[The following material is the typescript version of responses written for the forthcoming volume *Narratology: Five Questions*, edited by Peer F. Bundgaard, Henrik Skov Nielsen, and Frederik Stjernfelt (Copenhagen: Automatic Press, 2011). Contributors to this volume were asked to respond to five, pre-established questions and, in the process, describe their perspective on key issues in the field as well as how their own research relates to those issues.

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### Responses by David Herman for the 5 Questions Volume:

## 1) Why were you initially drawn to narratology or narrative theory? and 2) What do you consider your most important contribution(s) to the field?

Taking these first two questions together, I begin my reply with a rather odd narrative--an autobiographical tale that features a kind of backwards chronology. When I was a doctoral student (in the late 1980s and early 1990s), poststructuralism was the dominant paradigm for critical theory. While studying poststructuralist theorists like Derrida, Lyotard, and others, I thought that it might be important to go back and study the structuralists against whom the poststructuralists were reacting. In this way, I found out about narratology. At the same time, I began to read some of the scholarship of Gerald Prince, who helped introduce narratology to North America and with whom I eventually went on to study for my dissertation research. I was greatly impressed by Prince's work, which opened up for me whole vistas of research that I thought it might be productive to explore. Some 20 years later, I still feel as though I've only barely begun to scratch the surface of those areas of inquiry!

There's another part of the story, too, As I began to study structuralist narratology, which I came to with a background in philosophy and classics as well as literature and literary theory, I also developed an interest in linguistics—in part because the structuralists thought that they could use Saussurean linguistics as a pilot-science for the study of narrative, among other cultural phenomena. Fortuitously, shortly after being appointed to my first teaching position, I was asked to teach a graduate seminar in discourse analysis, and while studying linguistic pragmatics, Goffman's interactional sociolinguistics, Conversation Analysis, the ethnography of communication, and other linguistic frameworks, I ran up against the limited applicability of Saussurean language theory for the analysis of narratively organized discourse—or discourse more generally, for that matter. (See, however, my response to question 4 below.) Recall that one of Saussure's basic premises is that parole, or situated uses of language in particular communicative contexts, lies outside the domain of linguistic science, which for Saussure properly limits itself to langue—or the system underlying any specific utterance or communicative act. By contrast, the ideas on which the discourse analysis seminar focused from the notion of turn-taking systems, to concepts of politeness, to the distribution of given and new information over a stretch of talk—brought into focus the systematicity of language in use (Herman 2001). This work also accentuated for me the need to enrich classical, structuralist understandings of "narrative langue" with more recent work in language theory (Herman 2001, 2002, 2009a, 2009b). I felt that the field of narratology could only benefit from greater convergence with sociolinguistic, discourse-analytic, and other work on narrative viewed as a contextually situated communicative practice.

What is more, research on discourse understanding has emerged as a subdomain within the sciences of mind, and points up how linguistics can be viewed as part of a larger constellation of disciplines concerned with the structure of intelligent behavior. Over time I came

to recognize the importance of working to situate narratology within this same constellation of fields, in order to develop strategies for studying the nexus of narrative and mind. In sketching out strategies of this sort, I have drawn not just on language theory and discourse analysis but also areas such as cognitive and social psychology (Herman 2002, 2007, 2010a), cognitive linguistics (2009a), cognitive anthropology (e.g., work on folk taxonomies, or indigenous systems for classifying elements of experience) (Herman 2009b), and the philosophy of mind (Herman 2008, 2009c, 2011a, 2011b; Herman, Phelan, Rabinowitz, Richardson, and Warhol under review).

# 3) What is the proper role of narratology and narrative theory in relation to other academic disciplines?

In a broad perspective, narratology/narrative theory can be viewed as a kind of meta-discipline-or at least as a highly syncretic inter-discipline. To take the true measure of what stories are, how they work, and what they can be used to do, narratologists will need to interweave insights from a range of fields, including psychology, comparative media studies, linguistics, philosophy, literary theory, ethnography, and others. I would therefore resist characterizing narratology as a subfield within literary studies or critical theory, for example. For one thing, the proper scope of narrative inquiry extends beyond literary narratives, encompassing stories told in face-to-face interaction, graphic narratives, films, digital narratives, and so on. By the same token, narrative theorists cannot limit themselves to the analytic tools used by literary scholars if they are to develop a model capacious enough to characterize stories of all sorts.

