A conversation about narrative and translation

A Conversation about Narrative and Translation

Theo Hermans, Sue-Ann Harding, Julie Boéri

Theo Hermans (TH): While 'narrative' is simply another word for 'story', the narrative approach that Mona Baker introduced into translation studies with her book *Translation and Conflict: A Narrative Account* (2006) is usually described as socio-narrative theory. It hails from the social sciences rather than from literary studies, and it views narratives as existential: we make sense of ourselves and the world by telling stories about ourselves and the world. Socio-narrative theory as applied to translation has proved influential, and for this reason the editors of *Cultus* have invited us to put out heads together in the form of a conversation. The aim is to get a clearer idea of socio-narrative theory, what it is about, what it has achieved, and what potential problems there might be. You, Sue-Ann and Julie, have worked with socio-narrative theory for years. For my part, I've dabbled in narratology in the past and more recently have been reading historians talking about narrative.
So I thought I'd have a go at starting a conversation about translation and narrative. To that end, I've dreamt up a few issues and questions, (in no particular order).

1 Narrative and Renarration

From what I've seen of the socio-narrative approach in the work of Mona Baker, yourselves and others, my impression is that the approach invests heavily in types of narrative, from the private narratives we tell ourselves about ourselves to all manner of public narratives. But as regards the study of translation, it seems to me that the two key tools in the socio-narrative toolkit are framing and renarration. I understand framing as the way a translation is presented in its environment, that is, the way it draws on and interacts with its context to generate meaning. Renarration I take to mean the way a translation forges a discourse out of pre-existing materials and makes them relevant in its new environment. Renarration and framing are contiguous and probably even overlap, although I suppose one is more textual, the other more contextual. The reason why it seems to me framing and renarration are of special importance for translation studies is that they draw attention to the insertion of texts and narratives originating from elsewhere into new environments. This mobility, I suppose, is constitutive of translation. Would you agree?

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Sue-Ann Harding (SH): It's true that this socio-narrative approach invests heavily in types of narrative. Mona's *Translation and Conflict* (Baker, 2006/2019) devotes a chapter to a typology of narratives (ontological, public, conceptual or disciplinary, and meta- or master-narratives). These of course, are not the only types scholars have proposed; Baker takes these four directly from Somers (1992, 1997) and Somers and Gibson (1994) simply because they seem 'the most relevant' and then uses them as a scaffold for her own expansion of their ideas. Typologies like this are, as we know, useful for analysis, useful for taking apart complex phenomena in order to see from different and fresh perspectives – Mieke Bal has a nice quote on this: 'Establishing categories is not continuous with analysis [and] The point is to ask meaningful questions' (2009, 226; 228) and I think Mona's use of this typology stems from that desire, not to define and categorise (for their own sake), but to decide how to critically dismantle, examine, explore and interrogate phenomena.

As Mona's PhD students at the time of the publication of that book, Julie [Boéri] and I also used her typology as a way of entering into and scaffolding our own emerging doctoral work. Julie added 'professional narratives' because she was looking at professional and 'non-professional' or activist interpreters, and I grappled with what I thought was a flat model that didn't explicitly distinguish between personal – that is, narratives which we self-author and for which we are personally responsible – and shared or collective narratives that are created through process of consensus and/or coercion (Harding, 2012). I also added 'local narratives' to the typology, because I was looking at eyewitness accounts of a single violent event (the 2004 Beslan hostage-taking) and was seeing how these often disparate voices were subsumed and homogenised into larger, official narratives, particularly of the Russian state (which we see continuing to a totalitarian degree in Putin's Russia today). My point is that this 'heavy investment in types of narratives' – which I do see continuing in the way that literature drawing on Mona's work often resorts to referring, fairly uncritically, to the original typology – came about, I think for all of three of us, rather accidentally rather than with any specific intention to focus on typology and definitions per se as a significant component of the theory. For me, it was most certainly because I was a student, struggling to 'engage with the theory' as Mona always admonished us in supervisory meetings; scaffolding my work around the typology seemed one way of simply beginning the dreaded 'theoretical chapter', and playing around with categories and definitions seemed to be an intellectually interesting way of pushing and expanding the theory, much as Mona did in her work with the typology from Somers and Gibson (1994) and the features of narrativity from Bruner (1991).

This is not to diminish the typologies. I still actually very much think of narratives in this way, of narratives of different origins, different 'sizes', different reach, scope, composition and power, circulating as intersecting threads, or tangled lines

in the sense that Tim Ingold (2007) writes about lines. Thinking of these narratives fractally is also helpful, I find – the size of the narrative (you are choosing to look at) differs only according to perspective, and you can zoom in and out to look at small, local, 'minor', personal narratives all the way out to powerful, reductive metanarratives with enormous reach. This is where, for me, complexity theory becomes particularly useful and interesting; how might those small, local, 'minor', personal narratives disrupt, challenge and change those metanarratives, in the way that small changes in complex systems can have the 'power' to completely change the system. This is also where translation comes into its own, because translation can add to the proliferation and diversity of the elements available for configuration into narratives, as well as to the proliferation and diversity of these 'small' narratives in circulation.

Which brings me at last to framing and renarration. In answer to your question, yes, I do agree with what you say. These are indeed both key tools in the socio-narrative kit, and I also understand them in the way you describe. Framing and renarration, I agree, are of special importance for translation studies because of the way they draw attention to the shifting of narratives across disparate environments, but I also see the elaboration and circulation of fractally related narratives (which we can usefully identify and label as different types of narrative) as an intrinsic part of, rather than separate precursor to, those framing and renarration processes. Any telling of a narrative is already a version of that narrative, is selective, purposeful and intentional for the moment, tangling with other narratives. Framing and renarration highlight the mobility that is constitutive of translation as you say, but mobility is also constitutive of narratives themselves, and thinking of different types of narratives and the way they are fractally entangled is also a way of drawing attention to that change and mobility.

Do you see the types of narratives as useful? How do you see them in relation to renarration and framing? I talked about lines and fractal; how do you imagine or visualise narratives?

