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# Temporality of sense-making in narrative interactions

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## Abstract:

Human experience is inherently temporal and involves placing events, symbols, and actions in a temporal scheme. This article deals with a specific aspect of temporal experience as it relates to reading and experiencing narrative fiction. Within an enactive understanding of human cognition, we propose a view of literary reading as a process of participatory sense-making between a reader and a storyteller. The enactive theory of participatory sense-making maintains that agents, by enacting their own sense-making, directly and partially constitute the sense-making of other agents. Sense-makers in interaction navigate two orders of normativity: their own and that of the interaction itself. Linguistic sense-making (linguaging) opens up further possibilities for understanding complex spatially and temporally distributed forms of social interactions such as narrative interactions. Reading a narrative is one such example of mutually constituted navigation between an interaction dynamic and interactors' sense-making. The reader completes and co-authors emergent textual meaning and a textually emerging storyteller guides and anticipates the multiple temporal displacements, realized linguistically, that a reader has to experience in the process of reading. We explore the participatory structure of a narrative through its temporal unfolding and the specific, non-linear nature of the temporal dynamics of interacting with a storytelling agency. In particular, narrative interactions are seen as modulations in the pacing of a given narrative's unfolding. It is suggested that the reader's enactment of such temporally realized pacings constitutes a better description of narrative immersion than its traditional understanding as a simulation of spatial situatedness.

**Keywords:** participatory sense-making, temporality, narrative, tense, aspect, pacing, immersion

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## 1 Introduction

Human beings are fundamentally temporal beings and there are many ways for us to experience time. From the moment we are born to the day we die, our bodies grow and change continually under the action of time. At the level of physiology and biology, every aspect of our lives is pervaded with the intricate workings of cyclical and recurrent ranges of time. For example, circadian rhythms, which exist in all living creatures from single-cell organisms up to human beings, are responsible in equal measure for both biological functions and the periodicity in human cognitive operations, demonstrated in mood, speed and exactness of thought, pulses of attention, and so on (Wittman 2016: 80). Such "internal clocks" regulate the cycles of our lives: waking and sleeping, hunger and thirst, the rhythms of breathing and heartbeats.

At the same time, awareness of this thing we call "time" is perhaps the most ubiquitous feature of conscious life. Events, experiences, actions invariably take place in time (duration) and in certain order (succession). We experience time when we run to catch a train, decide how long it will take to finish a task, remember a wonderful holiday, or observe change in a familiar face. Although such lived experiences of time are recognizable to us all, it is very difficult to think of time in a substantive way. The frustrations of thinking about time are aptly summed up by Augustine's famous remark, made around 396 AD in book XI of his *Confessions*: "What then is time? If no one asks me, I know what it is. If I wish to explain it to him who asks me, I do not know" (Augustine 1961 XI, 14: 17). This observation captures the familiar experience of knowing intuitively what time is when making sense of everyday life and, at the same time, the frustration of trying to theorize and explain the phenomenon of temporality. Yet time remains a topic to which, in the history of human thought, scholars and scientists alike have returned again and again.

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This article deals with a specific aspect of temporality as it relates to *reading and experiencing narrative fiction*. While often described as a kind of spatial immersion in the narrative world, we will argue that the particular experience of being lost or swept up in a book that often happens during reading is also amenable to an analysis of the story's particular temporal unfolding and the reader's enactment of such temporality. Immersion, in other words, is a matter of temporal, and not just spatial, experience.

Within an enactive understanding of human cognition, we propose a view of literary reading as a process of participatory sense-making and of readers as linguistic bodies (Sections 2 and 3). On this basis, we claim that narrative interactions between a reader and a narrating consciousness can be considered as processes of resonance between distinct temporal perspectives; these processes themselves are distributed in time and space (Section 4). To define our understanding of temporality, we review relevant positions on time and temporal experience in philosophy and psychology (Section 5). To support our claim that temporality is enacted in narrative interaction, we examine some of the linguistic literature relating to the expression of temporality in language and in written discourse (Section 6). On the basis of our novel extension of participatory sense-making theory, we provide a typology of paces in the narrative flow and elaborate the proposed theoretical framework on a number of examples taken from English literary fiction (Section 7).

## 2 Enaction and participatory sense-making

Time is the precondition of meaning for organic creatures who act, move, and perceive. This basic truth is particularly salient in the enactive theory of cognition as sense-making (Di Paolo 2009; Di Paolo and Thompson 2014). In this view, meaning arises for living beings who exist as precarious configurations of complexly interdependent material processes. Processes (such as metabolism, sensation-perception routines, or action schemas) unfold at different rates, dynamically affecting and effecting other processes in such a way that forms the operational closure of a living being as an organized system. Simply put, processes run and decay in time. The precariousness that grounds the intrinsic normativity of living creatures (giving us the apt phrase "mind in life," Thompson 2007) stems not merely from external threats or sub-optimal environmental conditions, but also and always from that which we cannot outrun: time.

A living, acting, perceiving creature, as a precarious life form, must balance a basic openness to the world and an agential, that is, asymmetrical, relation to its environment.<sup>1</sup> The enactive theory of participatory sense-making shows that both this openness and this agency are intersubjectively achieved (De Jaegher and Di Paolo 2007). If at the level of ideal theory we can say that an individual organism makes sense by regulating its relations to an environment so as to manage or mitigate precariousness, then when we attempt to engage the intricacies of real-life phenomena we find living beings-in-interaction. Participatory sense-making explains how regulating one's relation to an environment can be, and perhaps mostly is, a joint endeavor unfolding in time. Understanding the technical workings of this perspective is necessary for appreciating the full significance of our claims below.

The central tenet of participatory sense-making is that agents, by enacting their own sense-making, directly and partially constitute the sense-making of other agents. In performing an action, it is often the case that I am serving two distinct and sometimes contradictory orders of normativity: that of my own precarious organization (and its arising needs for adaptive action) and that of an emergent interactive organization, which may be enduring or fleeting, but nonetheless is precariously in-time.