I do not mean to suggest, however, that all scholars of narrative must obligatorily study all manifestations of narrative, across all possible communicative situations and storytelling media. Instead, a pathway to progress in the field (to anticipate part of question 5) is for scholars working with particular kinds or corpora of stories to collaborate with one another, so that medium-specific aspects of story corpora can be sorted out from generically narrative features of those corpora. For example, by collaborating with sociolinguists and literary scholars, experts on comics or cinema can explore commonalities and contrasts among the storytelling techniques used in these domains. Honing in on the contrasts, analysts can then determine which differences arise from the constraints and affordances associated with specific media. At the same time, joint work by theorists bringing different perspectives to bear on one and the same narrative corpus--say, literary narratologists adopting feminist versus diachronic approaches to printed fictional texts--can help illuminate the structures and functions of stories told in a given medium.

But I would like to respond to this question in another way as well--namely, with reference to my particular interest in developing models for studying nexus of narrative and mind. Granted, narratologists can productively adapt ideas from the sciences of mind, including psychology, linguistics, philosophy, and other fields, to explore basic mental dispositions and abilities bound up with storytelling practices. Conversely, though, concepts developed by analysts of narrative can also benefit the sciences of mind themselves. Narrative theorists' work on techniques for representing the minds of characters, for instance, can inform discussions in the philosophy of mind about the status and functions of consciousness itself (Herman 2011a, 2011b). Likewise, convergent evidence now suggests that narrative not only triggers inferences about authors', narrators', and characters' mental states and dispositions, but also constitutes a key source of the commonsense models of mind that support everyday reasoning concerning one's own and others' actions (Bruner 1990; Hutto 2008; Herman 2009c). In short, researchers investigating the mind-narrative nexus should strive to avoid the unidirectional borrowing--i.e., the importation of ideas from the cognitive sciences into traditions of narrative study but not vice versa--that Sternberg (2003) rightly characterizes as problematic.

## 4) What do you consider the most important topics and/or contributions in narratology?

In my response to questions 1 and 2, I suggested that recent work in discourse analysis, the philosophy of language, and related fields points up some of the limitations of Saussure's ideas when it comes to studying narrative discourse. Yet the inadequacy of Saussurean models for narrative inquiry in no way impugns the original insight of the structuralists: namely, that language theory provides invaluable resources for analyzing stories. This key insight has proved to be the starting point for much of my own research on narrative--and in particular my ongoing attempts to help foster a "postclassical" narratology. In addressing the present question and the next, I will sketch how I arrived at the idea of postclassical narratology; discuss trends in the field that I interpret as manifestations of this ongoing reassessment, from multiple theoretical standpoints, of earlier, structuralist models of narrative; and then (in my response to question 5) pinpoint five open problems that have emerged along with this shift from classical to postclassical approaches.

As I use the term in my introduction to *Narratologies: New Perspectives on Narrative Analysis* (Herman 1999), postclassical narratology refers to frameworks for narrative research that build on the work of classical, structuralist narratologists but supplement that earlier work with concepts and methods that were unavailable to story analysts such as Roland Barthes, Gérard Genette, A. J. Greimas, and Tzvetan Todorov during the heyday of structuralism. My choice of the term was inspired in part by some of the work presented at a symposium on "Mathematics and Postclassical Theory" that I attended in 1993 at Duke University here in the U.S. After attending that symposium and reading published versions of some of the papers (Herrnstein Smith and Plotnitsky 1997)--especially the one by Arkady Plotnitsky, with whom I had also worked during my doctoral studies--I began to think of the contrast between classical and postclassical physics as a possible analogue for the contrast between structuralist narratology and approaches that focus on aspects of narrative that were not considered by structuralist theorists.<sup>1</sup>

