Events are us

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> From the time of Aristotle, Western metaphysics has had a marked bias in favor of *things* or *substances*. However, another variant line of thought was also current from the earliest times onward. After all, the concentration on perduring physical *things* as existents in nature slights the equally good claims of another ontological category, namely processes, events, occurrences - items better indicated by verbs than nouns. And, clearly, storms and heat-waves are every bit as real as dogs and oranges.
>
> Nicholas Rescher[1]

Event, eventfulness and *tellability* relate to the type of epistemological scenario which seems to trigger our most basic and primary impulse for narration: someone knows that *somewhere something* has happened and deems this occurrence *worthwhile to be related to somebody else*.[2] In this context, 'event' is the concept aiming to clarify what such a 'something' would be in most principled terms; 'eventfulness' is a qualitative measure for the relevance of that which 'happened', and 'tellability' concerns the degree to which such a noteworthy *something* can be adequately related to somebody who either did not witness the occurrence in question directly, or who failed to recognize its true significance. However, while the concepts of *event*, *eventfulness* and *tellability* thus concern one and the same phenomenological setting, they obviously conceptualize it from distinct methodological angles: the first one is concerned with the abstract definition of *event* in the sense of a logical primitive in narrative representation; the latter conceptualizations – i.e., the discourse on *eventfulness* and *tellability* – address the questions of historically contingent norms and pragmatics of narrative as communicative performance.

My contribution will focus on the first aspect: on 'events' as logical primitives. Since this smacks of a somewhat dated formalist, or hard-core structuralist approach, I have to stress that my primary interest does, however, not lie in the abstract logic of narrative, but rather in the anthropological roots of narrative processing; hence my argument might ultimately better be labelled "cognitivist with a metaphysical bent" than logic.[3] By narrative processing I mean the full and dynamic ensemble of routines enabling us to encode and decode narrative representations. In our current context I will concentrate on one particular sub-routine only: that which we employ for the decoding of represented events. This practice, I believe, is best explained in constructivist terms: events are not 'read' by us, rather they are actively constructed from representational material. Obviously, this activity takes place within a given historical, social, aesthetic and axiological context, and thus most of it will normally turn out to be re-construction rather than original creation. Again, admitting that ideology

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[1] Rescher, Nicholas, "Process Philosophy", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Summer 2002 Edition)*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2002/entries/process-philosophy/ (seen 26 September 2007.)

[2] The current article is based on a paper presented at the ICN-workshop on "Event, Eventfulness and Tellability" held at Ghent University, 16.-17 February 2007[2]

[3] See Jan Christoph Meister, *Computing Action. A Narratological Approach.* Walter de Gruyter: Berlin, New York 2003

plays a decisive role in how we construct events might also raise false expectations as to the intent of this article. Two further points must therefore be clarified at the outset: I will not concern myself with the social and cultural factors which predetermine event construction, nor with a critique of narratological logo centrism. In fact, the obverse is true - if anything I want to give the screw of logo centrism another turn. Here is an outline of my reasoning, presented in the form of a more general philosophical premise:

The common sense notion of an event, to which we referred in passing already, conceptualizes events as abstractions gathered from perceived transformations in objects. In other words, first there are objects, then we note that something happens to them, and then we conceptualize this in the form of the mental construct 'event'. Narration, it is commonly held, follows the same trajectory in how it presents events and actions as occurrences that affect characters and objects. In the following I will explore a radical philosophical antithesis to such common sense definition. I am taking my lead, among other, from the original etymology of the Latin word *evenire*, meaning „to emerge" or „to come to the fore", as well as from the philosophical school known as *process philosophy*.[4] Accordingly, let us assume that nothing exists outside of events and that whatever is perceived to 'exist' must by logical necessity first be 'eventuated'. This would mean that there are no pre-existing corporeal or ideal 'existents' to which something happens, in the sense of a change of attributes over time, but that *the only a priori existents would indeed be events*, which may or may not become populated with objects. Objects, then, are a secondary phenomenon: they are what emerges in and by events. The consequences of the proposed philosophical turn-about are (pardon the pun) 'substantial': for if our assumption were valid, then events would in fact 'matter' to us not only in the trivial sense of being meaningful in a denotational or symbolic way. In fact, their primary relevance would not be semantic, but rather existential, in that events actually 'make' matter come to the fore and enable it to emerge from indistinctive, formless sensual data.

