

Deriving the paradoxical effects of metalepsis

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Nerval, *Sylvie*, end of chapter 3 (Eng. translation)

What a dreary drive the road to Flanders is at night; things only start looking more attractive once you get into the forested areas. To either side, there's the same endless file of trees coming at you with their vague, twisted shapes. And beyond this, squares of green fields or plots of ploughed earth bounded to the left by the bluish hills of Montmorency, Ecoen and Luzarches. Here is Gonesse, a vulgar little town full of memories of the League and the Fronde.

Beyond Louvres there is a lane lined with apple trees whose flowers I have often seen glimmer in the night like the stars above – it was a short cut to the outlying villages. **While the coach is making its way up to the hills, let us piece together the memories of the days when I often visited these parts.**

Nerval, *Sylvie*, end of chapter 3

Quelle triste route, la nuit, que cette route de Flandres, qui ne devient belle qu'en atteignant la zone des forêts ! Toujours ces deux files d'arbres monotones qui grimacent des formes vagues ; au-delà, des carrés de verdure et de terres remuées, bornés à gauche par les collines bleuâtres de Montmorency, d'Ecouen, de Luzarches. Voici Gonesse, le bourg vulgaire plein des souvenirs de la Ligue et de la Fronde. . .

Plus loin que Louvres est un chemin bordé de pommiers dont j'ai vu bien des fois les fleurs éclater dans la nuit comme des étoiles de la terre: c'était le plus court pour gagner les hameaux. **Pendant que la voiture monte les côtes, recomposons les souvenirs du temps où j'y venais si souvent.**

Metalepsis

[A]ny intrusion by the extradiegetic narrator or narratee into the diegetic universe (or by diegetic characters into a metadiegetic universe, etc.), or the inverse [...], produces an effect of strangeness that is either comical [...] or fantastic.

Genette (1980, 234–5)

- ▶ While the venerable churchman climbs the ramps of Angoulême, it is not useless to explain. . . (Balzac, *Illusions perdues*)
- ▶ But it is time to rejoin the Baron as he advances with Brichot and myself towards the Verdurins. (Proust, *À la recherche du temps perdu*)