TH: I have no quarrel with the socio-narrative attention to types of narrative. They are obviously useful and can be further differentiated and interrelated in various ways, as you indicate. It's just that focussing on types of narrative runs the risk of becoming an exercise in classification rather than in understanding the dynamics of translational mobility, and that's why it seems to me that framing and renarration, as the active processes of re-arranging and reorienting texts so as to fit them out for their new environments, are worth highlighting.

SH: Agreed. Any focus on types and categories can turn into an overly descriptive exercise that has little purpose beyond naming and identifying. Again, as Mieke Bal

(2009, 11-12) says, "a systematic theory is helpful, not to eliminate or bracket interpretation, but to make it arguable [and] discussable".

TH: I'm not sure what you mean by fractals and fractally related narratives. Do you mean narratives that touch, show points of contact, partly overlap, intersect? As for visualising narratives, this is not something I have given any thought to. If I try, I find myself drawing on my reading of Niklas Luhmann (1992), for whom communications are fleeting events that have to be connected as links of an emergent chain forming over time. A new translation asks to be viewed as an intervention that is relevant to existing narratives, and the way recipients integrate the new text into their existing web of narratives determines its significance.

SH: By fractals and fractally related narratives, I mean the zooming in and out that you talk about in the first chapter of your new book (Hermans, 2022, 5):

> We can focus on a large or a small geographical space. We can zoom in on a single person or object, or survey groups of people active in broad domains such as the economy, politics, religion, science, art. We can trace abstract entities like ideas and concepts. We can approach things from the perspective of those at the top of social hierarchies or from the standpoint of those below them. We can consider a cross-section at a particular moment or take in longer temporal stretches….

Whichever of these views or vantage points we are taking, the narratives we (or historians) construct, are still narratives, with the features, elements and properties of narratives. A narrative may span hundreds of years or a single day, the building of a nation or the coming of age of a single person, the loss of an empire or the devastation of a small village. I like the sense of robust flexibility of narrative, that we use narrative to tell all of these stories and that all the while we are sort of trying to grasp – as in the title of the recent movie – everything, everywhere, all at once (Kwan & Scheinert, 2022). They are all embedded and connected, even when we don't realise it, or know why or how.

I like what you say about Luhmann and communications as fleeting events and new translations as interventions. Kobus Marais (2019) talks about this kind of thing, the way that any translation, any attempt at meaning-making for that matter, is but a momentary stasis in ongoing dynamic processes.

TH: It may well be that the power of the narrative approach lies exactly here: it sees translations as interacting with and affecting the narratives circulating in a given environment. But I wonder if this strength also conceals a blind spot. What does the narrative approach have to say about the actual process of translating? Is there a narrative aspect to the successive moves a translator makes in producing a translation? How would we emplot these moves? It ought to be possible, but I

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don't think I've seen it done. Have you? As far as I'm aware, we (including me, Hermans 1996 and 2014) have discussed these moves in terms of the translator's discursive presence in the text and of positioning. This latter term seems to allow for, even to invite, a narrative, as the gradual construction of a position. Framing and renarration, too, suggest unfolding series of acts of framing and renarrating, and hence a plot structure.

SH: Is this about telling stories of our translations? How we came to the text, how it came to us, what our motivations were/are, how we tried/are trying to navigate competing demands, how we are reading the text and are being changed by it, how we waver between choices before deciding? Some translators are very good at telling these stories, I'm thinking of Chantal Wright (Tawada and Wright, 2013), for example, or Marilyn Booth (2008), I'm sure there are many others. But, yes, I doubt we could really reconstruct those narratives just from trying to identify elements of the translator's discursive presence in the text even though, you're right, we sort of try to, when we try to uncover 'the translator's ideology' in the text, something that students seem to find very attractive and yet underestimate the difficulties of such an endeavour.

Julie Boéri (JB): "Engaging with the theory": how nice to read and hear these words again, Sue-Ann. Like a Proust effect, these four words triggered so many memories of supervision meetings with Mona. "Engaging with the theory" had an indelible imprint on my doctoral experience and still very much influences my theoretical mindset. It is clear that theory (and typology) is not 'sitting out there', as a one-fit-for-all toolkit to be applied or forced onto one's data. As we confronted the theory with the data to address our research questions, we navigated, stumbled, found possible pathways and breakthroughs. In so doing, we made the typology our own, opening up new avenues of research for narrative enquiry. 'Engaging with the theory', thus, has proven to be an effective shield against uncritical and unproductive classification of narratives; a risk Theo is so right to remind us of in this special issue on narrative and translation. I tend to think that Mona's injunction to engage with the theory had to do with a similar concern, as she was supervising no less than 5 narrative-minded PhD students at the time, including us two, immediately following the publication of *Translation and Conflict: a narrative account*. We even cheerly self-referred as the Narrative School, remember?

SH: I remember it well!

JB: Engaging with the theory allowed us to flesh out the typology with new types, and to give more depth to existing ones. My addition of "professional narratives" to the typology resulted from the strong adherence to stories of interpreting practice/profession across activist and professional interpreters. But perhaps more importantly, we reconfigured the relations between types. In my contribution to

the special issue on *Translation and the Formation of Collectivities* to be published in the *Translation in Society* journal (Boéri Forthcoming), I unearthed from my PhD thesis two nodes – "narrative locations" and "narrative positions" – to map intersections between the different types of narratives. Conceived of as a nexus of various types of narratives (personal, professional, conceptual, etc.) that intersect into one's own (narrative location) or into one given group (narrative position), they proved very useful to account for the dynamics of resistance and co-optation across deliberative and participatory online spaces like Babels.org, the volunteer network of interpreters and translators, and pyramidal professional organizations' websites such as Aiic.net or Aiic.org. More importantly, locations and positions allowed me to highlight that there is variation across individuals of a same group and that collectives, be they 'activist' or 'professional', are all underpinned by a narrative power struggle.

Interestingly enough, a cross-analysis of narrative locations and positions, like that of "personal" and "shared" narratives in Sue-Ann's work, allows us to explore the processes of consensus and coercion Sue-Ann refers to above in her first comment. But more particularly and perhaps distinctively, location and positions allowed me to map the different types of narratives which individuals and groups draw on when interacting, negotiating and clashing over narratives, in the communication space, at a given moment in time, on a given matter of concern of their community. To me, this dual and dialectic approach, which Sue-Ann and I developed through different labels and different sets of data, acknowledges that any narrative is a renarration/reframing of narratives. While we kept Mona's types, we adapted the typology to our own purposes, emphasizing the networked, intertextual, that is, the 'fractally entangled' nature of any narrative we zoomed in on for granular analysis and zoomed out from for streamlining insights.