What I have outlined thus far is, of course, primarily meant to be read with reference to the concept of *narrative* event. However, the philosophical trajectory of this premise does extend further: for if we take the idea seriously, then they – events – must also be understood to constitute *us,* in some way or other. Not that this would put us in a bad state; if anything,

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[4] Philosophies based on an event ontology have been proposed in numerous variants ever since Heraclitus. At the beginning of the 20th century quantum mechanics provided for a particularly strong impulse to re-think the relationship between objects and events, resulting in the most prominent philosophical attempt at formulating a full-fledged so-called *process philosophy*, namely Alfred North Whitehead's *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology* (1929). Whitehead's most fundamental premise is presented in the form of an antithesis to the dualist position: "We diverge from Descartes by holding that what he has described as primary *attributes* of physical bodies, are really the forms of internal relationships *between* actual occasions. Such a change of thought is the shift from materialism to Organic Realism, as a basic idea of physical science." (ibid. 471; I quote from the edition by David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne, New York: Macmillan, 1978). For Whitehead, ontological primacy does not reside in objects, but in occasions of experience: "Actual entities - also termed Actual Occasions - are the final real things of which the world is made up. There is no going behind actual entities to find anything more real. ...The final facts are, all alike, actual entities; and these actual entities are drops of experience, complex and interdependent." (ibid.) As Nicholas Rescher emphasizes in his article in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, the ultimate concern of process philosophy is thus a metaphysical one: "Process philosophy diametrically opposes the view - as old as Parmenides and Zeno and the Atomists of Pre-Socratic Greece - that denies processes or downgrades them in the order of being or of understanding by subordinating them to substantial things. By contrast, process philosophy pivots on the thesis that the processual nature of existence is a fundamental fact with which any adequate metaphysic must come to terms." (Rescher 2002 = note 1) For further reading, see Rescher, Nicholas, *Process Metaphysics: An Introduction to Process Philosophy* (New York: SUNY Press, 1996).

we can gather a more flexible concept of self from it, and would perhaps ultimately arrive back at the old Heraclitean conclusion that we *are*, epistemologically speaking, in no single state, but always in and by experiential *events*. This reasoning, speculative as it might be, would then perhaps point us to the deepest anthropological relevance of narrating events, and of listening or reading or watching them *as* events: while sense-making via narrative embedding and emplotment is the obvious pay-off of any tale, existential foundation of the recipient's self through base-level event-processing would turn out to be its most foundational dimension.[5]

I.   The event matrix

An important distinction elaborated by recent narratological debate of the structuralist vein is that between an abstract and formal base level definition of event, and a higher-level semantically charged definition that transcends pure representational denotation (mimesis) and concerns what one might call the *meaning-function* of symbolic representations.[6] Put in simple language, the base level definition – we refer to it as *Event I* - is about events as something that occurs, whereas the higher-level definition (*Event II*) is about events as something that occurs *and matters* to us. If one wants to tie these two differing conceptualizations of event to names and research traditions, then one could say that the former (*Event I*) is that of Vladimir Propp or Gerald Prince or Claude Bremond, whereas the latter (*Event II*) follows on Juri Lotman's idea of 'semantic boundary crossing'.

The higher level definition incorporates the base level definition as a necessary, yet not satisfactory condition. It postulates that in order to 'matter' and be cognitively or aesthetically relevant, an event must also fulfil certain contextually defined criteria. Wolf Schmid has defined a comprehensive set of such additional criteria; I need not elaborate on these here.[7] Being hermeneutically predisposed most philologists are of the opinion that, whereas the identification of phenomena that fulfil the base level criteria is a rather trivial affair, the fun and aesthetic pleasure really only starts when one begins to check the first round candidates against the second set of criteria.

However, I for one believe that the first order process is in itself already substantially complex and fascinating – and that the second one is perhaps over rated in that it boils down to little more than the application of a historically contingent check list. Indeed, the base level operation is not just highly creative – it is fundamental in an existential sense. To begin

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[5] This relegation of narrative emplotment as a strategy for legitimizing and organizing our self and self-image to a secondary, symptomatic rather than a primary position echoes the more principled critique of what Strawson has termed the fashionable *psychological* and *ethical Narrativity* theses (see Galen Strawson, "Against Narrativity", in: *Ratio* (new series) XVII 4 December 2004, p. 34), according to which we cannot exist outside of the narrative framework of emplotment. Strawson argues the opposite, stressing the delusive nature of coherence-bent self-narration: "The implication is plain: the more you recall, retell, narrate yourself, the further you risk moving away from accurate self-understanding, from the truth of your being." (ibid., p.447) This truth, he holds, is of an episodic and momentous nature.