Eco on *Sylvie*

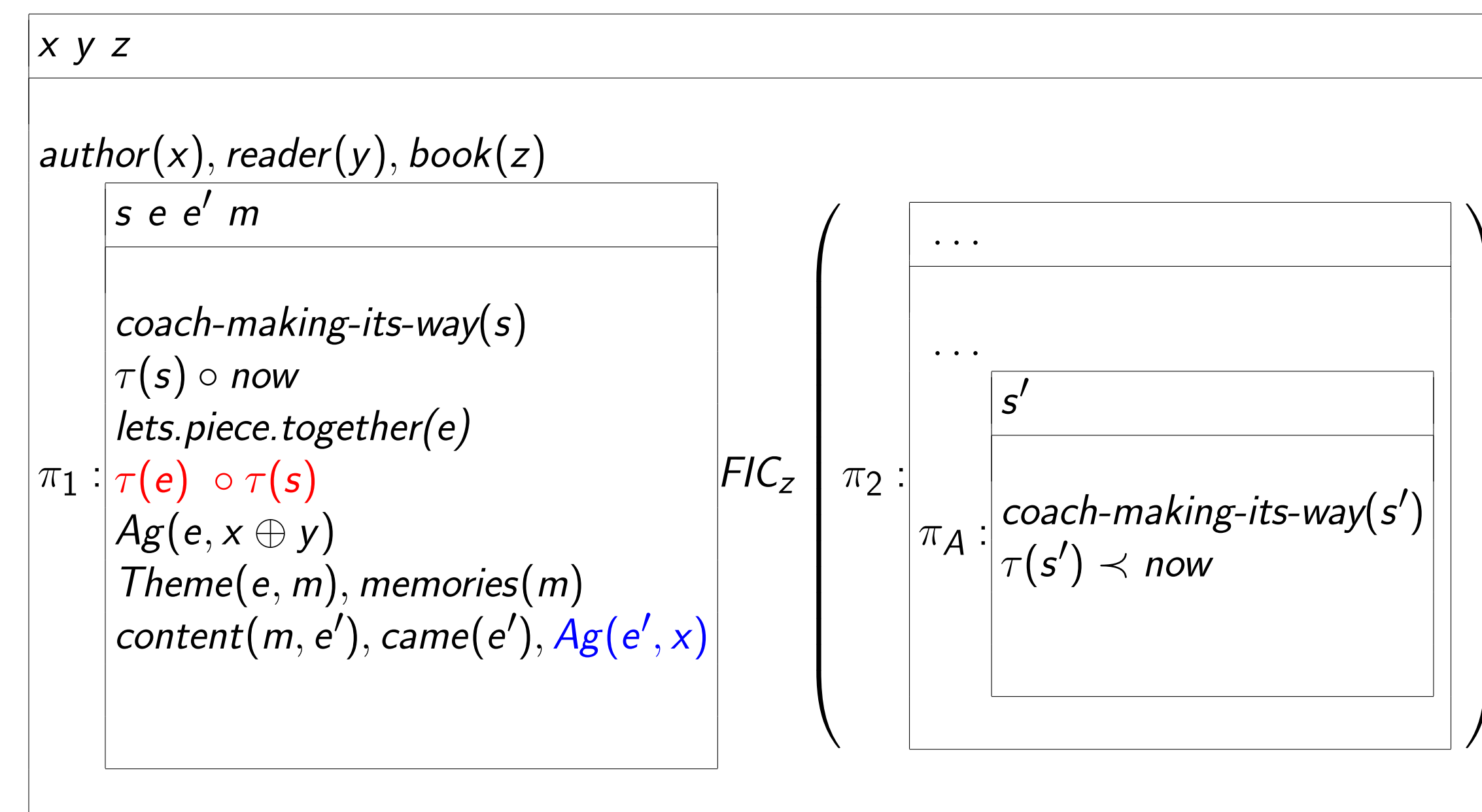
Who is – or rather, who are – those “we” who together have to bring back the memories and therefore make preparations for another journey into the past? Who are the “we” who have to do it now, “while the carriage is climbing” (while the carriage is moving at the same time as we are reading), and not then, “when the carriage was going,” at the moment the narrator tells us that he was recollecting?

This is not the voice of the narrator; it is the voice of Nerval, the model author, who for a moment speaks in the first person in the story and says to us model readers: “While the narrator is going up the hills in his carriage, let us recompose (with him, of course, but you and I, too) the memories of the time when he would come so often to these places.”

This is not a monologue but one part of a dialogue between three parties: Nerval, who surreptitiously enters the narrator's discourse; we, who have been called upon to participate just as surreptitiously, when we thought we could observe the event from the outside (we, who thought we had never left a theater); and the narrator, who is not excluded, since it was he who came to those places so often (“J'y venais si souvent,” “I used to go there so often”).