In retrospect, the typology provided us with a reassuring point of departure. We used it deductively as we went from theory to data. But this was only the beginning of the journey. As we mapped ('visualized') the convergence and divergence between types of narratives in specific 'sites' of narration in our data, we inductively coined new labels, terms and types. Besides, this act of naming is closer to taxonomy rather than typology. In fact, in a typology, reality is categorized on the basis of the different dimensions that the analyst seeks to conceptualize, whereas in a taxonomy, reality is categorized on the basis of empirical observations that the analyst seeks to label. Indeed, the Ancient Greek etymology of the word – *ono/* naming and *táxo/*order– is revelatory in this regard. Of course, the line between typology and taxonomy, like the one between deduction and induction, is fuzzy. However, these iterative phases through which we map a complex reality may help visualize the abductive process of 'engaging with the theory'. The process of adopting and adapting a typology, of naming and labelling narratives, in itself is an act of re-framing as we attend to multiple audiences: the scholarly community, the people in our data and the larger public.

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SH: Oh, very nice! I very much like where you have arrived here!

JB: Now, more specifically on translation, I think socio-narrative theory equips the researcher to trace back the process of translation, as Theo suggests. Mona's model provides a tentative way of doing so and I believe that it has been taken up by narrative scholars. Baker outlines several strategies for reframing narratives in translation – through temporal and spatial framing, framing through selective appropriation, etc. – but these are meant to be "illustrative" rather than "exhaustive" (Baker 2006: 112). This means that it is up to researchers to explore the ways in which a translation reframes narratives, by paying attention to the transformation of features and types. For instance, with my colleague Ashraf Abdel Fattah, we analyzed the transediting process of *Al-Ittihad*, a UAE-controlled Arabic language news outlet and its section of hard news reports dedicated to Qatar, in 2017, at the height of a diplomatic conflict in the Gulf and of a blockade against Qatar. We used socio-narrative theory (and appraisal framework) to analyze the many 'moves' undergone by the attributed foreign sources in the process of their transedition into Arabic. We found that many of these sources (originally published in English and French in other news outlets) were reframed through the manipulation of features and types: turning a personal narrative into a public narrative, an eyewitness account into a hard news report, selecting particular pictures, colors, and font styles, to support the blockade on Qatar (see Boéri and Fattah, 2020: 81-82). This is just one example. I am pretty sure that narrative analysis of paratexts such as Mahmoud Alhirthani's (2009), in his doctoral thesis on Edward Said's reframing of *Orientalism* in translation, paves the way for the agenda of "understanding the dynamics of translational mobility" you set forth, Theo.
All in all, I believe that types and features, the two pillars of Mona's model, are useful and underpin narratives as much as they underpin renarration and reframing. Going a step further, and building on narrative location/position and personal/shared narratives, we can also map/visualize how different agents in the process of translation, position themselves in relation to one another and to larger political agendas and pressures.

2 Narrative and History

TH: In the last couple of years, trying to write a little textbook to be called *Translation and History*, I found myself reading historians talking about narrativity. Some of the relevant essays have been collected in *The History and Narrativity Reader* (Roberts, 2001). The book includes – obviously – work by Hayden White. In his early work, but, if I'm not mistaken, less so in his later work, White (1987, 1980) spoke of four narrative archetypes, which he called comedy, tragedy, romance and satire. These are not literary genres but conceptual archetypes. White argued that narratives fitting one or other of these archetypes gain credibility because we

recognise them. I don't know if you're familiar with White or not, but it occurs to me that questions of possible interest to you in this connection might be: what is it that makes some narratives more, or more widely, acceptable than others? Is it the kind of recognition White talks about or does it boil down to more brutal issues of control and enforcement? And why is it that what historians have had to say about narrative seems virtually absent from the socio-narrative approach in translation studies?

SH: That little textbook has just been published since we began this conversation and I have very much enjoyed reading it! It's a very clear exposition of some very complex and fascinating ideas, with rich examples. Chris Rundle asked me to contribute a chapter on narratology and narrative theory to his *Routledge Handbook of Translation History* (2022) and I have to admit to having to work quite hard to try to bring myself up to speed with this tradition of narrative in history and historiography; and *The History and Narrativity Reader* which you mention was very helpful in this regard. I would have probably done a lot better if I'd been able to read your little textbook back then.

I don't think there is a simple answer to your question about why some narratives have a greater hold than others, because there are so many contributing factors, from recognition and resonance of White's archetypes to coercion, but also including laziness, ignorance, pride, arrogance, unexamined privilege, money, exhaustion, inertia, fear, exclusion, access (or not) to resources, institutional and systemic norms and inequalities and so on. I think it is certainly well established now that it is through the use of narrative and storytelling that power is both held and challenged, and I also think that the narratives we tell ourselves are precious and valuable to us; the narrative locations and narrative positions Julie talks about are often very beneficial for us or are hard-won; we are often very reluctant to change them or see them change, because we have so much invested in them. It takes courage to admit you've made a mistake, to reconfigure and re-imagine your narratives.

As to why it is that what historians have had to say about narrative seems virtually absent from the socio-narrative approach in translation studies, I think this is possibly just an accident of trajectory in that Mona's work in narrative has so dominated the field and while she refers to Hayden White, she does so to make her point about narrative being 'the principal and inescapable mode by which we experience the world' (2006: 9) and not to engage with the debates of historians about the role of narrative in making sense of the past. Yet, as I argue in my chapter in Rundle's *Handbook of Translation History*, many of Baker's examples in that seminal work are drawn from history and 'narratives of the past', so the seeds are there. Neil Sadler (see this issue), another of Mona's former doctoral students, is one of the few translation studies scholars to engage more deeply with historian debates around narrative.

