélou (2016). To my knowledge, this latter work constitutes the most comprehensive introduction to the topic to date.

b Whole works that draw on counterfactuals in order to answer questions related to one specific moment or situation. Studies of counterfactuals often take as the prime example of this type of inquiry *Railroads and American Economic Growth*, in which the American historian Robert Fogel (1964), relying on a weighty quantitative apparatus, defends the idea that the American economy would have expanded at the same rate if trains had not been available to carry the freight. A more recent example of this kind of research, *Explaining the Iraq War*, by the Canadian historian Frank P. Harvey (2012), focuses on a different domain: politics, with its continuation in war. Roughly summarized, Harvey's thesis is that the decision to invade Iraq is not traceable, as is often assumed, to the circle of hawkish and neo-conservative advisors that surrounded Bush in 2003. According to Harvey, things would not have happened differently if Gore had been president; thinking it had no alternative, a Democratic administration would have resolved to go to war just as the Republicans did.

c Articles often collected in an edited volume. Tetlock and Belkin's book mentioned earlier is a member of this category, which includes numerous English-language works with programmatic titles: *What If* (Cowley 1999), *Roads Not Taken* (Dozois & Smith 1998), *Virtual History* (Ferguson 1999), *What Might Have Been* (Roberts 2004), *Unmaking the West* (Tetlock & Parker 2006), etc. Even though Charles Renouvier (1876) opened the way in the nineteenth century with a book devoted to what he called "uchronies", French historians have shown less taste for speculating about the past than their Anglo-American counterparts. *Et si on refaisait l'histoire* (Rowley & d'Almeida 2009) and the two volumes of *1941–1942. Et si la France avait continué la guerre* (Sapir, Stora, & Mahé 2014) are rare exceptions (while Deluermoz and Singaravélou's study admits examples, its focus is historical and theoretical). The articles contained in these collections focus mostly on political and military events. They ask, to take a few typical examples, what would have happened if the Persians had won the battle of Salamis (Hanson 1999), if Cortés's army had been destroyed in 1520 (Hassig 1999), if the Wehrmacht had turned to the Middle-East instead of invading the USSR (Keegan 1999), or (a 'postcolonial history' scenario) if the East had conquered the West, an armed Chinese flotilla then moving up the Thames instead of British steamboats up the Yangtze (Morris 2010, 3–10).

d Counterfactual digressions. Under this term, Deluermoz and Singaravélou (2016, 24) refer to the hypotheses that historians briefly include in works in which they study the past as it was, not as it could have been. These "digressions" are generally found in the sections of historical

studies devoted to the search for causes. Even authors most dedicated
to accounting for events "as they really occurred" allow themselves at
times to ask, "what if"? Deluermoz and Singaravélou found instances
of this question in Marx's work, and Avezier Tucker in Ranke's.

Whether they have the format of a whole book, an article, or a mere
digression, counterfactuals may follow two different tracks. Starting from
a known outcome, they may return to the antecedent, modify it with a
counterfactual hypothesis, and describe the consequences of the change;
or, starting in the past, they may account for what the future would have
been "if" the wishes (hopes, fears etc.) expressed at the time had been
realized. The first type is the most frequent, and several of the articles
included in the anthologies mentioned earlier (e.g. "what if the Persians
had won the battle of Salamis?") exemplify this model. The second type,
returning to the perspective of people in the past, is less frequent, possibly
because it requires documentation that is not always available. Deluer-
moz and Singaravélou, for instance, needed specific sources to describe
the "possible, feared and hoped-for futures of 1848" (title of Chapter 10
of their book). The "petitions" that were sent from all over France to the
Constituent Assembly provided the necessary material, allowing the two
historians to reconstruct the expectations of "other futures" people had at
the time, futures that, for the most part, unfortunately "never took place"
(Deluermoz & Singaravélou 2016, 258, 273).

