# 1

# Getting Started

## *A Thumbnail Sketch of the Approach*

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### Toward a Working Definition of Narrative

The overall aim of this book is to sketch an account of some of the distinctive properties of narrative. At a minimum, stories concern temporal sequences – situations and events unfolding in time. But not all representations of sequences of events are designed to serve a storytelling purpose, as we know from recipes, scientific explanations of plant physiology, and other genres of discourse. What else is required for a representation of events unfolding in time to be used or interpreted as a narrative? This book develops strategies for addressing that question, and the present chapter provides a thumbnail sketch of my approach. The next chapter then situates the approach in the context of the growing body of research on stories and storytelling, while the remaining chapters provide a more detailed description of the model presented in synoptic form here.

One of the main goals of this book is to develop an account of what stories are and how they work by analyzing narrative into its basic elements, thereby differentiating between storytelling and other modes of representation. Here at the outset, it may be helpful to provide an orienting statement of features that I take to be characteristic of narrative.[1] A relatively coarse-grained version of the working definition of narrative on which I will rely in this study, and that I spell out in more detail as I proceed, runs as follows: rather than focusing on general,

abstract situations or trends, stories are accounts of what happened to particular people[2] – and of what it was like for them to experience what happened – in particular circumstances and with specific consequences. Narrative, in other words, is a basic human strategy for coming to terms with time, process, and change – a strategy that contrasts with, but is in no way inferior to, "scientific" modes of explanation that characterize phenomena as instances of general covering laws. Science explains the atmospheric processes that (all other things being equal) account for when precipitation will take the form of snow rather than rain; but it takes a story to convey what it was like to walk along a park trail in fresh-fallen snow as afternoon turned to evening in the late autumn of 2007.

Yet just as it is possible to construct a narrative about the development of science, to tell a story about who made what discoveries and under what circumstances, it is possible to use the tools of science – definition, analysis, classification, comparison, etc. – to work toward a principled account of what makes a text, discourse, film, or other artifact a narrative. Such an account should help clarify what distinguishes a narrative from an exchange of greetings, a recipe for salad dressing, or a railway timetable. This book aims to provide just this sort of account, drawing integratively on a number of traditions for narrative study to characterize the factors bearing on whether a representation of a sequence of events functions as a story. Another overarching goal of the book is to enable (and encourage) readers to build on the ideas presented here, so that others can participate in the process of narrative inquiry and help create more dialogue among the many fields concerned with stories, ranging from the humanities and social sciences (literary studies, creative writing, (socio)linguistics, history, philosophy, social and cognitive psychology, ethnography, communication studies, autobiography and life-story research, etc.) to clinical medicine, journalism, narrative therapy, and the arts.[3]

The next two sections of this chapter seek to move closer to a working definition of narrative. I begin by noting that narrative can be viewed under several profiles simultaneously – as a form of mental representation, a type of textual or semiotic artifact, and a resource for communicative interaction – and then identify four basic elements of narrative (some of them with sub-elements), which might also be viewed as conditions for narrativity, or what makes a narrative a narrative. Subsequent

chapters zoom in on these elements or conditions in turn, offering a more in-depth treatment of the core features synopsized below.

Here at the outset, it is important to address a broader – indeed, foundational – issue pertaining to my attempt to identify basic elements of narrative. This issue can be approach by way of the distinction between what might be termed "etic" and "emic" approaches to narrative study – a distinction also applied to narrative research by Georgakopoulou (2007: 39ff.) in an important recent book that bears significantly on my own analysis, and that I return to at the end of this section. The etic/emic distinction, coined by Pike (1982), is based on the contrast between phonetic and phonemic differences. Phonetic differences include, for example, all the various shades of difference among tokens of the consonant [p] that may be produced by speakers of English when they pronounce the first sound in the word *put*, such as aspirated [$p^h$] versus unaspirated tokens. Whereas in Hindi such differences do affect the meaning of utterances containing the [p] sound (i.e., the differences are phonemic), in English these differences do not (i.e., the differences are merely phonetic). By contrast, shifting from an unvoiced to a voiced bilabial stop, that is, from [p] to [b], does change the meaning of an utterance in English, as anyone hearing or reading *put* versus *but* would recognize. To extrapolate from this distinction: whereas etic approaches create descriptive categories that are used by analysts to sift through patterns in linguistic data, whether or not those categories correspond to differences perceived as meaningful by users of the language being analyzed, emic approaches seek to capture differences that language users themselves orient to as meaningful. Accordingly, a question for any account of the basic elements of narrative is whether those elements are in fact oriented to as basic by participants engaged in storytelling practices (= emic), or whether the elements are instead part of a system for analysis imposed on the data from without (= etic).