Why there is not more crossover between history and translation studies - two disciplines that have an enormous amount to say to, and learn from, each other - is something that has been discussed since at least 2012; I'm thinking of Chris Rundle's article in the journal *Translation Studies* (Rundle, 2012), with responses from you, Paul St-Pierre and Dirk Delabastita, and is hopefully on the way to changing with the recent establishment of the *History and Translation Network* – and with the publication of your text book! Given the centrality of narrative in so many fields, it seems obvious to me that social narrative theory, history and translation create a very rich nexus for research and exploration. Why it's not as explored as it could be, I don't know. Maybe it's just the way people do research – they are focused on the problem at hand, they are trained in particular ways of thinking and researching that have their various blind spots. It can be difficult and intimidating for 'outsiders' to step into well-established fields, universities proclaim the benefits and advantages of 'interdisciplinarity' yet university structures and systems of reward and recognition are still very much disconnected silos, the demands of rapid publishing and 'impact' mean that scholars don't see the reward (and are not rewarded for) what can be slow, long-term theoretical work.

What sort of intersections (in this nexus of narrative, history and translation) are you seeing in the writing of your *Translation and History* textbook?

TH: As for why some narratives gain a greater hold than others, you're probably right to say there will usually be multiple factors at work. Yet the combination of cultural and institutional embedding of certain types of narrative remains intriguing. James Wertsch, for instance, has suggested that there is a particular narrative pattern that has been used to describe several episodes in Russian history and that is inculcated through the Russian school curriculum (the pattern is: outside threat followed by foreign invasion, followed by local resistance, leading to the invader being expelled and the outside threat removed; Wertsch 2008). Hayden White's four conceptual archetypes, which he linked with four figures of speech, look very Western to me in that they are embedded in a Western cultural tradition, and I wonder how they would fare in, say, an Indian or Chinese context.

On historians being absent from the socio-narrative approach: I certainly don't hold it against Mona Baker that she focussed on social scientists rather than historians in her *Translation and Conflict* book. She made choices, and these choices proved productive. But there were opportunity costs. One consequence of the choices made was that some interesting ideas that historians had voiced didn't find an echo in the socio-narrative approach to translation (as far as I'm aware; I may well be wrong). These ideas include the degree of fictionalisation that goes into the construction of narratives that purport to deal with real events, and the fact that constructing a narrative requires artifice and linguistic means. Fictionalisation means that the narrative put together by the historian differs from the narratives preserved in the archive. The historian's account offers an interpretation of the archive and any narratives it may contain, even if that account may gain authority

and end up being read as *being* the past. Artifice means that the historian's narrative is a verbal (or verbal plus audiovisual) construct and that the techniques and tropes and figures of speech that go into the making of this construct generate their own meanings. Both ideas have obvious relevance for translation as such and for scholarly writing about translation.

SH: Absolutely and, even the way the archive is created, curated, categorised, made available or not and to whom is already a kind of 'fictionalisation', or translation or interpretation of the past, often so well disguised and normalised that we don't see these interpretive moves. You talk, in your book, about 'illusionist' and 'domesticating' ways of writing history and/or translating so that the artifice is disguised, and we think we are reading the original, or directly accessing the truth of the past. I have a PhD student just graduated who looks at exactly this sort of illusionist repurposing of an archive in Salamanca (Purvis, 2022). I've also been impressed by Temi Odumosu's (2020, 2021) work on critically interrogating images of black people held in archives and the way these images are labelled, stored, storied, categorised etc. It was Temi who introduced me to the work of Saidiya Hartman (2008), who has overcome the historian's unease over fictionalisation to practice what she calls 'critical fabulation' and 'historical poetics' - the attending to, imagining and storying of the gaps, the minoritized silenced lives in the archives - so as to remake and break open the histories that have gained canonicity and authority. Hartman's radical, thoroughly-researched, writing is a powerful, creatively imagined, transformative translation of history.

TH: Re history and translation studies: while there may not be much crossover between history and translation studies, the rise of transnational and global history in recent decades has meant that historians have certainly discovered translation, and some (many?) of them are fully alive to its complexity. Names like Douglas Howland, Jörn Leonhard and Pim den Boer come to mind based on my own reading, but there will be many others. There are also researchers who work primarily on translation in historical contexts and who are taken seriously by historians. I'm thinking of the likes of Lydia Liu, Hilary Footitt, Peter Burke and Vicente Rafael. I hesitate to call them translation studies scholars because I don't think they would want to be compartmentalised in this way. And compartmentalisation is a large part of the problem. As you indicate, university structures and intellectual traditions tend to create disciplinary silos, and it requires effort and time to step outside them. Yet it seems to me that, speaking from a translation studies perspective, we would do well to engage with the way transcultural historians deal with translation. Some of their insights resemble what translation studies scholars have been saying but the key difference is that, for historians, it is always the larger picture that counts – something the narrative approach to translation also stresses.

JB: Our familiarity with narrative structures and configurations may lead to acceptance but also disinterest or outright rejection. Hayden White's four archetypes immediately reminded me of canonicity, one of Jerome Bruner's (1991) features of narrativity which Mona included in her model. Actually, Bruner draws on Hayden White's archetypes to define conventional scripts as legitimate scripts which prescribe canonical behaviour. But he contends that for a series of event to become a story, it needs to be worth telling, and to be worth telling, it needs to "breach", "violate" and "deviate from" the canonical script "in a manner that does violence to what Hayden White calls the 'legitimacy' of canonical scripts" (Bruner 1991: 11). Breaches, like canons, are recognizable. To be more specific, Bruner refers to familiar human plights such as "the betrayed wife, the cuckolded husband, the fleeced innocent" (12). Looking into specific cultural and professional communities and focusing on their adherence or resistance to these scripts can yield powerful insights into larger configurations of power which Theo points to when he raises the issue of "control and enforcement". To me, socio-narrative theory is a powerful framework to map the network or system of relations that can be established among multiple phenomena streamlined under Foucault's (1980: 194) umbrella concept of *dispositif* (apparatus): "discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral, and philanthropic propositions".

