

The
PHILOSOPHY
of
FICTION

~

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0. *The end; or a preface.*

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0. *The end; or a preface.*

The end of this book is an essay on fiction. And the end of the book could well be read first. After all, much of it was written first. It describes what C. S. Peirce might have called the “surprising fact” of *fiction*, the premise from which much of the rest of the book has been inferred as an historical “explanatory hypothesis”. The middle is about how and why fiction has ended up as it is, by virtue of being human, communicative and narrative. This middle is made up of reflections on the significance of stories that are contrary to fact, and before that a history of narrative culture, and before that again a descriptive critique of narrative reason. The beginning is about how philosophy—more by ellipsis than deliberation—has gone about theorising the phenomenon of narrative. Together, the middle and beginning make up a natural history of narrative. Initially, much may seem irrelevant to a theory of fiction. But a round about way through the foothills of narrative theory is not mere diversion. Diversion counts as deliberation in an essay on something as diverting as fiction. And besides, the end is not the be all and end all.

Modern narrative theory has at least made *narrative* itself a *topic* again—something that had hardly happened since Aristotle’s *Poetics*. But as a topic it is a hard place in which to locate oneself, and, for something so familiar, it is a difficult thing to grasp. Narrative theory demonstrated this typically philosophical predicament, never getting far past the problems of *where to start* and *how to know one’s way about* in the topic. This way of putting it, frames narrative theory’s problems in terms of its object: the narrative problems of *beginning* and of *proceeding on an as yet ill defined course*.

As for *fiction*, despite being a more historically and generically specific concept, despite all the works of criticism and appreciation of narrative art, despite clearly marking out a place on the shelves of any book or video library, and despite its status as one of the great and most time consuming and lucrative spiritual projects of modernity, it scarcely occurs as a *topic* itself. We scarcely pause to ask the question *What is this thing called fiction. Why?*

Whatever fiction is, it seems so obvious, too obvious to question; but as philosophy continually rediscovers, whatever seems most familiar may well be most obscure. The nature of fiction seems so simple: every child knows about the difference between non-fiction and fiction: between what is real, and what is just pretending, making up, or make believe. And the concept of fiction seems to have been covered anyway, either as a passing topic or as a given, in all that discoursing on narrative art. Theories about such social and aesthetic phenomena as fiction, no matter how much they aspire to the discursive status of description and explanation, risk being taken as manifestos or as aesthetic injunctions, and immediately superseded ones at that. We happily live with a concept of fiction, but we don’t get our minds around it. As a topic, the concept of *fiction* is placed in a kind of social unconscious—for fiction’s sake there may be good reasons for doing so, just as the psychic unconscious has its own vital and inalienable uses—and society is unconscious that it is unconscious.

A warning to readers: sometimes concepts introduced in early essays are not explained until later. This is a consequence of the temporal predicament of meaning:

to paraphrase Niklas Luhmann, a book can't say everything at once. *Time will tell*, and, as it turns out, the importance of the temporal predicament of meaning should not be underestimated. The temporal condition of narrative meaning is one of many necessities that fiction is happy to present as a virtue.

Though people are inclined to demand that aesthetic theory should, like its object, have an aesthetic effect, this book is not like fiction. It is not fiction, but about fiction. It is philosophy, that melancholy science so called. It cannot content itself with repeating the lazy cadences in which literary culture has all too often briefly theorised fiction, half expecting that it could somehow evoke fiction's own thrill and paroxysm with would-be poetic prose, and that it could substitute this for theory. This simply preserved the mystery of its object and saved it from conscious reflection, which was perhaps its secret purpose anyway.

§1

The Natural History of Narrative

The History of the Philosophy of Narrative

1. Beginnings.

Beginnings are a matter of picking up stories in the middle of things. This is something authors have long known, and, making a virtue of necessity, they have put it on display in the customary device of starting *in medias res*. Like ends, beginnings are not merely arbitrary. They are the result of convenient reductions, more or less adequate to the intention of a story and to its task of dividing the kingdom of time, if not thereby to conquer it, at least to gain some purchase on its complexity. Beginnings are given by the nature, predicament and intention of the teller and by what's being told. Typically, narratives aspire to getting them just right, so that in their justness of beginning, middle and end, they emulate the self-referring autopoiesis of organisms or any self-generating system. Thus, they offer their narrators or their audiences an image of and for the narrator's or the audience's own autopoiesis. Typically, a work of fiction, or a narrative, aspires to at least being an image of its own autopoiesis, even when it tries by aesthetic innovation to treat this as a norm made for flouting. When a work, at its beginning, seems to flout norms about its own self-perfection, this is normally just another way of demonstrating the virtuosity of its own self-generating, self-referring virtuality: it shows that it can start anywhere and still manage to absorb its contingent beginning, among all the other contingencies, in the course of making sense of time. In the end, of course, we can't understand a beginning until we understand the end.

The task of deciphering a narrative design lies in running several storylines together through the middle of the experience of the story, with several beginnings, middles and ends. Otherwise there will be no understanding what comes next, nor how it redetermines what came before. This is why appropriate beginnings are typically only discovered in retrospect, and why famously, for human narration, the time when a story's plot begins does not determine once and for all when its chronology begins. So already in the first speech in Sophocles' *Oedipus*, there are at least three stories running at three different time scales: amidst *the afflictions at Thebes*; *Oedipus speaks*; about *Cadmus's founding of the ancient city*. During any narrative it is always going to be tricky to know exactly where we are and where we are going; we will have to cast aside what were once likely storylines as we find our way through; and these discarded stories, even when unconscious, may remain part of the narrative experience. The problem of middles—the problem for which *method* was invented—is the problem of beginning again and again, but with less uncertainty, because how we proceed is conditional upon what has already been told. The naturally gappy argument and underdetermined design, typical of narrative communication, is not unlike the grab bag of data supplied by experience in general. Stories need an audience that, like the teller, can infer an order and meaning from the narrated data. This can only happen if all that must inevitably remain untold in the course of a plot is somehow already manifest. Typically, most of the reasons things happen in a narrative have to be worked out by the audience from what, it is assumed, it already knows *in its heart*. Thus narrative argues in a manner that classical rhetoric called *enthymematic*.

2. *A beginning, in medias res.*

Once upon a time in the twentieth century there was a flurry of narrative theory, but it stalled for want of narrative nerve, or verve. This failure of nerve meant that, in the end, narrative theory turned an habitual scepticism onto historical inquiry itself, thus proving its own historical limitation by archaic, antiscientific forces. What the theory of narrative lacked was, of all things, stories; and what it therefore failed to appreciate, despite thinking it had a mortgage on the matter, was just how thoroughly narrative itself is an historical phenomenon.

Philosophy not only reflects on the design of narrative argument, it also uses narrative argument. Working on the concept of narrative demands a history of narrative, and the history of the concept is itself a late chapter in the history of the phenomenon. Each story needs the other, and each needs telling for the sake of a philosophy of narrative art. Suspicion of narrative is a theme that runs through the history of the philosophical significance of narrative, so I have begun by picking up *this story in medias res*—though quite late in the history of philosophy—when the suspicion still infected and debilitated modern narrative theory and its work on the concept of narrative. As story tellers know, picking up the current of one story means being swept into others and embarking on an ocean of story. I have chosen the current of modern narrative theory as one way to lead onto an ocean. The name of the ocean I want to survey is the natural history of narrative.

3. *The order of philosophical presentation.*

There is a kind of narrative in all prose, in its moment by moment unfolding. Whether the prose tells a story or not, there is still this underlying narrative: the immediate experience of reading. In philosophy this most immediate story usually goes unnoticed and remains untold. Regardless of the writer's labour on it, it is just experienced by the reader as the condition of discourse rather than its content, and here it has already started: the order of philosophical presentation in the temporal experience of the text. In a narrative rather than a philosophical work it would be called the plot. In philosophy, it does sometimes get a mention. In the last paragraph of *Critique of Pure Reason* Immanuel Kant referred to the book's finally completed journey as a "hitherto untravelled route;" and from the first paragraph of *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel made an issue of the order of execution. In a way that cannot be avoided, the order of philosophical writing, even in hypertext, will be experienced as particular and temporal, that is, as an event or action, and so as something that is already in some sense *narrative*. Any actual narrative work runs at least two stories—the order of telling (the plot), and the chronology of the world that is told (the storyline). Plot has to be variable because chronology isn't. Yet philosophy's traditional, if overweening, concern with what is universal would, in its wild desire, have the order of both be inessential or accidental. Traditionally, a philosophical or scientific theory, like the tenseless state of affairs it usually likes or purports to explain, is ideally present all at once as a timeless, consistent array, like a big picture—a deductive *system*. "It is all the same to me," declared Parmenides (or at least his goddess), "from what point I begin, for I shall return again to this same point." (Freeman 1971, Fr. 5, p 42) He thus stated an enduring desire of philosophical thought, and one that has defined it precisely in its antagonism to narrative. The order of presentation still has to honour the conceptual design of the system. It has to present in time what would, if it could, transcend time. Undigested thought signalled

by indigestible order is what the disciplines of dialectic and good teaching overcome, but let polemic, explanatory demands or educational purposes slacken the passion of order, and philosophical thought suffers. Its presentation degenerates into the formalities of managerial arrangement. In a way, and in its time, Parmenides' transnarrative intention was really a desire for the passionate adventure of intellectual order.

It is a passion for a kind of narrative, for the first or immediate narrative of timeless or *first philosophy*. Strangely, if Parmenides had wanted his work to be a plenary whole emulating indivisible Being, his desire has been thwarted. We are only left with the fragments selected by the ravages of time. It is the pathos of time that shows itself in the order and curtailment of what are his default, and others deliberate, aphorisms—whether selected by the contingencies of cultural history or the contingencies of individual thought. For a long time the aphoristic was philosophy's secret method of signifying its profane passion for “the activity of dissolution” and for “the evanescent as itself essential (Hegel 1807, p.18).”

Novice philosophers worry about how to define something right from the start—and in order to start. There is the fear that piling one's hard won concepts into a mere preparatory definition will only demonstrate their poverty; or there is the worry that a makeshift will mislead inquiry and spoil the systemic perfection of philosophical truth; or maybe it is just a matter of not wanting to give the end away first. Some things may actually define themselves by their own operations, others may be initially grasped, at least, by means of the kind of understanding that we associate with unanalysed, everyday familiarity, and, along with others, these may need to be defined throughout the whole course of a theory or history. When the design of a theory must be a narrative design, we should not be awestruck by the magic of origins—the beginning is, after all, what we leave behind. We should remember what Nietzsche said: “Only that which has no history can be defined.” (1887, p. 212) Worries about definitions are a symptom of philosophy's once defining and still chronic antagonism to narrative. It was a stance that enabled philosophy, under the flag of *Being*, to break away from myth, which along with history, was left with the lesser verbs. Yet it was also an antagonism that entered philosophy as subject matter, right from Parmenides and Heracleitus on.

Fascination with the timeless array of a philosophical system was probably a consequence of the inaugural role of writing in the evolution of philosophy. For it was writing as a virtually timeless array of text, in contrast to the fleeting character of speech—and especially mathematical script with its visual, diagrammatic liberation from speech's pressing dimension of time—that enabled philosophy to perfect its theories *sub species aeternitatis*.

4. What if anything is narrative?

What if anything is narrative? Does human *experience* give us narrative in its primary form, its authentic subjective origin? After all, there seems to be nothing narrative that is not experienced in time. How could a dream be narrative if experience were not? Sure, the verbal recollection of a dream, its “secondary revision” as Freud called it, is narrative; but if the dream experience itself is narrative then wouldn't all experience in its temporal particularity be narrative? And if, as Freud in *The Interpretation of Dreams* concluded, dreaming involves a kind of representational construction, what about waking experience? Mustn't it be constructed too?

Or is it *events* themselves that are narrative, assuming—but only for the moment—that an event is something objective, something that happens whether there is someone to describe it or not? Or are narratives *things* made from the materials called *media*, things out there in the world called *texts*, and in particular texts about events? Or are narratives the actions or performances of drama or storytelling that produce these texts? And then what about the act of interpretation? For communication is always two actions, a dialogue. *Experience, events, communicative actions, texts*—such an array invites the customary act of abstraction and a description or definition of the shared *property*. What does that abstraction involve? How does the likeness shared by that array of kinds of narrative present itself both as a *likeness* and as the property *narrative*?

It is not just to idolise narrative that this essay proposes historical questions about narrative, and begins by treating this array of narrative kinds, not as something eternal, but as something historical. It is not just an array but a chronological order—or partial order—of stages in the history of narrative and of media: experience, events; communicative actions, texts.

Narrative is something quite familiar, even if its many forms of medium, plot and validity seem to stretch any single definition. If, just to get started, we call narrative *the communicative representation of sequences of events*, then narrative representation in the broadest sense would actually not fall neatly inside this definition, just as, historically, narrative representation comes before narrative communication. Meanwhile, the number and kinds of relations of events in a communicated sequence is also historically specific and subject to change. Indeed just what *historically* means remains to be seen. And, for that matter, what if anything is *an event*?

5. *The order of inquiry*

In his chapter on the Architectonic of Pure Reason (architectonic being the art of designing a philosophical system), Immanuel Kant pondered the problem of the actual temporal and historical production of philosophy.

It is unfortunate that, only after having occupied ourselves for a long time in the collection of materials, under the guidance of an idea that lies undeveloped in the mind, but not according to any plan or arrangement—nay, only after we have spent much time and labour in the technical disposition of our materials, does it become possible to view the idea of a science in a clear light, and to project, according to architectonical principles, a plan of the whole, in accordance with the aims of reason. (Kant, 1787, p.472)

Any writer or film maker knows that not only must they get their order of presentation right, but that once they have completed their work they may reach a new cognitive vantage from which the now *passé* work no longer looks right. They feel the need to suspend their experience, to write, as it were, from the vantage of a single, all-seeing moment, in order to get their ideas down pat once and for all without being condemned to ceaseless revision. This is like the old problem of the order of philosophical presentation, but Kant recognised that it belongs to another story in which philosophical essays are embedded, and which occasionally is made explicit: the order of research, the order of writing, and more fully, the order of the experience of the author. In its fullest sense it comprises not just everyday experience but the course of an individual's development, in which case it is called *ontogeny*. In my own

case an account of that experience would go something like this: *Enchanted by stories, a child's wonder eventually turned to wondering about the nature of that enchantment, and the nature of narrative. Such a child would be a child of its times, times when a particular desire to understand narrative had itself become a significant historical phenomenon. And the architectonic idea that would come to this child of modernity at the end of his researches, after thinking and writing and thinking and writing..., would be the developed form of the one he began with: the idea of narrative design.*

This way of putting it exemplifies—as Kant exemplified, but did not make explicit—how running the story of the contingencies of an individual's intellectual development quickly leads to running another story: a cultural history. After all we are cultural animals and our experience takes place in the environment of cultural history. Of course, cultural history was hardly unknown in eighteenth century Europe—on has only to think of Vico—but Kant only gives the history of philosophy a desultory run in his last chapter. Sticking with the problem of constructing a transhistorical theory from the contingencies of one's life and researches, Kant ended up—indeed he had already begun—by siding with what he called the unity of subjective reason against what he considered mere historical information, with its “rhapsodistic aggregation” of externally given additions.

Indeed the story of my course of inquiry did this too. In a typical narrative device it circled round to find its end in something that had been there from the beginning. This gives the story a quality of having its end implicit as an organisational principle throughout its development. Though this gave the story a kind of organic unity, it left out the messy particulars of the process of writing. The order of my presentation has turned out to be quite different from the order of my inquiry and my writing.

My use of the term *ontogeny* might also be said to give already a kind of organic unity to the unconnected experiences of life, including the contingencies and the changing results of research. In fact, the problem for human organisms is much the same as for Kant's *reason*. He conceived his *reason* formally as that of any rational being confronting any possible *nature*. However, apart from the brief reflection on the unfortunate temporal predicament of inquiry, he did not run the biological or biographical story of his rational organism's ontogeny, just as he did not run the story of cultural history, not simply because back then it was more folklore than science, but because, as biological and historical, it was empirical and so it was part of the problem *for* reason anyway. Kant had little compunction in draining such contingent history from reason, in accordance with philosophy's old transnarrative custom.

For Kant the dilemma of research and its temporal determination was thus to be seen in terms of his division between rational principles and the historical, empirical data which those principles govern. He may not have been the first to articulate this dilemma of research, for it had always lurked in the experience of writing and intellectual production. In a way, philosophy had actually harnessed the force of this dilemma as it presented itself in spoken dialogue, and it applied it as the drive of *dialectic*. However, Kant's incipient explicitness in at least mentioning the two stories of authorial experience and cultural history provided a precondition for the problem of the tension between universal reason and its particular temporal circumstances to become not only a driving force but also a content for the philosophical reflection of modernity.

6. *Historical design in philosophy.*

The notoriety of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* lay in its canonised if, to many, obscure conception of a philosophical system with a narrative design. Hegel felt the damage done to thought by the conventional and educational order of presentation that began by explaining earlier theses, only to reject them as false. For Hegel, this was a way of avoiding the hard work of philosophy and he was rightly suspicious of its tending to be an exercise in the author's self edification. Nowadays, when the special sciences dissolve old philosophical problems or when philosophy itself hives off what had been its own subject matter into other scientific departments, and when the historical task of philosophy, while maybe seeming to wither, grows stranger, such self edification still seems smug in the mastery of little more than the archaic discourse it claims to be superseding. Such smugness is rife in literary philosophy, and in cultural and narrative theory. Yet until philosophy's extinction, it will always have to go back to the likes of Parmenides and Heracleitus, if only because, among the sciences, philosophy is one that theorises the sciences themselves, including itself. Thus, having made itself its own object with its own history, it will have to keep on reformulating the problem of itself. Throughout its evolution, philosophy has repeatedly undermined itself and watched its most inspired ideas degenerate into doctrinal untruth, its most cunning inquiries stagnate into method, and its most ardent and fascinated questions evaporate into irrelevant wrong-headedness—even the question *What is philosophy?* For philosophy is the long and difficult emergence of intentional consciousness from the nightmare of its natural history, the emergence of linguistic and symbolic self consciousness from its own self generating self delusions. It can therefore never thoroughly cleanse its thought of ancient concepts such as *being*, *seeming*, *knowing*, *believing*, *meaning*, *design*, *mind*, *will* and such, because these are its evolving historical subject matter as well as its evolving explanatory terms. And scientists won't be able to avoid philosophy and whatever they would dismiss as its confusions as long as their own claim of avoidance is just a nagging symptom of the same naive philosophical pride that science otherwise exposes. Meanwhile, people who think there is nothing new in philosophy, that now as always philosophy is just empty talk going nowhere, that it is idle and opinionated conversation, or that there are no more philosophical firsts, fail to understand what philosophy and science are. Above all they fail to understand what Hegel made explicit: that any philosophical or scientific theory with universal pretensions must be reflexive and theorise its own self-transforming self as one of its theoretical objects. What still distinguishes the empirical sciences from philosophy is that they are, as much as is practically possible, constituted as non reflexive: their observations are limited to phenomena that are not affected by descriptions thereof.

Though writing has its peculiar place in the historical emergence of philosophy and science—because it made its propositions look eternal—philosophy still has to be about dialogue and go on in a temporal, interactive medium like speech, in order that it can bring intentional consciousness to theorise itself for itself, in its own way. It has to dispel the delusions begotten by writing, by reminding us that writing is as much a child of time as speech, and that neither offers any more authentic vehicle for philosophy. There is no justification for writing to avoid its temporal responsibilities, just because it wins certain advantages by being sluggish, deaf and unresponsive on the page. Writing has to acknowledge its responsibility as a *responsive* or dialogical medium. The special place of dialectics in philosophy is an indication of this. Dialectics is not the embarrassment that Heidegger accused it of being, or at least it is only an embarrassment for the detemporalising desire of a would-be fundamental ontology. Socrates is emblematic of the sense that philosophy

is not to lose contact with what it might think to be its superseded prehistory in a superseded medium. Socrates? Who is Socrates but a character in historical novels by Plato? Yet he stands as the arch critic of writing whose thought lives on only by virtue of the delusory medium of writing that he criticised. He appreciated that, as written and as science, philosophy must not simply deny or forget its complex relation to dialogue in the dimension of time. This is an epistemological imperative because it is an ethical one, and vice versa.

For Hegel, the order of presentation that summarily explained and then rejected earlier theses did not comprehend them as stages in the dialectical unfolding of truth. So instead of the summary treatment, Hegel emphasised the need to comprehend these stages within the exposition of the philosophical system. Accordingly, within his order of presentation, he ran the two narratives that Kant had barely mentioned: the experience of the philosopher or philosophical subject, and the cultural history of philosophy. Consequently, the concept of *experience* that he had inherited from Hume and Kant became, in Hegel's hands, more than a matter of contingent biographical detail or empirical data because it arose from the interanimation or mutual embedding of both these stories (1807, p.16). On the one hand, the temporal shape of the development of reason was given in the successive stages of experience through which a human consciousness passes; on the other, experience was embedded in the history of reason (1807, pp. 46-57).

Hegel recognised the significance of two special kinds of narrative description, and he used them to refer to two kinds of related historical processes: reflexive and dialectical processes. He also recognised that reflexive and dialectical processes apply in both of the two interanimating kinds of history: in the history of subjects and in the history of culture. What epitomised modernity in Hegel's thought and experience was its reflexivity, its acute self consciousness of its own historical position. Philosophy was to be understood as the object of its own descriptions and counter-descriptions, and, accordingly, as something dialectically unfolded throughout the history of those descriptions. Forsaking the more cunning devices of empiricism, such a science cannot readily guarantee the unambiguous repetition of its observations because its descriptions insinuate themselves into and thereby change the social object being described. Meanwhile *history* was to be understood as a concept that demanded philosophical reflection and that had its own history as a concept. No wonder Hegel was the author of both a history of philosophy and a philosophy of history.

For Kant, experience had meant, quite formally, "the synthesis of perception". For Hume, it had merely indicated what Hegel would have called the immediacy of individual psychology. Both versions were reductions of what it had meant for modernity at least since Montaigne. This was a period in which the measure of individuality was increasingly felt to be guaranteed by the passion of experience—a great sentiment struck in the fiction of bourgeois Europe. (In the twentieth century, the subject's *passion* was partially superseded by *desire* as the guarantor of individuality. Indeed abstract desire became a kind of ontological principle of psychoanalytic theories of the subject, and an ethical measure of modern forms of the heroic.) Hegel's concept of experience registered this rich historical pathos. At the same time, he disparaged the sentimentalisation of individual life and warned against trivialised abstract individuality, with the pathos of its existence thought merely and wrongly in terms of isolation or independence from others. Adorno appreciated how despite Hegel's eventual siding with the universal at the expense of the individual, he showed that individuality that thinks it can stand independent of social universals negates itself, and becomes the unwitting servant of universal conformism. I mention

this here as a warning against the common view that “narrative knowledge” is somehow guaranteed by a sentimentalised personal authenticity. The fetishisation of personal recollection has occasioned too many bad biographies and autobiographies, either full of gossipy speculation or designed to warm the mediocrity in reader’s—or writer’s—hearts. Even the academic survey of previous theories, undertaken as historical assessment, can disguise a secret and narcissistic autobiography, a pathetic allegory of self. Insofar as potted histories of philosophy amount to self edification, they might be seen legitimately as artefacts of individual psyches’ theorising or recollecting themselves in their own theories. These works all perpetuate the schism between passion and intellect—at the expense of both—by mistakenly assigning passion to narrative, and intellect to that other supposedly non-narrative discourse, science.

One function of Hegel’s thinking philosophy with a narrative design was the way it yielded an insight into the meaning of concepts that had been rendered untrue by the historical course of scientific and philosophical knowledge. Instead of dumping the negated concept and being left with nothing from it, the image of the superseded concept lives on with a transformed meaning. Such generosity towards superseded notions promises the redemption of knowledge stored in myths, and even in stories that deliberately display their falsehood, such as fictions. It recognises quite truthfully that truth is not the only function but one of many functions of communication—even of philosophical communication. This kind of transformation foreshadowed the kind of transformation in function and meaning that Darwinian *evolution* and Nietzschean *genealogy* were later to recognise. These later thinkers were to work a new transformation on the very concept of historical transformation, and so supersede notions like that of Hegelian *development*, thus transforming the concept of narrative design as it applies to history.

Given his modern consciousness of *modernity’s* own sense of its historical specificity, it is not so surprising to find that Hegel himself was ultimately limited by his own historical circumstances. Despite his talk about the *end* or *telos* of history, he was not to know what history would become. Besides, right from the first paragraphs of *Phenomenology of Spirit*, while he asserted the importance of the narrative act of philosophical execution and of the mutually embedded stories of individual and cultural history, he was busy reconciling the historical particularity of philosophy’s situation and execution with its rational, universal element. He did this by invoking a version of the ancient, recursive device of *entelechy*—a favourite of storytellers, and also of Aristotle and Leibniz. (I used it above to give a quality of organic unity to the story of my otherwise messy sequence of inquiry and writing.) So on the architectonic of *Phenomenology of Spirit* Hegel wrote

'For the real issue is not exhausted by stating it as an aim, but by carrying it out, nor is the result the actual whole, but rather the result together with the process through which it came about. The aim by itself is a lifeless universal, just as the guiding tendency is a mere drive that as yet lacks actual existence; and the bare result is the corpse which has left the guiding tendency behind it.'(1807 p.2).

Here, Hegel, from Aristotelean beginnings in concepts such as *entelechy* and *organism*, expresses that most influential tenet of process theory, repudiating means/ends pragmatics in favour of an *entelechy* of process that has so deeply insinuated itself into the ethics and aesthetics of practice. Constructed according to the form of symbolic or linguistic recursion, *entelechy* is a device for grasping the

contingencies of an historical process, not in a conceptually specific form, which would be too long, but indicatively, in a single, perfected, transhistorical structure—something worthy of the universal. The story that ends with its own retelling, and that is that retelling, is the form that the desire for entelechial perfection takes in narrative art. I would not be the first to say that *A la recherche du temps perdu* is like a *Phenomenology of Spirit* written as novelistic remembrance. Though Hegel asserted the importance of what might be dismissed as contingent philosophical execution, in the end the temporal body of thought was to dissolve and drain away from the perfected transnarrative system of the book.

In a curious way, Hegel's failure to resist the temptations of detemporalising thought was an effect of a still unreflected historical feature of natural intentional consciousness. Such consciousness could scarcely resist projecting its handy detemporalising representations onto all events and processes in order to master them in accordance with its own biological design. It was in the explanation of *psyche*, after all, that Aristotle had used the conceptual device of *entelechy*. The transnarrative habits of metaphysics were a matter of natural history—of an organism's interest in transcending time—aggrandised into a theological edifice. All of living nature is devoted to making nothing of time, but as natural organisms ourselves, this devotion still deludes us in our thinking about time. The troubled and desperate identification of time with the psyche or soul or subject—be it in Aristotle or Augustine or Kant—turned our natural, instrumental ploy of not wanting to know about time into an aporetic metaphysics. Like the Tower of Babel, the unfinishable result of all this metaphysical labour would end up being left to ruin. Eventually *natural selection* has shown that even something as apparently transhistorical as the *reason* of intentional consciousness is not an eternal state, but a contingent, particular, and very long event. What we share as human psychological design is historical, but it is not historical simply because different times and different culture's determine it in different ways. Its history is deeper and needs more stories than that.

7. Narrative in and as philosophy.

All the stories up and running so far—the temporal order of philosophical presentation, the timely order of inquiry, and the narratives of ontogeny and cultural history—are subplots in the architectonic of the philosophy of narrative. The gist of this inclusive story is the history of the significance of narrative in philosophy. For modernity—especially since Hegel—this story has been enriched by the philosophy of history, which accorded to historical narrative its status as an object of wonder and therefore of philosophical reflection. However, once something which came to be called *modernity* started to define itself in terms of its peculiar historical self consciousness, even the most transnarrative categories started to seem to be subject to flux in the queer acid of time. Any child who has a grown up and been absorbed in modern thought will know the poignant explanatory attraction of process, change and history. “Always historicize!” writes Frederic Jameson (1981, p.9), “...the one absolute and we may say ‘transhistorical’ imperative of all dialectical thought.” It has been an imperative driving the romance of modern inquiry, including this inquiry. Now that history and narrative themselves demand narrative, historical explanations, those explanations must be in terms of their object as newly understood—a way of putting it that is just as Hegel long ago described the process of experience: “*Inasmuch as the new true object issues from it, this dialectical movement which*

consciousness exercises on itself and which effects both its knowledge and its object, is precisely what is called *experience* [*Erfahrung*].” (1807. p.55)

In more general terms, beyond just the *experience* of the subject of individual human consciousness, this is the general, temporal predicament of epistemology. Its problems, and solutions, lie not in absolute foundational knowledge but in the natural relativities of this self-referential movement of theory, including theory with a narrative design. So telling narratives of narrative, or using a narrative architectonic, is not just a propagandist counter response to the great anti-narrative tradition. It is a move to relativise and particularise that which has long pretended to transcend relativities and particularity. Such a pretence was a useful one—as it has long been for human consciousness—but it is not one to be severed from its historical genesis. Whatever is represented as a trans-historical or trans-narrative state obtaining through time must represent the condition of its obtaining in a narrative manner. So the trans-historical is a useful ploy, but not something to be made into a fundamental truth.

Nor need the relativities, that the cunning of epistemology sought to transcend, be made fundamental either. Epistemology naturalised is not epistemology utterly relativised. The way humans know something is historically particular, and it could all have been otherwise, but in selecting what counts as knowledge it is not a matter of anything goes. Historical narratives, in their entraining event after event, get more and more specific in their reference to the particularity of the state of the world. In this they represent their referent—knowledge in the case of the natural history of epistemology—less and less as a matter of unrestricted relativities, and more as one of historically stacked limitations on the epistemological possibilities. So the suspected relativities of historicised knowledge or knowledges are no reason for any absolutism of epistemological relativism, nor for those hysterical charges against such purported relativism—charges that are usually directed against a straw dummy, absolute relativism that few, if any, actually subscribe to anyway. The relativities of human knowledge are historically sedimented contingencies, subject to the pressures of natural and cultural selection, which, for modern science has meant especially the pressure of empirical adequacy.

Epistemology, the science that theorises science (including itself), has both narrative and trans-narrative representations as its theoretical objects. It must theorise both together as a paired outcome, and a contingent outcome, of evolving natural processes of representation. What the pair indicates is what any thoroughly scientific system must represent as a natural condition of the evolution of its representations, namely the asymmetry of time.

We are already aware of the philosophical energy of modern time consciousness in such events as Francis Bacon’s announcement—or was it his back announcement—of the project of scientific and technological *progress*. *Novum Organum* has an extraordinary, almost Satanic verve that still incites environmental philosophers to make an example of its exploitationary attitude to nature. I only wish such creatures of what has degenerated into critical habit could summon such verve and put it at the disposal of long suffering wild organic nature. For incipient modernity it was as if the *is* of sheer historical change was harnessed with a Promethean ideological cunning for the *ought* of modernity’s norm of innovation. Hegel’s philosophy of history has been canonised as the first attempt to bring philosophical reflection to bear on this restless and developing historical self consciousness. Hegel seems to have been the first to appreciate how the reflexivity of modernity could drive the reflexivity of philosophy, or vice versa, thereby releasing the kinetic genie that metaphysics from Aristotle to Leibniz had managed bottled up

as entelechy. But as I have said, Hegel did not outwit the deep antinarrative habits of natural consciousness stored up in the metaphysical tradition. Hegel's concepts of historical *development*, and of progress, invoke a principle or reason (the principle of freedom) that is deemed to be present, in embryo, right from the start, and is unfolded towards an end or *telos* that is this principle realised as a whole: *arche* is *telos* in embryo.

In tracing the history of the function of narrative in philosophy, I have noted its role as a straw dummy from which earliest philosophy, in the likes of Parmenides, distinguished itself, just as a natural subject or organism likes to distinguish its own persistence and integrity from the incessant flux of its environment. But ever since modernity made the concept of history a creature of history—and with it the philosophy of history too—modern philosophy has been marked by the frequent historical bent of its questions, and by a desire for ever changing historical designs to its answers, including its answers to the questions of epistemology and metaphysics.

8. A brief, introductory history of history

Speech makes an airy text; words were written on air long before the poets used writing on water as their image of evanescence. Writing was distinguished by its immense duration relative to speech. It enabled the unambiguous conception of linguistic texts as durable things. By contrast, speech seems like a fleeting, scarcely objectified excrescence of innerness, more an action than a thing, and in that sense, especially significant for a tradition in which the universe was understood as a world of things rather than of events. Writing answered the desire for durable objectified texts that was already implicit in phenomena such as the prosodically persisting language of song and myth, or in painting, drawing and sculpture. Speech was left with the function of authentic and spontaneous testimony; it was the standard of natural communication and therefore, as in Plato's *Phaedrus*, the focus of a certain nostalgia.

History as we still know the concept is an after effect of the technology of writing. Prehistory is prewriting. We use the word *history* to refer to at least two things: the telling of past events, and the events themselves. For the institution we call *history* this telling of events is present as text. Even what is now called *oral history* is an after effect of written history, and audio recording technology. The differential duration of written texts meant that they themselves were important historical entities; for the historian of past events, history is present, not so much as the events of empirical or topical history, but as documents. The documents are not just the record of events; rather they are crucial events themselves. With newspapers, film, TV, video, radio, audio and internet, history becomes even more of a "media event". The durable nature of writing was what made it a tool of memory; but written history, as Foucault, like Socrates, said (1969, p.7), is no longer essentially memory in the psychic, human sense. The myth in *Phaedrus* (274) about the invention of writing was right about its inventor's not always knowing the eventual use to which an art will be put. This is a general rule in the history of functions. The document, as monumental as it is durable and copied, becomes an historical creature with a life of its own far from its author, and its survival may be put at the service of institutions such as the *state*, or even the *individual*, in their self formation. Hegel made something of these themes in the history of history: "It is the state which firsts presents subject matter that is not only *adapted* to the prose of history, but involves the production of such history in the very progress of its own being (1822, p. 181)." Writing kindled a chain reaction whose development was the mutually determining unfolding of history, the

state and even, in turn, modern individual consciousness. New media transform history and people.

Yet it was all a kind of productive confusion arising from that enchantment by a communicative technology which we might now recognise as the effect of *virtual reality*. Writing made reality from the virtual reality or the virtual truth of documents. Virtual history is not just counterfactual or ‘what if’ history; rather all history is virtual history. It was the technologies of virtuality that made history possible, and also, that made history primordially flawed. For its truth must always be by way of the virtual, and it must risk itself against the delusions of virtuality. New media only up the ante. The deliberately theatrical history that Borges described in *Theme of the Traitor and the Hero* comprises variations on a theme known to any television news producer or any child of the television age.

The problem of getting footage for screen historiography—of getting “vision” as the producer in *Frontline* sings—has so far resulted in an impoverished poetics of screen historiography. We see this especially in contemporary TV news. As the history of the topical present—and hardly ever of the relevant let alone immediate past—news vision must be dished up hot off the satellite. The great events of prose historiography didn’t, and still don’t, tend to happen before cameras. At least prose historiography could just as effectively quote eyewitness accounts; but if screen historiography does no more it is seen as squandering the medium’s promise, or being ignorant of the (hardly new) medium, or behind the times. In fact, a dismal ignorance of screen media (irrational fear of the talking head and of audio, cheap or more often absent graphics, mystifying denial of the truly powerful conceptual as opposed to sensational value of images, etc.) along with the fear of looking ignorant and behind the times, and fear of ratings, beget the industry’s terrified conformity to the mindless, if at least sensational, imperative of “vision.” Remotely illustrative or even irrelevant file footage, embarrassing re-enactments, and metonymical or metaphorical images (a news item about a storm brewing in industrial relations on the waterfront shows a container vessel in heavy seas) are sad substitutes for good visual documentation. If the medium can’t go to the news, news becomes whatever goes to the medium. Thus TV, not unlike prose long before it, makes its own kind of history. Even speech produces myth and rumour as its distinctive forms of protohistoriography. Visual and accessible events become the prime commodity of TV news. Door stop interviews, reduction of sound to bites, historical soap operas like royal or celebrity watching, and the shape, rhythm and spectacle of events like the Gulf War, organised as it was around such video events as that terrible yet sublime ride on a US missile into an Iraqi building, are all instances of news as a function of the still poorly appreciated medium of video. TV sport is one result of the desire for real time visual historiography. Even if it started out as pretending history, sport becomes virtual history and therefore history itself, complete with the grandeur of conflict between nations. And one team really, historically wins, and gets its victory documented for posterity. As texts become increasingly the subject matter of history, with a life of their own, we witness the displacement or distortion of nearly every residue of that supposedly irreducible actuality that we still cherish as the ultimate reference of historiography, and the triumph of history as thoroughly textual. Sport is a genre of history as pure textuality. It is its own drama, its own self referring, self unfolding history. Election politics, in turn, becomes more like sport. Once we might have said that sport was a form of political catharsis, but now it is the other way round.

The speculative Hegel was as much the child of the enchanting spectacle of the virtual as he was its scrutineer: for want of a document, and therefore in the thrall of a kind of unreflecting scepticism, the most incisive of scepticism’s critics himself

fell foul of a mere practical limitation and declined to recognise the historical character of events that took place before writing. He thought they lacked an *objective* character because they lacked any *subjective* telling (1822, p.26). In a way he was wrong on both counts: it was the durable, objective character of told texts that was so dazzling, while the events themselves were, as *events*, somehow already subjective.

What was originally Kant's distinction between *subjective* and *objective*, has itself become a cause of confusion. The category of the *event* is subjective in the Kantian sense, in that it is the means or category by which the human subject may grasp and represent particular temporal phenomena. Its conceptual complement, the *state* of affairs, is the subjective means by which humans grasp what obtains throughout or regardless of time. The *event* as humans represent it, thus marks a stage in the history of narrative, a stage that is contemporary with that animal which must use it to represent temporal information—the human, or even prehuman, subject. But now we're talking Darwin, not Kant or Hegel. More on this later. The two categories share between them the reference of each and every human sentence. Emerging from the distinction between the two categories are such divisions as those between narrative and theory, genesis and structure, and timeliness and timelessness. Consigning unwritten events to the *terra nullius* of prehistory was a convenient excuse for ignoring them, and for ignoring the traces of their contingency that inevitably marked and determined subsequent history. Imagine now ignoring prevideo! The reluctance to submit the mysteries of consciousness to natural history has also been an instance of preserving a pristine scientific wilderness from the meddlesome footfall of thought and experimentation. One of the events ignored, but which no history of narrative can ignore, was the development of language, without which there would have been no writing either. Conveniently, the invention of writing gave Hegel and grammophilic culture, if not an origin, then a ready place in the middle of things to start telling history.

The fascination with virtual reality is an ancient one. The enchantment by writing probably replayed the even more ancient enchantment of speech itself. How it must have changed the world to have filled it with spoken texts, however fleeting. Insofar as linguistic texts have a life of their own beyond their author's, that life was already lived by speech, and it has been crucial to human history. It was just that, after writing, the life of speech seemed prehistoric, yet also more authentic. Derrida (1976) even felt we needed to be reminded that speech was already a kind of writing. Scepticism about the prehistory of writing was probably due when it came to speculation about the origin of language; it is a topic as seductive as it is obscure. Bans on telling it were sometimes explicit (the Société de Linguistique de Paris put bans on it in 1866), or they were, up until very recently, just a customary inhibition of sceptical documentary historicism. Evolutionary biology seemed to be dogged by lack of documents—or fossils—at the same time as it opened up the field as a legitimate one for natural history. Darwin's own remarks on the subject were clear but provisional.

It was not until natural selection came to be clearly seen by biologists such as George Williams (1966, p.252) less as a way of cobbling together paleohistorical stories of morphological change, ecological specialisation and taxonomic cladogenesis and more as a theory of adaptation and biological design constrained by genealogical contingencies that it could join with linguistics, psychology and philosophy in an historical theory of human cognitive, affective and communicative design. This was to release it not only from the charges of biological determinism, but from the embarrassment of having to make up for the perceived lack of historical detail by resorting to the ploys of bad historical fiction. It changed the genre from one

of story telling to one of theory with a narrative design. Instead of an historical romance or science fiction set in the Pleistocene, what the natural history of language asserted was the evolved linguistic and cognitive design of the human organism. As for the lack of fossil evidence: the best ‘fossils’ we have of human evolutionary design lie in the talking, thinking, creatures before us now. Thus the work of linguists like Noam Chomsky on the general features of human grammar provided important evidence for understanding the biological origins of language. Working out how human language, cognition and emotion work, and how they could have evolved are interdependent, interanimating tasks.

9. *History as natural history.*

In hindsight, it is not surprising that it would take the natural sciences, with their empirical, non anthropocentric perspective, to dispatch the transnarrative metaphysics that lingered in the afterlife of transcendental epistemology. What is perhaps more surprising is that, after the theory of natural selection was formulated, its sublime cybernetics could be quarantined for so long—in name at least—in the departments of non human biology. But, as Theodor Adorno observed (1966, p.358), “The traditional antithesis of nature and [human] history is both true and false—true insofar as it expresses what happened to the natural element; false insofar as, by means of conceptual reconstruction, it apologetically repeats the concealment of history’s natural growth by history itself.”

The story of evolutionary history is a long, slow story, so general and pervasive in its consequences that it reaches deep into the heart of human narrative, and fiction. In submitting all life to narrative explanation, it provides a history of narrative itself. If the philosophy of fiction chooses to ignore the evolution of human narrative, preferring, like Oedipus, to remain blind to historical genesis, it chooses a familiar dullness over wonder, and mystification over insight. Likewise if it chooses to ignore the effects that natural historical thought, and in particular natural selection, have had on the history of the concept of *history* in its social sense.

Biological evolution aside, some kind of autonomous evolutionary process has long seemed to be at work in social history; or, at least, certain social phenomena—most famously, markets—have seemed to behave like natural processes insofar as the *natural* is conceived in one of the Aristotelian senses (*Physics*, 192b) as self generating and self determining. However, to submit human cultural history to a natural, law-like explanation was (like Darwinian evolution) something of a challenge to cherished human freedom. Kant epitomised a persistent cultural sentiment (as it turns out, one with its own natural history of cultural selection and cultural reproduction) in feeling that he had to specifically distinguish freedom’s causation from the determinations of heteronomous natural causation. The difficulty—not to mention the perceived hubris or arrogance—of developing theories of either the evolution of the human species or the evolution of cultural forms, and the difficulty of clearly distinguishing the two in the first place, if countenanced at all, could, for most, be conveniently and indefinitely postponed. Due scepticism toward such theories easily became customary disregard for their claims to any validity.

The most infamous expression of the naturalisation of human history was Social Darwinism. It was a tradition whose analysis failed to appreciate the importance of the distinction between what we now understand as genic transmission and social communication; so it lacked the discrimination of the elements of meaning involved in social processes, and with that, lacked any chance of understanding the lawful nature of certain cultural historical processes. Social Darwinism, in its worst

and eventually its most ridiculed expression, was an historically limited, pseudo-scientific, cultural form, theorised in the muddled terms of a half baked evolutionism that thoroughly confused the not indistinct processes of cultural and sexual reproduction. All this in order to prove as fact natural human inequality and thereby justify it as a norm. In a way, the tradition of Social Darwinism has been less well defined and persistent than the tradition of referring to it disparagingly. And this itself is an instance of how cultural evolution can work its transformations, as the reference of a term drifts away from its initial historical extension. Loose talk that confuses so called racial and cultural descent is almost as common among those who refer to Social Darwinism in order to disparage it as among those they disparage.

Still, in the nineteenth century, at a time when theories of history and their reformulation became a normal feature of modernity, it seems the theory of natural selection—that is of selection without a human or some other designing agent—was contributing to changes in the philosophy of history that extended beyond the misguided claims of Social Darwinism. The same cultural environment, including the same scientific system that selected the theory of natural selection, also selected related contributions to the theory of cultural history, contributions that theorised cultural processes as autonomous, like physical nature, and though cultural, yet again like physical nature, heteronomous to psychological intentions. These contributions were, *genealogically* related to Darwin's, that is, by a genealogy of social (communicative) transmission.

In the preface to *Capital*, Marx wrote, "My standpoint, from which the evolution of the economic formation of society is viewed as a process of natural history, can less than any other make the individual responsible for relations whose creature he socially remains, however much he may subjectively raise himself above them." (1867, p.21) It has taken a long time for the working out of the psychological implications of natural selection to even get started. Marx himself could scarcely have foreseen them. But it is not a fallacious projection back onto nineteenth century history to say that Marx explicitly recognised not only that human history belongs to natural history, but that it is subject to natural *social* processes that are somewhat autonomous and take place "over the heads" of individual humans and their intentions.

A specifically modern feature of Marx's philosophy of history was the way it brought modernity's norm of innovation into the philosophical interpretation of the world, with the injunction that philosophers should change the world. As Anthony Giddens (1990, pp. 38-9) has suggested, the appetite for the new is actually a consequence of modernity's reflexivity—a reflexivity which is characterised by self-altering self-descriptions. So, in a way, Marx's thesis about changing the world is yet another case of making an *ought* out of an *is*. The norm of technological progress was adapted (to borrow an evolutionary term) into a norm of social progress, or, as it were, a norm of progress in the techniques of social reform based on progress in the social sciences. The passage at the start of *The Communist Manifesto* about all that is solid melting into air is about using the natural flux of capitalism to liquidate itself. It is a far cry from the archaic stasis that state "Marxism" became—in order, it almost seems, to make capital's task of outwitting it ridiculously easy. Perhaps the desire for social reform was the condition for grasping at what were still, then, the straws of a natural science of social history. For in theorising the natural history of society, Marx saw the possibility of a technology of history, and not what the Social Darwinists took to be an immutable human or social nature. Seeing social history as part of natural history was not a way of asserting its dismal inevitability. We are free to ignore the natural regularities of social history at our own peril, but we are also free to recognise

such regularities in order to break the spell of their inevitability and perhaps outwit them: merely to conceive of the inevitable restrictions of gravity is not to remain earthbound. On the contrary.

Both Marx and Darwin drew inspiration from Adam Smith, a common intellectual ancestor, whose concept of the “invisible hand”, implied that a natural self determination was at work in at least one historical process. In describing market processes, Smith wrote (1776, p194): “...he [the individual capitalist] intends only his own gain, and he is in this, as in many other cases, led by an invisible hand to promote an end which has no part of his intentions.” Smith himself did not create the concept of self guided systems *ex nihilo*. The idea that certain social processes had a life of their own guided by designs beyond those of the individuals involved was an old one indeed. Witness the life of self perpetuating conflicts! Like the great feud between the descendants of Pelops that ran irresistibly through the generations until it was brought to an end by Athena’s judgement of Orestes, such conflict systems are a perennial theme of fascinated human narratives. Even the metaphor of an invisible hand guiding natural processes was one that Smith himself inherited. Niklas Luhmann (1986, p.46) draws attention to Joseph Glanville writing in 1661, that “Nature works by an invisible hand in all things.” Smith’s use of the metaphor of the invisible hand in a social context fell on fertile ground—on an intellectual landscape long prepared for it, and quite prepared to take it up, if not to scientifically develop it. It was, after all, still disarmingly metaphorical.

The common intellectual environment exerted a selection pressure for theories of selection. Thus thirty years before Darwin, Wallace (and others) had put natural selection on the centre stage of biology, Patrick Matthew published what Darwin acknowledged was “precisely the same view on the origin of species.” Matthew’s 1831 book on Navel Timber and Arboriculture had a succinct description of natural selection (see Darwin, 1859, p. vi). While the ground for theorising a program of selection was fertile, and while Darwin clearly saw the importance of variation, the understanding of variation itself awaited the development of a genetic theory of inheritance. In fact, the strength of Darwinian theory in turn created a selection pressure for a theory of variation that would both be consistent with it and confirm it.

Smith’s was a very simple version of the systemic, self sustaining character of markets, but he rightly distinguished between individual and market systemic intentions and so, rightly appreciated an autopoietic teleology of markets independent of individual human teleology. What he failed to mention was that the interests of individuals and of a public need not be the same as those of the market’s invisible hand. He did not fully appreciate the market system’s autopoietic autonomy, and he did not clearly distinguish it from *society*. Nor did he understand the individual as anything but an atom of the system, whereas, not only does the social system construct its individuals, individual psyches, as Luhmann (1985) put it, are the environment of society. Market systems and social systems seem to behave like the self perpetuating systems of biology—namely organisms (but not ecosystems) or the self referential elements in natural selection (the “selfish genes”). They are self reproducing and autopoietic, and they define themselves for themselves by means of a self reference that distinguishes them from their environments. Luhmann has analysed social systems—distinguished as systems consisting of communications rather than people—in terms of their self referring, autopoietic persistence. Drawing on the post Darwinian concepts of variation and selection as operative processes in systems autopoiesis, Luhmann’s functional analysis naturalised social history and epistemology with an illuminating vengeance.

Another philosopher of history who exhibited a significant genealogical relation to Darwin, and whose idea of *genealogy* exerted an influence on the theory of history right up to the end of the twentieth century was Friedrich Nietzsche. His *Genealogy of Morals*, inspired by philological method, was strangely Darwinian despite his declaring otherwise. For me now to tell this history of the concept of *history as natural history* in terms of the progressive refinement of the concept would be an instance of a kind of heedlessness that often damages the stories dished up by historicist thought. The transformation of the concept of history that has taken place since the likes of Darwin and Marx has its genealogical forebears, but after Darwin and Marx the idea that human history belonged to natural history so transformed the concept of history that it was like a new species. Indeed it has seemed like a bit of a monster—such a monster that, over a century later, the sciences and the humanities are only just daring to let their gaze rest upon its awful form. The Social Darwinists thought that the natural history of humans proved their received concept of human nature. But whatever *they* took to be the nature of humans and whatever the origin of *their* concept of human nature, the meaning and uses of the term had been transformed into something utterly different, right under their noses, and by the very science they thought they were using. And even those self styled humanists who a century later refused to hypostatise human nature, on the grounds that it licensed biological determinism or dog-eat-dog capitalism, shared more with the Social Darwinists than they realised. They had not appreciated how the concept of nature was no longer what it had been, and could no longer be used of something simply to mean that it was determined, unfree, inevitable or brutal. One thing Nietzsche's *genealogy* asserted was just how catastrophic these kinds of historical reversal in meaning and function can be. Thus Nietzsche on history:

There is no set of maxims more important for an historian than this: that the actual cause of a thing's origin and its eventual uses, the manner of its incorporation into a set of purposes, are worlds apart; that everything that exists, no matter what its origin, is periodically reinterpreted by those in power in terms of fresh intentions; that all processes in the organic world are processes of outstripping and overcoming, and that, in turn, all outstripping and overcoming means reinterpretation, rearrangement, in the course of which the earlier meaning is either obscured or lost. No matter how well we understand the utility of a certain physiological organ (or of a legal institution, a custom, a political convention, an artistic genre, a cultic trait) we do not thereby understand anything of its origin. (1887, p.209)

Like the meaning of *nature*, the meaning of *history* is also subject to this set of maxims for the functional analysis or *genealogy* of historical meanings—likewise, I should point out for now, the function or meaning of *fiction*: parallel to the genealogy of *history* there is a genealogy of *fiction*. This parallelism of fiction to facts is itself an instance of the way fiction lives by making a spectacle of narratives and thereby changing their function. Fiction could be built upon the maxims of genealogy deliberately employed to make new meanings: *making up* is narrative innovation by emulation of the genealogical transformations of narrative meanings, with the new meanings being interpretable by a process of contextual inference or *implicature*. Sometimes, of course, the parallels meet, as in, say, embellished news and rumour, or in so called historical fiction.

The genealogical relation of Nietzschean to Darwinian thought is not that of illegitimate child, but again that of a common intellectual ancestry. For one thing,

they shared an appreciation of the philological method that had managed to start compiling a genealogy of languages by carefully tracing the historical paths of functional transformations in the linguistic elements. The maxims of genealogy apply, more or less, to biological as they do to cultural history. (Nietzsche's genealogy was a bit of an unholy tangle of both genic and cultural evolution—but then, presumably, this is actually the case in human history.) Nietzsche's idea of something's function, use or meaning changing over time was also an important insight of Darwin's biological thought: "Thus throughout nature almost every part of each living thing has probably served, in a slightly modified condition, for diverse purposes; and has acted in the living machinery of many ancient and distinct specific forms." (1862, p.284)

When it comes to the evolution of cultural as opposed to physiological elements or organs, changes in the cultural function of elements—that is, variations in their meanings followed by selection of the new meanings—take on a cultural, genealogical life that is frequently alienated from any earlier psychological function or from individual psychology and intentions. The functional transformations and perceived discontinuities of genealogy arise not in contrast to Darwinian evolution, but precisely because of a kind of Darwinian calculus—a program of copying, variation and selection operating on elements of cultural meaning. As with natural selection, the selections of cultural evolution are effectively authorless.

At this point then I should get one thing quite clear. In biology, evolution by natural selection is not only the accepted scientific paradigm, it is, despite alarmed creationist nostalgia, part of the folk biology of postmodernity: any child educated in modern biology can say that humans have evolved from apes. Yet evolution, because it is governed by often counter-intuitive selection processes, is still not widely well understood. To speak of cultural evolution in this context may lead to some misunderstandings. The idea of cultural evolution that is basic to the understanding of many social phenomena, including narrative art, is not to be confused with *evolutionism* as it is still often understood in both the social sciences and popular imagination—namely as another term for the ideology of *progress* (See Giddens 1990, pp. 4-6). This is one reason why the term *genealogy* has persisted. It is used to distinguish descriptions of social historical processes from naive, "continuist", progressivist evolutionism; and it is sometimes even used to distinguish descriptions of the same social historical processes from what many in the humanities wrongly believe to be the progressivist evolutionism of Darwinian evolution. Though it may well qualify for the title of "grand narrative", cultural evolution, like biological evolution, is not teleological, it is not necessarily progressive, it is not told in terms of a unified or "totalised" story line, and it is not continuist. These things follow precisely from its being conceived in terms of Darwinian selection processes.

As it turned out, it was not until Richard Dawkins (1976) proposed a likely operational definition of a reproducible unit of cultural information—the *meme*—that the process of natural selection was actually applied to cultural evolution in anything approaching the principled manner of the genetic theory of natural selection. When Dawkins speculated about the existence of a social science of memetics he was, as we shall see, a bit like Saussure speculating about the existence of a science of semiotics when semioticians had been beaver away at it for over two thousand years. However, once Dawkins had defined a self-referring, reproducible unit of cultural information (the meme is a creature very like a *sign* or an *idea*) in terms that made it operational in a natural selection algorithm, it could then be used by Daniel Dennett (1995, p.349) to suggest how, among other things, social, memetic evolution, arising and going on within the intimacy of human minds, could exhibit its own non-human

autonomy: the meme, as a reproducible unit of cultural meaning is a selfish structural element within a social system of communication, as the gene is a selfish element within an organism. Many genealogical phenomena—including the genealogical relation of writing and other media to history and narrative art—are clarified when analysed memetically. As philological method had demonstrated before Darwin, the analysis of the functional history of social organs like those that Nietzsche cited, or of the history of a word, a scientific concept, a joke, a genre or a kind of narrative plot, demands a methodological recognition of the limitations placed on the possibilities of actual history by the processes of the reproduction, variation and selection of the memetic phenomenon in question. Whether we want to recognise an historical science of memetics or not, taking a memetic perspective entails certain requirements of methodological rigour that scientific historiography would only ignore at its peril.

Though misrepresented by Social Darwinism, the theory of natural selection has slowly developed and broadened the scope of its analysis. Even though its biological significance for the concepts of history and narrative is still not fully appreciated, it provides a basis for the functional analysis of human psychology and so for telling a history of the human capacity for telling. How could any theory of narrative ignore an historical plot that proceeded by its own unintentional yet law-like momentum, let alone one that could claim to tell how human psyche itself was happily one of the plots unintended outcomes? It is a glib metaphor to say humans are “hard wired” for narrative, but the possibilities for human psyche, and therefore for human narration, have been framed by natural selection. Perhaps we should say soft wired. Whatever. The resistance to Darwinian biology in philosophy produced a deracinated and so unhistorical version of history which often seemed to occasion the mystification that beset much epistemology, and narrative theory. Consequently, theorists of narrative and history just did not have enough explanatory stories up their sleeves.

At the same time, cultural critics and twentieth century theorists of narrative have certainly not entirely ignored the seemingly autonomous nature of social processes. The recognition that such processes work in the environment of, and often despite, individual intentions is, in these disciplines, largely one with a Marxian genealogy. And, in turn, the sense for individual consciousness of a familiar yet estranged cultural reality had been classically intimated in an other genealogical ancestor, the Hegelian theory of *alienation* (1807, pp. 294ff). Cultural critics and narrative theorists have not usually looked to cultural selection and systems theory so much as to conceptual descendants of the theoretically suggestive but underdeveloped concepts of *alienation* and *reification*, and to a concept of *genealogy* that has not fully appreciated its own genealogical relation to *natural selection*. Dawkin’s, Dennett’s, and others’ speculations on memes, if they have been noted at all, have seemed too glib, too much like pop sociobiology, and too much like a repetition of biological determinism in the social sphere. Meanwhile, the application of systems theory to social systems has either seemed too abstract, too speculative, or too remote and inhuman for inquiries into such a cherished and intimately human practice as narrative art. It has not managed to find an environment conducive to its reproduction and selection beyond a limited genealogical network. Consequently, cultural and narrative theorists have all too often taken the insights of their theoretically underdeveloped concepts—concepts whose limitations are themselves to be explained in terms of cultural selection—and, in the context of the old “critique of the subject”, simply parlayed them into a kind of rote, and therefore systematised, ideology critique with its own self-perpetuating autonomy. All this suggests a genealogy that needs telling in the philosophy of fiction: that of philosophy’s resistance to the natural

history of epistemology in general, and of resistance to the post Darwinian narratives of natural and cultural selection in particular. This story is at the crux of narrative theory's resistance to a thoroughly narrative theory of narrative, a resistance that persisted so poignantly right up into structuralist and post-structuralist narrative theory.

In telling this story it is important not to reproduce that other rote critique—the one that habitually uses terms like *postmodern* and *post-structuralist* as pejoratives. To do so would be to have one's concepts drawn into the self referential vortex of a conflict in which each side limits itself by limiting its presumed other to a mere straw dummy. What is of interest for the philosophy of narrative is not the conceptually trifling shots that go off according to the self perpetuating law of a late twentieth century “culture war” but the convergence of quite different theoretical traditions in the recognition that, in Adorno's words (1966, p.354), “the objectivity of historic life is that of natural history.” The likes of Dawkins and Dennett converge with cultural critics, drawn together by the irresistible gravity of the same preponderant object.

10. *Time scales.*

We can't understand historical time without recognising that different processes and dramas with different ontologies and casts are happening at the same time but over different time scales. Without a paleological time scale measured in eons—however hard that is to grasp for we creatures of everyday time—we can't grasp biological evolution and therefore the biological human animal. This is the time scale of *phylogeny* or *evolution* in the genic, biological sense. It is at the phylogenetic level that we must tell the story of narrative in the most ancient and general sense as the biological processing of temporal information.

The time scale of an organism's genically and environmentally determined development, a human's say, is that of *ontogeny*. In its most general sense, it is that of an organism's life, or to put it in its operative, epistemological sense, its experience of its environment and itself. Ontogeny interanimates with phylogeny in that the genic determination (or strictly underdetermination) of the organism takes place in and is effected (or underdetermined) by the organism's experience of its environment. The processing of temporal information at this time scale is the main kind of narrative skill that phylogeny bequeaths to an organism.

Human ontogeny may itself be operatively subdivided according to the time scales of different kinds of memory. Working or short term memory is functionally different from long term memory. While working memory is more like a brief store of present data consisting of particular representations of particular events and objects, long term memory appears to rely more on the generation of representations of events from a memory of kinds of sequences of events rather than particular sequences. We don't so much store all the events of past experience as store the stories that generate them (Schacter, 1996).

Another operative subdivision to be made in the course of the human organism's life is that between childhood development—often seen as ontogeny in the strict sense—and adult life. In childhood development, the still growing and forming physiological resources bequeathed by phylogeny are formed by and in a human environment. Thus an infant's inherited linguistic ability, comprising the schematic framework of a pancultural grammar, develops according to its genetic determination, but only in a suitable human, linguistic environment. In the process, it is tuned to a particular language or languages (see Pinker, 1994, pp. 277-8). Since these

developmental processes take place while the brain is still being formed, the kinds of *learning* and *memory* involved are somewhat different to the learning and long term memory of adult experience.

The use of the term *memory* for different kinds of abstract memory (rather than for just experiential human memory) at least reminds us of the general problem of time that confronts living things. Whatever time might be, there is scarcely enough of it for an organism in a complex, changing environment. Indeed time is a matter of the temporal relation of different sequences of events, most significantly, the relation of organismic and environmental sequences. Memory gives us our leeway in time, opening out abstract time's single and urgent dimension, by enabling the anticipation of events, and so relaxing the imperative of time's asymmetry. By enabling the representation of sequences of events, it enables the choice we need in order to respond to a changing environment and maintain ourselves in it. Whatever time is, it is effectively given to us by memory when we compare one sequence of events with another: so called *real time* is an abstract standard of comparison, the need for which arises when subjects observe subjects like and including themselves observing temporally conditioned phenomena. Different time scales correspond to the comparative duration of the different operatively defined kinds of memory—genic, cultural, technological, and organismic or subjective or experiential—that have developed throughout natural history.

Between the time scales of phylogeny and ontogeny lies that of cultural history or the social history of the human species. This story interanimates with ontogeny in that culture provides developmental environment for an individual: a child may develop language in a human social environment but it will be an environment characterised by a particular cultural variant of human language with its own etymological history. A child will also encounter an historically specific scientific, technological, economic, political and artistic culture. Thus, as Hegel (1807, p.16) recognised of a child in his time, so now a postmodern child learns science which would have taxed Aristotle, and is born into a social and technological environment quite different from that encountered by the infant Stagyrte. The persistent structures of culture—the kind of memetic memory that persists and develops through social, historical processes and that is so important in telling the history of different languages, scientific theories, and arts like fiction—make peculiar demands on historical narrative. Whether there is a reliable, governing narrative—a grand narrative, some might call it—for telling this history is a moot point; yet use of the very concept of *culture* implies some such narrative, grand or grandiose.