For example, Eggins and Slade (1997) draw on Labov's (1972) approach to narrative analysis and Plum's (1988) work on storytelling genres in face-to-face discourse to differentiate between full-fledged narratives and anecdotes (defined as reports of remarkable events plus the reactions they caused), exempla (defined as reports of incidents coupled with the interpretation of those events), and recounts (defined as the giving of a more or less bare record of events).[4] But the question

remains whether these are emic categories to which participants themselves orient, using them to make sense of different kinds of communicative activity, or whether such differences go unnoticed in the business of talk and are instead viewed by storytellers and their interlocutors as instances of the broader category "narrative." To what extent do participants themselves discriminate between anecdotes and recounts, for example, in their own practice, and how would we go about finding that out? Similar questions can be posed about the model presented in this book – for example, whether participants in face-to-face discourse, readers of written texts, or viewers of films would discriminate among the categories of description, narrative, and argument in the manner suggested by my account later in this chapter and also in chapter 4. Further, for what populations do the critical properties of narrative outlined in this study indeed constitute basic elements of narrative, such that texts, discourses, or mental representations lacking one or more of those properties would be categorized by members of those populations as something other than a story? And how robust are these effects: within a given population, how important is a given element identified in my approach as basic?

To be addressed adequately, these questions must be explored via empirical methods of investigation, whether in controlled laboratory settings, through statistical analysis of responses to questionnaires, or in more naturalistic environments through techniques of participant observation, followed by interpretation of the data elicited in that fashion. I do not undertake these methods of inquiry here; instead, I argue for a particular approach to identifying the basic elements of narrative in the hope that it might provide a basis or at least a context for further studies of this kind. The book draws on my own native intuitions about stories and storytelling, coupled with traditions of narrative scholarship, to construct a model that I argue provides emic categories for narrative study, and not just etic ones. The possibilities and limitations of the model will not be fully evident, however, until others test it against their own intuitions about what constitutes a story – as well as the intuitions of broader populations whose narrative practices might be studied through the empirical approaches just mentioned.

This last point affords a segue back to a recent study that I mentioned above and that I wish to return to for a moment in concluding this

section. The study in question is Georgakopoulou's (2007) ethnographically oriented analysis of stories told in face-to-face interaction, and more specifically in non-interview settings where peers or family members tell (and retell) stories about events from their immediate as well as longer-term past, co-narrate shared stories, engage in projections of future events, and also produce truncated yet heavily evaluated reports that Georgakopoulou terms *breaking news* (Georgakopoulou 2007: 40–56; cf. Norrick 2000, 2007). Building on Ochs and Capps' (2001) pathbreaking account (discussed below and also in my next chapter), and in particular their working assumption that "mundane conversational narratives of personal experience constitute the prototype of narrative activity rather than the flawed byproduct of more artful and planned narrative discourse" (2001: 3), Georgakopoulou argues that the development of models appropriate for research on everyday storytelling has been hindered by the kinds of narratives assumed to be canonical or prototypical. In the domains of sociolinguistics, life-story research, and other fields concerned with narratives produced in face-to-face interaction, Georgakopoulou suggests, the canonical or prototypical narrative is the kind of story on which Labov's (1972) influential account was based: "namely, the research or interview narrative that is invariably about non-shared, personal[-]experience past events, and that occurs in response to the researcher's 'elicitation' questions or prompts" (Georgakopoulou 2007: 31).[5] By contrast, adapting a term first suggested by Bamberg (2004b), Georgakopoulou proposes to shift the focus of research on everyday storytelling to "small stories" whose structure and functions do not map directly onto the narratives featured in the Labovian model:

> small stories . . . can be brought together on the basis of their main characteristic, namely that they are presented as part of a trajectory of interactions rather than as a free standing, finished and self-contained unit. More specifically, a) the events they report have some kind of immediacy, i.e. they are very recent past or near future events, or are still unfolding as the story is being constructed; b) they establish and refer to links between the participants' previous and future interactions . . . including their shared stories. In this way, the stories are not only heavily embedded in their immediate discourse surroundings but also in a larger history of interactions in which they are intertextually linked and available for recontextualization in various local settings. (Georgakopoulou 2007: 40)

By focusing on such noncanonical stories, and by drawing on ideas from linguistic ethnography, Conversation Analysis, and other approaches to talk-as-interaction, Georgakopoulou aims to "document local theories of what constitutes a narrative and what the role of narrative is in specific communities" (2007: 21).

Despite some terminological and methodological differences, Georgakopoulou's analysis and my own are arguably quite consonant in their underlying assumptions. Though readers are advised to come back to the following remarks after they have had a chance to read the rest of this chapter (and perhaps the subsequent chapters as well), it may be worth underscoring at this point the links between Georgakopoulou's and my approaches. For one thing, as chapter 3 explores in more detail, in the model developed here one of the basic elements of narrative is the embeddedness of stories in a specific discourse context or occasion for telling. To paraphrase Heraclitus: the same story cannot be told twice, because the context in which the first telling takes place is irrevocably altered by that initial narrational act – this being a way of capturing what Georgakopoulou terms the "social consequentiality" (2007: 148) of situated storytelling acts. Shifting to a different issue, it is true that my account is based on the premise that there are modes of representation that are prototypically narrative, and also that there are identifiable critical properties associated with those modes of representation. Yet chapter 4 begins by characterizing such properties as more or less evident in a given story and anchors them in the patterns of use by virtue of which certain texts or discourses come to count as narratives. In other words, what constitutes a prototypical story is defined in a gradient, more-or-less way, and emerges from the strategies on which people rely in their everyday narrative practices.[6] And as I also discuss in chapter 4, what is considered to be prototypical can vary across different contexts; think of the prototypical cold day in Tampa, Florida, versus Helsinki, Finland. Hence Georgakopoulou's "small stories" might be redescribed as modes of storytelling in which, because of a shift of communicative circumstances, the normal and expected range of narrative practices differs from the practices used for relatively monologic narration in an interview setting, for example. Yet both sets of practices fall within the scope of narrative viewed as a kind or category of texts, and are oriented to as such by participants.