Breaches of canonical scripts may be praised by certain communities and despised by others. For instance, in his satire of Babels, Peter Naumann (2005) constructs a professional narrative of the conference interpreting profession as endangered by new technologies, by a free market and by novices. This danger constitutes a breach of the professionalization canonical script in 20th century Europe: a professional body regulates the market and entry into the profession, sets the standards of expertise and monitors training programs. The fact that Naumann's personal renarration of Babels members as amateurish, irrational and immoral gained so much traction in AIIC may well have to do with its compelling breach of the professional narrative AIIC had been constructing for decades; it also shows how organizations and individuals subscribe to and re-enact particular histories of the profession. At the same time, Babels' members strongly opposed Naumann's renarration of their network and constructed, in their public response, alternative canonical scripts and breaches on AIIC's electronic forum. This act of counter-narration was the first public incursion (to my knowledge) of alternative narratives into AIIC's apparatus of power. This reminds us that not only audiences but also technologies and architectures at the heart of Foucault's work, mediate and instantiate the power, credibility and appeal (or lack thereof) of narratives, stories and histories (Boéri, Forthcoming a).

In this light, we should remind ourselves that narrative archetypes are not standing alone but are granted meaning in interaction with an audience. Hence the need for a more interactionist and ethnographic approach to narrative analysis (and to canonicity and breach), that has been called for in intercultural communication (De

Fina, 2016). On the occasion of the special issue on translation and ethnography in *The Translator*, I proposed an "ethnonarrative approach" (Boéri, forthcoming b), which incorporates socio-narrative theory, usually applied to sets of texts assembled by the researcher, into an ethnographic methodology of participation in (online) communities of translators and interpreters. Participation (with varying degrees of involvement) allows researchers to be immersed in the interactions, and in peoples' (re)narration of themselves, their practice and their world in time and space, within these dynamics of control/enforcement and resistance.

I have always considered that narrative was not just a theory but also a methodology, and I think ethnography connected the dots very well. This takes me to the question of interdisciplinarity. I would venture that the lack of cross-fertilization between different disciplinary strands of narrative theory is a side effect of the narrative turn in the social sciences and the subsequent dispersion of frameworks, models, and concepts. The problem thus, is not specific to historians and socio-narrative minded translation scholars. To me, methodology and epistemology function as a powerful transdisciplinary nexus not only for narrative theorists to dialogue from across disciplines but also for different theories to come into dialogue.

For instance, in my project on interpreters' narratives of the Covid-19 pandemic in Qatar, I collaborated with Deborah Giustini, a trained interpreter and a sociologist who applies practice theory to interpreting in her own work. We collaborated because we sensed that despite working with two different theories, we converged in our aspiration to contest the victimizing discourse of interpreters in the wake of the pandemic. As we explored the interview data I had collected in Qatar, we searched for a methodology of qualitative inquiry that would equip us to capture how social actors (including ourselves) produce and contest accepted forms of knowledge. It is in this process of methodological exploration that narratives and practices appeared to us as two sides of the same coin: 'narratives' are stories constructed and enacted in social life, and 'practices' are tasks and projects composed by 'doings' and 'sayings'. Integrating the two theories within an ethnographic case study allowed us to overcome the dualism between 'action' and 'discourse', and to gain granularity on participants' storied practice and practiced stories of the Covid-19 crisis (Boéri and Giustini, forthcoming).

I would venture, however, that interdisciplinary work demands common epistemological premises. While the narrative turn had an unavoidable effect of dispersion, it has also inaugurated a joint concern to explore stories not just as stories, but as storied forms of knowledge. As narratives are reframed as ontological and epistemological prisms for social life, the narrative enquirer, be they an historian, a sociologist, an ethnographer or a translation scholar, *narratively* mediates knowledge. Couldn't 'fictionalization' and 'artifices' (in the case of historical narrativists) and 're-narration' and 're-framing' (in the socio-narrative model) function as entry points into this *narrative practice* of mediating/constructing knowledge?

3 Causation

TH: As far as I can tell, narrative has a complicated relationship with causality. At some point, however, and if only for the benefit of those translation scholars unfamiliar with the narrative paradigm, the relation between narrative and causality will need to be clarified. How would you do this?

SH: What do you mean by "complicated relationship with causality"? Causality is a major concern of just about everybody (why did x happen? What can we do to make y happen or prevent z from happening?), not only those thinking about narrative, including historians, psychologists, philosophers, social scientists, even particle physicists. Baker talks about causal emplotment; Sadler argues that of the many relationships between elements in a narrative, "[c]ausal links are the most important" because it is "causality that furnishes narrative with its power to explain how situations came to be and project what their implications will be" (2018, 3269). So, I would say that narratives don't establish causality per se, as if there were some connection between finding a 'true' narrative that could explain to us the 'true' cause of something, but that we use narratives to establish causality for us as we go about our lives trying to figure things out.

Can I turn the question back to you? What is that complicated relationship between narrative and causality? How would you clarify it?

TH: I didn't phrase things very well when I said that "narrative has a complicated relationship with causality". Perhaps 'interesting' or 'subtle' would have been a better choice of adjective. Or perhaps I have a problem with the idea of causality as such, and I have a sense that narrative can help me to deal with that problem. Let me explain.
Several translation scholars (including Anthony Pym and, I believe, Andrew Chesterman) have written about causation in translation history and invoked Aristotle in that context, referring to Aristotle's four causes, namely material or initial cause, final cause, formal cause and efficient cause. The exact definitions don't matter, and I can see that the categories have been used intelligently. Still, I have two problems with an approach along these lines. One is the very idea of cause and effect. It suggests we can explain something by identifying its cause. Since cause leads to effect, the effect can be traced back to its cause, and the cause accounts for the effect. I have no faith in a schema like this because it seems far too neat and reductive to me. You will probably agree, since you speak of the illusion of finding a 'true' narrative that presents us with the 'true' cause of something. I think (like you, I believe) that the reasons why we do things or why things happen are multiple, complex and often indirect, and a cause-and-effect pattern cannot do that tangle justice. My other problem is that identifying causes

to explain effects tends to bring about closure: once we know the cause, we have explained the effect, and that's it, end of story. You recognise this, too, when you refer to 'true' causes, which of course don't exist. Yet I think a lot of explanation in translation studies (and possibly beyond) follows this pattern: we study something and when we have traced what caused it, we assume the matter is settled. (The irony here is that many of us see successive translations as an open-ended series but in research on translation we conceive of explanation as final).