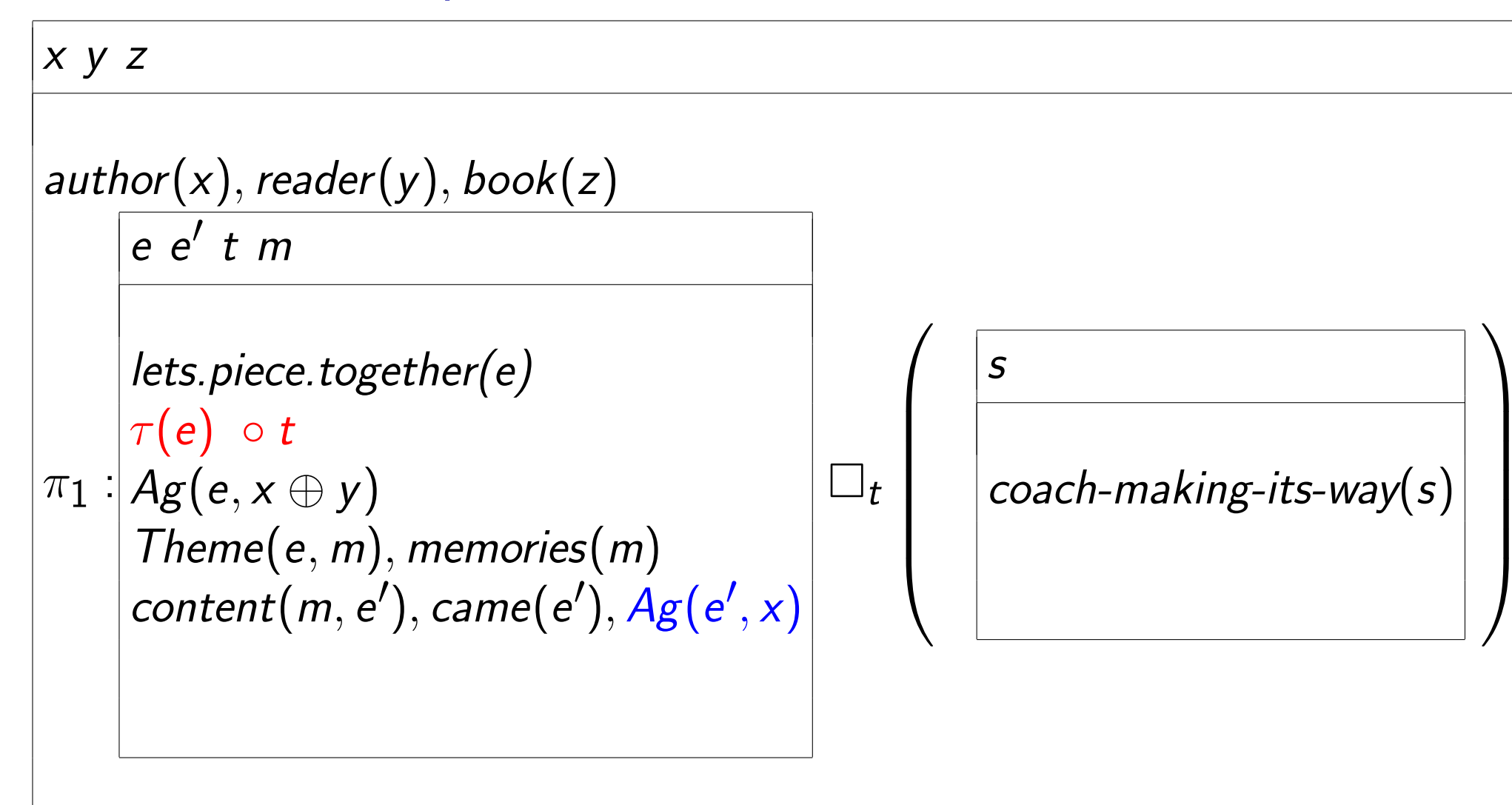
(Eco, 1994, 22-23)