6 See Peter Hühn, "EVENT AND EVENTFULNESS". http://www.icn.uni-hamburg.de/images/stories/NarrPort/Texte/modelarticle-english_event_09_07.pdf (seen 26.09.2007). Hühn's article is to be re-published in the forthcoming *Handbook of Naratology* edited by Peter Hühn, John Pier, Wolf Schmid and Jörg Schönert (due for publication in 2008).

[7] See Wolf Schmid, *Elemente der Narratologie*, Walter de Gruyter: Berlin, New York 2005, p.11-31

with, we have an entire repertoire of ways in which we may construct events on the basis of a narrative's raw material, i.e. the sequence of its narrative propositions (sentences) which we process as we read along. I have discussed these principle options elsewhere and summarized them in the form of a logical 'event matrix'.[8] In the following I want to demonstrate how an event-creating matrix operation is performed in practice. In order to do so, we will map two excerpts taken from Goethe's 1795 *Unterhaltungen deutscher Ausgewanderten* onto the matrix.[9] Both these excerpts belong to the famous *Märchen*, the fairytale which concludes the series of novellas that make up the text.

Here is the first excerpt:

> By the great river, which was newly swollen with heavy rain and overflowing, the old ferryman, weary from the toil of the day, lay in his little hut and slept. In the middle of the night loud voices wakened him; it seemed that travellers wanted to be ferried across.
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> <div align="right">Goethe 1989:70</div>

Let us first look at how the recipient, in his or her reading of the passage, constructs what I call an '*object event.*' In philosophical event theory this type of occurrence is called a 'physical event': a qualitative transformation that affects objects. In our first example the affected object happens to be anthropomorphic; it is the old ferryman. What happens to the ferryman is told in two consecutive sentences. In the terminology of my event matrix these sentences are called the *expositional* and the *dispositional* statement. The expositional opens up the possibility for something to happen to something; the dispositional realises that potential fully or in part, but it also opens up a new possibility – a disposition for yet another transformation, and thus a possibility for the story to go on, and on, and on… Of course, in practice, it won't. But the point is that in principle, the transformational logic will never come to an end purely in and by itself: its boundaries are always enforced contextually.

The standard definition of 'event' shared by most disciplines, from philosophy to narratology to computer science (and many others), conceptualizes an event as a logical triple of an entity, a quality and a time stamp. Our event matrix varies slightly in that it models events as a *quadruple* of temporal index, matter, *predicate class* and predicate. This is in line with our intuitive knowledge that in an event, you cannot compare apples with pears: the notion of transformation presupposes categorical homogeneity. However, categorical homogeneity is not a given – it is the result of an act of judgement. In a constructivist perspective, things or notions do not fall into the same category per se; we *group* them into categories. This is how we systematize the world and how we make sense of it – and it is well-neigh impossible to put a stop to that. Indeed, the famous 'apple and pears'-metaphor often used to enforce logical rigor is easily put at rest by dialectic reasoning: for once we have stated that 'apples' and 'pears' are both 'fruit', nobody can prevent us from comparing them ever after.

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[8] See Meister 2003, note 3

[9] Quotes are taken from the English translation: Johann Wolfgang von Goethe: *Conversations of German Refugees. Translated by Jan van Heurck in Cooperation with Jane K. Brown. Wilhelm Meister's Journeyman Years or the Renunciants. Translated by Krishna Winston. Ed. By Jane K.Brown.* (= Goethes Collected Works 10). Suhrkamp Publishers: New York 1989.