Now it seems to me that at least some historians have written about narrative while being careful not to conflate narrative with causal explanation. I am thinking in particular of an essay by M.C. Lemon ('The Structure of Narrative', 1995) reprinted in the *History and Narrativity Reader* (Roberts, 2001). He speaks of narrative making things 'intelligible', of narratives linking occurrences into "an order that makes sense", and of stories as a whole, held together by a narrative voice, as being "explicatory" in providing a sense of continuity and coherence from beginning to end. I think this is what I find attractive about narrative: it can make a series of events or actions intelligible or insightful without resorting to the rather mechanical linking suggested by cause and effect. It also leaves more room for alternative accounts, which are hard to imagine under a cause-and-effect schema. I recognise that Lemon's approach to narrative relies on vague terms (making 'intelligible', creating an order that 'makes sense'), but they seem both more experiential and more flexible than cause and effect. Perhaps they also create more space for cultural differences, since what seems 'intelligible' or what 'makes sense' may be culturally determined. I have a feeling that someone like Tim Ingold may be sympathetic to an approach like this, but I've only read his book *Being Alive* (2011). I know you've read much more. Do you think he might be helpful here?

SH: Tim Ingold certainly talks about storied knowledge, that we come to know as we do and make, as we 'go along'. He is also very concerned with how we can cultivate and practice attentive *processes* of being in and co-responding to the worlds of which we are a part, in contrast to models of 'transmission', where the focus is on final results or endpoints or 'outcomes'. Saidiya Hartmann also rejects any supposed simplicity of 'cause and effect' because of the insidious and pervasive structural violence and inequalities that so often determine what these are considered to be. Lemon's approach as you describe makes more sense than a cause-and-effect model, but the words he uses also have something of a numbing and embalming effect (intelligible, ordering, making sense, explaining) and I think we need to be ever vigilant about a sense of ease and comfort. Who is doing the telling, and who is making space for whom and on whose terms. "Fact is simply fiction endorsed with state power . . . to maintain a fidelity to a certain set of archival limits," Hartman says, quoted in *The New Yorker*; "Are we going to be consigned forever to tell the same kinds of stories? Given the violence and power that has engendered this limit, why should I be faithful to that limit? Why should I respect that?" (in Okeowo, 2020).

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JB: I would argue that the social sciences in general have a 'complicated relation' to causality and that a narrative approach provides 'interesting' and 'subtle' insights and breakthroughs. In their aspiration to elevate social practices to science, scholars have described, explained and predicted phenomena arising from practice. Translation is not an exception in this regard and causal models like Chesterman's attests to this. Kaisa Koskinen's (2010) critique of his treatment of causality strongly resonates with Theo's dissatisfaction with linearity and reductivism. An interesting alternative she puts forward and which I have used in my model for a meta-ethics of interpreting, is "causation". While causality strictly refers to a "relation between cause and effect" (Saldanha and O'Brien, 2013: 7), causation refers to the "production of an effect" (Koskinen, 2010: 179n5). It reframes the question of 'why' into the question of 'how', and focuses on "causal mechanisms" (181-183); an endeavour which is more attuned to qualitative research. Causation assumes that phenomena arising from social practices rest upon a complex chain of events, interactions of factors leading to several outcomes, across different spheres (political, sociocultural, cognitive, psychological, etc.).

Narratively speaking, it entails agency in the practice and in the (re)telling of practice, since there are potentially multiple stories through which a practitioner/analyst may make sense of it. The narrative that ends up being constructed by an individual or collective actor may opt for a linear causal explanation/emplotment or a more complex one. For instance, if we look at the foundations of ethical thought in interpreting (what is referred to as meta-ethics in moral philosophy), we could argue that prescriptive approaches to ethics rest upon linearity between cause and effect. Indeed, in deontology, which is based on do's and don'ts, one's action is ethical because it abides by general rules; whereas in teleology, one's action is ethical because it achieves a just outcome. Each of these conceptual/disciplinary narratives of ethics intersect with a distinct professional narrative of interpreting: as governed by an *a priori* authority that sets the rules for all contexts (impartiality, confidentiality, etc.) vs. as governed by goals (benevolence, autonomy, etc.) that should guide individuals' decisions in context.

However, if we turn our attention to the discourse and the practice of interpreting in the social justice movement, we find that this linear causality is disrupted. Within contemporary prefigurative movements, activists (including translators and interpreters) ought to *embody* the change they want to see in the *immediacy* of the communication encounter, rather than wait to access the means of change (e.g. access to political power, recognition of the need for interpreting in public services) to achieve their ends. This conflation of means and ends of social change, far from flattening out the causation mechanisms, configures a narrative space where practitioners experiment (with uncertainty and indeterminacy) *how* to bring about social change in the here and now.

The model I have proposed (Boéri, 2023) for a meta-ethics of interpreting builds on causation, rather than causality. It situates the explanation of human action and discourse within a complex network of factors, players and events, which I have

broken down into three dimensions/nodes: the interpreting encounter (micro); the politics of organization of interpreting (macro) and interpreting enquiry (meso). Research models are narrative constructions which may simplify a complex reality through causality which is at odds with qualitative, critical research. But they also have the potential to trace and map the mechanisms of transformative practices, policies and theories.

4. Narrative and fictionalisation

TH: In the comments above, you have both, Julie and Sue-Ann, separately but in complementary ways, clarified – not so much, perhaps, the narrative approach to translation and interpreting as the ongoing, fluid project that is the narrative approach to translation and interpreting. You've both worked with the narrative approach in different contexts over a period of time, and you have taken the core ideas further. Hearing about that has been illuminating, and I want to thank you for it. I would like to leave you, though, with two final questions.