Time scales larger than ontogeny are quite likely to produce counterintuitive stories like Nietzsche's *genealogy*, or *natural selection*, because they are less likely to be immediately graspable by our evolved but untutored narrative skill. It is very difficult for people—even budding biological taxonomists—to grasp the concept of the origin of a species; and in such circumstances it is also difficult to grasp relations of temporal priority. This can be illustrated by questions such as: which comes first, individual human consciousness or human language and social systems? Or by questions about the historical priority of the factual as against fictive use of communication. Or even by questions about the priority of chickens or eggs. When the assertion is made that fictive communication is parasitic on factual communication, this is a bit like blithely asserting that you first need a chicken to lay an egg. Part of the problem lies in the way things such as a species (like humans, or chooks) or consciousness or social systems are not uniquely specifiable over long time periods. Defining the essence of something is an evolved naturalistic bias of

human consciousness, and the explanatory power of timeless essences breaks down at time scales beyond those that we are designed to spontaneously process. It is not enough to just invoke a process of the coevolution of these phenomena without addressing the problem of distinguishing different moments of reciprocal causation between say a new psychological function and some causally related communicative or social phenomenon. As we know from everyday cultural history—from trying to analyse the relation of screen violence and social violence, say—matters of causal sequence can be obscure even when plenty of evidence seems to be available. What these problems illustrate about narrative, and what the cryptic origin of species so well exemplifies, is that narratives are designed to represent, and perhaps sometimes explain in terms of more familiar (such as, say, gradual) processes, a kind of *metabasis eis allo genos*, a transformation into an other species. In order to do this at counterintuitive time scales we have to use genres that rely on quite sophisticated, culturally evolved, technical plots, even though they still depend on the narrative and epistemological skills of genically evolved human psychology.

The history of culture has its own time scales, apparent in the history of social systems and closely tied to the history of technology. The most operationally important technologies in the history of cultural reproduction are those that store and communicate information. In a sense all tools do this for such semiotic animals as us, but some tools are tools of communication and memory: the media.

The history of narrative can be seen as the history of its media. It lies in the cultural history of new genres—and the information they may bear—as they arise in new media. Yet we may more radically understand the order of several kinds of narrative—experience, events, communicative actions, texts—as based on an order of biological media at the evolutionary time scale. It starts for convenience *in medias res* (it has a prehistory) with pre-human processing of temporal information—a necessary condition of *life*. Human experience, in the medium of the *body*, comes long after. Then the human phenotype extends beyond communicative actions in the media of *speech* and *gesture*, to various environmental objects such as *pigments*, say, or other graphic media, and thence to more recent communicative technologies. A medium is not just abstract matter, but as Theodor Adorno has said in the context of aesthetic theory, it comes replete with its historical intention—or its biological or cultural function. The history of *myth* is primarily a history of the media of speech, song, dance, graphics and, as we should well know in Australia, the land. For such designing creatures as humans, the whole environment is ripe for the semiotic taking: the human phenotype extends itself to take in media all around it. Nowadays landscape is no longer just memory or myth it is postmodern history. In Australia it is a document recording historical antagonisms in the biota: there is the phylogenetic drama of fire adapted communities versus moist communities, and there is the human drama recorded on the Aboriginal landscape where it has been written over by the palimpsest of modern invasion. History, philosophy and science correspond historically to the medium of writing. Modern fiction corresponds to the history of printing and, as Alberto Manguel suggests (1996), the history of silent reading; though it has its prehistory in the earlier media of drama, speech and writing, and it lives on in audio and screen media. New media take up and transform the genres of earlier media. Screen media transform the functions of earlier genres and modes such as history, fiction, and philosophy in ways that are still unfolding. Nowadays, the cascade of new information media even threatens to force screen to develop, as it were, posthumously.

One level of time scale does not just follow another; rather, events at each finer time scale are superimposed on those at a larger time scale in a kind of fractal construction of uneven, multileveled historical development. Seemingly non simultaneous phenomena from apparently different historical periods occur simultaneously because they are separately effected by different processes that are in fact taking place at different time scales. So the history of culture takes off as a set of wrinkles on the vast curve of genic evolution; and cultural phenomena form archaic societies persist in the environment of and therefore as denizens of, postmodern society. It is not a matter, in telling these stories, of sorting out the levels as before and after; given their interanimation it will not always be easy to actually sort them out. The *events* in one time scale become the (virtually unchanging) conditional *state of affairs* or environment for events at a finer, more fleeting time scale, while at a longer time scale such a *state* is queered by the arrow of time into a fleeting *event*. The human organism is a virtual state of affairs at the level of cultural history, but a fleeting event for genic evolution. This is why the genetic underdetermination of the human organism is effectively expressed in shared or *pancultural* characters—in particular, in pancultural linguistic, cognitive and emotional characteristics—upon which cultural differences in language, science and emotional expression supervene. Even fast changing cultural phenomena supervene on slower ones, as, say, a motor transport grid supervenes on one that developed in horse and buggy days; or a postmodern, cinematic science fiction supervenes on the ancient and persistent generic form of prose or oral romance, so that we get people on a space station with an anachronistic feudal social structure. In the sphere of cultural phenomena, this supervening of a process from a finer time scale on another of coarser grain lies behind Ernst Bloch's notion of *Ungleichzeitigkeit* or synchronic 'uneven development' (Jameson, 1981, p.141).

The thinking subject for Descartes or Kant was a state of affairs—one that transcended time and biology. In the wake of the development of the concept of culture throughout the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and especially after cultural anthropology and cultural theory, the human subject came to be regarded as a creature conditioned by cultural evolution as well. Genic evolution actually underdetermines the state of a culturally specific subject or *person* whose nature is also a product, as Daniel Dennett puts it (1995 pp. 470-471), of the cultural history of memes. Though the narrative cognition of humans goes back to their phylogenetic evolution, it is also a matter of cultural history. The stories humans tell are deeply cultural: one needs a post Darwinian scientific culture to tell stories at the evolutionary time scale; or one needs a TV to tell a sitcom. Any narrative medium or genre conditions its own narrating subject. The human subject is a creature of several histories going on at different time scales: there is one phylogenetic tree with its one ancestral subject and its multitude of similar (though genetically diverse and polymorphic) descendants; there are many cultural histories each with its cultural subject, and as many ontogenies as there are individuals. And, it is not strictly a matter of longer time scales providing the condition for shorter ones; the causal relations work both ways.

While the genically evolved human animal is a condition for cultural history, culture becomes an environment for genic evolution as well as for individual ontogeny. Once we understand genic evolution we become conscious agents in genetic history, through genetic technologies. In fact we have long practised breeding other species on the basis of the ancient, proto-genetic science of inheritance. Indeed, for lack of a science of genetics, Darwin himself had to base his explanation of natural selection on this old science. Perhaps in matters of sexual selection and in the

evolution of linguistic communication we have practised breeding on ourselves. Might not the culture of *romantic love* or, more generally, marriage and kinship conventions, and sexual ethics and aesthetics be forms of eugenics, in which, having been designed by nature to be designing, we (more or less inadvertently) design ourselves in a feedback from memic to genic processes? Visually arresting but genetically trivial, skin deep differences like skin colour may have been partly outcomes of geographically and culturally persistent preferences selecting such features. In a way, much that is distinctive and contradictory about human sexual and social life seems like a result of the lag time between the cultural evolution of moral and aesthetic norms and phylogenetic evolution.

Many baulk at what they see as the glibness or banality of operationally defined entities such as these time scales or the phenomena that only start to appear when seen from the perspective of one of these time scales. They suspect—often rightly—an overweening projection of reductive theoretical concepts onto things. But as Quine (1936, p.322) said, “some flow from the theoretical to the conventional is an adjunct of progress in the logical foundations of any science.” Walter Benjamin said that this practise amounted to solving otherwise impossible problems by the emphatic declaration of conceptual distinctions and that this is what Plato meant by ideas “rescuing phenomena.” (Benjamin 1963, p 33) Another way of putting it is in the Platonic terms of carving nature at the joints (*Phaedrus* 265). The natural boundaries at these joints, that separate out entities as “natural kinds” operating at their own distinctive time scales, are effects of the self reference of the entities *vis á vis* their environments.

11. From philosophy of history to poetics of narrative.

Sometimes, when critics praise the beautiful prose of a work of narrative art, they are just invoking the frisson of lyric so that aesthetic ineffability can hide the lack of anything much to say. Beautiful prose is more than a matter of fine cadences because writing (and narrative) is primarily conceptual. Even the peculiarly simple yet obscure style of the King James Bible gets called beautiful because the shine of the Bible’s narrative concepts rubs off on the translation. The sonority of prose, the rhythm of composition or montage, stunning cinematography and the like are nothing as mere beautiful trappings. They are nothing if not affective signs of the conceptual power of narrative art.

Aristotle’s *Poetics* was a poetics of concepts because it was primarily about the art of narrative. Its primary concern was not with what we now call literature but with the making or the *poesis* of stories—with plot and character in drama and epic, and, prospectively, in print, cinema and TV. A response to the antipoetics in Plato’s theory of education, it was the first, and for a long time the pre-eminent European work on the theory of narrative.

Aristotle’s theory preserved the philosophically seductive hope that what could be said about narrative in general, including history, would be implicit in and revealed by a poetics of narrative art. Though no doubt spurred on by art’s peculiar apologetic predicament, Aristotle (*Poetics* 1451b) claimed that poetry is something more philosophical and serious than history because it tends to give universal truths rather than particular facts. Implicit in this way of putting the role of narrative art is not only the high philosophical purpose of poetics but also the notion that narrative arts are not mere history but, indeed, define themselves by both negating and subsuming history.

The flowering of narrative theory in the twentieth century was a reinvigoration of poetics in the Aristotelean sense. In a way, narrative poetics was the last of the old Aristotelean scientific disciplines to emerge from medieval inertia. Partly a reaction against the privileged vagaries of literary taste, and the neglect of non literary media, narrative theory was a scientific concern with the workings of aesthetic and poetic phenomena in fiction, romance and myth, in film, drama, print and voice. The remarkable work of formalist and structuralist theorists—Tyanov, Propp, Bakhtin, Levi-Strauss, Frye, Barthes, Greimas, Todorov, Genette, and many others—exhibited a scientific concern with narrative universals, such as those that condition interpretation or distinguish genres, and this was despite aesthetic Modernism's emphasis on the particular and on the autonomy of the individual artwork.

This somewhat tentative application of scientific inquiry to art was an historically specific phenomenon—perhaps, we might say, a stage in Modernism's self transformation into Postmodernism. Traditional literary scholarship was not always happy about the functional differentiation of inquiries into what had formerly been its baby; but it could not resist it, just as it had not been able (or willing) to subsume cinematic narrative into its domain the way, from Aristotle on, it had managed to subsume drama by way of the *script*. On the other hand, narrative theorists were seldom happy to reduce narrative art to the pinched ontologies of functional analysis; they were seldom able to resist the fine phrases or the kerygmatic claims of whatever persisted of good old artistic taste. In a way though, they were honouring scientific scepticism, because art is notorious for giving the lie to any reductive description of it, as the sorry state of aesthetic theory had had a habit of showing. Of course this restless relation of art to descriptions of it is both a major object of aesthetic theory and a going concern of art itself. The sense that the theory of narrative art had somehow to emulate its object—the way literary criticism was thought, at its best, to be literature—was not just an alienated subjective hankering after some of the prestige attached to art; but this hankering did encourage some of the mystificatory practices that were selected in the evolution of literary criticism and of that arty science that came to call itself *Theory*.

One of the abiding concerns of philosophy is the distinction between representations and what they represent. It is also one of the abiding confusions. The old philosophical debates between Idealism and Materialism, Nominalism and Realism, Relativism and Anti-relativism all ferret their ways through the nooks and crannies of this distinction. Under the selection pressures of polemic and conflict systems, dialectic degenerates into the habitual “turning of the tables”, and for the sake of winning at argument, opponents misrepresent opponents—usually by more and more sophisticated obscuring of the distinction. Art too, in its fascination with all the varieties of *appearance* and *virtual reality*, has long exploited this confusion. To simply say that objects and events owe the precise nature of their existence to the properties of representations is to risk propagating the confusion. To use the term *history* to mean both the events themselves and the account of those events is an instance of how this confusion infects everyday speech and concepts. Similarly, in this book I speak of an *event* regardless of whether I am referring to what actually happens or, in more technical contexts, to the conceptual category whereby consciousness and language represent what happens. Sure events are “out there”, they exist “in and by themselves”, but what we represent as events is determined by the nature of our representations. Kant said as much, once and for all, and naturalising his epistemology, it turns out that the nature of those representations is the result of selection processes, natural and social.

Traditionally, rightly or wrongly, the philosophy of history has been driven by the desire to fathom some design (or a manifest lack of it) in the real course of historical events themselves, rather than being merely concerned with the forms of their representation. However, ever since Hegel, the philosophy of history has understood the reflexive character of historical narrative: historiography is an event among events and, as such, enters into its own subject matter and has an effect on the subsequent course of history. Representation and what is represented are not unambiguously separable into distinct logical domains: the form is fed back into the form. Even when its subject matter is the pathos of individual experience, history is, at least mediately, a history of representations. Like fiction itself, the theory of narrative has been driven by the desire to say something about narrative as such. As Aristotle intimated when claiming that poetry was concerned with what was universal, narrative art, like the theory of narrative, is interested in the representational conditions of events. But it does not follow that the theory of narrative is simply a concern with the universal forms or structures of narrative representations. This was the naive assumption that lay beneath much formalist and structuralist narrative theory. Its counterpart in the philosophy of history was the notion that the philosophy of history was purely a concern with the real and not with its mere representation. Precisely because historical narratives—true or false or half true, reduced or embellished—are real events of history, the theory of narrative must be concerned with reflexive narratives in which representation and the events represented refer to and feed off one another. This is the representational condition of events, whether fact, contrary to fact, or fiction. The theory of narrative-as-such must be concerned, as fiction has long been, with the way that narrative feeds off narrative, with the autopoiesis of narrative as such.

Obscurely conceived, the reflexivity of social science and history has sometimes fed the reformist desire for belief in a kind of fictivity of history itself, that is, for a fictivity of history in which we could make up history for our own good. The phenomenon called *reification*—the way society makes its own social reality in its own image, or makes its concept of what is real more or less concretely real—is a consequence of society's reflexive descriptions. Once communicated, a theory becomes a more or less causally active piece of the world it theorises. In this process, the hard won timelessness of a science's universals exhibit their inevitably temporal predicament by their own re-entry onto the stage of history. Marx, in an effort to make a virtue of this necessity, thought it implied or was at least consistent with the thesis about philosopher's changing the world rather than interpreting it. Granted, the reflexivity of social science holds out the hope of some kind of generalising mathematics of reflexive systems, and perhaps, eventually, some contribution to the technology of enlightened reform. However it is a mistake to think that the world can be changed in some kind of predictably good way by simply making it up in the image of whatever revolutionary science one makes up with reform in mind. The causal relation between a theory and its object is much more uncertain than those bewitched by this mistake would want it to be. Reflexivity does not render social science, let alone society, fictive. But it does deeply implicate social science in the autopoiesis of society. Social science and history are only fictive or poetic insofar as society is autopoietic. Like Plato, Marx talked about *philosophers* changing the world. However *everyone* in interpreting the world participates in changing it, or to put it strictly, the vast labour of the self explanation of society—the media, academic social theory, political discourse, everyday conversation, the whole *society* of society's self explanation—makes up society.

The relation of the modern theory of narrative to the philosophy of history is not a genealogy of simple succession. It would be a case of being seduced by the most dubious historical continuity to claim that the theory of narrative was a deliberate way of looking for universal narrative forms of historiography after the ruination of the grand edifices of the philosophy of history—everything from Augustinian *providence* to the *march of history*, to the various projects of *progress*, social and technological. Yet the task of the semiotic analysis of narrative had implications for historiography that could not fail to kindle at least the idle thoughts of an age obsessed by historicist thought. In fact, given the usually universalistic habits of *theorists*, they could scarcely fail to entertain such thoughts—after the prototype of Aristotle. One did not need to be looking for a *telos* or end of history to appreciate that historiography drew on the teleological designs of all sorts of stories

The genres and plots of historical narrative change according to the events they represent and the time scales of those events. Frederic Jameson (1983, p.139) has claimed that genealogy was not an historical narrative; but it is a mistake to reduce genealogical history to a detemporalised array of “simultaneously non simultaneous” cultural fossils, or to a formalised mode of critique based on a functional analysis that is supposed to reveal unconscious cultural meanings, and it is a mistake to heedlessly limit narrative to the story making habits of ideologically besotted consciousness. The so called naiveties of linear, homogeneous time or continuous history, and of a sovereign “centred subject”, naiveties that have been supposed to characterise historical narrative in its limited, unsophisticated sense, are not characteristic of narrative as such, let alone even naive narrative. Fabulous discontinuities and transformations characterise naive myth and sophisticated genealogy alike; and the gist of any narrative—myth, fiction, rumour, genealogy, or whatever—has its own ideological genealogy. Indeed, Nietzsche’s genealogy of morals gets its energy from Nietzsche’s not scrupling to tell the most outlandish and even naive stories. Distinguishing genealogy from historical narrative is just a case of theory’s sublime gaze abstracting time from history yet again. However, what matters is that only time could be the condition of genealogical or cultural historical phenomena; and what narratives are for is the representation of whatever phenomena time conditions.

Narrative includes historiography, genealogy, and evolutionary explanation, as well as any of the more or less disparaged narrative genres, grand or trivial, fact or fiction. Though there is abstraction involved in submitting them all to the single category of *narrative*, they all share the task of representing particular acts and events and of arguing the relation between such events; and this task is the hallmark of narrative’s conceptual character.

What historical narratives like gossip and personal recollection share with fictions like the feature film or the bourgeois novel is a matter of content and time scale. These narratives of everyday social life are usually commensurate with the narrative skills of an animal well adapted to representing such experience, even if untutored in certain culturally emergent forms such as the grand historical narratives of evolution or genealogy. However, genres like the feature film or the novel are also developing cultural forms that exhibit increasing conceptual and aesthetic sophistication, so they too require some tutored interpretation. A child of modernity will follow *The Odyssey* or *The Red Shoes* before *Ulysses* or *L’année dernière à Marienbad*. In a sense, the innovative effort of modern narration is an attempt at conceptual progress in art, analogous to conceptual progress in science. No matter how familiar the human content of narrative artworks, that content is still inevitably shaped by historically evolving plots.

The importance of genre and medium in giving particular narrative forms to particular historical events occasioned the recognition of historiography's infection by a certain degree of fiction. Telling events in terms of a particular generic form in a particular medium, to some extent informs the content, and so, to some extent, even makes it up. It was under the genealogical influence of this sort of insight, rather than under the simplistic abstract categorisation of history and fiction as narratives, that the theory of narrative was sensed as somehow contributing to and extending both the philosophical project formerly limited to the philosophy of history and the cultural project called literary (or film or dramatic) criticism.

A novel like *Ulysses* (contemporary with the re-emergence of narrative theory) was not just a bit of clever generic play, but a sign of modernity's appreciation that the history of everyday life needs many genres, including fiction's, in order simply to be told as history. Genre and media actually infect everyday experience with their fictivity, in turn infecting the historical retelling of that experience. How often an experience seems like a movie. How often the news media tell history as extravagant romance or tragedy or farce. How often history, which was always virtual reality, becomes the media spectacle of history.

Whatever the actual history of Diana Spencer might have been, the market demand to know more about what the tabloid and TV romantic-soap-tragedy actually withheld drove the publication of more romance, more soap, more tragic detail. In the almost Aristotelean plot of her death—told rather than actual (more than ever the historical event is not what happened but what is told), enacted in the spectacular virtual realm of royalty and stardom rather than in the “real world” of power and politics, incorporating episodes from the House of Windsor soap, and capped by the cruel, archaic thrill of gladiatorial actuality—the postmodern news media staged a snuff tragedy for the delectation of billions. These phenomena characterise the autopoiesis of narrative communication, and it is an autopoiesis that is not to be quarantined to the system of fictive communication. It is just that fiction defines itself by its deliberate poetic use of narrative's autopoietic processes. Narrative autopoiesis infects historiography, not only feeding its elaborated plots back into deliberate courses of action, but also feeding its plots into the actual selections of historiographic representation and thus into the reduction and representation of past events that constitute the virtuality we call history. Once the turn from the philosophy of history to the theory of narrative might have been dismissed as a retreat from history and politics into aesthetics, but now when history and politics make it more and more obvious that they are matters of media poetics, the philosophy of history would have to turn to the theory of narrative and fiction just to keep up with history.

12. Ontology and fiction: the text.

Questions about the ontological status of whatever fictions refer to are neither trivial nor empty. The unreflecting assumption that they are has been responsible for fiction's study being ignored or deferred by philosophy because fiction is supposed to be a mere epiphenomenon of more serious narrative intentions. Though there is a lot of writing on narrative art, there is little philosophical reflection on that peculiarity of fiction we call *making up* or *pretending*, because philosophy is not averse to customary social demands for a specific kind of concreteness. Accordingly, it is easy to find instances of philosophers quickly dismissing the phenomenon of fiction as merely aesthetic delight (Frege), parasitic use of language (Austin, Searle), or not the proper problem solving use of communication (Habermas). This popular habit may actually be a symptom of bewitchment by ontology, poetic justice given that fiction's

charms have long been used epistemologically to break the spell of ontology. The attitude of fiction accords with that of science, which is well known for being sceptical of any fundamental importance being granted to the ontological assumptions that are put at the service of inquiry.

In the theory of fiction, questions about the ontological status of fictional worlds are different from those about what things the *theory* of fiction refers to. Scruples about non-existent worlds have often led to philosophical neglect of a theory of fiction; but scruples about what the theory of narrative and fiction refers to have limited the scope of inquiry too. While critical ontological reflections are not of the utmost importance, their initial neglect, combined with doctrinal assumptions, can mislead theoretical interest. While assuming that ontology does not precede explanation, it would be a mistake to say that explanation precedes ontology. Like character and plot, ontology and theory mediate one another.

In defining the theoretical object as a universe of narrative texts whose sublime contemplation will yield the outlines of a structural narrative grammar, like the structural geology of a distant prospect, one has repeated the theoretical gesture by which philosophy long ago formed its idea of the *idea*. In Greek it meant the *look*. At the end of his seminal *Morphology of the Folktale*, Vladimir Propp advocated just this approach by quoting A. N. Veselovsky's *Poetics*.

It is permissible in this field to consider the problem of typical schemes. Can these schemes, having been handed down for generations as ready-made formulae capable of becoming animated with a new mood, give rise to new formations?...The complex and photographic reproduction of reality in modern narrative literature apparently eliminates even the possibility of such a question. But when this literature will appear to future generations as distant as antiquity from prehistoric to medieval times seems to us at present—when the synthesis of as great a simplifier as time reduces formerly complex events to the magnitude of points, then the lines of present-day literature will merge with those which we are now uncovering in our examination of the poetic tradition of the distant past. The phenomenon of schematism and repetition will be then extended across the total expanse of literature.

Across this distancing in time, what is being observed is not one thing but a class of replicas, a cybernetic abstraction which emerges only in retrospect, from the social transmission and selection of replications and from the psyche's own abstract reductions of complexity. The prospect so sketched—say a diagram of a type of plot, distanced and so “objectified”—has rightly interested structural poetics and the theory of genre ever since Aristotle, not least because it has interested story-tellers. As *tokenings* or *replicas* of *types* of plots, *texts* are embodied in the particular stuff of a medium and they are highly significant for theories of narrative if only because of this existence as more or less enduring, external, empirical phenomena, their character as fleeting, inner, semantic or intentional experience notwithstanding. The physically effective cultural persistence of the abstract type—it is physically effective because it is socially effective and society belongs to the natural or physical universe—has long been naively intuited in terms of the concreteness of the structured text. The same naive concreteness of thought that trivialised fiction was incapable of properly observing phenomena that did not measure up to its expectations of the concretely real. Though this is a misapprehension of naive structuralist thought—a confusion of memetic phenomena observed at the time-scale of cultural history with physical

phenomena observed at the time scale of everyday experience—it is one whose own memetic replication has infected the narrative objects under consideration.

Structuralist narratologists such as Propp, Levi-Strauss, Barthes, Greimas and Todorov usually insisted on the synchronic status of narrative signs—that is, on the methodological detemporalisation of narrative so as to reduce what is experienced through time into a big, graspable-all-at-once signifier. When Barthes (1977, pp. 83-4) and Todorov (1971, p109) claimed that narrative structures were homologous to linguistic structures, they saw at least that the theory of narrative would do well to consider the relation of the tokenings and recursions of language to the structure of narrative. They also came close to sensing a relation—one that is probably exploited during a child's acquisition of language—between syntax and what would be an infantile form of inference. However, they ended up bewitched by the detemporalising abstraction that tokening and recursion (and logic) inflict for the convenience of intentional consciousness with its transcendental designs. It is this detemporalisation that enables the conversion of the “surface”, syntagmatic string of language into the “deep”, synchronic, tree-like structure of linguistic grammar. At the discursive level of narrative exposition—sentence by sentence, scene by scene or shot by shot—the structure is less a matter of synchronic symbolic encoding than of human, inferential information processing through time. Dazzled by the enduring, concrete presence of the written (if not the spoken) textual object with its enduring structure, theorists abstracted the temporal experience of the exposition just like the old philosophers did. Narrative artists themselves do something similar when they use the device of recursion to present a complete, albeit reduced, virtually synchronic tale embedded within another that is still hurtling by. Sometimes, as in Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu* or Altman's *The Player*, this recursion comes at the end to still the restless movement of the plot and enable the completion and perfection of its exposition. Structuralist theorists, however, have often detemporalised narrative without quite appreciating the poignancy or the theoretical inadequacy of robbing time from the very class of signs whose inalienable function is the signification of temporal events by means of temporal events.

Derrida (1967, pp. 154-168) sensed something of this poignancy in Husserl's ideas about the timeless *eidetics of historicity*, registering it in the title of his essay, “‘Genesis and Structure’ and Phenomenology”. This ancient antagonism of the timeless and the temporal is already implicit in the pair of conceptual categories that comprise all the references of all the world sentences: *the state of affairs* and *the event*. Bakhtin's concept of *chronotope* (1981) registered the same antagonism of genesis and structure, but instead of detemporalising representational events, the concept of chronotope was designed to show how, after a series of inferences, structural states—a geological structure or a biological community or a plot structure—indicated, and were to be retemporalised as, a series of events. Narrative texts are not just enduring things that signify sequences of events, they are themselves events or sequences of events. They are deeds, performances, actions. What would comedy (or suspense or drama or montage) be without *timing*? Yet again, in the case of structuralist detemporalisation, the biological design of intentional consciousness, with its skill at abstracting time, seems to have projected its wild, idealising skills onto its theoretical object, creating its object in its own purposely designed but misleading image. I call this poignant because most of the structuralist theorists, as children of modernity, generally retained the modern desire for historical explanation, and so perhaps for a thoroughly historical design to the theory of narrative.

13 *Ontology and fiction: the subject.*

Stress on texts as the main objects of inquiry was partly a way of holding questions about the subject—the author or audience—in abeyance, and of trying to ensure something external and objective, rather than intentional and subjective, for the theory of fiction to contemplate. In structuralist and formalist narrative theory this was genealogically related to the turn from the philosophy of the subject to the philosophy of language. It was hoped that theory could escape the mentalism of a theory of thoughts and deal with the more respectable objects of a theory of external language—which were sometimes supposed to correspond to or even underlie thoughts anyway. Clearly there were certain behaviourist scruples or at least antimentalist reductions involved in this hope. The important formalist distinction—anticipated by Aristotle (*Poetics*, 1450a)—between plot and storyline, that is between the textual sequence of events and the chronological sequence of events, could be seen as consistent with a non mentalist methodology. Yet although the inferred storyline could be seen as a spatiotemporal, empirical structure, it was also, at a different level of description and ontological commitment, a set of inferences and therefore a set of mental actions. The methodological decision not to consider *mind*, and the great philosophical tradition of antipsychologism—whether in the philosophy of the subject, the philosophy of language, structural narratology or the theory of social systems—amounted at best to a makeshift way to do logic or philosophy or the theory of narrative before and without a theory of psychology. Todorov (1971, p 198) rightly said that any universal structure of grammar or of narrative was a matter of psychology, and he quoted Mallarmé's saying: "Language is wise because it belongs to nature." Like the theory of linguistics, the theory of narrative awaited a science of this psychological nature, including a science of its socially mediated nature. Texts, as external objects, or culture, as a universe of texts, could not be understood if they were forever separated from the mental or psychic reality that shaped them. Nor was this a situation to be remedied by simply substituting consideration of social structures or intersubjective norms as the objects of contemplation in order to avoid the problems of mentalism and psychologism. Textual structure and syntax, on the one hand, and subjective meaning and semantics on the other, were two sides of the same theoretical problem—the one seeming to approach the problem from the outer side of empirical and social description, the other from the side of intentional or mental description, but each effected by the other.

Describing the structure of a text or a type of text, even if it could avoid intentional terms, would not exhaust its semantic potential—for at least two reasons. Firstly, as already suggested, the structure of a text is not just an empirical feature in the narrow concrete sense of the term *empirical*. Concreteness of *structure* is not like the concreteness of stone. Structure is a self replicating element of that other semantic system besides the psyche, namely the communicative system of the society. Structures are self replicating cultural meanings and not spatiotemporal textual shapes *per se*, even though individual replications might be based on their apprehension (or misapprehension) as textual shapes. In the world of texts and therefore in the ontology of human communication, the relevant concreteness is the concreteness of meanings or information, not things. To mix these matters up is to mix up different time scales, different levels of description and different kinds of systems and objects. Secondly, individual access to the meaning of cultural structures is only by way of individual psyche—the subject of human consciousness and the human unconscious. Meanwhile, the so called subject, both in the philosophy of the subject and in its

prolonged critique—at least since Nietzsche and Freud—remained one of philosophy’s most dazzling and seductive concerns. The genealogy of narrative theory’s antinarrative disposition lay in its unreflected genealogical relation to antinarrative philosophical scruples that persisted from the philosophy of the subject on into its critique and deconstruction.

The term *subject* is a relic of a terminological strategy of early professional academic philosophy. We can largely blame Kant for its resurrection from earlier scholastic use, though the character he used it to designate was already well known as the *I* of Descartes’ “I think”. Especially in Kant, and in the subsequent tradition of the philosophy of the subject, it was the self reference of consciousness, a way of designating and thinking about the agency of thinking from the transcendental perspective of its own intentional consciousness. It thereby cunningly avoided the then unthinkable task of an empirical, psychological account of thinking, while still yielding unprecedented philosophical insights.

I is a fascinating word. Its shifting *indexical* use indicates—as a child takes a while to master—one thing when I use it and another when someone else does. As the agent of that strange, inner action, thinking, in the theory of thinking, a workable term was demanded to avoid the funny old pronoun under which we unify, as Kant said, the manifold of experience; hence the term *subject*. Combine the shifting denotation of *I* with the seemingly irreducible character of subjective consciousness and right from the start *the subject* referred to the non objectifiable character of consciousness, paradoxically objectified. The subject was conceived in the image of what it was designed in the theory thinking not to be, namely, an object (Kant 1787, p244). Indeterminable insofar as it is the determining subject of a judgement (1787, p237), so fluid and elusive in what it refers to, and, for the sake of rescuing freedom from the rigours of empirical causation, deemed by Kant to exist without temporal determination (1788, pp 120-1), Coleridge captured the founding contradiction of the concept and aptly called it a “something-nothing-everything” (1817, p.70), like the “quicksilver plating behind a looking glass.” (p.69)

Primo Levi has said somewhere that a species that does not build receptacles is not human. For Hegel, the *I* was “the ultimate and unanalysable point of consciousness...a receptacle for anything and everything” (1830, #24, p.38), the universal in and for itself. Such a handy device had been discovered by nature long before the philosophers. Philosophy’s transcendental subject was actually a kind of virtual, transcendent subject produced as part of one of nature’s most wonderful ruses: natural intentional consciousness. To live is to reckon and thrive on time’s passing. It is an event in which the state of an organism persists because it is designed to ride out the transformations of its environment. That is, the state of the organism persists by meeting environmental events with complementary, self perpetuating events of its own. An intentional organism designs its future by representing possible future events—an eminently narrative action—and it represents its conspecifics as self-designing self-tellers too (Dennett, 1995, p.379). The persistence of the organism as a state is dependent upon the organism as a process, including a process of representation of the environment. Such a process produces the virtual transcendence of time and nature called *life*. What the human organism takes as its own transhistorical identity, its transcendental subjectivity, is actually an effect of its moment to moment empirical non-identity. The affective and effective self identity of the transcendental subject is an effect of wild nature. The subject is kind of receptacle of narratives: narratives that represent the story of the self, narratives of the past and the future whose ends are the self, and narratives that are recursively embedded in the

self as the self. Or as Aristotle put it, the psyche has its end, or its *telos*, in itself; he called this its *entelechy* or its *having its end in itself*.

The virtual, transcendental subject was a kind of biologically handy fiction that became effectively objective. As Dennett (1995,p.237) has put it, we are much better off employing descriptions of humans at this level of intentional phenomena than at the immensely difficult levels of physiological or computational description. The fiction though insinuated itself into philosophy as a delusion, and from Descartes on, it became the crux of efforts to find foundational, necessary truths. So much philosophical labour was bound up in the term *subject* that, when Freud and other psychologists tried to analyse the empirical genesis and structure of the human psyche—thereby resubmitting it to the empirical and historical determination it had pretended to transcend—the mystique of its Kantian synthesis of the manifold of experience was preserved in the psychoanalytic mystique of its manifold, decentred structure and genesis.

Freud rightly gave sex the importance it had to have, especially in the light of Darwin's stress on reproduction. However he did not have the scientific means to carry out an immensely difficult project. (Lacking the scientific means for anything approaching a computational, let alone a neurophysiological, model of psychic processes, Freud, in his frequent resort to thermodynamic and hydraulic metaphors, used the closest thing to a theory of information available at the time.) So Freudian and subsequent psychoanalysis had to burrow into the psyche using, as cunningly as it could, the very idioms of intentional life that were the object of the inquiry. Thus psychoanalysis was devoted to the empirical but had to examine developmental phenomena via adult memory; it had to detect and describe psychic function from cases of purported malfunction, and from the profane experience of dreams, everyday slips, free association, jokes and sexuality. Therapeutic urgency compromised by scientific aporia produced the talking cure, with its brilliant but provisional basis. Its mix of complex analytical reduction of scandalous, and therefore fascinating, emotional life set in an inspired heuristic matrix of myth, fiction, riddle, jargon and spleen proved all too seductive. So what got culturally transmitted was often less a matter of Freud's scientific project than of the seductive matrix, the mystique of an esoteric knowledge of the secrets of emotional life, and even the polemic pride of the disparaged antihumanist scientist—in which role Freud, somewhat justifiably, had identified himself with Copernicus and Darwin. When the subject's transcendental pretension persisted in the pretension of critical philosophy not to be mired in the faults of empirical science, the critique of the subject became theological itself. It was in the context of this genealogically persistent predicament that the project of the theorisation of narrative lost its narrative nerve and turned back against narrative.

14. Certainty.

When Descartes began to search in his pure intentional innerness for indubitable, apodictic truths he was ostensibly driven by the old desire of first philosophy to found knowledge on certain grounds. Ever since Plato's *Theaetetus*, what had skewed the theory of knowledge into a search for guarantees against any possible future disabuse was the apprehension that one could not actually *know* something unless one knew it were true. Effectively cashiering the wisdom of hindsight, epistemology scarcely countenanced any idea of a grounding of knowledge in the narrative contingencies of history let alone in the exigencies of biological information systems; yet, at the same time it did not entertain any scepticism about the apprehension that was the ground of its self allotted project. Consequently, right

from its Cartesian beginnings, the modern epistemological project was automated by a kind of systematic, formulaic scepticism, whose limited and lazy task was to find wanting all that was not indubitable. In Montaigne's essays, the scepticism was that of the essayist's publicly trying to answer his own curiosity: *what do I know?* Montaigne also said that those who think they know do not know what knowing is. After Descartes, scepticism—and with it philosophy—was reduced to method, a handy tool of applied epistemology conveniently exempted from its own self scrutiny. Such a habit of thought has been repeated time and again, so that it became a form of life of philosophical culture, and a fetishised one at that. It even persists now, long after the superannuation of the old subject centred reason, in the formulaic scepticism of critical and deconstructive thought.

Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, with its distinction between pure reason and empirical knowledge, was one of the most remarkable outcomes of the obsession with indubitability. Pure reason was an island, "the land of truth", while all around, nature was "a wide and stormy ocean, the region of illusion" and dubious empirical knowledge (1787, p.180). Pure reason belonged to the transcendental subject, the truths of pure reason being the necessary formal conditions for all knowledge. The transcendental subject therefore was not the empirical human subject, the social, psychological human animal; rather it was what was strictly universal to all rational beings. This universality was not merely something empirically induced from all those rational beings, but something deduced from the premise of reason itself, and free of the accidental conditions of the psychological subject.

It might be hard now to appreciate why the obsession with indubitability was so strong. The charm of indubitability lay partly in avoiding the historically specific crisis of belief. After all, it is for the sake of belief that the conscious subject feels the want of grounding, and not for the sake of knowledge, which often seems quite unbelievable. Even to speak of "grounds for knowledge" rather than "evidence" now sounds like a category mistake. It also lay partly in the uncanny but not unwise appreciation of the unshakeable persistence of certain mathematical forms—like Platonic forms, or universal theoretical paradigms—abstracted from all physical embodiment. Partly too it lay in the comforting and repressive charms of certainty, in the Platonic release from the effort of continually asking the boring Socratic *why*, and in the provision of the easy answer to anyone who asks why things couldn't be better. And partly too it lay in that wildest of philosophical urges: the desire to win at argument, to grasp the referent of a discourse for oneself, as the brought home bacon on which the would be philosopher has won the privilege of gnawing. The endlessly foreshadowed, endlessly postponed project of cataloguing certainties gave philosophers something to brandish against their colleagues in the empirical sciences, something seemingly more wonderful, even if because more mystificatory. On the one hand philosophy squirmed at its sensed servile relation to science, even its insignificance; on the other, in a servant's move to mastery, it sensed and pursued its own right to a more transcendent position from which it could dismiss science as "merely empiricist." Philosophy was to be the right to, and the profession for foundational and certain knowledge.

A philosophy of narrative, let alone a philosophy of fiction, seems like an excuse for the sort of stylish literary activity that Husserl (1960 p.5) regarded as a sign of philosophy's decline. Yet when he restaged, with such ardour, the Cartesian overthrow of dubious empirical knowledge, in the name of grounding science, the air of swansong was only made more plaintive by the admission that science itself had paid little attention to such efforts—ever since Descartes. Science, as knowledge rather than belief, has been little concerned with indubitable grounding, and even its

own assumed methodological rules tend to be too limiting for the actual knowledge that frequently gets wheedled out of various dubious intuitions, guesses, handy operational definitions, and evidence and analogues from other disciplines.

Husserl, the heir to Descartes and Kant, attempted what he called the transcendental *epoché*. In this process, the philosophical observer holds in check, or brackets to one side, the universal prejudice of world experience—including all experience, science and tradition—in order to discover the apodictic truths of the pure transcendental ego. But such a shining purity turned out to be an easy target for the acid of empirical scientific thought. For such thought, no absolute unimaginableness of its own untruth may be demonstrated by any knowledge: the sign of truth lies not in the certainty of its foundation, but in the risk of its fallibility. Even the scientific and common uses of the word *know* imply that the object of knowledge is an object *in question*, not a matter of certainty. As a term provided by the social evolution of folk epistemology for the self description of psyche, *knowledge* need only imply as much reliability as is adequate to the psychic and social purposes at hand. As for the component of belief in knowledge—as opposed to truth or certainty—well perhaps, against common usage, belief, with its cherished ontological commitments, should no longer be counted as a concomitant of knowledge, but rather as a contingent and concomitant affect of knowledge for naive human consciousness. Hume suggested something like this when he wrote about the *sentiment* of belief. Science is not a belief system. And religion is, but only in retrospect, only when it seems no longer to be knowledge but merely faith.

Transcendental phenomenology's attempt at supplying an absolute ground for science would turn out—for empirical science—to be grounded in what Husserl himself had distinguished and rejected as the “psychological parallel” to transcendental phenomenology (1960, p.33), that is, in the impure, social, empirical, psychological human being. It is only in the psychological ego, supposedly “parallel” to the transcendental one, that the “ultimate genesis” and the “ultimate universality” of Husserl's *eidetic* phenomenology could be all too contingently based; and such a phenomenology may not defer to or suspend the account of its genesis by citing the excuse that it is only the initial spadework in the immense task of the pursuit of the apodictic. Nor may it eternalise its genesis under the dream concept of a timeless “historicity”.

Husserl saw the problem of the philosophy of history in terms of an *eidetics of historicity*. The term *eidetics* comes from the Greek *eidos*, which is what Plato called his ideal forms. In a similar vein, Heidegger proposed to theorise history in terms of an *existentiale of historicity*, that is, as a kind of detemporalised existential structure of *Dasein* or personal existence. (Detemporalisation is readily achieved by the good old ‘ality’ suffix.) Adorno said (1966, p 130) that the ontologization of *historicity* involved a spiriting away of history, “as if real history were not stored up in the core of each possible object of cognition.” Nowadays *historicity* and *historicality* look like relics from the boneyard of phenomenology and fundamental ontology. If they still have any truth, it lies in the historically evolved human psychological design for processing temporal information—in *narrativity*, if you like.

Better to enjoy the uncertainty of knowledge and the delights of discovery rather than hopelessly desire the comforts of certainty; and better to try sorting out the contingencies of biological and social science and history. Better to appreciate the limitations in the way the subject and the scientific system each represent themselves, their environments and each other, and how these representations reduce the complexity of their objects, and why. In that *how* there lies a particular functional and causal description; in that *why* there lies an historical tale about particular events.

Whatever the transcendental reduction is, it takes place in natural history. Whatever the tenacious old subject/object distinction did for that cunning object, the subject, that made it, it is a limit beyond which philosophy has now long passed, and for even longer yearned to pass. Naturalised epistemology has moved beyond the old division of the subjective and the objective to the problem of developing a theory of knowledge that contains and explains this difference, rather than seeking, of all things, its grounding in it, or in one side of it. The question of the possibility of the transcendental reduction can, despite Derrida's saying otherwise (1967, p.167), expect an answer, just not an apodictic one. The action of "inhibiting the universal prejudice" of world experience can never shed its own foothold provided by natural history, the foothold that is the condition of its "inhibiting" and its "reflecting". As the world persists for phenomenology's transcendental ego in the *noematic* description (roughly, the description of things thought) so too it persists as the not to be transcendently reduced or bracketed empirical conditions of *noesis* (the process of thinking). The phenomenological reduction or *epoché* is a kind of pretence, presumably a natural one for a self-perpetuating intentional ego, and it is only possible as such. It achieves, not an absolute foundation, not *prote philosophia*, but a *proton pseudos*, a first fiction, whose truth, like any fiction's, is dependent on an injunction or on social collusion.

15. Antipsychology.

There is an aversion to the messy problem of the brainy human body that can be traced from Descartes' mind/body split right through to the antipsychologism of the philosophy of the subject, and beyond into the radical critique of the subject and narratology. There is a genealogy of this antipsychologism that extends from Kant to Husserl and Heidegger on the one hand, and to Wittgenstein and the early Quine on the other. It persists in Derrida as referential pussy footing, and in the unreflected habits of the devotees of deconstruction. So it even ends up reinfecting the critical theorists whose materialist forebears, including Freud, probably thought they had exorcised Idealism, once and for all. How does the idea of antipsychologism perpetuate itself with such virulence?

Somehow scepticism about empirical accounts of the mind gets formally but illegitimately extended to any suggestion of a natural history of the mind. What is seductive about this absolute scepticism is that it seems to allow philosophy to get the better of psychology. When Wittgenstein, in *Tractatus*, was worried about the job description of philosophy—in all conscience it needed a cultural function distinct from science's, didn't it?—he wrote that "Psychology is no nearer related to philosophy than is any natural science. The theory of knowledge is the philosophy of psychology (4.1121)." By then inserting the clause that evolution is like any other scientific hypothesis (4.1122) he indemnified any theory of knowledge against attempts to cede its governance to the biological exigencies, let alone the historical contingencies, of our psychological nature. The later Wittgenstein was not so different from the early one. *Philosophical Investigations*—a remarkable, last ditch, antipsychological attempt to clarify the workings of language from outside the black box of the other's consciousness—asked brilliant questions, but subsequent psycholinguistics have largely dissolved them, revealing their fascinating wrongness. Desperate for tenure, or nostalgic for the thrill of the old philosophical wonder—the latter in the case of Wittgenstein, who philosophised like a hero from times past, without the burden of footnotes—philosophical antipsychologism imitated the action

of its vanquished hero, the transcendental subject, pulling up the ladder behind it to isolate itself in its sublime vantage. However, as Beckett's rejoinder to Wittgenstein had already put it: "I shall have to speak of things of which I cannot speak." The words of the *The Unnameable* are those of epistemology naturalised: sceptical philosophy might have wanted to be fastidious about these matters, but nature simply had to confront them in order to dream up its incredible, thinking, talking animals.

Hegel expressed his suspicion of empirical psychology in his remarks about a contingent medley of faculties making up a kind of psychological bag of tricks (1807, p.182). And such suspicion may have been justified when directed at the empirical adequacy of faculty psychology in his own day. As it turns out though, postmodern psychology, with its (still highly provisional) theories of modular psychological design, is supported by both neurological evidence and by consistency with the most likely scenarios of evolutionary psychology. It is far easier for evolutionary changes to rejig a psychological *module* than a total psychological system because the modular approach limits possibly deleterious consequences that otherwise might flow through to other processes in the system (see Marr, p.102). Natural selection solves problems by limiting them, just as functional analysis does the same as the functional differentiation it describes in its object. So Hegel's grab bag of faculties, which once seemed so tawdry and unworthy of philosophy's dignified *universal*, now seems to reveal a rough empirical adequacy. It might well have served, in its seeming tawdriness at least, as a way of shaking the foundations of the universal subject in the way that Freud's or Nietzsche's somewhat misanthropic observations eventually did. Instead, though, Hegel's scepticism became the repressed condition of psychology avoided.

Hegel insisted, against psychological contingency, on the strictly universal aspect of the subject. He did this for want of an account of its genesis—a genesis whose full biological story would have included an historical account of the psychological subject's virtually universal or pancultural character. The philosopher who laid such stress on the mediation of the universal and the particular, was denied the insight that the virtual universality of the subject was mediated by the particularity of its evolution, and its ontogeny. Gestures like Hegel's were repeated again and again, helping to harden into a philosophical prejudice against psychology. Meanwhile, another Hegelian requirement was also forgotten: to experience the full strength of the thought one criticises and not to dispatch a mere straw dummy instead—a prophylactic against infection by the most comfortable philosophical assumptions.

Of course behind the premature abstractions of the antipsychological impulse there was a scientific attempt to generalise the problem of psychologies to that of an epistemology of any rational being in any possible nature. In Kant it was this problem of how knowledge could be possible at all (rather than something like Husserl's making of phenomenological plans for phenomenological self descriptions of the problem of knowledge) that generated his most far reaching insights. Kant's distinctions between empirical and rational knowledge, between things in themselves and representations of them, and between freedom and empirical causation are all informed by the general problem of knowers making representations of a nature in the way that an organism makes representations of its environment. The rational/empirical distinction anticipated the need to apply the very distinction itself to reason as something empirically embodied and historically emergent rather than universal to any rational being. The difference between the thing in itself and its representation anticipated the central problem of all knowing representation: its inevitable selection and reduction of information. The distinction between freedom

and empirical causation indicated that we may only reduce psyche's self descriptions of its freedom to the level of empirical description with an inevitable loss of information due to the reductions so made. The problem for general epistemology is that of how a would-be knowing subject can be empirically embodied, and so embodied in time. This conditions the contingencies of any particular representational strategy, including the arbitrariness of, say, human representations—the famous arbitrariness of signs which is the consequence of now obscured historical processes of selection after selection after selection. In the context of each selection, the scarcity of time conditions the reductions of real time representations, and the historically embodied means of representation condition the reductions too. So time and embodiment are the last things that should be abstracted for the sake of the reductions of a general epistemology.

In a recent work on narratology by Mieke Bal (1997), the topic is deliberately bracketed off from psychology. This is a theorist's delusion posing as rigour: the rigorous compartmentalisation of thought. Made under the unconscious influence of the old hankering for a transcendental epistemology it is perpetuated as an oddly inappropriate function—like that of the qwerty keyboard which was designed to slow typists down. When narratology refuses to examine the psychological aspect of something like narrative suspense—and other emotional matters—it displays the kind of fastidiousness to these matters that comes from their abstract critique. *Suspense* in narrative art certainly deserves critique, but ruling out psychology seems to be a case of not wanting to get one's hands dirty with the real work of critique. Antipsychological narratology is most unlike narrative art in this particular fastidiousness: half way decent narrative artworks present the experience of emotion—like the emotion of suspense—in order to reflect on it. The suspense of a thriller is not primarily a functionary of sales—though it is ready to be co-opted—it is a functionary of something like the cognitive emotion of curiosity. It is hard to imagine Hitchcock without his films' wonderful curiosity about suspense. What better critiques of abstract suspense for the sake of suspense (and in turn for the sake of sales) than *Rear Window* or *Vertigo*! What better voyeur of voyeurism than Hitchcock! The old habit of thinking that structural form is the real subject matter of narratology is really the last resort of antihistorical, antipsychological thought. Such form is always the more or less cryptic outcome of a history, including the natural history of psychology.

The persistence of antipsychologism among the critical theoretical heirs of materialism probably shows how aversion to the ideological excesses of a pop psychology and self-help industry designed to reproduce well functioning consumers, was too easily parlayed into the power grab of merely doctrinal forms of critique. An underlying reason why critical thought baulks at evolutionary history and adaptationist argument, especially in psychology, is adaptationism's unabashedly functionalist concerns, combined with a bored misconstrual of evolutionary science. In the effort to rightly assert the importance of cultural history and the cultural subject, the psychological subject was ignored and biological history was equated with the by now old bogeys of determinism and positivism. Nowadays, devotees of evolutionary psychology slag the "cultural determinism" of the straw dummy they call "the Standard Social Science Model", while cultural theorists still dismiss a straw dummy neo-Darwinist determinism, confident that somewhere there is a once and for all critique of evolutionary theory that relieves us from having to tell a story of biological history that is only good enough for the non human sciences. As in most cultural wars, the debate is not between ideas born of curiosity and inquiry but

between self replicating cultural abstractions, enlisted on behalf of self edification, that lack a real referent apart from the straw dummies they reify.

There is always something disturbing about the functionalist reductions of instrumental reason, especially when cited in order to engineer ethical and political life, or to justify cruel means by their advertised ends. Still there is something wickedly cunning about engineering and design, and regardless of human intentions, nature is wickedly cunning. The wonder of it all is that somehow, from the matrix of such impersonal cunning, there emerged such a thing at all as ethical reflection on “the good life”. Even philosophy’s most important concern is somehow an outcome of and consistent with the astonishing transformations of natural history. Yet for a long time now a comfortable scepticism has merrily thrown out the kernel of psychology with the chaff of bad psychology.

Psychology is not to be forgotten, avoided or dismissed absolutely, or quarantined from philosophy, on the basis of any piecemeal or provisional scientific status. Its provisional status is reason for more, not less, psychology; and the provisional at least has the virtue of advertising its disdain for indubitability, while showing little fear of the risk of truth. If *empiricism* is, as Derrida has said, “the matrix of all the faults menacing a discourse which continues ... to consider itself scientific” (1967, p.288) then it should be added that this menace to scientific discourse—the intersubjective observability of observations—is the selection pressure of science, what tests it or proves its strength or weakness. Nothing is easier to doubt than the empirical—philosophy since Descartes has taught us nothing less—and that precisely is the strength of the empirical. The risk of scientific conjecture and the social accountability of knowledge to objects themselves make the metaphysical pretensions to certainty of grounding look ridiculous and grandiose. Meanwhile scepticism about psychology, and scruples about the mind, end up looking behaviouristic, as they did long ago in Wittgenstein and the early Quine; after all, behaviourism was always scepticism of mind, hypostatized.

One strange outcome of the critique of empirical psychology is a kind of contempt for the body that passes itself off as a devotion to its theorising. The contempt is anything but intended—a sign of its subservience to heteronomous intentions—but it persists in the attitude of not wanting to know about the body as an historical, biological event, or even as a brainy, talking, telling, imagining body—a body in which mind is embodied. Bans on theorising the mindful, brainy body as a scientific object are not repaid by theorising only the cultural norms about a juicy, oozing, visceral and gendered, yet strangely and impossibly brainless body. All such bans do is institute a kind of lobotomy, reproducing the old mind-body separation that is still wrongly supposed to characterise scientific objectification. Under such bans the closest the theory of the body comes to breaching the by now long ruined walls of the mind-body divide is to expedite a vague old metaphysical reunification. In doing so it exercises the same theological desire for unity that prompted Hegel to avoid psychology so long ago.

16. History’s deconstruction, deconstructed.

What was an understandable ignorance of human biological and psychological history in the pre-Darwinian age of Kant and Hegel, has persisted as agnosticism and distorted the historical study of human culture. It has persisted as an archaic institution, a habit or custom scarcely appreciated and religiously followed, an instance of the self replicating symbolic order ruling over its unwitting subjects. Misplaced squeamishness about the phantom of genetic determinism, combined with

ecological wariness of the genetic engineering business, a tasteful rejection of stories that can sound like awful Pleistocene sitcoms, a secret devotion to maintaining the mysteries of *life, desire, consciousness* and the *unconscious* rather than to discovering what they are, the wild, animal desire for transcendence and the lazy habits of a scepticism at what would or should happily admit its own fallibility anyway—all these are the habitat of this autonomous symbolic order. Despite the Marxian injunction about there being only the single science of history and that “as long as humans exist natural and human history will qualify each other” and despite Adorno’s maxim that historic being, where it is most historic, had to be grasped as natural being (1966, p.358, 359), too many cultural critical heirs to the materialist tradition have simply exaggerated the old Idealist fastidiousness toward fallible natural history, and hypostatized a deracinated cultural history. That rootless history is just history as an abstraction, torn out of the matrix of empirical contingency and given an arbitrary but unspoken, and unspeakable beginning. At its worst the avoidance of biological history in favour simply of cultural history produced, unreflectingly, an abstract image of the human mind marked by its pernicious reduction to an innately clean slate—almost a parody of the old Lockean notion—while crucial emphasis on the historical specificity of cultural forms and ideology became a smokescreen for deeper urges toward the ahistorical and the irrefutable upper hand in critique.

Abstract critique of history as such, let alone just biological history, is as theological as it is a version of negative theology. Somehow, there is an unhappy postmodern consciousness that cherishes both its received tradition of historicism, and its contrary, the tradition of transhistorical scepticism. It is a consciousness bequeathed to postmodernity by its modern past, self-perpetuating and a nightmare, and still, as it was in Hegel’s time (1807, p.126), “not yet explicitly aware that this is its essential nature.” Critique and the negative deserve to be delivered from the theological devotees of deconstruction; and so does Derrida for that matter. Still, Derrida’s critique of history reads like Husserl’s of psychology. It is a sort of absolute scepticism toward the empirical, and therefore, by virtue of a kind of clandestine seduction by philosophy’s promise of transcendence, an enslavement to the implacable natural history of abstraction.

History does not cease to be an empirical science of “facts” because it has reformed its methods and techniques, or because it has substituted a comprehensive structuralism for causalism, atomism and naturalism, or because it has become more attentive to cultural totalities. Its pretension to founding normativity on a better understood factuality does not become more legitimate, but only increases its powers of philosophical seduction. A confusion of value and existence, and more generally, of all types of realities and all types of idealities is sheltered beneath the equivocal category of the historical. (Derrida, 1967, p.161)

No doubt about the philosophical seduction of history. No doubt either about the philosophical seduction of this particular culturally self-replicating critique of the empirical and “facts”. It was historical, cultural transmission that ensured that Derrida could make this criticism by just nodding in its general doctrinal direction, as easily as others can shake their heads at the mention of deconstruction. Interestingly, Derrida stressed the importance of not blurring the distinction between value and existence, norms and facts. This from the philosopher whom Habermas accused of blurring the genre distinction between fiction and the other non-fictional things, like assertion, that we do with communication. Derrida, despite his being among the most discerning

readers of philosophy, didn't deconstruct the scepticism toward the empirical, he just used it by citing it, and indemnified himself against the risk of assertion with a certain irony that implied, "this is what is said, or this is what Husserl or someone or other said, and you might very well think that I think this too."

(Just an aside on the prose of so called Theory, as opposed to the prose of refereed, empirical science. Critics who like to dismiss the former with pejoratives like *postmodernist*, *poststructuralist*, or *deconstructionist* fail to appreciate that such prose uses more than the limited linguistic devices of explicit literalism. Theory is not fiction, but it uses irony, hyperbole, metaphor and the like in provocative, communicatively deliberate and conceptually useful ways—though not always. Unfortunately there are critics who need to be told that things like Barthes's old title proclaiming the death of the author might be just a little bit ironic. They need to consider whether what look to them like dodgy scientific or mathematical expressions aren't, in fact, metaphorical. Nuanced theoretical prose is designed to be about social phenomena that are themselves designed to escape empirical methodologies through their deliberate use of the functional ambiguity and reflexivity of communicated meaning. It uses these linguistic means to theorise the same means, while it deliberately lures unsympathetic, would be critics into an expected, deliberately literalist misreading. To the theorist, such critics condemn themselves by their own bloody minded literalness. Derrida's critique of the historical and the empirical uses the device of irony, so perhaps my critique is too literalist. However when literal reference is suspended, when assertions dissolve into ironic references, and when suggestive but unconfirmed judgements are hyperbolised into authoritative, world historical announcements, conceptual nuance is somewhat endangered by the emergent social systemic autonomy of its own devices (or worse, by the temptation to believe the literal, witless meanings of the devices). The fine romance of describing something like the ambiguity of meaning by means of itself is a risky venture, like art, and fallible, like science. It places special stylistic demands on writerly wit. And for all its wisdom or cheek, for all its intuitive appeal to articulate users of language, and despite its being part of the great tradition of philosophical and essayistic prose, it can't automatically anticipate and get the better of critique. Generally, Derrida's prose is most vulnerable when, wearying of referential pussy footing, he succumbs to customary desire and indulges in a venture into cliched poetic declaration. In the case of his critique of the historical and the empirical, his own thought cedes its autonomy to a custom of cliched scepticism. This, of course, is just what good philosophical prose avoids, and the success of nuanced theoretical wit depends on nothing less than good, unalienated prose.)

History is seductive because we have a handy grab bag of narrative gists or ideologemes, and we apply them willy nilly, as wantonly as the ideologemes about the critique of the empirical or the historical or deconstruction are applied. Seductive history is used to say why things are as they are supposed actually to be. But *actuality*—or, as Derrida put it, *presence*—is the most seductive of concepts. It refers *indexically*, like pointing, to what is present; it doesn't refer *conceptually*, like, say, the propositional form of a sentence does. So conceptual prejudices get smuggled into the supposedly obvious "actuality", without examination. Witness the way early evolutionary anthropologists once applied a dismal parody of evolutionary theory to explain an "actuality" that was just not the case, in all those stories about superseded, unfit races and classes. Witness too the reaction to this when cultural anthropologists used a simplistic misunderstanding of the little understood history of cultural transmission and learning in order to explain the supposed "actuality" of the good life in Samoa. And witness still, the excesses of propagandist or triumphalist

contemporary evolutionary psychology. This is why we should pay careful attention to descriptions of the present and actuality, otherwise we use quasi historical narratives to justify descriptions of non existent actuality.

What Derrida rightly called seductive is actually the natural historical seduction of history for narrative, myth-telling animals like us. History's pretension to founding anything in a better understood factuality would be just that: pretension. History does not found or ground anything, least of all in something that is better understood. And a history of norms is hardly likely to come up with much in the way of factuality that is better understood than the norms. But this is no justification for agnosticism towards history. All the origin myths and just-so stories, all those wrong histories are signs of the pitfalls of historicism; but only an inquiry into the admittedly obscure genesis of norms and values, realities and idealities can start to sort out the confusions. Thus the poorly understood facts of evolutionary history explain and are consistent with the virtually strict universality of the "norms" of human grammar. The norms of a particular language, say, or a particular narrative genre, are explained by the memetics of cultural replication and selection supervening on underlying and historically less fluid psychology.

Derrida writes as if he doesn't want any concept to get away with hiding its credentials. He pulls concepts apart in order to show the kinds of ideas on whose behalf they operate. Because *the historical* and *the empirical* are among the concepts that he deconstructs, he could be read as closing off the great materialist route of ideology critique, (though I suspect that in true philosophical style he savages most what is also closest to his heart). Yet there is always in Derrida the sense that deconstruction, like Cartesian scepticism, serves the old desire for some indubitable foundation, the desire that is never content with the merely effective, or dare I say *virtual*, reference of historical science. However his negative theologian's fastidiousness about declaring any such foundation leads him towards the most mystical of concepts—such is his reference to a kind of fundamental ontology of *différance* and of an *ur-writing* that precedes all histories, all writings. These are the fruits of an almost absolute negation, a critique of history and the empirical that falls into the habits of first philosophy. Derrida is emblematic of philosophy that thus cuts itself from the empirical and history for the initially commendable reasons of critique. It turns critique into a replicable abstract form, and thus it becomes the slave of unacknowledged historical forces whose perpetuation is precisely an instance of the *ur-writing* of cybernetic, systemic natural history.