Consider the classic example of two people who, heading somewhere in their office building, find themselves walking towards one another in a narrow corridor. Yvette is trying to get to the printer, and Elinor is trying to get to the water fountain. As the two draw nearer, Yvette acts to avoid a stand-off by stepping to her left. At the same moment, Elinor acts to avoid a stand-off by stepping to her right. At the level of individual action, which we typically understand in terms of intention and planning, either person would describe her movements as "trying to get by" or "trying to allow her to get by." Yet if we attend to the scene as a whole, we see that the acts are also *moves* in a shared space of restricted material possibility. In that particular environment, "coordinated sideways movements conserve symmetry, and symmetry promotes coordinated sideways movements" (De Jaegher and Di Paolo 2007: 493). In other words, when Yvette steps left and Elinor steps right at the same movement, the next available movement for each of them is: Yvette → right, Elinor → left. This round of moves again positions them opposite and blocking each other, rather than going around.

Note that what is happening in the "corridor dance" does not align with the *intention* of either agent, although the steps they take to realize their intentions do contribute to how the interaction unfolds. Rather, interaction dynamics feed on the excess or remainder of moves in a *material* environment (Di Paolo et al. 2017; Di Paolo et al. Forthcoming). The stand-off might not take place if one of the people was running, if one or both were crawling or carrying a wide plank of wood, or if they were walking across a wide field rather than down

a hallway. From the interactive perspective of the encounter, moves in a material environment contribute to a transpersonal or suprapersonal dynamic which is itself a set of sustaining interdependent processes. This dynamic sends feedback to the interactors in the form of influences on their moves and acts. There is thus a *mutual influence* between what the interactors are doing and what the interaction encourages or allows (De Jaegher and Di Paolo 2007: 493–494). Sense-makers in interaction navigate two orders of normativity simultaneously; social agency consists in jointly regulating sense-makers' relation to the interactive order.

### 3 Readers as linguistic bodies engaging in participatory sense-making

The theory of participatory sense-making has come a long way since its introduction in 2007. At that time, the theory marked a particular enactive intervention in an ongoing debate about the nature of social cognition. De Jaegher and Di Paolo (2007) argued that embodied interaction dynamics that arise between sense-making agents *constitute* social cognition (see also the discussion in Auvray and Rohde 2012). This work emerged in conversation with a robust interdisciplinary literature concerning social interaction modeled in terms of agents discovering other agents in perceptual-crossing experiments (Auvray et al. 2009; Rohde and Di Paolo 2008; Di Paolo et al. 2008; Froese and Di Paolo 2008 and 2010). In these experiments, one participant moves a basic avatar (a “minimalist device”) on screen in search of another participant's avatar; encounters with objects (fixed or mobile) or with the other avatar result in the same tactile stimulation. Over a variety of trials, “the perception of another intentional subject” was shown to be “based on properties that are intrinsic to the joint perceptual activity itself” (Auvray et al. 2009: 79); that is, when both parties search for each other, a pattern emerges that allows participants to differentiate between encounters with another perceiving subject as opposed to with a (moving) object. For interactionist enactivists like De Jaegher and Di Paolo, perceptual-crossing studies demonstrated that embodiment, embeddedness, and agency are “necessary ingredients for the emergence of coordination” (Auvray and Rohde 2012: 11) in social interactions, while others interpreted the experiments to emphasize individual strategies within interaction contexts (Michael 2011; Michael and Overgaard 2012).

It should be noted that participatory sense-making as a theory aims to shift “the onus of social understanding” away from the individual. The original paper's goal is to “reframe the problem of social cognition as that of how meaning is generated and transformed in the interplay between the unfolding interaction process and the individuals engaged in it” (De Jaegher and Di Paolo 2007: 485). It is this particular aspect of the theory that is of crucial importance for its extension in the context that we are proposing in this article. In other words, this theory is meant to and can do more than explain the self-organization of multi-agent systems. Participatory sense-making provides a rich framework for understanding how humans participate in each other's sense-making in direct and indirect ways. In recent years the theory has found many diverse applications — for example, in work on autism (De Jaegher 2013), musicology and music teaching (Loaiza 2016; Van der Schyff 2016), and education (Towers and Martin 2015; Maiese 2015).

One innovation that is of particular relevance to the present proposal sources the dialectical foundations of participatory sense-making to articulate a theory of the logical and developmental emergence of *linguistic bodies*. According to Di Paolo et al. Forthcoming, participatory sense-makers who deal in dialogical acts, i.e., who co-regulate relations to shared environments through utterances, are “linguistic bodies.” Linguistic bodies form themselves in time, as structured flows of dialogical acts become self-directed.

On this account, *dialogue*, itself an outcome of more basic joint-action solutions to more basic interactional tensions, enables a new level of reflective awareness *vis-a-vis* participation in a mutually influential interaction dynamic. Participating in a dialogue entails participating in a temporal organization and distribution of roles within an episode of co-regulation. This level of participatory sense-making affords a kind of self- and other-recognition not previously possible or required (for example, in the perceptual-crossing experiments). Participating in social acts of a turn-taking nature reveals participants as such; it also facilitates a distanced or reflexive perspective, as specific acts-upon-utterances such as critique, revision, or interruption are applied to one's self in the course of navigating the tensions between individual and interactive normative orders (discussed in Section 2). This reflexive self-management is the practice of agency at the level of linguistic sense-making. In other words, a special kind of social agency is enacted in languaging.

We suggest that this conceptual development in participatory sense-making theory opens up new possibilities for understanding more complex and spatially and temporally distributed forms of social interaction, including narrative interactions. Froese and Di Paolo (2011): 23 observe that:

[...] for an action to be social it has to be a joint action. Of course, this does not say anything about the way in which this joint effort is actually accomplished. It could involve roles that are relatively synchronous in their realization (e.g., some forms of dancing), or they could be complementary in an asymmetrical manner (e.g., the act of giving, which must involve offering and accepting).