The first one concerns what I think of as the outer limit of the narrative approach. It's been hovering at the back of my mind for some time, but it leapt to the fore when I read Sue-Ann's references to the work of Saidiya Hartman. Simply put, the question is: how much fictionalisation can a scholarly (by which I mean: historical, sociological, translation-studies) narrative bear? Hartman's 'critical fabulation' begs the question. She says she strains against the limits of the archive but she carefully controls the amount and the kind of fabulation that she engages in – by writing in the subjunctive, for instance, as she does in what may be her best-known essay, 'Venus in Two Acts' from 2008 (also readily available online). Hartman works on a particular topic, the transatlantic slave trade and its legacy, and the problem of humanising the enslaved with only the slave owners' archives to go on is something that historians doing 'history from below' will recognise. It also finds echoes in some of the work done on interpreters in history. But in all these cases, it seems to me, the fundamental problem remains: narrative emplotment and its presentation require a degree of fictionalisation, of fabulation, dramatisation and artifice, and I wonder at what point we start writing fiction, fable, drama, art? We can't separate the factual from the fictional, yet we want to be scholars rather than novelists. How to negotiate that divide?

SH: I suspect that I really want to be a novelist! I also suspect that it is part of our life's work to constantly negotiate fact and fiction. That, if they are divided, they are only a hair's breadth away from each other. It is our daily work, our human endeavour, to tune and fine tune our critical faculties, our bullshit detectors, our sensitivities to the truths of fiction, fable, drama and art. Postmodernism at its best, with its liberating and provocative playfulness, humour and imagination, has done much, in my view, towards providing cognitive and critical tools for negotiating the varying shades and manifestations of fact and fiction.

JB: Fiction has been at the heart of classical narratology. Following the postmodern rejection of the traditional distinction between non-fiction and fiction, all narrative texts may be considered as fictional. This "doctrine of panfictionality" (Ryan, 1997) entails that all narratives, including scholarly narratives, are fictionalized. But in practice, don't we have the responsibility to constantly reflect upon the effects of our emplotment of 'raw' facts? To what extent 'facts' come to us already (pre)cooked, if you allow me the analogy?

If we agree with Hartman that "fact is simply fiction endorsed with state power", as quoted by Sue-Ann earlier in this conversation, then the distinction between fact and fiction cannot be absolute, but a fluctuating one. Still, we need these categories, however problematic they may be. Factual discourse may be fake and fiction may well be true. The poststructuralist orientation of narrative theory denies veridical truth, which demands narrative scholars to recognize their positionality and to problematize their object of study within an interplay of dominance and resistance; a key question raised in anthropology way before translation studies. Such an epistemological approach acknowledges fictionalization as part and parcel of scholarly narratives; hence the notions of "artifices" used by historical narrativists, "re-narration" and "re-framing" in Socio-Narrative Theory. In fact, we are trained as professionals and as scholars through and within a narrativization of the field and its related practices. Aren't we fictionalizing facts and factualizing fiction, when we abide by scholarly conventions (drawing on evidence, on a systematic review of the literature) and even literary ones (making our claims compelling, giving a sense of dramatic urgency of the proposed research agenda)?

If we step aside from the doctrine of panfictionality, and look at the defining features of fiction, one interesting characteristic is that the falsity of fictional discourse should be non-deceptive (Gorman, 2008). That is, the audience should be made aware (explicitly or implicitly) of the status of the events being recounted. This would thus entail, in response to the question you raise Theo, that we should not trick our audiences into thinking that the facts we emplot in our research are raw facts. While scholars can certainly find inspiration in ethnographic methods to address this dilemma, I would venture that the responsibility should not be only placed on scholars as authors or producers of narratives, but shared with audiences of scholarly work, be they scholars or lay people. Indeed, to what extent can we practically draw a rational and explicit line between facts and our own narratives of them? To what extent are we self-conscious of where this border stands, if we assume it exists, at any point in time in the thinking and writing process?

Hartman's 'Venus in Two Acts' is an inspiring invitation to emancipate ourselves from the empirical pressures of the social sciences and to embrace a more humanistic and creative form of knowledge production. There is so much potential for contesting the brutality of our world. This makes me think of the fiction film *The Translator*, directed by Rana Kazkaz and Anas Khalaf. It has a clear external referent in the Syrian Revolution and on the role that translation and translators, interpreters, subtitlers, fixers, etc. *may* play in this context. In our discussions before

the movie, Rana and I came to the conclusion that making the main character of the story a translator worked as a perfect artifice to articulate distant places: Australia, on the one hand, where he finds refuge after a slip of a tongue against Bachar Al-Assad in a press conference at the Olympics, and Syria, on the other hand, his home country. Then, there are different positionings: committed journalists and translators, the disappeared, the imprisoned, the survivors, the accomplices, etc. Unlike the Syrian revolution, Sami does not exist outside the film but inside the film, he epitomizes much of the political and ethical dilemmas that we try to come to grips with in our field.

Fictionalization of translation has not received enough attention in translation studies, with the exception of a special issue on "Fictionalising Translation and Multilingualism", guest edited by Dirk Delabastita and Rainier Grutman in the *Linguistica Antverpiensa* series. Perhaps it is time that as scholars we start experimenting with new formats and genres to create worlds where everything is possible, from addressing questions raised in the field to subverting scholarly conventions entirely. Maybe we sort of engaged in something like this Sue-Ann, in the IATIS Conference Cultural Night in Hong Kong (July 2018). Directed by conceptual artist Saskia Holmkvist, we were four scholars from translation and interpreting studies put in a room together to sketch out prompts of dialogues on stage. Once on stage, we used this rough and unfinished canvas to improvise a live performance (Holmkvist 2018). We did so through telling stories of translators and interpreters, of wars, of learning, of resistance. Whether these stories were facts or not did not matter. They were created on the spot, tapping onto our knowledge and affects. Scholars may well experiment with novels, films, drama, danse. This seems really appealing to me!

5. Narrative Blind Spots?

TH: My second final question is much simpler. If I could invite you to stand back from your own projects and research, what would you say are the weak points in the narrative approach to translation and interpreting, what is the approach not so good at? The question came to me as I read Julie's comments about working alongside Deborah Giustini and her use of practice theory (which I take to mean the sort of thing Maeve Olohan unlocked for us in her *Translation and Practice Theory* (2021). The two approaches, narrative theory and practice theory, proved to be complementary, two sides of the same coin, as Julie puts it. That suggests that each approach, left to itself, misses something. I'm aware, of course, that this will always be the case. Every approach makes us see some things while obscuring others. But my question then is: what would you say it is that the narrative approach, specifically, is not good at seeing?