It should be remembered that the procedure of deconstructive reading does not amount to absolute negation. We are still in the territory of Hegelian critique and determinate negation. All that is negated is the necessity and certainty of certain ideas, like the *empirical* and the *historical*. There is no certain organising principle of knowledge, no theological architectonic; but there is no absolute negation of the historical or the empirical or the epistemological as such. The history of narrative and history implies, first of all, the historical contingency of narrative and history themselves. The idea of the *historical* quite rightly dissolved in the acid of deconstruction because history and narrative are themselves contingent historical phenomena. Those who still lazily denounce the relativism of what they call, clumsily and variously, "deconstruction", "poststructuralism" and "postmodernism", are just grumbling about straw dummies. On the other hand, while Derrida was critical of the theology of history, he gave the seductive impression that he had a higher theology on his side, an unspoken and unspeakable negative theology, another *something-nothing-everything*, and an undeconstructed one at that. One kind of pathetic fallacy that took hold of those postmodern subjects devoted to the replicable formalities of

deconstruction was that which took pleasure in reading the self critique of reason as a world historical negation of the possibility of reason and its subject. In misreading the difficult conditions of reason as a sign of the death of all pretensions to reason, such postmodern subjectivity replicated the old epistemological bewitchment by the desire for certainty, and in doing so it was symptomatic of the world historical postmodernity that its own mistaken self description had performatively declared into existence.

There is a particular history whose outcome is the human subject, even if it is only tellable in barest summary. It is abstract scepticism applied to history that is equivocal, not knowing what assertions to risk; and it is critique that forgets Hegel's prophylactic and that does not dispatch its object by first entering thoroughly into its spirit that ends up being the carrier of an alien, self-replicating and misleading cultural order. The critique of biological and social science, and history, is part of the scientific project, while it is abstract negation of the empirical that remains philosophically seductive, feeding, as it does, the secret nostalgia for the apodictic. *Mechanistic*, *positivist*, and *reductionist*—these long serving and often appropriate pejoratives—can't just be used as throw away denunciations. Science objectifies phenomena, that is it *reduces* them to various levels of description, each involving various ontological commitments. It is reduction to one level of determination, theologically and once and for all—and typically for technocratic reasons—that is pernicious. Consciousness might be the object of neurological, psychological or computational levels of description as well as the natural, irreducible, intentional one into which the philosophy of the subject, thinking it was above it all, thought it could transcendently withdraw, and outside of which critical theoretical and deconstructive scepticisms now fear to venture. In doing so, such scepticisms seem unaware of their own wild and natural historical desire for the high epistemological ground of something approaching the apodictic. It is under this theological category that equivocation hides, still confusing truth with grounding, and knowledge with the adolescent desire for getting the upper hand in polemic.

Recalling the humble or pragmatic or even dismal formula for truth—*adequatio rei atque cogitationis*, the adequation of thought to things—truth is only ever merely adequate, merely sufficient. Narrative shows us what truth is all about, and it is not about the certainty that the theology of truth desires. Narrative truth can never pretend to be more than adequate. It can make no claim on certainty. Narrative's concern for the particular, based on its natural selection for dealing with the particulars of experience, is a concern for the workable adequacy of its reductions despite the almost unavoidable fallibility. And this effects science, because although science strives for a general tenseless truth, its truth too is a truth of adequacy, not certainty, not a truth that is disclosed apocalyptically, apodictically or theologically, but a truth that is dreamed up if need be and then tried and submitted socially for disconfirmation at the instance of mere events. The best it can do is make its observations observable. Narrative propositions and arguments are all too often dubious, glib, highly ideological or presumptuous, or the argument is weak, ambiguous or outlandish. A narrative can usually sneak into a system of knowledge without demanding—by dint of any inconsistency—any expensive abandonment of more universal and therefore more deeply held claims, and almost inevitably, it is tolerant of some apparent contradiction internal to itself. And it can be discarded if need be without much conceptual revision. It can even be preserved as a kind of quasi fiction, which is how myth has survived in philosophy, ever since Plato. The problems of naive historicism lie in what are somehow its strengths too.

Storytellers often upgrade narrative adequacy by embedding a dubious story inside another more reliable one; the tale within a tale is often a device of perfection through objectification of what's claimed in the telling. This recursive objectification is a basic gesture of fiction. It is the presumptuousness and the particularity of narrative that recommends narrative communication rather than scientific communication to the make-up artists of fiction. There is hardly any poetics of science in the sense of making up scientific claims, except perhaps in the marvels of romance genres like science fiction. Fiction's *pretence* is a kind of neutral or sublime form of narrative *presumption*: the perfection of presumption through its objectification.. It imitates the presumptions of design, teleology and autopoiesis generally, including the presumptions of life's sports—the fruits of evolutionary variation—that have been subsequently confirmed in their adequacy by natural selection. Fiction, in a way, celebrates the act of originality, whether in nature or in human nature; it celebrates its presumptuous and risky proposition or inception, before its adequacy is retrospectively confirmed. And like a living species, a fiction is retrospectively confirmed too, though not necessarily in the adequacy of its truth to things but in its adequacy for reproduction in retelling, in the adequacy of its truth—whatever that may turn out to be—for others.

17. The natural history of causality; or every change must have a cause.

No doubt one of the sentimental appeals of the philosophy of the subject lay in the beautiful puzzles and the almost fictive constructs it produced. Thus Kant had to treat the subject as something that could not be an object of sensuous intuition, something he called a *noumenon* or a *thing-in-itself*. As such it existed “without temporal determination (1788, p.120)”, and so it could transcend the limitations of natural causation and thus there could actually be such a thing as freedom. All this made the subject seem like a remarkable and mysterious thing, pregnant with the narrativity that its transnarrative state subsumed and worthy of the awe that lies behind philosophical wonder. It also made subjective freedom seem theological, something easily swamped by implacable processes of systemic cultural reproduction, yet still available for the systemic function of consolation.

By understanding the subject as something human with a biological and cultural history governed (however remotely) by the iterative process of natural selection, and not as some pure rational being, many of the old philosophical problems dissolve, and many of the seemingly puzzling features of the old transcendental subject become explicable. Kant's thought provides a good illustration of this because he often preserved quite puzzling and even contradictory conclusions rather than trying to cobble them together into a neater system. In this way the great philosopher of subjective reason exhibited a kind of frankness with regard to objects which later philosophers of transnarrative Being, like Heidegger and his heirs, neglected. They tailored their concepts not to things, but to the desire for the perfection of grounding, glibly smoothing out arbitrary antagonisms and inconsistencies in those distinctive loops of ontologising thought that are too clever by half. (Thus Jean-Luc Nancy extricates the process of grounding from history and ontologises freedom at the same time by using that skill in the old symbolic device of recursion that our natural history has bequeathed us: for Nancy, echoing Heidegger, freedom “the ‘foundation of foundation’ is nothing other than the foundation that is rigorously no longer founded in anything but itself.” (1988, p.90)) This kind of thinking uncouples concepts from objects in order to spin them into pleasing patterns, safely folded into the immanence of intentional consciousness, as fatuously and

dismally clever as Escher drawings. Nothing could contrast more with the practice of Kant (or for that matter Hegel)).

Consider *The Critique of Judgement*, with not only its unabashed interest in beauty, the sublime and nature, but also, scandalously (or quaintly), teleology. In the face of the apparent triumph of mechanistic, antiteleological thought, Kant would not abandon the old Aristotelean insight about final causes, but instead insisted on the importance of this most narrative of concepts—almost naively. It was an insistence that was not fully redeemed until biologists realised how nature could be credited with generating teleological processes (Mayr, 1982). Related to this is the great fissure that runs through the three critiques: the divide between the *a priori* knowledge of pure reason and doubtful, *a posteriori* empirical knowledge. The reason for this seemingly all too arbitrary divide is one puzzle that teleological, biological thinking illuminates. In a theory of narrative, where better to attempt such an illumination than in relation to the principle of causality.

According to Kant, there is an *a priori* principle of causation—“that all changes take place according to a law of the connection of cause and effect” (1787, p.148)—and such a principle of the pure understanding must be *a priori* true in order for experience, as “the synthesis of perception”, to be possible at all. Kant’s thinking was a response to Hume’s rightful scepticism about such a principle. Thus Hume:

I shall venture to affirm, as a general proposition, which admits of no exception, that knowledge of the relation [of cause and effect] is not, in any instance, affirmed by reasonings *a priori*; but arises entirely from experience, when we find that any particular objects are consistently conjoined with each other. (1748, iv, I, #23, p.459)

Hume is talking about particular causal relations, rather than a general principle of causality, and about how one instance of cause and effect might be applied to another future instance involving the same objects, or kind of objects.

We have said that all arguments concerning existence are founded on the relation of cause and effect; that our knowledge of that relation is derived entirely from experience; and that all our experimental conclusions proceed upon the supposition that the future will be conformable to the past. To endeavour, therefore, the proof of the last supposition by probable arguments, or arguments regarding existence, must be evidently going in a circle, and taking that for granted which is the very point of the question. (iv, II, #30, p.462)

Hume questions how we can, as creatures of nominalistic experience, pick ourselves up by our bootstraps and break out of this circle, in order to prove or take as reasonable the principle that “from causes which appear similar we expect similar effects” (iv, II, #31). He concludes that there is another principle that determines the formation of such a conclusion, and “this principle is custom or habit”. It “renders our experience useful to us, and makes us expect for the future, a similar train of events with those that have appeared in the past.” (iv, II, #31, p.462)

Hume’s scepticism and habitual scientific parsimony allows him to reduce the principle of causation to a principle of custom or habit. (There is a usually unstated appeal in such psychology which Nietzsche well appreciated—as only one who has felt its pleasures can: it is a kind of prurient taste for reducing the sacred cows of human reason to something demeaning like the inertia of habit.) Hume’s associational

psychology is marked by its reduction of psychological phenomena, including the grab bag of faculty psychology, to a few principles of association. The history of these principles, in fact, may be readily traced back to Aristotle (*De Memoria*) and forward to Peirce's semiotic modes: the association of ideas by dint of *likeness*, empirical or spatiotemporal *connection*, and *custom* or *habit*. As had been appreciated since the dialogue on *likeness* in Plato's *Parmenides*, such principles raised as many questions as they answered. At the very least too, custom and habit should be distinguished—the former as a social, the latter as a subjective phenomenon—otherwise the two mix up quite different categories.

Kant appreciated the power of Hume's sceptical inquiry and the problems it raised for the epistemological status of a principle of causation. On the one hand, the very possibility of experience requires an *a priori* principle of causation just to connect events in time, on the other hand, how could such a principle be strictly universal and necessary if we derive it "from a frequent association of what happens with that which precedes, and the habit thence originating of connecting representations." (1787, p.27) Kant said this derivation would lead to a merely customary or *subjective* necessity, and would prevent experience from acquiring any *certainty*.

Kant's solution was that every human intellect is already in possession of such *a priori* cognition not by virtue of custom, but by virtue of reason itself, otherwise experience would be impossible. The principle is *subjective* in that its necessity holds for any rational being or subject. And it is also, in holding for *all* subjects, universal. So for Kant it was a principle of the pure understanding of the transcendental, as opposed to the empirical, subject. But what kind of *certainty* is actually required by experience—or, for that matter, science—that 'the future will be conformable to the past'? The answer is, only a workable certainty—that is, a high probability—which is not what *certainty* is supposed to be at all.

Evolutionary biology suggests that what is required for experience is not the certainty but the adequacy of representations of environmental processes, an adequacy that has enabled the survival and reproduction of our ancestors. Any organism's experience, as a causal synthesis or narrative of perceived events, that does not match its synthesis to what is happening, is going to find it that much harder to survive. There is clearly considerable selection pressure for organisms to embody causal information processing skills. "Creatures inveterately wrong in their inductions," wrote Quine (1969, p.126) "have a pathetic but praiseworthy tendency to die before reproducing their kind." The mistaken conjecture, as it were, of a variation to the working knowledge of an organism or a scientific system will be refuted by the selection processes of objects themselves. Humans, like other animals, have been designed by evolutionary history to process perceptions according to a phylogenetically determined principle of causation. Kant's transcendental subject with its pure understanding and its strictly universal *a priori* principles turns out, in a biological universe, to be better understood as an empirically universal state of the human animal, its virtual universality being not strictly necessary, but the result of the common ancestry of all humans. It is the immense time scale of evolution that gives its sedimented results the kind of virtual universality that seems to be strictly universal from the time scale of every day human life. Kant's principle is so general that it is about as universal as a judgement can get, without being a tautology—a fact registered by Kant in his calling it a *synthetic* rather than an *analytic a priori*. In a way, Kant's solution looks like an anticipation of evolutionary psychology.

As for Hume's *custom* or *habit*, its supposedly merely empirical, subjective character derives from Hume's limited Lockean conception of experience and

ontogeny. Humans have evolved to process causal information so that early in their development they can quickly interpret and predict cause and effect; it is just that they are not born with the causal nous of an experienced or scientifically learned adult. Evolution has endowed the human organism so as to quickly acquire from early developmental experience a great deal of causal knowledge about say the physics of solid objects or the chemistry of certain foods. As is also the case in language development, this intuitive knowledge is likely to be derived not from the repetitions of custom or habit, but from an actual paucity of stimuli. In a way that Hume could not have appreciated, the acquisition of a so called habit and the work of connecting frequently associated representations, happens not simply at the time scale of an individual's life, it is also the outcome of generations and generations of natural selection. That is where the repetitions took place and the psycho-biological basis of "habits" were formed. Hume's concept of experience, as Hegel recognised, was plagued by its emphasis on immediacy. For Hegel, particular and immediate experience required the mediation of what was universal. The kind of universality that was needed, as it turned out, was the evolved virtual universality of the human subject, not to mention the working universals generated throughout the social history of science. Epistemological "habit" is a term for the inculcated psychic expression of such universals. In the social sphere, the social "customs" of epistemology—not merely the customs of associating a cause with an effect, but the variation and selection of knowledge claims in the customary social environment of observable, repeatable observations—have bred the working universals of scientific society.

The rate and order of ontogenetic development is as much a result of genic biological history as is any innate knowledge; and the precise ontogenetic stage at which particular causal knowledge is acquired is a question for experimental science. A principle of causation and of uniformity (of 'the conformability of the future to the past') is being applied unconsciously from early development; a young child has a good understanding of solid object physics and needs it to survive, while plenty of adults have little understanding of the causality of natural selection and no need of it to survive and reproduce. Much causal knowledge is virtually universal to humans for good biological reasons, while a good deal of it belongs to cultural knowledge and the time scale of the history of human concepts. We need both time scales, and the time scale of ontogeny, to even start to make sense of the principle of causation.

In a way, Kant's positing of a transcendental subject might seem surplus to the kind of parsimony practised by Hume—a parsimony which might seem to be more in the nominalist, empiricist spirit of natural selection. But parsimony is not the be all and end all of science, especially when, rather than simplifying explanations, it just ignores phenomena, including that empirical phenomenon that was so fascinating that Kant demarcated it from the empirical by the term *transcendental subjectivity*. Such a practice is what gives reduction a bad name. Strangely though, the most pernicious reductions are made in the name of the irreducibility of consciousness: Idealism or subject centred reason was the propensity to reduce historical narratives to transhistorical ideas, before all the stories were told. Even Hume fell victim to this custom. Meanwhile, Kant's distinction between the rational and the empirical was not just an awkward reconciliation of earlier traditions inherited from Leibniz and Hume. It recognised that the empirical phenomena of an observation needed the working universality of "rational principles", or rather that is, adequate and regular procedures as the basis for adequate representation and information processing, and ultimately, for communication too. In the case of causality, the rational/empirical distinction registers causality not just as objective causation inherent in things—which is how it might seem to natural consciousness, and how it might have seemed to Hume's

scepticism—but as a cognitive principle regulating the common information processing of the human animal. However, even to call it a cognitive principle is to risk needlessly ontologising causality, especially once we pass from the psychic sphere and psyche's socially selected way of speaking about itself, to the social sphere of scientific society. To speak of *cause and effect* is itself just an evolved, socially selected way of talking, a manner of speaking which science has less and less need of, and which, as happens in the case of the quaint ontologies of superseded sciences, gets tossed into the recyclable garbage can labelled “metaphysics”.

18. *Hic Rhodus, hic salta.*

There is something poignant about an age devoted to innovation but condemned to repetition. For modernity—the age that created and replicated its guiding norm of innovation out of the fact of its reiterated sense of historical change—this poignancy has been a recurring feature, a chronic trace of its antinomical constitution. Norms might not be historically explained by a better understood historical factuality, but they have been founded or proclaimed again and again in the image of many a half understood one. In submitting all phenomena to historical renovation, modernity has also submitted its own sense of time: hence what Habermas (1985, p.13) has called the sensed periodic slackening of modern time consciousness, and its subsequent revitalisation in works ranging from Marx's *18th Brumaire*, to Benjamin's theses “On the Concept of History”, to Foucault's *Archéologie*. But the innovative impulse, like all cultural phenomena, only persists by replication so, like fashion, it became a matter of abstract innovation and therefore, in some ways, no longer innovative at all. This was obvious once Modernist revolution and innovation became pop culture—as it did by the 1960s. The outcome of this predicament was registered most famously in that revealing term for the most recent times, a term that equivocates as a name for the times in terms of an abstractly innovative style or fashion, and yet also as a name for what has passed beyond the possibility of innovation: postmodernism. The various attempts at revitalising modern time consciousness were proclamations for modernising the norms of historiography as much as they were stages in any progress in the concept of history. In the reflexive context of modern society they were a matter of potentially self actualising desire rather than of some unambiguous actuality; and indeed each rightly subjected the naive idea of progress to a critique. Each registered a desire to leap out from the nightmare circumstances transmitted by all the past generations, even if only the past generations of historians; each sought some insight into, or sometimes escape from, the implacable *events* of history by working on the *concept* of history; and successively, each represented a growing sense of the immense power of dismal historical repetitions, such that by the period of postmodernity, it seemed that all that one could work on was the concept, and perhaps only aesthetically—the *aesthetic* being dimly understood as the realm where the reality of facts cedes governance to the virtuality of norms or to radical subjectivity.

In a way then, Benjamin's critique of the assumption of continuous, homogeneous historical time, and Foucault's critique of its foundation in the synthesising ruses of the *subject* are both also expressions of subjective desire in an age whose transmitted norms of innovation created this desire for new histories before a way out of the old histories presented itself. With fashion (as Benjamin described it), they share the symptom of wanting to differentiate themselves from the products—the conceptual products—of the most recent past. Eventually, in fact, the

way for a cognitive reconceptualisation of history, and of narrative, was blocked by a kind of intellectual super-ego, the internalised law of the most implacable and abstract of repetitions—the repetitions of a cultural history whose implacability proves its subjugation to the heteronomy of natural history.

When the object of its interest was history itself, or more generally narrative, the chronic poignancy of modernity became especially touching. Things like the old bans on investigating the natural history of language (for fear of repeating the hubris of Babel?), distaste for the messy empirics of psychology, a nostalgia for subjective transcendence, interdepartmental cringe masked by scientific, literary, philosophical or cultural critical hauteur—all these regulatory habits and customs of cultural transmission—have frustrated the desire for a more thoroughly historical understanding of history and narrative themselves. And this in an age whose first research assumption has been, in Meaghan Morris's words, "the excess of process over structure", and whose architectonic maxim has been "always historicise!" It was subjugation to these antagonistic norms that made attempts at innovation in the theories of the subject and of communication—and therefore in the theory of narrative—poignant instances of merely abstract innovation.

Habermas's theory of communicative *intersubjectivity* was an instance of this abstract innovation. Taking as his cue the twentieth century turn from the philosophy of the subject to the philosophy of language, and avoiding the radical or even absolute critique of reason that he diagnosed as characteristic of philosophical postmodernity, he attempted to supersede the philosophy of the subject with a theory of linguistically generated *intersubjectivity*. However, when it came to his analysis of the intersubjective *lifeworld*—"the structures of mutual understanding that are found in the intuitive knowledge of competent members of modern society" (1985. p323)—Habermas avoided the fact that shared biological history, including both linguistic and social biology, was one of the vital conditions of that mutual understanding. The lifeworld and intersubjectivity, in the absence of an account of their historical genesis, remain as mysterious as the transcendental subject: for Habermas, the term *lifeworld* refers to that which cannot be brought into determinate focus; its formation cannot be historically reconstructed; and it miraculously transforms itself to accommodate the needs of communicants (or else the theoretical needs of Habermas). It too is another *something-nothing-everything*. And as with the first something-nothing-everything—the subject—the concern of philosophy is not to perpetuate the mysteries of its theoretical objects, but to inquire into them: an understanding of the lifeworld lies in its historical genesis. The virtual universals of the shared lifeworld of communicants, and the lifeworld's mysterious character belong to the state of the biological and cultural human subject. Though Habermas was sceptical, even mystificatory, about the determination of its content and the reconstruction of its history, the lifeworld (or what Wittgenstein called "forms of life") has a history, and it is one of a genic as well as a symbolic, cultural nature. The universal—the element in which, for Hegel, philosophy moves, and which included the particular—turns out to be something particular itself, the unique outcome of historical contingency, an anciently constructed, deeply sedimented, slowly changing, ceaselessly reproduced, social subject.

Another instance of abstract innovation—specifically in poetic theory—and one that deliberately tried to restore to the subject its historical character, drew on psychoanalytical stories of the subject's genesis. Julia Kristeva's *Revolution in Poetic Language* was an instance that marked, as Barthes noted, a "shifting away from a semiology of products to a semiotics of production" (Kristeva, 1974, p. 10). It stands

as a divide between the heroic age of structuralist poetics and the subsequent slackening and dissipation of narrative theory in the period that the managers of intellectual history have called *poststructuralist*. No work better exemplifies the attempt to revitalise the theories of poetics, narrative and communication by restoring process to structure and giving it a narrative, historical architectonic. What more desirable story than the story of story? But Kristeva did not have enough stories to tell.

Instead she had to repeat the by now simplistic Hegelian architectonic of running an ontogeny—supplied by psychoanalysis—along with a still inadequately theorised cultural history. The psychoanalytical story was infected by scepticism toward psychology that persisted in the replications of doctrinal psychoanalysis, despite Freud's reassertion of the empirical subject, and Lacan's emphasis on the biological character of language. Even Lacan's essay on the *mirror stage* and the formation of the subject (upon which Kristeva drew) now looks threadbare in its citations of evidence, and the self referential device of the mirror looks like something Lacan picked up, as his own essayistic device, from a garage sale after the death of metaphysics—a device for discerning ends in origins.

As a cultural history, Kristeva and those who came after her ran an ideology critique either of the philosophy of the subject (which was now to be decentred and put in process) or of the history of narrative art. This may have declared a putting of the subject in process, as was already reflected in the historical transformations of artistic practice, but the shortage of stories still made the subject function as a mystifying *something-nothing-everything*, like the one left over from transcendental epistemology.

As long as critical narrative theorists continued to reproduce their own peculiar *epoché* in regard to the empirical historical subject and the history of society, and as long as they repeated doctrinal critiques of Idealism, its subject centred reason, and positivism, the not only desired but scientifically vital narrative of narrative remained untold. Instead the theory of narrative remained, to use Kristeva's own description of contemplative discourse, "archaic and mannered, borrowed from the textual practices of bygone eras." (1974, p.99) This archaism repeated Idealism's delusion by the ruses of its all too cunning reason: desiring transcendence it could not fully admit the empirical genesis of a consciousness supported by all the stage machinery of its unconscious. These last divinities, these last mysteries lived on as the last mystifications.

If all that I have written so far were presented as a grand historical narrative about the resistance of modern philosophy and, after it, narrative theory to narrative conceptualisation, it would be a highly selective one. The limitations of its citations would be just those of a mere philosophical *biographia literaria*, complete with some self edifying critical manoeuvres. At best it might sample and reflect one of those increasingly self enclosed constellations of works that get cited in the bibliographies of the increasingly separate, self differentiating systems of theoretical communication. (Nowadays what inquiring thinker has not come upon whole other worlds of knowledge, peculiarly relevant to their curiosity, whose thorough mastery must remain beyond the practical limitations of individual research.) Distance in time, with its attendant cultural selection of persistent theoretical themes and theories, at least makes the citations of Descartes, Hume, Kant, Hegel and Husserl seem relevant to a grander history, especially given the persistent transnarrative pretensions of transcendental subjectivity. But the selective citation of the likes of Derrida, Habermas or Kristeva seem much more arbitrary. (Perhaps, though, even *Derrida* by now has ceased to refer to a human author, and like *Descartes* or *Marx* or *Darwin*

(and others) refers to the persistently replicated label of an emblematic set of often wrongly attributed notions.) As evidence in a grand history, the citations of recent works are not unlike contingently preserved, isolated fossils from the relatively recent sediments of poststructuralism.

However what motivates my selections is not big unified intellectual history (especially given the self differentiation of the sciences) but an attempt to trace the persistence of a specific cultural adaptation of philosophical communications—the transnarrative adaptation—in a particular intellectual environment that exerted its selection pressure on the discourse of aesthetic, narrative theory.

When Frederic Jameson (1981, p.139) declined to call the genealogy he and others inherited from Nietzsche an historical narrative, he was, more than anything else, concerned to distinguish genealogy from the naive continuities of narrative habit. But genealogy (as the selection history of social communications) *is* an historical narrative and, in an important sense, it is continuity that characterises genealogy, if not at an initial descriptive level then at least at the level that explains it. The continuity/discontinuity division, or the old gradualism/catastrophism distinction are artefacts of choosing different time scales or different levels of scientific abstraction and therefore of divergent scientific disciplines. “*Natura nihil facit saltum*,” said Darwin, “Nature does not make leaps.” But as Marx said, to humans the conditions themselves cry out “*Hic Rhodus, hic salta!*”—“Here is Rhodes, leap here!”

In the realm of ideas, say, negation is a kind of real continuity, even though its consequence—functional or semantic transformation—would be described as a discontinuity. Another kind of discontinuity arises from continuity when ideas from divergent, separately continuous traditions (albeit of common ancestry) come back together like black swans trespassing on a lake of white ones. The resistance to natural history and continuous historical narrative was precisely one of those “collective mentalities” beneath which an historian like Foucault sought to detect “the incidence of interruptions.” (1969, p.4) When the history of ideas and their cultural transmission has to be based—according to the cybernetics of cultural transmission—on evidence of particular person to person communication, any bans on considering cultural studies either as part of natural history or as a science of continuous narratives (or for that matter, psychologistic bans on recognising the effective autonomy of social processes)—bans that are still epidemic over certain intellectual populations—will have the look of those great, solid, governing continuities that discontinuous historiography only wished it could disrupt.

This resistance to narrative and natural history, traced here through philosophy and narrative theory, looks like a collective mentality but on analysis it is a tree-like network (a tree with reticulation of various branches) of cultural transmissions. And it is a partially ordered network that takes in the seemingly great divide that still gets reproduced in the conflict between psychological and cultural theorists. What now disrupts the continuity of the collective transhistorical, transnarrative mentality and transforms the theory of narrative is partly its reinfection by once divergent and now transformed scientific traditions, traditions against which most aesthetic philosophy had long maintained an interdepartmental, theological resistance. Aesthetic theory can be informed by naturalised epistemology, so the conformist hand of its repetitions might leave off brushing the history of poetics with the old, persistent transhistorical grain.

Enough of ancient history. Now the theory of fiction—that narrative object that seems so deeply and elusively cultural—has the opportunity to take heart from

ideas about narrative born in the sciences of natural history, from the astonishing historical nature of the body, and the body politic.

Narrative and *fiction* demand a thorough historical explanation: they cannot simply be defined and explained without more story. They are terms that “semiotically condense a whole process, (and so) elude definition.” At the risk of ontologising narrative, the essence of narrative lies in its narrative contingency. And the nature of fiction—its genesis and its functions—lies in the nature of narrative.

Plot & the Critique of Human Narrative Reason.

19. *The shot and the cut.*

A shot in Andrey Tarkovsky's *Mirror* records the evaporation of a circle of condensation left by a tea cup. I have seen whole action films in which much less happens (But then rather than being, as reviewers like to say, narrative driven, the spectacle of breakneck movement in action films is a kind of front for the immense stasis of the action genre's plot. Kubrick's *2001* seems to proceed from some such idea as this, by displaying it in his almost motionless masterpiece of what is normally action cinema). The shot of the vanishing circle follows a preceding shot—that's how we know what it means. In the preceding shot a woman and her servant, who seem to come from the nineteenth century, have apparently materialised inside a modern apartment. They are encountered by the occupant's son, and eventually they will disappear again. *Mirror* is a film about remembering and time's passing, about the personal and political events in the lifetime of a man who thinks he has taken more love than he has given. In particular it is about the man's mother, wife and son, and it is about the peculiarity of a remembered life as exhibited by the peculiarity of the events memory selects.

The woman who has materialised out of the past, gets the boy—the narrator's son—to read aloud from a letter by Pushkin. The letter is about the peculiar historical predicament of Russia, sandwiched there between Europe and Asia. She sits at a table with a cup of tea while he reads. When the boy finishes, the camera tracks him as he goes to answer the doorbell. There is an old woman, the cleaner, at the door. She is expected, but she shows surprise because she does not appear to recognise the boy or the apartment. It is as if she senses that, like the audience, she is looking back into the past by looking into this apartment. She excuses herself; the boy closes the door; and the camera tracks him back to where he has been reading, only now the woman out of the past, and her servant, have disappeared. The film cuts to the surface of the table as seen by the boy: the evaporating circle is the vanishing trace of the woman from the past. "The word 'history,'" wrote Walter Benjamin, "stands written in the countenance of nature in the characters of transience." (1963, p.177)

As in all cinema and all narrative, there are two kinds of representational processes going on here: that which represents information explicitly in each shot (or in a sentence), and that which represents it implicitly so it has to be inferred as each shot (or sentence) is followed by another. The former—an event represented by a shot—corresponds to an event represented by a sentence, although the obviously different modes of representation and perception in screen and language make for different amounts, kinds and affects of information.

I think English betrays a strange but widespread ignorance of screen poetics by still resorting to undigested French terms for these two narrative processes: *mise en scène* and *montage*. On the other hand, I think it is an ignorance that is typical in the case of phenomena that are somehow too familiar. An audience understands the narrative effects of shots and editing intuitively because it is by and large a matter of unconscious inferential processing.

Take the shot of the vanishing circle. “Cinema came into being,” Tarkovsky (1989, p.94) rightly said, “as a means of recording the very movement of reality: factual, specific, within time and unique: of reproducing again and again the moment, instant by instant in its fluid mutability.” Many think of *mise en scène* as a matter of composing the scene of the film’s drama and then using it to express the meaning of what is happening. Many a mediocre blockbuster seems to reflect the notion that cinema is a matter of putting a story into the medium of film; instead movies show cinematic stories. Cinema and video think their concepts in moving images. Tarkovsky was right to emphasise that the *mise en scène* is what is happening; it is an image of passing time: “I think that what a person goes to the cinema for is *time*.” (p.63) In the evaporation of the tea cup’s condensation, time becomes visible, like the path of a charged particle in a cloud chamber. Tarkovsky was also right to emphasise that this was the original and the (so far) enduring fascination of cinema—what made people leave their seats when they saw a train coming straight at them in the Lumières’ shot of the Gare de la Ciotat. This is what André Bazin (1967) called “total cinema”, cinema as virtual reality. Unlike the sentence’s opaque representation of an event, the visual proposition—the shot or *mise en scène*—is a transparent image of movement. Fortuitously unable to distinguish the 24 separate frames appearing on screen every second, we effectively see continuous motion and duly process it as continuous visual experience, until the cut.

Tarkovsky’s cut from the shot of the boy returning to the empty room to the shot of the surface of the table is hardly noticed. The table is already there beyond the boy in the first shot and, rather than zooming onto the table’s surface, the film cuts and takes up the boy’s perspective on the table. The movement of time *within* the first shot is much more like what usually happens between shots—it is a movement between centuries. Tarkovsky’s method reflects his misgivings about “montage cinema” and his devotion to the imprinted time of the shot. For him, the rhythm of editing was determined less by what he saw as intellectualised conventions of the symbolic interpretation of the juxtaposition of shots, than by what he called the “time pressure” within the shots. He thought (p.119) Eisenstein’s rapid montage of the battle in *Alexander Nevsky* was, for all its rush, sluggish and unnatural. The time pressure of each of these shots in *Mirror* is quite extraordinary; in comparison, the cut from an objective to a subjective viewpoint is almost imperceptible.

In *The Secret Language of Film*, Jean Claude Carrière explores the sense of novel narrative power that the discovery of montage had, and still has, for film makers.

A man in a closed room approaches a window and looks out. Another image, another “shot” succeeds the first. We are shown the street, where we see two characters, the man’s wife for instance, and her lover... We effortlessly and correctly interpret these juxtaposed images, that language...Like a kind of extra sense, this aptitude is now part of our perceptual system.(p.9)

Right from the time that film makers became aware of the requirements and the potential of montage they were struck by its apparent difference from linguistic narrative exposition. Carrière (p.114) illustrates how easy it is for a novelist to write “next morning he left the house”; but just how a film signifies “next morning” depends, not only on a shot that somehow shows “morning”, but on a deliberate and careful rhythm of editing that implies that the “morning” is the morning of the “next day”.

Fascination with the expressive potential of montage was evident in the claims that a new language was involved. As Jean Epstein said in 1926: “The grammar of film is peculiar to film.” And throughout the short history of screen poetics, techniques and conventions have evolved—and sometimes been abandoned—as part of the cinematic “grammar”: *fade-ins* to indicate a short interval between shots; *dissolves* to indicate longer intervals; various wobbles and fast pans to suggest *flash backs* and *flash forwards*. “Nothing,” writes Carrière, “in the history of artistic expression had suggested such a relation-by-juxtaposition might ever be possible.” (p.12)

Yet montage is actually the ancient expositional structure of each and every narrative. More than the cognate term *editing*—which implies the process of culling, cutting and arranging shots—*montage* implies the process of constructing a cinematic *argument*. To understand montage and cinematic editing we might need a few conventions (or as many as we like) to symbolise certain temporal relations, like *before* or *soon* or *later*, between shots. And, just as we pay attention to logical connections between sentences, we need to pay attention to details of rhythm, directions of movement and to continuity of characters, objects and actions in successive shots—after all, film lacks the gamut of temporal indicators that language has. And, of course, as with linguistic narrative, part of the art of cinematic style lies in the poetics of the rhythm of montage—the poetics of plot. However, the problem of the connection of one shot to its preceding and succeeding shots is much the same problem in terms of narrative inference, as the connection of the event of one sentence to the events of preceding and succeeding sentences. In practice, mistakes in continuity need not destroy or mislead the interpretation suggested by the editing. They simply stand out as mistakes because we in the audience have already made the right connections, inferring or confirming them intuitively from other more robust (and otherwise redundant) information. Thus we would follow a quick series of cuts between speakers in the to and fro of dialogue even if one character’s cigarette miraculously gets bigger. We might even infer that it is a symbol of a male character’s growing desire for his interlocutor. When, or if, we notice that a particular character in Buñuel’s *That Obscure Object of Desire* looks like a different person in different scenes—because she is played by two actors—we assume continuity of character and make the appropriate inferences about the obscurity of objects of desire.

Whereas we process the dense experiential time within one shot by means of visual perception, or the propositional form of a sentence by means of linguistic processing, we process the montage of shot after shot or sentence after sentence inferentially, according to a conceptual grammar of events and processes, and states of affairs. It is not quite as clear cut as this: sentences present inferences explicitly—every *because* sentence argues—and a single shot may require a lot of inferential labour while it is still running. However there is an important schematic distinction to be appreciated between the inferential processes of narrative plot, and the events—however a particular medium represents them—that make up the plot. Montage in the feature film is just cinema’s version of narrative argument, cinema’s way of colligating its propositions or event-concepts. These different kinds of narrative information processing—propositional (visual and linguistic) and inferential—are related, but by a genealogy obscurely written in the wetware of human biology.

20. Narrative argument.

The way a narrative is set out is its argument or plot. Yet because many narratives seem to be more concerned with just telling or describing or reporting, rather than arguing or explaining and making a claim for their validity as argument, then it might seem peculiar to call narrative exposition an argument at all. It is not an argument in the more familiar sense of demonstrative inference or *deduction*. Nor is it *induction*; although the way induction is supposed (Carnap 1950) to marshal particular data or evidence in its premise and determine therefrom the degree of confirmation of some predictive or more general conclusion or hypothesis, seems more like narrative than deduction does. If a narrative is an argument it is of that loose kind that C. S. Peirce called *abduction*.

An abduction is an argument whose conclusion—perhaps just a likely outcome of a certain course of events or actions—lacks “any positive assurance that it will succeed either in the special case or usually (Peirce, vol. 2, p.153).” Its justification is “that it is the only possible way of regulating future conduct rationally, and that induction from past experience gives strong encouragement to hope that it will be successful in future (p.153)” This would describe an argument that is a kind of plot or plan used to frame the goal—or end—of a course of action. Another kind of plot is an explanation; it begins with a curious situation as its premise and then explains—or concludes—how that situation could have come about. For that other great class of narratives of the past tense—histories and fictions—the premise would be the events of the story and the conclusion would be simply what we call the end of the story.

Narrative is usually a kind of argument that scarcely seems to argue and need scarcely seem to be conclusive. It seems more like a big colligation of propositions, indeed, one big compound proposition; and as Peirce said, a proposition does not argue, and does not furnish any “rational persuasion (p.177)” concerning the information it conveys, even if it is, again as Peirce thought, a kind of rudimentary inference. Insofar as it is a *description* rather than an *explanation*, a story is like a big propositional concept representing particular events in space and time. However, Peirce (p.154) also rightly noted that, once we start compounding propositions together, the meaning of each proposition changes by dint of its inferential relation to all the others. The colligation as a whole starts to look like a premise that is more than the simple sum of its parts. In chapter 2 of *Ulysses* Joyce wrote:

On the doorstep he felt in his hip pocket for the latchkey. Not there. In the trousers I left off. Must get it. Potato I have. Creaky wardrobe. No use disturbing her. She turned over sleepily that time. He pulled the hall door to after him very quietly, more, till the footleaf dropped gently over the threshold, a limp lid. Looked shut. All right till I come back anyhow.

If we reverse the order of these sentences we see how mere stringing together may change the meaning of both the whole and its parts simply by virtue of the queer effect of the temporal order of presentation. Plotting order encodes inferential information about the chronological order that is not explicit in the propositional forms. Typically a narrative argument emerges from a surfeit of propositions—an ordered surfeit; and aside from whether or not an argument can actually lack a conclusion, any conclusion, as just another proposition can merge with all the rest. The art of narrative consists, among other things, in the force, if any, of its conclusion.

A narrative's avoidance of explanatory reference extends to its self-reference: like announcement or proclamation, and unlike argued scientific or theoretical assertions, narrative does not usually have to explain itself or justify itself. It usually just has to describe the sequence of events or show the events and their sequence; so it is usually used to explain something else: its *end*. Even though this *end* informs the entelechy of the narrative and is, as such, an object of the narrative's self-reference, it is actually what obtains *after* the events of the narrative. All this suits fiction, because it means fictional narrative doesn't have to explain its fictivity or its contrariness to fact. It does not have to waste explanation on what really doesn't demand explanation.

Any argument belongs to a general class of arguments, which "on the whole will always tend to the truth (Peirce, p.145)." For Peirce an argument was a kind of sign that signifies the law or rule of its general class. "It is this law, in some shape, which the argument urges; and this 'urging' is the mode of representation proper to arguments (p. 145)." The class of arguments to which narratives belong includes many kinds—many types of plots, many gists, in many genres. So even if a narrative scarcely argues or concludes, it still urges its general gist. Considered as an argument then, a narrative which is a *fiction* is still an argument that tends to the truth; it is still valid if not factual. Certainly a proposition need not be asserted; it may just be shown; it may be just a kind of spectacle, an image of a proposition. Indeed Peirce used the term quasi-proposition to suggest this, and also to suggest that propositions need not necessarily be linguistic signs. A film shot or a sequence of mime are non linguistic quasi-propositions. But an argument urges itself as the image or replica of a universal form. It is as an argument that a narrative quite properly makes a spectacle of its narrativity; and insofar as a proposition shows its universal form, rather than making a particular assertion, it displays its own rudimentary form as argument. This is something that is not only essential to the validity of historiography, but also to the appreciation of fiction's truth. Whatever a fiction, as a propositional sign, refers to—whether to a ridiculously quixotic knight and his adventures, to the goings on of everyday life, or to whatever—its truth lies in its argument.

21. *Natural selection as a narrative argument.*

In an inquiry into the nature of narrative argument, the argument of a history of narrative does not just furnish an example from the field of inquiry—one of those often unhappily dislocated creatures of philosophical discourse—in explaining the nature of narrative, it must also explain itself. There are dangers awaiting those who think they can kill two birds with one stone, but the main one in this case is that which lurks in all exemplification: that of deriving specious universality from seductive particularity. There are many kinds of narrative, and if any thing emerges from an historical inquiry into narrative, it is that narrative is a heterogeneous phenomenon called on to account for all sorts of particularities. The history of narrative is not your typical narrative, but then what narrative is?

The other danger seems to be that of circularity, that of explaining narrative with a narrative. However, this grounding of narratives in narratives, this quality of human narrative communication being an historical phenomenon that is historical all the way down, is really, as we shall see, what accounts for its seemingly arbitrary particularities. Meanwhile, though the type of argument of the history of narrative that I want to consider might not be that of a typical narrative, it is a type of narrative argument that seems to be explanatory for at least two quite different sets of historical phenomena, and hence for two aspects of the history of narrative. Both describe

sequences of the replication and selection of elements of information, but one is called natural selection and the other, no less natural, may be called cultural selection.

In a history of narrative, how do we know what the argument of that history is worth? When that history is the evolutionary one and its argument is *natural selection*, which all we postmoderns are supposed to know by heart, what is being explained (the outcome, or perhaps the conclusion) is the functional and physical state of the human design for processing narrative information. Rather than considering narrative-as-such, or pure narrative reason (and putting aside for now whether such an ideal form or universal might exist) the history of human narrative considers how the particular design of human narrative representation came about. The gist of the evolutionary argument goes like this: *A human has a particular, functional, phenotypic design for narrative information processing and communication in its environment* (the conclusion let's say), *because its ancestors, who all survived and produced offspring, passed on their particular functional designs for narrative processing, with only slight, if any, variation, to their offspring* (the premise let's say).

Cultural selection works not with genes and organisms (like humans) but in the domain of ideas and communicated structures. Its gist is as follows: *Ideas and cultural structures (including narratives) have particular features that enable them to survive and reproduce in their psychic and social environment because they are historically descended from earlier ideas or structures that were able to pass on, with only slight, if any, variation, the features that gave them their comparative fitness in their particular psychic and social environment.*

The general gist of both these historical arguments, the gist of *selection* in general, may be expressed as follows: *A self maintaining individual has its particular functional design in its environment because it is descended from other individuals whose own functional design was both heritable (with slight, if any variation), and responsible for conferring differential fitness in comparison to other individuals in their environments.*

Neither natural nor cultural selection should be ignored in the history of human narrative. For the moment, in order to examine the value of selection arguments in general, I shall consider the argument of natural selection.

The premise—about the saga of the survival and reproduction of each and every one of those ancestors—is a summary way of telling all those ancestor stories, all those protagonists, all those proto story tellers, all those settings, all those biographies of birth, survival, story telling, sex and death. Doesn't the incredible lack of detail damage the argument? Put in the rudimentary form of a single sentence (or if you like, two sentences yoked by *because*) the argument makes a strong, non tautological claim, but it is particularly brief and schematic; and it is not only what I've called the premise that is lacking in detail. Isn't such an argument of less explanatory significance than a detailed analysis of the present design and workings of human narrative skills? At the very least, despite its complexity, the description of human narrative consciousness, and the narrative unconscious, is more empirically accessible, and to that extent seems more reliable and the task more important, than trying to retrospeculate on how it got to be that way. It is all very well to say things are as they are because of how they got that way, but citing unobserved historical reasons to explain the still uncharted complexities of narrative consciousness and the unconscious might look like a bad epistemological habit.

An important point about the kind of argument and inference involved is indicated by the noteworthy order of English sentences that use *because*: typically, the expository order of such sentences reverses the order of the events it refers to. As I have labelled the argument above, the conclusion, or the end of the story, comes

before the premise or the beginning and middle of the story. It seems the labels are around the wrong way, and the inferential order of the argument reverses the chronological order. In his later thoughts on argument structure, in volume 6 of his *Collected Papers*, Peirce described abduction as an inference from a “surprising fact” to an “explanatory hypothesis”; the end, the historical outcome, is the premise from which the historical explanation is inferred. This is one reason why in evolutionary explanations an accurate description of the outcome—the design and functions of the organism—is of the utmost importance. The broad application of this to all sorts of narratives was registered by Aristotle when he said that in drama the end is the most important thing. The reversal (*peripéteia*) and discovery (*anagnórisis*) of Aristotelean plot (*Poetics* 1452a) refer to this propensity of narrative plot to reconfigure the beginning in the light of the end. Only in the end does Oedipus see what has actually been happening all along. Only the punch line reveals the proper logic of the joke. In evolutionary inference, the account of how an organism now works has to be true. And as in all descriptions of humans, the crucial task in the descriptions of contemporary human narrative lies in sorting out at what time scale or time scales a particular phenomenon is determined. Is a particular narrative genre, say, determined by genetic evolution? or by cultural genealogy? or by both? or by what else?

The world is full of evolutionary arguments about humans that are simply “just so stories”. Apart from the unavoidable lack of empirical observations that things evolved in just such a manner and not otherwise, they consist of misleading explanations of what are merely false descriptions of contemporary human nature. No wonder the concept *human nature* has long had such a bad name, muddled even more so by that paired category mistake *nature and nurture*. Ever since Darwin, evolutionary arguments have been marshalled to conclude such pseudo facts as the biological necessity of capitalism, *laissez-faire* economics, various stereotypes of gender, sexual preference, and ethnicity, the biological inevitability of greed, class, racial inequality, violence, rape, injustice and warfare. Even contemporary neo-Darwinism has provoked a rash of dubious evolutionary accounts, like those that explain environmental aesthetics in terms of a supposed pining for the savannas of the Pleistocene, or those about human sexuality that misconstrue its complex and diverse character by reducing it to some adhocery about a couple of Barbie and Ken stereotypes from the image factories of the narrative industry. The mistake nearly all these arguments share is that they start with false premises—false descriptions of the outcome they are attempting to explain. In many cases this is simply a case of blissfully ignoring empirical data. They then proceed to misconstrue the scope of genetic determination, mixing it up hopelessly with phenomena that are also determined by cultural history and individual development. (This, incidentally, is why the feminist distinction between sex and gender had nothing to do with merely splitting hairs; the two interanimating categories belong to different kinds of phenomena operating at quite different time scales.)

Ends garner particular prestige because their representation is generally a description of a state of affairs. A state obtains through time, and may therefore usually be subjected to social verification by, say, empirical observation. Events, especially past events, are particular and not repeatable or observable according to the same epistemological standards. A sequence of events, as a narrative argument, “urges its argument”, but a description of an end state, as a propositional sign, does not need to furnish any “rational persuasion” of its truth—especially if it is still empirically observable and verifiable. This predicament of historical argument is of course one reason for the traditional philosophical and scientific suspicion of narrative. It is a suspicion that is replicated in the evolutionary context when

biological taxonomists argue that classification descriptions of species may be used to support historical accounts of how the species evolved and how they are related, but that historical accounts, being strictly empirically unverifiable, should not be used to make inferences about the actual classification descriptions. Though this is a useful methodological caveat in taxonomic classification, there is more to consider. The isolated description of what is an historical outcome may at best seem arbitrary and inexplicable, and at worst it may be wrong if it cannot be inferentially related to an account of its historical genesis. The easy and frequent confusion of genetic and cultural evolutionary outcomes is a particular problem in this context. It is necessary to determine whether something is the outcome of genetic or cultural evolution in order to adequately describe it. So the crucial question about historical *evidence* cannot be completely avoided even in descriptions of the historical outcomes.

Nevertheless, even if we know next to nothing that is empirically verifiable about an historical process, we may know something about the argument describing that process. In an evolutionary account, the theory of natural selection provides such an argument. Attempts to describe the end of an evolutionary process may be “theory laden” (with evolutionary theory) because the theory describes a *state*. At a very general level natural selection describes the *state* of a special kind of causal mechanism or program that has obtained throughout any historical, evolutionary, selection process. Along with the minimal empirical claim that reproduction with heritable variation has obtained throughout the whole course of a selection history—a claim that is difficult though not impossible to falsify—such general information as that supplied by a selection program may disambiguate a description of a seemingly arbitrary historical outcome, or it may contradict it and so suggest its wrongness. In evolutionary argument, and in narrative argument generally (and indeed in argument generally) inference is not a one way process. The history and the outcome are interanimating concepts. Just as the historical conditions determine what can happen in the end, the actual end has implications for how we may construe what happened in the lead up.

The way that evolutionary arguments rely both on the unavailable empirical detail of past events, and a theory about the outcome of a program of reiterated replication with variation and selection causes much confusion. It is often thought that arguments that rely on natural selection are tautological—a suspicion fed by talk about such seemingly tautologically interdefining concepts as *survival* and *fitness*, or *niche* and *adaptation*, or *selection pressure* and *adaptation*. Tautologies or deductive arguments or mathematically derived expressions do no more than frame the scope of the logical possibilities and thereby enable us to infer what follows deductively from given empirical information. Predictive science relies on its empirical content to supply the otherwise uninferable information of causal relations or explanations or predictive hypotheses; the tautologies of mathematics and deduction can rearrange this empirical information to reveal what might not have been obvious to a naive first glance at the data or at an hypothesis induced from the data. Natural selection *is* a tautology insofar as it is an algorithmic program that is, as such, content neutral. In the context of genetic evolution, its empirical content lies in the causal or predictable machinations of genetic replication, variation and selection. Those machinations involve all those stories of survival, reproduction and death, and, at a more general, theoretical level, all the little predictive, theoretical narratives about things like the replication and inheritance of genes. The predictive, empirical content supplied by genetics, even in the absence of specific information about all the specific ancestors, is empirical grist to the selection program’s mathematical mill. To some extent, the concepts used in the empirical descriptions and explanations are tautologised, as it

were, by being operationally defined in terms of concepts that are amenable to manipulation in the selection algorithm. Thus *genes* are defined as *replicators*. On the other hand in any actual evolutionary narrative, the sublime, inhuman, mathematical purity of the algorithm is riddled with the empirical detail of each and every generation. Practical ignorance of this empirical detail feeds into the tendency of many evolutionary arguments to degenerate into a tautological hither and thither that is as empty of empirical content as it is free to slip between mere possibilities posing as actualities.

22. Teleological function of narrative.

Evolution is an old story and the world was full of evolutionary stories long before Darwin. One has only to read Lucretius to appreciate how narrative historical argument has long been a force in the natural sciences. What Darwin did was set out a strong evolutionary argument that amounted to a program, or indeed an algorithm, for the generation and maintenance of biological design. He combined an analysis of the ecological function of any particular organic feature with a natural history or genealogy of that feature, whatever the ancestral function or functions that feature may have had. He argued that physiological features inherited from ancestors were the historical means at hand for the generation and selection of such functional adaptations as are revealed by a functional analysis of an organism. In doing so he tempered the tautological or transhistorical proclivities of abstract functional analysis, wherein similar ecological selection pressures may be construed as selecting *analogous* features regardless of the historical circumstances, with the inescapable historical contingency of the genealogical inheritance of *homologous* features. The value of *selection* as an historical argument lies in the causal coherence that a continuous genealogical sequence of elements guarantees, even though specific information on each and every genealogical stage is lacking. This unavoidable narrative, historical character of evolutionary theory is sometimes forgotten when adaptationist zeal is dazzled by functional analysis alone. Evolutionary psychology, despite its importance to the history of narrative, has typically been light on the neurophysiological detail required for a good natural history of homologous features, and this has sometimes proved to be a temptation too seductive for adaptationist zeal to resist.

So the stories of all those ancestors being born, reproducing and dying, belong to a general class of narratives called natural selection. The gist of this kind of plot may be told in terms of three types of events:

- *Replication or copying* of the elements. Just what these elements are has been contested and refined throughout the history of evolutionary biology. For Darwin, the absence of a theory of replicating elements meant that natural selection had to be thought on the basis of inheritance, in which the traits of individual organisms were somehow replicated and (in sexual reproduction) mixed by procreation. In contemporary evolutionary theory these elements are “cybernetic abstractions” (Williams, 1966, p.33) called evolutionary genes. Such a gene is “any hereditary information for which there is a favourable or unfavourable selection bias equal to several or many times its rate of endogenous change (p.25).” Richard Dawkins (1976) introduced the more general notion of a *replicator*, similarly defined in terms of the permanence of its structure relative to the degree of selection bias. Whether all biological replicators are genes is a moot point, but the way such evolutionary genes are defined in terms of their operative place in a natural selection process makes for replicators that vary from just small chunks of genetic

material (when the genetic material is heterogeneous and subject to crossing over) to whole genomes (in the case of asexual organisms). The general notion of replication and replicators led to the suggestion that natural selection could apply to the replicable elements of culturally transmitted information, that Dawkins (p.206) called memes.

- *Variation* of the elements. For Darwin (mistakenly, but fruitfully) this variation was apparent in the differences between parents and their offspring; but, now, for the genetic story, the variation comes from changes to the DNA that makes up the genetic material. There is a limit to the amount of variation that can take place per replication, and therefore to the type of variation event. That limit is specifiable in terms of the program, and if it is exceeded the program breaks down (say when massive mutation causes death). In other words, the variation must be heritable.
- *Selection* of the elements. Darwin likened this to a pigeon breeder selecting the best of his flock for subsequent breeding. Throughout natural history, natural selection has been a matter of which organisms (and therefore which genes) managed to survive and reproduce in their given environments. There is no need to assume, by the way, that competition is the only type of event determining selection; cooperation has proved more than once to be a good strategy for selection. The event type called selection stands for a whole constellation of events which we might loosely call *environment*. This raises the question of at what level the selection takes place, or of how the selections attributed holus bolus to environment are distributed among the kinds of environmental entity. Are the elements selected the same as the replicators, or may selection be said to work at the level of organisms or species? Just as Dawkins, after Williams, proposed a general definition of a replicator in the operational terms of the process of natural selection, a general theory of selection needs to define selection and the elements selected in the terms of the operations of the process, rather than just assuming that the selected elements will be known culprits like organisms, genes or species. Such a procedure helps make the process of selection generalisable beyond only biological evolution. David Hull (1988, pp. 408-9) introduced the concept of an *interactor* as a way of dividing up the environment of a replicator according to the effective units of environmental interaction that make replication differential. For Hull then, selection was “a process in which the differential extinction and proliferation of interactors *cause* the differential perpetuation of the relevant replicators.” Still, the operative self-definition of the “selfish” replicator is not matched by the same kind of self-definition of the interactor. The abstract event, *selection*, is a kind of under the carpet concept: if a gene or replicator is the protagonist in this saga, its environment and its selection comprises all the other characters, the setting, and the whole damn plot. This ruthless schematisation of a selfish system on the one hand and its environment on the other is what gives the selection algorithm its power: that abstraction, the “selfish gene”, is only as powerful for evolutionary explanations as its self differentiation from that other abstraction, its environment, makes it. Significantly, the two sides of this distinction, *replicator* and *environment* (or its component *interactors*), are hardly symmetrical. In the terms of George Spencer Brown’s *Laws of Form*, in this distinction, one side (environment) is indicated and the other (self) is unmarked.

Hull introduced his terminology in the context of his work on conceptual evolution in science. He argued:

One reason for our tardiness in treating sociocultural evolution as a selection process is that most of us know a great deal about sociocultural transmission

and have an overly simple view of biological transmission. If biological evolution were a neat process of genes mutating, organisms being selected and species evolving, then sociocultural evolution is nothing so simple. (p.440)

But biological evolution is no less complicated than cultural evolution. For Hull, the primary interactors in the evolution of scientific concepts are individual scientists; but whether this is true, and whether the primary interactors in the evolution of narrative concepts and narrative art are individual artists is another matter. One argument for the importance of individuals though is that they too are self differentiated from their environments.

Recognising that all those sagas about all those ancestors and environments were governed by the sublime cybernetics of what may be called this *teleonomic* plot is what gives evolutionary argument its inferential power in explaining biological design. However natural selection—an abstract narrative of scientific culture—is not a typical or intuitively familiar narrative.

Narratives are typically about particular events or particular sequences of events. Any explanatory force they have when referring to historical phenomena comes from the material coherence and continuity of a sequence. Though they urge their arguments as one of a general class, most stories tell about events, which in their particularity defy, to some extent, the universals of types of sequences of events and types of narrative argument. The limiting case of narrative particularity would be something like an observation statement of a single event. However it would be wrong to take such a case as the primitive or pure form of narrative; for narrative seems to be as much about the abhorrence of such purism and simplicity of proposition as it is about the impracticality of the perfect demonstrative argument that explicitly represents all the data in its premise and then deduces its conclusion therefrom. A narrative piles events on events and states of affairs on states of affairs and general types of states and events on particular tokens thereof. At each conjunction it specifies more and more particularity and, as we shall see, assumes that countless propositions are to be taken for granted—usually as what is vaguely called *context*. It is as if what Quine called the underdetermination of a total field of knowledge by particular experience (1953, p.42) licensed such profligate compounding of events and states. This underdetermination of a scientific system by any single narrative proposition may ensure little likelihood of insurmountable or even detectable inconsistency between the narrative and the more general theory. Realist fiction typically exploits this in order to slip its events and actions into an argument that still looks like just another little bit of particular history.

Meanwhile, a single proposition is true or false, but a narrative, taken as a compound of propositions, is almost always going to be false. That is, one false proposition and the whole conjunction is false; and since anything at all follows from a false proposition, then we might even say that fiction has long been an illustration and exploitation of this so-called ‘paradox of material implication’. However this is not quite how narrative works. Probably all works of history are false in this trivial sense, and no-one would say that they *believe* a particular history *in toto*. A narrative-as-proposition may be false. The same narrative as argument may still be valid though, and its conclusion true, even if some propositions in the premise are wrong, and even though (or should I say because) many important propositions or sub-arguments are simply not explicitly represented in the argument at all. One of the great and defining ruses of narrative reason is to surreptitiously slip between possible interpretations and possible worlds, precisely by not explicating everything.

Evolutionary stories are *could-have-happened-like-this* stories. They are just not *just-so* stories, because things could have happened otherwise. The term *just-so* signifies this in its ironic mode of use by both Kipling and Gould. The extent to which evolutionary stories are literally just-so stories is the extent to which they are falsifiable—so falsifiable that we can probably assume that like any history taken *in toto*, they are false. They can and need make no claim to being just-so-and-not-otherwise because their explanatory power derives from their making allowances for a lot of unknown contingencies. They claim a comparative similarity to what did happen, and that similarity is governed by a schema that emerges from the continuous historical process of natural selection. Though they are seldom, if ever, explicitly told as a great family tree of reproductive events (Abraham begat Isaac who begat Jacob...), their argument is one of functional analysis in the context of such a genealogical tree. The crucial historical particularity of the story, all those events after events—the very thing that makes it an historical narrative—is mostly left unsaid, apart from whatever empirical details may be available. These details include the relatively accessible description of the end of the story—the present state of the organism—and whatever genealogical evidence there is for constructing a genealogical tree. The story emerging from the natural selection process tells how and why organic design that works for survival and reproduction is selected, why certain functional designs persist, what organic features are available for adaptation to some ecological function, and how one design for one function may be coopted for a different function. The functional analysis derives from the condition that there is the fact of a genealogy, even if it is, for want of the contingent detail, untellable; and it uses well described, emergent patterns of genealogy (i.e. natural selection) to explain what is the well described end of that genealogy. Thus, it can be used to explain why human narrative is as it is and not otherwise, and so, when it comes to narrative processing itself, what conceptual categories like *events* and *states* are for.

A teleological definition of narrative could do much worse than saying that a great historical function of human narrative has been to tell what cannot be completely put in narrative, but which—to add a dialectical rider—would not be as such but for having been so put. Narrative is designed to objectify and account for the contingencies of history, but any suggestion that it can transcend or master those contingencies by narrating them perfectly and completely, mistakes the nature of narrative representation. As an argument, narrative implies there are such contingencies, but given the empirical condition that it is impossible to account for them exhaustively (how can it know about that butterfly in Brazil causing the cyclone in Sydney, or the fuck in the Pleistocene that caused all human history) a narrative argument represents what particular data it can or will as part of a merely intelligible, partially ordered, lattice-like totality of causes (to use a Kantian expression), or as part of “an ocean of story”. It is a totality—or ocean or lattice—that we can only hope to represent *enthymematically*, that is, by a rhetoric that leaves its audience to fill in the gaps in the lattice from what it knows by heart.

In a pragmatic way, a narrative describes or refers to the workings of a kind of causal relation, and so involves an interest in how a given type of state (the mechanism of the causal relation) enables or prevents certain types of events and determines their outcome. Thinking of a causal mechanism or relation as a type of state (at a certain time scale) is a strategy for finding knowledge that works time and again (at that time scale). The power of the argument of natural selection lies in its reference to a causal mechanism that is continuous and programmatically specifiable. Strictly speaking this causal mechanism should be called a teleonomic argument or

sequence (see 32.3 *Typology of narratives*). The argument of the selection process cuts out a particular lineage of causes (and a particular object—a *lineage* of replicators) from the great, partially ordered web of historical events. Those causes are the particular replications of the elements of the lineage and the particular localised selection of elements according to their local environmental fitness. The selection argument, in urging its kind, urges the following claims: that it is always possible to make such a cut on the basis of the spatio-temporal localisation of causes operating on a spatio-temporally specifiable lineage; that such a lineage always exists or has existed; and that such a causal program obtains. The localisation of selection ensures that remote causes—the sort of information that other narrative arguments might represent enthymematically—is always represented insofar as *it is always represented as mediated by the localised environmental events* of the selection. The argument claims that selection is a natural kind of argument, with general (or effectively universal) applicability to genealogical processes. The referential extension of other narrative arguments is usually not so general, but purchases generality by playing on the sliding and variable meaning of whatever is enthymematically represented. As we shall see this is a particularly important aspect of most historical arguments. Insofar as a narrative argument urges its kind, it urges its quasi or effective universality. So while telling about the most particular subject matter, narrative argument is a way of rescuing whatever predictability and invariance it can from the superabundant stochastic wilderness of time's passing.