'Statements', in their most basic form, are propositions describing a 'state', i.e. the quality (attributes) which something has at a given point in (or during a defined period of) time. In a formal notation, the definition of 'state' could be rendered like this:

$$_a\text{State}(_{\text{Tindex}}A, _{\text{Matter}}A, _{\text{PClass}}A, _{\text{PValue}}A)$$
$$_b\text{State}(_{\text{Tindex}}B, _{\text{Matter}}B, _{\text{PClass}}B, _{\text{PValue}}B)$$

An *object event* would then be defined as:

$$\text{event}(_a\text{State},_b\text{State})\text{:-}$$

$$\text{not } _a\text{State} = _b\text{State},$$
$$_{\text{Tindex}}A < _{\text{Tindex}}B,$$
$$_{\text{Matter}}A = _{\text{Matter}}B,$$
$$_{\text{PClass}}A = _{\text{PClass}}B,$$
$$\text{not } _{\text{PValue}}A = _{\text{PValue}}B.$$

In this notation the sequential logic of state transformations is in fact that of a computer algorithm written in a high-level programming language (PROLOG). The algorithm enables a computer to check whether two given states a and b can be bound together to form an event. The essence of it is perhaps easier to grasp if we represent the logic calculus in the form of a table which includes some concrete examples for the variables and instantiates them in the form of specific values:

Expositional statement temporal index = t_{exp}			Dispositional statement temporal index = t_{disp}		
MATTER	Predicate Class	Predicate	MATTER	Predicate Class	Predicate
ferryman	*relational*	(1) *by the river* (2) *in the hut*	*ferryman*	*relational*	(2) *loud*
	physical	(3) *lying* (4) *old*		*physical*	(3) *hearing*
	cognitive	(5) *asleep*		*cognitive*	(1) *awake* (4) *requested*

Table 1: Statements in an OBJECT EVENT

When we read these two sentences as an *event* we basically perform six logical operations – not necessarily in the following order:

1. we sort the sentences by their time stamps
2. we fill the empty MATTER and PREDICATE slots on the left hand side of the matrix
3. we assign a predicate classes to the left PREDICATE
4. we fill the empty MATTER and PREDICATE CLASS slots on the right hand side
5. we sort through the second sentence to find the right predicates to be inserted in the far right column
6. we check for binaries among the left and right column predicates.

Obviously, this is not just an act of description. We do not identify events – we *construct* them, and our individual event constructs can only be expected to be similar if our respective frames of reference have sufficient overlap. Or, to put it in cognitive science jargon, if our conceptual 'ontologies' correspond. In this regard our first example seemed pretty clear cut, though. Now let us see what we can make of the following two sentences:

> By the great river, which was newly swollen with heavy rain and overflowing, the old ferryman, weary from the toil of the day, lay in his little hut and slept. […] 'Don't you know,' she replied, 'that you have also grown younger?' 'I am glad, if to your young eyes I appear to be a sturdy youth.'

Things are a bit trickier here. To begin with, these two sentences can only be 'slotted' into one event matrix if we tolerate a significant analepsis – for in real terms, the modest bracket behind the first sentence indicates a massive ellipsis of some 60 pages of text. Of course, expert readers can handle worse. Given a choice between leaving the last two sentences hanging in hermeneutic mid-air, or connecting them to some preceding mental image we will happily recall from memory what we already read. So let us assume that the analepsis is not really a problem. If this is granted then the constructive process seems to boil down to the same procedure as before: we simply have to parse the two statements for their propositional content and fill the slots in our table.

> By the great river, which was newly swollen with heavy rain and overflowing, the old ferryman, weary from the toil of the day, lay in his little hut and slept. […] 'Don't you know,' she replied, 'that you have also grown younger?' 'I am glad, if to your young eyes I appear to be a sturdy youth.'

Expositional statement temporal index = t_{exp}			Dispositional statement temporal index = t_{disp}		
MATTER	Predicate Class	Predicate	MATTER	Predicate class	Predicate
ferryman	*relational*	(1) *by the river* (2) *in the hut*	*you*	*relational*	
	physical	(3) *lying* **(4)** ***old***		***physical***	**(2)** ***young***
	cognitive	(5) *asleep*		*cognitive*	(1) *unaware*

Table 2: Statements in a DISCOURSE EVENT

And as our table indicates, the potential EVENT prepared by the *expositional statement*

> By the great river…the *old* ferryman…lay in his little hut and slept.

would then be realized in the *dispositional statement*:

> 'Don't you know,' she replied, 'that you have also *grown younger*?'