A literal interpretation



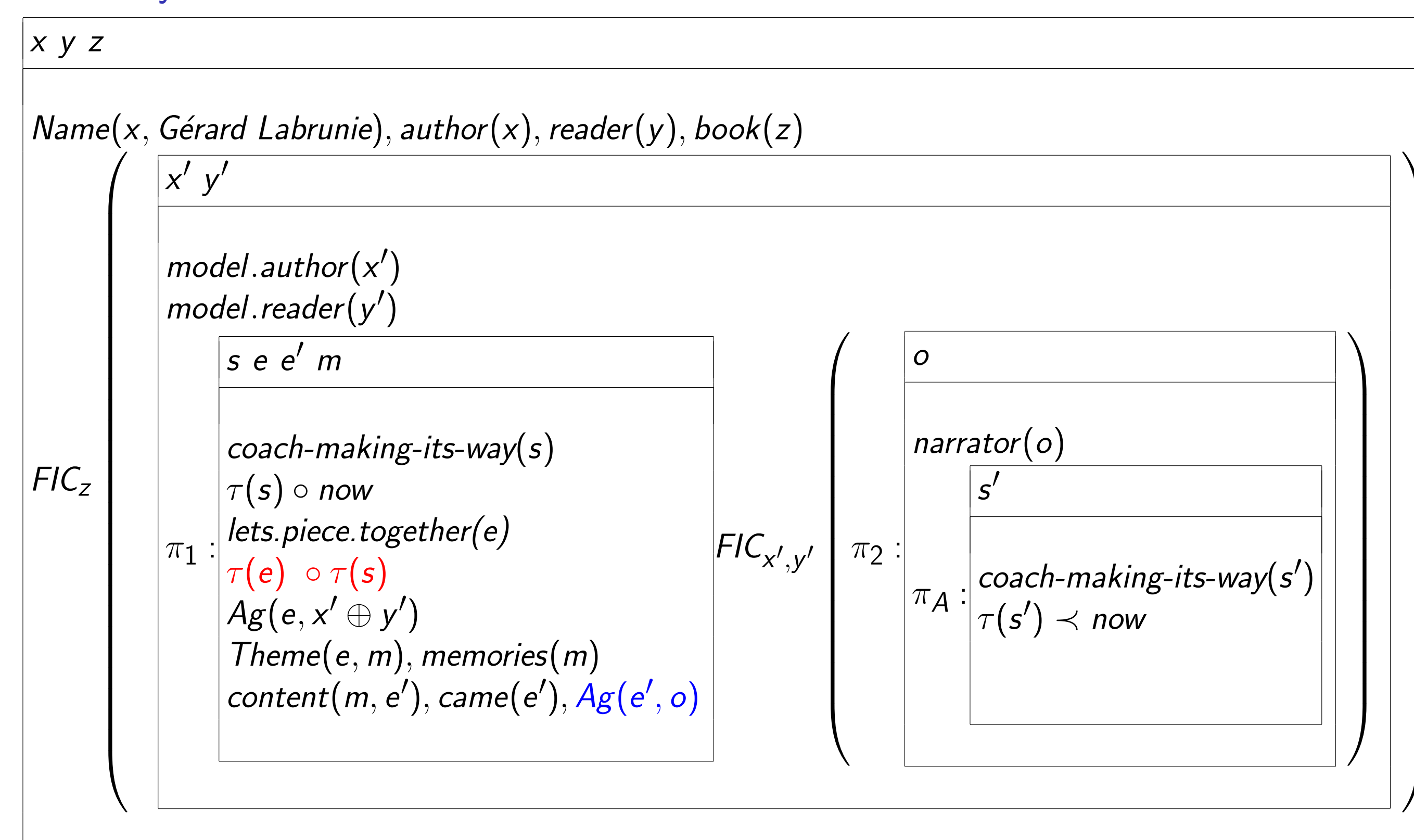
- ▶ Is there a coach ride in the actual world?