## Profiles of Narrative

Part of the challenge of analyzing stories into their basic elements is that narrative can be viewed under several profiles: as a cognitive structure or way of making sense of experience; as a type of text, produced and interpreted as such by those who generate or navigate stories in any number of semiotic media (written or spoken language, comics and graphic novels, film, television, computer-mediated communication such as instant messaging, etc.); and as a resource for communicative interaction, which both shapes and is shaped by storytelling practices.

Among the most resonant and often cited words about stories and storytelling are the following, from Roland Barthes's 1966 essay, "Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives":

> The narratives of the world are numberless. Narrative is first and foremost a prodigious variety of genres, themselves distributed amongst different substances. . . . Able to be carried by articulated language, spoken or written, fixed or moving images, gestures, and the ordered mixture of all these substances; narrative is present in myth, legend, fable, tale, novella, epic, history, tragedy, drama, comedy, mime, painting . . . stained glass windows, cinema, comics, news item, conversation. Moreover under this almost infinite diversity of forms, narrative is present in every age, in every place, in every society. . . . All classes, all human groups, have their narratives. . . . Caring nothing for the division between good and bad literature, narrative is international, transhistorical, transcultural: it is simply there, like life itself. (Barthes [1966] 1977: 79)

Emphasizing in this passage the ubiquity of narrative, Barthes goes on in the rest of his essay to identify key aspects of narrative – defining traits that might be argued to be basic elements of narrative irrespective of the medium or context in which it appears.

For example, Barthes suggests at one point that we human beings have a narrative language within us that consists in part of "sequence titles" (*Fraud*, *Betrayal*, *Struggle*, *Seduction*, etc.) that we use to make sense of stories. According to Barthes, such titles, or labels for kinds of events, allow us to segment or "chunk" the flow of narrative information and

make sense of things characters are doing (1966: 101–2). Elsewhere he suggests that "the mainspring of narrative is precisely the confusion of consecution and consequence, what comes *after* being read in narrative as what is *caused by*," such that "narrative [can be thought of as] a systematic application of the logical fallacy denounced by Scholasticism in the formula *post hoc, ergo propter hoc*" (1966: 94). In other words, if a sequence of panels in a graphic novel first shows two characters walking along a sidewalk and then shows them seated in a restaurant, readers will assume, all other things being equal, that the characters' being in the restaurant is a result of their having walked to it. This default assumption can be forestalled or dislodged only if the text provides other, supplemental information. For example, the text might rely on a different style of typography or different colors for the borders of particular panels (or different clothing and hair styles for the characters) to suggest that the restaurant scene is remembered from an earlier time rather than one the characters encounter after their stroll.

Barthes's larger point here is that narrative is not (or rather, not only) something *in* the text. To the contrary, stories are cognitive as well as textual in nature, structures of mind as well as constellations of verbal, cinematic, pictorial, or other signs produced and interpreted within particular communicative settings. In other words, narratives (the *Iliad*, an episode of the *Star Trek* television series, the film or graphic novel versions of *Ghost World*, anecdotes exchanged among friends during a party, the courtroom testimony of a witness to a crime) result from complex transactions that involve producers of texts or other semiotic artifacts, the texts or artifacts themselves, and interpreters of these narrative productions working to make sense of them in accordance with cultural, institutional, genre-based, and text-specific protocols. Indeed, as these examples suggest, different communicative situations can involve very different ground rules for storytelling. If I watch a *Star Trek* episode with the same mindset as a prosecuting attorney cross-examining a witness, or vice versa, I am apt to misconstrue the narrative at issue – with potentially disastrous consequences. By the same token, although a witness giving testimony and a screenwriter producing a screenplay for an episode in a TV series are both subject to constraints on the sorts of narratives they can generate, the constraints are radically different. Narratives that would be censured in court as too extravagant (violating for example the stricture against hearsay) might well get a screenwriter fired for being too formulaic and boring.