To develop the analogy somewhat more fully: the classical physics of Newton is not "invalidated" by the postclassical physics of Einstein, Bohr, and others. Rather, what the postclassical frameworks clarify is the scope of applicability of the earlier, Newtonian models. Newtonian physics is very good at describing and predicting the behavior of mid-sized objects like chairs and bicycles. But it is not so good at describing and predicting the behavior of very large or very small (or very fast) things, such as the evolution of a galaxy or what goes on inside a particle accelerator. A theory with a wider scope of applicability is needed to account for such phenomena, and the classical Newtonian model can then be re-interpreted as a special case within the broader, postclassical account. By analogy, structuralist narratology is not invalidated by later developments in the study of narrative; instead, those developments suggest that, though scholars of story can build on the aspects of narrative discussed by the structuralists, the scope of narrative analysis--the range of narrative phenomena that need to be investigated by theorists--is more expansive than the structuralists envisioned.

Research concerned with storytelling in face-to-face interaction exemplifies the shift in question; this shift corresponds to a rethinking of the scope of applicability of models for narrative analysis. Precipitating the shift, in this case, is the recognition that the model pioneered by the linguist William Labov in studies such as "The Transformation of Experience in Narrative Syntax" (1972) captures one important sub-type of narrative told face to face--namely, stories elicited during interviews--but does not necessarily apply equally well to other storytelling situations, such as informal conversations between peers, he-said she-said gossip, or conversations among family members at the dinner table. Narratives do different things, and

assume different forms, in different communicative environments (Ochs and Capps 2001). In conversations among peers, for example, participants may all be trying to capture the floor at once in order to tell their own version of a story under dispute. Such competition for the floor will drastically alter the shape of the stories participants (try to) tell; given the communicative exigencies at work, storytellers are likely to truncate or omit all but the most essential orienting information, and conversely to bolster their efforts to signal the point of their narrative, or why they should be heard out rather than interrupted with a competing story. Meanwhile, the narratives told in this context are likely to bear on the social status or "face" of their tellers in ways that they might not in the context of interviews. Hence new, richer models of the structures and functions of storytelling in interaction need to be developed--with the Labovian account now acquiring the status of a model suited to a special case within a larger array of storytelling situations.

More generally, subfields within postclassical narratology have taken shape as theorists engage in different ways with the possibilities and limitations of prior models for studying stories. These earlier models can then be redescribed as capturing particular aspects of narrative--or specific kinds of narrative experiences--but not necessarily (the experience of) narrative tout court. Although it is not possible to provide an exhaustive list here, relevant strands of inquiry include the following:

- research on narrative and mind (Fludernik 1996; Herman 2002, 2007, 2008, 2009a, 2009b, 2009c, 2010a, 2010b, 2011a, 2011b; Herman, Phelan, Rabinowitz, Richardson, and Warhol under review; Hogan forthcoming; Jahn 1997, 1999; Palmer 2004; Zunshine 2006);
- feminist narratology, which explores how issues of gender bear on the production and interpretation of stories (Lanser 1992; Page 2006; Warhol 2003);
- corpus-based approaches, which draw on large, multimillion-word corpora to test out intuition-based hypotheses about stories and also to rethink foundational categories for narrative study (Mani 2010; Salway and Herman forthcoming);
- research seeking to come to terms with narrative traditions associated with non-Western cultures and also with the full range of narrative experimentation within Western traditions (Gu 2006; Alber, Iversen, Nielsen, Richardson 2010);
- and transmedial narratology, which I've already touched on in my response to question 3, and which is premised on the assumption that, although narrative practices in different media share common features insofar as they are all instances of the narrative text-type, stories are nonetheless inflected by the constraints and affordances associated with a given medium (Herman 2004, 2009b, 2010b; Ryan 2004).

In my response to the next question, I discuss some of this work, or rather the problems it has enabled narratologists to articulate and begin exploring, in more detail.

## 5) What are the most important open problems in this field and what are the prospects for progress?

I focus here on five open problems in the field--problems that not only grow out of postclassical approaches to narrative but also cut across multiple frameworks for research on stories. The five problems are (A) narrative worldmaking; (B) storytelling across media, as well as variable narrative practices within particular media; (C) diachronic narrative study; (D) large narrative corpora; and (E) the use of narratives to model the experiences of non-human animals. Although these problems by no means exhaust the scope of current-day research on stories, they do suggest something of the range and diversity of the work relevant for postclassical narratology. The five problems also span established as well as emergent areas of inquiry in the field.