   Historians, moreover, can also make counterfactual hypotheses to show
that their actualization would not have changed the course of history.
Harvey, as we have seen, sets out to demonstrate that a Gore administra-
tion would have decided to invade Iraq just as the Bush administration did.
The key concept, for Harvey, is the "path", though a path which has no
"fork"; finding a diplomatic solution to the conflict was not regarded as a
possible alternative at the time, and a Democratic president would not have
acted differently from Bush. Diane Kunz (1999) answers in parallel fashion
a question often asked: if Kennedy had not been assassinated, would he
have ended the Vietnam War? Grounding her argument in a detailed exam-
ination of American foreign policy after 1945, Kunz states that Kennedy,
had he been re-elected, would not have acted differently from Johnson; re-
fusing to escalate the conflict as the Pentagon demanded, he would still not
have negotiated a peace treaty; and, too concerned with his place in history
and his brother's career, he would not have taken the risk of merely stop-
ping the war and pulling out of Vietnam. In other words, and more gener-
ally, Kennedy would not have renounced the prevailing American belief
that the United States had to continue fighting the Cold War, victory being
the only conceivable outcome. In a different area, the history of science,
Peter J. Bowler devotes *Darwin Deleted* (2013) to examining the theories

that biologists could have developed if they had not been compelled to situate themselves with regard to Darwin's *The Origin of Species*. Not as bold as Harvey and Kunz, Bowler surmises that scientists would have come to the same conclusions as Darwin did in one specific area—evolution. The concept of "natural selection", however, was Darwin's own, and one can assume—given the hostility this notion encountered—that a non-Darwinian biology would have offered a less radical view of the relations between evolution, heredity, and the environment.

However historians answer the counterfactual questions they pose, their recourse to this strategy often includes a political agenda. Some of the scholars who rely on the "what if" approach do so in the name of neoliberal theses, which emphasize the role of the actors as well as that of contingency. Ferguson, in his long introduction to *Virtual History*, thus indicts any form of determinism. He especially takes on the leftist British historians who, from Eric Hobsbawn to E.P. Thomson to Christopher Hill, produce what he contemptuously labels "reheated Hegel": presuming that phenomena all have identifiable causes, they assign to historians the task of describing the facts in a way that conforms to a logical model of explanation and interpretation, in this instance, Marxism (Ferguson 1999, 55). Drawing on chaos theory, Ferguson assumes, on the contrary, that determinist systems admit "stochastic behaviour", which means that events may have "unpredictable" outcomes, even when they are causally linked. Instating counterfactual hypotheses allows one to account for the randomness of these events, reconciling the notions of cause and contingency. Historians, for Ferguson, have no other way of testing the explanations that they advance, barring a return to obsolete theories according to which facts are interlocked in "a chain of preordained causation based on laws" (Ferguson 1999, 79). Let us emphasize that "contingency", according to Ferguson, is not synonymous with "chance". Quite the opposite: posing the question "what if?" draws attention to the role of the actors, highlighting the fact that they are the ones who, having arrived at a "fork", opted to follow one path rather than another. While events, according to Ferguson, are contingent in the sense that they "could have not occurred" or "could have occurred in a different way", their unfolding is therefore not accidental at all; it is dependent on the will of individuals who, in a specific situation, made choices that a counterfactual hypothesis makes it possible to define with precision by considering the options that were rejected.

Making use of counterfactuals, however, may also underlie deterministic approaches to history. The hypotheses that Harvey and Kunz formulate about the decisions Gore and Kennedy would have made lead to one conclusion: American policies were on a course from which it was very difficult (or perhaps impossible) to deviate. Still, as defined by Harvey, the concept of a "path" does not involve the type of predictable regularity which for

Ferguson characterizes theories such as Marxism. What Harvey sees in the measures a Gore administration (and Kunz, a post-1964 Kennedy administration) would have made is merely a continuation: the persistence of policies that endure because they were put in place and meet with what the government holds to be the role and the interests of the country. Thus, Kennedy would have resolved to continue the Vietnam War and Gore to invade Iraq because a pattern of responses to what was, at the time, thought to be a military or ideological threat was in place. Here, counterfactual reasoning serves a form of non-Marxist determinism for which policies are difficult to modify once they have been established and are taken as "good". This determinism nevertheless shares with Marxism (or at least a certain type of Marxism) a rejection of the idea that decisions made at a "fork" are contingent and that they result from the actors' free choice. "Chance" is obviously not a factor here; for Kunz as for Harvey, turning to counterfactuals supports the idea that events have a course which has been set and that nothing accidental could modify it.