In short, an essential part of our mental lives, narratively organized systems of signs are also socially constituted and propagated, being embedded in social groups and constructed in social encounters which are themselves represented after the fact by way of narratives. Hence it behooves scholars of narrative to explore how people weave tapestries of story by relying on abilities they possess as simultaneously language-using, thinking, and social beings. Or, to put the same point another way, a truly cross-disciplinary approach to stories (only barely hinted at in the present volume) may help reveal the extent to which human intelligence itself is rooted in narrative ways of knowing, interacting, and communicating.[7]

## Narrative: Basic Elements

In the approach developed in this book, stories can be analyzed into four basic elements, some with sub-elements of their own. I characterize narrative as (i) a mode of representation that is situated in – must be interpreted in light of – a specific discourse context or occasion for telling. This mode of representation (ii) focuses on a structured time-course of particularized events. In addition, the events represented are (iii) such that they introduce some sort of disruption or disequilibrium into a storyworld, whether that world is presented as actual or fictional, realistic or fantastic, remembered or dreamed, etc. The representation also (iv) conveys what it is like to live through this storyworld-in-flux, highlighting the pressure of events on real or imagined consciousnesses undergoing the disruptive experience at issue. As noted previously, for convenience of exposition these elements can be abbreviated as (i) **situatedness**, (ii) **event sequencing**, (iii) **worldmaking/world disruption**, and (iv) **what it's like**.

Consider the following two texts, both of them concerned with human emotions. The first is an excerpt from an encyclopedia article on the topic (Oatley 1999: 273); the second is a transcription of part of a tape-recorded interview with Monica, a 41-year-old African American female from Texana, North Carolina, who in the transcribed excerpt

refers to the fear that she and her childhood friend experienced as a result of being pursued menacingly by a large, glowing, orange ball that Monica characterizes earlier in the interview as "[a] UFO or the devil."[8] (See the Appendix for a full transcript of the story and also for a description of the transcription conventions I've used to annotate the text here and elsewhere in the book.)

Text 1

An emotion is a psychological state or process that functions in the management of goals. It is typically elicited by evaluating an event as relevant to a goal; it is positive when the goal is advanced, negative when the goal is impeded. The core of an emotion is readiness to act in a certain way . . . it is an urgency, or prioritization, of some goals and plans rather than others; also they prioritize certain kinds of social interaction, prompting, for instance, cooperation, or conflict.

Text 2

(26) But then ... {.2} for some reason I feel some heat > or somethin other <
(27) and I < look back >
(28) me and Renee did at the same time
(29) it's right behind us. ... {1.0}
(30) We like-... {.2} /we were scared and-/..
(31) "AAAHHH" you know=
[....]
(33) > =at the same time. <
(34) So we take off runnin as fast as we can,
(35) and we still lookin back
(36) and every time we look back it's with us. ... {.5}
(37) It's just a-bouncin behind /us/
(38) it's no:t.. > touchin the ground, <
(39) it's bouncin in the air. ... {.5}
(40) °Just like this ... {.2} behind us°
(41) as we run. ... {1.0}
(42) We run all the way to her grandmother's
(43) and we open the door
(44) and we just fall out in the floor,
(45) and we're cryin and we scre:amin
(46) and < we just can't breathe.> ... {.3}
(47) We that scared..

Text 1 exemplifies what Jerome Bruner (1986) calls "paradigmatic" or logico-deductive reasoning.[9] The author uses definitions to establish categories in terms of which (a) emotions can be distinguished from other kinds of phenomena (goals, events, evaluations, etc.), and (b) different kinds of emotions can be distinguished from one another. The author also identifies a core feature (readiness to act) that can be assumed to cut across all types of emotion, and to be constitutive of emotion in a way that other features, more peripheral, do not. In turn, the text links this core feature to a process of prioritization that grounds emotion in contexts of social interaction.

By contrast, text 2 exemplifies what Bruner characterizes as "narrative" reasoning. In this text, too, emotion figures importantly. But rather than defining and sub-categorizing emotions, and explicitly associating them with aspects of social interaction, Monica draws tacitly on emotion terms and categories to highlight the salience of the narrated events for both Renee and herself at the time of their occurrence – and their continuing emotional impact in the present, for that matter. Monica uses terms like *scared* (lines 30 and 47), reports behaviors conventionally associated with extreme fear (screaming, running, feeling unable to breathe), and makes skillful use of the evaluative device that Labov calls "expressive phonology" (1972: 379), which can include changes in pitch, loudness, rate of speech, and rhythm, as well as the emphatic lengthening of vowels or whole words. Thus in lines 31 and 46, Monica uses heightened volume, on the one hand, and a slower rate of speech combined with an increase in pitch, on the other hand, to perform in the here and now the emotional impact of past experiences. In other words, more than just reflecting or encapsulating pre-existing emotions, the text *constructs* Monica (and Renee) as an accountably frightened experiencer of the events reported. Monica's story provides an account of what happened by creating a nexus or link between the experiencing self and the world experienced; it builds causal-chronological connections among what Monica saw that night, her and Renee's emotional responses to the apparition, and the verbal and nonverbal actions associated with those responses. Text 1 abstracts from any particular emotional experience to outline general properties of emotions, and to suggest a taxonomy or classification based on those properties. By contrast, text 2 uses specific emotional attributions to underscore the impact of this unexpected or noncanonical (and thus reportably noteworthy) sequence of events, which happened on this one occasion, in this specific locale, and in this particular way, on the consciousness of the younger experiencing-I