What we wish to explore is how asymmetrical this joint effort can be while remaining a joint effort? How much pause can there be in a dialogue before it ceases to be such? Does storytelling have a dialogical, participatory structure? What is the nature of the interaction between a reader and a narrator? Froese and Di Paolo continue: “The essential factor is that the unfolding of the sensorimotor interaction is co-regulated, because it is this interactively coordinated regulation of interaction that imbues the situation with a social quality” (Froese and Di Paolo 2011: 23).

Of course, a text is not itself an embodied cognitive agent.<sup>2</sup> But it would be too hasty, we think, to disregard the uniqueness of textual engagements on this basis. To do so would be to disregard the special sensitivities and powers that linguistic bodies have when it comes to utterances, perspective-taking, and role-inhabiting. In what follows, we suggest that linguistic bodies read fictional narratives as one of many engagements of their inherently intersubjective, participatory, dialogical agency. In reading a narrative one necessarily comes to recognize other forms of agency, such as a storyteller’s, via the temporal dynamics of interacting with a text.

## 4 Narrative interactions

Popova (2014 and 2015) presents reading a fictional narrative as an act of participatory sense-making between a reader and an enacted narratorial consciousness, where the latter is defined as a textually emerging storyteller or storytelling agency. Such a claim entails that reading a narrative also involves the navigation of multiple orders of normativity and thus gives rise to a situation of mutual influence between interaction dynamic and interactors’ sense-making. Building on this idea, we propose that the linguistic markers of this navigation can be found by attending carefully to shifts in temporality in the narrative unfolding. Analyzing temporality and asymmetry as key constituents of interactional agency sheds important light on the changes in meaning that take place across strange distances of time and space when one person opens a book to read the words of another.

In thinking about narrative, we find it important to note that participatory sense-making can enhance stability or precariousness; it selects and holds certain patterns or processes as available for agents for some period of time. Participatory sense-making *reduces without eliminating* a sense-maker’s agency, which means that it changes and forms the meaning of an experience for a participant. Such modulations of asymmetry and changes in interactional affordances of agency are just what we suggest constitutes narrative experience; reading a written narrative is a form of actively letting go in our linguistic engagements, submitting to the temporalities imposed by another.

It may seem counterintuitive to posit a bidirectional influence, that is, a true social interaction or true participatory sense-making obtaining between a human being (the reader) and a thing (the text). A reader can shut and discard a book that bores her, but she cannot change the book’s contents. How could this constitute participatory sense-making?

Our claim is offered as a novel and experimental expansion of participatory sense-making because we are suggesting that a mutual (if asymmetric) influence unfolds *in time* between a reader and a teller, whose presence arises as the reader engages with the text. Both a fiction teller and a fiction reader depend on the possibility of an unexplored mode of participatory sense-making that is delayed in time, yet depends on enacting temporality. Consider that in writing, the author selects and *orders* events for some reader. In doing so, she *anticipates* a reader being directed by these linguistic cues of temporal displacement (about which we say more in Section 6), and this anticipation leads her to make certain choices about the course of narrated events. Keeping in mind the model of a dialogue displaced in time (discussed in Section 3), we can understand the author’s sense-making being guided by a future reader. It is (perhaps trivially) true that the reader does not rewrite the sentences of the book as she reads it; if we take a distributed temporal perspective, however, we can appreciate an interactive exchange that takes place between teller and reader, a flow of narratorial consciousness that emerges as the reader enacts specific textual cues. This position should not be taken to mean, however, that the reader is the sole mediating agency through which a predetermined text is brought into existence, as some versions of reader-response criticism have maintained (e.g., Iser 1978). We propose that in literary experience sense-making cannot be analyzed outside of an interactional dynamics arising between a given reader and the text.

Readers, in turn, can assume authorial agency. Although the text is, in a strict sense, an artifact, it is not an object like a coffee machine, one with simple and limited affordances like ‘boil water,’ ‘brew coffee,’ ‘on,’ ‘off,’ etc.<sup>3</sup> The reader experiences the text as issuing from and performing the role of an emergent and responsive agency. Readers interact with this agency in various ways. They participate in and anticipate the text’s unfolding; they adjust to the narratorial pace; they predict events and outcomes, and continually test and revise expectations. In the experience of opening to a dialogue with a text, in submitting her agency to the guidance of another, the reader’s sense-making is co-authored. Especially, her experience of the temporal flow or pacing of

events is not of her own making, but emerges out of an active-passive dialectic encounter (or a dialogue) with the text. Temporality, as we analyze in Section 7, demonstrates the agentive effects the text enacts on a reader.

## 5 Lived time: Human temporality in philosophy and psychology

What do we mean by temporality? As noted in the introduction, time is a difficult and controversial topic. The fundamental points of disagreement in the study of time concern ontology, namely distinguishing between time as it is in itself (i.e., a measurable quantity of some kind) and time as we, human beings, perceive and experience it (i.e., time as a certain value or quality). Another way of formulating the same distinction is to view time as an objective feature of the physical world, on the one hand, and as a feature of human experience, on the other. Without going into much detail it can be stated that certain strands of modern science (particularly, cosmology and quantum physics) question some of the fundamental phenomenological givens of human temporal experience, such as the directionality of time, the passage of time, and, even, the very existence of time.<sup>4</sup> The question of the ontology of time thus leads to the paradox of what Ricoeur calls “the being and the nonbeing of time” (Ricoeur 1984: 7).