An intensional interpretation



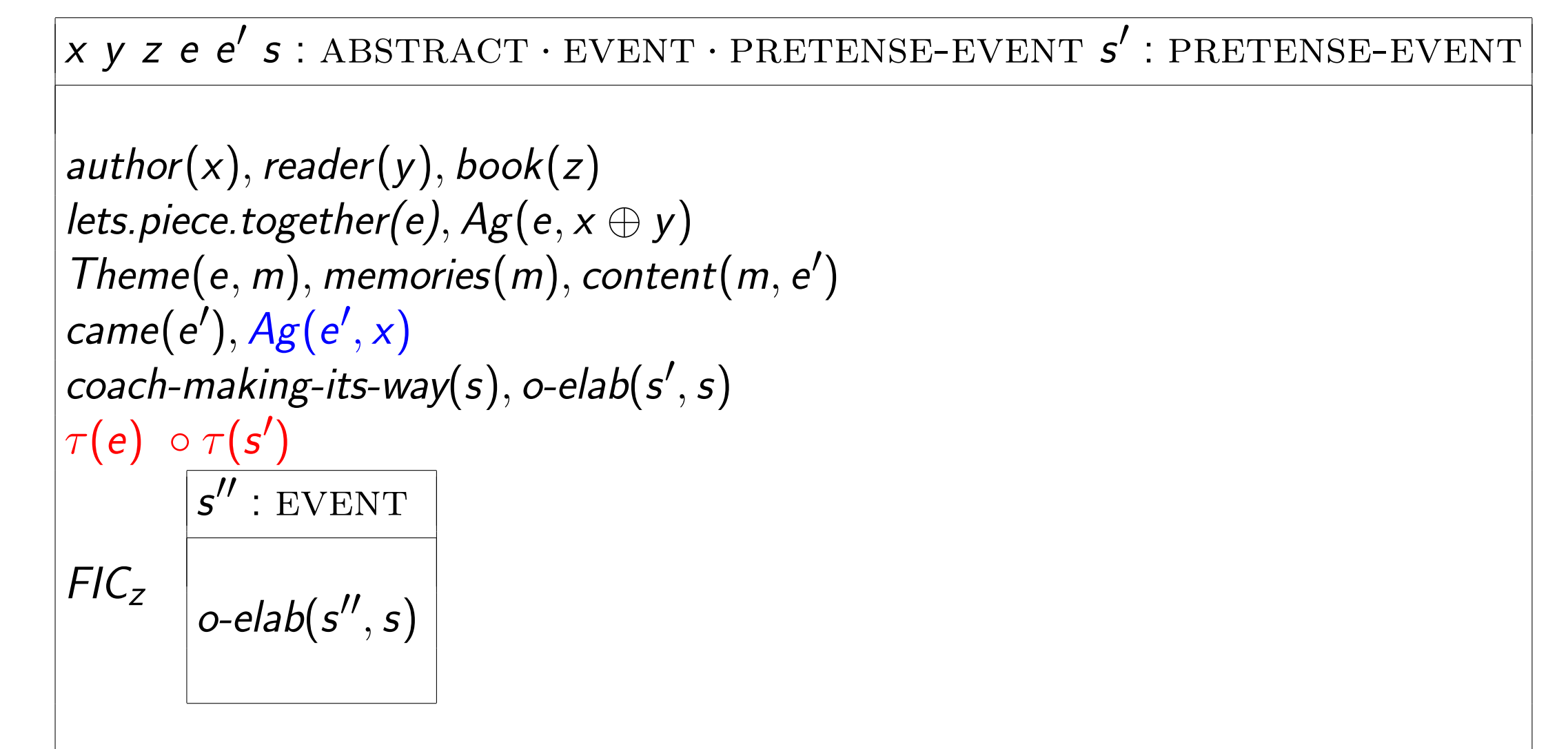
- ▶ \square_t = “while in the story. . .”, “while we imagine. . .”, “while in another world. . .”
- ▶ Where does intensionality come from?
- ▶ Temporal independence of e and s