The truth of a narrative is a merely adequate *adequatio rei atque cogitationis*—a merely adequate match of thought to things. As the argument of history, narrative stands as the epitome of what cannot be represented in a perfect or absolute truth. A narrative concept is the epitome of the concept of *concept* as that which falls short of its contingent historical object, the epitome of knowledge as a problematic judgement. This reminds us of human narrative's pragmatic evolutionary genesis, and it remind us that truth itself is something evolved. It is not absolute, not the gold standard for measuring concepts. Rather, it is something more human, a concept among concepts (see Jackendoff, 1993, p.170). Sure, truth's *adaequatio* has its ideal—the persistent possibility of the identity of the representation and that which is represented, the virtual reality of representation as replication—but truth's adequacy to its object is adequacy for a specific organism or subject in its historical environment. This is not a case of the much dreaded relativism, because, besides that ideal of which objects themselves have the persistent habit of reminding us, we humans are all human subjects with cognitive and perceptual skills that are very much alike, and we observe the adequacy of one another's observations and communications. However we are not all the same scientific or artistic subjects, and we have certainly not been the same scientific and artistic subjects throughout cultural history: one person's religious truth is another's psychotic delusion.

23. *The interanimation of beginning and end.*

It was the old desire for unity and perfection that surfaced when Hegel rejected empirical psychology because it observed nothing but an (admittedly astonishing) bag of tricks (1807, p. 182). That messy medley of faculties belonged to mere “contingent particularisation,” for which reason Hegel was dismissive of its importance. However this attitude also seems to betray an irritation or even boredom with the seemingly offputting complexity of the body, or a kind of bondage to an unreflected, painful and innate contradiction between fascination with, and aversion

to and ignorance of, our innards. Hegel himself criticised this philosophical attitude under the name of Stoicism. Like the attitude of a suffering person who won't consult a scientifically informed medico, it is "a freedom which always comes out of bondage, and returns to the pure universality of thought," whose "Notion, as an abstraction, cuts itself off from the multiplicity of things." (1807, pp. 121 & 122) That contingent, particular and immensely complicated state of the empirical subject was not the universal of Spirit, nor was it simply the particularity of individual humans in their differences. Rather it was the evolved, evolving and quasi universal state of the human animal. The human animal is one of a species, and a biological species is an evolving historical individual rather than a universal kind; but from the temporal perspective of one generation a species looks like something that is virtually, if not actually, universal

Working out how all people perceive, think, talk and tell involves working out how they could have got to be the way they are, because how they could have got to be the way they are constrains what they could actually be and how they actually work. And how they could have got that way is constrained by the awfully general plot of natural selection, because it is a plot type that frames the possibilities of the historical events. The possible historical events are further constrained by genetic theory, historical rates of mutation, by particular historical evidence including observation of the organism at present, and by the kinds of processes that are physically and biologically possible. In evolutionary science the predictive power of the argument of natural selection typically lies in applying the argument to an observed feature or function in order to infer a testable proposition either about what it does or how it does it. A biological design and the adaptive function it performs in the organism's environment "may be," as Williams and Nesse put it (1991, p3), "interpreted as a necessary component of the imagined machinery, or as an unavoidable cost of the machinery, or as some incidental manifestation of its operation."

In his book *Vision* (1982), David Marr approached the problem of how human vision works by seeing it in terms of the information processing tasks that need to be solved by the complex, and not fully understood, biological engineering of the eye and the brain. Thus Marr postulated three levels of description: the description of the ecological function of vision for the organism; the description of the kind or kinds of computational process necessary for implementing that function; and the description of the actual neurophysiological embodiment of such a computational process. Vision's task is to build a description of the shape, position, colour and movement of things from a mere 2D retinal image. Regardless of just how much of Marr's theory is true (sometimes, for instance, the way a task is solved according to Marr's computational description might not be an accurate description of its actual embodied form) the careful and precise formulation shows how problems might be solved—problems that were once thought to be unsolvable, and so were not really faced. Meanwhile, the same precise formulations frankly expose themselves as hypotheses to observation and testing, and so to subsequent confirmation or disconfirmation. In this context, the doubts Wittgenstein expressed at the end of his *Tractatus* (6.51) about the point of asking a question if it is presumed there is no answer is not a sign of philosophical humility sublimed into mysticism, it is just the old Stoical disincentive to inquiry, restated.

Marr invoked the interanimation of likely evolutionary history with the functional psychological description of the end of that history as one of his predictive tools.

Computer scientists call pieces of a process *modules*, and the idea that a large computation can be split up and implemented as a collection of parts that are as nearly independent of one another as the overall task allows, is so important that I was moved to elevate it to a principle, *the principle of modular design*. This principle is important because if a process is not designed in this way, a small change in one place has consequences in many other places. As a result, the process as a whole is extremely difficult to debug or improve, whether by a human designer or in the course of natural evolution, because a small change to improve one part has to be accompanied by many simultaneous compensatory changes. (p.102)

This claim is important for psychology's claims about the modular neurophysiology of vision, language and other mental faculties or modules. The principle is really a special case of the general functional analysis of systems, which consists in the construction and isolation of the problems at hand. (In the social evolution of ideas, the same kind of functional differentiation appears in things like the divisions of the sciences and of areas within the sciences, or, at a more general level, of art from science. The functional differentiation of the sciences cuts deep—it is conceptual too: we not only like to isolate possibly ramifying problems, we can't, as we might like or suppose, reduce everything to physics. Within the narrative arts a similar functional differentiation divides the genres of fiction by medium and content.) Jerry Fodor (1983) has suggested two specific functional analytic reasons for modular or faculty psychology: domain specific processing of a limited database has the ecological advantage of being faster than a global intelligence that must process a much larger amount of information; and information available from such a domain specific module has the advantage of being able to contradict existing globally held beliefs, and as such may initiate a conceptual revision that might otherwise have been blocked had the global intelligence governed the process. An empirical researcher would not throw out a hypothesis on the strength of one contradictory observation, but they would get out of the way if they saw one unscheduled train coming. Without a modular design to vision, say, we might not believe our eyes, and we might not see something coming in time to get out of the way.

In addition to these reasons supplied by functional analysis, many observations of the particular neurophysiological features that perform psychological functions—often provided by observation of trauma to particular areas of brain tissue—seem to be consistent with predictions of modularity. It is noteworthy that Marr's assumption of a computational, information processing description—which deals with what brains are for, and with what problems they solve, before actually describing the neurophysiological machinery itself—led to his applying an evolutionary argument. It is an instance of how “an evolutionary explanation of the history of some feature of some organism, always implies more than the observations that suggested the explanation.” (Williams & Nesse, 1991, p.2)

Yet whatever it implies must face the experimental music. When the implication is the modularity of brain functions, its confirmation ultimately depends on an accurate neurophysiological description. This is only to be expected from another principle that applies in the general functional analysis of systems: there is more than one way to skin a cat. Though there seems to be complex functional organisation of neurophysiological topology, and even specific processing of specific functional domains, it does not follow that just any apparent function should be mappable to any one module, functional or neurophysiological.

One particular “module”, or perhaps set of modules, that has been hypothesised independently of the general “modularity of mind” hypothesis, and that has been seen as at least circumstantial confirmation (indeed the confirmation is reciprocal) is that of a “language organ” or, at least, of various language modules for syntax, phonology, etc. The language organ hypothesis was suggested by the apparent impossibility of a child’s ever being able to induce the rules of grammar from the paucity of the child’s actual linguistic experience during development. Chomsky (1986) argued that the child’s ability to learn grammar must be based on a kind of “internal language”, that is, on an innate Universal Grammar. This along with references to a “language organ” was a significant impetus to evolutionary psycholinguistics (Pinker, 1994), and more particularly, to the hypothesis of the evolution of a brain with some kind of modular linguistic design. Yet without a precise description of the modularity of brain functions it is impossible to confirm whether and how the “deep syntactic structures” of language are distributed over several kinds of mental processing, and whether and how these kinds of processing are distributed in modular brain topology, or, in particular, whether there is a specific, modular brain adaptation for the specific historical, biological function of syntax. This is a busy area of research and speculation, claim and counter claim. In a critique of the modularity of grammar, Terrence Deacon (1997) has argued that hitting the right syntactic universal is a bit like hitting a target with a thrown stone—it involves many brain functions working together.

24. *Imperfection and the traces of history*

Natural selection will not produce absolute perfection. (Darwin, 1859, p.187)

Ever since Darwin, evolutionary historians have known that the relation of the end of the story—the apparent design of a species—to how it evolved is often revealed in the design’s apparent imperfections. As Williams put it (1966, p.263)

The analysis (of functional design) would disclose much that is functionally inexplicable. The inversion of the retina, the crossing of respiratory and digestive systems, and the use of the urethra for both excretory and male reproductive functions represent errors in the organisation of the human body. They have no functional organisation but can be understood as aspects of functional evolution. Historical considerations are also necessary in explaining the many functionally arbitrary limitations that are always apparent in the design of an organism.

In the context of social history, much the same assessment was made before Darwin. “Humans make history,” wrote Marx (1852, p.437) “but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly found, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living.”

It is only from organic traits and designs inherited from the past that natural selection may adapt new ones. Likewise, cultural evolution must work with the cultural heritage. The idea of imperfection, in the context of biological evolution, refers to the relation of an adaptive function and its embodiment in a physical trait: an imperfection, so called, becomes apparent when a physical trait reveals, to functional

analysis, features that are inexplicable or unnecessary as part of the present adaptive function of the trait, but are leftovers from the old trait from which the present, homologous one is descended. Time and again natural selection has had to use a custom built cat skinner to do something else. Despite suggestions to the contrary, if your only tool is a hammer you don't quite have to treat everything as if it were a nail: it could be a xylophone, or a pile of papers that need a paperweight. "Imperfections" are "incidental manifestations" of the operation of the new function. Such features are signs of what natural selection had to work with. They are indelible traces of empirical history.

Certain adaptive functions seem to arise time and again in evolutionary history. In the evolutionary history of diverse taxa there is a convergence on such functions, as if they were ideal functional forms that will eventually and inevitably evolve. One such function is vision. When it comes to considering the astonishing functional design of the eye, it might seem misguided to expect to find the traces of history in something so apparently perfect. But different taxa have quite different systems of vision, that produce quite different visual information. There is no ideal functional form of vision that they all share. What they do share is an illuminated environment of some kind, in which vision of some suitable kind is a good adaptation for moving organisms. Taxonomic differences in the design of vision are not only signs of differences in environmental demands, they are signs of the different historical preconditions and processes of their evolution. Because evolution is a variable and recurrent historical process "incidental manifestations" get embedded in subsequent "incidental manifestations", resulting in the arbitrariness that characterises so much of the functional design of evolved phenomena—whether phylogenetic or cultural. If we apply a functional analysis to the human eye, say, there is no functional rationale for the inversion of the retina. We don't need it. Squid and octopus, for example, don't have it. Its arbitrariness is a hangover from all the dead generations of our vertebrate ancestors, from whom we happen to have inherited it.

The processing of temporal information is an adaptive function (or complex of functions distributed over several organs) that, in one form or another, is of the utmost importance for all living organisms. In this it is like reproduction itself, and indeed reproduction is a very general kind of temporal processing, in which time is measured in generations and preceding generations are remembered in genes. Unlike human vision, which is a relatively discrete perceptual function that is performed by a relatively discrete, even if multimodal embodiment in the eye and the brain, human narrative processing is shared out as part of several other information processing functions. Because narrative information is communicated and enacted, it needs to be processed in active or motor functions as well as in perception. Information processing that involves narrative processing includes that involved in linguistic and gestural actions as well as visual and linguistic perception. Human vision has its own historically embodied version, but human narrative seems to be even more entangled in and determined by the contingencies of its more heterogeneous historical embodiment. Many of the surprising and peculiar features of human narrative are explained by this biological, historical character—before we even start to consider cultural evolution.

When it comes to functional descriptions of human narrative capabilities—including the features of its argument structure and inference, the phenomenon of the evolved distribution of brain functions, and the higgledy piggledy history of those capabilities across a number of faculties or modules—the resultant skills look as though they evolved in the classic Darwinian way, producing "much that is functionally inexplicable" or arbitrary. What semiotics has long called the

arbitrariness of signs is not only a result of cultural history, but also of evolutionary history. Such arbitrariness is not just a characteristic of the sign system called language, but of narrative signification as well. In human evolution, linguistic and narrative communication, along with vision and other perception have all partly shaped and determined one another according to the constraints imposed by cross faculty functional demands. To complicate matters, these phylogenetic processes underlie the evolving cultural phenomena of languages and narrative genres. These generate their own arbitrariness and may well exert their own selection pressures back on human phylogeny. No wonder, for so long, the theories of narrative, linguistics and semiotics have looked far too complex for any attempt at principled explanation.

25. *Historical semiotics.*

There have been many versions of what a *symbol* is, but one that has especially fascinated semioticians since Plato's *Cratylus* is that of a conventional or arbitrary sign. This is the version of the *symbol* that Peirce (vol. 2, pp 141-2) took up when he formulated what he called the most important of his tripartite divisions of signs, the division in which he classified signs according to how the sign (the *signifier*) related to its signified object (the *signified*). Accordingly, an *icon* is a sign that signifies by being a *likeness* of its object (whether or not that object actually exists): images, pictures, diagrams, simulations, imitations and anything mimetic signify as *icons*. An *index* signifies by having a *real relation* to its object—typically an empirical relation of spatiotemporal proximity or of cause and effect: smoke signifies fire, an arrow signifies what it points at, or a reading on a scientific instrument signifies what it is reading as *indices*. A *symbol* signifies by virtue of being *a law or general rule*—usually thought of rather vaguely as a conventional association of ideas. The symbol's law relates the sign to its object: words are symbols, and so too are phrases and sentences and narratives and generic narrative forms.

Peirce's division reproduced an ancient idea or meme of psychology. Peirce tried to deduce the division in a formal, epistemological manner—as Kant did his categories—according to the possible ways in which the idea of one object (the sign) could be related to another (the signified), and though the deduction was supposed to produce a taxonomy of such relations that was both exhaustive and parsimonious, it also ended up reproducing the old exhaustive and familiar division that had come to be known as the laws of association. It is there in embryo in *Cratylus*, appears full blown in Aristotle's *De memoria* (2451b), and persists, near enough in Hume's and others' versions 2000 years later. Dividing up the association of ideas by likeness, by empirical connection, and by custom, law or habit may seem like an intuitively useful move, but it is a reduction that raises as many questions as it answers. The categories are familiar enough to native consciousness, but do they carve the phenomena of semiotic nature at their operative joints?

Certainly Peirce's modes have a special appeal to phenomenological inquiry—and have done so throughout their long philosophical history. But their appeal for phenomenological inquiry may simply be a consequence of their dependence on the evolved phenomenological processes of intentional consciousness rather than their actually providing an adequate description of the processes that actually produce phenomenological inquiry and human semiosis. That is, they may only be as adequate as psyche's self-descriptive self simplifications need to be for itself and for intersubjective communication of such descriptions. Though once seen as the basis of philosophical empiricism, they may not be adequate to the demands of

an empirical description (that is a social description for more than just self referring psyche). They divide up the kinds of semiosis all too neatly, while one suspects that a functional description of human semiosis and communication would have to consider the complex contingencies of the embodiment of communication throughout natural and social history. They look suspiciously like the products of epistemological inquiry avoiding nature and yet again tidying up psychology for the sake of both metaphysical simplicity, or Occam's parsimonious razor, while secretly and ultimately serving psyche's wild self simplification. Peirce himself recognised that *a priori* descriptions gleaned or deduced phenomenologically mean little without "much further, arduous analysis" (vol 2, p.138). Though he, like Saussure, recognised the self-referential immanence of the world of signs, he was never an advocate of semiotic purism, never a formalist when it came to the actual psychological embodiment of semiotics or logic. He insisted on the relation of semiotics to psychological and social phenomena.

As Peirce emphasised, any particular sign may be of more than one kind. A sentence, by virtue of the diagrammatic character of its syntax and the conventions of its lexicon, is both *iconic* and *symbolic*; a sentence that refers to the empirical environment is also thereby an *index*. Likewise, a generic form such as a kind of plot is a *symbol*, as well as a likeness or *icon* of other replicas of the same form. Because a *symbol* is a law or rule relating a kind of signifier to a kind of signified, then it "governs or 'is embodied in' individuals" or *replicas* (vol 2, p.166). As well as being a likeness or *icon* of other *replicas*, each *replica* of a *symbol* is a *token* embodying the general rule or symbol, which is a *type*. By means of its law then, a symbol refers not primarily to a particular thing, but to kind of thing. The utterance "tree" is a replica of the *type* of utterances that the symbolic law associates (though not always) with the *type* of tall, self supporting, woody plants. It is the loophole here that makes all the difference, for the law of a symbol—that is the symbol itself, for the symbol *is* a law—is not always obvious, nor specifiable, nor even determinate. It might even be said that on account of its historical character, it cannot be universal and therefore cannot even be a law, but as Peirce (vol 2, p.134-5) appreciated, quasi-universal is good enough.

Using the term *symbol* for this kind of sign differs from another popular, perhaps more Romantic, use in which the term is applied to a more iconic kind of sign. Saussure (1966, pp. 68-69) (like Hegel) actually distinguished symbols from "arbitrary" signs, and gave the scales of justice as an example of a symbol. Symbols for Saussure were "motivated" signs, by which he meant that the relation between the sign and its signified was recognisable without some arbitrary rule, and the use of the sign was motivated by that assumed recognisability. Arbitrary signs were thought of as depending on the human freedom to make them up; yet, as arbitrary, that freedom of meaning is not an individual's own, but is encountered as another's freedom, and to that extent it is alien or even unnatural (i.e. cultural). Hence neither Lewis Carroll's humble Humpty nor Locke's (*Essay*, Bk 3, ch. 2, #8) mighty Emperor Augustus could make words mean whatever they wished. The idea of natural recognisability, as opposed to recognition that is dependent on some arbitrary convention, is the same as that by which Plato distinguished signs that signify *phúsei* or naturally, and signs that signify *théseí* or by convention.

It is not difficult to avoid terminological confusion here. I follow Peirce's terminology. As Peirce said, it is familiar, it is older and it is in keeping with primary Greek usage. It is also operationally useful insofar as it defines symbols clearly, and in a way that, as we shall see, they define themselves, and so it nicely fits the concept of a meme. Saussure's scales of justice is still a symbol in Peirce's sense, but a mixed one that is also part icon. The important thing is the concept of a sign that signifies its

object according to a symbolic law that governs each replication. If icons are replicated one after another, the class of replicas that emerges may prescribe a common symbolic law; or at least it may do so for some intentional consciousness, or for some other social selection pressure that apprehends, mistakenly or not, a common function, meaning, design or structure typifying each of the members of the class of replicas. When repeatedly replicated icons give rise to symbols at an emergent and different level of phenomenal description, we commonly use the word *emblem* to refer to such a symbol. The scales of justice are an emblem. In fact current usage of the word *icon* more commonly has this meaning of *emblem* rather than its Greek meaning of *likeness*—as in *the Opera House is a Sydney icon*, or *Marilyn Monroe is a Hollywood icon*.

It is clear from this discussion that one mode of signification can be constructed from another. More importantly though, as far as this construction goes, there is a natural historical hierarchy of this sign construction—that is, a hierarchy as far as the difficulty of learning and understanding the different modes is concerned (Deacon, 1997, pp. 73-80). Though each mode can be constructed from the others, it is according to this particular natural hierarchy that the three modes are embodied in actual organisms.

How or why one thing is *like* another occupied Plato in *Parmenides*. The young Socrates thought he could challenge the Eleatic philosophers, Parmenides and Zeno, with the problem that any likeness is also in some way unlike what it is supposed to be like. The experience of likeness and how we measure likeness are significantly determined by our phylogenetically evolved and ontogenetically developed perceptual and inferential abilities. This implies, by the way, that whatever degree of precision constitutes likeness can also be a matter of norms operating in a particular cultural context. A likeness gets called a natural sign because the perception of likeness between objects is intuitively familiar to humans. In addition, certain likenesses are recognised by many other animals.

Learning an *index* however requires more nous. Associating smoke with fire requires recognising the likeness between different instances and memories of smoke perception, and recognising the likeness between such instances insofar as the perception of the smoke was spatiotemporally accompanied by instances of fire perception which were themselves likenesses of each other. In what is basically a conditioned response, the likeness between the co-occurrences of smoke and fire grounds the indexical reference of smoke to fire.

The first obvious difference between an indexical association and the symbolic association between the utterance “tree” and whatever it signifies is that, in the case of a symbol, there is no requirement of spatiotemporal correlation between the signifier and the signified. We can’t learn a symbol “tree” by remembering that every time the word is said a tree happens to be nearby. Symbols uncouple communication from its immediate empirical context. This makes them useful, but it is also why, as Deacon says, they aren’t simple. What makes them difficult and fascinating is the fact that a symbol is a *law*, or what the old associationists called a convention or custom. Peirce appreciated this, and also that a symbol is not a law like the simple spatiotemporal correlation of an *index*. A symbolic act is not observed simply when a token refers to a nearby thing or event, but rather, when a token refers to *its symbol’s law in relation to other symbols*. Thus “tree” may refer to a nearby tree, but it does so indirectly by referring first to the law that associates “tree” with, among other things, tall, self supporting, woody plants. “Tree” can refer then to trees present, absent, metaphorical, metonymical or fictitious, by using what symbols give to their tokens: meaning.

Insofar as a symbol defines itself by referring to other symbols, it is clear that the law of a symbol, or its meaning, is actually a function of the symbol's relation to other symbols in a system of symbols. It is not something so determinate as a universal language rule, let alone one coded by some domain specific brain function. And indeed, the difficulties of specifying language rules, or of thoroughly specifying a Universal Grammar, tell of an historical phenomenon whose "laws" are the quasi-universal, more or less persistent regularities of an evolving system. Any propositional description of a law is likely to be induced by an abstraction that picks out pattern without necessarily paying due attention to the hypercomplex history that actually produced some apparent and effective linguistic regularity. Because the laws are historical they cannot be defined. As Deacon argues, a symbol's history includes not only the natural selection of the human species and human brain, but also the social selection of language rules in the environment of human psyche.

The symbol to symbol relations of language (and narrative) lie in the relations between words, phrases, and sentences, that is, in the propositional relations of syntax and grammar and the inferential relations of discourse or argument. It is not only single words that are symbols; so are the grammatical combinations of words—phrases, propositions, arguments—and so are the non-linguistic propositions and arguments of cinema. Once we start getting such complex symbols as propositions and arguments and what Quine saw as a conceptual web, statements at the centre of the web are underdetermined by particular empirical experience, and do not come into one to one relation with instances of such experience, the way that statements at the periphery do, and the way that *indexical signs* do.

It is the symbol's effectively lawful character resulting from its place in the self perpetuating, self referring system of the symbolic web that releases it from indexicality and iconicity, and this lawful character is implicit in the lawfulness of combinations as reflected in what Roman Jakobson (1987, pp. 106-7) called the syntagmatic and paradigmatic regularities of language. A symbol refers or is related paradigmatically to other symbols that can occupy the same functional role in a proposition or argument, or that decompose into the same paradigmatic elements; it refers syntagmatically to other symbols either before or after it in the syntagmatic string of discourse. In fact the symbol's law might defy explicit determination because its law is being ceaselessly redetermined by its combinatorial use with other similarly indeterminable symbols.

To induce the law of a symbol, even if one that is neither explicit nor determinate, and regardless of whether we act like grammarians and consciously induce an explicit propositional description of the law, at the very least requires a different level of description than that which suffices for an index. Such an induction may take many repeated instances of the law before we start to see patterns or likenesses at the metalevel of description. Or we might have to have the knack of somehow "stepping back" and observing from the right level of description, or we might just make the right kinds of mistakes that enable the representation (conscious or unconscious) of the lawful or programmatic regularity that would have escaped a more meticulous, rigorous and less heuristically inspired induction. As Heinz von Foerster (1981, p.171-2) saw it, in order to construct an internal representation of the regularities involved in symbolic phenomena, as opposed to conditioned response learning, we need to construct a program for generating lawful symbolic strings rather than remembering determinate laws of association between a replica and its signified object. Speakers young and old learn to use words in context before they learn to define its lawful use. Meanwhile, to define (or learn) a rule and then turn that abstraction into a norm or convention is a typical habit of we social, linguistic

animals. The apparent difficulty of a child's learning the laws of grammar from its limited linguistic experience was enough for psycholinguists to hypothesise a mental grammar module that had been preformatted by evolution for the induction of the right laws. On the other hand, perhaps language is such that the infant brain is for some reason inveterately good at making just those special mistakes in induction that felicitously induce the otherwise inscrutable laws or programs that make linguistic symbols so communicatively useful. This is something like what Deacon argues. It is also not so different from Lacan's idea about the importance of *méconnaissance* or misapprehension in the ontogeny of language.

The indeterminacy of symbols-as-laws, or meaning, the impossibility of thoroughly and explicitly defining them, is an effect of the way that they are embodied in ongoing linguistic and symbolic practice. They are built through history, and this helps them to colonise history. Symbols, as laws, have both a narrative content and they themselves are subject to narrative description. They obey a kind of meta-law, namely, that they change. When Aristotle (*Poetics*, 1452a) said that the best narrative plots go against expectation and yet are still consequential, he was describing the kind of narrative process that can reconfigure our understanding of a symbolic law. The evolving, indeterminate complexity of symbols or symbolic systems as a whole matches the indeterminacy of historically contingent processes in the world. It has to, just to keep up with such processes. The law of a symbol is never completed, just as—we shall see—meaning is never completed.

Symbols can refer to indexical signs, and in doing so differentiate themselves from them. The symbol's law differentiates it and releases it from the empirical demands of indexicality and factuality. For as the old Realist ontologists suspected, it is this law—however it may be specified or however it may emerge for communicative animals—that is an effective or virtual reality, and therefore its own reality demanding its own level of operative description and its own ontological commitment. The process of a symbol's emergence is top down as well as bottom up.

Since communicative symbols refer to one another and make themselves in terms of this systemic self reference, they exhibit as a system (a social system in Luhmann's terms) an evolving autopoietic character. The environment of this autopoiesis is made up of minds and texts; and minds themselves evolve in an environment that includes the symbolic system as it is embodied in communicative texts. Each of these environments exerts its own selection pressures on its respective denizens: the symbols of language and other communication are adapted through social evolution to human minds and textual material; and the human brain and mind is probably adapting through recent phylogeny to the symbolic system of communication, or, as Luhmann calls it, society. These processes are the subject of Deacon's theory of the co-evolution of language and brain.

According to Deacon, the grammar of language is an evolved, cultural adaptation to the human brain. Rather than there being a language module in the brain specifically encoded with universal grammatical forms which are then, during ontogeny, tuned to the specific rules of specific languages, language or languages have evolved and adapted to the possibly misapprehensive inductions that the infant brain is naturally disposed to make. It might not be fully developed for the task of rigorous induction of predictive empirical laws, but it is very good at inducing—or perhaps it is better to say producing—the virtual laws (or conventions or norms) of a symbolic system that has socially evolved by the selection of such rules as may replicate and vary in the environment of infant minds. Whereas an adult may be able to generate kinds of causal and teleological narrative sequences in order to make predictions about empirical and social events, and thus demonstrate a nous for

empirical and social laws, an infant is able to generate kinds of syntagmatic strings that may be less empirically or socially adequate, but that, by dint of their normativity, make their own symbolic reality. In their promissory, socially regulatory way, they are a self generating reality. This primary process of reification constructs language as a kind of infantile mythos-cum-virtual-reality.

As Deacon (contra Chomsky and Pinker) says, the laws of grammar are in a real sense not internal but external. On the other hand, these external structures are intimately adapted to internal ones. Different languages are convergent upon a Universal Grammar because they comprise analogous social adaptations selected by the same ecological pressures that are exerted by all infant brains; and they are homologous to the extent that they share features because of shared cultural ancestry. They are inscrutable and arbitrary in their various slightly different grammars because their functional social evolution is shot through with homologous features—the accidents and incumbencies of their cultural evolution. The analogous outcomes of their cultural evolution may be distinguished in things like the function/argument structure of phrases and sentences (e.g. the subject/predicate structure), in the conceptual categories (Jackendoff, 1993, p.34) that phrases and sentences may represent (e.g. events, states, things, paths, places, properties), in their tree-like “deep” structure encoded in a “surface” string, and in their use of recursion for the function of symbolic objectification, including self-objectification.

Rather than human phylogeny producing a genetically determined language module, it produced a brain that could make, learn and use symbols, and then the symbol system evolved to fit the brain during all of its ontogenetic and phylogenetic stages. In turn the brain has subsequently evolved in a social environment in which the symbol system of language has been a major component. Deacon argues that the selection pressures exerted by language cannot have been sufficient or sufficiently persistent for the genetic fixation of genes for a grammar module, and that language draws on many brain processes—auditory, phonological, visual, conceptual, inferential and symbolic. He argues that it is the ability to use symbols that constitutes a genetically fixable neurophysiological function, and a primary impetus for the subsequent evolution of language.

In Deacon’s own particular just so story, it was the peculiar selection pressures of sexual partnership and food distribution in a social and omnivorous proto-hominid that selected the symbolic function as a way of normatively regulating hominid society. The particular symbol that Deacon suggests as the primary one is that of the socially observed promise of sexual partnership—a progenitor of the marriage vow. Like all symbols it is made under the meta-law that it may be broken and renegotiated. Marriage promises are still eminently breakable and rewritable, as millions of narrative plots still demonstrate, and it is this social teleological character, in the face of historical contingency, that characterises symbolic laws. As a symbolic law, the promise prescribes future actions. It designs the future, making a virtual, that is to say, effective reality out of a mere norm. A promise is indeterminately ongoing. It is a teleological plot about oneself for others. It means its end, and its end is its persistence as a promise, its making itself into a state of affairs out of the flux of events. It inaugurates symbols as self referring and society as self generating.

Deacon’s story is not without its virtues, not the least thing being that it takes into account that known and predictable hot bed of evolutionary processes—sexual selection. But it also touches on a great philosophical theme. The promise has a special fascination for philosophical discourse. Kant (1788, p.19) used it to illustrate his categorical imperative, and the categorical imperative was always a way of discovering a system of practical reason—a moral system—that made itself: “Act so

that the maxim of your will could always hold at the same time as a principle of universal law giving (p.30).” John Austin (1962), and other speech act theorists liked to use *I promise* as their first example of the felicity (or infelicity) of *performative* speech acts—those illocutionary acts that refer to themselves in enacting themselves. And Nietzsche said at the beginning of his second essay on *The Genealogy of Morals*: “To breed an animal with the right to make promises—is not this the paradoxical problem nature has set itself with regard to man? and is it not man’s true problem?”

26. *Telling as showing.*

Telling a story in speech or writing by relying on the distinctive grammatical forms of language to report and describe events is a kind of narrative that occupies a special place in the history of narrative. As Plato (*The Republic*, 392-3) distinguished it, the mark of such narratives is to report speech indirectly through the author’s own voice, whereas in more dramatic narrative, the author shows or imitates the characters’ speech acts in direct quotation. The difference is that between story and drama, or telling and showing, or, as Plato said, *diegesis* and *mimesis*. And ever since Plato, *diegetic* story telling has commonly been thought of as the essential or authentic or definitive form of narrative. Bewitched by what seemed like the irreducible authenticity of linguistic *diegesis*, Plato just wanted to abolish *mimesis*. The idea of an author’s imitating a character and pretending to speak as someone else offended against Plato’s sense of personal authenticity. (I wonder, though, about Plato’s speaking through the characters of his dialogues, especially poor Socrates. What kind of irony is at work? Or is it a complete lack of irony and a claim to historical verisimilitude? Or are philosophers free to use what poets can’t be trusted with?) Two thousand years later, Roland Barthes—hardly the champion of authenticity and authorship—was still looking for the mysterious code of narrative form by hypothesising an homology—not an evolutionary one but rather one of pure structural similarity—between the order of linguistic syntax and the order of plot (1977, p.83); so he too acted as if *diegesis* was the essential form of narrative. To be human is to be linguistic, and lacking any other idea, linguistic syntax seemed made to function as the model of narrative syntax.

When I began wondering about narrative, it was the peculiar *diegetic* form of the story that seemed the most distinctive and the most mysterious. To understand it seemed to be the way to unlock all the secrets of the diaspora of narratives across all the other media. But if it was, then it was not in the way I had imagined. Now I think that the specialness of *diegesis*, as opposed to mimetic narrative and drama, lies in its mathematically strange and arbitrary—yet basically human and familiar—presentation of what is a disguised *likeness* of events. Telling is a special way of showing. The special affect of the *diegetic* telling of a story lies in its way of showing events *as only language may show them*, while also, in the process, *showing the strange yet natural fact of language itself*.

Firstly, as Peirce made clear, linguistic propositions, even when used *diegetically*, are diagrams, albeit strangely disguised by the highly schematic biological anamorphisms and tokenings of syntax and the cultural symbols of lexicon.

Secondly, a *diegetic* description of events is also a sequence of events itself, that is, a sequence of spoken or written sentences. At the discursive level of plot, as opposed to the propositional level of the sentence, much the same knowledge and much the same kind of intellectual labour is needed to understand the narrative, and the events it reports, and any dramatic or mimetic version thereof. They are all

logically alike, and whether watching and being shown, or listening and being told, narrative experience is an inferential process. Whatever biological and social encoding is involved at the linguistic level of the sentence, the difference, compared to the encoding involved in visual perception, is largely a matter of the diagrammatic morphing and the logical succinctness of the selections of grammar, the function of which has been a compromise of conceptual and communicative usefulness. Imagine communicating phonologically all the information supplied by vision without doing any of the inferential processing that distils the most relevant information. What a mouthful! The high degree of diagrammatic encoding in language just ensures that the story shows its events effectively and affectively, as only a linguistic nature may show them. The plot of any narrative is a kind of show that demands inferential labour.

Thirdly, even at the level of the sentence, language still works transparently as a kind of mimetic representation. I don't know what the "original" design and functions of language were. Functions change. So I don't think we can just assume that diegetic literalness is some kind of original or normal function of language. I imagine that both diegetic and mimetic uses of language have long been involved in its evolution. Direct quotation of speech is a likeness of another's speech, but even indirect speech or a diegetic description is a likeness of something thought. The truth is not, as Gérard Genette (p.164) thought, that mimesis in words can only be mimesis of words. Likeness is less strict than that. Rather, words add up to more than just words, words, words; so mimesis in words can be mimesis of speech *acts*, or of *acts* of story telling, or of *a person* speaking or story telling, or of *thoughts*, or of the same or a like *concept* expressed in an other medium. Stubborn behaviourist scruples lurk behind the theologisation of the external text and the mysterious arbitrary code, especially when conceived as semioticians from Plato to Locke to Saussure conceived it, on the model of the arbitrariness of the single word. This diverted structural narratologists from speculating about mental events like inference and conceptual processing or symbolic processing. Meanwhile, along with direct speech or writing, things like parody, irony and free indirect prose style all lie at the heart of narrative language—and maybe natural language—and they are either, as Bakhtin said, images of language, or of linguistic concepts, or of people performing linguistic or conceptual actions. According to Gilles Deleuze (1983, p.72), Pasolini "thought that the essential element of the cinematographic image corresponded neither to direct discourse, nor to indirect discourse, but to free indirect discourse." I would say this of narrative generally. And the way free indirect style, whether in prose or film, slips between different voices and points of view, is implicit in all human communication and its evolution. For communication depends on different takes on the self and the other. It oscillates between phenomenology and heterophenomenology (to borrow Daniel Dennett's term).

Likenesses are much more polysemic and can be used to mean and do many more things than one might at first assume. Despite Plato's canonical and puritanical censorship of copies and imitations, humans have wickedly upheld the great biological tradition of copying and replication. And it just gets worse and worse. The vision of Baudrillard (1983), designed to annoy the theologists of authenticity, has always been nature's way: it is not just a question of images or copies of the real substituting for the real itself; rather, the real has always been built out of images and copies.

Rather than being a new phenomenon, it is something that has yet again become too obvious to deny. A copy has never needed to be just a mere copy: the gene and life are predicated on this. Once making likenesses and copying start, new

functions for copying emerge such that a whole new kind of phenomenon can emerge requiring a quite different level of description. Originality is not, as Malcolm McLaren tried to sell it, the art of concealing your sources. It is the art of revealing, retrospectively, functions and meanings your sources never dreamed of. Likewise, reality or nature is the retrospective revelation of possible realities that were accessible by processes of mere copying—a kind of cosmic reification. The autopoiesis of nature—the self-generating as Aristotle’s *Physics* saw it—is a function of the poetics of copying. Such are the cybernetics of replication. What *is* a new phenomenon is that the realisation has been transformed from a fact of natural history into a norm of postmodernity. And that is a case of making a likeness too: making a norm in the image of a fact.

Fourthly, fiction is an image of non-fiction narrative. It is dedicated to the simulacrum. Just as the gestures of an actor are a likeness of the action they signify, the speech or writing of a fiction is a likeness of the non-fiction it represents or pretends to be. Let’s say play or drama is the prototype of mimesis. Then a linguistic fiction is a drama of linguistic actions. The author of a literary fiction is an actor, a *hypocrite auteur*, acting beneath the standards of authentic judgement, in the theatre of writing.

According to Gérard Genette (1972, pp. 163-164):

The very idea of showing [in literature], like that of imitation or narrative representation (and even more so because of its naively visual character), is completely illusory: in contrast to dramatic representation, no narrative can “show” or “imitate” the story it tells. All it can do is tell it in a manner which is detailed, precise, alive, and in that way we give more or less the *illusion of mimesis*.

For Genette (p.173), the Aristotelean evaluation of mimesis and the effect it had on the cultural history of narrative meant that scenes in novels were, up to the twentieth century, conceived as pale copies of scenes in drama. I would say that the late twentieth century novel’s fixation on vivid “poetic” description, imagist language, and the aspiration to transmute opaque and leaden language into crystalline vision amounted to the Aristotelean evaluation taken to its fetishistic limit. But I wouldn’t blame Aristotle—especially not after photography and film made mimesis even more alluring. Heaven knows, when it came to poetics Aristotle liked to make a norm out of what he took to be fact, but the alluring uses of mimesis and copying and showing could not have been contained for long anyway, despite all the theologians who have tried to suppress the profane attractions of mere images. In fact, isn’t Genette’s “illusion of mimesis” itself just an instance of second order mimesis—an illusion of an illusion, a likeness of a likeness?

The fact that diegetic language is deeply mimetic has scarcely been appreciated as a fact. (Although I think Aristotle’s word for the declarative mood of language—the *apophantic*, or the showing forth—is an instance of such an intimation.) The contemporary novel’s norms of visibility actually seems to be the result of a persistent failure to appreciate this too. Instead, the norms of progress in verisimilitude, and the culture of the spectacle urged twentieth century novelists to desire a transcendence of the opaque and limiting nature of diegesis, lest they and their genre become the victims of the dazzling progress of mimesis in the society of the spectacle—as epitomised by the triumphant spectres of screen media.

Making norms out of facts is an ancient habit. Philosophers have traditionally emphasised the fact that an *ought* cannot be deduced from an *is*. The only sort of logic that gets us from one to the other is a somewhat transformative, narrative one—something like the leaping, negative one that Hegel (1830, p.81, #50) suggested in his version of the ontological argument. However, at least from the time hominids started talking with one another, they have been making norms from facts for good functional reasons. What is communicative reason based on if not a principle that what the other and I ought to think is more or less inferentially accessible from what we already do think, and what we already do think and how we think it are more or less the right way to think? (See Dennett, 1987, p.98) If someone says something to me that I don't quite understand, or that doesn't seem relevant, my first task—if I can't just ask them to explain themselves—is to work out what they might be thinking about in terms of how I think they should be thinking about it. Some such principle or norm of communicative reason is not just a cultural phenomenon. It has probably played its part in the phylogeny of language. In fact the origin of human symbolic reason was probably contemporary with the transformation of a general fact, whose law is empirical and inducible from its repeated instances or from the bottom up, to a norm, whose law, like that of a symbol, determines its instances from the top down. A hominid that didn't embody some such communicative principle would have been at a disadvantage with regard to any selection pressure for symbolic communication. Fiction is dedicated to the task of finding what is true in what seems to be, *prima facie*, untrue; and we do this on the basis of this kind of norm of communicative reason. What else do we have to base norms on but facts, or at least, the likenesses (including even the negations) of facts or what we believe to be facts?

Plato wanted to base his norm of diegetic narrative on what he thought was the fact of language's diegetic essence. He would not have been the first, or the last, to base a norm on a mistake. Lacan's idea (1966, p.96), in his mirror myth, about the function of *méconnaissance* or misapprehension in the formation of the ego is an instance of both the deeply biological character of this kind of idealisation, as well as of its using mistakes. No likeness of norm and fact amounts to an identity. Right from the non identity of dialogical or dialectical reason through to the contemporary norms of visibility in literary narrative, the non identity of norms and facts has been an engine in the transformation of the real. The merely adequate, non identical character of factual truths (that is, they are not an identical, unreduced match to the complex realities they represent) points to the inevitability of the non identity of norms based on facts to whatever is actually the case in the environment. Even so there is the persistent, naive, pedantic idea that a truth is fundamental, complete and absolute and that therefore any norm that runs counter to a fact is just wrong. Assertions of *what ought to be* based on *what is*, as well as being logically underivable, have their own built in flaw or bias towards change, despite themselves. It is part of their futuristic bias—a situation rarely appreciated by those who think ethical, political or aesthetic life are determined by some inevitably simplistic abstraction about what human nature is. Like philosophers, humans have not only misinterpreted the world, they have changed it according to their misinterpretations. The point is that we are not yet human—an eminently narrative irony that every ethical and aesthetic norm demonstrates, even if despite itself.

Repudiating the diegetic essence of language, because of failure to see its mediation by mimesis after all, has become, to some extent, a symptom of a certain anxiety in the contemporary novel, a certain loss of faith in language as language. When Genette referred to the “naively visual character” of the idea of showing, this was itself a sign of his failure to appreciate in how many non visual ways language is

mimetic, and how “mimesis of life” means mimesis of, among other forms of life, linguistic life. If the norm of visibility in literature has been made from a fact—and I think it has—it is from the eminently replicable and mistaken “fact” that mimesis is primarily a visual matter. The reason vision seems emblematically mimetic in the first place is because language—the other great form of narrative “perception”, along with vision—has seemed, as it did to Plato and Barthes and Genette, not to be essentially mimetic at all. But in fact, as I shall argue, it is too mimetic: it is a kind of virtual reality. Making norms out of mistakes (or facts) is itself a kind of copying, a phenomenon furiously engaged in generating the culture of the spectacle. It happens again and again in artistic history, not necessarily without good results. Given that “the passion which may excite us in reading a novel is not that of vision,” (Barthes, 1977, p.124) it is strange that contemporary literary fiction has come to be so often judged for its visual quality. The short sharp sentences, the metaphors that display their debt to imagist poetics, the avoidance of the argumentation of subordinate clauses and long sentences—with emphasis on the crystalline (albeit encoded) sentence, rather than the actually mimetic process of inference—the passion for long sections of lifelike dialogue, and perhaps the Jamesian fidelity to only what the characters can see and know, all these persistent features of the twentieth century, visual, mimetic novel are also likely to be symptoms of a debilitating, anti diegetic anxiety.

In his essay “The Storyteller”, Benjamin did not mention diegesis explicitly as a feature of the *story* that differentiated it from the *novel*, but his idea that the story is informed by the experience of the story teller (1955, p.87) is very like Plato’s idea about diegesis being informed and guaranteed by authentic authorship rather than pretence or imitation. Because the novel lacks authentic diegetic counsel, because it shows but rarely argues, judges or moralises, misplaced anxiety about prose’s limited mimetic potential has become onerous. When writers who want to be artists lack content and confidence in diegesis, and when editors, audience and critics aren’t confident about what is good or what they like—apart from fashion—the features of “visual” prose get reproduced in abstract. This is a big problem for the contemporary novel: novelistic prose ends up suffering because it is artificially refused its diegetic essence. In the late twentieth century we have witnessed the proliferation of a novelistic genre—the 180 page “poetic” novel—a genre that has evolved from homologous prose in certain passages found in writers like Joyce or Woolf or Hemingway, under normative selection pressures for marketable brevity, serious, high-minded literality or poeticality, stylistically simple diegetic language, and non-explanatory mimetic or imagistic argument. Nowadays, in a kind of cult of literary efficiency, prose is assessed according to cost cutting and time saving. The readiest critique is, ‘It could have been 200 pages shorter’. And it can be read faster if we do away with the intellectual burden of subordinate clauses. Cut and polished sentences only. Everyone’s an editor. We could throw out half of Shakespeare if we didn’t want repetition, all of Faulkner or James or Proust if we only wanted little sentences. There is a stylistic tyranny in this. If we threw out 200 pages of *Underworld*—as one critic suggested—wouldn’t we be 200 pages worse off. Or would we then be free to watch more TV. Literature too goes for the short attention span. The received genre of pop literary culture is the 180 page novel—the slim volume of prose—of short sentences, no semicolons and free indirect style.

The storytellers of twentieth century fiction are often writers who deal in ideas. Kafka, Borges, Singer, Michel Tournier, Paul Auster all come to mind. The so called novel of ideas is quite likely to belong to the diegetic storytelling tradition

rather than to the tradition of the dramatic novel or to the tradition of novelistic visuality in the poetic or two hundred page novel. Misunderstandings about, and slavish conformity to the norms of visuality and dramatic presentation can simply impair the intelligence of contemporary novelistic prose. What Benjamin (1955, p.87) saw as the novel's lack of wise counsel can degenerate into a kind of anti-diegetic stupor. A bad contemporary novel—Helen Demidenko's *The Hand That Signed The Paper* is a notorious example—can follow these norms and so fool the judges, but fail to generate the implicatures or meanings in which its aesthetic and ethical intelligence should reside. *The Hand That Signed The Paper* was so thin and insipid in its implicatures that people were free, or even forced, to read remorseless anti-Semitism into what is, I think, much more a clichéd, anti-Ukrainian, anti-peasant tract, complete with blond, Heideggerian Nazis. It is much more about a young Australian woman's—the narrator's, but also the author's—failure of historical imagination. “Queensland with death camps”—Robert Manne's remark—captured the quality of this failure. Beneath its pretentious or hoaxing, middle European seriousness, it is much more of an historical romance, turning the Holocaust into the prestigious, high minded setting for kind of tame adventure with lashings of teen erotica and philosophical name dropping.

27. *The origin of events.*

What are events, and why are they so queerly as they are? Some questions just sound wrong, so wrong it seems stupid or deluded or improper to ask them. Are there such things as events tangible enough to ask about in the first place? Perhaps philosophy was deluded by its long obsession with *Being* and with *states of affairs*, with the result that traditional logic was left looking threadbare in comparison to the riches implied by the syntactic and semantic riches of language, let alone drama and cinema. Somehow, for humans, *events* and *processes* conceptually grasp something that is not reducible to *things* or *states of affairs*, something that is somehow unavoidably and almost unanalysably queered by its temporal essence. In order to get a better idea of the peculiar nature of events, readers may wish to read *28 Acts and other events* before proceeding.

Like much that is intimately familiar to human consciousness, the nature of events seems at once too arbitrary, too complex and too various to analyse, and at the same time too banal to bother with anyway. Contempt for the unfathomable arbitrariness of what might be called the conceptual category of the *event* even seems to breed this sense of familiar banality as a kind of self perpetuating impediment to inquiry. Arbitrariness is a sign of alien or unfathomed historical intentions. In a way, arbitrariness refers to design or intention in abstract, design as alienated from one's own intentions and as originating from another, or even design as something seemingly hidden or absent for want of a story about how it got that way. Arbitrariness derives from motivations and designs being selected and piled temporally and functionally on earlier selections of motivations and designs so as to eventually obscure all sense of motivation and design. The arbitrariness of what the category of the event is or does, derives from its contingent, particular history, while its familiarity derives from the long unreflected and unconscious universality for human subjects of this contingently evolved category of temporal information. By nature we did not have to be conscious of a theory of events in order to use them, and we have to use them, to be conscious or to tell about what happens. But there is a history that explains the arbitrary workings of events as a universal human conceptual category, and that shows the past constraints and functions sedimented in their present

configuration of temporal information, and so in our present design as narrative animals. It is important just to make this claim and bear it in mind. I offer the following as a preliminary description of some of the features of events, as speculation on how, historically, and why, functionally, these features evolved, and as an inquiry into the relation of events to human narrative in general. I can take no comfort in declaring my confidence in the fact that what follows is naive and simple minded, and will only appear more so as time goes by.

In reflections on narrative no opportunity should be lost to loosen the mystique that language and literary concerns have exerted on thinking about what is not essentially a linguistic phenomenon. But I suspect that as the reference of every sentence, the *event* (which includes the *state of affairs* as a particular kind of event) is one element of narrative discourse that is especially shaped by language, and that the linguistic structure of the event is the result of one of language's adaptations to the brain's multi-modal representation of temporal phenomena. In any event, the *event* is a category for language to describe itself and mental phenomena as well as empirical phenomena, and in its own recursive structures language describes linguistic and mental events similarly, as acts about events that are themselves linguistically represented. So if language is an external phenomenon adapted to human brains—and it is this, whether there is a mental grammar module for internal language or not—then expressions like *Hamlet thought he had seen his father's ghost* project linguistic representations into the brain as if they were repatriating the mind's ontological denizens, and the mind welcomes them as readily as if they were coming home to roost. In everyday language we diagram what is going on inside the head with sentences referring to the seemingly discrete phenomena we call *thoughts*, *beliefs*, *hopes*, *desires* and *imaginings*, and the selection pressure for doing this has been a factor in the cultural evolution of language.

However, when it comes to diagramming the way the brain processes and interrelates linguistic, conceptual, visual, motor and other information functions, the discrete way in which we speak about these functions is unlikely to best reflect the complex and still little understood interrelations between those of the brain's functional modes that actually generate them. For we generate aspects of phenomenologically described functions from combinations of mental modes that are themselves hidden from phenomenological inquiry or lost by the socially evolved reductions of psychic self description. We may well like to think about information structures or functions such as syntax, phonology, conceptualisation and inference discretely, each with what Jackendoff (1993, p.32) calls its own set of formation rules, and with correspondence rules for translation of information between structures. However, perhaps these assumed discrete functions are, as Deacon says of syntax in particular, not all internal brain functions at all, but adaptations of external language to a complex of brain functions. In whatever way humans have come to be able to refer symbolically to events, whether by an internal universal grammar or by a more complex and not necessarily universal combination of brain functions, we can assume a social selection pressure for an external language that provides a kind of adequately consistent translation between linguistic production and interpretation in a brain that can translate between these and conceptual, visual, motor and other functions. If events as we now understand them had not existed before language, then after language they existed in an external representational form that could be readily internalised by linguistic interpretation.

Even linguistically based philosophy was slow to appreciate just how important a category the event is. The capitalisation of nouns in German, as formerly in English, is a lingering effect of viewing the world as primarily a world of things

rather than facts—a fact being a true event or state. Long after Jeremy Bentham pointed out the problem, philosophy remained captivated by names and things, failing to appreciate that the sentence and what it refers to—the event or state—govern the term and what it refers to (Quine, 1969, p.72.).

Jackendoff's diagramming of the autonomous mental information structures involved in language is useful, but with the proviso that the syntactic structures, unlike those of vision or conceptual processing or phonology, are adaptations of external language to complex multimodal brain functions, and that in fact what Jackendoff assumes to be the autonomous information structure of syntax is not primarily an internal mental structure but, in an important sense, an external one. Phonological and conceptual structures may be internal, along with perceptual and motor functions, but when we put syntactic structures into the picture of linguistic information processing the information flow diagram, in order to be adequate to the processes under inquiry, has to jump out of the psychic system, for language is a social phenomenon. The discrete functional character that syntax seems to have, and that suggested that it was performed by a discrete, autonomous mental process—a “language module” with its own distinct neurophysiological topology that was presumably homologous to an ancestral neurophysiological trait—derives from the convergent, social evolution of linguistic syntax under the persistent selection pressures of human brains. We are mistaken if we map this single universal grammar, which is, after all, an abstract scientific reduction of external linguistic phenomena, onto a single mental mode.

As far as global conceptual processing is concerned—as opposed to domain specific processing—it would seem to be multimodal. Insofar as it is *self conscious* as discrete mental acts or events, it is so because in the psyche's simplifying reductions of itself for itself, the discrete events as such have been fished up with the social net of language, leaving a complex of uncommunicable and therefore unconscious support behind. In the social selection of language and its syntactic constituents, events have emerged as a communicable conceptual category from this universe of combinations, built out of the conceptual constituents of sentences and, in turn, governed by their combination with other events in the string of an argument. The conceptual constituents range over a number categories: things, events, states, places, paths, properties, etc. And the syntactic constituents range over the syntactic categories: the sentence (S), noun phrase (NP), prepositional phrase (PP). As Jackendoff (p.34) stresses: each major syntactic constituent of a sentence corresponds to a conceptual constituent in the meaning of the sentence; not every conceptual constituent in the meaning of a sentence however corresponds to a syntactic constituent because, for example, many may be contained within a single lexical item; and any conceptual category may be represented by more than one kind of syntactic category, while any syntactic category may represent more than one kind of conceptual category. In turn, beyond the sentence, the inferential argument structure of discourse generally or of narrative description and explanation in particular, also govern what a sentence or its component phrases or words refer to. This is an effect of the temporal character of communication and it is embodied in the combinatorial requirement of symbolic communication.

Narrative representation is a visual and a gestural concern as well as a linguistic one. And, as it turns out, the requirement of human organisms to translate narrative information between various narrative processing functions—including, especially, the requirement of translating to and from communicable forms—and the kinds of ancestral functions that natural selection had to work with, are particular

constraints that have left their mark on the nature of events. Visual and motor narrative processing in our non linguistic ancestors are presumably homologous to our own. So it is not just because I am a child of cinema and TV that I choose to look first at the problem of watching events.

When we watch things happen before our eyes, our mental processing of the information we receive has to keep up with the environmental flow of information. Whether watching a shot in a film, a scene in a play or the world go by, our vision has to start from a 2D retinal image (or a 3D image if time is included) and construct a mental representation of shapes, position, colour, movement and so on. This constructed representation is not just another image—a 4D space time image of our 4D space time environment—because such an image would then require another little viewer in the head to watch it. Instead the process of vision has to use information available at the retinal image to produce a kind of mental representation of the environment. This enables us, as organisms, to deal with our environment moment by moment. Its ancestral form has enabled our ancestors to survive and reproduce, and for us humans it *feels like* human vision.

What is represented for consciousness is not some dense, complete totality from the visual field that floods in through the eyes as if vision were some all seeing window on the world. What gets represented *for consciousness* is much less than what is fleetingly and peripherally represented in other than a conscious manner. In *Poetics of Cinema* (pp. 57 ff), Raúl Ruiz imagined a movie that unfolds by progressively discovering and redeeming the visual unconscious that passed unattended in earlier shots. Antonioni did something like this in *Blow-up*. Or in a Robert Altman film the easily unnoticed events in the background might turn out to be more relevant than the overt action taking place in the foreground. Ruiz recalled (p.60) watching sword and sandal films “to discover the eternal DC6 crossing the sky.” And perhaps only someone with deranged vision appreciates that *Seinfeld* was not a sitcom but a minimalist drama about subtle and disturbing rearrangements of furniture and clothing. How something is relevant in a shot, or in everyday vision, has much to do with cultural norms and with inferences about the plot or the environmental context, but it also has much to do with the evolved representational reflexes of human vision.

In linguistic processing the relevant information—usually the deliberately communicated information—is either explicitly spelt out and attended to according to the parsing of the highly schematic representational system of grammar, or it is inferred therefrom in the particular context. In vision, the information is also schematic and highly selected by vision’s naturally evolved representational processes. Even if we don’t feel this schematic quality (and we don’t usually notice it when we are in the thick of linguistic processing either, but only when we defamiliarise language into an object rather than a meaning) it is nevertheless a general consequence of the information selection processes involved in referential representation and in perception. “Any particular representation,” wrote David Marr (p.21), “makes certain information explicit at the expense of information that is pushed into the background and may be quite hard to recover.” We are all familiar with maps that show a country’s roads as lines, but when the same maps show cities as dots they cancel information about the road networks in the cities. Such maps are *diagrams*—they are likenesses, but only up to an arbitrary point, beyond which they reduce whole swags of information with a single blanket token. The information selected and preserved by the biology of human visual tokening is itself a consequence of whatever visual tokening processes have been naturally selected.

Vision is naturally selected to process only certain environmental information. Notwithstanding what vision selects *for consciousness*, at a more fundamental level,

there is much that human vision is simply not designed to token and process at all—even unconsciously. It is only designed for a narrow spectrum of light that is different to the spectrum used by many other animals. Then there is the peculiar way that we process vision so that it can sometimes mislead us about the actual state of the environment: well known illusions such as the motion we see in movies or the bending of solid objects when they enter water are evidence that our vision is only capable of selecting certain information about the environment from the information available at the retinal image. Presumably an animal that hunts aquatic prey from the air could well have been selected for vision that does not represent sticks bending at the surface of water. Or we could, I suppose, imagine an animal evolved in cinemas that processes each film frame so fast that for it a movie would look like a series of stills.

Can any creature process such information so quickly? Well yes, fast reacting creatures like flies can, but clearly there are time constraints on the instant by instant processing of moment by moment environmental processes, time constraints that have a bearing on what kind and amount of visual information is selected. There is a fineness of grain in the instant by instant perception of quick moment by moment events below which we can no longer distinguish temporal differences, or the gaps between events or even which event comes first. This implies that time relations—as well as spatial relations—are constructed by vision in the selection process of perception, and that the continuous, infinitesimally gradated representation of movement that normal vision feels like is the result of such construction. As Niklas Luhmann (1984. p.42) put it: “In complex systems [like organisms] time is the basis of the pressure to select, because if an infinite amount of time were at one’s disposal, everything could be brought into tune with everything else.”

The nature of temporal information processing is to represent certain kinds of information by means of an indexical mental event or token. In the case of linguistic and conceptual processing, the general kind of representational event represents narrative information in the form of the conceptual category of the event. The category of the event grasps what is not reducible to other conceptual categories, that is, to *things*, *states*, *properties* and so on.

In abstract, for a given set of things or objects or a given place, any slice of time or even several slices of time, or any period or set of periods of vision, can be used to indicate an event. A cinematic shot, which lasts for a take or a slice of time, is an event, and whatever it depicts is also an event. This means that we can process any cinematic shot as an event. That is, we can treat it as a kind of proposition, as we would the linguistic symbol, the sentence. A communicative act using a linguistic symbol is, like a cinematic shot, a discrete unitary act itself, and it represents a discrete act or event. Meanwhile, what a film shot depicts in all its photographic detail might seem like a highly complicated event, or even several events, when compared with an event referred to by a single sentence. After all, “a picture is worth a thousand words.” As it turns out, a cinematic shot conforms to intuitively well understood rules for compounding larger events out of constituent events. So too do sentences when they use conjunctions, or when a single lexical item combines (and perhaps reduces) several constituent events, as in the sentence “Keating led the Labor Party.”

Events grasp time’s queerness for humans in a causally particulate form, so that they may be substituted into representational and inferential structures. A particular sentence is a linguistic token—a linguistic event—which refers in turn to another event. States of affairs or situations, and processes are also the referents of sentences, and they may be treated as special kinds of events. They conceptually categorise either what obtains throughout an extended or indefinite period of time or

what is ongoing and incomplete within the tokened time period. Events and processes capture time in so far as it has emerged as irreversible; states and situations “capture the reversibility of time because they hold open a limited repertoire of possibilities for choice.” (Luhmann, 1984, p.44). The processing of time relations in language, vision and other organismic functions is based on primitive representations—perhaps different to some extent for each kind of function—that are neurological events representing empirical and mental events. In some cases, for example in real time perception, perhaps the temporal intervals and order of the neurological processing itself can be used to represent the temporal intervals and order of the events being represented. Though the neurological details of the representations in the different functions are, with great difficulty, open to experimental findings. Yet at the very least, because they are neurological *events*, we seem to be designed, as Jackendoff (p.32) has argued, so that there are accurate correspondences or translations between the different narrative processing functions. Otherwise we could not see or experience an event as well as talk or think about it, or enact a deed that we may also see or describe.

The event as a communicable conceptual category has been adapted, during the history of society, to the task of referring to mental, conceptual, visual and linguistic temporal phenomena. In being able to refer to events in each of these intuitively familiar modes of brain function, the category of the event has been selected as a useful category of mentally and intersubjectively transferable information. It is transferable between these functions, the different details of the neurological embodiment and interrelation of these functions notwithstanding. The arbitrary character of the event reflects the fact that the category had to evolve culturally as a modally and intersubjectively translatable category of temporal information, as much as the fact that the mental functions and their interrelations are themselves the evolving products of phylogeny.

Like rules of grammar, the conceptual grammar of events is framed by our evolved psychology, by our linguistic system that has been selected by its psychological environment, and by its ontogenetic acquisition that depends on foetal and infant development in a suitable environment. This grammar of events regulates the compounding and breaking down of events, the differential conceptual semantics of events—including those features that language indicates in tense, aspect, agency and lexicon—and the translation of events from one function, such as vision, to another, such as language.

Modern narrative artists, in their normatively encouraged passion to transcend the conventions of narrative art, have sometimes confronted the conceptual grammar of events as a poignant or irksome limitation on autonomous expression. Just when the narrative artwork thought it could be a law unto itself, the nature of events seemed to defy the desire for autonomous designs. Anacoluthic syntax in modernist prose was often an expression of the pathos of this narrative limitation rather than a representation of, say, a so called stream of consciousness. It was as if there was a desired object of representation, but it was obscure, and so obscurely represented because it was impossible to represent.

One narrative artist who seems to have made something of this predicament was Samuel Beckett. The characters in his trilogy are overwhelmed by the empty husks of narrative form that seem to govern them.