However, if we check this hypothesis against the actual narrative we will find ourselves faced with a significant dilemma. On the one hand, this is indeed the only way in which one can make 'intradiegetic' (rather than extradiegetic or metaphorical) sense of the second sentence, i.e. the only way in which we can relate its representational content to that of any other statement in the text, and hence the only one in which we can interpret it as *meaningful*, that is to say, as *event*-ful. But – and this is the real crux - the 'you' referred to as MATTER in the right hand side of the Matrix, the 'you' who has become younger, cannot be proven to be identical to the 'old ferryman' on the left hand side. In Goethe's narrative these seem to be two *different* characters – which means that at least one criterion for an object event (identity of MATTER) has not been met.

What do we conclude? At this point we are left with three alternatives:

1. The event construct we just built constitutes a mere case of misinterpretation on the reader's behalf; it is probably motivated by his noble, yet unacceptable attempt to normalise a case of representational incoherence.
2. The construct which we just built does not fall into the category of event at all; rather, it represents a paradigm.
3. The construct *is* an event, but it is one that belongs to a different *type*.

Let us disregard the first option as trivial.

As for the second option – paradigm rather than event construct – there can be little doubt: yes, this is exactly the manner in which we identify isotopes and trace themes in a representation: by grouping their propositional content into paradigms. By definition, paradigms are not subject to criteria of syntagmatic ordering, such as contiguity, causality or referential identity. The elements of a paradigm are held together by a transcendent higher-level concept, not by same-level relationships.

So how about the third option? Well, I would argue that, while the second alternative is true, so is the third: we can *also* describe our construct as an attempt to read a sequence of three sentences as actionally related <u>irrespective</u> of their lack of a shared diegetic object. If we look at it in this way we have just witnessed the construction of a second type of event, the one which I propose to label *Discourse Event*. Admittedly, for a narratologist this choice of terminology is not without problem because I fail to use the qualifier 'discourse' in the strict sense of the formalist distinction *histoire* vs. *discours*. In our current context, the qualifier discourse does not point to a functional distinction, but to an ontological one. Simply put, discourse events are events that do *not* take place within the narrative – neither on the level

of the told, nor on that of its telling. Unlike object events, discourse events have no representational content: nothing happens in the world of the characters, or in that of the narrating instance. A proper discourse event takes places in an ontological domain that is completely separate from that of the fictional world and its mediation: it takes place in the mind which processes the narrative. In terms of event philosophy this would normally be called a 'mental event', but using that term also invites confusion in that it could be misunderstood to denote a fictional character's mental processes.[10] However, from my perspective characters are just a specific class of objects, and so changes in a character's mental state merely constitute a sub-class of object events. Yet proper discourse events cannot, by definition, take place anywhere within the fictional world, not even in a fictional mind. They are ontologically 'real' only in our own mind.

One might argue that this specific notion of discourse event conflates the concepts of event and paradigm, because the process logic of discourse event construction is that of paradigmatic rather than syntagmatic ordering. Indeed, that is exactly what I am suggesting. I believe that the concept of *event* which we have used in narratology thus far is somewhat reductionist. So before we concern ourselves with the particular logic of *discourse events*, let us spare a moment to discuss the concept of event in more general philosophical terms.

II.   The metaphysics of event

Are events real, or must we adopt a non-realist position? Those philosophers who argue in favour of the realist opinion point to what Casati and Varzi (2006) have termed "the *prima facie* commitments of human perception, action, language" to events: our ability to discriminate and "re-count" events; our ability to plan and execute actions; the existence of dedicated linguistic devices (such as verb tenses and aspects, nominalization of some verbs, certain proper names), and the fact that thinking about the temporal, causal, and intentional aspects of the world requires the ability to parse those aspects in terms of events and their descriptions.[11]   But there are also strong arguments for the non-realist position, i.e. one that conceptualizes events as mental constructs rather than as objective 'facts'. For example, on what metaphysical grounds can we distinguish among events and non-events, such as objects, facts, properties, and times? And how do we arrive at the many facetted differentiation among types of events, such as durative and resultative ones (activities, accomplishments, achievements, and lasting states), static or dynamic ones, intentional actions or non-intentional bodily movements, and mental vs. physical events. Are these distinctions really of an objective nature, or are they context-dependent and perspective bound?