– to whose thoughts and feelings the story recounted by the older narrating-I provides access.[10]

Hence, besides using principles of reasoning to develop definitions, classifications, and generalizations of the sort presented in text 1, people use other principles, grounded in the production and interpretation of stories, to make sense of the impact of experienced events on themselves and others, as in text 2. But what are these other principles? Or, to put the question differently, assuming that "we organize our experience and memory of human happenings mainly in the form of narrative – stories, excuses, myths, reasons for doing and not doing, and so on" (Bruner 1991: 4), what are the design principles of narrative itself? What explains people's ability to distinguish storytelling from other kinds of communicative practices, and narratives from other kinds of semiotic artifacts?

To capture what distinguishes text 2 from text 1, it is important to keep in mind the ideas about categorization developed by cognitive scientists such as George Lakoff (1987) and Eleanor Rosch ([1978] 2004) – ideas that Marie-Laure Ryan (2005a, 2007), among other story analysts (cf. Herman forthcoming b; Jannidis 2003), has used in her own proposals concerning how to define narrative. I return to these ideas in more detail in chapter 4, and readers may wish to read that chapter immediately after the following paragraphs to get a fuller sense of the conceptual underpinnings of the model presented in an abbreviated fashion here. In any case, the work on categorization processes suggests that at least some of the categories in terms of which we make sense of the world are gradient in nature; that is, they operate in a "more-or-less" rather than an "either-or" fashion. In such cases, central or prototypical instances of a given category will be good (= easily recognized and named) examples of it, whereas more peripheral instances will display less goodness-of-fit. Thus, a category like "bird" can be characterized as subject to what Lakoff calls *centrality gradience*: although robins are more prototypical members or central instances of the category than emus are (since robins can fly, for example), emus still belong in the category, albeit farther away from what might be called the center of the category space. Meanwhile, when one category shades into another, *membership gradience* can be said to obtain. Think of the categories "tall person" and "person of average height": where exactly do you draw the line? Narrative can be described as a kind of text (a text-type category) to which both centrality gradience and membership gradience apply.

A given story or story-like representation can be a more or less central instance of the category; further, some narratives will have properties that place them in closer proximity to neighboring text-type categories (descriptions, lists, arguments, etc.) than is the case with other narratives.[11]

Thus, whereas prototypical instances of the category "narrative" share relatively few features with those of "description," more peripheral cases are less clearly separable from that text-type, allowing for hybrid forms that Harold F. Mosher (1991) called "descriptivized narrations" and "narrativized descriptions."[12] Consider the nursery rhyme "This Little Piggy Went to Market":

> Text 3
> This little piggy went to market.
> This little piggy stayed home.
> This little piggy had roast beef.
> This little piggy had none.
> This little piggy cried "Wee! Wee! Wee!" all the way home.

Recited while one pulls each toe of the child's foot, this nursery rhyme constitutes a playful way to focus attention on and "describe" all five toes by means of a quasi-narrative that groups them together into a constellation of characters, who move along non-intersecting trajectories in a somewhat nebulous space-time environment. The quasi-story vehiculates the description – i.e., the enumeration – of the toes. Conversely, a modified version of an example discussed by Culler (1975: 167) in a different context suggests how descriptivized narration operates. If in paraphrasing Eudora Welty's short story "A Worn Path" (Welty [1941] 2006) I were to slow down the pace of narration drastically, and make Welty sound something like Robbe-Grillet, I might arrive at the following descriptivized narration of one brief phase of Phoenix Jackson's walk through the woods in quest of medicine for her ailing grandson:

> She raised her left foot two inches off the ground while swinging it forward and, displacing her center of gravity so that the foot hit the ground, heel first, strode off on the ball of the right foot . . .

This hyperdetailed paraphrase effectively moves the text in the direction of description and away from prototypical instances of narration – since the plot of Welty's story threatens to be submerged beneath the mass of descriptive detail associated with this ultra-slow-motion method

of recounting. Thus the two examples discussed in this paragraph suggest the relevance of centrality gradience for members of text-type categories: narrativized descriptions and descriptivized narrations are neither prototypically descriptive nor prototypically narrative.

But what accounts for where along the continuum stretching between narrative and description (among other text-type categories) a given artifact falls? What are the design principles that, when fully actualized, result in prototypical narrative representations? As already indicated in the headnote to this section, I suggest that stories can be analyzed into four basic elements: situatedness, event sequencing, worldmaking/world disruption, and what it's like. On this account, a prototypical narrative can be construed as

(i) A representation that is situated in – must be interpreted in light of – a specific discourse context or occasion for telling.
(ii) The representation, furthermore, cues interpreters to draw inferences about a structured time-course of particularized events.
(iii) In turn, these events are such that they introduce some sort of disruption or disequilibrium into a storyworld[13] involving human or human-like agents, whether that world is presented as actual or fictional, realistic or fantastic, remembered or dreamed, etc.
(iv) The representation also conveys the *experience* of living through this storyworld-in-flux, highlighting the pressure of events on real or imagined consciousnesses affected by the occurrences at issue. Thus – with one important proviso – it can be argued that narrative is centrally concerned with *qualia*, a term used by philosophers of mind to refer to the sense of "what it is like" for someone or something to have a particular experience. The proviso is that recent research on narrative bears importantly on debates concerning the nature of consciousness itself.[14]

The subsections that follow discuss each of these elements in turn. But some preliminary comments may provide useful context.