In the philosophical literature, this paradoxical nature of time (as either a characteristic of objective reality or a feature of human experience) is known under various names. Ricoeur differentiates between “cosmological time” or “time of the world,” and “felt” or “lived” time (Ricoeur 1984; Ricoeur 1988), while Husserl (1991) sets apart “transcendent time” or the time of external objects and “immanent time” or the internal time of mental acts. The scientific view that accepts time as a feature of the world (as in classical and relativistic physics) still defines it as a quasi-spatial dimension.<sup>5</sup> It can be argued, however, that time can be understood in this way only if we erase the observer, while lived time is always measurable to or for someone. One cannot have a 3rd person perspective on lived time; or, to put it differently, a purely physicalist account of time (i.e., time as an absolute ordering of events) cannot replace a view of time as experienced (i.e., relative to a perspective). For the purposes of this discussion, we will concentrate on some aspects of qualitative time, i.e., of time as a feature of human experience. Worldly events can be measured by clocks and can be experienced as long-lasting or short-lived only because we do experience the present moment, duration, simultaneity, and so on in our subjective life. To that extent, we argue that the psychological reality of time is existentially primary and, to a large extent, experientially undeniable.<sup>6</sup>

Numerous aspects of conscious time experience have been studied by psychology, such as simultaneity, succession, the perceived present, and duration.<sup>7</sup> Here, we will briefly single out two such fundamental aspects of time experience, namely duration and the perceived present moment (or the *nowness* of experience). Both of these aspects of temporality are directly relevant to the discussion of narrative interactions in Section 7. When we look through the window of a moving train and see the landscape flowing by, it appears uninterrupted. If we listen to a melody, we are not aware of each note as an individual occurrence; we hear each note as it flows into the next. In other words, we experience continuity and duration and that is why many philosophers and psychologists, from James to Bergson, Husserl, and others have argued that human consciousness is essentially temporal in nature.

For many thinkers, the present moment has a privileged position in conscious experience. This is because we can remember the past and anticipate the future but our direct experience is strictly confined to the present. However, this essential feature of our experience gives rise to a problem. Change and succession all take time; they unfold over temporal intervals of various duration. So, how can we be aware of change and duration if our conscious awareness is confined to the present? Augustine (XI, 22: 26) suggests that it is wrong to think of three times: past, present, and future. Instead, it might be correctly said that there is a “threefold present:” “a time present of things past (memory), a time present of things present (direct experience), and a time present of things future (expectation).”

Other ways to resolve this paradox have been suggested, namely, by viewing the “present moment of experience” as not merely momentary, a dimensionless point, but as possessing enough temporal depth to accommodate the change and succession that we encounter in immediate experience. This extended temporal depth is known by various names: Husserl (1991) called it “original temporal field” or “the living present,” James called it “the specious present” (James 1890). Thus, famously, conscious awareness for Husserl consists of a momentary experience (listening to a tone), which he calls “primal impression” but also a concurrent presentation of the just-passed phases of the tone (“retentions” or “primary memories”) and anticipations (“protentions”) of the future phases. Retentions are distinct from recollections (also called “secondary memories” or “re-presentations”) due to the volitional nature of the act of recall in the latter (see Husserl 1991: 42–43, 49–50). The flow or succession of consciousness consists of the current primal impression being replaced continually by a new primal impression, in a constant process of renewal or becoming. In other words, we live in a con-

tinually renewed present, but we are also aware of what has just passed and anticipate that there will be more to come. In this way, constant becoming, or lived duration, constitutes an indelible aspect of human temporal experience.

According to Husserl 1991: 94), the flow of consciousness that constitutes time experience is *intentional*, or aimed at the world, which means that a given object of experience and the flow of consciousness are mutually dependent. Intentionality is a core concept of phenomenology and stands for the conscious relationship we have to an object in the very act of experience (Sokolowski 2000: 8). For Husserl and James, therefore, we are able to experience something like a specious present, a temporally extended, sensed content, only because there is inherent temporality in the act of consciousness itself. Time psychologists, e.g., Ernst Pöppel (1989), maintain a similar relational view whereby external reality (e.g., a temporally extended object) and the flow of conscious experience are mutually constituted. On the one hand, experiencing time is a manifestation of how the world reveals itself always incompletely, as Husserl will say; on the other, it suggests that the content of experience is necessarily made up of temporal objects: things that take time (events) or endure through time (objects).<sup>8</sup>

It is important to note one more feature of consciousness that bears directly on the structure of narrative in general and on narrative temporality in particular. As already noted, on a phenomenological understanding of time, temporal awareness underlies every aspect of conscious life. A notable feature of conscious awareness, first discussed by James (1890), is the dynamism inherent in the flow of conscious experience itself. James describes it in terms of the “different pace” of the parts in the stream of conscious experience: “like a bird’s life, it seems to be made of an alternation of flights and perchings” (*ibid.*: 243). As we will argue in Section 7, narrative interactions are based on similar moments of alternating periods of flight and rest, of acceleration and deceleration, in the process of reading. Importantly, as we will demonstrate, these alterations are linguistically traceable in temporal terms.

To sum up, human phenomenology of perception implies a phenomenology of time (see also Zlatev, this volume, Section 4.2). For our purposes here, we note that the very possibility of an enactive engagement with the experienced lifeworld requires also a phenomenological, enactive view of temporality. This means that human time is best viewed as *tensed* time, that is, as always relative to a given perspective and situated in the flow of felt time. Tensed time, when expressed through linguistic means (discussed in Section 6), goes beyond the dynamic protentional/retentional model outlined by Husserl, as it involves much larger and often nested time scales. At a basic pragmatic level, human action implicitly relies on a notion of tensed time because any intentional action incorporates its own inherent temporality, which goes beyond Husserl’s model of time consciousness. As Heidegger has put it, Being-in-the-world and any action this involves is always “ahead-of-itself” (1962: 236), anticipating what comes beyond its outcome. We are always beyond the present moment to various degrees, yet also coupled with it through past experiences. No action ever begins from nothing but always already stands against a background of prior circumstances and previous events. Such an extended, macro-level of human temporality, characteristic of human lived experience, is further articulated in the narrative form itself, when linguistically expressed.<sup>9</sup>

As we will argue in Section 7, the effort of engaging with a book unfolds in real time for the reader but includes a constant maintaining and updating of events and situations distributed in multiple orders of temporality, i.e., being tensed with respect to each other. Such engagement requires an enactive participation in the duration of the textual unfolding itself, much like the unfolding of time in lived experience. As human cognitive life presupposes an evolving and complex dialectic of past, future, and current moments, so too in reading do we update the present against the flow of experience that is narrative time. Various theorists have put forward psychological descriptions of this process. Merlin Donald (2007) has proposed a hypothetical *slow process*, running at the background of human cognition, and distinct from the faster sensorimotor processes that result from direct perception. Roman Ingarden speaks of *active memory*, as a special mode of consciousness that condenses and updates the events within a given temporal perspective, so that they get structured in the flow of reading. One relevant characteristic of these two notions is that they offer a linear conception of time: duration is seen as a temporal extension that grows cumulatively as new events get added to the old.