For lack of time let us consider this problematic in just one particular case, namely that of *events vs. objects*. Casati and Varzi comment on this:

> Ordinary objects have relatively clear spatial boundaries and unclear temporal boundaries; events have relatively unclear spatial boundaries and clear temporal boundaries. Objects are invidiously located in space-they *occupy* their spatial location; events tolerate co-location [Quinton 1979, Hacker 1982b]. Objects can move; events cannot [Dretske 1967]. Objects are continuants -- they are *in* time and they

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[10] See Alan Palmer, *Fictional Minds*. University of Nebraska Press: Lincoln, NE., 2004

[11] See (http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/events/ 04.02.2007)

persist through time by being wholly present at every time at which they exist; events are occurrents -- they *take up* time and they persist by having different parts (or "stages") at different times [Mellor 1980].

http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/events/ [seen 30.10.2007]

While all of this seems to make perfect (common) sense, some philosophers argue the exact opposite. They

conceive of objects as four-dimensional entities that extend across time just as they extend across space. Some such philosophers would in fact draw no metaphysically significant distinction between objects and events [Quine 1960]. Rather, they would regard the relevant distinction as one of degree: both objects and events would be species of the same "material inhabitant of space-time" genus (as opposed to the genus "immaterial inhabitant", such as the Equator); but whereas events appear to develop quickly in time, objects are relatively "firm and internally coherent" [Quine 1970].

http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/events/ [seen 30.10.2007]

It is obvious that our everyday practices are based on an object ontology, and not on an event ontology. This 'objective' bias is enforced in particular by our language, which conceptualises the relationship between objects and events as asymmetrical: our grammar allows us to employ event terms as attributes to object terms, but it does not tolerate the inverse. Casati and Varzi illustrate this fact by contrasting the proverbial "fall of the apple" with its obverse, the "pomification of the fall." Why, indeed, should 'pomifications' be ontologically impossible – for logically they certainly are not? Taking this rather comic example more seriously and attempting to think of our entire experience of reality in terms of such 'pomifications' one immediately realizes the extent to which we are indeed locked into a (culturally enforced) object ontology.

This 'objective' ontological bias in our Western languages and philosophical tradition is no new problem; Heidegger's attempt at a radical philosophical reorientation based on the category of 'Sein' and his transcending of Husserl's objectifying phenomenology come to mind. In the long run objects and events will turn out to be logically as well as ontologically co-dependent - you cannot *think of* and you cannot *have* objects without events, or events without objects: neither in the world, nor in the narrative.

III.   The Logic of Discourse Events

Or can you? Is not the *discourse event* which combines two propositions that refer to non-identical objects *the* example for an 'objectless' event?

It is, and it isn't. Obviously, in the case of a discourse event we cannot tie the postulated transformation to some fictional entity or assumed existant. But that empty slot has already been taken – by our own reflective consciousness. For what remains stable and relatively coherent over processing time is the mind who connects the propositions. In other words, we invest our *own* existence into the construction of discourse events – and in many cases we would rather do that and succumb to our event-building impulse than admit that the world, fictional or real, is just made up of an unordered heap of states. We tend to think that immersive and illusionary effects have to do with our wish to participate in the world of make-belief, to project ourselves into it in order to be able to experience its qualities and content matter. But that is only secondary: logical immersion comes first.

I stated earlier on that the inferential process represented in our second table can be described equally well as (1) a case of *paradigm* building, and (2) a case of *discourse event* construction. As a matter of principle, it is really the same phenomenon under two descriptions – the difference lies in the fact that while the former description (*paradigm*) takes resolve in logical *abstraction*, the latter (*discourse event*) counters the exact same problem by way of epistemological *immersion*. It 'slots' the readers own mind in for the missing entity which, on the level of diegesis, cannot be found, but is logically required in order to be able to experience eventness and a sort of 'sense of it all'. For sense it must have, seeing that it is - a narrative…

It would be interesting to investigate the use of the two opposite strategies for 'event reading' on an empirical basis – my guess is that the processing mind, where it cannot read simple object events, bounces back and forth between the modes of disengaged paradigmatic ordering and paralogical engagement in the construction of discourse events. The event matrix tries to outline the logical continuum which that activity might theoretically span, depending on the type of narrative propositions we are given. I have discussed this in more detail elsewhere.[12]

IV. *Cui bono?*

Narrative, as some scholars will not tire to state, is an anthropological universal. It is rather obvious why narratologists love to be told so – to prolong narrative's "fifteen minutes of glory" seems to be in our own interest as it elevates our object to the status of a timeless constant in the definition of man. A word of caution might be in place: one, the intellectual shelf-life of such proclaimed 'universals' is never limitless – there have been other turns before the narrative one (for example, the linguistic), and there are more to follow. Two, if all of the human experience were narrative, then narrative would be a meaningless concept. There are, indeed, other ways to experience existence, as Galen Strawson for one has convincingly argued in "Against Narrativity" (2004), and the current pre-occupation that manifests itself in a discourse on anything from *self-* to *master narratives* is clearly one that has its roots in the cultural practices of the Western world.