As practiced by professional historians, the use of counterfactuals is, of course, subject to precise requirements of plausibility and documentation. First, the initial hypothesis must alter only one aspect of a historical reality that—all else being equal—remains unchanged. That hypothesis, moreover, must at the time have been part of the field of possibilities. Asking whether Napoleon would have won at Waterloo with the help of an air force is thus a "bad" hypothesis; a "good" one would focus, to take the narrative of the battle as it appears in schoolbooks and in Victor Hugo's famous poem, on the French attack being delayed by fog or Blücher's army (and not Grouchy's) joining the battle. Ferguson is very strict on this point. According to him, historians can only admit "hypothetical scenarios which contemporaries not only considered, but also committed to paper (or some form of record)", making them "a valid source" (Ferguson 1999, 87). Elazar Weinryb is more indulgent. Finding Ferguson excessively restrictive, he maintains that historians have the right to put themselves in actors' heads and make hypotheses that the latter have not "explicitly formulated". Still, the "possible world" that historians create must, for Weinryb, remain within the "conceptual and epistemic horizon" of the contemporaries and be in accordance with the "expectations" they might have had in their daily lives (Weinryb 2009, 116). Concerned about credibility, Harvey, Deluermoz and Singaravélou are extremely cautious in this regard. They stockpile the documents that allow them to describe in a convincing way what would have happened if, respectively, Gore had been elected President and the 1848 Revolution had reached some of its goals. In other words, they follow the principle expounded by Tucker, according to which "the more information, including theoretical information, we have about the past, the fewer alternative pasts there are"; and, conversely,

"the more evidence there is about the past, the more information about historical agents and situations there is, the more accurate can be the evaluation of proposed counterfactual hypotheses" (Tucker 2004, 228).

However careful they might be, historians who resort to counterfactuals expose themselves to critiques from various quarters. The most violent, and the most predictable, come from leftist scholars for whom research must stick to the facts and not lose its way in the quest for answers to the question "what if". E.H. Carr, for example sees the use of counterfactuals as a "parlor game", and Thompson, more crudely, a "Geschichtscheissenschlopf", that is, a procedure which must be disposed of like a "pile of shit" (quoted in Prendergast 2019, 38). Because they are located on the very turf of those who formulate them, the objections made by historians whose practice includes counterfactual reasoning are more relevant. Examining the dangers involved in this mode of thinking, Deluermoz and Singaravélou thus note the tendency of constantly returning to the same hypothesis, be it a victory of the Spanish Armada in 1588, the American Civil War ending with a defeat of the North, or the Nazis invading Great Britain in 1940. The risk, they contend, is to "indirectly rehabilitate a conception of event, actor, and cause" regarded today as obsolete, as well as to forget that the notion of a "turning point", like the oft-criticized idea of a "fact", is not a given but a construct. A focus on discrete events may also divert attention from the long time span, a challenge that Deluermoz and Singaravélou aim to meet by "testing the Empire" (the title of Chapter 9 of their study), that is, by submitting colonial expansion "to the trial of counterfactuals and possible futures" (Deluermoz & Singaravélou 2016, 213). Finally, as Prendergast stresses, the most attractive "combination of conditional and subjunctive elements" cannot provide a "proof". The epistemological status of counterfactual hypotheses, he writes, is that they "*always*" remain questions and "questions without answers" (Prendergast 2019, 17). In other words, however believable they might be, counterfactual scenarios are still conjectures; they do not, and cannot, establish that these scenarios would really have unfolded as the scholars who imagined them claim that they could have.