### A. Narrative worldmaking

A key open problem in the field is how best to characterize procedures of narrative worldmaking. At issue are practices whereby story creators cue interpreters to engage in the coconstruction of narrative worlds, or "storyworlds," whether they are the imagined, autonomous worlds of fiction or the worlds about which nonfictional accounts make claims that are subject to verification. Indeed, imaginative relocation to narrative worlds can be viewed as a core aspect of all narrative experiences--as an enabling condition for storytelling and story-interpreting practices as such (Herman 2009b: 105-36). Despite important contributions over the past two or three decades, researchers have only begun to characterize the nature and scope of narrative ways of worldmaking.

Major questions remain unresolved. How exactly is narrative worldmaking imbricated with--how does it at once support and get supported by--basic mental abilities and dispositions? How do communicative, aesthetic, and other norms bear on the design and interpretation of storyworlds? And, to anticipate the second open problem (or set of problems) to be discussed here, how do differences among storytelling media impinge on the process of building narrative worlds?

## B. Storytelling across media and cultural traditions; the variability of narrative practices within a given medium or tradition

Another important research question is whether the narratological principles and methods developed to date--principles and methods extrapolated from a growing but still relatively limited corpus of narrative texts--are sensitive enough to capture differences in storytelling practices as they play out across different cultural and linguistic traditions (Gu 2006). Narrative scholars from all over the world will need to engage in a collaborative, cross-cultural as well as crossdisciplinary effort to refine the narratological toolkit, as necessary, in light of attested storytelling traditions. This work is a necessary complement to the research on narrative across media that is likewise emerging as a focal concern in the field. Unlike classical narratology, transmedial narratology disputes the notion that the story level of a narrative remains wholly invariant across shifts of medium. However, it also assumes that stories do have "gists" that can be remediated more or less fully and recognizably—depending in part on the semiotic properties of the source and target media (Herman 2004). In other words, given that medium-specific differences among narratives are nontrivial, intertranslation among storytelling media will be more or less possible, depending on the particular formats involved. A key question is how the process of remediation plays out in a given instance, given the constraints and affordances associated with the media involved (Herman 2010b).

Complementing the cross-cultural and transmedial focus in contemporary narratological research is a focus on the variability of narrative practices *within* a given medium or tradition. A case in point is the emergent debate concerning the relation among subgenres of narrative fiction--and also among fictional narratives and other kinds of narrative texts. One of the issues under dispute is whether reflexive, avant-garde fictions require a different analytic framework than fictional narratives that do not comment as overtly on the procedures for worldmaking that they simultaneously cue interpreters to deploy. See Alber, Iversen, Nielsen, and Richardson (2010), Herman (2011b), and Herman, Phelan, Rabinowitz, Richardson, and Warhol (under review) for different positions in this debate.

### C. Diachronic narrative study

The previous problem or set of problems concerns the variability of narrative practices at any given time. Another issue is how to study changes in storytelling practices over time. Here the distinction between synchronic and diachronic methods of analysis, outlined by Saussure in the context of linguistic study, can be brought to bear. This distinction is pertinent for all aspects of narrative--e.g., techniques of characterization, focalization, emplotment, and so forth. For the purposes of this brief remark, however, I will focus on the relevance of the synchronic-diachronic distinction vis-à-vis techniques for representing minds in narrative.

In the introduction to a forthcoming volume titled *The Emergence of Mind* (Herman 2011b), I build on work by Fludernik (2003) and Palmer (2004: 240-44) to suggest that, along with differences in methods for presenting minds that may obtain among different narratives (e.g., different narrative subgenres) produced during the same time-period, narrative theorists also need to consider changes in techniques for mind representation across texts written in different epochs. A diachronic perspective focuses on the evolution, or changing distribution, of the strategies for mind representation that are built into narrative viewed as a system for worldmaking. The question is how best to identify commonalities and contrasts among narratives from different periods and any trajectory of change that the narratives might reveal when examined together. Arguably, story analysts will need to employ--and ideally combine-many kinds of investigative tools to study patterns of change of this sort. One set of tools has emerged from qualitative approaches based on in-depth examinations of case studies. But another set of tools is emerging from quantitative, corpus-based methods of narrative studymethods enabled by the large narrative corpora that are now available via digitization. These methods for dealing with large narrative corpora--my next open problem--can be used either to test or to generate hypotheses about the structure of stories, including hypotheses about changing distributions of mind-evoking cues in stories written at different times.