The first element listed gives due recognition to what Meir Sternberg has called the Proteus Principle: "in different contexts . . . the same [linguistic or textual] form may fulfill different [communicative or representational] functions *and* different forms the same function" (1982: 148). Given the proper communicative context, a simple utterance like *He walked* might serve narrative functions – cuing interlocutors to construct

a fuller representational scaffolding around that simple clause that might include a character who because of disease or injury was expected never to walk again, or who, rather than driving a long distance in a car, had to walk that far because of car trouble. Accordingly, the elements of event sequencing, worldmaking/world disruption, and what it's like should be viewed, not as failsafe guarantees of the presence of narrative, but rather as critical properties of texts that circulate in communicative contexts in the manner that is characteristic of – or prototypical for – narratives. To put this another way, my aim is to diagnose critical properties of texts that can be interpreted as fulfilling a narrative function across a range of contexts; to stipulate that the properties thus identified constitute basic elements of narrative; and to specify the gradient or more-or-less manner in which those properties may be realized in a given case, resulting in more or less prototypical instances of the category *narrative*. Further, as I discuss in chapter 4, judgments about what counts as "prototypical" are themselves subject to change across different contexts.

As just indicated, some of the critical properties I have characterized as basic elements of narrative are gradient (i.e., they operate by degrees) rather than binarized: how detailed or particularized is the portrayal of the storyworld? how momentous is the disruption represented, and how extensive are its ramifications? how much impact do the events have on the experiencing consciousnesses affected by them? In turn, the gradient nature of these elements or properties helps account for variations in the degree of goodness-of-fit between the text-type category "narrative" and representations or artifacts that may be more or less prototypically story-like. The gradience also explains the existence of the hybrid forms identified by Mosher (e.g., descriptivized narration), as well as why, past a critical threshold, a given representation will lack the kinds of structure necessary for it to be interpreted in narrative terms. Thus, to anticipate my discussion below of the fourth element, what it's like, if the factor of an experiencing consciousness impinged upon by the narrated events becomes sufficiently attenuated, then past a certain point a given representation of a temporal sequence will fall outside the category of narrative and enter the domain of chronicle, synopsis, or some other genre of discourse (i.e., text type) – depending on how the representation aligns itself with other features characteristic of the texts and practices that circulate within communicative contexts under these names (see chapter 4).

In this respect, an analogue to narrative would be something like taking an examination in an academic setting. As with stories, some of the conditions for such "gatekeeping encounters" are binarized, but others are gradient. If the student does not show up for the exam, or if a fire guts the room where it was supposed to occur and there are no other rooms available, then basic conditions for the exam have not been met – just as there can be no story without a representation of one or more events involving one or more human or human-like agents. But other conditions for a successful exam, such as comprehensive mastery of the material on which the exam focuses, or the ability to deploy the conventions of scholarly argument in a relevant, field-specific way, are more-or-less rather than either-or affairs, and can lead to differences of opinion among students and their examiners. Likewise, interlocutors in face-to-face interaction, readers of novels, and moviegoers can have differing intuitions about the degree of narrativity of certain representations – their capacity for interpretation in narrative terms – and such discrepancies can be attributed to the gradient nature of some of the basic elements of narrative itself.

This approach to the conditions for or basic elements of narrative can be compared with the "dimensional" approach developed by Ochs and Capps (2001), also discussed in my next chapter. As Ochs and Capps put it,

> We believe that narrative as genre and activity can be fruitfully examined in terms of a set of dimensions that a narrative displays to different degrees and in different ways. Rather than identifying a set of distinctive features that always characterize narrative, we stipulate dimensions [namely, tellership, tellability, embeddedness, linearity, and moral stance – see chapter 2 below] that will always be relevant to a narrative, even if not elaborately manifest. . . . The dimensions pertain both to narrating as activity and to narrative as text. Each narrative dimension establishes a range of possibilities, which are realized in particular narrative performances. (2001: 19)

Although I likewise stipulate that some of the basic elements of narrative can be conceived as continua or dimensions, I also assume that storytelling as a communicative and representational practice does have distinctive features that set it apart from other such practices, including the representation of particular kinds of temporal sequences and the use of cues that evoke narrative worlds, or storyworlds, marked

by the occurrence of disruption-causing or noncanonical events (see chapters 4 and 5). In other words, the claim that features or properties of narrative obtain in a gradient, more-or-less fashion is consistent with claim that those features are critically important for the identification of certain forms of practice as narrative in nature, as opposed to syllogistic, definitional, descriptive, and so on.[15]

Now, on to a somewhat fuller sketch of the four basic elements themselves; this sketch will be complemented by the exposition provided in chapter 4, and indeed by the rest of this book as a whole.