As practised by historians, the use of counterfactuals raises additional issues, three of which I want to examine by way of conclusion. We can first ask, with Tucker, whether it is meaningful to ask questions to which there are obviously no satisfactory answers. "What was the nature of the first human language? Why did Hitler hate Jews so much? How did Beethoven intend his Ninth Symphony to sound exactly? How did Mahler intend to finish his Tenth?" (Tucker 2004, 240). Even though he is a strong advocate of counterfactual reasoning, Tucker deems it futile, given the lack of documents, to imagine possible answers to these questions. It is worthless, for instance, to ask what Hitler's policy towards the Jews might have been "if

he had not hated them". Indeed, no record indicates that Hitler, finding himself at a "crossroads", had at some point paused before making decisions about the Jewish community. Rosenfeld poses a related question focusing on what he calls the "dialectic of counterfactualism": how to decide between scripts that are equally plausible and equally grounded in legitimate evidence. The risk, for Rosenfeld, is that the ensuing debates would "drag on indefinitely without resolution", especially in cases that involve "emotions—regret, relief, shame, and guilt—that can be difficult to control" (Rosenfeld 2021, 476–477). Last but not least, one can ponder whether it is always possible to satisfy the requirement, expressed in particular by Prost, of "formalising one's hypotheses", that is, of making every use of counterfactual reasoning explicit (Prost, 176). The problem here is consistency. Given that every explanation involves a "what if", are historians supposed not just to offer alternatives to what really happened but to state that they are doing so and make plain why? Obviously, texts applying this reflexivity rule would soon become unreadable, supposing they could be written at all. Historians who rely on counterfactuals naturally make choices about when to explicate and justify doing so—choices that would be revealing to examine in specific works. Such an analysis would allow us to theorize a practice which, proceeding from the bottom up, involves describing the epistemology which, in the critical area of providing explanations, underlies the decisions made by historians on the textual level. The same procedure, for that matter, could be applied to texts by historians less interested in conjectures than in the role of chance, as one could ask whether such texts formulate their theory explicitly and, if not, how the assumptions that support them are manifested implicitly in their writing.

Philippe Carrard

Notes

1 See also Chapter 6 in this volume on "Chance in Games".
2 See, for example, in this volume, M. Bitbol's critical analysis of the foundations of "speculative" realism, which, in some writings, accompanies a view of contingency as the only necessity (Chapter 3, section 2).
3 Philippe Carrard's contrapuntal analysis of the counterfactual reasoning used by historians demonstrates this (section 4 in this chapter). While it is always useful for historians to justify their specific or extensive use of this narrative tool, often seen as a fictionalizing artifice of writing, the use of counterfactual hypotheses is, in fact, inseparable from historiographical reasoning itself.
4 For Ricœur as for Derrida there is an essential indeterminacy and dynamism at the heart of signification. This is the condition for new ways of speaking and seeing. But where for Derrida this fealty resists our attempts to master it, Ricœur endows thought with the capacity to hold language at a critical remove (to distanciate) and to stabilise polysemy for conceptual and creative ends.

5 Ricœur uses these terms on p. 79 of Vol. 1 of *Time and Narrative* (in the context of fictional reference and literature's agency to effect real world change) and on p. 188 of Volume 3 (in the context of historical suffering).

6 In the essay "Existence and Hermeneutics", Ricœur writes of understanding in volitional terms of effort and desire: "Reflection is the appropriation of our effort to exist and of our desire to be by means of the works which testify to this effort and desire" (Ricœur [1969] 2004, 17).

7 The phenomenon of "gapping" and the work of interpolation it naturally gives rise to are rooted in Roman Ingarden's phenomenology of the artwork. See also the work of James Phelan on the construction of the "synthetic" form of the plot. By referring to the Bakhtinian notion of the "chronotype", Gabriel Zoran stresses the need to presuppose a "total space" for the horizon on which partial "fields of vision" suggested by the narrative come together (Zoran 1984, esp. 329–334).

8 See Nagel (1961, 323): theoretical and experimental science is based on the precept that "everything is not relevant to everything else".

9 We are put in mind of his famous words in *Pragmatism*: "the lowest grade of universe would be a world of mere *withness*, of which the parts were only strung together by the conjunction 'and'".

10 Cournot supposes lines of causality taken separately to be continuous and, in principle, to match up (at least locally) with deterministic formats of explanation. Only when they occasionally interfere with one another do they lend themselves collectively to being described in terms of probabilistic or statistical regularity, rather than strict determinism.

11 I developed the idea of "regional" simultaneity ("envelope of simultaneity") in During (2022).

12 Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from the French in this section are mine (P. C.)

13 On this point, see Kozuchowski (2015).

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