### D. Large narrative corpora

I have teamed up with computational linguist Andrew Salway to establish what we've christened as the Corpus Narratology Initiative, which centers on the following key question: will coming to terms with large narrative corpora—not single narratives or even groups of stories but rather multimillion-word collections of narratively organized texts—alter the foundational concepts of narrative theory? Or, to put the question in somewhat more specific terms, what methods for studying large amounts of textual data have been developed in other fields, e.g., corpus linguistics, and how might incorporating those methods into narrative inquiry afford new foundations for the study of stories, and perhaps also new applications for narratological research?

To assess how corpus-analytic methods bear on the core concepts and explanatory aims of narrative inquiry, Salway and Herman (forthcoming) situate their analysis vis-à-vis two broad approaches: top-down or hypothesis-driven approaches, and bottom-up or data-driven approaches. Top-down methods have been used in stylistics-based research (e.g., Semino and Short 2004) that begins with categories of structure proposed in advance by analysts and then seeks to (dis)confirm the existence of those structures—and study their patterns of distribution—in textual corpora. Thus Semino and Short (2004) use top-down methods to test whether earlier work on modes of speech and thought representation is borne out by distributional patterns found in an actual corpus of narrative texts. By contrast, Salway and Herman (forthcoming) use bottom-up, data-driven methods. Corpus-enabled research of this second kind seeks to remain as much as possible at the surface level of the texts included in corpora, rather than assuming beforehand that some features will be more relevant than others for the analysis of those texts. Our bottom-up approach begins with textual features that are computationally tractable, aiming to work up from there to an account of the structures and functions of narrative. We suggest that a data-driven approach of this sort may provide new

strategies for addressing one of the root problems of narratology—namely, what constitutes *narrativity*, or the property or set of properties that makes stories interpretable as narratives to begin with. Our suggestion is that narrativity can be defined, at least in part, as a distinctive mode of information packaging, which contrasts with how lists, syllogisms, and other kinds of representations structure the information that they convey. Corpus-driven methods may prove especially useful for research on narrativity from an information-theoretic perspective of this kind.

### E. Non-human experiences

Recently (Herman 2009b) I proposed that a factor contributing to narrativity is a focus on human or human-like individuals experiencing events in storyworlds. However, I believe that this claim needs to be set against representations of the experiences of non-human animals in stories. To what extent can stories figure non-human experiences, and what are the markers, structures, and effects of such experiences in narrative discourse?

In broaching this issue, I mean to suggest that narratology can be informed by as well as contribute to the emergent, interdisciplinary field of critical animal studies (Wolfe 2003). Practitioners in this field question assumptions about the primacy of the human--and call for a rethinking of institutions and practices based on such assumptions. By investigating how stories use methods of focalization (Nelles 2001) and consciousness representation to model non-human experiences, narratologists can contribute to this same far-reaching project. If narrative worldmaking affords a bridge between the human and the non-human, not merely through anthropomorphic projections but also by figuring the phenomenal worlds of creatures whose organismic structure differs from our own, then the study of narrative can in turn provide scaffolding for this important mode of ideology critique. By modeling the richness and complexity of "what it is like" for non-human others, narratives can underscore what is at stake in the trivialization--or outright destruction--of their experiences.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> I should stress here that the classical/postclassical distinction is not exclusively a matter of chronology. The distinction reflects, rather, different understandings of the proper scope and methods of narrative inquiry.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Likewise Herman (2005) draws on top-down or hypothesis-driven strategies for analysis. This study uses quantitative evidence to test hypotheses about genre-based preferences for representing actions and events--hypotheses that grew out of earlier qualitative work (Herman 2002).

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