Narrative time, as we understand it here, is captured by a very different insight into the notion of *duration* itself. For Henri Bergson (Bergson 1911/1998: 4), lived duration is never linear, “not merely one instant replacing another [...] Duration is the continual progress of the past which gnaws into the future and which swells up as it advances.” Lived duration, in other words, is made up of conscious states of temporal perspectives that are not merely unfolding in a linear manner but are continually interpenetrating and changing each other. It is this conception of time as continuous multiplicity, as a dynamic non-linear flow, that best captures the participatory nature of time experience in reading a story. Language allows much more nuance and sophistication in the articulation of some of these temporal aspects and we turn next to a brief explication of how linguistic theory has dealt with addressing time experience.

## 6 Linguistic theory and its take on temporality

It would be surprising if a category so fundamental to human cognition as time had not found expression in language. Indeed, language can be shown to further refine and fine-tune the experience of temporality. One level of expressing time in language is the very distinction between nouns and verbs as linguistic categories, common to all known languages. The nominal element, or the noun, regularly names something that remains permanent in different contexts, i.e., it is experienced as time-stable. The verb, on the other hand, most commonly expresses a phenomenal element proper to the particular occasion of speech and is therefore linked to a specific temporal perspective. The fact that temporality inheres in the very semantics of linguistic classes is a fact noted by linguists from various theoretical schools.<sup>10</sup>

As noted in Section 5, a phenomenological understanding of time involves a temporal “depth” of experience (a perceived present) and a lived duration that includes a past and a future, both of which are understood in relation to the given here-and-now situation of a speaking subject. This position is therefore perspectival (ego-centric or subjective) and stands in opposition to an objective, i.e., non-perspectival, view of temporality. In linguistics, this latter distinction constitutes the basis for the grammatical category of *tense*, expressed commonly by morphological markers of the finite verb. Tense constitutes one of multiple ways of expressing temporality in language, however. These include grammatical categories, such as tense and aspect, inherent temporal features of the verb, complex verb clusters, temporal particles and adverbials, and many others (Klein 1994: 14).

Tense is traditionally taken to “localize” an event in time in relation to the moment of speech and is therefore always relational and deictic. In Fleischman’s succinct definition, tense is “the grammaticalization of a location in time” (1990: 15). Aspect, on the other hand, is not concerned with relating the time of a described situation to the moment of speech. Rather, it allows the speaker to think of an event or a process in various ways: as completed or not, as seen synthetically (from outside) or not, as singular or iterative, as synchronous to the time of speech, etc.<sup>11</sup> A third category, *Aktionsarten*, often serves as an additional lexical way to express the strictly grammatical category of aspect: the fact that certain actions and events have natural end points (such as the property of *telicity*, as in *find* or *succeed*), while others don’t (such as *atelicity*, as in *know* or *believe*). This latter category is often called *lexical aspect* (Fleischman 1990: 20).

When participating in a language exchange, such as reading a narrative, readers need to control and interconnect at least two frames of temporal reference: those relating to the specifics of the act of utterance itself (temporal deixis, or time of utterance) and those relating to the content of what is being said (conceived time, or time of event). Making sense of time linguistically thus involves the ability to position and coordinate one’s own time experience with that of what is going on around in real or imagined situations. We take temporal displacement (being able to distinguish between past or future events and the moment of speech) and an ability to handle coordination of different orders of temporality related to content as constitutive of an understanding of temporality that is linguistically expressible. Crucially, such an understanding of temporality is not simply subjective but involves the temporal positioning of a language user in relation to others. As any human activity that takes place in time, the subjective position of a speaker is tensed in relation to the ongoing action of others and the world. The speaker’s time thus becomes a reference point for other subjectivities joined in any linguistic exchange and it is from this reference point that various orders of content time also get their meaning.

What we argue is that language, through the primary grammatical means of tense and aspect (at least, in English), allows human time-experience to be both more and less refined in the course of interaction. This is an enactive understanding of temporality that goes against a recently proposed view of temporality as modality, expressive of a speaker’s construal of a temporally described situation purely in modal terms: as either certain (present), probable (future), or in some way uncertain (past) (see Jaszczolt 2009). On this view modality is a more basic concept than temporality, providing the basic conceptual blocks of the concept of time itself. Instead, we have argued for the primacy of time as an experiential notion, based on the flow of time as understood by Husserl, which, in turn, finds its expression in grammatical temporal forms such as, e.g., tense and aspect.

Before we move to an analysis of specific cases of narrative temporality, we would like to mention a particular role played by the use of tense in narrative understanding. In most languages, the present is a tense used to describe rather than to narrate, narration being a verbal activity for which the dynamic past is better suited. This is because narration is most commonly understood as a presentation of experience viewed from a retrospective vantage point. Experience does not occur in narrative form; the choice of particular events and their order of presentation constitutes the “configurational role” played by narrative itself, as noted by Ricoeur (1984: 155–161). But in some contemporary English fiction, the chosen narration often is entirely in the present tense. It can be argued that as possible tenses of narration, the present and the past contrive in different ways to link the narrator’s (and therefore the reader’s) world to that of the story. While the past is used to report on events (as if from a distance, the present, a tense conventionally used for conversation (e.g., actual speech) enables narrators to represent directly what they profess to observe. For this reason this kind of tense usage is deemed by many to be more vivid and immediate (Chafe 1994: 208; Fleischman 1990: 59). In terms of the reader’s experience, the use

of the present can be seen as allowing a more immediate way to participate in the events described. We argue that, instead, the use of the present tense creates additional work for the reader, as she needs to navigate the temporal unfolding of the events, often switching back and forth between habituality and uniqueness. Passage (1) shows one such example, where direct perception and habituality appear to vie to represent the narrator's temporal viewpoint.