To discover the cold cigar between my teeth, to spit it out, to search for it in the dark, to pick it up, to wonder what I should do with it, to shake it needlessly and put it in my pocket, to conjure up the ash-tray and the waste-

paper basket, these were merely the principal stages of a sequence which I spun out for a quarter of an hour at least. (*Molloy*, p.112)

Here several actions are compounded into an inclusive course of action that is, in turn, referred—as if there is little else that may be done with it—to an abstractly equivalent slice of clock time. These narrative forms that so implacably govern Beckett's characters and narratives are sensed not only as the alien forms from a vast junkyard of cultural forms, but even as the alien limiting forms that seem to have been cobbled together by god knows what design in the conceptual workings of human communication and representation. Perhaps that emblematic machine of Beckett's, the bicycle, can also be seen as an emblem of the evolved contraptions of our narrative intelligence. Beckett makes new parodic meanings out of received narrative forms, but none is more wretchedly pathetic—and in keeping with his humour—than the sense of being imprisoned in the received narrative forms of a malevolent, practical joking nature, an arbitrary detention at the hands of *events* as such. Beckett uses the alien arbitrariness of nature as the emblem of arbitrary and alien second nature.

The conceptual grammar of events is adapted to highlight, process and preserve the most relevant environmental information that events symbolise. Both the empirical, spatiotemporal configuration of the human environment and, eventually in evolutionary history, the semantic environment of human meaning have played an important role in determining the nature of our temporal representation. Environmental constraints associated with priority and the asymmetry of time, with the persistence and repetition of certain types of phenomena and intentions, with the coexistence of certain phenomena and intentions, and with the causal or functional relations between phenomena and intentions are all reflected in the design of our conceptual grammar of acts and events. If they weren't, misleading representational design would have resulted and natural selection would not have looked kindly on such instances, had they occurred in our ancestors, or in the cultural ancestors of modern languages. These are the kinds of information that narrative processing had to capture in our ancestral environment. Such information has a certain qualified necessity. Like Kant's synthetic *a priori* principles about the permanence of substance, about causality and about co-existence, they make experience possible. When the science fiction sitcom *Red Dwarf* told a story in which time ran backwards it did so by running the video backwards. The only way to process the information was to re-translate the discrete shots into their recorded order, because all the processing had to be done in the natural direction that we are selected for by an environment in which time is *de facto* irreversible. Martin Amis used a similar ploy in *Time's Arrow*: the narrator tells the story as if it is a video rewinding before him.

In reflecting important environmental constraints, events are not just a matter of abstract slices of time, even though what *happens in* an abstract slice of time can be construed as an event. The abstract mathematics of empty time treats time like space. The grammar of events, however, treats time as anything but empty. Events, as it were, have a hero. That is, they are full of characters, settings, agents, sufferers, goals or things. Events symbolise relations between things-at-different-times. They are temporalising functions of things. Just as there are particular kinds of things or organisms or events that are important for a given species of organism, so there are many "natural kinds" of events that are important for organisms like us. These include the intentional and communicative actions of humans, the quasi intentional or teleological actions of other species, and the discrete, environmental events that organisms observe or suffer, regardless of agency and intention. (Strictly speaking, as

symbolic information, the term event is to be applied to the information processing within the organism, but it can be metonymically attributed by the organism to the environment, as in the previous sentence, and as it has been throughout its social evolution. (See Luhmann, 1984, pp. 67-69)

Events are populated slices of spacetime that are cut out of the perceptual or conceptual field of natural phenomena and meanings in a form that our ancestors could effectively deal with. By dint of selection, the things we call events carve nature at pragmatic, spatiotemporal joints that suit both our available means of representation and the information we need to represent. The “shape” of the slice of time is determined by whatever lives or acts or suffers in it, or as part of it. David Marr theorised that human vision uses the device of schematic 3D models—like stick figures—to solve what were once intractable problems from the philosophy of perception. John Austin, in *Sense and Sensibilia*, had asked “What is the real shape of a cloud or a cat? Does its real shape change whenever it moves? If not, in what posture is its real shape displayed?” And he answered himself by saying “it is pretty obvious there is no answer to these questions.” But Marr (p.31) demonstrated that 3D models *were* a way of answering such scepticism. “There are ways of describing the shape of a cat to an arbitrary level of precision, and there are rules and procedures for arriving at such descriptions.” Such 3D models of things, agents and sufferers can be extended to the dimension of time and used to model acts and events. The visual conceptual differentiation of a cat crouching, crawling or creeping would be a matter of reference to 4D models. Jackendoff (1993, p.45) has suggested that such conceptual models are referenced by language as well as vision; that is, lexical memory accesses the 4D model representation of events, and so does vision. A natural kind of thing like a kangaroo gives its shape to a natural kind of event like a kangaroo hopping. Language reflects this by the fact that the events it represents in sentences may be decomposed into the grammatical function-argument structure such as that of subject and predicate.

As Jackendoff (p.36) remarks, there is “a basic correspondence of syntactic and conceptual argument structure” regardless of whether the conceptual category is an event, state, thing, place or whatever, and beginning with the correspondence of syntactic constituents to conceptual constituents. The diagrammatic combination involved in the syntactic argument structure of a sentence—the subject and predicate—was what Peirce (vol. 2, p.158) saw as the iconic character of the sentence. As such it is a very schematic icon: a diagram. In the sentence *The king is old*, the verb *be* expresses a function whose arguments are in the subject and the predicate adjective positions. In *The king abdicated*, *abdicated* expresses a function whose argument is in the subject. The function-argument diagram of a sentence seems to be limited in actual linguistic practice to no more than three argument places, but it allows for recursion and hence may correspond to an infinite number of concepts. It is also a structure that is reproduced iconically within the other syntactic categories besides the sentence. Thus, for example, the NP *daughters of the king* analyses into the function, *daughters*, and its argument, the NP complement, *the king*. Jackendoff derives a general diagrammatic formation program for the syntactic categories, and a corresponding one for conceptual categories.

Deacon (p. 333) argued that the deep universal structures of syntax are the very things that are not likely to have genetically fixed neural supports because genetic fixation of an adaptation requires persistence of selection pressure, while the deep syntactic structures are “the most variable in surface representation, variably mapped to processing tasks, and poorly localisable within the brain between individuals or even within individuals.” The very schematic character of the general

function-argument structure of syntax, that is, of the general syntactic icon (as, say, Jackendoff diagrams it) is just the sort of formation that could be handled by various processing tasks. The fact that it corresponds to processing of the various conceptual categories suggests this. In order to give adequate phonological form to conceptual representations, such a general and multi-modal neurological capability would select for the general function-argument syntactic structure in the social evolution of languages, both early and persistently in all societies and all languages.

The function-argument structure of events is a particular feature that illuminates the old narratological problem about the divisibility and relative importance of plot and character. “What is character but the determination of incident?” asked Henry James in *The Art of Fiction*, “What is incident but the illustration of character?” Events, as propositions in a narrative plot, symbolise a conceptual category which subsumes another group of conceptual categories: *things*, *agents*, and *sufferers*. The indivisibility of an event from its component things, agents or sufferers is an affect of what an event represents, and how. This *what* and *how* have been given to us by the evolution of human narrative and there are teleonomic answers to the question of *why* this particular *what* and *how* obtain. Perhaps the conceptual processing of temporal phenomena in hominid ancestors reflected this indivisibility, and its neurological basis provided the homologous neurological basis for combinatorial symbolic processing and therefore a selection pressure for symbols that reflected this combinatorial character across all the syntactic categories. Speculation aside, a thing (or an agent or a sufferer), and an event (or an act) symbolise quite different but important information. Typically a thing persists from event to event, while its own or its environmental state changes. The permanence of its substance (to use the old metaphysical expression) is an important constant for an observer in a variable environment. It is a good adaptation to represent a something as the same something of several events, as a regularity persisting throughout a period of time. So a thing can be grasped as a special kind of event, that is a state of affairs or a substance, that captures the possibility of a little bit of temporal leeway. What happens to a thing is an event between two states. Typically, an event or act is one of various spatiotemporal or intentional modalities of a thing or agent or sufferer. The kind of regularity a particular event captures—as the token of a type of event—is a regularity of outer spatiotemporal shape or of inner intentions, neither of which can be represented independently of the things, agents or sufferers they involve. As an argument constructed from events, that fits told events together into chronological sequence, and in which certain things and agents and sufferers persist from event to event (i.e. an argument in the discursive rather than the syntactical sense), a plot is a highly complex event, and therefore the highly complex modality of a comparatively persistent set of things, agents or sufferers.

We don’t only see strictly empirical, spatiotemporal events, we are designed to perceive and represent intentional ones too, that is, acts that must be distinguished in terms of their goals or in terms of agents’ intentions. Thus we don’t only see *a stone falling* or *a cat falling*, we also see *a cat stalking* or even *a cat wanting something*. Strictly empirical or behaviourist description or tokening of intentional and social actions—whether the actions of humans or of other organisms—is not a very natural kind of intuition at all, because it does not readily capture the environmentally relevant information. Nevertheless, I suspect we still use 4D models in recognising intentional events, because these events still have a distinctive and spatiotemporally recognisable physiognomy that provides a basis for inferring the relevant intentions. *Giving* and *taking* are social, symbolic and intentional acts, but they also have certain associated empirical manifestations which are relevant for inferring their meaning as

actions in a context of meaning. *Thinking*, *worrying*, even *lying*, are recognisable in the facial movements and gestures of their agents, but more importantly, intentional acts are perceivable in communicative actions such as speech acts and in the apperception of subjects. We tell each other, and ourselves, what we think, fear, believe or desire. (The distinction, incidentally, between *acts* and *events* lies in whether an event is attributed to a teleological agent or not.)

It is clear that linguistic narrative does not necessarily communicate what it *feels like* to experience the events that it describes. Compared to a movie or a play, a verbal story at first seems like a very poor attempt at virtual reality. However speech and writing are very good at representing a virtual reality of linguistic perception, that is of speech and writing—a feature that is of fundamental importance in the narrative arts of radio, the novel, and drama and film dialogue, as well as in historiography. Language represents events in two distinct ways, as Plato recognised: diegetically and mimetically. It represents empirical events diegetically, and it can represent communicative events like speech mimetically. Not only is this of fundamental importance in the history of the narrative arts, it was probably of fundamental importance in the evolution of human communication and language, and in the genesis of the event form. Just as a quote is a likeness of the utterance quoted, it is also used as a representation of the thought or intention, as we say, expressed by the utterance. In this case, whatever neurological form the thought might have had, the utterance that is said to express it is like it in the sense that it shares for human intuition the same relevant inferential consequences. Whatever the precise nature of the neurological event is, the linguistic event is deemed to be, and used as, its iconic translation into language. Even so, it is probably a highly schematic likeness, especially if the bulk of neurological activity that comprises the thought remains unconscious.

Though a linguistic event is felt to be like the corresponding conceptual or intentional event it is said to express, a description of a visual experience is not usually felt as a likeness of the visual experience—the similar inferential consequences notwithstanding. At best, as Peirce was the first to make clear, a linguistic proposition is a kind of highly schematic diagram of any empirical event or intentional act it describes by means of its syntax. This iconic relation of a sentence's syntax to a visual perception of the same empirical event that the sentence describes suggests in itself that syntax has been socially selected as an adaptation to both vision and conceptual processing.

The role that Jackendoff (p.39) saw supposedly internal syntactical structures playing as intermediary between conceptual processing and vision on the one side and phonology and auditory functions on the other, did not necessitate the internalisation of those structures in a language module or in “internal language”. Language as a socially evolved adaptation of external communicative texts to the various brain functions can still be an intermediary between them. To be selected as such, a language has to achieve an adequately useful translation, grasping the relevant information represented by conceptual processing and visual processing in a phonological or motor form—however arbitrary this translation schema may be. For versions of the biological evolution of internal language, this adaptation was believed to be a matter of natural selection, but it could also be achieved by the cultural evolution of an external grammar that was humanly learnable because it was adapted to the human brain. Such an *external* translation or intermediary between *internal* brain functions is just the kind that would not necessarily preserve an intuitive feeling of likeness between visual and linguistic propositions. Syntax distorts any likeness the way a highly schematic diagram does. Though language is a diagram of what it

describes, it is one whose unlikeness to any empirical reference indicates a kind of arbitrary schematics that results from the historical contingencies of its cultural selection

Language might be an external system of vocal (or written, or signed) symbols historically adapted to our phonologically, symbolically, conceptually and ultimately even visually adept brains, but it has been re-internalised insofar as it has been selected for the task of symbolising the obscure mental processes of conceptual and affective processing—what we call thinking, hoping, believing, desiring and the like. It is adapted to zeroing in on the relevant conceptual gist, on what, say for vision, would be the consciously attended figure in the more or less unattended and unconscious ground. So in language it seems we can trace the musculature of our embodied conceptual and inferential processing; these conceptual processes, in all their hidden complexity are, however, going on elsewhere. The bulk of the processing never reaches consciousness. This is the case even if there is an evolved, neurological basis for syntax. On the other hand, invalid assumptions of such a basis amount to a kind of reification of internalised language. As I said above, with the socially evolved net of language, we fish up thoughts, beliefs, images and so on, giving them the conscious form we know so well, but leaving the mark of the diagrammatic and social artifice of language on them at the same time.

Intentional actions and attitudes—*belief* in particular seems to be one—are dubious psychic self descriptions, and reductions of complex psychic processes. Belief seems to refer to a variable psychic relation of a psyche's ownership of its knowledge. The variability, apart from indicating the cultural genesis and degeneration of belief (and thus suggesting the social as well as the psychic character of belief) also indicates the variability of the reductions made in the selections of psychic representations for consciousness. In the case of *thought*, we may better understand the way language structures and reduces it by rephrasing Pope's theory of wit. I wonder whether, even in its own time, *What oft was thought but ne'er so well expressed* captured the norm of wit, let alone the fact. If it did define the norm, no wonder the meaning of *wit* has degenerated through ironic use into mere wittiness. For the sake of modernity's norm of originality, dressing up old thoughts in fine words won't do, except as a symptom of nostalgia for eternal verities. *What ne'er was thought for ne'er so well expressed* correctly apprehends the relation of language and thought, and it also expresses the truly conceptual (rather than the merely prosodic, superficial, or witty) nature of wit in its highest sense.

Language provides the most important source of information we have for inferring others' intentions, and it provides the most important means of giving representations of our intentions explicit, objectified form. Its external character facilitates the kind of recursion that seems to characterise human consciousness and self consciousness. Language is a virtual reality medium for linguistic experience, and, because of its coevolution with the brain, for self consciousness. The conceptual correspondence of language with the selections of the conceptual processing of the complex, unreduced (though in its own way selected and schematic) information supplied by vision makes for a vicious little circle of virtual reality. The iconicity that language lacks *vis à vis* visual reality, it makes up for with a vengeance *vis à vis* linguistic, intentional and conceptual reality. The event was selected as an externalisable symbol adapted to this bewitching situation of not only symbols but virtual reality icons. Such virtual reality is declared into affect in what Austin called performative speech acts, such as *I promise*. Then there is the "external" virtual reality of mimetic speech and the "internal" virtual reality of speech for thought. It is not so easy to grasp this because all this virtual reality is just part of everyday

communicative reality, and we are not much impressed by the cunning of its devices because our experience is constituted by its spell. All this contributes to the peculiar form taken by the conceptual category of the event and to its special place in human narrative.

When we try to put concepts into communicative form, when we say what we are thinking or imagining, language may be fishing up its catch from mental experience, but it is also put to the task of being a succinct likeness of conceptual and intentional experience. With a little bit more extension of our phenotype into other external media, we can put other thoughts and imaginings into visual media. Gesture and gestural mimesis, of course, are at least as old as language when it comes to communication, and we can and do represent aspects of intentional experience with gestures. For a dancer, an actor, a film maker or an animator, vision and gesture are the symbolic bearers of concepts, and objects of propositional attitudes. We *believe* the amateur video of the plane crash, we *understand* the fictional feature film, we *imagine* the atoms and molecules the way the computer graphic diagrams them. These media have not, by and large, been adapted to representing intentional experience, except insofar as intentional experience is somehow like empirical experience, as in, say, imagining a visual experience. What selection pressure the multi media environment of propositional communication will exert on human psyche and society in future is anyone's guess, but virtual reality has long been and remains a favourite function for both natural and cultural selection.

While the information supplied by vision is reduced by the demands of conceptual relevance and inferential processing, and in turn by the social selection of an external language that is adapted to these features of conceptual processing as well to the demands of phonological tokening, visual information is also propositional. We tend to think of propositional form as syntactic, linguistic form, but as Peirce made clear, images can be used as propositions too. A cinematic shot is a quasi proposition representing a complex event in which a particular subset of events is relevant in the context. Syntactical, linguistic propositions are a subset of a general class of signs that Peirce called quasi propositions, but the general class might just as well be seen as that of propositions in their general form. Just what a proposition is, is a moot point, one that Daniel Dennett (1987, 206) once said "is practically off limits to all but the hardy specialist." David Lewis (1973, p.46) said that we may take sets of possible worlds to be propositions. As befits such an arcane subject, the notion that propositions are sets of possible worlds is suitably outlandish and, as we shall see, suitably useful. "It does not matter much what propositions are, so long as (1) they are entities that can be true or false at (possible) worlds and (2) there are enough of them." Propositions are true and false at worlds because they represent states or events at some worlds and not at others. Conjunctions of propositions narrow down which possible worlds they may collectively refer to. Propositions are concepts as communicatively *proposed* for others. They are thus communicative and conceptual, but they are not necessarily linguistic. The linguistic form of a spoken proposition is often called a propositional form, but it would be better called the linguistic or grammatical form of a propositional concept, because video is also propositional and argument is also conceptual.

28. *The montage eye and the visual proposition.*

In his writings on cinema, Gilles Deleuze (1983, p.81) said "the cinema is not simply the camera: it is montage. And if from the point of view of the human eye, montage is undoubtedly a construction, from the point of view of another eye, it

ceases to be one; it is the pure vision of a non human eye, of an eye which would be in things...It is not that we have to construct it since it is given only to the eye which we do not have...What montage does, according to Vertov, is to carry perception into things...this is the definition of objectivity.”

When he was describing the kind of information processing that we have to carry out in vision, David Marr noted the way we use information from the 2D retinal image—information that in its 2D form corresponds to, say, a circle or a disc—to derive information about a 3D world in which the 2D retinal image of a circle really stands for a bucket viewed from the top down. In effect, Marr claimed that, built into its information processing, vision already carries out its own decentring of its subject. Nature has already given us an eye that carries perception beyond the apparent limits of its situation and, as it were, into the world of things. Human vision is already naturally selected for its special Apollonian, objectifying skill. It anticipates seeing around corners, a bit like the way human meaning anticipates other unanticipated, possible meanings. The cinema’s “montage eye” is a phenotypic extension of our vision, which is itself already constructing objectifying images. Deleuze saw the montage eye as a way of designing a non human eye that “would be in things” without considering that objectificatory design and its cultural selection throughout the history of cinema had been anticipated in the natural selection of human vision.

At first montage may have been experienced as a limitation on the power of cinema to be or feel like virtual reality; but if this was the case, it was quickly seen as a necessity that could be turned into a virtue—as is so often the case in art. Though the illusion that made intentional consciousness represent a virtual reality was disrupted by a cut, there was a new, schematic representational power to be had from cutting. This representational, objectifying power of montage had been historically prefigured in the biological development of language, in the objectifying power of language’s proposition by proposition argument.

Yet we must not forget the first great innovation of cinema. Tarkovsky, I think, was right to emphasise its importance in relation to montage. In cinema—in its imprint of events on film—the proposition, which formerly had been hard to imagine outside what might have been seen as its essentially linguistic form, was given a moving, pictorial form. A film lingers on the event of getting dressed or eating an apple or evaporating condensation. It is thinking in moving images. Deleuze said film makers think in images rather than concepts; I would say screen uses moving images to represent and communicate concepts. In a way, cinema restored to the proposition the iconicity that human biology had obscured through the arbitrary diagrammatics of language.

29. Acts and other events.

All philosophical exemplification makes peculiar demands on tact. And indeed many have regarded narrative art as essentially a division of labour devoted to the task of tactful exemplification of philosophical, especially ethical, matters. Depending on the times this has been seen as a norm of narrative art, or the dead hand of universality lording it over particularity. One problem of examples is that they are cunning context shifters, moving (or being surreptitiously moved) back and forth from the genre they are supposed to illustrate to the genre of philosophical or technical exemplification. They thus employ a certain irony in order to lend specious universality to what might be a particular use. Rather than making up a story for the sake of exemplifying *the story*—and risking ridicule for doing it badly, especially

when plenty of good stories go begging—I simply want to sample a range of events in order to illustrate some of the conceptual properties of some of the different kinds of events. The following belongs to the genre of event illustration before it belongs to the genre of story. However to analyse events in isolation from other events is to risk missing the point that some of the peculiar properties of events are designed for fitting them together as before and after or cause and effect. So the samples cobbled collectively make up a banal story of sorts, even though analysing the complex inferential processes in following a narrative event by event are not as yet my immediate concern. (see 35. *Narrative inference*)

The present concern is not so much with the significant peculiarities of the textual representation of events in specific media, nor with some ontology of events as worldly entities, nor with events as abstracted in a universal theory of temporal processing as such, but with events as instances of a psychologically and socially determined conceptual category, by means of which humans grasp temporal experience and, in doing so, give the experienced environment its ontologically familiar event form. Though the events that follow are bookish by necessity and represented in writing, my concern is with events in any human medium rather than in a specific medium. Therefore the following events may be taken as read, or, *mutatis mutandis*, as a shooting script, or as a transcript of a surveillance video. And the banality of the story may not be such a bad thing when trying to illustrate the queer banality of events. Raúl Ruiz has remarked on the irresistible humour with which Judith Thomson, in *Acts and Other Events* (1977), attacks her event analysis of the assassination of Robert Kennedy. The source of the humour lay in the scandalous revelation of the queerness that lies behind what seems utterly banal.

1. A freeway was busy with evening traffic.

This represents a state of affairs and as such is typical of the start of stories, which have been thought of as accounts of what happens between two states—a beginning and an end. As when nouns represent things, when propositions (sentences, shots) represent events and states, they may represent particular events or states, or types of events or states. (Jackendoff, 1993, p34) This token/type distinction enables the same sentence or even the same shot to represent different events in different contexts. Narratives tend to home in on particular events, and when narrative texts compound one event (or state) after another in long strings, the compounded type-event becomes so exclusive in its detail that it can scarcely avoid suggesting something particular, even if non-existent. Nevertheless, fictions seem to preserve, as Aristotle intimated, a sense of the universal reference of the big compounded type event. This is related to their urging the general validity of their argument. In a sense then, a fiction might be conceived as a narrative type, any tokening of which is untrue in this world.

In video the opening shot of the expressway busy with evening traffic may be taken as an event; or several events, in each of which a car passes; or as a state of affairs, depending on the subsequent conceptual selection of information. Video does not explicitly and exclusively represent a state of affairs, though it could use a still and hope it would do the same. Rather, video has to give enough information such that the conceptual information represented by the state of affairs can be inferred when or if it is relevant. As a transcript of the video, *1.* sacrifices information according to the schematics of conceptualisation and language, but in doing so it buys time. One property of states of affairs, according to Thomson (p.125), is that they do not have parts that temporally succeed one another. This kind of temporal

discrimination is sacrificed for the sake of abstracting information about what is regular or obtains throughout time, and thus for buying time, or even a handy bit of temporal reversibility.

2. *A car lurched to a stop and a man scrambled from the passenger door.*

These two joined sentences represent two events, or one compounded event. As Thomson (p.111) shows, even the compounding of this event with the event represented by *Caesar crossed the Rubicon*, is a well formed event. Besides compounding, events may be decomposed into constituent events. Thus 2. comprises the car lurching, the car stopping, the man scrambling out, and presumably the passenger door opening before he does. Though not explicitly represented in the sentence, the opening of the passenger door may be inferred, as a tentative assumption, from the context. In the case of the video it is explicit, as are many other more or less relevant events, such as the man hurrying, breathing, wearing jeans or whatever.

Video events are more or less complex compounds. Whatever event is selected, that is, whatever event language tokens from such an information rich complex, depends upon the conceptual relevance, *relevance* being defined functionally for the observer (Note: The principle of *relevance* is not fully explained until the section below on *Narrative inference*. In the interim, while its meaning is being demonstrated in various contexts, the term is used with the expectation that an understanding of its everyday meaning will suffice.). Most of the videoed events are completely lost to the linguistic schematism of the transcript, though some are to some extent recoverable by inference. The arts of storytelling and literary narrative differ from screen narrative primarily in that they involve the highly developed exploitation of the schematic poverty of language. Closer examination of the linguistic account of these events will not reveal events that a closer examination of the video may do, namely, that there is a gun barrel being aimed from the car's driver's window. Meanwhile, even what is explicit in video depends upon what the viewer makes, in context, of the acts and events depicted by the video. The surveillance video shows a particular event, but the very same piece of tape may also be used to represent a type of event, or in another context, another particular, perhaps fictional, event. And what if the surveillance video just happens to capture actors recreating an incident, whether historical, conjectured or fictional?

Thomson demonstrated the curious but important property that "no event causes any of its parts, (and) no event is caused by any of its parts." (p.63) Events are thus designed as discrete causal elements in order to function in the conceptual reckoning of causation. We conceptually grasp visual information in this causally particulate form, and preserve this feature when we represent events in language. To name an event or to represent one is to posit a graspable conceptual unity, a meaningful temporal sequence, be it long or short, continuous or discontinuous, in real time or in some other time; whether it comprises a number of other events or is part of a greater, inclusive event; whether it comprises a single action or a series of actions or a course of action. As unitary symbols, events, in some sense, detemporalise time for the convenience of conceptual representation and inference; they reduce the complexity of the environment for the sake of its complex conceptualisation. When Roland Barthes noted that structural analysis "dechronologises" the narrative sequence and "relogicises it" (p.99) he could have been describing just the task that event perception and conception does by reflex; the structural analyst follows suit instinctively. Many of the abstractions of science are

just of this natural, intentional kind, and thus preclude the ontological absolutism of claims like *events have no temporal dimension*.

3. *He ran along the freeway towards a flashing light.*

This represents a temporally unbounded event or *process*. Any part of a process may be represented by the same sentence (Jackendoff, 1993, p.41); in other words it is not detemporalised in quite the same way as a bounded event. The distinction between the event and the process is signalled in this case by the unbounded path represented by the phrase *towards the flashing light*. The bounded path *to the flashing light*, would signal a bounded event. The distinction between an event and a process parallels that between a *thing* and a *substance*. Any part of a thing cannot be described as that thing: a part of a car cannot be described as a car. On the other hand, a part of a substance, air say, can still be described as that substance, air. Jackendoff makes the point (pp. 41-42) that the parallel distinction between events and processes, things and substances, and bounded and unbounded paths suggests that the same inference rules conveniently function across the underlying conceptual categories of events, things and paths, each of which may be represented by at least one kind of major syntactic phrase: events by sentences or noun phrases; things by noun phrases; and paths by propositional phrases.

4. *He waved and called desperately for cars to stop until, stumbling, he fell to the ground near the flashing light.*

This is another compounded event with, in this case, a temporal bound placed on it by the sentence *until he fell to the ground*.

5. *The light flashed.*

This represents a repeated event, and as such it too behaves like a process. Because English syntax has no special iterative aspect, 5. could, in another context, be said to represent the light's flashing only once. The conceptual possibilities implicit in the type/token distinction enable the one sentence, representing one type of event to also represent the iteration of particular instances of the same type of event. We do not have to abandon the principle of the particularity of events, or assume, universalistically that some events happen more than once or are condemned to eternal recurrence. The light flashes more than once, each flash is a different event, and the iterative aspect allows the representation of an event that is a compound of repeated events of the same kind.

The iterative aspect is often used to represent remembered events of the same type, that were repeated on several occasions over a period of time. Its relation to memory is demonstrated by what Gérard Genette called Proust's "intoxication with the iterative (1972, p123)."

6. *Dozens of cars drove past.*

This is one event, but it implies dozens of different actions or events. again, this way of representing events is a way of masking other events at the same time.

7. *This caused the man to gesture more frantically, and then to get up and run in front of the traffic.*

What caused him to gesture? Not the sentence 6., but the event it represents, and that the man perceived. Clearly events need not be represented linguistically in order to be perceived; or that, at least, is how we understand them.

8. *His actions stopped a van.*

Causal verbs, as in 7. & 8., may take acts or events as their subjects: acts and other events cause other acts and events. The conceptual importance of causal relations is incorporated into an important property of causal verbs: they token events that may be conceptually decomposed into a useful general inferential form. Thus:

His actions stopped the van → His actions caused the van to stop.

or

Sirhan killed Kennedy → Sirhan caused Kennedy to die.

Generally, a sentence with a causal verb decomposes into an expression like

x causes the event E to occur.

This is a handy feature in both the acquisition and formation of new concepts. Jackendoff (1993, p.51) points out that, due to such features, there is a potential of an infinite number of lexical concepts inherent in the grammar of conceptual structure. Rather than all lexical concepts being primitives, they may be constructed from more primitive concepts.

9. *The driver of the van opened her passenger door and the man climbed in.*

A compounding of events—and a story is just that—may imply a temporal relation between those events, and thereby a causal or functional relation as well. Here the man is able to climb into the van *because* the driver has opened the door. *Post hoc ergo propter hoc* may not be a rule governing the order of compounding, but it is a typical feature of those compounds that comprise a familiar sequence of events in familiar situations. Such compounded sequences have the short, memorable form that we might recognise as the *gist* of a story.

10. *Meanwhile, the first car had driven off.*

One event following another in the narrated sequence of plot normally implies a correspondence between narrated order and chronological order, unless otherwise indicated. *Meanwhile*, and the tense of the verb imply that 10 does not happen after 9.

11. *A little earlier, however, another driver had been passing, but on seeing the man's frantic gestures, had taken fright.*

This event, the second out of chronological sequence, was presumably masked by the summary, linguistic schematics of 6. The communicative action of representing events is also an event, or a series of events: a series of sentences or shots or gestures. We might think of the non chronological weaving of events into a plot as a sign of a sophisticated storyteller's art; but it is a design necessity for a linguistic animal. In linguistic narrative, tense and aspect, along with the specific

lexical value of the verb, pick out the specific temporal period of the event or process, and the time frame of the speaker in relation to the event. They also indicate the time of a second (earlier or later) event, in the context of which or in relation to which the first event takes place. This last feature is vital for making inferences about the relations between sentences (see 27. *Tense and aspect*). We are all like Oedipus, trying to piece together stories while still on the run, so we have to slot events back into our accounts well outside their chronological place. Tense and aspect are the tools for this. The Teiresian, Appollonian viewpoint that presents all the relevant events in their chronological sequence, is exceptional, abstract and very often poetically boring.

Film and video lack as yet the devices of tense and aspect. These devices not only locate the event in time, they locate the speaker too. Language thus implies the viewpoint of a subject. Film presents its text like a kind of found object. It doesn't have to scrub out the traces of an *I* that writers of fiction have to do if they want their texts to have the same textual independence. Probably all works of fiction aspire to this independence: they are like found autopoietic objects rather than someone's message. This independent objectivity gives them their universality and their power. It is also part of their memetic autonomy. Prose authors may narcissistically reclaim this universal, extra-individual quality for their own self construction; but as far as the artwork is concerned they are like playwrights and film makers: effectively dead or ensconced in some other world.

Showing this event on screen would require a bit of cunning editing—a dissolve perhaps, or a voiceover or a title, or a retake of shot 6. that highlighted the particular passing car. Both *Pulp Fiction* and *Jackie Brown* employ such devices.

12. *He did not stop.*

Is this an act of omission? Thomson (p.224) said there are no acts of omission. Not feeding a baby is not an act of omission according to Thomson. However I would call it an act of starvation. *If you want more pudding wiggle your thumb, if you don't, don't!* Does not wiggling your thumb constitute an act of omission? Thomson said no; I say yes. The act of omission is not the abstract negation of action as such. It happens in an interaction context. Acts are bearers of human meaning, and the negation of a meaning is always another act of meaning, not an absence of meaning. As Gregory Bateson (1978) defined information, I would define an informative act: it is a difference which makes a difference.

13. *While he drove on, he imagined the events related so far.*

Events 1. - 12. are somehow embedded in this event, with great efficiency but also with a great loss of detailed information. This is an event *about* events; it is a psychological event representing the intentional act of *imagining*. The driver who entertains this story is entertaining a narrative like that of 1. - 12. The entertainment of stories, regardless of whether the events actually occurred, is part and parcel of human narrative, as the future tense alone would illustrate.

At this point considerations of fiction or history enter the interpretation. Are 1. - 12. actual or imagined? Again, medium is important. Language is *the* medium for communicating mental events. It was designed for doing so over a very long period of time. But video and cinema can do it too. And, indeed, many mental acts are acts of picturing (imagining) rather than acts of linguistic formulation. Take remembering, for example. We tend to picture occasions of dialogue and remember communicated

intentions rather than actually hearing them. We can readily picture empirical events, but not intentional ones. Hence voice-over is used in film to signify intentional acts, as long as the film makers are not frightened by the notion that somehow voice-over is uncinematic. (Thankfully Terrence Malick has not been frightened of this.) We need to extend our phenotype a little in order to represent mental acts in a non linguistic manner. No matter what the medium, the representation of the mental act is going to be formative of the content of that act; or at least that has been the case historically when language has represented thoughts. Because linguistic formulation *is* a mental act, what we *say* we think has a certain, performative authenticity. If we *show* thoughts on screen the technological extension alienates our thoughts somewhat, giving them a certain heteronomous content—such as events going on in the background—not found in the intimately and schematically condensed linguistic representations of the thoughts. In cinema, spare, stagy sets are sometimes used to represent the uncluttered succinctness of linguistically represented events. We see this in films of poetic, literary drama, or in representations of dreams and thoughts. In *Perceval le Gallois*, Eric Rohmer creates a succinct ethical meditation out of a certain kind of lingisticality that the bare setting induces.

14. After a minute this made him turn around.

Intentional events are events that may cause events. Our representation of events is not pinched by behaviourist scruples. It is only to be expected that social, intentional animals are not behaviourist but, to use Daniel Dennett's term (1987, 1991), *heterophenomenological*: they tell stories about what goes on inside others' heads, and attribute to these goings on real causal power.

15. Driving back, he imagined some crime having taken place and having to relate the events, including his own act of imagining, someday in court.

16. He even imagined having to explain to the court how he had come to imagine the court.

An honest account of imaginative acts could get you into trouble. What goes on inside people's heads largely remains untold. Communication is a kind of exchange and it is not typically marked by the openness that we may only imagine as *mind reading*. Language is a kind of highly selected mind reading, or misreading.

17. He reached the place where he had seen the frantic man, but there was no man, no car, no van.

There was no elephant either. As with acts of omission, so with the negation of existential claims about things or people. Negation is determinate.

18. The light flashed.

Is this the same event as 5.?

19. The expressway was busy with evening traffic.

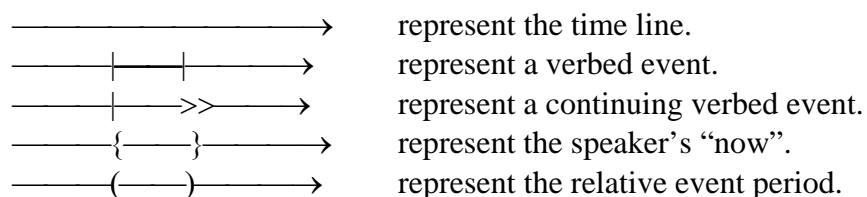
Is this the same state of affairs that we began with? What if there had been a lull in the traffic for ten minutes? Thomson (p.125) preferred to think of states of

affairs as *obtaining* rather than *existing*. And this properly captures their temporal information content: it holds throughout a specifiable period. A state may exist in time, but this is secondary to its obtaining through time and thus enabling a certain reversibility of time for the organism or system that represents it. Thomson preferred to “leave open what is the case between successive obtainings.” (p.125) We have to infer this from context. The same type of state may be used to token different and successive states; but different and successive states of the same type may be tokened by the same type of state, and may be compounded into a particular, iterated, if discontinuously obtaining state. Leaving open what happens between successive obtainings is actually what the information content of a discontinuously obtaining state does—a feature that preserves the conceptual content of obtaining through specifiable, if discontinuous, time.

30. Tense and aspect.

In language, temporal relations are indicated by the lexical value of the verb, tense and aspect, prepositional phrases, adverbs, and compounding in a sequence with other sentences. By means of tense and aspect a number of temporal relations are indicated (in English) between a speaker’s “now”, the verbed event or process, and another time period (the *relative event period*) relative to which the speaker locates both her “now” and the verbed event. The scope of this *relative event period* may usually be grasped by prefacing the sentence in question by some appropriate term or phrase (it varies with the tense) such as “at this (or that) time”, “now”, “then”, “when”, “until now”, etc.. The *relative event* occurs at some time during the relative event period as it is indicated by the tense and aspect, and it is likely to be represented propositionally in the course of the communication. For example, in the sentence “Caesar had been crossing the Rubicon when a light breeze started,” the event, “a light breeze started”, is a relative event, and it occurs in the allowable time period indicated for the relative event by the tense and aspect of the verb in the sentence “Caesar *had been crossing* the Rubicon.” The relations of the speaker’s “now” (sometimes this is the “now” of yet another event), the verbed event, and the time allotted for the relative event period may be graphed on a time line.

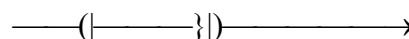
Let



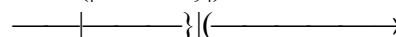
The various tenses and aspects are graphed as follows:

- | | |
|---|-----------------------|
| 1. Caesar crosses the Rubicon | ———({———})———→ |
| 2. Caesar crossed the Rubicon. | ———(———){———→ |
| 3. Caesar has crossed the Rubicon. | ——— ——— ({———→ |
| 4. Caesar had crossed the Rubicon. | ——— ——— ((———){———→ |
| 5. Caesar is crossing the Rubicon. | ——— ——— ({>>})———→ |
| 6. Caesar was crossing the Rubicon. | ——— ——— (>>){———→ |
| 7. Caesar has been crossing the Rubicon. | ——— ——— (>>){}———→ |
| 8. Caesar had been crossing the Rubicon. | ——— ——— (>>)——— {———→ |
| 9. Caesar will be crossing the Rubicon. | ——— ——— }>>)———→ |
| 10. Caesar will have been crossing the Rubicon. | ——— ——— }>>(>>———→ |

11. Caesar will cross the Rubicon.



12. Caesar will have crossed the Rubicon.



These diagrams do not exhaust the possibilities. Iterated events, for instance, are different, as are those denoted by different verbs with their own specific spatiotemporal dimensions. These different representations of the same event are graphed into a spatial, visual form only to illustrate the complexity of temporal information that (in this case English) speakers calculate and represent by reflex in the course of everyday speech. A couple of interpretations should show how to read the graphs.

1. indicates that the verbed event and the relative event occupy the same period of time, and the “now” of the speaker also occurs during that event, as though the duration of the event constituted, for the speaker, an obtaining state of affairs. 6. indicates that the relative event occurs at the time of the continuation of the verbed event, while the speaker’s “now” is at some indefinite time afterwards. In 7. the speaker’s now is *immediately* after the relative event and the continuing verbed event. In 8. the relative event period extends some period beyond the time of the continuation, perhaps beyond the completion of the event, while the speaker’s “now” is at some indefinite time after the relative event period.

Clearly, in the reflexes of tense and aspect there is a lot of reckoning about time, and relations in time. These temporal acrobatics are easy for any speaker, which is why our narratives do not have to be presented in chronological order. We can piece that together from the plot, acrobatically. (However the order of the plot is the inferential order that helps to give us the *how* and *why* of a narrative as well as the *when*.) As Gérard Genette observed

By a dissymmetry whose underlying reasons escape us but which is inscribed in the very structures of language (or at the very least the main “languages of civilisation” of western culture) I can very well tell a story without specifying the place where it happens, and whether the place is more or less distant from the place where I am telling it; nevertheless, it is almost impossible for me not to locate the story in time with respect to my narrating act, since I must necessarily tell the story in a present, past or future tense. (1972, p.215)

Genette is happy to acknowledge unknown reasons for this—and that he doesn’t know that it is not restricted to the western civil culture with which he himself is familiar. For Quine, on the other hand, it is a nuisance and an impediment—albeit ironically expressed—to the transnarrative designs of his logical project in *Word and Object*.

Our ordinary language shows a tiresome bias in its treatment of time. Relations of date are exalted grammatically as relations of position, weight, and colour are not. This bias is of itself an inelegance, or breach of theoretical simplicity. Moreover, the form that it takes—that of requiring that every verb form show a tense—is peculiarly productive of needless complications, since it demands lip service to time even when time is farthest from our thoughts. (1960, p.170)

What Quine called “lip service” is really a sign of our astonishing narrative skill. *Natura nihil agit frustra*, nature does not act in vein. We pay lip service not because

language does all the conceptual work, but because we have already done the conceptual work and put it at the service of our linguistic representations. That we can do this when it is farthest from our thoughts shows what narrative creatures we are—thanks to our natural selection—as well as how, like Quine, our transcendental subjectivity would like to be able to forget time sometimes, in order to get the better of it, or transcend it, or even reverse it.

For someone who remembers half way through telling a story that they need to tell their audience about something else that had happened prior to the main events of the story, then they need to quickly slot the earlier event into its chronological place. So it is very handy to be able to say things like “Earlier, when Oedipus’s father had consulted the oracle at Delphi...” or “When Oedipus had met a stranger on the roads to Thebes...”. The intricacies of tense and aspect are a functional solution to the problem of telling stories on the run, without the writer’s luxury of being able to rework the text before making it public. It is a very useful device for speech and dialogue, and for narrative conceptual processing as well. In a way, the desire for an exposition that transcends the problem of having to string our meanings out in time is already answered by our design for narrative. As for Parmenides and Hegel, so for any speaker telling a story: it does not matter at what point we begin. We always have to start in the middle of things, and from that point we might have to go back to earlier events, or forward to later ones. Artists, of course, have been putting this function to good use, at least since Homer.

The wide Apollonian prospect of time, that is shared by the dramatist, the audience and the Teiresias of *King Oedipus*—and also by natural linguistic narrative as such—enables leaps forward too. But a narrative leap-forward seldom uses the future tense. Avoiding the future tense’s speculative or planning function, narrative leaps-forward opt for the historical irrevocability of, at most, a future perfect or a conditional, relying on the Apollonian potential of aspect (our own device, given to us by nature, in whose image we have made gods) rather than the uncertainties of future tense. Usually the future events are still told with a past tense, the favoured tense of Apollonian truth. Thus the opening sentence of Marquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude* goes “Years later, when he faced the firing squad, Colonel Aureliano Buendia was to remember that distant afternoon when his father took him to discover ice.”. It signals from the very start—in *medias res*—the Teiresian aspect of the character Melchiades, whose understanding, we learn in the end, circumscribes and prescribes the story.

Most drama moves about in time more within its characters’ speeches than in its dramatic sequence. The demands of the stage tend to select the dictates of the neoclassical unities. Film has the still often awkward device of flashback and is still developing the functional conventions for time shift—as the rarity of flashforwards indicates. Still the means for time shifts are there already in our temporal conceptual processing, so screen time shifts are easy to follow even if not yet quite a second nature to language’s first. Narrative exposition is able to reactivate earlier meaning possibilities and reinstruct the audience in what has happened, what had been happening, or what must have been happening. What we call meaning is thus conditioned by this universal possibility of revision.

31. *The functions of meaning.*

Meaning, including narrative meaning, is always, as we shall see, a matter of suggesting logically accessible possibilities—accessible, that is, from the explicitly

represented or communicated information. Meaning is thus inherently unstable, likely to change, and likely to require revision as further meanings unfold during a text. Typically, in speech, it is this need to revise and add later adjustments to expository material that compels slotting in events out of their chronological sequence. The temporal demands of speech, the fact that we can't mean everything at once, is a selection pressure for the way meaning works, and the way meaning works makes it useful for other functions.

Meaning frees humans from what is too often presumed to be the straight jacket of actuality and actual chronology for the sake of a more complex narration of an actuality that is constructed as a virtuality replete with possibility. This enables revision of not only future plans but past facts. Even the irrevocable past is a complex of *could have beens* rather than just an unchanging, explicit fact. The revisionist function of the tenses and aspects makes the wisdom of natural language manifest, and, for that matter the wisdom of fiction—told so often in the tense of that which is supposed to be irrevocable. For fiction makes a virtue of actuality's virtuality.

The much touted thing about history is its actuality, but the thing about human meaning—both thought and communicated—that emerged from phylogenetic and cultural history, is its capacity for generating an actual world that is understood in terms of its possibilities. Hegel intimated this with his view that actuality is richer than possibility because it includes possibility (1830, p.207, #143). What meaning grasps is indeterminate enough, so that if it falls apart in our hands we still have threads of accessibility to other meanings, other worlds, other chronologies, other actualities. The actuality that meaning grasps is conveniently preserved, for all its actuality, as something open and indeterminate. A meaning is always a matter of where it leads, of its possible consequences and not of just where or when it is at. The present, as the world, is present as meaning, and so it is present as its future possibility as well as its historically bequeathed circumstances. As far as meaning is concerned, presence is always replete with non presence. No wonder *actuality* and *presence* have been so bewitching for philosophical consciousness, and ripe for deconstruction. Yet the deconstruction has not always revealed the excess of functionality that derives from the natural, unconscious cunning of the semantics of presence. It is the indeterminacy of meaning that is its most practical feature. It is to the extent that meaning enables what we call fiction that it has power to reduce and grasp actual complexity—whether the complexity of psyche, or society or of their environments. Part of the power of that reduction is that it enables its dissolution, if need be. It is not reduction closed once and for all.

Fiction—that subsystem of communicative genres—makes the indeterminacy of actuality absolute. It is not just a mere entertainment or a clever non functional exercise of communicative skills. If it had ever been merely that then the subsequent history of cultural functions or meanings and their selection has left that far behind. Fiction's device is meaning's device: ancient, and with various biological, psychic and social functions, and with more social functions coming and to come, almost daily.

It is only because we think of function in pinched, mean spirited and determinate ways that firstly, we treat art and fiction as non functional—trivialising both art and function at once—and secondly, we treat functionalist analysis of fiction as beneath fiction's aesthetic dignity. The critique of functionalist reason was not functionalist enough; unwisely, it imagined it was to reject function absolutely. Both vulgar functionalist reason and its vulgar, absolute critique are dazzled by the most extraordinary functions—like those of meaning—which they then have to treat as

more than merely functional. The question of disinterestedness in aesthetics is mired in this vulgar conception of function: disinterestedness is anything but the rejection of interest. As Adorno said: “In his purposeless activity the child, by a subterfuge, sides with use-value against exchange value. Just because he deprives the things with which he plays of their mediated usefulness, he seeks to rescue in them what is benign towards humans...The unreality of games gives notice that reality is not yet real.” (1951, p.228). Play is the transformation of function, and thereby serves function.

32. *Die Geschichte and priority.*

The layering of states and events piled one on top of the other in time is a typical narrative conceptualisation of history. It is no wonder that geologists like Hutton and Lyell, whose rock formations could be read like narrative texts, provided access to the deep time of biological history. But all things may be read as more or less obscure records of their history. All things are what Bakhtin called *chronotopes*. In its most straight forward form narrative compounds the description of events and states along the temporal string of its text. The temporal shape of history and of its straight forward narration are alike: narrative representations are events themselves. Or rather, as far as intentional consciousness is concerned, each—the representing and the represented—is a compound of events. As description of event follows description of event, the explanatory knowledge of the narrative argument is as much a condition of watching or reading as it is of watching or experiencing the narrated events. No wonder *history* refers to both events and their telling. *Description* rather than *explanation* might be a better term for the general argument form of narrative texts. So called *narrative explanation* might not be explanatory at all. A typical narrative can avoid the word *because* and so, as part of watching or reading, require rather than provide explanation.

Yet even without any use of *because*, narrative still argues by virtue of the chronological order of events; and, unless otherwise specified, the chronological order is specified by the order of narrative presentation. The interpretation of a plot consists, firstly, in placing the narrated events into their chronological order. There would be worse ways to model a chronology than as a *partially ordered* set of states of affairs wherein each state is related to a subsequent state or states according to acts and events happening to things and thereby producing new states of affairs. The chronological relation so defined would be *reflexive* insofar as each state is related to itself by the event of *obtaining*; *transitive* insofar as when one event follows another and the chronology moves from an initial state to a outcome via an intermediate state then the single sequence of events relates the initial to the outcome state by compounding the successive events; and *antisymmetric* insofar as we cannot wind back the clock with an event that changes an outcome back into the initial state that preceded it. Priority is so important in this temporally asymmetrical world that even deductive logic and metaphysical thought have deigned to take the term from narrative and apply it to their own sublime endeavours: the *a priori* principles of first philosophy are a matter of narrative’s *priority* sublimed, detemporalised and hypostatised.

Mention two events and the first relation reckoned is their chronological order. Read the start of *Ulysses*.

Stately, plump Buck Mulligan came from the stairhead, bearing a bowl of lather on which a mirror lay crossed. A yellow dressing-gown, ungirdled, was

sustained gently behind him by the mild morning air. He held the bowl aloft and intoned:

– *Introibo ad altare Dei.*

There are three sentences here. The first represents a compound of two simultaneous events—the *coming* and the *bearing*. The second represents a state of affairs which obtains during the compound event of the first sentence. The third—the compound of *holding* the bowl aloft and *intoning* the line from the mass—represents an event that unambiguously follows the earlier events of *coming* and *bearing*, while the state of the dressing gown may still obtain. And so we read on effortlessly representing these temporal relations. The sequence of the events here is indicated primarily by the order of their narration, which it matches.

The first event in a chronological order, even if it is not cited as a cause, may still be a datum of a more or less accessible totality of causation; and it is never an effect of what follows it. Causation does not work backwards in time. The fallacy, *post hoc ergo propter hoc*, seems almost a synthetic *a priori* of narrative because what is not prior is not a cause. Barthes (p.94) rightly noted that narrative is almost the systematic application of this fallacy. Though it is more correct and more cognitively powerful to say *because of this, it follows that*, it may not be that the fallacious principle is inadequate for an organism's processing of information, especially if it is picking out information about an event that is empirically close to the effect in the causal totality of its environment. Empirical proximity combined with temporal priority is a good rough guide to causal relevance. Perceiving and calculating priority is a matter of representing a crucial empirical relation whose misrepresentation is likely to be more disastrous than occasionally overestimating the precise weight of that prior event in the causal totality. Humans do the latter all the time, especially in their vain or vindictive attributions of historical agency. Was the Whitlam government the cause or the effect of social change in Australia? Was what is now called "Marx" the cause or the effect of Stalinism? Perhaps it is no wonder then that humans are so susceptible to this fallacy; they reify it anyway.

33. *Because.*

Narrative argument by way of representing relations of temporal priority is one thing. To say that one thing happens *because* of something else is another. Priority is only a necessary condition of cause, not a sufficient one—or that, at least, is how we usually understand the use of the word *because*. A *because* argument is one that language is naturally designed to express, whereas in screen and drama it is the kind of argument that has to be inferred from the plot and chronological priority.

But just what kind of argument is a *because* argument? What does it mean to say things like "The Second World War happened because the Nazis were appeased after the Czech invasion," or "The US won the Cold War because they hawkishly opposed Soviet communism." Whether these dubious clichés of pop historicism are true or false is another question. As arguments rather than propositions we would be better considering their validity. But how valid are they, and how do we judge their validity? Beloved of lawyers, historians, propagandists, blamers and Jeremiahs, explicit causal argument of the form " ψ because ϕ " is a bit of a logical can of worms. Behind what seems explicit there is a lot left unsaid. And in particular, the once only character of the events that historical science must examine means that we can't repeat observations; we can't run history again. But we talk as if we could, or would: "If only the Nazis hadn't been appeased."

So when someone says “WWII happened because the Nazis were appeased.” they seem to mean something like “The British appeased the Nazis; and the French appeased the Nazis; and the Soviet Union signed a non aggression pact with the Nazis; and the US pursued an isolationist foreign policy; and the Nazis built up their arms; and the Nazis believed in their Aryan superiority; and the Nazis thought they could get away with invading Poland; etc. Therefore WWII happened. A lot goes unsaid in a *because* argument. But just what goes unsaid? And how strong is an argument that purports to give explicit reasons while actually withholding most of its premise?

This problem of so much usually going unsaid in causal arguments has been appreciated by the cunning empirical scientific method. Situations of scientific causation have to be carefully defined by specifying precisely what is causally, or at least predictively, relevant, and by not allowing the predictive situation to include unaccounted or unaccountable predictive phenomena. For situations of scientific causation “almost everything in the universe shall be irrelevant (Von Foerster, 1981, p197).” This requirement has led to reduced, operational definitions of specific causal or predictive events, that are judged to be neatly abstractable from the unwanted ramifications of any causal totality; and as a result of this process of specification, the definition of the predicted effect is methodologically reduced as well. Having a theoretically determined set of objects of research has its consequences in the social sphere: areas of research are reduced into definite, self differentiating scientific disciplines with a corresponding division of labour. This kind of process has led to powerfully predictive theories, but it has also led to theories that are intuitively unsatisfying because they fail to satisfy the curiosity that led to research in the first place; and often, especially in the ecological and social sciences, when reductive theories are applied in the practical or technological domain, they result in unexpected side effects because, in the rush to reduce the salient predictive phenomena in a particular area of research, the defined causes and effects are inadequate to their objects, because these objects cannot be so neatly abstracted from their causal totality as technocratic desire might wish.

The argument about appeasing Nazi aggression seems to imply some such counterfactual conditional as: *if the British hadn't appeased the Nazis, and all the other conditions remained the same, then WWII would—or might—not have happened.* In fact this is a pretty weak argument—the kind that usually only lurks behind some normative claim or some naive game theoretical strategy like “The British should not have appeased the Nazis after the Czech invasion.” And, in fact, people usually state this kind of argument as an example to justify their present decisions, as in “ Unless we defend South Vietnam against North Vietnam and the Viet Cong all the dominoes in SE Asia will fall.” Whether or not the argument about appeasing the Nazis was a strong one, it certainly cast its influence over strategic policy makers from WWII to Vietnam and beyond. So when someone uses a *because* argument, not only is there much that is implicit—just how much is another question—but they are not just talking about actuality, they are also talking about possibilities, about what might happen. The stated premise of a *because* argument has a special determining force. Again though, just how much force does any premise have?

In his book *Counterfactuals*, David Lewis (p.66) remarked on what he called an analogy between arguments of the form “ ψ because ϕ ” and counterfactual arguments of the form “If it were the case that ϕ , then it would be the case that ψ .” Both seem to be related to a kind of backing argument like the one about British

appeasement which cites several other conditions in its premise. That is, both are related to an argument of the form

$$\phi, \chi_1, \chi_2, \chi_3, \dots, \chi_n; \text{ therefore } \psi.$$

Lewis considered this analogy by discussing a disagreement over the relation of the *because* argument—or the counterfactual argument—to its supposed backing argument. Carl Hempel regarded “ ψ because ϕ ” as an elliptical (or enthymematic) presentation of the full backing argument with the other conditions, $\chi_1, \chi_2, \chi_3, \dots, \chi_n$, being left out but understood. Morton White took the *because* argument to mean that there exists some correct explanatory argument from ϕ and some other premises to ψ . Each is a metalinguistic account, with the former claiming that what is left out of the elliptical presentation is assumed to be mutually understood and so in some sense presented quasi explicitly. The latter claim is less specific: there is an explanatory argument but just what is left out and just who assumes it is left open. Who is to say what unspoken premises may be assumed as mutually understood, or whether they are enumerable?

The term *because* might signal an explicit argument, but in their own way *because* arguments involve as much inferential work going on backstage as screen and dramatic narratives demand. The schematic adaptation of language to a population of like minds was partly a way of cutting out all the mutually understood contextual information that does not need to be communicated, but this design can have other functions. It can be a way of deceiving another by telling a half truth and withholding relevant information, while perhaps even deceiving oneself into thinking one has not lied. And it can be a way of deliberately misunderstanding another in order to accuse them of lying or being wrong or whatever. These are handy communicative functions, especially for assigning blame to others or blamelessness to oneself.

Since my concern is with what goes unsaid, something should be said about human intentions, whether undisclosed or not. Aristotle’s distinction between *efficient* and *final* causes tends to get blurred in the hidden guts of *because* arguments, just as the heuristic devices of causal reason are hidden in our naturally selected brains. The strongest form of *because* arguments is that of efficient cause, in which causes precede their effects. The non reflexive, physical sciences purchase their predictive power by the methodological restriction of their field of study to relatively discrete and sufficient, efficient causes. The human sciences cannot so restrict their fields of research. Where human agents are the objects of research, science must become reflexive; that is, the scientific descriptions are themselves objects of the research, and they are objects that must be themselves treated as causal phenomena. Final causes are said to succeed their effects: the final cause of the Nazi invasion of Poland was the glorious extension of the Third Reich. Processes involving so called final causes are usually called *teleological*, and as we shall see (32.3 *Typology of narratives*) they are inherently reflexive and less predictable.

Final causes may be properly understood as efficient causes by expressing them as desires, wishes or intentions: the Nazis invaded Poland because they wanted to gloriously extend the power of the Third Reich. In the argument about WWII starting because the British appeased the Nazis, one proposition that I did not deem to be relevant (in the context of my philosophical example) was the one that blames the Nazis: the Nazis wanted to extend the power of the Third Reich by military means. This (one would have thought relevant) proposition is usually deemed irrelevant (in the argument given) in order to elliptically assert the relevance of the British’ final

cause: the extension of peace by non military means. (The premise about the Nazi's intentions may be deemed irrelevant, though only half sincerely, by virtue of the assumption that it is obvious and so its expression would be redundant.) The point of the argument about British appeasement has probably been that, after the Czech invasion, the non military securing of peace was a lost cause, and that the British government should have to or should have had to take responsibility for the invasion of Poland and the war that followed. In the context of scientific method—in those sciences that we used generally to call *physical* or more narrowly and disparagingly *mechanistic*, and in which rules observed in the past apply in the future (another norm of scientific method)—the reduction of causes and the reduction of effects usually produces explanations adequate to our purposes. In the context of human freedom, where intentions may elude empirical observation, and where descriptions of human behaviour reflexively enter into and so transform the behaviour of humans, the reductions of human causal reason produce only variably adequate results. Historical truth becomes patently a matter of the quality of this adequacy: it is a matter of adequacy to what or to whose intentions.

I think Hempel was right to say that *because* arguments may be regarded as elliptical presentations, but White reminds us that the backing argument is seldom if ever specified, perhaps because it is not practically or finitely or, indeed, truthfully specifiable. It is information that is lost in the reductions of causality. As regards the problem of a finite premise, it is worth noting that Kant, like a modern ecologist, ultimately relied on the idea of a causal totality: no matter how many strong, discrete and determining reasons may be stated, there remains something supplementary, so the horizon of this web-like totality is always receding before us. In an historical world, where massive contingency prevails, kingdoms can be lost for want of a single nail in a single horseshoe, and cyclones can devastate coastlines because of what some butterfly does on the other side of the world.

The word *because* not only explicitly signals an argument, in doing so it urges the general class of arguments to which it belongs, and so also invokes the kind of enthymematic information relevant to its argumentative gist. Narratives are typically a matter of *reading into*, and *because narratives*, to the extent that they urge their arguments, programmatically limit what may be relevantly read into them. Enthymematically understanding the gist of the argument also programmatically limits the precise determining force of the stated premise. By *programmatically* I mean that not only does the audience share knowledge of the unstated premise, it also shares programmatic knowledge about what kind of knowledge needs to be accessed if the claim of the *because* argument is to be made good. Unstated premises about remote butterflies or single nails are not among the most accessible, even though a military inquiry might eventually blame—for blame may well be its forensic purpose—the cavalry officer or his farrier. Mutual, enthymematic understanding implies that the more relevant the information the more likely it is to be programmatically accessible to both author and audience. (These matters are discussed in more detail below in the essay on *Narrative inference*.) As far as the determining force of the explicit premise goes, if the British hadn't appeased the Nazis then assessing whether or not WWII might still have happened the way it did involves running through the more or less accessible possibilities, where the accessibility of these possible outcomes is commonly called *plausibility*. This plausibility of possible outcomes is a matter of how inferentially accessible they are from a representation of the actual historical context minus the fact of British appeasement. In the hope that such inferences match the environment they refer to, this programmatic trail of inferential accessibility is determined by our shared

psychology and our shared cultural knowledge, including science. In this sense there are many causalities. The effectiveness of such inferences is an outcome of natural selection and cultural, scientific knowledge. Such inference is a psychological process—often heuristic rather than deductive—and not just a matter of logical implication.

These are not just matters of logical nicety. Humans make all sorts of inferences all the time, and are very good at doing it, even if they don't appreciate the precise working of the logic, and even if they are not always exactly logical or valid. Natural selection achieves adequacy if not necessity, and when the inferences are highly complex narrative ones that often need to be made quickly, a strictly necessary and logical deduction is likely to be well beyond practical possibility. Heuristics—and ideology—step in. So there may be disputes about *because arguments*, about the kind of argument they urge, and about what is relevant but unspoken information. When the paraplegic survivor of a cliff fall sues the local government for not signing and fencing the cliff, what the court does is make a determination about what the gist of the relevant narrative argument is. The competing gists of the plaintiff and the defendant differ in their attribution of the roles of agent and sufferer. (Litigious individualism of this kind is often self contradictory because it is anti individual as far as responsibility goes.) The argument that the plaintiff suffered because the obvious and obviously dangerous cliff had not been fenced and signed is not one whose premise has a particularly strong determining force. But in cases of dispute what is under question is usually the ideological credentials of the gist; and if the legal and social context required signs and fences then the litigant should be successful. What does have a special determining force in such cases is the juridical requirement of making a causal determination, willy nilly.