### *(i) Situatedness*

In emphasizing that narrative representations are situated in specific discourse contexts, or embedded in occasions for telling, I hark back to my earlier claim that stories are the result of complex transactions involving producers of texts, discourses, or other semiotic artifacts, the texts or artifacts themselves, and interpreters of these narrative productions working with cultural, institutional, genre-based, and text-specific protocols. Insofar as narratives are *representations*, they exhibit the same twofold structure that Saussure ([1916] 1954) identified in his discussion of the relationship between *signifier* and *signified*. Thus, in parallel with the relationship that obtains between the English word *cat* and the concept evoked by that word (at least among speakers of English), a narrative representation encompasses both (a) the textual or semiotic cues used in the representing medium and (b) the characters, situations, and events (what this book terms the *storyworld*) represented by those cues. But insofar as narratives are also *communicatively situated* representations, making sense of them requires attending to how they are geared to particular communicative contexts. In other words, interpreters seeking to use textual cues to reconstruct a storyworld must also draw inferences about the communicative goals that have structured the specific occasion of the telling, motivating the use of certain cues in favor of others and shaping the arrangement of the cues selected.[16] Further, even in the case of stories not told to others, narratives are shaped by the broader sociocommunicative environment in which they are produced (cf. Bakhtin [1953] 1986). Thus, if I construct in my mind a representation of my own life story but never share it with anyone else (or perhaps mumble the story unintelligibly), I have nonetheless produced that account in a context structured by conventions

for narrating the story of one's life (see Linde 1993) – conventions with which I bring myself into relation even when I seek to resist or subvert them.

Chapter 3 discusses several frameworks for inquiry that can be used to explore how stories are grounded in – necessarily interpreted with reference to – communicative occasions of this sort. Preliminarily, though, one can verify how crucially a narrative's communicative situation affects its interpretation by contrasting Monica's story (text 2) with representations that are not narrative in nature and also with a story having the same basic structure but slotted into a different discourse context. For example, stress equations used to represent forces impinging on buildings and bridges, or diagrams used to represent the radius of a circle, are not communicatively situated in the same way Monica's story is. Neither, for that matter, is the account of emotions presented in text 1 above. It makes a difference, when interpreting her story, to know that Monica is not for instance reading a script written by someone else, and thus quoting another person's first-person retrospective narration, nor a fictional character whose account is being quoted by the narrator of the text in which she appears. These altered occasions of telling would alter, too, the overall sense and also the truth status of the narrative. In the former case (Monica as script reader), the story could no longer be interpreted as firsthand testimony; in the latter case (Monica as fictional character quoted by a narrator), it would no longer make sense to ask: "But did that really happen to Monica [or the person for whom 'Monica' is a pseudonym] near Texana, North Carolina, on such-and-such a date?" By contrast, the stress equations, geometric diagram, or account of emotions could be quoted by others or inserted into dialogue among fictional characters without affecting either their basic propositional content or their truth status.

### *(ii) Event sequencing*

Whereas the hallmark of narrative representations is their focus on particular situations and events, scientific explanations by their nature concern themselves with ways in which, in general, the world tends to be. Further, if particularity sets narrative apart from general explanations, narrative's temporal profile helps distinguish the prototypical narrative from many examples of description. I can in principle describe the objects on my desk in any order (left to right, back to front, smallest

to largest, etc.); by contrast, narrative traces paths taken by particularized individuals faced with decision points at one or more temporal junctures in a storyworld; those paths lead to consequences that take shape against a larger backdrop in which other possible paths might have been pursued, but were not.[17]

I discuss the issues of temporality and particularity in more detail in chapter 4, but for the time being contrast text 2 with text 3 in this connection: transpose any elements of the sequence that Monica recounts and you would have a different story, whereas in text 3 the order in which the little piggies' actions are recounted is a function of the need to rhyme end-words and establish logical contrasts, not of any corresponding sequence of actions in a little-piggy storyworld. Meanwhile, insofar as text 1 outlines features of emotion in general, it does not focus on any individualized actors, nor any specific sequence of events. As discussed in chapter 5, representations of particularized sequences of events – representations that likewise have a kind of temporal structure specific to narrative – are best viewed as cues used by interpreters to construct mental representations of narrated worlds, that is, storyworlds. Even an apparently barebones verbal sequence such as *The cat raced down the hall in pursuit of a mouse that, however, cleverly eluded capture* prompts the construction of a multifaceted mental model or storyworld. That storyworld includes the cat as agent; the mouse as the (unattained) goal of the cat's pursuit; a path of motion that unfolds along an axis parallel with the hallway of a house or other building, an axis oriented such that the near end corresponds to the position from which the action is viewed; and a temporal profile that, defining the chase as a singular event rather than a recurrent scenario, situates the cat's pursuit of the mouse earlier in time than the moment from which the narrative report itself originates.