(1)

She lives to see the century turn. She lives still. It's a Saturday morning in early March, and her grandson Michel collects her from her flat and walks her through the Jardin des Plantes. Frost glimmers in the air, and Marie-Laure shuffles along with the ball of her cane out in front and her thin hair blown to one side and the leafless canopies of the trees drifting overhead.... No one else here: too cold or too early or both.

"You'll be twelve next Saturday, won't you, Michel?"

"Finally." (Doerr 2014: 527)

Framed by an atelic verb *live* and its imperfective aspect, the present tense used in this passage can be read as indicating habituality. The events in the park could be regular events happening over many weeks or even years. It is only with the initiation of direct speech that a unique temporal reference is eventually established. This is because, as noted by linguists (see Fleischman 1990: 34), "the range of temporal references that the present tense can have is greater than that of any other tense category." Such a range of possibilities necessitates choice and inevitably creates a certain level of difficulty for the reader of this kind of fiction. In one sense, then, the use of the present in the passage above and in many instances in contemporary English fiction remains timeless, or "inherently unmarked for time" (*ibid.*: 34), while, as we argued in Section 5, an enactive understanding of temporality assumes a specific temporal perspective. A participatory narrative experience requires the reader to know whether what is being narrated is a singular or a repeated series of events. Perhaps the deictic quality of the past tense contributes to the fact that it still remains the default tense of narration. Similarly, "now" or "the present moment" can expand from *this hour* to *this hour* or to *this year*, as long as it remains shared among participants. Most importantly, it is through bringing our own present moment in resonance with the narrator's that a given narrative brings us into its own temporal world. As Tallis has rightly noted, *now* may be indexical but never private to the speaker. Space does not require the same degree of participation and hence, we say: *I am here*, but *It is now* (Tallis 2017: 304). Tensed temporality is shared temporality.

## 7 Studies in pacing and immersion

Narratives depend on time as probably no other written form does. The very definition of narrative as "the representation of real or fictive events by one or more narrators to one or more narratees" (Prince 2003: 58) already presupposes a degree of congruence between time and the narrative form itself. As Ricoeur (1984: 3) has aptly put it, "the world unfolded by every narrative work is always a temporal world [...] narrative in turn is meaningful to the extent that it portrays the features of temporal experience." The main question of interest for us here is how readers experience literary works from a temporal point of view.

When thinking about our temporal experience as readers, it is useful to keep in mind the already mentioned congruence between the process of reading and our ordinary experience of lived time. For example, we have access to a story only in a series of temporally extended acts, present moments of a kind, so that its successive parts become the phases of reading. The phases read earlier remain always subject to some modification of temporal and causal perspective as we progress with the reading. Just as the present moment of experience is phenomenologically distinct from something recalled from memory, we experience the present moment of reading as different from something we read at the beginning of the novel we are currently engrossed in. In addition, as discussed previously, the present moment never exists in isolation but is bound up in lived duration with many facts and experiences of a recent, as well as more distant, past. Similarly, in reading we relate our present moment(s) of reading with phases of the story preceding it, so that individual events and episodes get connected, even in longer literary works.

Roman Ingarden noted that each phase of the experience of a literary work of art can be related to a specific temporal perspective towards the events described. From a phenomenological perspective, the same is true for memory. As we consider and represent various events from a distant past, we can do so in distinct temporal ways: we can be situated proximally to the events described and thus represent them in detail or we may summarize them briefly and selectively, leaving out some details. The temporal perspectives available to memory underlie the temporality employed in the telling of stories. There are two main ways to narrate past processes:

[...] either we apprehend a whole temporal interval and what happened in it from the standpoint of our actual present in a single act of remembering, all at once [...] or else we transport ourselves in memory

back to the beginning of the period in question and, in the process of remembering, progress as it were simultaneously with the remembered period by calling to mind the successive events and processes phase by phase. (Ingarden 1973: 110)

These two main ways of remembering result in two main types of temporal perspective, available to storytellers: distal and proximal. Wallace Chafe (1994), a linguist, has theorized this same distinction in terms of what he calls “displacements” of consciousness: the immediate conversational mode of telling, a product of “extroverted consciousness” on the one hand, and the displaced narrative mode, a product of memory or “introverted consciousness,” on the other. It is of interest that narratives, and often ordinary conversations as well, are dominated by displaced modes. People rarely tell stories about the future, hardly ever about what is happening now or is immediately available, and most commonly about what is already past. This is perhaps due to the fact that through the act of remembering the past we tend to distance ourselves from it, to re-configure it in some way, as Ricoeur would say.

Crucially, time in narrative mirrors the flow of time in consciousness and, as noted before, the oscillating pace of the parts of conscious experience translates into the pace of narrative time itself. In other words, consciousness alternates between immediacy and displacement, between what is perceived and remembered or imagined, just as narratives unfold in dynamic temporal frames, where one focus of active information is continually replaced by another.

Ingarden points out that “the most obvious phenomenon of temporal perspective is the abbreviation of temporal phases” (1973: 109) and that such abbreviation can be to a greater or lesser extent. In other words, it is the teller’s decision what to present proximally and what distally, whether to tell a scene in its unique temporal unfolding or as a distant summary. In classical narratology (Stanzel, 1984; Genette, 1980), the encoding of a narratorial point of view is theorized via three specific categories: Person, Mode, and Perspective. Both for Stanzel (1984) and Genette (1980), temporal perspective is seen as a matter of mode (which is also, linguistically, a form of deixis): does the narrator adopt a retrospective or a synchronous temporal position in relation to the events? But classical structuralist models, such as those mentioned, are static models that do not seek to account for the dynamic flow of consciousness and the process of lived duration, as characterized by Bergson and Husserl and discussed earlier.