Eco's analysis



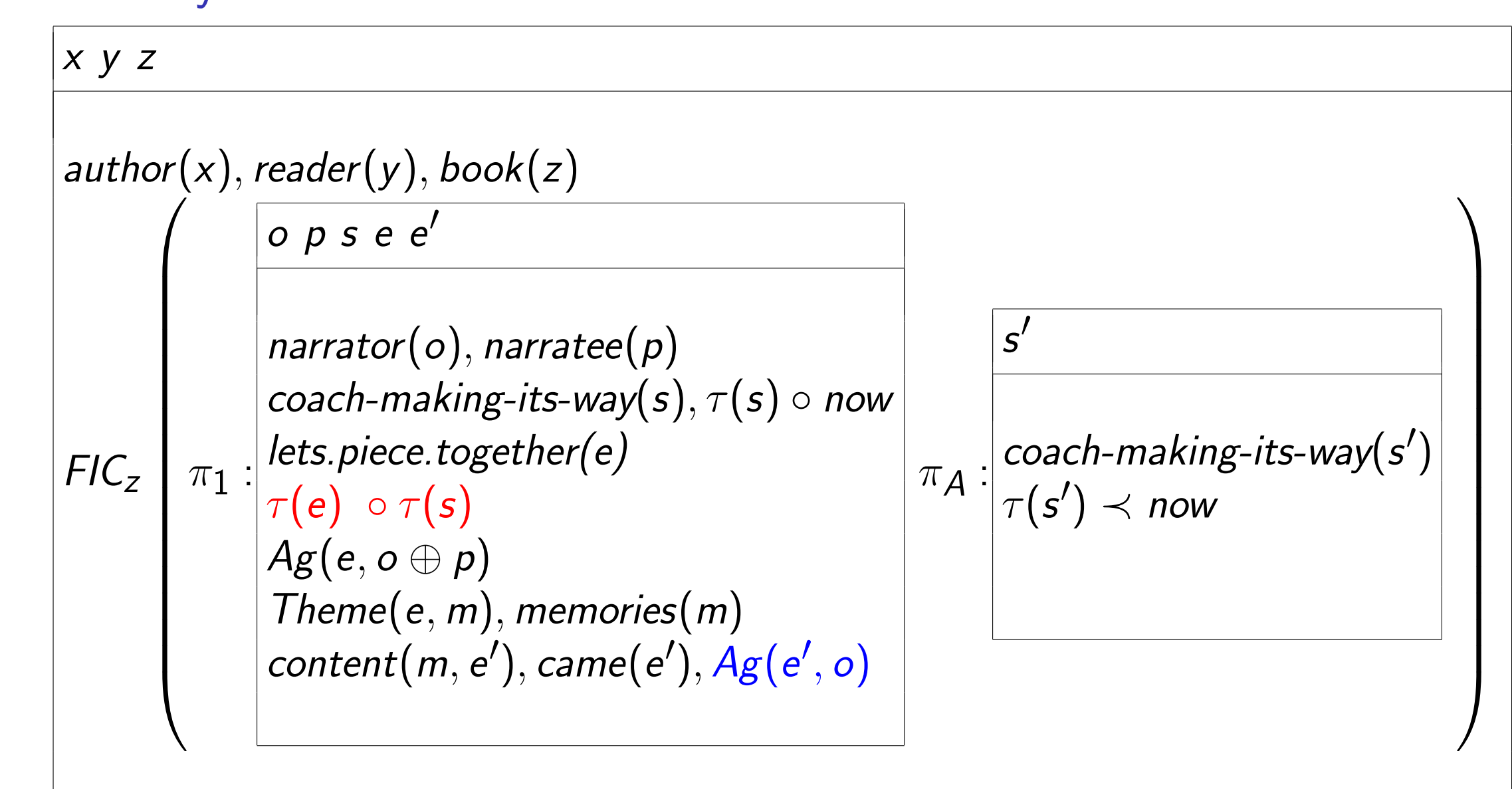
- ▶ The text clearly intends to refer to the narrator-protagonist's travels but how?

Bücking's analysis (Bücking, to appear)



- ▶ Extends Recanati (2018)'s analysis of fictional entities as dot objects to fictional events
- ▶ Does not solve the problem with indexical 'I'

Our analysis



- ▶ Literal interpretation, but as uttered by the narrator
- ▶ Inconsistent identification of narration time and narrated time
- ▶ Cinematic effect: narrator joins his younger self

Homo- and hetero-diegetic narration

- ▶ Reference to the narrator-protagonist in homodiegetic metalepsis is a key argument for our account
- ▶ Can be extended to heterodiegetic narration by the mechanism of *narrator accommodation* (Altshuler and Maier, 2022)
- ▶ This is what is going on in Balzac: metalepsis provides enough descriptive content to accommodate a narrating event, which is entailed by the semantics of the fiction operator (e.g. on the account of Lewis 1978)
- ▶ Accounts for the intuition that metalepses in heterodiegetic narrations are “more intrusive”

References

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