### *(iii) Worldmaking/world disruption*

But prototypical instances of narrative involve more than particularized temporal sequences unfolding within more or less richly detailed storyworlds. Building on the work of Vladimir Propp ([1928] 1968), who characterized disruptive events (e.g., acts of villainy) as the motor of narrative, Todorov (1968) specified a further test for when an event-sequence will count as a story. Todorov argued that narratives characteristically follow a trajectory leading from an initial state of equilibrium,

through a phase of disequilibrium, to an endpoint at which equilibrium is restored (on a different footing) because of intermediary events – though not every narrative will trace the entirety of this path (see also Bremond 1980; Kafalenos 2006). Todorov thereby sought to capture the intuition that stories prototypically involve a more or less marked disruption of what is expected or canonical. Making sense of how narratives represent disruption in storyworlds, then, depends on forming inferences about the kinds of agency characters have in those worlds, as role-bearing or position-occupying individuals sometimes acting at cross-purposes with their own interests and goals or those of other such individuals. In my previous example, compare the clash between the cat as aggressive pursuer versus the mouse as clever eluder.

At issue here is what Bruner (1991) characterized as a dialectic of "canonicity and breach": "to be worth telling, a tale must be about how an implicit canonical script has been breached, violated, or deviated from in a manner to do violence to . . . [its] 'legitimacy' " (11; see also chapter 5). But it is not just that stories can be recognized as such because of the way they *represent* situations and events that depart from the canonical order. More than this, narrative is a cognitive and communicative strategy for navigating the gap, in everyday experience, between what was expected and what actually takes place. Thus Bruner (1990) characterizes narrative as the primary resource for "folk psychology" – that is, people's everyday understanding of how thinking works, the rough-and-ready heuristics to which they resort in thinking about thinking itself. We use these heuristics to impute motives or goals to others, to evaluate the bases of our own conduct, and to make predictions about future reactions to events. In this context, narrative affords a kind of discourse scaffolding for formulating reasons about why people engage in the actions they do, or else fail to engage in actions that we expect them to pursue. As Bruner puts it, "the organizing principle of folk psychology [is] narrative in nature rather than logical or categorical. Folk psychology is about human agents doing things on the basis of their beliefs and desires, striving for goals, meeting obstacles which they best or which best them, all of this extended over time" (1990: 42–3). More fully,

> when you encounter an exception to the ordinary, and ask somebody what is happening, the person you ask will virtually always tell a story that contains *reasons* (or some other specification of an intentional

> state). . . . All such stories seem to be designed to give the exceptional behavior meaning in a manner that implicates both an intentional state in the protagonist (a belief or desire) and some canonical element in the culture. . . . The function of the story is to find an intentional state that mitigates or at least makes comprehensible a deviation from a canonical cultural pattern. (Bruner 1990: 49–50)

Judged by the criterion of more or less markedly violated expectations, or Bruner's dialectic of canonicity and breach, text 3 ("This little piggy") would score lower in narrativity than text 2 (*UFO or the Devil*). True, the contrasts drawn in the first four lines of text 3 may suggest a rudimentary kind of narrativity, involving a disparity between plenty and dearth, hunger and satisfaction; but Monica's story in text 2 centers on a strongly (and strangely) disruptive event: the apparition of a supernatural big ball chasing Monica and her friend through the woods in the dark of night. For its part, because text 1 does not set up a concrete, particularized situation, there is no background against which a tellably disruptive event might be set off.

### *(iv) What it's like*

Prototypically, narrative involves not only a temporal sequence into which events are slotted in a particular way, and not only a dynamic of canonicity and breach; more than this, stories represent – and perhaps make it possible to experience – what it is like to undergo events within a storyworld-in-flux. Narrative roots itself in the lived, felt experience of human or human-like agents interacting in an ongoing way with their cohorts and surrounding environment. To put the same point another way, the less markedly a text or a discourse encodes the pressure of events on an experiencing human or at least human-like consciousness, the less amenable that text or discourse will be to interpretation in narrative terms. Chapter 6 explores this nexus between narrative and mind; the chapter not only examines how the consciousness factor constitutes a critical property of narrative representations, but also draws on recent work in the philosophy of mind to speculate about the converse relation, that is, whether stories provide a basis for conscious experience itself.

In any case, as an analysis or explanation, rather than a story about time-, place-, and person-specific events, text 1 makes no attempt to

capture what it's like to experience an emotion. And note also the contrast between texts 2 and 3 on this score. Whereas Monica uses emotion discourse to highlight what it was like to undergo the frightening events she reports, in text 3 the closest we get to qualia – states of conscious awareness grounded in the felt, subjective character of experience (Tye 2003) – is the fifth little piggy's cry of "Wee! Wee! Wee!" all the way home.

Having presented this synopsis of what I take to be basic elements of narrative – a synopsis upon which subsequent chapters attempt to elaborate – I pause in my exposition of this approach to provide in my next chapter a brief overview of recent scholarly developments in the field. This overview should throw light on the context from which my analysis emerges, as well as indicating for interested readers directions for further study.