Narrative is a dynamic process, a whole that changes over time and, hence, possesses an explicit temporal contour. A reader enacts the changing temporal positioning of a narratorial consciousness in order to make sense of the story dynamically. As argued in Sections 2–4, participatory sense-making presupposes a dynamic interplay between teller and reader, which transcends previous text-based or reader-based approaches to literary interactions. So, how does the flow of narrative temporalities influence the experience of a reader? Is there a way to explain this without falling back into static, individualist models of narrative understanding?

By answering this question, we can begin to explain why summaries in novels carry less emotional and cognitive weight, in comparison to scenes that mimic a naturally occurring flow of events. In summaries, when a course of events is rushed through (like in a report), the focus of the narrating consciousness is experienced as external to the events and therefore temporally distal from them. There is no immediate temporal experience here, just a summary of a distant past. We call this particular way of telling an *accelerated temporal perspective*. In contrast, in a scene, the narrating consciousness is part of the narrative world, and the temporal perspective is internal to that world: that of an imaginary observer or participant. There is no time lapse felt between the telling and the events described: the past tense feels like an illusory present. Importantly, the present moment of reading feels experientially to coincide with the unfolding events. We call this latter time perspective, a *synchronous temporal perspective or flow*. Passages (2) and (3) show examples of accelerated and synchronous time perspectives, respectively.

(2)

Old Mister Pontifex had married in the year 1750, but for fifteen years his wife bore no children. At the end of that time Mrs Pontifex astonished the whole village by showing unmistakable signs of a disposition to present her husband with a heir or heiress. [...] The boy grew up into a sturdy bright-eyed little fellow. (Butler 1903/1994: 5)

(3)

Ramon went into his room and closed the window-doors and the shutters, till it was quite dark, save for yellow pencils of light that stood like sun patches on the darkness, from the cracks of the shutters. He took off his clothes, and in the darkness thrust his clenched fists upwards above his head, in a terrible tension of stretched, upright prayer. [...] He picked up a thin, fine blanket, wrapped it around him, and lay down on the pile of mats on the floor. In an instant he was asleep. (Lawrence 1926/1995: 150)

A related question that can be addressed in this context is whether written narrative, which, as we have argued, requires by default an extended temporal perspective (i.e. one that is either accelerated or decelerated),

can present in verbal form a notion of the “specious present?” Can the verbal medium, in other words, slow down the passage of time? We propose that in some particular instances it can and call this particular temporal perspective a *decelerated temporal perspective*. Passage (4) is one such example.

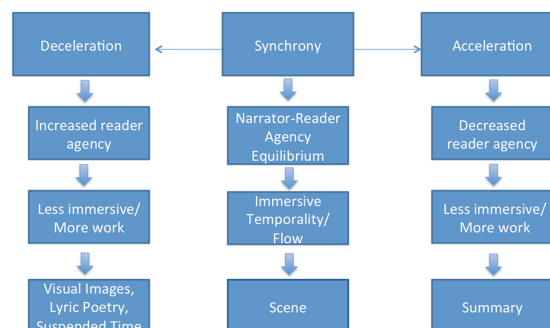
(4)

He saw partly on the ceiling and partly on the wall the moving shadow of an arm with a clenched hand holding a carving knife. It flickered up and down. Its movements were leisurely. They were leisurely enough for Mr Verloc to recognise the limb and the weapon.

They were leisurely enough for him to take in the full meaning of the portent, and to taste the flavour of death rising in his gorge. His wife had gone raving mad – murdering mad. They were leisurely enough for the first paralysing effect of this discovery to pass away before a resolute determination to come out victorious from the ghastly struggle with that armed lunatic. They were leisurely enough for Mr Verloc to elaborate a plan of defense involving a dash behind the table, and the felling of the woman to the ground with a heavy wooden chair. But they were not leisurely enough to allow Mr Verloc the time to move either hand or foot. The knife was already planted in his breast. (Conrad 1907/2002: 192–193)

This passage presents an event that should have taken just a moment to happen but, instead, takes nine long sentences to illustrate. The reader is slowed down, just as the main character, Mr Verloc, is, and is not able to comprehend what is happening. The repetitions emphasize the impression of there being enough time for elaboration, whether of the character’s subjective feelings or plans of escape. The reader is carried along with the syntactic pattern much further than she might have expected and by the time she reads the last but one utterance, she understands the relevance of this effect, since “[t]he knife was already planted in his breast.” The reader never witnesses the strike itself: the moment of a deadly blow has occurred at some point already, in the midst of Verloc’s thoughts. A crucial event from the plot of the novel has been taken out of the flow of time.

We have argued that analyzing pacing or temporal representation in a story offers a new way to explore participatory sense-making in narrative interactions. This intersubjectively constituted narrative experience bears similarity to the notion of “immersion,” used traditionally to characterize reader experience in relation to literary fiction or other forms of art. Existing approaches, such as Zwaan’s *Immersed Experiencer Framework* (2004), suggest that immersion works by simulating perceptual experiences in the reader. We posit, instead, that one significant way for immersion to work is by effecting modifications of reader agency during reading. Modifications of reader agency are elicited by accelerations or decelerations in the pacing of the text. When immersed or “in-sync” with the temporal flow of narration, modulations in interactive agency remain implicit and not noticed. This happens during scenes where the step-by-step coordination of a temporal unfolding creates a sense of immediacy, as in (3). In cases of deceleration, like example (4), the reader has to work back to equilibrium in order to make sense of the text: this results in less immersion. This is because a drastic shift in temporal flow increases the need for reader agency, as well as the felt time for the reader to fill in. In accelerated portions of narrative text, such as summaries as in (2), the reader feels less agency over the unfolding pace of the narrative. This is because a whole (usually, rather large) temporal interval is presented all at once, in a single act of remembering. This often involves iterative tense use, multiplicity of events taking place not consecutively but at different times, a multitude of temporal perspectives, all of which have to be fitted in a time frame by the reader. Figure 1 below summarizes the cases of narrative pacing we have discussed and their relation to reader immersion.



**Figure 1:** Pacing in narrative. The figure summarizes three aspects of temporally experienced narrative unfolding (pacing) and their respective effects on reader immersion.