Some gists, in the context of our cultural and natural environment, have greater force than others, and as such they form the cognitive basis of purposeful or goal oriented actions. Any cook knows that the souffle rises because the egg whites are beaten and folded into the roux; and that a souffle does not rise twice. They also know or they had better find out, precisely, the other unstated premises of the narrative argument—that is, the rest of the souffle recipe—even if they can't possibly take every little detail in the causal totality into account. They know that if the egg whites are not beaten then, without divine intervention, the souffle won't rise and they will lose if sued by a diner whose life depended on proper, fluffy souffle.

34. Historical explanation and understanding.

Historical explanation is a matter of showing how something could have turned out the way it did. The understanding required to frame such an explanation is a matter of understanding how things might have happened otherwise: we have to understand events in terms of their contingency. Despite the irrevocability of the past, we can usually only say, in detail, what might have happened, and how it could have happened otherwise and not precisely how it did happen. Often in historiography it is not just explanations that are problematic but descriptions as well. And if descriptions put a certain slant on the records then the records—the data—are problematic too. The arguments of historical explanation typify a certain transcendental inadequacy of representations as such: nothing is quite the same as it is represented to be.

To explain something historically is to argue by proposing a premise comprising a set of propositions representing actual states and events and a set of likely states and events (whose truth is problematic and perhaps impossible to confirm), such that those events and states are causally related to each other and to

their end or outcome. So historical explanation is an account of ends, following from a premise of possibilities or plausibilities as well as of actual events and circumstances. We need such arguments in order to live as teleological creatures, to design and execute our ends. These narratives, whether used in history or fiction, usually fall short of strong explanation; as Geoffrey Hawthorn (1991. p.157) has said “possibilities increase under explanation as they also decrease.” Their strength or validity lies in showing how things might have turned out, without urging strong explanatory links. Typically, strong explanatory arguments appear as sub-routines or subplots that are only part of the colligation of the entire story. For the most part though, this kind of narrative might just tell about events or states while leaving varying amounts of the interpretation or explanation or argument up to the intellectual labour of the audience.

History makes its attempt at explanation or at describing whatever is universal in the unfolding of events, but it may only do so by way of the universal of *logical accessibility* from actual events and situations. Aristotle (*Poetics*, 1451b) said that poetry was more universal than history because it tells what might happen rather than what did happen. However, history itself has to understand what might happen otherwise, anyway. The historian’s *what might happen* is about what might happen given something in particular. As Hawthorn (p.164-5) put it, “the departure from the actual present should not require us to unwind the past or appropriate the future,” and “the departure from the actual present should not require us to alter so much else in the present itself as to make it quite a different place.” These are principles of historical reason; they involve relevance conditions that define the kinds of logically accessible worlds that we should consider earlier rather than later in analysing historical experience—what I have already called the programmatically limited scope of unstated premises. The kinds of logically accessible worlds that they direct our attention to are the kinds we should represent if we want our narrative to be adequate to our environment. Hawthorn says (p.185) that he is merely taking common sense seriously. It seems to me that, in saying this, he has come close to appreciating that such principles of historical reason are actually embodied in human conceptual processing—for good evolutionary reasons. Of course, historical explanation or understanding needs to take into account the contingencies of culturally evolved historical and political theory; for such information insinuates itself into the judgements of historical players and their teleological actions, even if there is not much of a predictive role for strong explanations or theories of history.

So to speak of a universal of *logical accessibility* is merely to speak of the particular way all humans are more or less designed to understand and explain historical processes in a temporalised world. It is merely the quasi universal of human common sense. But it is a limited common sense. There is no strict line between the weak universality of historical explanation and the contingency of particular events. The distinction is, to use David Lewis’s phrase, “variably strict”, albeit variably strict in a principled or programmatic way. Humans just have to make their own way through their environments based on what narratives they can tell. Beckett’s paradoxical categorical imperative says it all: “I can’t go on. I must go on”. We just have to narrate as best we can.

Historical argument eventually cedes so much of its validity to the validity or truth of propositions about particular events that, in rescuing what validity it can, it ends up scarcely arguing at all. It falls back on the order of events. Fiction, in its comic form, and especially in its parody of genres, at least has the option of presenting an explanatory argument if only to make its audience laugh at it.

35. Foresight and hindsight

I leave to the various futures (not to all) my garden of forking paths.
(Jorge Luis Borges, *The Garden of Forking Paths*.)

35.1 Foresight and hindsight; or the critique of teleological reason.

We find ourselves in a world in which time is asymmetrical. The past and the future are subject to different narrative considerations and require different kinds of narrative argument: hindsight and foresight. To pass from the recording of particular events and sequences of events to the assertion that one type of event happens because of (or regularly follows) another type of event is to make a claim for the strength of a more general determining argument. It is also to pass from narratives that are adequate to telling what has happened to narratives of prediction. These predictive narratives of the future are the conceptual basis of planning those sequences we call *courses of action* in this time queered universe. Because the past is typically marked by regular sequences and courses of action, the predictive narratives are themselves elements in our narratives of hindsight, whose own functions seem to include the recording of just how time-queered the world really is. Even prediction may be applied to the past; it can tell us what might have happened even if we don't know what did happen.

It is as creatures designed for teleological judgement that humans are quite skilled historians of the future. We have an evolved ability to formulate and remember schematic, generalised sequences, including causal narratives, that serve as the procedural premises in planned courses of action. It is our way of colonising the future according to whatever regularities we may reckon on happening there. As social animals we even institute and replicate cultural norms that regulate the flow of future events, making it conformable to the memories of every one of us according to the common parameter we call *time*.

The *real time* of clocks and calendars is a cultural phenomenon—reified time. Though we use some reliable natural sequence, it is still a culturally reproduced standard. The crowing of cocks, and sunrise and sunset being different the world over, a more universal standard has been selected—one that blandly subdivides the future to the count of some common meter, preformatting the reality of job time, recreation time or wasted time, progress or providence, crisis, catastrophe or dilapidation, before we live it.

Such is our inordinate desire to know the future—or as much of it as possible—that our representations of it spill over beyond all feasibility of description into not only individual but culturally reproduced delusions. Thus we beguile ourselves with the inauspiciousness of prophecy, with belief in a hereafter, with news commentary that degenerates from reflection on hindsight to idle, dazzled foresight, and with advertisements for a future suspiciously like the latest commodities.

Narrative arguments that plot goal directed sequences into the future may be expressed in various ways. We may say

If I want A to happen then I should do B.

in which the cause, *wanting A*, precedes its effect, *doing B*, while in turn, *doing B* would precede and be a cause of A. We may also use a counterfactual conditional:

If I weren't to do B then A would not happen.

Neither of these formulations is adequate to an important problem for narrative descriptions: uncertainty. Better to say

If I weren't to do B then A would be unlikely to happen.

The importance of uncertainty in narrative descriptions is hardly surprising; things have a habit of turning out somewhat unexpectedly. Our goal directed plans have to be informed enough to deal with a world that conforms to the melancholic second law of thermodynamics. In the context of narrative descriptions, uncertainty, information and entropy amount to the same thing, if we use these terms in their usual mathematical senses. The traditional philosophical term for the uncertainty of narrative connections is *contingency*: whatever is contingent could happen otherwise.

Plans have to deal with uncertainty, and to illustrate how, it is intuitively useful to use counterfactual conditionals, firstly, because in counterfactual conditionals the premise is expressed as contrary to fact, and in plans of action the action has not yet happened and so not yet a fact. Thus:

If I were to do B then A would be more likely to happen.

Secondly, counterfactuals enable us to use David Lewis's notorious, but intuitively useful, idea of *possible worlds*. The premise *If one were to do such and such* refers to deeds done in one of many future possible worlds. A choux pastry recipe says

If one were to mix boiling water and butter, and then dump in a certain amount of flour and cook a kind of pudding, etc, then one would produce a choux pastry.

By adding more and more propositions to the premise, such as *and then mix whole eggs into the pudding one at a time*, one places more and more explicit conditions on what kinds of possible worlds one is dealing with, so one narrows down these possible worlds to those in which choux pastry becomes more and more likely and less and less uncertain. The plots of courses of action limit the possibilities of what can go wrong. Typically they employ contingency plans or subroutines that get the procedure back on track if something does go wrong. If I were to follow a recipe for choux pastry, then all things in that possible-choux-preparation-world being as I would expect them to be, based upon my experience in the actual world up until then, I would get my cream puffs or profiteroles.

As in causal arguments the unstated expectations are unstated assumptions of the premise. They include expectations that a comet is unlikely to collide with the Earth, that a nuclear missile attack is unlikely to happen while the oven is being heated, and that I am unlikely to be visited by a serial killer just when I start to mix in the eggs or pipe out the pastry for baking. A recipe is a partially ordered set of causal arguments (some are taken together simultaneously) which, barring contingencies, is a strong narrative argument for its outcome. Typical of courses of action, it is a good gist for a teleological narrative of the future.

Such gists are good for interpreting past events too. They help one to reason from the outcome back to unexpected but retrospectively relevant conditions. If I am served a profiterole I infer that it is the outcome of a history in which someone has followed the choux pastry recipe. But a recipe hardly makes a good story. The interesting story lies in the extra events of the premise, in the particular incidents

rather than in the universal procedure. So it lies in how the cook dealt with the arrival of the serial killer, and whether the end—the finished profiterole—indicates that she had to spoon rather than pipe the pastry because she had to keep the serial killer at bay with a carving knife in one hand, while spooning with the other. What Northrop Frye (1957, p.175) noted as the commonly comical role of cooks in narrative art stems, in part, from the would be sublime order of their mysterious narratives, made ridiculous in the light of the world's contingencies. Divisions of labour and systems of cultural knowledge correspond to divisions in the kinds of narrative knowledge. The scientist-as-nerd is often a bit like Frye's cook. Stereotypically, the nerd's knowledge is that of inflexible narrative foresight rather than the humanly contingent wisdom of hindsight.

In narratives of hindsight the plots may make weaker claims for their validity. They urge their arguments less emphatically, while basing their claims about the truth of their descriptions on the brute irrevocability of the past. As arguments, they may amount to little more than a chronological conjunction of events, relying on the force of independent propositions rather than on causal argument consisting of propositions that are conditional upon one another. Accordingly, determined ends seem to be much less important. By virtue of time's asymmetry, there are more possible worlds in the future—with its garden of forking paths—than there are possible worlds for the past—which is more strongly limited by the present. So the strength of narratives of hindsight lies more in the purported irrevocability of the past than in the determining force of narrative argument, even though courses of action are important components in historical plots, and even though we use causal and teleological explanations in constructing narratives of past events.

Stories of hindsight seem to exhibit the kind of knowledge that typifies narrative art. They represent a loosening or abandoning of teleological rigour. They allow scepticism of teleology free rein, increasing uncertainty and thereby deconstructing, often comically, teleological intentions, if only because that is what the world does. Yet even in doing so they still honour teleology by not underestimating its obstacles. They record the obstacles, and as human representations of time and events, they never really cease to look towards their ends. Their apparent negation of teleology is not merely abstract and absolute because it may always be reappropriated for the sake of more general teleological intentions. The wisdom of hindsight has its teleological function in foresight.

Stories of the past still look towards their ends because therein lies their meaning. To wonder about how we know the end of a story is to wonder about what the story means. In historical narratives, but especially in narrative art, this wonder is not just a matter of the question of audience interpretation, it is a question that is internal to a work's meaning. Like all art, narrative art asks what art is. This is not just a problem of aesthetic theory. As narrative art it asks what its end is and when it is finished.

35.2. *Meaning: ends and teleology.*

The logical structure of descriptions arises from the logical structure of movements. (Von Foerster, p.262)

To tell a story means to tell what happens as the outcome of earlier events. And what we typically call the meaning of something is its consequence (see Grice, 1989, p.292). The end of a story, its intention, meaning, design, function, or reason—all these have a similar meaning and are modelled on teleology. When we use the word *meaning* to mean a consequence—logical, semantic or causal—it seems

in each case that we model its meaning according to a narrative that looks to ends. Following Brentano, we speak of intentional consciousness, but we could just as well speak of designing, semantic or teleological consciousness: consciousness that formulates and pursues its own ends. Meaning is a shifting, self-displacing thing; so habitually we think the meaning of something lies elsewhere, outside of itself. Meaning is not still but the unfolding of a journey, whether it is a journey to another place or another mind. Perhaps this apparently metaphorical relation indicates that in the evolution of human meaning there is a relation of these functions of meaning and movement.

The conjunction *then* is used to introduce consequential sentences: logical implications; inferential outcomes temporally computed; temporally successive events (in its simplest form *then* is like *and* in the dimension of time); causal consequences or effects; and even, if we include the old term *thence*, spatial relations understood in terms of the temporal relations of a journey (*thence* is like the *and* of a journey). Logic has an affinity with the processing of spatial relations, as the term *logical space* suggests: in particular, the principle of non contradiction is very like the empirical principle that two things, *A* and something else that is *not A*, cannot occupy the same place at once. Another way of thinking of precursors for logic—one that is perhaps more pertinent to the history of narrative cognition—is to think of *paths* rather than *places*. Like *states* and *events*, *paths* and *places* seem to be basic conceptual categories for human language and cognition, each being typically referred to by the syntactic constituent called a prepositional phrase, such as *to the lighthouse* (*path*) or *in the lighthouse* (*place*) (Jackendoff, 1993, p.34). In the case of paths, the principle of non contradiction is very like the teleological principle that an organism cannot approach and withdraw from the same thing at the same time (Von Foerster, p.268). Narrative represents the spatial and temporal relations between things. One of its *ur*-forms is the journey through time and space. Meaning seems to have an historical affinity to the processing of empirical phenomena according to their spatial and temporal relations for an organism. In the journey, it is to some end that the protagonist says *yes*.

The habit of understanding meaning in terms of consequence is one whose delusory potential has long worried philosophers. And I am not only thinking of that grand illusion that there is a meaning of life in the form of a hereafter. Since the meaning of something is understood as lying in something else, questions of meaning or value or function lead to a regression which, from the first step, seems paradoxically to deny what it had started with. Thus arguments of justification, giving reasons, apologies and excuses undermine what they purport to be justifying by appealing to something else. In political debate, persuasion that makes its appeal in terms of the values of one's adversaries can quite often blind the proponent to the value of what is being advocated. The critique of functionalist reason—in Kant or Bataille or Adorno, say—is the critique of the subverted cunning of meaning. At least since Aristotle, apologies for tragedy have appealed to its cathartic function. In one step they end up reducing it to a good purge and declaring that this is what makes tragedy worthwhile. Meaning's movement to something else, its constitutive restlessness, is a cunning design of and for human psyche in an ambiguous social environment, but it is precisely this restlessness that is susceptible to appropriation by non psychic, social systemic functions, in which ends and means are inverted. Consciousness ends up formulating and pursuing alienated, heteronomous ends. The critique of functionalist reason does not teach us to avoid contagion by the delusion of ends or the by sins of functional reason as such. It opposes the puritanical reduction and alienation of function and the deliberate denial of its ambiguity and multiplicity.

It would be wrong to diminish the meaning of ends in narrative. As Aristotle thought (*Poetics*, 1450a) the end is the most important thing of all. Though the old sceptical, inquiring mind might say that ends are arbitrary or subjective, or that there is good reason to be suspicious of teleological thought and its misapplications, such remarks are only preparatory to wondering and inquiring about the meaning of ends. Raúl Ruiz has put the wonder nicely, confiding that one reason he wrote *Poetics of Cinema* was to find how a movie finishes “if the word *end* is not indicated.” (p.58) We are teleological creatures, always trying to shape our ends and ourselves according to the ends we design for ourselves, and according to our interpretation of the ends of worldly events, and the ends or meaning of others’ actions.

The relation of narrative meaning to ends and the idea of a meaning as a *consequence* shapes our imagination of fiction. People are inclined to think that fiction is a kind of *as if* description. That is, a fiction is what follows from some assumed fictive situation. Stories, as Benjamin wrote (1955, p.) typically begin from some single remarkable circumstance. For example, a woman who has given up speech travels to a distant colony to marry. The only audible communication that she indulges in is music, and she takes her piano with her all the way to the colony. Every fiction begins with the condition that it is a fiction, and it begins chronologically with what might be called its *exposition*. The circumstance described above is the exposition of *The Piano*. Sometimes the exposition can seem like a kind of burden that authors have to fill in just to get the story going. A symptom of this might be a highly summary, diegetic prose style, which, of course, like any exposition, can be turned to advantage in the hands of a good narrative artist. But the sense of burden stems from the orientation of the meaning of a fiction to what follows. The semantic weight of a fiction is not in the such and such of the expository *if such and such*, but in the so and so of the *then so and so*. This consequentiality, with its distance from the hypothetical, has been used as part of fiction’s illusion—its virtual reality or, in the case of diegetic prose, its virtual truth. It is also a kind of substitute satisfaction of the impossible desire in the quest for meaning: its dreamed of completion and perfection. In saying of itself *this is the meaning of our exposition or premise*, fiction suggests *this is the meaning of meaning as such*. Or, at least, this is the magic that it gets invested with.

Of course the *then* of fiction still has to be told, and that telling still has to mean something itself. And that meaning is still something else because meaning is always still something else. As in so many ways of looking at it, and as in so many of the ways that it is used and means, fiction makes a virtue of this necessary *something else* of meaning.

35.3 Typology of narratives.

The gist of a narrative—its summary form—is typified by the narrative’s attitude towards its end. For human abstraction, this is the handiest and readiest reduction; in a ceaselessly and asymmetrically temporalised world, the reduction of the world to something that ends is the epitome of reductions. Aristotle saw plots in which ends happened accidentally or automatically as being deficient for narrative art (*Poetics* 1452a). For him, the only wonderful accidents were those whose ends seemed to be shaped by some purpose, as when the statue of Mitys of Argos fell and killed the very man who had caused Mitys’s own death. Aristotle recognised that humans like a story whose end is shaped by some design, that is, whose end is somehow *meant* and whose meaning lies in its end. As well as unmeant, accidental ends, other kinds of relations of narrative events to their ends may be used as the basis of a typology of narrative kinds.

A typology of narratives is of little use if it just arbitrarily divides the firmament of narratives for the convenience of expository, educational or managerial purposes. Though the following division need make no claim to being exhaustive; it does attempt to pick out some natural kinds. The operative concerns that give rise to the different kinds depend, firstly, on the asymmetry of time. Secondly, a narrative is not just some sequence of events in some observerless, objective universe. It is a description or representation, and that implies a describing or narrating subject or subjects. There is no such thing as an observerless objectivity. Whatever goes by the name of objectivity is objectivity for a subject, no matter how much the cunning of subjective reason tries to hide from itself in its descriptions, and no matter how our descriptions sneak up on their objects in order to be adequate to the idea of the *thing in itself*. This typology is thus based on distinctions generated by and for narrators in their dealings with the problem of the asymmetry of time.

This asymmetry suggests a primary division on the basis of the observer's temporal perspective: *hindsight* and *foresight*. Since the asymmetry is characterised by a past of limited possibility and a future of increasing possibility, the referent of hindsight has to be adequate to what is particular, and that of foresight or prediction to what is general. Hindsight, just because it is limited by historical irrevocability and is free to take advantage of its surfeit of detail, can present complex, seemingly random sequences of fascinatingly uncertain outcome. With its mortgage on particularity it is the canonical form of narrative when it comes to historiography and art. Foresight can only dream of the complexity of particularity. Its adequacy must be general to many possibilities, and its consequently schematic, reductive form suggests its normal typification as theory rather than narrative.

This division between narratives of hindsight and foresight has some relation to the distinction between the two interanimating semantic functions of narrative argument: *description* and *explanation*. Even though these two kinds of argument are not exclusive—descriptions may well be read as explanations of sorts, and *vice versa*—descriptions tell *what* happens and explanations tell *why* it happens. As it turns out, the general, explanatory narratives of foresight are typically among the elements used to construct the particular, descriptive narratives of hindsight. The particularity and complexity of hindsight is constructed as a complex composite of descriptive and explanatory narratives.

Aristotle suggested a typology of explanatory narratives when he said that there are four kinds of reasons *why* something happens. He distinguished these four kinds of causes according to how they generated their outcomes—whether by virtue of their *matter*, their *form*, their being *movers*, or their being *for the sake of an end*. “It is the business of the physicist,” he said, “to know about them all, and if he refers his problems back to all of them, he will assign a ‘why’ in the way proper to his science (*Physics* 198a).” This typology appears arbitrary to the extent that it reflects its historically specific context in the history of science. The last two are often referred to as *efficient* and *final* causes. Modern, non-reflexive science has been characterised by the relentless reduction of its explanations to those involving efficient causes, and by a corresponding suspicion of teleological explanations involving final causes. Indeed in its properly instrumental form, non reflexive science is more concerned with predictive argument rather than with the explanatory metaphysics of causes. However, the sciences of organisms have need of teleological narratives, and at the very least demand explanation of teleological processes.

Four kinds of explanatory narrative that suggest themselves, and that demand consideration as both explanatory types and as predictive, are those I shall designate as *accidental*, *teleomatic* (or causal), *teleonomic* (or evolutionary), and *teleological*

(or goal directed). This typology follows precedents in biological literature. (See, for example, Ernst Mayr in Plotkin (1982, pp. 17-38), Francisco Varela in Zeleny (1981, pp. 36-48) and George Williams (1966)). It marks a return of the sciences, at long last, to something very like the Aristotelean typology of causes. There is also some correspondence with those seemingly arbitrary *codes* that Roland Barthes used—with some ironic naivete—in *S/Z*, his fascinating though often pilloried analysis of Balzac's *Sarrazine*. Barthes's irony actually says something like “these are more or less the received wisdom of the western typology of narrative codes, and, though they seem to be somewhat arbitrary, I shall use them as I see fit, because, after all, narratives seem to use them as they see fit.”

As listed, the types suggest a usual sequence of analysis that proceeds, somewhat arbitrarily, from the simplest and the least powerfully predictive to the most sophisticated—or sophisticated—form. In fact, this order is an historical order, but it is an historical order as represented by and for the teleological purposes of human and social autopoiesis. Since narratives are for subjects whose ultimate objects are themselves, and since, therefore, the proper concern is with a biological or operational approach to a narrative typology—an approach that considers the viewpoint of organisms in the predicament of a changing environment—it is preferable to begin with what has been traditionally and variously considered as the most developmentally advanced, conceptually sophisticated, and metaphysically bogus type of narrative: *teleology*. When considered from the teleological perspective of an observing subject, the types of explanatory narrative listed no longer seem to be arbitrary.

Teleological narratives are those whereby subjects—or organisms or even self-generating systems—generate and maintain themselves in relation to a changing environment. Their ends are the organism's survival. They might also be called *autopoietic* narratives. Despite the antiteleological scepticism of eighteenth century science—arising infectiously from its critique of divine or providential teleology—Kant, to his credit, insisted on the importance of teleological conception. He did this even though he thought there was no objective basis for doing so, and that therefore teleology had to be treated as a kind of formality that was required to render “nature intelligible to us by an analogy to a subjective ground (1790, #61, p. 500).” He decided that it was as hopelessly, teleologically adept subjects that we just had to conceive certain natural phenomena teleologically. The *formality* that Kant felt he had to posit was the recursive form of self representation that characterises organisms. The objective basis that he felt the lack of was the impossible kind—that of an observerless objectivity, that of his own *noumenon* or *thing-in-itself*. What we describe teleologically is firstly and ultimately ourselves.

Not all organisms are capable of the same kind of teleological sophistication. For some the “description” and the performance of a teleological sequence may be one and the same, which is to say, the so called representation is actually an autopoietic behaviour. For others the representation of a course of action is part of a process of choosing from different possible courses of action. Of the former some may perform a course of action because they have been naturally selected to do so when they find themselves in a particular state, while others may perform it because the course of action has been selected by past experience, that is by the reinforcement of past success. Daniel Dennett (1995, pp. 375ff.) has referred to these as Darwinian and Skinnerian creatures, respectively. There is no need to speak of such creatures representing teleological sequences at all. Rather, they just behave in a predictable, autopoietic manner that has been selected for their own survival. Other

creatures—Dennett calls them Popperian because Karl Popper said that they “permit their hypotheses to die in their stead”—choose from among representations of different possibilities. They make a choice, depending upon their observations of their environment, from among predetermined behaviours—which still constitute a kind of Darwinian or Skinnerian memory—or they may be able to represent different courses of action according to their own ontogenetic memory of different experiences of similar courses of action. This is the kind of memory that we are intuitively familiar with from our experience of our own human remembering, memory in the human sense rather than the Darwinian or Skinnerian sense.

The point about teleological sequences or courses of action is that in order for an organism to reduce the uncertainty or the entropy of the outcome of its course of action—that is its immediate future—it has to have adequate information about its temporal environment. That information is not “out there” in the environment; rather it is associated with the organisms representation of its environment (and itself) and depends on how it can process that representation and generate inferences that inform its subsequent actions. An organism that can generate representations of past experience can thereby generate more useful inferences in the context of its representations of its current environment. Human remembering is one way of generating such representation. Human communication, itself a kind of external if fleeting memory, is another.

If I am an experienced cook, I can make a choux pastry from memory. If not, I can follow a recipe in someone else’s cook book. But if I have no experience and am only given some eggs, flour, butter and water, I am unlikely to get very far. However, if I am also given a saucepan, a spoon and a stovel, I am more likely to fluke a choux pastry, or perhaps re-invent the process. Tools involve telling oneself and others the teleological sequences that the tools embody or signify, and this enables us to generate better inferences about what to do in an environment, in this case an environment with eggs, flour, butter and water. Human teleological nous is thus uniquely informed by human memory, human communication and human technology, including significantly, technologies of communication and memory.

The various forms of biological teleology are historically related. The narrative type of this historical relation is *teleonomic*. By biological inheritance, human teleological nous incorporates, for various bodily processes, various of the other kinds of teleology that I have quickly sketched. A teleological narrative designs its end. It is almost as if causality overcomes its being bound by the asymmetry of time so that the end of a sequence of events is inherent in its cause—its so called *final cause*. One way—perhaps the only way—that nature can build up to producing such designing narratives is by way of a teleonomic narrative sequence whose end, though it is not predetermined or predesigned, nevertheless turns out to have a design, and eventually even a design for designing.

Natural selection is a *teleonomic* narrative. In a teleonomic process the normally teleological agency of selection is attributed to the environment rather than to the self referring replicators or to the organisms in that environment. We can think of this attribution as metaphorical if we like: it is as truthful as it is useful—which says something about the nature of metaphor. There is a sense in which teleonomic processes may be said to generate teleological ones, or that teleonomics are the origin of teleology. Assigning such priority though, is, in general, somewhat misleading. No doubt human teleological reason is an outcome of natural selection, but strictly speaking we are dealing with teleological and teleonomic *representations*, and in that case, because of their intuitive familiarity, teleological sequences were described long

before the culturally specific teleonomic descriptions of the biological and linguistic sciences were formulated. In addition, teleonomic processes seem to be contemporary with such primitive or proto-teleological processes as self replication—replication being what enables self reference in the first place; it is just that the different protagonists of teleological and teleonomic narratives, along with their different framing time scales, are at different orders of magnitude. Teleonomic time scales provide the historical stage for teleonomically elaborating the teleological nous of organisms. Teleological narrative and the ability of a subject to act teleologically can be explained by teleonomic narrative.

The descriptions of the reiterated elemental events of teleonomic sequences—copying, variation and selection—may themselves be distinguished according to narrative type. The copying that gives rise to biological evolution can become teleological—in the case of breeding technology; but in its primitive form it is *teleomatic* or causal; although, as I mentioned above, there is something special about self copying that makes it proto-teleological. Variation may be and, in biological history by and large has been, what we would describe as accidental: genetic mutation is treated in terms of probability. As genetic engineering improves, variation may be said to move into the realm of teleological descriptions as well. Selection may be described teleologically (a genetic engineer selects a gene or a plant breeder selects a genotype); or it may be described by a teleological metaphor (an environment selects a phenotype); or it may be described as a teleomatic process whose hypercomplex causal description defies our powers of observation and representation, so we resort to a probabilistic description of what, by virtue of their causal hypercomplexity, we would call accidents.

Returning to teleology, the representation of, and communication about, past experience is neither necessary nor sufficient for teleological nous. What is important is the predetermination of ends within a context, and in the case of humans this is epitomised by prediction in a context. It is not just the representation of past experience but the inference of regular sequence from that past experience that matters. If we want our predictions to die in our stead, it is important to be able to predict sequences of states and events in order to reduce the uncertainty about what kind of event is likely to follow another kind of event, such as a deliberate action. It is worth remarking that the problem of remembering past experience and that of finding regularity in experienced sequences of events are interanimating. We can remember a past experience if we can remember the general sequence that can generate the particular sequence. Hence the familiar observation—confirmed in the studies described in Frederic Bartlett's *Remembering* (1932)—that people construct remembered sequences of events according to what should or could have happened, as much as they do according to what actually happened.

The question for human teleology is *what kinds of regularity characterise the different kinds of observed sequences or what kinds of sequences are there*. This, however, is the very question that this typology of narratives has already been considering. Another way of putting this is in terms of what kind of memory or what kind of induction is needed to learn these regularities. As it turns out, the requirements of learning symbols and of learning indices correspond to the requirements of teleological and teleomatic representation respectively. As is only to be expected in a naturalised epistemology, any natural history of knowledge will encounter itself as a natural historical object. Besides, the self reference of teleological narrators made this inevitable from the start. So while emphasising the epistemological primacy of teleological narratives, it is worth remarking just how pervasively its teleological function permeates and determines human narrativity. It is

also worth noting that, even though there may be such a species as “teleology-as-such”, the particular reference here is to human teleology, which is specifically determined by its evolved, embodied circumstances. Yet even what I call human teleology changes. Terms like *fate*, *fortune*, *uncertainty*, *risk*, *trust*, *confidence* and *contingency*, terms that are so important for thinking about courses of action, have their own conceptual life and take on different meanings in the social life of modernity as opposed to traditional societies. Modernity’s own characteristic reflexivity generates characteristic forms of teleology, teleology epitomising, of course, reflexive narrative. The sociology of teleological narratives would, however, demand another volume.

Human actions are typically directed towards ends. So the conceptual category of *the act* or *deed* (which refers to a subset of the category of *events*) has the conceptual form it does because it has been selected in an environment that exerts a selection pressure for operational primitives that are teleologically differentiated. Even the conceptual category of the *event*, by means of which we refer to both acts and to other events in general, including those that lack an agent, is a natural kind that registers in its design its evolved propensity for teleological purposes. The verbal distinction between continuation and completion of events or acts is a distinction based on the vital teleological injunction to end, or else, not to end yet. Any event, like an Aristotelian plot, has a beginning, middle and end; and the exception of the continuing process only proves the rule.

We can and do extend teleological descriptions to anything in our environment that, like us, is a generator of teleological sequences. We follow and predict the courses of action of other animals as narratives of, say, *wanting*, *hunting*, *catching*, and *eating*, by an anthropomorphism whose evolutionary persistence is older than the *anthropos* we name it after. Our teleological prediction is adequate in such tasks because it was naturally selected to be. In the case of teleological projection onto other organisms, natural selection may well have the teleological self representations of an organism as a model for that organism’s teleological description of another organism, any subsequent selection being dependent on the model’s adequacy. Nowhere is this more biologically remarkable or philosophically significant than in the human representation of other or fellow humans, in which case it underlies human communication. We are so apt to teleologise other things such as organisms that, as I said, in the case of the reiterated events of evolution, we attribute the literally teleological action of *selection* to the *other* of a hypercomplex environment. This is not so different to the kind of attribution made in the traditional meaning of the term *teleology*, in which teleological design or intention was ascribed to fate, destiny or divine providence. Teleology in this sense was a case of autopoiesis ascribed to the macrocosm, and it was imagined in the image of human teleology, only omnipotent.

Clearly we are able to distinguish the regularity of a sequence even though we may be unable to say *why* it is regular or what its purpose or end is. By ascribing to a sequence what Aristotle called a final cause—that is, its purpose or end for some agent—we are able to reduce its uncertainty and characterise the sequence in a more general way than if we were just to remember the particular sequence or even the kind of sequence. However regular sequences are not always teleological.

The next type of narrative that suggests itself is one that describes regular but non-teleological sequences. The question then is why any regular, non teleological sequence happens the way it does rather than otherwise. There is either a reason that answers this question for a particular sequence or kind of sequence, or there isn’t. If there is, we call that reason *a cause*—or an *efficient cause* in Aristotle’s terms—and it temporally precedes its effect. Even a *final cause*, as was pointed out above (See 30.

Because.) is actually, in its form as an act of intention, brought to bear before its end or effect. We can interchange efficient and final causes according to what use we are making of them in our struggle with the asymmetry of time. This manner of speaking about reasons or causes—whether efficient or final—has culturally evolved under the relatively constant psychic and social selection pressure for more general *descriptions* of narrative processes; an *explanation*—what we have come to call a reason or cause—provides a method of generating such general *descriptions*. In the case of non-teleological sequences we use causal or *teleomatic* narratives to explain them.

The difference between teleological and teleomatic representation does not correspond to that between the terms *why* and *how*. Teleological, teleonomic, and teleomatic representations all explain why something happens. Asking *why*—or for what end or cause—something happens involves reducing a sequence, or a stage in a sequence, to two terms: a cause and an effect; or an intention and an outcome; or a design and an end. Even so, the cause or reason may itself be a whole, great narrative sequence. The distinction between *why* and *how* is to some extent like that between *explanation* and *description*. *How*—or by what process—something happens is a matter of *describing* the relevant sequence of events in a teleological, teleonomic or teleomatic process. What is relevant is what events or deeds must happen, and in what sequence, in order to result in a certain outcome. Both *why* and *how*-narratives look to specified ends, and to that extent both are explanatory. Thus, a sequence of teleomatic narratives may tell how a teleological outcome is achieved; and thus a *why*-narrative may be inferred from a *how*-narrative—that is, the end of a *how* narrative may be said to happen *because* a certain sequence of actions was undertaken. The lifeworld typology of *how* and *why*-narratives has some affinity with the scientific distinction between instrumental, *predictive* theories and *explanatory* theories that are grounded in a metaphysics of *reasons* or *causes*. *How*-narratives satisfy the modest aspirations of predictive instrumentalism. Ever since Bacon's *Novum Organum*, scientific consciousness has been unlearning its culturally selected bewitchment by the language of causes, and in doing so it is honouring something that the natural history of epistemology cottoned onto long ago.

The reason why we have *why*-narratives that cite *reasons* or *causes* is because *why*-narratives, as explanations, reduce information in a way that is readily selected by a society of teleological creatures. As I said above, this typology of narratives of foresight is conditioned by teleological consciousness; and after all, *how* and *why* correspond to *means* and *reasons* (whether the reasons are ends or causes). *Why*-narratives reduce the entropy or uncertainty of descriptions—including *how*-descriptions. They reduce the apparent randomness of a sequence of events, and they make events predictable in terms of what we know about other events. That is, they produce predictive knowledge by reducing complex information about events to information that we already have; and they reduce the complexity of our descriptions of events by tying those descriptions into our pre-existing web of knowledge. In the child's endless cascade of *whys*, in the regression of *reasons*, and in epistemology's search for foundations, this reason for asking for reasons is forgotten, while the sheer abstract movement of thought to something else or anything else, like the abstract movement of desire, is turned into a theology or an addiction. Even analytical philosophy's on-going inquiries into explanations and why-questions (Sandborg, 1998) have been bewitched by the notion that the ruses of intentional consciousness are likely to be consistent enough to provide a ground for deciding just what the true nature of explanations and their relation to why-questions is. The fascinating but also aporetic predicament of so much analytical philosophy lies in its being an attempt on

the part of the naturally and socially selected cunning of reason to reflexively explain itself by no more than the evolving epistemological ruses that are both its means and its subject matter.

Some narratives just describe *what* happens and thereby tend to relinquish the possibility of explanatory or predictive force. Narratives of hindsight are typically like this; but, even so, in the context of the communications of teleological animals, *how* and *why*-narratives are often inferable from *what* narratives—something that narrative art puts to great use. This question of what is inferable from the unfolding sequence of a narrative is treated in more detail below (see 36. *Narrative inference* and 37. *Multiple drafts*).

The ends of teleomatic descriptions are the effects of causes such as we encounter in physical experience. Things falling, colliding, revolving, etc., are teleomatic, and though they may demand sophisticated scientific conceptualisation, there are good phylogenetic reasons why humans are able to naturally acquire a working, predictive understanding of them: they have to in order to survive. “Creatures inveterately wrong in their inductions,” wrote Quine (1969, p.126) “have a pathetic but praiseworthy tendency to die before reproducing their kind.”

Typically, if we distinguish any regular sequence we assume there is some reason for it, and if we think we know the reason we think we can explain the sequence. Otherwise we satisfy ourselves with another description. This is not so much an assumption about there being an ontologically deep, teleomatic order underlying all the processes in the universe, as a good and highly selectable epistemological strategy. As I said, whatever regular order there might be in the world is best represented in a way that links it into what we already know because that reduces the load of information. The idea that there are deep underlying laws of the universe is an effect of the natural history of epistemology. In addition, a complex teleomatic phenomenon whose sequence and outcome are, for an observer, unpredictable may be reduced to a number of simpler teleomatic parts whose analysis may then enable a less uncertain prediction. Likewise, teleological courses of action that tell us *how* to do something are usually made up of a number of component teleomatic events and teleological actions. Ideally, the results of this reductive procedure should trivialise the relation between the beginning and end or input and output of a sequence. The habit of always boring for a reason, of always assuming there is an answer somewhere to the question *why*, is deeply ingrained in human biology, especially insofar as humans are a symbolic species searching for the laws of symbols. It has also been normatively elaborated by scientific culture. The evidence for this lies in emotional life which drives us to seek and hold on to reasons and to expect that, even if we don’t know what it is, there is a reason “out there” somewhere. For reason is a slave of the passion for reason.

This reductive procedure has been deliberately put to great use according to the methodological norms of the physical sciences. It is a procedure that has been culturally as well as phylogenetically selected and so has a cultural as well as a biological teleonomy. The sciences of modernity long characterised themselves by methodologically limiting themselves to strictly teleomatic descriptions that avoided the imponderables of *mind*, and the causal complexities of self reference and reflexivity (see 30. *Because*). As I said above, even teleomatic narratives have been seen as the explanatory luxury of inveterately metaphysical, teleological human nous, when, after all, simple predictive power will do. Meanwhile, the teleological narratives that are so characteristic of the actions of organisms, and especially of human organisms, have to be reflexive or self referential because they have to embed themselves recursively as objects of their own narrative descriptions in order to

rewrite themselves in the process of their self-correcting steering toward their ends. So while teleological nous may be explained by its teleonomic history, and teleonomy may be explained teleomatically, it is no easy task to reduce one level of narrative description to another. While the physical sciences can methodologically ignore teleology, the biological and human sciences don't have this luxury: this is why the soft sciences are so hard.

It was in the context of a zeal to reduce teleological to teleomatic descriptions and thereby locate causes in their most predictively powerful temporal position—as sufficient and before the fact—that teleonomic descriptions culturally evolved. Darwin's conception of a teleonomic description was that a teleonomic sequence could be reduced to, or was made up of, a great many continuous, teleomatic sequences. Anti-teleological zeal also led to the notorious anti-mentalism that simply treated all organisms as black boxes devoid of internal representations—organisms that, by suitable inducements, could be changed from black boxes that behaved unpredictably (or probabilistically) into black boxes that behaved predictably and as if teleomatically. In doing so, the observed change was paradoxically dependant upon the researchers' own *mental* ability to represent their own past experiences. A universe of strictly teleomatic descriptions appears to be observerless, however, as this paradox shows, this reduction to observerless objectivity has to be produced for an observer by an observer.

The immense cognitive labour, both phylogenetic and cultural, taken to produce virtually observerless teleomatic descriptions also ended up producing the notion that human freedom was inconsistent with natural, teleomatic causation. This happened most poignantly at a time when freedom had, by cultural evolution, developed from its phylogenetic origins in the history of individual, organismic, teleological self determination, into an affective and socially consequential concept with both a factual and a normative life. The so called bourgeois age was riven by this contradiction, dividing its spiritual project so that, while the sciences ground out more and more ingenious teleomatic descriptions, art forms like the novel churned out more and more affective counter examples to the all too thoroughly determined life.

Kant's third antinomy put this culturally specific problem of freedom in its emblematic form (1787, p.270):

Thesis

Causality according to the laws of nature, is not the only causality operating to originate the phenomena of the world. A causality of freedom is also necessary to account fully for these phenomena.

Antithesis

There is no such thing as freedom, but everything in the world happens solely according to the laws of nature.

Kant himself seems to epitomise the poignant contradiction between Enlightenment science and Romantic passion. Obscurely at least, he saw a way out of the antinomy via his concept of the *noumenon* or *thing-in-itself*, but he was shackled by his dedication to both epistemological certainty and to freedom as an eternal rather than as an historically specific idea. (See Adorno, 1966, p.218). Teleomatic description seeks to see the thing in itself, but it is always a description by and for a pre-existing observer or subject. Meanwhile freedom, which is always of and for a subject, would only become antinomical if subjectivity could *actually* be eliminated from situations of description rather than being merely *dealt with* by its *as if* elimination at the hands

of the powerful makeshift of teleomatic or scientific methodology. In addition, freedom is an historical, culturally normative phenomenon. The mistaken sense of its eternity is understandably a consequence of its supervening upon the natural, temporal self determination of organisms. The outcome of human freedom's prehistory in organic life was the evolved and complex narrative nous that now underlies our experience of it. To reduce human freedom to an eternal form that has existed in all ages and all societies, is to reduce it to its abstract biological persistence, but this is not the complex, contingent and by no means everlasting social phenomenon that modernity imperfectly selects and bequeaths as a form of experience to its individuals.

Ultimately, reducing teleological descriptions to teleomatic ones is a narrative historical task. It would consist in telling how things got to be the way they are, commencing, perhaps, with how self differentiating entities happened to arise in what, at the time, was an unobserved, observerless universe. At some stage in the story, we would recognise that life had appeared, almost without our seeing it happen, defying the specification of a defining moment because, in Nietzsche's words, only that which has no history can be defined. Thus I began this typography with this self distinction of an observer from its environment already assumed, because, finding myself *in medias res*, I could only describe the observerless prehistory of the distinction from the observer's side of it. Not that it is a case "whereof one cannot speak" let alone one where "thereof one must be silent." It is a matter of trying any description that is adequate. We could, for lack of any other description, suggest that the distinction arose as an *accident*.

An *accidental* or *random* sequence is one in which the stages are unpredictable and the outcome is uncertain. In a so called accident, the causes of the sequence are typically treated as defying adequate representation, where an *adequate* representation would be one that reduces what is a surfeit of information to a form that we can process. Even though we may still assume that there is some possible causal description, it may be assumed to be so complicated as to defy our powers of representation and prediction. Since the measure of an excess of information depends upon the information processing capacity of an observer, *randomness* is not absolute: some things are more random than others. Descriptions of such accidental phenomena are often undertaken in probabilistic terms, in the hope that statistical inference on probabilistic data may produce a hypothetical causal description. Ultimately we may be forced, for want of anything better, to describe a sequence as accidental or random. But, by predicting the unreliability of predictions, even this renders informative that which would otherwise amount to too much information.

35.4 Hindsight or narratives about particular events.

What stories about past events tell is what would scarcely have been predicted. That is why they are primarily *what* narratives. The irrevocability and particularity—or, in fictions, the image thereof—that urges their validity is what makes the gist of their argument, or its universal character, so much more difficult to grasp, and then only in retrospect. The wisdom of hindsight is that of passionate experience. Whatever universal spirit there is to be distilled from the utterly particular events of recorded experience is likely to be intuited largely and primarily by way of the emotional affect of the story, rather than simply by reference to systemic scientific knowledge. And one affect of the story will be the sense of those universals of experience: its particularity and contingency. Thus, in referring to something particular, a story of hindsight is likely to be a complex and unique union of narrative descriptions derived in part from the types of predictive or general narrative sequence,

while in its contingency for the teller it is framed by the cognitively powerful, if seemingly cautious, proviso that, for all the teller can say, things could have happened otherwise. Searching memory for like events, inferring how others think or feel, finding unexpected similarities in otherwise different stories, explaining thereby a sequence of events that goes against expectation—all these are among the heuristic arts that characterise the intelligence of stories, of their telling and interpretation, whether histories or fictions.

Narrative art consists in telling stories that look like hindsight—however slight its portion of wisdom. This is what distinguishes fiction from being merely a concern with possible worlds. When David Lewis (1978) extended his analysis of possible worlds to an analysis of fiction, though he elucidated aspects of the logic of fiction, he actually failed to appreciate fiction's distaste for sheer possibility, which fictions renounce by their striving to be an image of particularity. If fictions were made as records of merely possible worlds they would seem more like those examples or thought experiments dear to many American philosophers: Quine's *Radical Translator*; Putnam's *Twin Earth*, Nagel's *What It Feels Like To Be A Bat*; or Dennett's *Sharkey's Pizza Parlour*—all of which belong to the tradition of *Cretan Liars*. These are all narrative diagrams for experimenting on philosophical concepts, but they are not usually good fictions because they are about the illustrative power of what is possible and general rather than about the interpretation of irrevocable particularity. It was telling that Lewis used Sherlock Holmes to illustrate his analysis, because the detective genre, and the Sherlock Holmes stories in particular, are as close as fiction usually gets to playing with possible worlds. The other author that Lewis mentions is Borges, a writer noted for exploiting the stories dear to philosophers. Borges uses philosophical examples—those stories philosophers all too conveniently pluck from the realms of possibility for the sake of making universals specious—and wittily sublimates their designer glibness into passionate, contemplative forms. As the case of Lewis exemplifies, Borges has often resupplied the thought experimenters.

Aristotle (*Poetics*, 1451b-1452a) said the value of a story is sensed in the likelihood or force of its plot or argument, that is, in whether events happening one after another also happen as a consequence of one another. For Aristotle this evaluation was to be made on the basis of shared affect—in tragedy on the affects of fear and pity, in comedy, presumably on the affects of shared humour and mirth. These affects are the emotional measure of narrative intelligence. Narrative cognition makes relations between events intelligible; it shows how events happen against expectation yet consequentially. Ultimately the feelings belonging to narrative art are not so much abstract pleasure or gratification as wonder at the sequence of the events and the story's intelligence.

To distinguish poetry from history, as we now would fiction from history, Aristotle cited the power of generalisation at work in poetic narrative. Accordingly he took Herodotus as his straw dummy and made of history something that simply told the unadorned events that happened rather than something that told what would, as a general truth, happen. Aristotle thereby wronged both history and poetry, robbing the former of the universal element at work in the gists of its narrative argument, and damning the latter—in poet's eyes at least—with the burden of philosophy's all too serious universality.

Of course Aristotle was truly enthusiastic about narrative art. Calling it more philosophical and universal than history was his philosopher's way of praising it: the *Poetics* was a provocative philosophical response to a philosopher's reservations

about poets. Aristotle was especially taken by Sophocles' *King Oedipus*. This astonishing drama is a schematic and stylised representation of the affective erotogenesis of narrative and social intelligence (as Freud showed us). It is also a drama about the tragically unsuccessful repudiation of a myth that weighs like a nightmare on a man who, though he could make the primitive Sphinx look hapless, could not defy the severe Apollonian law—the law that he still managed to make, nevertheless, look senseless and unjust. It is a drama that repudiates mystification and trumped up spirituality, while still recognising how strange things are anyway. (If only Freud's mystificatory successors had understood this.) And it is a drama about a clever man, a master of narratives of the future, and an agent of enlightenment, who, nevertheless, is blind to his irrevocable origins, and who blinds himself when he finally and inevitably sees. In his own time Aristotle sensed a lot of this, though much is the effect of the drama's historical life as an artwork and so of changes in its historical significance. A so called great work of narrative art is not only made by its author, but by its history of cultural selection: the art consists in the uncanny anticipation of subsequently selected meanings, but the judgement of the quality of this anticipation is only and may only be conferred in retrospect, and it has to be done again and again. Aristotle, who has no doubt influenced the play's cultural selection and persistence, certainly appreciated the perfect entelechy of a prophecy told, fulfilled and understood in its retelling, and the way that the play's dramatic reversal is woven into the moment of dramatic revelation. It is like music—that rhythmic, melodic, harmonic, non conceptual likeness of the temporal erotogenesis of knowledge—in that audiences cannot help but be fascinated by the story, again and again, no matter how well they know it. The intense reflexivity of the drama's revelation—its staging of the theme, with variations, of a man's self-revelation, and, in turn, the revelation of that revelation for the society and the chorus, and, ultimately, the audience's self observation of its experience of the revelation of all this revelation—keeps the meaning of the drama, and its capacity to generate wonder, alive at every experience of a repeat performance or reading. In doing so it reveals the way that reflexive human observation of reflexive human phenomena is repeatedly fascinating for a human psyche—a cunning biological, epistemological adaptation when it comes to such reflexively destabilised and therefore unpredictable phenomena. Complex, pleiotropic and organically self sufficient, for Aristotle *Oedipus* was the epitome of wonderful narrative argument.

For Aristotle, the work of *poiesis* lay in both complicating and perfecting the argument of the plot, in order to produce something both unique and universal. Making a plot complex—say by weaving the gists of reversal and discovery together—means that the arrangement of events determines a narrative type that is more and more unique; and therefore it is a type that reflects the image of particularity. Yet as a *type* it is still universal. Otherwise, the more universal, the more a plot becomes glib and formulaic like a recipe, and the more it vaporises and dissipates that most volatile fraction of what must be universal in narrative art: the astonishing particularity. The history of fiction is marked by the sense that the meaning of fiction lies in its attempt to achieve its universality by service to particularity.

In the way that Aristotle distinguished poetry from history, his meanings are familiar but not the same as the present division of spiritual labour would have it. What we now call fiction is not one thing but a syndrome of many things. It has not one but many functions throughout its history. The meanings of history and fiction—and science and philosophy for that matter—are culturally selected and

always jostling and defining themselves in terms of one another and in contentious dialogue with one another. To understand fiction we have to appreciate the cultural history of this dialogue. Hence it is instructive to look at fiction's traditional opposite, history, for insights into fiction's plots. For if fiction is the negation of history it is not an abstract or absolute one.

It is fitting to take an example from Herodotus, the very historian that Aristotle chose when he contrasted history and poetry. It is also fitting to quote a story with a history of interpretation, especially when what is at issue is the interpretation of the gist of a plot. Thus in Book III, Chapter 14 of *The Histories* we find the story of Psammenitus.

After the Persians captured Memphis, their king, Cambyses, took revenge on the Egyptian king, Psammenitus, by forcing him to watch a cruel victory procession. He dressed Psammenitus's daughter, and the daughters of other Egyptian leaders, in slave's clothes, and paraded them, bearing vessels for fetching water. The young women cried and their fathers cried to see them, but Psammenitus simply turned his eyes to the ground. Then Cambyses had Psammenitus's son and two thousand other Egyptian men of like age led past to their execution with ropes round their necks and bits in their mouths. Again, while the other Egyptians wept, Psammenitus simply did what he had done before. But when afterwards he saw passing an old companion who had lost all his possessions, Psammenitus wept out loud and beat his head and called his name.

Montaigne said that "Since he (Psammenitus) was already overfull of grief, it took only the smallest increase for it to burst out." Walter Benjamin quoted this interpretation of Montaigne's in the course of his own analysis of the story (1955, p.90). Benjamin was struck by how this story epitomised the story as such: it never expends itself but preserves and concentrates its narrative strength in a manner that goes beyond the immediate value of the momentary information. "It resembles the seeds of grain which have lain for centuries in the chambers of the pyramids shut up air-tight and have retained their germinative power to this day." As such, it suggests many readings when, even after a long time, its meaning is released. Benjamin offered the following possible interpretations:

The king is not moved by the fate of those of royal blood, for it is his own fate. Or: We are moved by much on the stage that does not move us in real life; to the king his servant [sic.; Herodotus described him as a *sympotes* or a drinking companion] is only an actor. Or: Great grief is pent up and breaks forth only with relaxation. (1955, p.90)

Cambyses, who was also interested in the effects of his revenge, was himself astonished by the report of Psammenitus's reaction. So for his interpretation he sent a messenger to get the gist from Psammenitus himself. The Egyptian king replied that his grief for his own family was too great for crying, but that the sorrows of his companion deserved tears, for he had fallen from great wealth and good fortune to begging, on the threshold of old age.

In a way that is typical of retellings, the story becomes slightly different when refracted through the experience of Montaigne and Benjamin. Neither actually gives Psammenitus's interpretation. But then, even if they did, as Herodotus "did", that would be just part of the story and not an unequivocal meaning. As Benjamin says "Herodotus offers no explanations. His report is the driest." Psychological explanations, even that of Psammenitus, typically invoke shopworn universals or

narrative gists, the sort of information that “does not survive the moment in which it was new.”

Benjamin demonstrates not only something about storytelling that is very old, but also something that is still embodied in modern fiction. It is the reason why a story by Kafka or a film by Buñuel gives a terse, matter of fact expression to what is utterly unexpected. It is the reason why the events in a film by David Lynch are not designed to be unequivocally explained as real or fantasy. It is the reason why cinema, insofar as it just shows real, moving things, is precisely thereby naturally given to the surreal and to revealing the surrealness of the real. It is the reason why fictions about remembered life, such as Proust’s or Tarkovsky’s, are about so many incidents that might seem irrelevant to the standard life course of infancy, education, marriage, career and death. It is the reason why the stream of actions in John Cassavette’s beautiful film *Lovestreams* is illogical and loving, but cannot be simply explained as madness. Likewise with Hamlet’s so called madness. It is the concern with representing the utterly and astonishingly particular. As the image of what defies the universals of received narrative gists, the unexpected is the epitome of particularity.

Whether Aristotle sensed this or not, he still would have had the unexpected woven back into the perfected form of a normatively universal narrative sequence—one norm being, as it is expressed of *Oedipus* in the *Poetics* (1452a), that a discovery of the truth is most affective when it coincides with a reversal in fortune. Modern fiction however tries to perfect the argument of the utterly particular for its own sake. The argument then becomes ambivalent, like that of Herodotus’s story. To put this in the terms used by Roger Schank (1990), the story’s universality has to be mentally typified or labelled for memory under many gists, like the many interpretations of what Psammenitus did. Like *Oedipus* with its many interpretations, it expresses the universality of particularity precisely in its resistance to unequivocal labelling. Its wisdom lies in its ability to invoke many meanings and so, as memory, to inform disparate experiences.

We can reflect on these matters in the context of the task of learning narrative gists. Any sequence can function as a kind of standard for testing one’s next experience of a similar kind of story, and then, if need be, modifying the standard gist. A particular, aberrant or unexpected sequence that is similar to a standard, or to a number of standard sequences, but not unusual enough to compel a change in the standard—except perhaps to weaken its claim to universality—should be remembered. On the next encounter with a similar kind of sequence, the aberrant sequence gets more cognitive attention, just in case a new gist can be generated that does fit more of the data. This new gist is likely to be more useful in future interpretations or in future predictions. Such an aberrant sequence—one that is unexpected, incompletely understood and yet strangely familiar by virtue of its similarity to already remembered sequences, and one that is thereby memorable—is typical of narrative art. The rehashing of experience during sleep seems as if it could be part of this kind of cognitive process. This procedure, a kind of learning algorithm, is a possible way of assessing how good a gist is as we proceed through life, and how well we have understood an aberrant sequence. If it is not well understood it is not allowed to be forgotten. It also gives an insight into why we chew over difficult experiences.

The retelling of painful events to oneself and of going over and over unassimilable, traumatic experience—what Freud, in *Beyond The Pleasure Principle*, attributed to the death wish—may be explained as a cognitive matter of keeping a

poorly understood, poorly learned experience in consciousness in order to generate a plot for it that makes it conformable to one's store of stories and one's experiential wisdom. In order to learn from experience we have to construct a gist for that experience that is itself used later in order to generate the same sequence of traumatic events for long term memory. Once we have committed a kind of sequence to long term memory we don't have to keep remembering the events as the painful, unassimilated data of short to medium term memory. Better than most, Freud understood that for a subject a pleasurable assessment of an experience is not a guarantee that its memory is valuable for subsequent survival. What may be required is suffering. So there is more to Freud's notion of the death drive than a kind of modern tragic chic. In the niggling recollection of events and actions that threaten our self construction there is a painful and not always successful effort aimed precisely *at* self reintegration, not just some drive towards death.

35.5 *Constructing the unexpected and particular from the expected and universal.*

Montaigne said that in his middle age he had lost his youthful interest in romances. Instead he seems to have preferred the particularity of deed and gesture that he found in an historian like Plutarch, whose *Lives* are histories of astonishing experience represented in grand gestures. More than any other narrative art form, romance is a projection of desire onto history. It is a kind of narrative whose gist incorporates teleological intentions—a colonisation of the future, a quest. The forms of time of romance plots are typically simple and regularly ordered—usually chronologically—and arising from or in homage to folk narratives, they often reflect the simpler time structures of superseded historiography and myth. The way Bakhtin told it in his history of *chronotopes* or forms of time (1981), romance exhibited an early, unsophisticated form of novelistic time. The early prose romances in Greek and Latin had more complex narrative models available in drama and even in epic, yet they used the simple romance time structure—in its simplest form, the journey—with its teleological function. The romance plot has a universal gist that says come what may, there is a series of stages through which the romance goal is to be achieved. So romance plot represents and trades off chancy particularity for a bit more predictable universality. Its narrative concern is with *how* rather than *why*, and in this it perhaps typifies narrative cognition. The settings of romance, whether the wilds of some blasted landscape or the interstellar distances of science fiction are typically light on particular detail. From grail quests to fairy tales to science fiction and even to some romantic comedy, romance likes to furnish its settings with emblems rather than complex societies and ecosystems. Its wisdom is typically didactic and simple: to inculcate, and often by appeal to solipsistic, gratifying desire, a method for arriving at one meaning—sexual and social reproduction—disparate experience notwithstanding. It wasn't just that Montaigne was middle aged and beyond romantic desire. He was curious. What he wondered about was that disparate experience rather than simple teleological gratification.

Benjamin's response to Herodotus was also a sign of such wonder. He was taken by the arrested continuity of Brecht's epic theatre because of its repudiation of glib narrative argument. He stressed that Brecht's was a theatre of gesture in its particularity, and of astonishment that actually had to be learned—so unexpected were the events that produced the affect.

Yet for all the ambivalence in the meaning of Herodotus's story, what about the child's question? Isn't there much in the story of Psammenitus that is not unexpected and that is obvious plot with a goal oriented narrative? Isn't the

unexpected just so precisely because everything else is quite predictable? And isn't this suggested by what Benjamin appreciated as the theatrical style of Cambyses cruelty? There is the predictable, masque-like order of the procession—a simple form of the simplest of all narrative forms, the road story. There is Psammenitus's daughter as a common maid, bound for the well as for slavery. There is the son paraded to his execution. And there is the general story of revenge. The gists of these stories are so familiar that it seems trivial to state them. Their outcomes are almost as irrevocable as their pasts. Indeed when Cambyses, after hearing Psammenitus's account of his sorrow, takes pity and tries to stop the son's execution, it is already too late.

The story of Psammenitus is actually made up from these familiar gists. We simply could not follow its ambiguous plot unless we already understood these subplots that are combined to make up the whole. Barthes said that novelistic fiction was a tissue of quotations, Bakhtin that it presented a dialogue of images of languages. Be that as it may, all fictions and histories, no matter how astonishing, present a text woven from the familiar gists of many stories. Their argument structures or their plots are constructed from the images of many arguments, many plots, many gists. Though I have not attempted to give a typology of historical explanations, the non predictive, would-be explanatory representations of hindsight have occasionally been organised into classes according to the kinds of gists and the way that they are combined (See Peters 1991, pp. 155-167). Such typologies range over a seemingly arbitrary range of categories. *Normic* explanations might cite truisms such as those cited by Montaigne, Benjamin and Psammenitus himself. *Genetic* explanations might cite the relevance of a particular aspect of a prior state. Explanations that emphasise a whole range of prior events and states might be distinguished from genetic explanations and then called, for want of a better term *narrative* explanations. *Colligative* explanations might concentrate on arguing claims about just what colligation of events constitutes the actual event or process under question, in order to show that seemingly unrelated events belong to a single historical process. *Rational reconstructions* purport to understand events by entering into the minds and the experiences of the historical actors. We might like to try to reduce these categories by distinguishing between those with single and those with colligated premises, those that colligate events into single super-events and those that colligate events into argument sequences, and those that use normic gists and those that empathically project gists. However the arbitrariness of a typology of historical explanations, let alone of a typology of all historical narratives whether descriptive or explanatory, is indicative of both the particularity of what happens and the particularity of our historically received means for representing what happens.

The particularity of a story is produced by the increasingly unexpected interweaving of more or less likely events and sequences. There is a beautiful story at the end of Michel Tournier's *La Medianoche amoureux*, in which what is so particular in the hindsight of the story lies precisely in what is produced by the regulated forethought of lawlike replication. Firstly, I retell the story from memory, taking the lack of an immediately available copy as an opportunity for an experiment in remembering. The main differences between my version and Tournier's original are noted in passing as evidence of those strange, hidden processes of remembering that are part of the life giving process of retelling. Remembering and re-confabulating have profoundly left their mark on the nature of story. Perhaps in this case my recollection has left the mark of my illustrative purpose—the cue to my remembering—on the memory itself.

When his chef dies, a king (the Caliph of Isfahan in the original story—of course) decides he must find the best cook in the land to be the new chef. The king

has his ministers (bailiffs originally) search every corner of the country. Eventually they find two cooks, but they can't decide which one is the best. The king decrees that the two must compete for the honour by preparing banquets on successive nights (successive Sundays). The first cook prepares an extraordinary feast, astonishing the court with his choice and treatment of ingredients, with the combination and modulation of flavours, aromas, textures and colours, and with the artful sequence and spectacle of service (as a would-be cook in a highly culinary culture, I elaborated somewhat here). The court wants to declare the first cook the winner there and then, but the king urges everyone to wait and try the second cook.

On the second night the gathered courtiers are increasingly astonished as, ingredient by ingredient and course by course, they are served a meal identical to that of the first night. Not knowing quite how the king will judge such an action—he is renowned for his intolerance of mockery—the court has to wait apprehensively while the king, unhurriedly and silently finishes his meal.