SH: I thought about this for some time, trying to think of the 'weaknesses' of narrative theory, and could really only come up with the response that perhaps the

major problem with narrative theory is that it is too strong. It is now so well established that it has become mainstream and normalised, and with this have come assumptions and expectations around narrative, what it is and what it does, that are not always critically examined. Neil, in his piece in this issue, mentions the problem of 'narrative imperialism' and, as you say above, Theo, in relation to causality, we think the matter is settled.

Consequently, I think we don't (know how to) listen to voices and stories that don't meet our expectations, that don't, for example, fit the middle-beginning-end template. There are many non-narrative places, spaces, beings and voices – trees, rivers, stones, sky, creatures – that simply 'are'. Yet we impose upon them narrative structures that are anthropocentric and extractivist and that obliterate the non-narrative presence and right to existence of these other-than-human beings. Indigenous storytelling structures and practices, which are so melded that they are lived and experienced as the same thing, not as two complementary approaches, challenge and resist dominant narrative templates and expectations. Yet, they are not heard. Or they are reshaped to fit mainstream narrative shapes. Yet also, this is not, in my view, a weakness of narrative theory, but our weakness. It is not that narrative is not good at seeing, but that narrative has become a blunt and thoughtlessly used tool in our hands. It need not be so, and in fact, from what Neil writes about the work already being done in literary narrative theory, tools are already being developed for more nuanced handlings of different types of narrative and even 'degrees of narrativity'. So, in answer to your question about what narrative is not good at seeing, I think it is we who are not good at seeing, or listening, rather than narrative itself. This is quite an existential statement to arrive at, given that narrative is not a thing that exists 'out there' independent of human thought, so perhaps it is more accurate to say that where narrative fails to see, it is because those doing the seeing are themselves limited and because structural injustices limit those who may 'do the seeing'.

Neil concludes his piece with the observation that socio-narrative theory in translation studies has been characterised by "a degree of theoretical timidity and the absence of the kind of sustained engagement with the approach needed to really drive it forward" (Sadler this issue, p. 50). I agree. I also agree that walking down the four major routes he identifies as routes to building stronger narrative approaches in translation will require work that is difficult and theoretically dense. Neoliberal universities do not favour difficult and theoretically dense work in the humanities. All the more reason to do it.

JB: Unavoidably, there are always important elements of a given phenomenon that fail to be accounted for by narrative analysts but, like Sue-Ann, I would venture that this limitation (which is not exclusive to narrative analysis) has more to do with their 'narrative location' rather than with an incapacity of the theory to account for what remains unaccounted.

I am tempted to respond to your question, Theo, with a provocative answer which echoes Sue-Ann's: Narrative Theory may not be good at identifying what it is not good at! Since facts, imaginations, spaces, the self and the social are considered as narrations, what can possibly not be accounted for by narrative? While one may want to draw a line between narratives and non-narrative places, it is an impossible frontier. As you rightly underline in the opening of your book *An Archival Journey Through the Qatar Peninsula*, Sue-Ann, "discourse always precedes a place". The story of your encounter with Qatar as a newly-arrived expatriate prompts you to establish that "no matter how meagre, no matter how fanciful, the discourse constructs the place, and if or when we arrive, the place then constructs us" (Harding, 2022: 3).

Like for facts and fictions, narrative and non-narrative are necessary categories to be mindful of the imprint of our imaginaries on nature and on the social. But they are not separable at least epistemologically, given the conflation of theory and narrative which Neil Sadler rightly underlines in this issue. It does not foreclose any possibility to be critical with the theory, though. In fact, a mere application of the framework or model with zero engagement may not be possible, or at least would not qualify as narrative enquiry, as the data at hand and the objectives of the research will always push theoretical boundaries.

Because of its denial of the exteriority of narrative research (everything being a narrative), Narrative Theory has the capacity to constantly branch out to new territories of enquiry and concepts. Sue-Ann coined the term Socio-Narrative Theory precisely to underline the sociological orientation of Baker's model and to strengthen its toolkit with (post-)structuralist narratological tools ('texts', 'paratexts', 'textuality', 'fabula', 'story'). This relabelling explicitly posits Baker's model at the cross-roads between the humanities and the social sciences, thus warranting a development of the model in these two directions in order to zoom into texts and also zoom out into the larger social and communicational environments that they enact.

Such developments can both extend and deepen what is already there. For instance, with Deborah Giustini, we developed a practice-narrative qualitative research methodology (Boéri & Giustini, forthcoming). Adopting the lenses of a practice theorist for a moment allowed me to further reflect on Socio-Narrative Theory, and more particularly on Margaret Somers' work which lies at its foundation: how does her work overcome the divide between discourse and behavior which second-wave practice theorists like Theodore Schatski (2006) stand against? Somers precisely develops narrative theory as a way of emancipating sociology from an exclusive focus on structures and behavior. A key concept she puts forward is that of "relational setting" (1992: 624), defined as a temporal and spatial configuration of relationships which are narratively constructed and where actions take place and are lent significance. This concept echoes practice theorists' focus on "discursive formations" of "configurations of practice" and provided us

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with a common ground to look at practices as "sets of doings and sayings" (Schatzki, 2016: 130) that are narratively constructed, or in other words, as the enactment of particular narratives. We were better equipped to look at how practitioners' narrative locations (the intersecting personal, professional, conceptual and public and meta-narratives) plot the Covid-19 pandemic in their daily practice and, reversely, how the Covid-19 pandemic incubated the retelling of particular stories (Boéri & Giustini, forthcoming). Because positionality is so important in qualitative research, we took this a step further through a *mise en abyme*, or story within a story, of the concept in the *Qualitative Research* journal (Boéri & Giustini 2023). We reframed our own ethnographic fieldwork and case study as a relational setting whereby we act as primary narrators selecting practitioners' narrative to tell a different story; one that could give a voice to the unheard in a pandemic which, in our views, had prompted extremely unifying and victimizing narratives of interpreters. Cross-fertilizing theories augment the potential of each theory to better 'see' (to return to your question, Theo) as we walk the exploratory walk of new methodological and analytical journeys. As suggested by Neil in his inspiring critical review, an interdisciplinary dialogue with 'sister' theories is very much needed to push the limits of Socio-Narrative Theory.

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