Reading is an effortful engagement with a book, a process unfolding consecutively. Yet, the temporality of fictional narrative is not just about chronology. The reader goes not through a series of logical steps but, as we have argued, a particular temporal rhythm of accelerations and decelerations. Like the experience of lived time itself, temporal perspective in a narrative is not and cannot be of the same intensity or stay continually

the same. It alternates between being implicit and explicit all the time. In other words, it follows “the flights and perchings” of consciousness itself. Example (5) foregrounds the experientiality of narrative in a temporal sense, as it demands from the reader an adjustment to the change in temporal flow from habitual past to a more remote past, back to the “current” moment of narration.

(5)

She would sit and read, the book under the waver of light. She would glance now and then down the hall of the villa that had been a war hospital, where she had lived with the other nurses before they had all transferred out gradually, the war moving north, the war almost over.

This was the time in her life that she fell upon books as the only door out of her cell. They became half her world. (Ondatjee 1992: 6–7)

These quick and abrupt tense shifts in the reader’s temporal positioning showcase the powerful unpredictability of interacting with a narratorial consciousness, which is the source of meaning for the reader. Narrative experience results from this form of shared agency, a constant attunement to the assumed agency of another (see Popova 2015: 84). The effort of engaging with a book unfolds in real-time for readers, who interact dynamically with the work while necessarily maintaining and updating a coherent narrative experience. Changes in narrative pace are points when agency shifts between reader and narrator without any party giving up full agency. The modulations in pace are often implicit, yet when a stop or a change in the flow occurs, the reader is faced with the unexpected, almost visceral, clash between her own projections and what the narrative imposes on her at this particular moment in time. Time experience then enters the reader’s awareness in an explicit manner, as the tension of participatory sense-making in the form of interactional asymmetry, and forces her to directly perceive, if not the described actions and events themselves, then at least the manner of their temporal unfolding.

## 8 Conclusion

What we have proposed in this paper is that narrative requires a temporal perspective, a participatory unity of consciousness, that of the teller, and that of the reader — a way of connecting not just cumulatively but enactively with the continuity of what is being narrated. Moreover, we have suggested that enacting the narrative pace revealed through the modulation of temporal perspectives of a given story, as discussed, supplements and perhaps even replaces the need for theorizing about simulation of spatial situatedness for immersion effects. How does this interactive dimension of reading work with the continual alternation between what we are reading at the present moment and the memory that we have of what has gone on before? In other words, how can we theorize the process of lived duration in relation to narrative interactions? We have suggested that narrative experience is not a moving flashlight illuminating successive events and situations but a rhythm of continual modulations of time. The dynamics of conscious engagement with a story requires a constant back and forth between memories of what has happened earlier and current perceptions of the text, as well as personal experiences for the reader that the work brings up. Linguistic markers of temporality indicate and articulate such complex time experiences.

We suggest that a careful consideration of participatory sense-making reveals the explanatory need for a richer temporality than simple linear unfolding. Temporal patterns, both dialogic (retention/protection requiring) and durational (complex and cumulative), emerge and hold sway in a state of mutual influence between an emergent interactive autonomy and the sense-making normativities of each participant. Such patterning has yet to be explored in relation to participatory sense-making that is distributed in time, as in reading a narrative. Our taxonomy of paces elaborates the temporal dimension of interactional patterns that realize social agency and it raises an empirical challenge of identifying the intersubjective and non-linear processes that afford this kind of distributed attentional effort.

## Notes

1 For an operational enactive definition of agency, see Barandarian et al. (2009), who propose that to be called “agential:” “(i) a system must define its own individuality (identity), (ii) it must be the active source of activity in relation to its environment (interaction asymmetry), and (iii) it must regulate this activity in relation to certain norms (normativity)”.

2 Froese (2014) places a strict organismic embodiment requirement on agency and suggests that all technological pieces of apparatus that have agent-like qualities be seen as “interfaces” for human agents. We understand the logic of the argument but do not see works of narrative storytelling as interfaces, for reasons discussed in Section 4.

- 3 David Herman (2008), a cognitive narratologist, has compared textual designs to affordances, similar to those provided by a coffee machine. See also the related discussion in Popova (2015): 75
- 4 For a useful review of some of these theories, see Bigelow (2013): 151–166.
- 5 For a spirited argument against space-like notions of time, see Tallis (2017): 34–43.
- 6 This is very much a Kantian position, where time is considered a precondition, a form of inner intuition, that imposes order on the flux of experience. It is also a phenomenological position, stressing the point that time is not simply an object or a given fact of the world and maintaining the undeniable relationship between time awareness and consciousness, best epitomized in Heidegger (2008): 197 well-known statement that “Dasein itself [ ... ] is time.”
- 7 The psychology of time has distinctly different aims and methods from the philosophy of time. Thus, it passes over questions of ontology, such as what time is or what is the nature of the human notion of time. Its aims are, rather, to understand how people react and adapt to the temporal conditions of their lives. See Fraisse (1963: 10).
- 8 The protentional/retentional structure of consciousness, proposed by Husserl, has been studied by psychologists and neuropsychologists and estimated to have a duration of about 0.5 to 3 seconds (see Pöppel 1988; Varela 1999). This range of values corresponds phenomenologically to the experienced “present moment” and varies among subjects due to, for example, age, fatigue, and context.
- 9 Varela (1999: 116) calls this scale of time processing “the scale of descriptive-narrative assessments,” which constitute broader temporal horizons.
- 10 Givon (1979) discusses at some length how temporal stability is manifested in language at the cognitive-lexical and cognitive-grammatical levels. For a related discussion, see Popova (2007). For the centrality of time and space in relation to the conceptual characterization of verbs and nouns, see Langacker (2012).
- 11 There is some controversy around the use of the term *aspect* and its applications, particularly regarding specific language groups. For our purposes here, looking exclusively at forms of written English, it is sufficient to mention the most prominent aspectual opposition of *perfective/imperfective*. This contrast captures a description of an event as either punctual and complete, or as durative and iterative, respectively (see Fleischman 1990: 19).

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