Finally the king delivers his judgement. He praises the first cook for his extraordinary skill and originality. Then, turning to the second cook, he declares that it is a remarkable thing to cook an original meal, but another even more remarkable thing to exactly reproduce it. Quoting from the English translation of Tournier's original (translation is also a kind of copying or retelling): "The first banquet was an event, the second was a commemoration, and if the first was memorable, it was only the second that conferred this memorability on it in retrospect."

This is an important truth about the life of stories, and it is followed by a statement about its application to history: "Similarly, historical deeds of valour only emerge from the uncertain gangue in which they originated through the memory that perpetuates them in subsequent generations." As well as being wise about the teleological process of cooking, the story describes the emergence of a teleonomic process: whether in the replication of stories, histories or dishes, a new phenomenon emerges—in this case we might call it memorability—something that is not necessarily intended or predictable, but whose status is instead only to be conferred retrospectively upon the past by the future. History is not so irrevocable nor ontology so fundamental after all.

As in the case of Psammenitus, we may ask why the Caliph (to give him his original title) acts as he does—that is, why he values an imitation which, as a mere copy, his courtiers fear he may well take as an affront. Through reference to the courtier's apprehension, the story evokes cultural expectations (especially those of modernity) that value originality and innovation over imitation. So as the story unfolds it goes against these expectations.

Leontes, the king of Sicily in Shakespeare's *Winter's Tale*, knew that eating was the epitome of a "lawful" art. In the last scene of the play, when the statue of Leontes's wife Hermione comes to life, he says "If this be magic let it be an art lawful as eating." Shakespeare is not only the most entertaining of English narrative artists, and the most naively bold in his expression, he is also the most philosophically curious. Cooks have to be in command of highly regulated goal oriented narratives. Being bound by the biology of nutrition, toxicity, and taste, cooking is an art that has limited opportunities for exploiting the sublime innovations that we expect of an art like narrative. In cooking as in biological reproduction, variation can be a recipe for disaster. That other art—the art of love and with it reproduction—is also a notably lawful one: Leontes wrongfully disowns the true storyteller in the play, his own son Mamilius, for being illegitimate, unlawful and "not the copy of his father." Narrative artists glean their gists from the past, and they can combine copies of these expected sequences of events into plots that, in their originality, are the images of the unique

and unexpected particularity of historical events. Clearly, Shakespeare does this, using, among other things, a resurrection story that, as Paulina says in the same final scene, “were it but told to you, should be hooted at like an old tale.” (Yes, *that* old tale.) There is a mathematics of narrative composition, as Poe rightly said in his essay on “The Philosophy of Composition”, but narrative’s sequences are different to those of cooking’s recipes, because narrative’s task is to represent all the kinds of contingency that human experience dishes up. And narrative’s ingredients, the gists of all the worlds stories, are contingent upon the complexities of human intelligence and culture.

In an historical world, a world of *massive contingency*, a world of individuals in which even apparent universals like a species are to be better understood at greater time scales as emergent individual lineages rather than as abstract classes of things of the same kind (depending on time scale we are either Nominalists or Realists), likenesses and copies are remarkable things. In his essay “On Experience” Montaigne was struck by how the diversity of experience, though supplying a feebleness and less worthy means of knowledge than the universals of reason, was often the only way to proceed in a world where “there is no quality so universal in the appearance of things as their diversity and variety.” The Caliph appreciated a chef whose art could give the lie to Montaigne’s maxim about similarity: “Dissimilarity enters itself into our works; no art can achieve similarity.” Cooking is an art undertaken in the face of this dilemma. Narrative has to represent this once only character of experience, and also what is universal in experience—namely, its once only character. Meanwhile the cultural transmission of stories and their gists is, more like cooking, an art of replication with emergent teleonomic phenomena like memorability and tellability. The life of a story, like the life of culture generally, depends on its replication.

Whether my own copy of Tournier’s story is an adequate one or not, it suggests questions about memory and storytelling and cultural transmission. So does Benjamin’s variation on Herodotus. I have been using the term *gist* as Roger Schank (1990) used it in his deceptively simple—some might say simplistic—book on storytelling; it refers to a remembered summary of a plot, an entity specified by the contingent operations of human narrative intelligence and memory. Typically, remembered or retold tales are simplified in the retelling, their gists being polished in accordance with general expectations about what would or should have happened—the way Aristotle defined narrative universals; their particularity is sacrificed for the sake of facilitating remembering’s task. Or else they are embellished in accordance with universal narratives that define the norms of what is tellable and worthy of an audience’s time, as if, otherwise, the summaries of memory and retelling would eventually run down stories to lifeless and predictable shells. What is tellable is something contingent upon the nature of humans and the nature of their fascination with contingency. What is best to tell is what is unique and unexpected and could have been otherwise, and yet it is also consequent upon what has already been told—or at least so Aristotle reduced the quality of narrative wonder. It is in the teleonomic process of telling and retelling that the only form of modern fiction that is truly popular culture and also oral storytelling has its genesis: *the joke* only lives in the repeated confirmation of its tellability by acts of retelling. Tellability, originality and whatever makes for narrative wonder are themselves contingent narrative phenomena; they are qualities that, like memorability, are conferred in retrospect. Only time will tell.

The story of Psammenitus has an unexpected end constructed from other predictable gists. In a typical romance, the overall, goal oriented story—a quest, say,

or even a redemption like the *Winter's Tale's*—is fulfilled, but the unexpected is in the trials of the episodes, in the wild and desolate places, in the seductive temptations, in the magic objects, in the strange and powerful foes and friends. When one first reads Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale*, one wonders how or whether a structure so higgledy-piggledy—and therefore, one would have thought, so particular—could be universal to all so called folktales. This induced structural narratologists like Levi-Strauss and Greimas (1966, pp. 123 ff) to try and reduce Propp's several episodes to something whose ontological parsimony was more in keeping with what the scientific model of a universal plot should look like. This was not just a matter of the fetishisation of reduction in its abstract repetition as the image of scientificness. However, human narratives are not so readily reducible to an abstract mathematics of temporal forms because human history isn't, and because humans have been made by the contingencies of natural history to represent historical contingency in their own contingent way. The seemingly arbitrary higgledy-pigglediness of Propp's morphology, and of Greimas's reduction for that matter, is a sign of the history of meanings of narrative gists, and of the history of human meaning, stored up in the folktale form. In its broadest teleonomic sense, the history of the folktale, or of its more general form, the romance, has been a sustained attempt to construct a goal oriented narrative argument that can subsume all the unexpectedness that historical particularity can throw in its protagonist's way—that is all the trials enumerated in Propp's *functions* or episodes.

When goals prove elusive, when expectations are not met, there are new stories with new expectations. Comedy, from the joke to the romantic comedy to tragi-comedy, transforms the unexpected or the undesired into shared mirth. The puniness of individual life and desire is objectified and transcended by a social appreciation of its universal character, the effect of which—laughter—is intersubjectivity in its most irrepressible expression. Comedy, among other things—for as fiction it has many social functions and meanings—socialises failed, overweening intentions, in a narrative argument that spectacularly objectifies the more naively universalistic argument of those intentions.

Tragedy comprises narrative arguments in which the utter inadequacy of subjective intentions is demonstrated by the utter catastrophe of their failure. Like the chorus in Greek tragedy, which Kierkegaard said (1843, p.148) stood for what was more than merely individual, we watch, fascinated and momentarily transcendent, the argument of any individual's and therefore of our own end. Teleological intentions notwithstanding, the character in Don DeLillo's *White Noise* is right: “all plots move deathwards.”

36. Narrative inference

To understand a narrative is to infer connections between its events and states as they appear throughout the course the plot. Such connections may be made explicit in the text, but commonly they are only implicit. They are underdetermined in the text and they cannot always be thoroughly deduced by logical rules and demonstrative inference. Rather, the audience of a narrative, like someone spontaneously processing temporal experience—and in particular, a communicative action—has to rely on fast, non demonstrative inference. This is not to suggest that there is some set of occult, non demonstrative inferential principles of induction, but rather, that such inference involves making suitably reliable or successful guesses or assumptions, and then making deductions therefrom. Humans have evolved to make such reliable heuristic

guesses as part of their real time processing of experience and communication, and the guesses or assumptions that they so make belong to what is typically called the *context* of an experience or a communication.

When researchers first tried to process narrative information using a computational technology, the problem of specifying contextual assumptions leapt out at them (Schank & Abelson, 1977, p.30) The problem for the researcher or programmer was to find what knowledge or assumptions were required in order to make the inferences that would make sense of a particular story—and a human story contingent upon human comprehension at that. It is not easy to assemble and categorise such information; history—phylogenetic, cultural, and ontogenetic—has had a long time to do this, and its organisation and categorisation seems to reflect the kind of hotch potch that cannot really be easily unravelled, precisely because of the deeply historical character of its compilation and its complicated, highly contingent embodiment in complex, psychological and social subjects. What people do so readily and what seems utterly familiar turn out to involve a multitude of unconscious processes. Phylogeny has bequeathed to emotional awareness the role of somehow monitoring these unconscious processes at a level of consciousness, without actually consciously representing or reperforming them in all their complexity. Emotions govern the unconscious processes of heuristic intelligence, making reason necessarily the slave of wiser passions.

As a story unfolds, each event, each action, each shot, each sentence must call up a context comprising not only already narrated events of the story, but assumptions that belong to the shared intersubjective *lifeworld* of the authors and audience. Such information (I have borrowed Husserl's term) comprises, as Schank and Abelson thought, general situational assumptions about what is likely to happen in certain settings—whether the Victorian drawing room or the orbiting space station—what kinds of goals or intentions people are likely to entertain and pursue, and what kinds of events, social or natural, are likely to causally follow other events. This kind of contextual information is also effected by the communicative context: choice of medium and genre effect the kinds of goals and the kinds of relations that may apply between events, as well as effecting whether an event is to be interpreted literally, fictively, metaphorically, ironically, parodically or whatever. Because none of this information need be made explicit—and in a typical narrative clarificatory dialogue with the author is not an option—narrative mimics the unexplained character of experience. Narrative is a big, glorious, polysemic underdetermination of historical, explanatory truth. It usually enables a broad field of interpretation without a great loss of consistency. And since the underdetermined connections between events are contingent upon the particular contextual assumptions they evoke on a particular occasion of viewing or reading, different occasions produce different readings. Significantly different emotional states or moods, on the part of an audience, can significantly effect the kinds of contextual assumptions that are brought to bear. Everyone recognises the experience of liking or not liking a narrative artwork, depending on the occasion. In spontaneous, non demonstrative inference, we have to work on assumptions, and their implications, whose rapid conceptualisation, and adoption or rejection is experienced for the most part as a matter of sentiment.

The context in which the meaning of a narrative is inferred is primarily a set of assumptions that the audience must use in order to make the inferences necessary for understanding the story and relating its events. In the traditional model of communication—Buhler's say, or Shannon's for that matter—in which message sent and message received are to be one and the same, the author and audience must share

the same cognitive environment. As Sperber and Wilson (1986, p.42) put it: “in a mutual cognitive environment, every manifest assumption is ... mutually manifest.” Communication across times and cultures thus becomes a kind of fascinating challenge for the communicative arts and technology, one that always haunts the narrative arts and their interpretation, and that has left its indelible mark on them: Sometimes a narrative artwork, like artworks in general, seems to be less the message bearing text of a communicative act and more like a wonderful natural object.

What most matters about each new event presented in a narrative is also what determines the audience’s choice of contextual assumptions, additional to those already given in the course of the text. Audiences readily and generally take the relevance of each newly narrated event as given, and so choose contextual assumptions, which, when combined in a set of premises with the newly narrated event, yield effectively valuable inferences that would not have been otherwise inferred. This is as Sperber and Wilson suggest in their psychological, inferential version of how communication works (p.142): “relevance is treated as given and context as variable.” Or as Barthes said in his “Structural Analysis of Narratives” (pp. 89-90), there is no noise in narrative; as in art, every detail has meaning, “however long, however loose, however tenuous may be the thread connecting it to one of the levels of the story.” A contextual assumption that only yields old, redundant, unconnected or, in general, irrelevant information, and that therefore has little effect on the narrative communicative context—that is, in particular, on the already narrated information, or the audiences existing assumptions—will thus be found wanting and, for the sake of understanding, will have to be varied or extended. Watching the next scene or reading the next sentence might help of course, and typically we just keep on watching or reading rather than rewinding or back tracking. Sometimes, however, redundancy may turn out to be intended, because it may strengthen existing assumptions or overcome the problem of mistakes made in the course of what is a rapid heuristic process of interpretation; or redundancy or repetition may be the point.

Since the already watched or read events of a story are an important part of the context of each newly narrated event, narrative interpretation is often quite a different matter at the beginning of a story compared to the middle or end. So beginnings provide a good opportunity for showing just how an audience must choose context, based on the assumed relevance of what is explicitly being told, and in the absence of any already narrated context. If the device of beginning *in medias res* is not a convention of modern fiction then at least it has a modern counterpart: beginning in the middle of things is signified by the sense of being in the thick of a confusion of events. Trying to sort things out, and trying to pick up the main threads from this tangle are typical processing problems set for readers of twentieth century novels. William Gaddis’s *Carpenter’s Gothic* belongs to this tradition, and I will use it to show, event by event, some of the assumptions a reader must make in order to infer the meaning of the narrative or what the narrative tells or implies.

As Sperber and Wilson have said, this amounts to demonstrating the processes involved in a semiotics of non demonstrative inference, rather than in just a semiotics of codes. Whether meaning is explicit or implicit, that is, whether it is an *explicature* or an *implicature*, depends on whether it is a direct logical development of the explicit propositional form, or whether, in the case of an implicature, it follows from the convention or principle of relevance. It is the immediately felt lack of relevance of the explicature that, on the basis of the assumed relevance of the proposition, prompts the search for contextual assumptions that yield relevant implicatures. As Sperber and Wilson (p.182) suggest, even an explicature involves inferred implications, rather than simply being, as traditionally construed, decoded. It is a matter of degree.

Though the concepts of *explicature* and *implicature* were first used by Paul Grice in the context of linguistic meaning, Sperber and Wilson developed them in a way that enables their extension to propositions that do not involve the obvious syntactic and lexical coding of language; they can be used of visual as well as verbal propositions.

The first paragraph of *Carpenter's Gothic* may be read, more or less sentence by sentence or sometimes phrase by phrase, as set out below. The phrases in italics and numbered 1.0, 2.0,..., 14.0. are the actual text of the novel's opening paragraph. The items in **bold type** are contextual assumptions that are not contained in the text but that are necessary for making the inferences required to follow the text. The starred assumptions (2.8, 4.2, 4.4, 6.1 & 7.17) are interpretations of the text up to that point, that turn out to be disconfirmed on further reading.

1.0. *The bird, a pigeon was it?*

1.1. There is a bird. (explicature)

1.2. A question is a likeness or interpretation of an anticipated answer, the *truth* (or *falsity*) of which is expected to be relevant. (This is the principle of relevance in relation to questions).

1.3. It is a pigeon. (weak assumption, an implicature inferred from 1.0 & 1.2; like 1.1, it is an assumption that need not turn out to be true)

1.4. It is not a pigeon. (weak, contradictory assumption; implicature from 1.0, 1.2 & 1.3); only one of 1.3 & 1.4 can be true.

2.0.... *or a dove...*

2.1. It is a dove. (weak assumption; implicature; strengthening 1.3, but only if a pigeon is a kind of dove, and only if 2.2 is not true)

2.2. It is not a dove. (weak assumption; implicature from 1.2, 2.0 & 2.1)

2.3. It is a pigeon or a dove.(implicature from 1.0 & 2.0; or an implicature from 1.3 & 2.1)

2.4. It is neither a pigeon nor a dove. (weaker assumption; implicature from 1.4 and 2.2)

2.5. It is relevant whether the bird is a pigeon or a dove, or neither. (implicature from 1.2, 2.3 & 2.4)

2.6. There is an amateur ornithological problem distinguishing doves from pigeons in general. (assumption—a gist—based on widespread cultural knowledge)

2.7. A dove is a sign of peace and hope.(assumption based on cultural norm)

*2.8. The scene is a portent of peace and hope (implicature from 2.7)

2.9. A pigeon is someone or something that is made the target of undeserved punishment (assumption based on a common metaphorical use of the term *pigeon*)

2.10. The scene is a portent of undeserved punishment.

3.0.... (*she'd found there were doves here*)...

3.1. In their initial, expository phase, novels are likely to use *she* or *he* before naming a definite character, only if that character is important, and her or his identity is to be specified shortly. (assumption based on common generic convention which stems, in turn from the principle of relevance)

3.2. *She* is an important character. (implicature from 3.0 & 3.1)

3.3. In the novelistic style known as *free, indirect style*, the thoughts or words of a character are commonly quoted or mimicked as part of the general flow of the narrative voice. (assumption based on common generic convention)

3.4. The amateur ornithological question about whether it is a dove or a pigeon is *hers*. (implicature from 2.5, 2.6, & 3.3; the subsequent observations in the paragraph turn out to be *hers* as well)

3.5. People like to get to know the wildlife when they move to a new environment. (assumption based on cultural knowledge)

3.6. *Here*, where *she* is, is a new environment for her. (implicature from 3.0, 3.4 & 3.5)

3.7. It is a dove. (implicature; strengthening of 2.1. by 3.0)

4.0. ...*flew through the air*,...

4.1. Birds fly. (assumption based on natural history)

*4.2. It is a flying dove. (implicature, strengthening of 1.1, 2.3 & 3.7 by 4.1)

4.3. The flight of doves is sign of hope. (assumption based on cultural norm)

*4.4. The situation is hopeful. (weak implicature from 4.0, 4.2 & 4.3)

5.0. ...*its colour lost in what light remained*.

5.1. Colour and light fade at the end of the day. (assumption based on natural history)

5.2. It is the end of the day. (implicature from 5.0 & 5.1)

6.0. *It might have been the wad of rag she'd taken it for at first glance*,...

*6.1. It is a wad of rag. (assumption; explicature, and a weakening of 1.1 & 4.2)

6.2. It is a pigeon or a dove or a wad of rag. (implicature from 2.3, 2.4 & 6.1)

6.3. The glance happened before the events so far narrated. (explicature from tense of 6.0)

6.4. First glances are often unreliable.(cultural knowledge)

6.5. It is a bird. (implicature; restrengthening of 1.1, and weakening of 6.1, by 6.4)

7.0...*flung at the smallest of the boys out there wiping mud from his cheek where it hit him*,...

7.1. There is a smallest boy. (assumption; explicature from 7.0)

7.2. Superlatives imply more than two of what is being compared. (assumption based on knowledge of the grammar of comparisons)

7.3. There are more than two boys relevant to her present observations. (implicature from 7.1 & 7.2)

7.4. Things *flung at* someone are usually flung *by* someone, and, usually, intentionally. (assumption based on knowledge the definition of *flung*)

7.5. Someone has flung the bird or rag at the smallest boy. (assumption; implicature from 7.0 & 7.4)

7.6. If *she* had flung *it* then she would know what it was. (assumption based on knowledge of flinging things)

7.7. *She* does not know what it is. (implicature from 6.2)

7.8. *She* did not fling it. (implicature from 7.6 & 7.7)

7.9. One of the boys—not the smallest—has flung it. (assumption; implicature from 7.3 & 7.9)

7.10. A muddy projectile makes its target muddy (assumption based on the natural history of mud)

7.11. The smallest boy is muddy where the projectile hit him. (explicature of 7.0)

7.12. *It*, the projectile, is muddy. (implicature from 7.10 & 7.11)

7.13. Birds are not usually flung. (assumption based on common cultural knowledge)

7.14. Rags are sometimes flung. (assumption based on common cultural knowledge)

7.15. Birds are not usually muddy. (assumption based on natural history of birds)

7.16. Rags are sometimes muddy because they are used to wipe things. (assumption based on common cultural knowledge)

*7.17. It is a wad of rag. (implicature; strengthening of 6.1, and weakening of 6.5, by 7.5, 7.12, 7.13, 7.14, 7.15 & 7.16)

8.0... *catching it up by the wing to fling it back...*

8.1. It has a wing. (assumption; explicature of 8.0)

8.2. Birds have wings. (assumption based on natural history of birds)

8.3. Rags don't have wings. (assumption based on common cultural knowledge)

8.4. It is a bird and not a rag. (implicature; strengthening of 6.5, and weakening of 7.17, by 8.2 & 8.3)

8.5. Flung birds fly but they are not the agents of their flying. (assumption based on common knowledge and the definitions of *flung* and *fly*)

8.6. A flung bird starts flying unless it is dead or injured. (assumption based on natural history of birds)

8.7 It is a dead or injured bird. (implicature from 8.4, 8.5 & 8.6)

9.0. ...*where one of them now with a broken branch for a bat hit it high over a bough caught and flung back and hit again into a swirl of leaves...*

9.1 The bird is in a different place, as a result of having been flung. (explicature of *where*)

9.2. Its journey has corresponded to a slight elapse of time. (explicature of *now*)

9.3. This *one of them* is a boy, but no longer *the smallest of the boys*. (implicature from 9.0, 9.1, 9.2 & 7.3)

9.4. This boy uses a branch as a bat to hit the bird. (explicature of 9.0)

9.5. Bats are used in games in which something inanimate is hit and/or flung back and forth between players. (assumption based on cultural knowledge)

9.6. The boys are batting and flinging the bird repeatedly. (explicature of 9.0)

9.7. If they are not already dead, repeated hitting kills doves and other birds. (natural history of birds)

9.8. This is a dead bird. (implicature from 8.7, 9.4, 9.5, 9.6 & 9.7)

9.9. Playing batting games with dead pigeons is a dismal, inauspicious act. (cultural norm)

9.10. The situation is dismal rather than hopeful. (implicature; disconfirmation of 4.4 by 9.6, 9.8 & 9.9)

9.11. Fallen leaves swirl. (common knowledge of natural history)

9.12. Fallen leaves are a somewhat sombre sign of autumn and passing. (cultural norm)

9.13. The *swirl of leaves* is a somewhat sombre sign of autumn and passing. (weak assumption; implicature from 9.0, 9.11 & 9.12)

9.14. The situation—that of this character's (*she*) observation—is dismal, inauspicious and sombre. (atmospheric implicature from 9.10 & 9.13)

10.0. ...*into a puddle from the rain the night before*,...

10.1. It has been raining. (explicature of 10.0)

10.2. The bird is hit into a puddle. (explicature of 10.0)

10.3. Rainy autumn weather is sombre. (assumption based on cultural norm)

10.4. A dead pigeon falling into a puddle is a dismal, inauspicious event. (assumption based on cultural norm)

10.5. The situation is dismal, inauspicious and sombre. (implicature; confirmation and strengthening of 9.14 by 10.3 & 10.4)

11.0. ...*a kind of battered shuttlecock moulting in a flurry at each blow*,...

11.1. It is a game of dead bird shuttlecock. (explicature; confirmation of 9.6)

11.2. This shuttlecock is losing feathers. (explicature)

11.3. When a shuttlecock loses its feathers it deteriorates. (assumption based on cultural knowledge about the maintenance of shuttlecocks)

11.4. The situation is deteriorating. (implicature confirming atmospherics of 10.5)

12.0. ...*hit into the yellow dead end sign on the corner opposite the house*...

12.1. Dead end signs are at the dead ends of dead end streets. (assumption based on cultural knowledge)

12.2. The bird reaches a dead end. (implicature from 12.0 & 12.1)

12.3. Reaching a dead end is a sign of having come the wrong way and is not a good result. (assumption based on cultural knowledge)

12.4. The situation is not good. (implicature from 12.2 & 12.3, confirming and strengthening atmospherics of 11.4)

12.5. There is a definite house. (explicature of 12.0)

12.6. A definite house is that of the relevant character, usually a definite, important character, unless otherwise indicated. (assumption based on principle of relevance)

12.7. It is her house. (implicature from 3.1, 3.6 & 12.6)

12.8. Her new environment (*here*) is this house and its surrounds; i.e. *she* has moved to a new house. (implicature from 3.6 & 12.8)

12.9. A house on a corner opposite a dead end street sign at the end of a dead end street is also at the end of the same dead end street. (assumption based on the geometry of dead end streets)

12.10. The house is at the end of a dead end street. (implicature from 12.0 & 12.9)

12.11. *She* now lives at a dead end. (implicature from 12.7 & 12.10)

12.12. *She* has come the wrong way and *her* situation is not good. (implicature from 12.3 & 12.11)

12.13. The situation of an observer and the situation observed are metaphorically related. (cultural norm of pathetic fallacy)

12.14. Her situation, like the bird's, is dismal and inauspicious. (implicature from 11.4, 12.11 & 12.12)

13.0. ...*where they'd end up that time of day.*

13.1. The boys end their day at this spot. (explicature; the gist of an repeated daily sequence)

14.0. *When the telephone rang she'd already turned away, catching breath and going for it in the kitchen she looked up at the clock: not yet five.*

So begins the second paragraph. It describes a new scene and a new set of events. In fiction a phone typically rings in a change of scene. It is like the arrival of a messenger. *Carpenter's Gothic* is almost a telephonic—as opposed to an epistolary—novel.

This attempt at a phrase by phrase interpretation of the first paragraph is certainly not complete. Because of the difficulty and length of the task, I have not listed all the possible contextual assumptions, nor all the explicatures, nor all inferable implicatures. And I haven't been able to scrupulously specify the precise modality of verbs (i. e. the precise weight given to a state or event by a word like *might*). I trust, however, that the whole thing was long enough and tedious enough to demonstrate the large amount of unstated information and inferential processing required by even a short piece of text. Thankfully nearly all this processing goes on unconsciously and rapidly.

There is no complete version, and no version is the correct one in either content or inferential order. When I first read *Carpenter's Gothic* I was confused by this opening paragraph. What stayed with me was the sombre, autumnal atmosphere and something about identifying doves rather than the specific description of dead bird shuttlecock. Different readers at different times bring different contextual assumptions and different degrees of attention. I was lazy and relied on reading-on for subsequent clarification. Whatever the reading, at this point in the plot, it is hardly likely to be the final interpretation of the meaning of the paragraph. Explicatures, implicatures and contextual assumptions are all subject to subsequent disconfirmation: 4.2, 4.4, 6.2, & 7.17 are all disconfirmed before the end of the paragraph. The implicature that *her* situation is somehow reflected in the bird's, if it is made at all, is by no means secure. It is only confirmed by the end of the novel (and we might also confirm 2.10, and conclude that she and the bird are pigeons). The implicature about having moved to a new house, however, is confirmed in the second paragraph.

Even though my long inferential schematisation is incomplete, highly subjective and lacking in rigour—just like a typical reading—it still serves to demonstrate the enthymematic character of narrative argument: it relies on the reader or viewer to fill in information that is simply not explicit in the text. Without the assumptions based on knowledge of natural history or cultural practices or norms, there would be no chance of understanding the story. And the reading above is parsimonious in the assumptions it shows. Readers probably entertain many trifling assumptions as they daydream, or free associate, their way through a story, but I have only listed some of those that yield relatively relevant, if prosaic local implicatures. When I read the novel I probably made some assumption—among many others that I have failed to recall—about the boys being just a bunch of feckless local kids hanging around. As it turns out they hang around like a tragedy's chorus. Mistakes, incomplete detail, reading-into, and a high degree of subjective particularity are all likely to be

features of any particular reading at any particular stage. However these will usually be sorted out by redundancies and by subsequent strengthening or weakening of the truth value of implicatures, otherwise successful narrative communication would not be realised. I suspect that there is a high degree of redundancy when it comes to the information inferred from even the most pared down and seemingly unrepentive narrative; so the strategy of simply reading-on is unlikely to result in the reader's losing the plot.

When Roland Barthes undertook his notorious but fascinating line by line rereading of Balzac's *Sarrazine*, he was at pains to assert that the rereading was done "in order to obtain...not the *real* text, but a plural text." (1973, p.16) Yet Barthes's line by line rereading does not actually appreciate the unconscious plurality of even the most univocal first reading. The miracle of reading or viewing a narrative—or, at least most narratives—is the achievement of this high degree of communicative univocality despite the multiplicity of inferential possibilities. It is not only in the first reading that all this unconscious inferential processing must go on. This always goes on in the immediate, intuitive process of reading or watching, or rereading or rewatching, any story, even though the process might actually *feel* just like the straight explication of some *real*, explicit text. The text is felt to be explicit, but what is rarely appreciated, because we do it unconsciously, is that it is precisely what is felt to be the explicit and immediate narrative that requires all these unconscious assumptions and inferences. Barthes rightly saw his line by line rereading as being attentive to a plurality of readings; yet this plurality is in fact the very condition of comprehending the so called *immediate, explicit* narrative. In turn, the art of fiction, uses this plurality—makes a spectacle of it—to evoke its many, implied meanings.

Barthes was right to suggest (p.11) that larger chunking of the text, paragraph by paragraph or scene by scene—especially that employed in classical rhetoric or schoolroom explication, and also that employed in remembering earlier events while reading later events in the plot—involves simplifications and abstractions of information, and usually quite conventional reductions of the text's meaning. All the assumptions that must be called up from the audience's memory are called up intuitively and unconsciously, and what the narrative tells the audience, even though it has to be inferred from unexpressed assumptions, is intuited as integral to the explicit narrative. The integral form of the story just *seems* to be all there in front of us, but to a "Martian eye", or to a computer designed to read stories, this integration is anything but obvious. This simply demonstrates the fact—so obvious that it is therefore ignored—that humans tell stories for human subjects.

What a rereading typically reveals is the significance of what were at first weak implicatures. These implicatures, if consciously experienced at all, may only have been remembered as vague feelings or atmospheric moods. It is not the case that that rereading is, as is often claimed, a matter of the intellectualisation of some authentically passionate "primary, naive, phenomenal reading." Barthes (p.16) was right about this, but despite himself. It is an intellectual process for sure—even an intellectualising one—but one which, in recovering the emotional resonance of implicatures, demonstrates the emotional character of intelligence. We rewatch or reread a narrative, as we would listen again to a piece of music, re-experiencing the adventure of the narrative inference, as we would re-experience the inferential adventure of exploring tonality or chromatic qualities for the sake of feeling and, at the same time, thought. In the case of *Carpenter's Gothic*, rereading is the cue to one particular emotion—admiration—the emotion which Adorno rightly said is more important to art than pleasure; for it is for the sake of pleasure anyway. It is not so

much, as Barthes (p.16) said, that rereading “draws the text out of its internal chronology (“this happens *before* or *after* that”) and recaptures a mythic time (without *before* and *after*).” This is a case of Barthes the theorist dechronologising narrative meaning. What we appreciate is just how temporal a thing narrative is: the author must lead us through the before and after of the chronology by the means of the before and after of the temporal unfolding of meaning.

37. *Multiple drafts.*

A woman is watching a dovelike specimen of local birdlife perform the natural act of flight towards the end of daylight. This, or something like it, is the immediate inference made from the first sentence of *Carpenter's Gothic*: “The bird, a pigeon was it? or a dove(she'd found there were doves here) flew through the air, its colour lost in what light remained.” It all seems to be spelt out. If the next event were the dove's taking up roost for the night, the initial inference might well have been confirmed. If instead the next sentence had been “It might have been an owl taking flight at dusk,” then readers would not have been secure in inferring that the bird was a dove, but any assumption about a bird's being in flight would have been strengthened. And reader's might have already started entertaining assumptions about the woman's particular interest in ornithology, or about the auspicious meaning of bird flight in general, or about an allusion to the owl of Minerva and its symbolic relation to the history of the past day. The exact scope of such assumptions depends on the experience of the reader. And if the next sentence had been “But no one saw this evening flight,” then readers would not have been secure in inferring that the woman was watching the bird, and they would have had to work out the relevance of the information about the woman's biogeographical knowledge.

As it turns out the next sentence refers to a sequence of events that piles up evidence for the disconfirmation of any assumptions about doves taking wing at dusk. Readers eventually sort out being flung from flying and assume the bird is passive. It is a dead bird. If the boy had caught it up by a corner rather than a wing then it might have been the rag the woman had taken it for at first glance. The anacoluthic rhetoric of this long second sentence is an image of the plurality of readings that unfold like several growth tips on a plant, one or a few branches taking over while many others wither or go dormant. Or else, to change the analogy, it is an image of the plurality of representational and inferential streams that flow and channel in the reader's mind (and the protagonist's), an image of a language of consciousness. So called stream of consciousness is typically written anacoluthically to capture, in the syntactical turbulence of conscious streams and eddies, not just a sense of the stream like rush of real time experience, but a sense of the plurality of unconscious or preconscious representations. The stream of consciousness is just the surface of several, largely unconscious streams.

Many of the consciously or unconsciously entertained assumptions are disconfirmed (It is not a flying bird.). Others lapse into comparative irrelevance beyond their localised contextual implicatures, never to be unequivocally confirmed or disconfirmed. (It is, probably, a pigeon.). Others linger as setting or atmosphere (It is damp, sombre and autumnal.). And others that at first might not have been consciously entertained—or scarcely so—are subsequently strengthened and confirmed and take on an extended function as setting (*She*—Liz, the protagonist—has recently moved to this house.).

A reader might judge that plotwise, the detail about living in a new house and neighbourhood is the most immediately important information in the first paragraph.

The other contingencies might just be there to “give things more life.” The most important detail for the gist of the story is, at this stage of the novel, a matter of expectation, but as in all narrative, what is important depends on what happens subsequently. So narrative inference is not only a matter of understanding or disambiguating a description, it is also a matter of coming to appreciate the explanatory force of a narrative. Judgement about narrative meaning is always an *a posteriori* matter. The allegorical significance of playing shuttlecock with a dead pigeon—it is a key to Liz’s fate—takes a longer time to surface than the details about the house and setting.

While in the middle of things, watching or reading the representation of events, we have to run a number of possible events and stories at any given moment. Thus we run simultaneously the stories of a live pigeon flying, a live dove flying, a flung rag flying, a flung pigeon flying, a flung dove flying and a whatever flying, before we start simultaneously running stories about a dead pigeon being flung and a dead dove being flung. Psychologically it is likely to be more effective to do this than it is to run one univocal story, then reach a point of radical disconfirmation, and then have to go back and process another possible sequence from scratch. There probably just isn’t enough time in the task of real time reading or experience to do this (Marr, 1982, p.358). Some such hypothesis as this is worth treating seriously, at least until disconfirmed by empirical psychology. The demands of representing things as they happen, or as they are experienced, put strong constraints on how and what we perceive; events have to be represented and relevant inferences made as we go along.

Human experience, whether of natural events, of human actions, or, specifically, of communicative actions—is not a matter of a single stream of consciousness but rather of a braided, forking and reticulating network. Jackendoff (1993, pp. 137ff.) described this kind of process in our appreciation of that most non conceptual of narratives, music. Dennett (1991, p.253) has written of the production of consciousness in terms of “multiple channels in which specialist circuits try in parallel pandemonium, to do their various things, creating multiple drafts as they go.” Such ideas continue a tradition (and in doing so make more explicit empirical claims) that can be traced through twentieth century thought from psychologists like Freud and narrative artists like Joyce. Even the most unequivocal of experiences or stories is experienced, unconsciously at least (and preconsciously in Freud’s terms), as a seething plurality of drafts, with whatever seems unequivocal being the effect of a process in which explicit confirmations seize and occupy the stage or screen of consciousness, while the unconscious content is a backstage stream of more or less briefly entertained drafts, more or less susceptible to forgetting, like the practical details of a drive that we find we have forgotten by the time we have reached our destination. Critics mock the Lacanian saying about the unconscious being like a language, but what else would it be. What obscures this representational and propositional character of the unconscious is that, for the most part, all that impinges of it on consciousness is an abstraction, an emotional affect—a symptom—of an unconsciously drafted concept.

The contextual assumptions that we make in order to make relevant inferences sketch a set of possible worlds that are more or less accessible according to the constraints of real time processing. Narrative inference is an unconscious, automatic, heuristic process. We don’t needlessly call up and multiply assumptions, process all possible lines of inference, and take note of all the QEDs. Rather each newly related event is processed (with a good deal of native nous and cultural memory) until its relevance is manifest; and if it doesn’t become manifest we usually just keep on watching or reading until it does. The working inferential accessibility of any of these

possible worlds is a matter of psychological contingencies and depends on such things as the accessibility to memory of, say, different meanings of *flew* (a ready interaccessibility is indicated in English at the phonetic level in the alliteration of *flew* and *flung*), or the accessibility of a dead bird from a living one. Once we start pondering the psychology of memory we are dealing with that wonderful, still very mysterious, deeply biological feature of human narrative design. Just how the memories of contextual information are stored and accessed during narrative experience is still largely hidden in the cognitive and affective organisation of the human subject.

With relevance treated as constant, and context as variable, the assumptions of contexts imply nested sets of possible worlds that are more or less inferentially accessible according to the order of nesting. Such a concept of context is related to the Kantian idea of a causal totality. Kant's idea was an idealised version of what can be psychologically represented by a set of contextual assumptions that may be readily extended to more and more remotely accessible possible assumptions if need be, and that are bound or totalised by the principle of relevance. Husserl's concept of the "horizon of experience" (1960, pp. 61-62) is in a similarly idealised tradition. It is

a multiform horizon of unfulfilled anticipations (which, however, are in need of fulfilment) and, accordingly, contents of mere meaning, which refer us to corresponding potential evidences. This imperfect evidence becomes more nearly perfect in the actualising synthetic transitions from evidence to evidence, but necessarily in such a manner that no imaginable synthesis of this kind is completed as an adequate evidence: any such synthesis must always involve unfulfilled, expectant and accompanying meanings.

Interpretation is not just a matter of working out the author's intention. The collusive guarantee of relevance, as well as being a makeshift enabling human communication, is an important inferential assumption, and it is one that facilitates the inference of intended explicatures. But the process of interpretation is necessarily a matter of memories called up, consciously or unconsciously, as assumptions, and this depends on the contingencies of any particular kind of subject or species of animal (human, let's say), any particular individual subject, and any particular occasion of watching or reading. The idealised picture of how we interpret narrative meaning has to be physically embodied, and the contingencies of embodiment are what actually determine the peculiar devices of meaning.

As a theory of the inferential psychology of narrative interpretation, what I have written is clearly short on the detail of the actual neurophysiological embodiment of the processing; it simply makes a number of claims about the kind of inference involved and it is to that extent subject to empirical disconfirmation. In a way, it is consistent with the great tradition that recognises how much an audience must be an author. In *A History of Reading* (p.63) Alberto Manguel tells how Petrarch in, *Secretum Meum*, advocated reading that was more than just interpreting the author's intentions: "neither using the book as a prop for thought, nor trusting it as one would trust the authority of a sage, but taking from it an idea, a phrase, an image, linking it to another culled from a distant text preserved in memory, tying the whole together with reflections of one's own—producing, in fact, a new text authored by the reader." Such a suggestion seems to derive a norm of what reading ought to be from what, psychologically, it is.

So the braided stream of narrative possibilities cascade by. As it turns out, in *Carpenter's Gothic* there are no rags, no birds taking wing. These fictions come and

go as we hurtle through the logical hyperspace of the narrative, gleaning what images or concepts we can from all those possible worlds. So one fascinating aspect of understanding experience in this way is that in watching or reading or hearing a narrative—whether historical or fictional—all the possible but unactualised stories have a quality that thereby seems to have a special provenance in the worlds of narration: the quality of fiction. There is no reading or viewing the plainest factual record that does not dally with fiction.

The ontology of fictional worlds instructs us in the ontology of the actual world for human subjects: they are networks and branches of inferential accessibility just as a physical environment is a network of empirical, spatiotemporal accessibility. Just as information is not something *out there* in the environment, but dependent on an observer, the meaning of a narrative is relative to its interpretation; it depends on the inferences an audience is able to draw. Those inferences proceed in time, and the plot is experienced through time with each new proposition being capable of reconfiguring the interpretative content of the previously narrated information, while the new proposition in its own context, which is itself subject to subsequent reconfiguration, becomes a premise upon which further inferences are drawn. There is a homomorphism between the temporal procession of meaning and the spatiotemporal procession of experience as we move through a landscape. And it follows that there may be an homology between the conceptual apparatus for interpreting experience through space and time and that for interpreting communicated meaning through time. We follow meaning as we follow the path to the top of Donne's "huge hill", and so find that we "about must and about must go." The road is only the simplest model of the complex highways and byways of the simplest plotline.

It is often said that we access fictional worlds from actual worlds, but it is seldom appreciated that we visit the actual world from fictional ones. Whatever the *post hoc* functions of fiction may be, among its first functions is that of simply providing access to any meaning or any world; in particular, in the peculiarly recurrent possibilities that arise in communication, the same process of fictive accessibility enables access to the egological world of others. And often, on the guidance of other's egological accounts we arrive at another world: even reports of the next valley or the next bend in the river begin as fictions. Human meaning needs this function to get us about topographically on the reports of those who have been there before.

Narrative art, whether mythic, historiographic or fictive, has long been a matter of the deliberate exploitation of the plurality of narratives that narrative interpretation involves. The much cited ambiguity of fictional works, whether in the traditional poetics of metaphor, the various levels of allegory or in the non judgemental display of a drama, is not so much a matter of vagueness as an attempt to represent unreduced complexity—something narrative theorists have appreciated since Aristotle. The forking and reticulating paths of hypertext promise the full textual embodiment of such a plurality, as if all stories, futures or ends were not only entertainable, but already told and merely awaiting an audience to stumble upon that bit of cyberspace.

The difficult film or novel is a deliberate exploitation of the difficulties of running several drafts at once, in the face of the suspended resolution of unequivocal interpretations. Commonly, as in the opening of *Carpenter's Gothic*, modern fictions carry this complication and difficulty into emblematic disruptions of syntax, or even into unresolved plot outcomes that make the story plural and strictly unfathomable. An inferential reading of the freeway story (in *25. Acts and Other Events*.) would have arrived at a deliberately ambiguous conclusion, with contradictory assumptions

about whether the events had been imagined or not still being held in play. Seen as worlds, such ambiguous worlds may be understood as incomplete (Pavel, 1986, pp. 105ff). As it turns out, the worlds represented by narrative texts are constitutionally incomplete. There are always unresolved contradictions in narratives—contradictions that elicit inferential searches for the relevant details that would resolve them and thereby complete their worlds.

While watching or reading about *what* happens, we are also making inferences about *why* and *how* things are happening the way they are, and eventually we may be able to infer *why* and *how* some things turn out the way they do. From the primarily descriptive argument of historical and fictional narratives we infer possible explanations; but even if the account of what happens were deemed (theologically) to be complete, the inferences we make about how and why such things happened would lead us to incompletely explained worlds. As a political thriller, *Carpenter's Gothic* (I am surprised it has not been made into a movie) uses the ambiguity of the plot to display the difficulty of interpretation for the protagonist herself. To watch the sequence in Tarkovsky's *Mirror* when the boy goes to and from the door only to find the woman out of the past gone when he gets back, and then to ask what is *really* happening here, is probably to miss the point. We cannot completely explain how or why these things are happening.

Works of narrative art complete themselves in the image of autopoietic self-sufficiency by encapsulating rather than resolving their contradictions; they thereby use a ruse of recursion to complete worlds whose complexity consists in the impossibility of their complete representation. Tarkovsky seems to be showing just what temporal concepts film can represent in order to show just how we can and do imagine historical experience. To grasp and assert the precise meaning of the end of Buñuel's *Belle de jour*, or to trace the references of Godard's *Hélas pour moi* to a precise set and order of characters and events, or to ask of Lynch's *Lost Highway* "is this a dream or is it *real*?" as if this would sort out the fictional facts from the fictional phantasms—all these are beside the point. For each story is an emblem of the plurality of historical experience and its already inexplicable, phantasmal character. Unfathomability is an emblem, in text, of history's utter specificity, and its resistance to schematic, reductive generalisations. Running several stories at once is the human way of zeroing in from the generality of gists and types of events to the utter but equivocal particularity of what folk narrative wisdom introduced by the phrase *once upon a time*. Yet running several stories at once is a process inseparable from specific historical experience itself. It multiplies personal histories and leaves their traces in the unconscious, from where they occasionally surface in affects and symptoms that may be variously, contrary, painful, disorienting, puzzling or wonderful.

38. *Dream time.*

Nietzsche described a dream experience with which we are all familiar:

To start from the dream: on to a certain sensation, the result for example of a distant cannon shot, a cause is subsequently foisted (often a whole little novel in which precisely the dreamer is the chief character). The sensation, meanwhile, continues to persist, as a kind of resonance: it waits, as it were, until the cause creating drive permits it to step into the foreground—now no longer as a chance occurrence but as 'meaning'. The cannon shot enters in a *causal* way, in an apparent inversion of time. That which comes later, the motivation, is experienced first, often with a hundred details which pass like

lighting, the shot *follows*... What has happened? The ideas engendered by a certain condition have been misunderstood as a cause of that condition. We do just the same thing, in fact, when we are awake. (*Twilight of the Idols*. p.50)

This phenomenon, when an external stimulus acting on a dreamer exerts a kind of retroactive effect on the content of the dream is also described by Freud (1900, p.89). He cites a number of descriptions of “alarm clock” dreams including this one:

It was a bright winter’s day and the streets were covered deep in snow. I had agreed to join a party for a sleigh ride but I had to wait a long time before news came that the sleigh was at the door. Now followed the preparations for getting in—the fur rug spread out, the foot-muff put ready, and at last I was sitting in my seat. But even then the moment of departure was delayed till a pull at the reins gave the waiting horses the signal. Then off they started and with a violent shake the sleigh bells broke into their familiar jingle—with such violence in fact that in a moment the cobweb of my dream was torn through.

It turns out that the sleigh bells are really the shrill note of the dreamer’s alarm clock waking him up.

In explaining the way in which the external stimulus is provided with a cause, Nietzsche talks about the stimulus being held in abeyance while the dreamer provides the dream with the noise’s antecedent circumstances. This kind of explanation raises the question, for Freud, of how it was possible for the dreamer to crowd together an amount of dream content apparently so large, in the short time elapsing between the perception of the waking stimulus and the moment of actual waking. Nietzsche does not dwell on this question—the subject of fairy tales that exploit the differences between dream time and waking time—and instead he simply assumes that the antecedent circumstances *are* added after the stimulus because of the habituation to causal explanation. However, Nietzsche’s is a flawed theory of dream composition, there being no need to assume the holding of the resonance of the waking stimulus in abeyance just to just to illustrate the fallacies produced by the habitual “cause-creating drive”. Nietzsche himself could be said to have succumbed to the cause-creating drive. What we actually see at work in each of these waking-up dreams is a remarkable instance of the retroactive effect of a narrative’s end on its beginning.

While dreams may sometimes be hypermnesic with respect to almost forgotten events of waking life, it is also true that waking experience tends to be amnesic with respect to dream experience. Freud, when considering why dreams are forgotten after waking, argued that

In order that feelings, representations, ideas and the like should attain a certain degree of memorability, it is important that they should not remain isolated, but that they should enter into connections and associations of an appropriate nature...Now dreams in most cases lack sense and order. Dream compositions, by their very nature, are insusceptible of being remembered, and they are forgotten because as a rule they fall to pieces the very next moment. (p. 107)

It is the same *ad hoc* thrown-togetherness of dream composition that makes their content so susceptible to re-interpretation in the event of some encroaching external stimulus. The events are not already locked into a strong argument structure. The re-interpretation of the content of the dream’s beginning in the light of its end happens with a revelatory, retroactive energy usually only dreamed of in the denouement of

narrative art, and yet it is quite readily accomplished in the dying moments of the dream composition, and continues into the waking recollection or re-elaboration of the dream. It is accomplished with such alacrity as to make it appear that time has been inverted. Thus, in the case of the preparations for the sleigh ride, the dream contents are almost instantly re-elaborated so that what becomes *waiting* for the sleigh to come and the *delayed departure* appear not only to anticipate the sleigh ride, but the external ringing as well.

We are quite used to a denouement which discloses the truth of events that had previously been misunderstood, enigmatic or inexplicable; and when the end is reached the audience muses ‘so that is what it all meant’. In the case of the sleigh ride, the meaning of the bells at the end changes the meaning of the preceding events, whose meaning then becomes *waiting*, *preparing*, and *being delayed*.

39. *Time will tell; or time and meaning.*

When Parmenides imagined a perfect argument in which it did not matter where one began, the object of his desire was to transcend the problem of the temporally ordered predicament of meaning. He had, however, been seduced by the bewitching, all-at-once presence of writing. Language and narrative have to disclose their meanings through time; or as Luhmann has put it, meaning can’t be meant all at once. Meaning’s proposition by proposition unfolding necessarily involves selection of a temporalised argument structure. What Parmenides desired was a selected order that was semantically as good as any other selected order, or rather, one that was semantically complete so as to render the order irrelevant. Therein he envisaged the perfect match of thinking and being, representation and object. Parmenides’ idea of returning in the end to his starting point, was a way of envisaging the simultaneous representation of all connections between all propositions—something the technology of writing seemed greatly to facilitate, though in no absolute sense. Mathematical exposition, which, by means of its diagrammatic character, partly breaks out of the temporal linearity of language, seems to facilitate this even better: if one reads mathematics out loud, one loses sight of the diagrammatically obvious interconnections that stand out all at once on the page. Yet it too fails to achieve the absolutely detemporalised connectivity of propositions that perhaps it seemed to promise. It takes time to understand a mathematical argument too.

Parmenides seems to have imagined that an end that brings us back to the beginning realises perfect completion: it is the ideal end, that which would be the thorough connection of all meanings, all at once. Thus it is that the ends of stories garner their peculiar prestige; for only at the end does a narrative ever approximate to signifying its complete meaning all at once. Only then are all the propositions and explicit arguments aired or printed or screened, even though they still fail to constitute an omnipresent, detemporalised and completely connected array for our inevitably temporalised experience, and even though the inferable connections still have to be made, in time, by the audience. A temporalised argument structure inevitably implies the loss of connections between sequentially separated propositions, and the limitation of connections to within some semantic horizon, and with these, the loss of representational capacity to be adequate to the state of connections deemed, metaphysically, to obtain in the world. Parmenides’ passionate quest to sublime temporal order was a passion for no representational reduction, for a plenary and perfect grasp of the world’s complexity, unfettered by the exigencies of time.

What is complex? That which cannot be completely grasped; or that which may only be grasped or represented selectively. Turning to Niklas Luhmann again:

A state of affairs is complex when it arises out of so many elements that these can only be related to one another selectively. Therefore complexity always presupposes, both operatively as well as in observation, a reduction procedure that establishes a model of selecting relations and provisionally excludes, as mere possibilities (i.e. potentialises) the possibilities of connecting elements together. (1986, p.144)

Parmenides exhibited the old philosophical desire—a deep and enduring one—for a mastering of complexity. But Luhmann rightly defines complexity in terms of the impossibility of Parmenides’ desire. The encounter with complexity, and this impossibility constitutes the predicament of an organism’s embodied representations. “Once out of nature” it might be otherwise, but in its physical situation, human meaning is a system of representation that is actually an evolutionary adaptation to this predicament. Just as what Deleuze took to be the *montage eye* of cinema was actually anticipated, functionally, by the objectifying design of the human eye, so the indeterminacy of meaning is a concomitant of its heretofore little appreciated design for its inevitably temporal environment. Working memory can only keep so many threads of narrative on the go, while long term memory is the capacity for generating and replacing threads. Meaning ups our ability to renege on already made interpretative selections, to reverse time and deconstruct the selections and sedimentations of earlier interpretations, and to reactivate provisionally excluded possibilities of connection. In a way, the natural design of human meaning seems to have anticipated the old philosophical desire—from Parmenides’ *plenum* to *deconstruction*. Meaning uses memory to create even more possibilities, more choices of interpretation, thus making the narrow straits of time branch and open out. It enables us to wheedle what little leeway we can out of time. It is almost as if we can move sideways in time, to parallel, possible worlds. Meaning keeps open the horizon of its possibility and thereby keeps open the possibility of beginning elsewhere and connecting things up in a different configuration. The point is, however, that even meaning can only manage this up to a point. It cannot actually actualise all the orders—and certainly not for consciousness. In the end, time is too pressing, too asymmetrical and too narrow for all the meanings that meaning—like Parmenides the meaner—dreams of. So meaning is a kind of romance that works by dreaming of them anyway, not explicitly or conceptually, but by indicating them as possibilities within the bounds of its ever expandable horizon of possible meanings; that is, as inferable if need be. Parmenides—and the subsequent great metaphysical tradition—hypostatized what would be the realised dream of meaning, as if all of meaning’s possibilities were actualised in “well rounded Truth”, so that thinking (and therefore meaning) could exhaust Being.

This conception of meaning is related to what Quine (1969, p.89), after Peirce, said about meaning remaining centred on verification. In connecting up statements or images throughout the course of a narrative (or any discourse) a meaning is only verified up to a point, while other possibilities remain open. Any meaning may be more strongly confirmed down the track, or it may be given a new, unexpected slant, or it may need to be retracted if it reaches a disconfirming dead end. Quine also said that once we get beyond simple observation sentences—and thus assuredly when we are dealing with the string of linguistic and narrative discourse—meaning “ceases in general to have any clear applicability to single sentences.” It connects up with other sentences (or images) in a “more or less inclusive aggregate.” Human meaning is a

cunning way of multiplying these connections, given the impossibility of connecting everything with everything.

This is why the idea that propositions could be understood as *eternal sentences* (see Quine, 1960, p.192. & 1969, p.132) is just a bit too much of an idealisation. Eternal sentences may have, by definition, an eternal meaning; however what they mean is only something that unfolds through time, and to a subject. It is not there all at once, nor is it subjectless. Meaning is always emerging and never complete and closed, even if it is an object and we formally objectify it in, say, our recursive sentences of propositional attitude. (Recursion is such a handy device.) Meanings cannot be individuated sufficiently to rule out their having varying values as they unfold in an untotalisable environment of other propositions or meanings. In the terms of David Lewis (1973), there is a set of possible worlds where a proposition is true, but to individuate a proposition and thereby determine once and for all what it means would be a matter of exhausting those infinite possible worlds. If a proposition is set of possible worlds then it has a set of possible meanings. Those meanings are only revealed through time because they change through time. Meaning is a child of time, devised to overcome the problems of representation in time and of time. To eternalise meaning is a ruse of reason.

The argument structure of a narrative is a temporal icon, an icon of something that is never there all at once. In the sense that narrative argument is an icon or likeness, it is a universal. Narrative art has always delighted in the ruse of fleetingly presenting the fleeting and particular in its would-be universal form. Works of narrative art are would-be eternal narratives.

Histories of narrative, such as Bakhtin's (1981) on the history of *chronotope* (that is on the history of the temporal form of a plot), have asserted that the awareness of the way a plot's unfolding reconfigures the meaning of earlier events is something that has grown throughout the historical course of narrative art. Even so, as Bakhtin himself pointed out, this has been an uneven course of development in which early novels or prose romances adopted simpler, more primitive chronotopes than those already used in earlier works like those of ancient Greek drama, or in that prototype of both western romance and the novel, *The Odyssey*. The development of new narrative technologies has often been accompanied by regression in narrative technique and narrative argument. Prose romance seems to have been dazzled by the technology of writing, particularly by its function of enabling story tellers to work on their texts and to primly arrange all the events in their chronological order along the time line of the written string. *The Odyssey* preserves the narrative sophistication that was second nature to the oral medium, and which prose romance had to slowly rediscover. Similar instances of conceptual regression have accompanied the development of film technology. Film editing is still uneasy with non chronological order, and although there are things like flash back and even beginning *in medias res*, the time changes that language routinely makes between or within sentences would, at present, appear *avant garde*, or clumsy, or confusing in cinema. Film plot, particularly the action film plot, has also been regressive insofar as it has been besotted by ignorant ideologies of *speed* and *vision*, ideologies exacerbated by the potential for the peurile that is implicit in generationalism, and that don't quite understand the wonderful narrative possibilities of movement and vision. The action film is a fitting heir to the romance tradition, precisely insofar as it limits its conceptual and entertainment potential out of an ignorance induced by technological charms. Given the charms, the unprecedented hype and the generationalist culture of digital technology, it would not be surprising if regression in narrative argument became a

feature of digital narratives in the early stages of the “digital age”. Perhaps we already see this in the interactive narrative of games.

Lennard Davis (1987, pp. 207ff) has argued that with the modern novel, plot became especially *teleogenic*, that is, especially likely to have an ending that exerts a strong retroactive effect on meaning. Davis related this teleogenic tendency to the social, historical processes of modernity—processes that included the supersession of teleological providence, and the emphatic concern with individual freedom. Out of this observation he generated an ideology critique of teleogenic plot. Though epitomised by narratives as old as *Oedipus*, Davis claimed teleogenic narrative promised and modelled a way of reconfiguring the past, and was thus a tool for both Utopian and delusory ideological purposes, especially the bourgeois hope of redeeming its sordid past. A work like *Paradise Lost* with its explicit assertion of eternal providence and its fascination with Satanic, revolutionary modernity seems to exemplify the half completed, hybrid genesis of this modern function for teleogenic plot. In Australia, the delusive faith in teleogeny took the form that national progress could redeem the sordid and not quite repressed history of colonial invasion: somehow the advertised benefits of modernity could justify wiping Aboriginal culture out of minds and off the landscape.

On the other hand, any history is a history from the perspective of the present, or as Benjamin (1955, p.257) put it: “To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognise it ‘in the way it really was’ (Ranke). It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger.” There is also an increasing scientific awareness, after the rejection of providence, that there is a certain teleogenic nature in the workings of human meaning and freedom. The novel simply developed growing insight into this fact and made an aesthetic norm out of it. As the classic teleogenic plots of eighteenth and nineteenth century novels became the clichéd teleogenicity of genres like the detective novel, and as historicist self delusion was deconstructed, grand attempts to sublime the old teleogenicity upped the ante for the cunning of narrative art. What Davis (p.222) sees as the “chaotic” plot of *Finnegan’s Wake*, or else the plots of Beckett and subsequent narrative innovators, are, by and large, marked by an increase in teleogenic information, not by the negation of teleogenic structure. The plot of *Finnegan’s Wake*, complete with its “commodious vicus of recirculation”, rather than being chaotic, is actually an especially compressed and complex form of the teleogenic. It is no accident (I say with teleogenic hindsight) that while Beckett was writing his trilogy, Claude Shannon was writing *The Mathematical Theory of Communication*. What appears in a narrative text to be more and more chaotic, more and more random, and more and more uncertain is, for a better and better reader, more informative, more meaningful. In the end.

40. Contingency and fiction.

“This was sometime a paradox, but now the time gives it proof.” *Hamlet*

Narratives are, unavoidably, descriptions of uncertain truth about sequences of events whose meaning or outcome is also uncertain. The problem of the truth of narratives is both a problem of the adequacy of descriptions of temporal phenomena that happen once only, and of the temporal variability of the adequacy of a description as it unfolds, and afterwards, as it is read and reread in new circumstances. Over time narratives can change because they can keep on getting longer, or we can add sequels to supposedly completed ones—each of which allows them to argue or set out more

and more refined and adequate descriptions. Two narrative descriptions of the same sequence of events, or even the same narrative at different stages of its telling, may be adequate for some particular purpose, but they may differ from one another in their adequacy for other purposes. One may lack sufficient causal information, or it may only consist of a schematic subset of the events or states deemed relevant by the other. These variations in truth over time, and in the context of different functional requirements, belong to the general problem of the uncertainty of narrative descriptions, a problem traditionally conceived in terms of the concept of *contingency*. Contingency is a matter of the uncertainty of temporal processes—of the uncertainty of a sequence of events and the uncertainty of its representation. In the statistical analysis of temporal sequences, *uncertainty*, *entropy* and *information* amount to the same thing. The information and therefore the meaning a narrative conveys is related to our sense of its contingency.

The etymology of *contingency* (from the Latin for being in contact) suggests that contingency is a concern with the connectedness of states and events through cause and effect. Contingency suggests that things could have happened otherwise (than they did or than they have been described as doing) or things could happen otherwise than expected. (Both the past and the future are contingent). This is because the partially ordered set of events (some are simultaneous) in a narrative is a selection and a reduction of an even larger set of narratable events; and the causal connection of the unnarrated to the narrated events has been wrongly or inadequately deemed to be negligible, and therefore irrelevant. Any narrative is, as it were, excised from a larger, ideal narrative, a kind of Kantian causal “totality”; it is a relevant subgraph of a larger graph of all the causal sequences in the universe—a partially ordered set of particular states and events by which we may be said to imagine the hypercomplexity of actual (but not narrated) history. Things could happen otherwise because of unconsidered causal factors. In the case of predictions, subsequent events—we call them *contingencies*—test the adequacy of the prediction. In the case of hindsight, adequacy is tested by consistency with other descriptions of the same events, especially with what is called empirical *evidence*—or those descriptions supplied by socially observable observations.

Hegel’s characterisation of contingency (1830, #151, p.214) as something whose cause or ground lies elsewhere—in some other events—implies the unrepresented or inexplicit character of those other events: things could have happened otherwise because our descriptions don’t or can’t represent all the possibly relevant events and their connections. However, they often dawn on us in retrospect. Contingency is thus significant for the temporal predicament of meaning. It is sensed in the opening up of truths to negation with the passing of time. Time can utterly transform the truth value of a proposition. Claims about whether the present king of France has a beard, scientific theories and even a tautology like $\sim(p \wedge \sim p)$ are all rendered contingent by time. “This was sometime a paradox,” says Hamlet, “but now the time gives it proof.”

Language makes the most mundane of lexical provisions for what is actually the most mundane of events in the course of human meaning. Unlike film and drama, language has evolved as a profoundly scheming, schematic, explanatory, argumentative medium—especially in such features as the lexicon it provides for joining propositions. A conjunction of seemingly contradictory statements is signalled by the word *but*. Other terms like *however*, *nevertheless*, *although*, and *though* have much the same kind of function in explanation and argument. They are a terms that invite the audience to explore the branching tree of meaning in order to find worlds in

which, say, it is raining but it is not raining. Fiction also invites us to search for such worlds, even though the stylistic norm about fiction being descriptive rather than explanatory might encourage writers to avoid the conjunctions of explanatory argument just as they would the clichés of received explanation. This (contingent) norm of narrative art arises from a virtue of narrative. The argumentative manner of theory—of the claim and counterclaim of dialectic—is designed to explain such things as contingency; fiction makes a virtue and a norm from the fact that narrative is designed to just show it.