Universals, in order to be universals, cannot be specific to a time or a historical or cultural context – yet anything that smacks of 'making sense' will certainly be. A true universal is either utterly abstract, or foundational in an almost logical or mathematical sense. It is in this sense – and not in any hermeneutic one – that one might perhaps regard the *reading of events* a universal tendency in man. This tendency was at play long before the higher-level ambition of 'making sense of it all' (and by ourselves) so characteristic of Western post-Enlightenment culture set in. Art and literature in particular has been critical of modern man's obsession with the 'narrative' chaining of (real or fictional) events into an all-encompassing, perfectly meaningful narrative, and considerable literary effort has gone into producing narratives that counter act what Goethe termed '*Auslegungssucht'* (hermeneutic fervour).[13]

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[12] See Meister 2003

[13] This was with particular reference to the public's futile efforts to 'make sense' of the narrative which we used as an example earlier on, the *Fairy Tale* which concludes the *Conversations of German Refugees* (*Unterhaltungen deutscher Ausgewanderten.*) Goethe was very amused by these interpretive efforts, which have been kept up to date. As the book was originally published in series in a literary journal there is reason to believe that the over complex story (it contains a plentitude of characters laden with symbolism, but not a

Event construction, however, seems to have slipped quietly under the critical radar. It is here, I believe, where an attempt at describing paradigmatic ordering in terms of *discourse event construction* might offer us a new insight into the logic of narrative.

'Making sense of it all' – i.e., the interpretation of an entire narrative, as well as the narrative construction of our own identity – come at the end of a complex procedure which involves much more basic cognitive operations. However, for the processing mind, even these very basic acts of judgement and interpretation tend to yield a profound pay off long before symbolic interpretation comes into play: every single act of cognition and judgement already has an intrinsic *performative* value. This is particularly true with regard to observing (or reading) events. *Every event is a construct*, and no matter how brittle the construct at which the mind eventually – *eventually*! - arrives might be, its very existence *in* our mind also testifies to the identity *of* our mind.

To philosophers this illusion of the inferencing instance's existence over the processing time of a logical operation is nothing new. The mechanism amounts to what Immanuel Kant referred to as the 'Paralogismus der Personalität': a tautological proof of personal identity derived from acts of judgement. It is a pay off which we enjoy not only where we encounter a clear-cut and mimetically fully realized event within a story world, but also in the case where we read intradiegetically unrelated propositions as a *discourse event*, or perhaps just as an abstract paradigm:

By the great river, which was newly swollen with heavy rain and overflowing, the old ferryman, weary from the toil of the day, lay in his little hut and slept. […] 'Don't you know,' she replied, 'that you have also grown younger?' 'I am glad, if to your young eyes I appear to be a sturdy youth.

The old ferryman in the first sentence and the 'you' in the second one might turn out to be non-identical, and it might follow that we will proceed from reading these statements as an *object event* to reading them as a *discourse event* to declaring them a *paradigm* – but: who cares? Event reading is reflexive synthesis par excellence, whichever register one might choose to read in. All three readings are in the end indexical; they 'prove' to us (in an experiential sense) that, because these logical operations were made, some intelligent mind must have existed over the time that it took to make them - and as it so happens, that mind was ours. This logic is, of course, a tautology. But the tautology of reading events is one that is very hard to evade. It *matters to us* not only because it 'objectifies' and 'realises' objects – by the same token, it also *matters us*. Events are not merely occurrences that happen out there, in the real or in the represented world. We cannot help but read them – and this, perhaps, is why humans care to narrate, even when no grand narrative is in sight. Indeed, in terms of its anthropological function the 'episodic' (Strawson) micro-narrative is more than good enough to prove: events are us.

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convincing overall message) was intended to ridicule the readers, in revenge for some harsh critcism of the preceeding novellas which had been declared too simple, and too little artistic.