The contingent predicament of narrative descriptions is a function of time, and it is a problem that is attended to or solved in time too. It has to be, because meaning has to unfold through time. In the context of new information we realise that an earlier description of a sequence means something other than we at first thought. In a seemingly random sequence that seems to be arbitrarily leading us through an utterly particular branch of the labyrinthine order of historical possibility, we experience the baffling character of information. In *Fresh*, the plot gets more and more baffling unless or until we realise that the narrative sequence is being generated according to the plans of the protagonist, Fresh, himself. His plan is to outwit his enemies, but as the plan of the plot it also outwits the audience. Until the end. Or else, as Robert Altman cuts one Raymond Carver plot after another in the beginning of *Short Cuts*, we feel the effort and pleasure of having more and more balls in the air, and of being more and more uncertain about what is going on. It is this sublime burden of entropy that we admire in *Short Cuts*, more than its eventual reduction in the subsequent dovetailing of and short cutting between stories, or in the unifying earthquake ending. Altman's clever interweaving of stories from Carver's remarkable *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love* might seem somewhat antipathetic to Carver's spare style with its laconic descriptions of utterly unique and contingent events, but it works, not because of the clever dovetailing, but because of the sense of contingent life, of increasing entropy and of almost unassimilable information. In the end it is as if nature itself, in the form of the earthquake's destructive festival, must be called on just to make an end of all this.

The unfolding of meaning through time is a somewhat forced design to deal with the contingency of the descriptions of past events, given the narrow channel of time—that is, given that we can't say everything that may be relevant all at once. Descriptions, especially initial ones, are asserted only as explicitly as they are contingent on subsequent confirmation. They are, as we say, *thought* rather than *believed*. Truth may well be a practical matter of the adequacy of a narrative (*to* a sequence of events, and *for* a purpose); however along with *falsehood*, *truth* must also be a value of propositions conformable, by injunction or quasi-necessity, to the mathematical requirements of a Boolean algebra. Assertion (or denial), saying *yes* (or *no*), are the representations and communications demanded by this mathematical formality; and in turn the formal injunction is demanded by the teleological purposes of truth—hence its quasi-necessity. *Belief* is a matter of the subjective ignorance of this injunction *as* an injunction, and the hypostatisation of what is enjoined. In *thinking*, rather than *believing*, the representation of the formal character of the injunction is remembered as a reference to the subject's own enjoined state of play in the world. In *belief* a subject hides part of itself from itself. What is cherished as heartfelt belief comes precisely from refusing to look too deeply into one's own heart. We might say, after Spencer Brown (1969, p105), that a subject eludes itself (and risks deluding itself) and in doing so, it reflects and informs itself the way the natural world must have eluded itself in the initial distinction of subject from object.

The contingency of assertions is a consideration of both historical narratives and fiction, both of which seek to represent the possibly immense amount of information of a particular sequence of events in a hypercomplex world. History however is usually told so as to minimise suspense in interpretation and ambiguity of meaning. Or, at least, it proceeds on the basis of minimising the contingency of its assertions: normally a meaning is to be spelt out as early or at least as efficiently as possible, according to what, with the benefit of hindsight on completed events and resolved uncertainty, is taken as and believed to be the actual and irrevocable past. However the actual text is itself always a contingent selection, normally modelled for practical simplicity according to another mathematical injunction about the homogeneity of time. The so called irrevocability of the past is a crutch to ground historical assertions. As a principle, it involves a practical, self-elusive injunction, or, like *belief*, a pragmatic self-delusion about the contingency of narratives of past events. For as Benjamin (1955, p.257) thought: “The past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognised,” it is a selection of or “a tiger’s leap into the past.” And as we shall see, in the memetic selections of the history of culture, “every image of that past that is not recognised by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably.”

Fiction on the other hand deliberately makes suspense and ambiguity part of its experience. For it is a contemplation of the contingency of narrative descriptions. It is then, in its own way, theory, even if only insofar as it is theatre. Explaining fiction as “willing suspension of disbelief” (which Coleridge did *not* do), if it is not wrong, is irrelevant. It tells us so little about fiction because it tells us so little about belief. Assertion is demanded by the (by no means *mere*) formality that descriptions be true or false. The represented self elusion of a subject’s assertion corresponds to the intersubjective collusion of communication. *Thinking* rather than *believing* is akin to *imagining*. Communicative collusion is the mutually manifest understanding of this state of play. The contemplation of the contingency of narrative descriptions is related to the pleasure we get from contingency or uncertainty. Uncertainty is not all a matter of anxiety. Contemplated, it may rather be a matter of the sublime apprehension of uncertainty. *Collusion* in fiction is this sublime experience in the context of communication; its playful or ludic implications, evident to etymology, points both to our pleasure and to the lightness of our injunctions. Contingency entertains us for good reasons: in attending to baffling sequences of increasing entropy, we are more likely to expend the kind of inferential labour needed to disambiguate the sequence and learn to predict future sequences.

Ambiguity, which is so often said to be characteristic of art, is characteristic of descriptions whose design is to anticipate various contingencies. Ambiguity at a given stage in a narrative may be required if the description is to remain adequate in the event of subsequent new information. Science too knows the value of the right amount of ambiguity at the right time. Given the temporal unfolding of narrative text, initial stages in the plot are put forward and interpreted as *contingent* upon subsequent confirmation or disconfirmation. In the case of disconfirmation, the interpretation of this initial information needs to be changed. In a teleological context, contingency measures the likelihood that we may have to undertake some corrective subroutine in order to get a course of action back on course. In the interest of order and foresight (and memory), information must be limited, usually according to some kind of meta-information or law or symbol that is about the information it frames. When it comes to hindsight—the narrative mode of both history and fiction—narratives usually just flaunt the entropy that characterises historical particularity. In this, the true art of narrative is opposed to the endless and endlessly predictable repetitions of most of

society's communications. All the repeated formalities of our "forms of life", all the consistently replicated generic forms of managed, administered and advertised life, all the stock replies of "the great communicators", all received opinion of "the information explosion", all the would-be information of "the information age"—it all reminds one that we live in an ancient age of repetitions rather than of information.

In the rapid intuitive processing of narrative art, that is, in what used to be called *taste*, ambiguity is grist to the mill. We don't willingly suspend disbelief in fictions because when we are in the middle of narratives of any kind, we don't much believe them anyway. Belief is not really our primary concern; we entertain things or think about them—or they entertain us. The contingency of a work of fiction's meaning only allows that we *think* we know what it means—or, as we sometimes put it, how things will turn out—and a narrative's contingency demands that we know that it might not continue to mean what we think. Fiction is not just a handy narrative exercise that simply functions as a kind of practice for some so called "real thing", nor is it gratifying narrative "cheesecake", as it so often supposed to be and as it so often becomes in the narrative market place. Rather it is narrative in all its contingency, and therefore narrative at its most informative. It is narrative as it could happen otherwise, not only otherwise than history but otherwise when compared to already narrated or to expected fictions. In this, it is also a kind of exploration of human symbolic nature. These observations are consistent with the observation that good fiction demands good reading or watching. Its information and its meaning is contingent upon who watches or reads it.

41. The cinematic unconscious.

In a single shot there are countless events and countless combinations of events—a thousand raindrops fall, a thousand heads of wheat bend under the shower, a woman watches from a window, a pen, a pack of cards, any number of small props, line up on the window sill, and so it goes on. If a film shot is a kind of propositional sign, a visual concept referring to an event or events, its visible reference is to a complex of events beyond the schematic devices of the longest sentence.

How do we pick out from the phenomenal complexity of a shot those events which we process in narrative interpretation? The answer is: the same way we pick out and token events that happen before our eyes. What matters most in a shot is still a matter of the audience's treating the shot's relevance as a given and making contextual assumptions that demonstrate the relevant information. If equivocation is what matters, then so be it. Before we do this we are already tokening those events which phylogenetic and ontogenetic history have skilled us in distinguishing, for good ethological and social reasons. As evolved human animals we are able unconsciously to pick out what is relevant from perception because such a skill enabled our ancestors to survive. We are prisoners of such skills and their unconscious workings.

When someone is driving a car, an action far removed from our old evolutionary environment, they are sorting out relevant information—pedestrians, other vehicles, the road way, speed and acceleration, traffic signs—from less relevant information—the windscreen wipers, advertising billboards, road side architecture, landscape and vegetation, music on the radio, the cigarette being smoked and so on. A driver may well be unconscious of all this information because of a diverting conversation going on with a passenger, yet still be driving and unconsciously processing all the information relevant to safe driving. In this environment though our innate skills are taxed, sometimes beyond their limit: successfully answering the

mobile as well, may be too much to expect. Sorting out relevance unconsciously may privilege the social relevance of the call over the social relevance of the speed sign, or the physical relevance of the cornering speed.

In any experience, including watching a movie (whatever moves is typically relevant), we are processing different information at different levels of consciousness. Daniel Dennett (1991, p.309) has suggested that so called consciousness is an affect of information that is represented recursively as the object of another higher order representation: someone who is driving a car is conscious of driving a car if the otherwise unconsciously represented act is represented as a propositional object of, say, thought, or belief, or speech.

Other people's actions are, for good reason, matters of relevance. So if a shot pans from falling rain to a woman watching it, we watch the woman watching the rain, tokening this event conceptually and testing it for its relevance. To watch another human and to be unable to refer to what we see as a particular human action would be a very peculiar thing. Those special events called deeds or actions come invested with their own ends. As social animals, skilled in perceiving the acts and discerning the intentions of others, an inability to conceive of what another is doing—even if only to the extent of wondering *what* it is that they are doing—would probably be evidence of neurological impairment.

The schematics of linguistic representation, and the kinds of information that are readily, linguistically tokenable reflect the schematics of our conceptual processing, but only up to a point. It is much easier to convey certain spatial information graphically rather than verbally. Conceptual processing covers geometrical and topological premises and inferences as well as inferences involving linguistically tokened information. We don't usually watch and token a thousand events as a thousand rain drops fall, we watch rain falling. If the shot of rain is an establishing shot followed by a shot of rain falling on a tree, and then by a shot of one drop falling in a leaf, then individuation of the rain drop is an explication of the narrative sequence. In processing visual information, most of the conceptual processing of the perception is unconscious. Rain is tokened at the level or coarseness of grain assumed to be relevant; Unless it is assumed to be relevant in the context, we don't token each rain drop—least of all for consciousness as the recursive object of another higher order tokening. The sequence of the shots of the rain actually follows a sequence which, given only the first shot, proceeds from normally more to less accessible contextual assumptions and from normally more to less consciously tokened ones at that. Those assumptions are all accessible from the first shot. In a sense the experiential environment itself is to some extent used by an organism as a kind of short term memory. What we don't token, consciously or unconsciously, at first glance will often still be there for a second glance. In the onrush of a narrative however, such untokened "memory" is not always recoverable without rewinding, so narrative diegesis is designed to lead us (if only unconsciously at first) through the relevant assumptions and inferences. The unfolding sequence of shots accesses and confirms the manifest event of an individuated, falling rain drop, and brings it into consciousness.

Right from the start, the film maker is privileging certain information by the placement of actors and the framing of shots, while the audience is, in accordance with both ancient, evolved skills and cinephile experience schematically tokening certain information. Usually, film makers and their audiences are colluding in this game. For a start they share the same conceptual and perceptual skills, but they also share the same culture of cinema.

As a kind of social narrative act, a film is quite distinct from a non filmic experience. So our inferences have to premise certain norms of screen narrative. We don't watch Olivier's *Othello* solely as a record of certain events in the life of the actor and director. What matters most are the events in the lives of Othello, Desdemona, Iago, *et al.* As David Lewis (1978) put it, we go to the world of the fiction. But, of course, we do take note of Olivier's performance, and we might compare it unfavourably with Orson Welles' or Lawrence Fishburne's. So information from that other film, *Olivier—The Biography*, is not all unconscious or irrelevant. In our interpretations we run this biographical draft as well as the drafts of filmic verisimilitude, or other filmic or fictive contextual conventions.

So what about all the events that are recorded by a shot but never make it into the consciousness or never even get represented unconsciously? What of this cinematic unconscious? Raúl Ruiz has reflected on the cinematic potential of what Benjamin called the optical unconscious. Ruiz asked readers of *Poetics of Cinema* (p.57) to imagine, beyond the main features of a picture "an enigmatic corpus, a set of signs that conspires against the ordinary reading of the picture." In a film, the set of events in a shot calls up certain, more or less predictable, inferential effects in the context of the already (and the subsequently) seen. It also calls up assumptions about what is outside the frame. Ruiz however mentions his own propensity for watching sword and sandal flicks only in order to catch sight of planes and helicopters that stray into the background. Likewise one could watch Olivier's *Othello* for the red bus that appears in one scene. That red bus could hijack the whole narrative if the subsequent shot showed it stopping at a bus stop. Lawrence Olivier could get on it and *Othello-the Movie* might turn into *Olivier-the Biography*. In fact this kind of plot was the norm for *The Goons* or *Monty Python*.

When we watch a film it is a bit like driving a car. Characters, especially humans, are going to get the most attention, and nearly always, they are going to carry the burden of the film's meaning. But the setting, the clothes, a passing or incidental event, all sorts of things of which we may initially be unconscious and which we scarcely perceive and remember, can always become more significant as the narrative continues. In *Pulp Fiction*, the killer's casual clothes, worn in the scene when they deliver the bag to Marcellus Wallace, are scarcely noticed, but therein lies a tale. In *Blow-up*, the unconscious and the unnoticed of one photo emerges as the most important event in the film. In *The Discrete Charm of the Bourgeoisie*, a curtain behind a dinner party turns out to be a curtain in a theatre; it rises and exposes the diners to the disquieting scrutiny of an audience. Even in the most conventional film (as in the usual drive from work)—and after all, isn't Buñuel the most matter-of-fact of film makers—we are unconsciously processing information in a plurality of stories, and some of them are going to be unexpectedly confirmed as relevant.

Meanwhile, the necessity of such a method of interpretation actually gives any film the potential to trace myriad, initially unconscious story lines and perhaps even bring them into the explicit or conscious narrative content. In the end, any film charts a conscious and memorable path through an aura of unconscious and so scarcely memorable narrative pathways. Most of these are dead ends or tracks that peter out. The challenge would be to tell several conscious and unconscious stories all at once. But then most importantly this desire is already realised in and central to the great narrative art tradition. Allegory tells several different stories that are only accessible by premising different literal, historical or anagogical contextual assumptions. Different points of view can work the same way, as in *Rashomon*. And there will always be different interpretations of the same film, depending upon the viewer or the viewing. The cinematic unconscious, by virtue of the vast and polysemic nature of

visual information, is even more abundant than the conceptually selected and reduced linguistic one. The only limitation is the same limitation that will apply in the case of the much hyped multiple, interactive narrative possibilities of digital media: the limitations of human information processing skills. Narrative experience can only be so rich, unless we go slowly or savour each proposition or watch or read the same rich work again and again.

In relation to these matters, sometimes people question whether the spectacle of computer generated imagery—so significant in the aesthetics of many an action or science fiction film—or indeed any spectacle, is part of the narrative or just a shallow surface phenomenon. However such spectacle is not just the shallow surface of a narrative that is supposedly elsewhere and “deep”. The spectacle is in the narrative. Computer generated action imagery is computer generated narrative. In cinema all this is relevant, because relevance is a constant. In fiction, which is the spectacle of narrative, spectacle is not *mere* spectacle at all. It is narrative spectacle.

42. Memory and the gists of experience and history.

“The conclusions that we seek to draw from likenesses of events are unreliable because events are always unlike.” So wrote Montaigne in his essay “On Experience”, thus anticipating, for philosophical modernity, the epistemological problem of *experience*, and also of human narrative, and also indeed, of memory and learning and induction for organisms in general. “There is no quality so universal in the appearance of things as their diversity and variety.”

To understand a narrative we need to supply assumptions about types of events, about types of sequences of events or plots. The gist of a plot type supplies information about what follows what in a discrete, memorable order of events. As such, gists act as catalysts in interpreting the enthymematic argument of a story. It is human memory that mediates the supply of such narrative universals as a gist in the course of narrative interpretation, and it is human memory that shapes such a gist.

A culture may have its grand narratives, its myths, its histories, its fictions, all riddled with plans and plots and goals, but in the kind of brainy, bodily memory that a human must use to quickly understand a story, it is the accessible gists that count. Things like: many people have problems telling doves from pigeons; or, when people move to a new location they observe and get to know about the wildlife; or, light fades at the end of the day and colours fade with it; or, when people play certain games they each use a solid elongated object to bat another smaller, object back and forth to one another. Each of these is of the kind of highly contingent narrative information that is obvious to humans, but only because they are human. They use it to understand a narrative and it is obvious, but it is not obvious to them that they use it and it is not obvious to them why it is obvious and that it is contingently obvious. Though accessible to fellow humans—if not to anthropologists from another planet, or to an artificial intelligence—such gists, to varying degrees, bear traces of culturally specific information: batting games are very widespread; battledore and shuttlecock isn’t. We children of the five second grab, who store our ideas on discs, tapes and paper so we can forget them, are Philistines at the art of memory. But whether we bear the memorius burden of Borges’ Funes or of a Simonides, or whether we just mindlessly recall that “high tech weapons won the Gulf War” or “capitalism won the Cold War” this mysterious thing, memory, is the most intimate, the most bodily element of narrative ideology.

By virtue of its ontogenesis and its embodiment, the memory of narrative gists is in some sense autobiographical. When it comes to autobiographical memory, we

may distinguish a hierarchy of memorable time scales (see Schacter, p.89): long periods of life like the time spent living in Sydney, or the bush; general or repeated acts or events like writing a book or working in a petrol station; and specific episodes of experience like writing this sentence or hearing that fruit dove calling outside this morning. These *episodic* memories, though more likely to be forgotten than those of longer time scales, are different again from *short term* or *working* memory, which seems to store data only as long as we need it to process immediate experience. The general information from the first two categories is better remembered than the detailed information about particular events. (Thus, when I edited this section, I had forgotten writing the second sentence of this paragraph. I only remembered the task of writing this section on the theme of memory and the gists of experience, and that a Rose-crowned Fruit Dove was calling for many days last summer.)

When it comes to “searching” memory, rather than simply locating a specific remembered episode that is somehow stored as a discrete memorial unit, we seem to work through the hierarchy of time scales, narrowing our focus by somehow moving from the general to the particular (Schacter, p.90). Thus in what Gérard Genette (1972, p.123) called Proust’s iterative style, the narrator might ostensibly describe, say, one particular walk along one of his childhood “ways”, but he takes the opportunity to describe various incidents from several such walks, the walks being a repeated feature of his childhood at Combray. Initiated by a certain cue—let us say the aroma of a madeleine dipped in lemon blossom tea—the memory that a search “finds” is more like a construction whose particular details are dependent upon the cue and the process of construction. In turn, the telling and retelling of remembered events constructs and reconstructs the events remembered. “Memory,” as Heinz Von Foerster (1981, p.184) saw it, was “the potential awareness of previous interpretations of experiences.” To describe past experience we access the way we processed the experience in the past, including the way we processed it in past attempts at recollecting it. Rather than just remembering the events and states of a particular sequence of events, or even the order of a particular sequence, we remember the gist that generates that kind of sequence. Such a procedure *generates* memories, and would thereby greatly increase the accessible memory, when compared to, say, a vast store of discrete stored episodes.

Memory is intimately related to its dark sister, forgetting. We can and must forget things in the process of remembering and learning, so long as we remember how to adequately regenerate them. Barthes (1977, p.120) said that narrative lends itself to summary. This is true insofar as a narrative has a general argument structure, and false insofar as a narrative is a concern with the particular. We might say that for memory, forgetting performs the function of abstraction or selection that summarising involves, distilling the gist of the narrative argument. Schacter writes that people are better at recalling general or repeated events, and that they typically use them as an entry into personal remembering. They do this because they tend to forget and abstract the detail. Even what we call time or duration is forgotten in favour of invariant temporal sequence. People preserve the narrative gist wherefrom they may reconstruct the detail, albeit with some possible loss of accuracy. As sequences of events are recalled and retold much that is specific tends to be lost, except for things like a repeated, specifying detail or event that itself becomes a specifying *type* of detail or event. What is general, including things like the emotional resonance of an event (as Hegel (1818, vol 1, p.43) said, feeling is the most abstract of matters) gets strengthened for memory by repetition.

The process of abstraction, generalisation, forgetting and regenerating experiential information is partly carried out by the immediate demands of conceptual

processing. A particular visual experience is rich in information, and visualisation is important in memory. Yet visual remembering is already more diagrammatic than the visual experience being remembered. As linguistic recollection is effected by the nature of language and writing, visual remembering is effected by visual technologies. Schacter uses many pictorial artworks in *Searching for Memory*, and time and again the artists use old photographs as the emblems of memory. Likewise in cinema and TV, raw video or Super 8 footage is sometimes used to represent memory—the faded or filtered colour, the graininess, the hand held quality signalling a *field* memory from a subject's point of view. Such cinema and TV makes the diagrammatic abstractions of the camera felt, in order to signify the schematisms of memory.

Any representation of events is necessarily more schematic or reduced in the information it selects than the experience of the event itself. To represent a type of sequence of events in a conceptual, linguistic gist is to subject it to the highly schematic selection of information imposed by grammar in the service of efficient human communication, and of memory. Linguistic propositional forms evolved an abstraction and a forgetting that sees the demands of memory leaving their mark on the primary conceptual category of narrative—the event. Likewise the inferential forms of thought also involve abstractions that see the demands of memory leave their mark on the construction of narrative gists. Thus we remember types of events and types of gists and plots, and such memories become the necessary inferential catalysts in narrative interpretation. Events become alike or plots typical because of memory's uncanny ability to forget what makes them different.

Any organism that is capable of learning in a non trivial way has to be able to reconfigure its gists too, on the basis of new experience. This suggests that it is more important for the organism to remember and work on gists that generate sequences and their outcomes, rather than simply to remember the actual sequence and outcome of events (such as its own response to a particular experiential situation) from the last time that situation was encountered. The point is that, the next time around and as a result of that earlier experience, maybe the gist will have been revised so that, despite the same circumstances and despite being able to recall the old gist that generated the old course of action and its outcome, the organism's response this time will be different. A proviso is that if a sequence is experienced that is neither conformable to a remembered gist nor sufficiently different to it or understood so as to stimulate the revision of the old gist, then there is an advantage in remembering such an aberrant or incompletely understood sequence in the context of future experience because it may, in the light of more data, become significant for the revision of the old gist. For the sake of reconfiguring gists, a fiction can be as good as a fact, especially when actual experience is meagre. In many ways it is better than a fact, just as, in giving "hints" to learning machines a virtual example can get the learning algorithm out of the rut of a sub optimal gist—as long as the algorithm is not deluded by an overestimation of the value of the "fictive hints". (See Abu-Mostafa, 1995)

Telling and retelling stories, without the aid of writing or the mnemonics of prosody, demonstrates how remembered gists or plots effect changes in a story. In his book *Remembering*, Frederic Bartlett found that the inaccuracies of retelling a story were typically due to the effect of general expectations of plot (the details being generated from a gist) resulting in the telling of what *should* have happened according to the expected *gist* of such a story. Aristotle saw the problem of the art of narrative in these terms too: somehow narrative art, as opposed to history, had to tell what might in general happen, while still going against expectation. Thus he saw the problem as a cognitive matter of generating and learning new narrative gists, a process related to the tension between what is universal (and expected) and what is particular and

surprising. For modernity the problem of narrative art is like that of experience. Narrative art has to present that universal quality in experience: its particularity. And time and again the modern motto for the narrative artist was to look to experience.

43. *Gists, plots and ideology.*

Where do plots and their gists come from, and what is the basis of their claim to validity or their claim to our attention? As a plot summary, a gist is just another plot. In turn, a typical plot, in its non summary form, is made up of many gists. The schematic, memorial form of a gist means that it summarises a story to within an inch of its life. It is the limiting case of narrative and the catalyst of narrative interpretation, but not really a typical narrative because it is too short and schematic for that. Even particularly short narratives yield gists that are not just identical to the plot, because the gist extracts a thematic *likeness* of the plot—like the mottos at the end of parables and moral tales, or the ironic conclusions of Jane Campion's *Passionless Moments*. Leonard Michael's short short stories in *I Would Have Saved Them If I Could* each manage, in their ambiguity, to yield several gists in a kind of thematic dialogue.

Aristotle (*Poetics*, 1451a) thought a good plot was about a single piece action. But try and render the gist of one of those supposedly single actions, and you quickly see how much is lost. The gist of *Oedipus* might go something like this: *All efforts made to elude the Delphic oracle's prophecy about Oedipus killing his father and marrying his mother eventually only resulted in the fulfilment of the prophecy, so Oedipus blinded himself and went into exile.* However, even this is probably too long and it is still only one way of putting it—the old, mythic, Teiresian way. Sophocles drama could also be put as follows: *Oedipus inquired into the cause of the afflictions at Thebes and learnt that he was the cause, because he had fulfilled the oracle's prophecy about killing his father and marrying his mother, so he blinded himself and went into exile.* The second version emphasises the protagonist's discovery and the suffering and the injustice of his tragedy. It captures the enlightenment impulse of Sophocles' play. Aristotle (*Poetics*, 1452a,b) emphasised that discovery (*anagnorisis*), reversal (*peripeteia*) and suffering (*pathos*) were the most important elements of plot, and to that extent he could be seen as prescribing, according to a Sophoclean model, an historically specific, enlightenment norm for narrative art, one that superseded the older norm of mythic irrevocability. The first version reproduces the ideological burden of the old mythic order.

Whether we try to make a gist of *Oedipus* or to summarise Proust in fifteen seconds, any gist is just a gist, an abstraction, an ideological unit of accessible memory. The summary character and the socially shared and reproduced character of gists is what makes them little ideological bullets. Their intimate occupation of memory, their cherished status as belief, their resonance in emotional life, the capacity of the narrative business to exploit their affective character in accordance with its own social systemic functions—all these make the gists of human narratives the proper objects of critique.

Plots are constructed from gists and are, in an important sense, irreducible, because, by presenting a dialogue of gists, and by objectifying them, they are, or can be, an undertaking of their own self critique in their own self reference. The first version of *Oedipus* is objectified by the second version, but even the second version is still only in dialogue with the first. It does not neutralise the austere Apollonian truth of what Tiresias reveals. Plot is the argument structure of a narrative, not its summary, not its paraphrase. It is the whole narrative, in every detail, conceived as an argument

set out through time. Every detail exists for and by means of the whole plot, and the whole plot exists for and by means of the details. Barthes said there was no noise in narrative; there is nothing that is not relevant. Aristotle (*Poetics* 1450b) likened plot to a living animal, in an evaluation that expected poesis to be the image of the autopoiesis of natural systems like organisms. Nowadays, we can add to this image by saying that the plot of narrative art lives by feeding off the energy of all its interpretations

The Aristotelian judgements that a plot is simple or complex, unified or episodic, likely, believable, inevitable, mechanical or automatic are not just evaluations; they are also descriptive of certain genres. It is often thought that Aristotle's poetic theory is both ahistorical and evaluative rather than being an historicist, non evaluative description of plots. However, two things should be said in his defence. Firstly, he only considered a couple of poetic genres and media—three genres, if we count the lost section on comedy as well as the surviving sections on tragedy and epic—and his brief history of tragedy had to be brief because it referred to a limited body of works and it had to be produced with the limited historiographic evidence and media of his times: When Aeschylus raised the number of actors from one to two and gave dialogue precedence over the chorus, and when Sophocles introduced a third actor and scene painting (*Poetics*, 1449a), these were either technical or technological changes which, in their revolutionary historical significance, were akin to the virtual realities of the movies or the talkies. Secondly, as an argument, any narrative, in Peirce's words, "urges its argument", so any narrative is intrinsically self evaluative—and to that extent, potentially self critical. Like all would-be facts about art, any of Aristotle's historically specific descriptions were ripe for interpretation as normative, especially when narrative artworks themselves urge their self description as valid arguments, and they urge them as what narrative argument *ought* to be. Aristotle's limited historical circumspection and his evaluative descriptions were the ideological effects of his times and his subject matter.

The Formalist and Structuralist quest for a universal grammar of narrative that would transcend historical and ideological context was, insofar as it was entertained as applying to each and every genre in the way that syntax applies to every sentence, an initially useful but ultimately misleading basis for research. The most influential Formalist researches—like Propp's morphology—were genre specific and, as such, the outlined morphology was historically specific, whatever the universalist intentions of the researcher. Even so, narratives that are about the testing of protagonists in the context of their teleological quest after some object of desire—narratives that might generally be called *romances*—are so widespread as to almost qualify for the status of *the* narrative general form. The folk-tale form that Propp considered—itself a romance form—is a genre of certain kinds of culture, characterised by certain kinds of technologies, and with certain forms of social organisation. We can read most of the social features of the depicted society from the information available in Propp's own abstract analysis; but the depicted and the depicting societies are not one and the same. The genre is about a society consisting of larger numbers than a tribal, hunter gatherer society (the protagonist is often an unknown or one of the folk); the population lives in settled agricultural and village populations (the society is typically beset by problems effecting its agricultural economy—like a marauding dragon); it is a society with stratified class relations as well as kinship relations (the protagonist often wins or proves his, or less often her, place in the highest social stratum); there is centralised hereditary power (the protagonist often marries a prince or princess and

becomes the ruler); there are marked divisions of labour, knowledge and power (the donor figure, who typically gives the protagonist some magic tool or talisman, is an embodiment of esoteric knowledge and power); there is possession of riches by an elite and some forms of public architecture (there are always things like palaces, jewels and gold) (see Diamond, 1997, pp. 268-9). In addition to all this, it must be emphasised that with the emergence of modern capitalism, and after the likes of the brothers Grimm, the folk tale form itself has evolved from ancestral forms that originated in something like this earlier, traditional or feudal society. The folk tale is a memetic transformation of earlier sources, an archaistic (and largely a children's) genre of modernity. Typical of romance, its function as a modern genre is not primarily historical representation, even though it involves a representation of ostensibly earlier forms of social organisation confabulated out of stories inherited from earlier societies. The historical specificity of the folk-tale form is somewhat disguised by the archaistic content generated in the process of a confabulation that blurs historical distinctions for the sake of other psychic and social functions.

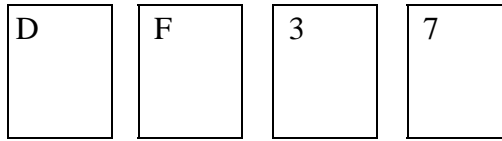
Propp looked forward to a time when the variety and complexity of modern novelistic plot would yield to a morphological inquiry similar to his own inquiry into the folk-tale. Not only is there a genealogy of plots in narrative art, *ipso facto*, plot as a category of narrative theory has its own genealogy. And, moreover, there is therefore a genealogy of evaluations.

Narrative is not a set of abstract discursive forms waiting for any old content to fill them. The content is an important determinant of the form. And the content, insofar as it is social is also social systemic. This might be thought of as marking a distinction between narrative and say deductive or demonstrative argument, which works on its premise regardless of the content. Narrative transforms the content of its premise. It is after all the argument of temporal transformation. Seen at an evolutionary time scale, human narrative skills and their most readily intuited and grasped plots are likely to be applicable to such relevant environmental contents as those of social actions and terrestrial natural events happening at familiar experiential time scales. Unlike deduction, which works on any explicit propositional content whatsoever, narrative inference is a matter of a non demonstrative heuristic whose validity is a matter of making the most reliably relevant inferences from a paucity of explicit information. The context of that information is crucial in both phylogenetic and cultural terms, because it determines the kind of extra information that the heuristic process must somehow—unconsciously or intuitively—take into account.

There is a well known experiment, devised by the psychologist Peter Wason, that seems to demonstrate the importance of phylogenetically relevant content to human cognition. Accounts of it replicate quite successfully in the textual environment of evolutionary psychology (See Barkow, Cosmides & Tooby, 1992, ch. 2). A publican working behind a bar has to stop under age drinking of alcohol. There are four patrons sitting at a table in the pub. The first is drinking beer, the second is drinking orange juice, the third is a child and clearly under eighteen, and the fourth is middle aged and clearly over eighteen. Which of the patrons must the publican question in order to check whether the law is being broken? Clearly, the answer is that the beer drinker must be asked about his or her age, and the child must be asked whether she or he is drinking something alcoholic. Enough is known about the other two not to have to worry about them.

Wason tested the same deductive situation but with a different content. He placed four cards on a table, each with a letter on one side and a number on the other. Two cards were placed letter up, and two were placed number up:

He then asked his subjects to determine whether there were any exceptions to the following rule: “If a card has a D on one side, then it has a 3 on the other.”



Specifically, the subject is asked to nominate which cards need to be turned over in order to determine whether there are any exceptions to the rule. Fewer than half of Wason’s subjects got it right, a result that compels me to give the answer: the D, and the 7. In terms of deduction, the problem is the same as that the publican faced, the D and the 7 corresponding to the beer drinker and the child. Yet even when inference is a matter of deduction, humans appear, generally, to reason better about a social situation involving suspicion of possible cheating than they do about the more abstract situation of cards, letters and numbers.

Since this experiment seems to neutralise the effect of ontogeny and education on inference (though I daresay a practised logician or mathematician would do pretty well on the cards), Cosmides and Tooby argued that the differences in inferential performance between the social and the algebraic content were evidence for an evolutionary influence on the psychology of inference. But even if this strong claim about the biology of inferential psychology is mistaken, and the result is, say, an effect of interpersonal experience being more widespread in human ontogenesis than abstract mathematical experience, it still seems that the way humans reason and the inferential processes that they employ are, to some extent, content specific. They are not always the general, content-neutral, inferential processes that we might expect in what can be treated as a general problem of deduction—that is, in a problem in which one need pay no regard to particular content. When the inferential situation is not one of deduction but of narrative, content is going to be even more important in determining what form an argument must actually take in order to claim validity, or to be memorable, or even to be called a good story.

The evolution of human psychology seems to have played an important role in determining the embodied nature of human inference. When Destutt de Tracy first coined the term *idéologie* he certainly had psychological phenomena in mind, as well as the social and political phenomena that the term has come to refer to. The evolutionary importance of social environment for social animals seems to have effected the human capacity for social, if not algebraic, cunning. Human feelings, ideas and inferences about social relations, about gifts and exchange, about others and their acts and intentions, about communication, honesty and deception—the stuff of both history and fiction—involve a narrative ideology, and the critique of the arguments and validity of that ideology cannot even be readily disentangled from evolutionary psychology, let alone from social history or from the vicissitudes of ontogeny and experience. The plots and gists of narrative argument are as contingent as that; and ideology is as cultural and biological as that.

Content determines the forms of human narrative, though not just for reasons of evolutionary psychology. Ideological history only begins with the time scale of psychological evolution. We are cunningly deceptive and self deceptive animals armed with the ability to use can-do, make-shift, narrative gists, which by virtue of their rapid inferential and heuristic function are necessarily both handy and misleading. But it is as a result of the history of social, economic and technological systems that narrative content and, with it, gists and plots, change and multiply. Though the plots of fiction deal with the ancient social content of human

experience—much the same as gossip, praise, rumour, jokes, anecdote and history—that social content is mediated by social and technological history.

During the ontogeny of human narrative skills, a child of the twentieth century learned plots that did not exist in ancient societies—everything from particular plots like the Big Bang, World War Two, or nuclear deterrence, to generic plots like the TV sitcom, cop series, or the science fiction movie. And these memorable plots form part of the ideological interpretative kit of such a child. Because these plots are still about the age old social phenomena of human evolutionary social environments—sex and reproduction, kinship and social organisation, growth and education, desire and its objects, friendship and enmity, honesty and deception, birth and death—the child is psychologically designed to quickly grasp and remember the relevant gist, cultural specifics notwithstanding. Such plots insinuate themselves into the cognitive life of the child by weaving themselves into the web of emotional life. The child learns plots, and there is conceptual development in this learning that, in some ways, recapitulates the cultural evolution of narratives, at the time scale of ontogeny: a five year old likes to hear the archaic story of Red Riding Hood, the ten year old likes the TV cartoon spoof of the same story, and the twenty year old likes the difficult, art house, feminist critique of Red Riding Hood stories. A fortunate postmodern child knows plots from all sorts of societies, all sorts of cultures, such as the archaic folk-tales that live on in their own contemporary form as children's stories or the Dreamtime myth that persists as an historical document of traditional society. Some genres—some of those that may be loosely included in the category called romance, say—seem to reflect a deliberate attempt at using superseded plots with superseded forms of time. Romance narrative is commonly a response to the supersession of the gists of historiography. Corresponding to the protagonist's desire there is an authorial and audience desire, especially on the part of the victims of progress, for historically superseded plot. Other genres, like the modernist novel, may be related to romance, but they represent deliberate attempts at conceptual progress in narrative art.

Are there gists and plots that especially interest us? Is there such a thing as “hard wiring” for certain good or memorable stories? Peter Goldsworthy (1998) thought so in his essay on “The Biology of Literature.” There are, of course, memorable stories—at the very least we tend to prefer social stories about humans to stories about bacteria or rocks—but what about the way a story is told or its plot?

Goldsworthy's argument is telling in its oppositions. He contrasts the good stories of popular literature and movies to the “dislocation, or alienation [of Modernist high culture narratives] from our story telling nature.” (p.161) He also likens this distinction to that between the ability to write an unputdownable story and the ability to write a memorable, musical sentence: “Story is present in pop fiction, but the musical elements of language at full stretch—cadence, epigram, assonance—are mostly absent.” (p.160) Goldsworthy thinks the “High Church Modernists” lost sight of good story literature while pop fiction lacks the good musical elements of the “High Church”.

Now this is a very schematic opposition, and Goldsworthy warns that his list of those Modernist authors of stories, so unpopular and unmemorable that they require academies to teach people about them, is “elastic sided”. “But [it] always includes Kafka, Beckett, Joyce and Woolf.”(p.162) Now, I have never thought that these authors can't tell a good story. Perhaps Goldsworthy—who is a good story teller himself—must have a different idea about what a good story is. Isn't Kafka, if anything, a wonderful story teller, and in the great tradition of the story teller? And as much as Borges, whom Goldsworthy praises, is a good story teller? *The Trial* is an

unputdownable, haunting tale, in which the haunting quality is not a matter of old Gothic cobwebs, or pulp fiction spookiness, but of that strange, claustrophobic, yet everyday possibility of modernity itself—something therefore felt as all the more weird and amazing. As for Kafka's short stories, they are astonishing in the way that they come out of story telling tradition and make of the form something as astonishing as the wonders that once puzzled the heroes of folk-tales—those enchanted objects that some magician would give to some hero. They also have that epigrammatic quality that links the short tale to the joke—that most truly popular form of popular fiction. (I should say that cadence, epigram and assonance are all valued as musical because of their pleasing cognitive role in the conceptual structure of plot.)

What about the others of this church? Goldsworthy (p.162) mentions “the fact (sic.) that any pub or dinner-party raconteur can tell a better story than, say, Virginia Woolf chooses to do.” Now choosing one example can be more misleading than illuminating. It must be said though that, as story tellers in the sense of narrative plotters (if not in the sense of the oral story telling tradition) and as opposed by Goldsworthy to the maestros of the musical sentence, Joyce in *The Dubliners* and *Ulysses*, or Beckett in *Waiting for Godot*, are better than your average raconteur. Goldsworthy's taste is hardly universal and therefore hardly “hard wired”. And I don't ever remember thinking, even as a young reader, that *Mrs Dalloway* or *To the Lighthouse* had the plots of someone who had chosen not to tell a good story. Their plotting, especially that of *To the Lighthouse*, is inspired by the desire to outdo received opinion on what constitutes good plot. And it succeeds in being anything but a boring story.

Because I am human, I think that I have got the genes for liking good or memorable human stories, but to think these genes predispose me to Michael Crichton and not Samuel Beckett is as wrong as saying that as far as sexual selection goes I am predisposed to women who look like Hollywood clones, rather than to a woman or a man—humans, not unlike many animals, are sexual, not exclusively heterosexual—whose sexuality is richer, more complex, more communicatively interesting, or whatever. What is innate, what is cultural, what is acquired or learnt are not to be so simply separated as this. Evolutionary psychology is often too ready to misconstrue cultural phenomena as phylogenetic, and this seems to be a particular problem in aesthetic matters. An egregious instance is that of explaining the aesthetics of wild nature in terms of speculation about proto-human, Pleistocene habitat, while ignoring things like the self-overcoming of *the sublime*, or the Pastoral and Romantic reactions to urbanisation or the technologisation of agriculture.

What Goldsworthy's essay does is make the simplest case for the sake of making a fairly schematic essayistic claim about the biology of narrative aesthetics—and in doing so he wrongs the importance of the biology of narrative aesthetics. His essay emphasises the importance of genes in what we share as humans. But those genes have to be expressed through ontogeny, in a phenotype. And that phenotype extends to all the tools and technology and social systems of human culture, including the highly sophisticated information products of scientific and artistic traditions. Humans are genetically predisposed to learning new information, to appreciating and searching for more powerful concepts, more powerful science, more complex and cunning plots. And they have cultural traditions and social systemic forces—especially in modernity—to egg them on in these interests too. Humans are not forever satisfied with the same old stew, with old, inadequate and superseded plots—both by dint of their historical psychological nature, and by dint of their cultural nature too. The great aesthetic tradition of *the sublime*, not to mention the

gastronomy of *acquired taste*, is evidence of this. Scientific and poetic systems develop throughout cultural histories in such a way that it takes individuals more and more intellectual effort in their quests to appreciate concepts, and to feel the wonder commensurate with that effort.

Modernism was certainly an effort to develop the pleasures of adventurous and difficult art. But these pleasures are not to be confined to a kind of lit. crit. taste aristocracy, treasuring the precious cadences of boring poetic novelists who can't tell stories, but who *can* write marvellously musical sentences. This thing about the thrill inducing appreciation of *cadences* and *fine prose* and *poetic style* and what, finally, is just reverentially called *language* is one of the great conceptual and emotional blind spots of literary culture. Sure the rhythm and cadence of prose or verse are the abstract temporal forms of meaning's phrase by phrase and proposition by proposition unfolding. Sure, in the unfolding of narrative argument, as comedy makes so clear, timing is crucial. Sure the abstractness of feeling thrills at the abstraction of rhythm. Evolution has given us this feeling for language, and for the rhythm of argument. Sure rhythm is the sign of thought, and, like Virginia Woolf said, if we find the rhythm we can find the meaning, whether we are the authors or audience. But this thing about *language* is still a sweet fetish. It gets reproduced as mindlessly as the TV news producer in *Frontline* chants *vision*. In a way, it says it all; but it is so inexplicit, it says fuck all.

Many of the best literary narrative artists of the twentieth century, especially Goldsworthy's "High Church Modernists", are good because they tell stories with plots that deliberately try to extend the conceptual richness of narrative argument, rather than just settling for what José Borghino has called the "familiar and comfortable emotional architecture of a simple story well told." The difficulty of Modernist literature involved a kind of ascetic striving for the sake of the hedonistic. The richness of its plots compares to the richness of melody in complex, atonal music. What looks senseless or bleakly random is really a symptom of complexity unappreciated.

Good language, like good cinematic or small screen vision, extends beyond the sentence (or the shot), and literary critics, who are forced to quote selected short passages, are not giving readers a good sample of a narrative's prose. They really cannot exemplify language in its fully narrative and literary character as argument. So instead they are forced by space and style to exemplify only fine sounding propositions; and perhaps then they—or at least Goldsworthy—mistake the grabs that they *can* exemplify with the art that is to *be* exemplified. And perhaps this mistake about what is artful has even become somewhat normative for literary culture in an age of short memory and short imagistic sentences and paragraphs. Anyway, they are almost as hard up at quoting narrative as film critics are at quoting vision. (When, by the way, will we have some truly on-screen essays on screen fiction? Or is screen really so much about imprinted movement that it is just *too narrative* a medium to lend itself much to the personal voice of essayistic theorising, argument and critique. At the very least, on-screen essays about screen fiction would seem to have to flout some of the normative misapprehensions about what screen should be, by relying on non-visual interview and voice.)

Don DeLillo has said in an interview in *The New Yorker* that the crux of the matter is language, and taken Hemingway as his example: "The word *and* is more important to Hemingway than Africa or Paris." Precisely. Just read the first page of *A Farewell to Arms*. For Hemingway, narrative argument and plot hinged not on *before* or *after*, and not on *because* or any of all the other implication pre-empting, subordinate conjunctions, not even on *but* or *and then*. His contribution to the cultural

history of twentieth century novelistic plot (inspired by Gertrude Stein, but hardly without precedent in English narrative literature—from *The Seafarer* to Mallory to Cormac McCarthy's *The Crossing*) lay in the relentless, laconic algorithm of adding simple sentence to simple sentence, building narrative argument in a rhythmic, heroic, incantation, a big fundamental conjunction free from the authorial presumption of implicational terms.

The questions remain: what is a good story? or a simple story well told? Or what kinds of stories are both universal and universally give pleasure (if pleasure is actually what primarily matters—and this, for the sake of pleasure, I doubt)? Aristotle's old list of plot features—the sequence of events going against expectation yet still being consequential, the reversal of fortune, the discovery of truth—are all related to narrative cognition, for both the audience and the characters, and they are related to the emotional affect of the drama, to feelings of fear, pity and presumably mirth. There are other formal features, also related to cognition, like the tale within a tale, in which levels of symbolic recursion amount to levels of conceptual objectification. There is also the affective identification with the desire or pathos of the protagonist. Each of these features, like everything human, is to some extent genetically underpinned and to that extent is probably encountered in the narratives of all societies. But in particular narratives each is also tied to particular cultural expressions of human nature.

When it comes to the tradition of verisimilitude in the modern novel, it is underpinned by the concern with truth, and in particular with the truth of the representation of the characters' social experience. The universalistic features of pathos and cognitive discovery are both at work. Yet the modern novelistic tradition of verisimilitude is marked by another tradition: the ceaseless supersession of earlier traditions and norms of verisimilitude. Roman Jakobson's 1921 essay on "Realism in Art" (1987, pp. 19-27) is an explicit Modernist recognition of this, and perhaps a manifesto as well. So verisimilitude is, as a result, historically specific—century by century, decade by decade—even if this historically specific tradition supervenes on the universally human cognitive function of recursive conceptualisation, according to the device of which the earlier tradition is objectified and thereby superseded, negated and preserved all in one go, in the dialectic movement whereby Hegel first modernistically described the historical life of human concepts.

Conceptual and technological and social changes will not let either the concepts of the good story or the good life rest. And there is no comfort given by resorting to gut feeling, as if conceptual doubts could be overcome by appeal to universal, alimentary, emotional responses. It is truly strange how little progress has been made on the question of emotion in the theory of narrative art—ever since Aristotle's attempt to relate poetry's cognitive and the affective qualities. Twentieth century narratology and aesthetics has scarcely done better than Freud on this matter. Apart from very recent work on the functions of emotions (see Griffiths, 1997), there is still little that could be called a philosophy of feeling. Hegel (1818, vol. 1, p.43) rightly said of the place of the emotions in aesthetic appreciation that "the distinctions of feeling are wholly abstract" and that "they are not distinctions which apply to the subject matter itself"—shocking as this may seem to those who think of feeling as authentically concrete experience. Hegel's observation would be a criticism of a lot of criticism of narrative, which deems these matters untheorisable, but only as an excuse to mystifyingly cite things like *cadences*, *language*, *great prose* and the like, and then to indulge in a few flourishes of clichéd poetic prose to whip up a bit of abstract feeling as a signature of the ineffable poetic quality of the artwork in question and the

ineffable taste of the critic as well. Still, we can't understand narrative art unless we make the effort to find how such distinctions in feeling do apply to the subject matter and the argument structure of plot. These are not easy questions, but that is why they still need asking. At present these are problems faced more in the production of narrative art than in narrative theory.

There is some truth though in Goldsworthy's claim about the alienation of twentieth century plot. It lies in the self alienating character of culture itself, by means of the social systemic selection of certain cultural forms. What twentieth century plot sometimes exhibits is the alienation of narrative conceptual development from modern human cognitive and emotional experience. The tradition of the new became a cultural selection pressure for abstract innovation, alienated from all but the most trivial, irrelevant or exploitationary conceptual and emotional interests, and alienated from the very possibility of aesthetic originality, the misunderstanding of which gave rise to the abstract innovative norm in the first place. Though some of the most renowned twentieth century narrative artists might find that some of their works fail to survive the so called judgement of history, this does not mean that their works are not good stories for the times. Certain genres—the folk-tale for one—seem, so far, to be very good at historical persistence, because they tap into very abstract and historically persistent forms of desire: the desires to perform good, socially recognised works and to attract a sexual partner. Certain classics—probably most of Milton's narratives, as many readers have long suspected—were stillborn giants, because they were too much governed by the aspiration to achieve lasting literary greatness in the image of an archaistic, Aristotelian model that probably seized Milton's imagination precisely because of his quite original experience of the new and astonishing flux of modernity. As all things solid melted, so did the cultural environment of the Miltonic moment, and so, despite the modern and nationalist emphasis on artistic endeavour, Milton may have himself become the victim of the last infirmity of noble minds: the desire for fame. And though his truly wonderful works may live on as the cherished experiences of devoted literary readers, their perhaps more assured persistence is as rarely read documents of literary history.

Certain literary works of the twentieth century seem destined for a similar fate. Sometimes the admiration inspired in their particular historical context, was scarcely admiration of their actual narrative conception—which, like science, gets more pleasurable the more difficult it gets. Instead it lay in their local historical meaning, the conceptual content of which was not in the narrative itself so much as in the history of narrative aesthetics—the concept of the new. In general, however, difficult narrative artworks put innovation to the serious task of eluding the delusions imposed by social systemic processes on the autonomy of individual narrative subjects.

Social systems and ideas have their own systemic and ideological reproduction at stake, and they can develop in ways that can be quite alien to individual human interests. They may serve a certain class or a certain corporation, say, and thus become instruments of power. Certain narratives may play on infantile or abstract forms of gratification in order to perpetuate a cognitively stupid content for the sake of the profit of narrative corporations. Market systems alienate narratives much more, and much more perniciously, than the innovative orthodoxy of modern artistic systems. Apart from this though, narratives can become untrue or invalid to the extent that their transformation or negation of older norms of plot no longer preserves the vital experience of narrative curiosity and emotion. But if they do this, they fall short of the demands of the cultural selection pressures for their persistence, which is a matter of getting reproduced again and again in a society consisting of the communications of narrative animals. While narrative capital knows that schmalzy,

narrative gratification works in this environment, the revolutionary ascesis of some Modernist and Postmodernist narrative artworks could well prove suicidal. Obscure and pretentious works may well find an arty niche, but those of Goldsworthy's "High Church" are not like this. If the works of Kafka or Joyce or Woolf or Beckett, or the cinematic works of Godard or Tarkovsky or Cassavettes or Ruiz, become extinct it would be more a case of the stupidity of history—not the failure of plot but the failure of exhibitors to exhibit and audiences to follow and enjoy good stories. Still, social contexts disappear (like Milton's) and such a failure is not unprecedented in the history of narrative art. It threatens even the best of works. A seldom read, but wonderful story like Beckett's *The Unnameable* could become as unrepeatable as the lost works of Aeschylus, or Sophocles, simply because its plot's habitat was the transient one of literary, philosophical postmodernity. Even Shakespeare is threatened—in the original Elizabethan English at least—by implacable historical processes.

44. *Excursus on the metaphysics of time*

How deep is time? How far down into the life of matter do we have to go before we understand what time is.

Don DeLillo, *Underworld*.

44.1 *The art of memory*

The ancient art of memory involved imagining a familiar place—a house, a road, a garden—and then cataloguing all the items that had to be remembered by picturing each one of them at a particular place within the familiar setting. The story goes that the poet Simonides, a native of Ceos, was commissioned by Scopas, a noble of Thessaly, to come to a banquet and sing a poem in his honour. There are many variations of the story—in Cicero's *De oratore*, in Carlos Fuentes' *Terra Nostra*, in Frances Yates' *The Art of Memory*, to name three. Simonides was not backward when it came to his talents, and his reputation as the first person to charge for writing—a world historical first in the commodification of communication—suggests that he was inclined to be on the make. After he had eulogised his host, he was bold enough to slip in a song in honour of the Dioscuri, the brothers Castor and Polydeuces. Scopas, however, took this as an excuse to pay only half the sum that he had contracted to pay the poet, and he told Simonides that if he wanted the balance he could collect it from the fabulous Dioscuri themselves.

During the feast that followed, the disgruntled Simonides got an urgent message to meet with two youths outside. Just as he left the building, only to find an empty street and the stars looking down from the sky, the great hall collapsed behind him, killing all the guests and crushing them beyond recognition. Simonides then demonstrated the feat of memory that so impressed the ancient world, and for which he himself is best remembered. He astonished the gathering relatives of the dead by identifying their disfigured and unrecognisable kin among the ruins. He recalled each guest just by picturing the precise place in which he or she had sat in the hall.

This kind of process became the basis of the method of *loci* and *imaginis*—of places and images—the mnemonic mainstay of ancient rhetoric. David Foster's D'Arcy D'Oliveres used the same method to remember all the Roman emperors, assigning each a letterbox on his mail run. Nature, of course, had developed the method long before, by selecting brains that could extend their memory by using the

environment to store information, and traditional societies had long selected mythologies that were stored in the stable features of landscape, just as the Dioscuri themselves were to be seen as twin stars the sky. Simonides recognised that places provided a kind of mnemonic technology, and he put the technique to systematic use. The technique says much about what psychologists of memory have called *elaborative encoding* (Schacter 1996, pp. 44-50)—the linking of new information (whether an assembly of guests or a story about the Dreamtime) with what is already known, or rather, with what is either visually obvious or readily visualisable (the spatial configuration of the banquet hall or the features of a landscape). This reliance on visualisation says much about the perplexing conceptualisation of space and time, and about the biological genesis of that perplexity.

44.2 *The formless form of form.*

Philosophers have usually found the concept of space to be easier to grasp, or to be more transparent, than that of time. Space's readier accessibility to intuition has been thought in terms of vision: vision gives us the intuition of spatial form (*morphe, eidos*); whereas time remains as the unconscious, barely intuited condition of spatial form. Time has been thought of as almost the formless form of form. While inquiries into space begin with the intuition that it is apparently just out there as *presence*, inquiries into time are characteristically aporetic, because time is fleeting rather than present. Whether in Aristotle or Augustine or Kant, or even Lacan, time is the more mysterious of the two great universals that condition empirical phenomena.

Heidegger (1926, p.49), who charged the whole of the western philosophical tradition with an inability to think about time beyond what had persisted as its essential determination in Aristotle's *Physics*, the same Heidegger who called for the *destruction* of western metaphysics, could himself do no better than epitomise that tradition when he conceived of time in terms of space—that is, as a kind of mockery of space. He used the Greek spatial term *ekstatikon*—the term for something's standing outside itself or for its inclination to displace itself—to explain *temporality*. Temporality, he said, “is the primordial ‘outside of itself’, in and for itself (pp 328-9).”

In fact deriving time from space was precisely what Aristotle's hesitating, fascinated inquiry into time had balked at. The great philosopher of nature was already wary of the wrongs that might be done to time by metaphysics. The trouble has been that metaphysics has fallen victim to and perpetuated the illusions induced by naive consciousness immanently theorising its own constitution. All that seems perplexing about time arises from the ruses of an evolved consciousness that would prefer to make nothing of time, and thereby overcome it. Even society reveals its life by finding time irritating. In the phenomenon of boredom, modernity has found a way of stimulating sales by irritating itself with time. Instead of just “losing itself to time”, modernity has cultivated addictions like shopping and drugs and entertainment to do this for it. What philosophers have sensed when they have spoken about the vulgarity of the problem of time turns out to be a kind of natural aversion. What could be more vulgar than that which the eye of eternity would vanquish from its gaze. Our obscure sense of the problem of time is that it is somehow mired in the vulgarity of our mortal innards. Each of Aristotle, Augustine and Kant gave up trying to separate time from *psyche, the soul, or the subject*. Each represented the experience of time in terms of that more obscure and abstract area of life—inner or affective life. Time is sort of felt rather than seen; or as Kant tried to put it, time is the pure intuition of an *inner visuality*. Apperception is to time what vision is to space.

Metaphors of visibility pervade philosophy, in part because vision has evolved, as Marr (1982) said, to be somewhat self-transcendent in its natural objectification of things. It is as if the eye estranges itself from our more immediately self-centred perception in order to see things from another perspective. The eyes see through space. But we have no comparable organ that would see through time, only, in the long term, memory and its arts, and, in the short term, the arts of rhythm. And even then, it is the obscure affects of an odour or a melody or *déjà vu* that eject us from the present more forcibly than anything so technical as Simonides' visualisation. Or else, without the mechanism of a clock, the bodily arts of rhythm—like dance and song—must be to time what the cold edge of the ruler is to space.

44.3 Vision and language

When it comes to thinking about space, or to communicating spatial information, visual images serve better than words. Language is notorious for the clumsiness of its spatial information. Translating a builder's plans into words is an exercise in longwindedness and confusion. An architect, a navigator, or a mathematician who had to work in words alone would belong in a Beckett novel. Since spatial information has long been represented and recorded in the shared environment for all to see, language has never been needed to communicate all the relevant detail. Having always got by with just pointing to things in the landscape, language had little call for speaking complex diagrams of spatial relations. The limited suite of available spatial prepositions (Jackendoff 1993) supplements gestures, environmental features and images. On the phone language merely copes.

This should remind us that we are extraordinarily visual animals and not just linguistic ones. Not only does the eye estrange itself in its natural, self-transcendent objectification of things, visual information communicated by pointing at things is itself the model of intersubjective objectification. Nature hit upon the importance of the observability of empirical observation long before the empirical sciences articulated it as method. No wonder metaphors of visibility pervade philosophy and science in such basic concepts as *theory* and *idea*—the very concepts that philosophy and science use to fashion their most cherished self-descriptions.

Time is another matter. When we try to think about temporal information in terms of vision, we typically diagram time in spatial terms as a one-dimensional line. In doing so we immediately abstract time itself; the grain goes out with the chaff. Visualisation acts as the model procedure of conceptual clarity, but only by abstracting obscure temporality from its proper place in the picture. In fact, the way to diagram time in visual terms without making this handy but also delusory abstraction, is to think in terms of moving visual images, that is, in terms of the theatres of drama and screen. Commonly, mimesis is thought of as morphological, and morphological mimesis is mythologically and metaphysically understood as a matter of spatial intuition—or so it still was for Lacan (1966) and Kristeva (1974) in their versions of the mirror myth about psychogenesis—yet all the time, time ticks away, not only as the condition of mimesis but as an intuitable and representable dimension of mimesis. Movies make this more obvious than drama because drama did not even abstract the flesh and blood from its texts. Painting, drawing and photography abstract time and help us to forget it. Drama and screen represent the temporal information of the referent in the temporal dimension of the moving image, just as in a picture or an indicated environmental feature, the spatial information is represented spatially. Yet unlike the spatial information, the temporal information is much less accessible. It isn't present except as *now*. We have to wait for it and grasp it in its fleeting passing. So it is as if we are cheated out of achieving the kind of objectification that we would

call *thinking* about time, because we can't *look* at time. We can only look at time by translating it into something spatial that represents temporal relations paradoxically as simultaneously present.

It wasn't until writing that language became a stable presence in the landscape. Language, in its original oral form, only lives in the fleeting dimension of time. Even so, language carves time up somewhat into grammatical chunks so as to disport its information across the simultaneously present branches of an invisible grammatical tree. That is, as linguists have said, language has a "surface", temporal, *string* structure, and a "deep", grammatical and logical, *tree* structure. Linguistics has only quite recently managed to *see* such trees.

Generally, language is much more eloquent about time than space—more or less unconsciously so. As Quine (1960, p.170) complained—against natural epistemology—language "demands lip service to time even when time is furthest from our thoughts." At the very least, it can and does represent the temporal relations of its referent in the temporal relations of the text. Yet it also represents time in terms of the tokenable conceptual categories of the event and the act; it represents the temporal relations between acts and events by means of tense and aspect and propositional phrases; and, by means of multi-propositional narrative argument, it is able to cue and perform the complex, shuffling of events *as narrated* on the "surface" structure of the discursive string, and thereby represent the "deep" structure of the events in their temporal order, comparative duration and even causal relation, which is, according to the natural theology of linguistic consciousness, *as they happened*. The usual name for such temporalised, conceptual diagrams of things temporal, such as the diagrams supplied by language, drama and screen, is *narrative*.

The media and the arts that seem to be most peculiarly devoted to time are those of music. Composed only of rhythms and pulses and vibrations inscribed on the air, music seems to abstract all that is conceptual and referential in language and narrative and leave us with the purely temporal, affective architecture of narrative. Still even the idea that music is architecture in time, relies on spatial intuition. And it would not be right to assume that music has no communicated content other than pure temporality: in the affects of pitch and melody and harmony the body translates its perception of temporally inscribed air into the music's communicated affective content. The obscurity of those affects though, seems to haunt us like the obscurity of time haunts us.

We might be dazzled by vision, but we are haunted by time. So deeply are we creatures conditioned by time that even when we look at a picture, it takes time. So paintings are often described in terms of the necessarily temporalised experience of looking at them. Thus, not only do critics of graphic arts fall into the often forlorn cliché of describing paintings in narratives about the journey the eye makes over them (as if painters—or is it the critics—were frustrated narrators), painters themselves have long designed paintings in terms of such narratives. It is as if the sublime presence of spatial information were somehow too blandly obvious to be true, so art took upon itself a task of mystification in order to get the obscurity of time and experience right.

44.4 Presence

We eventually succumb to time, it's true, but time depends on us. We carry it in our muscles and genes, pass it on to the next set of time-factoring creatures, our brown-eyed daughters and jug-eared sons, or how would the world keep going.

Presence is a loaded term, fraught with metaphysical prestige. This comes of its history in the ancient biological relations between an organism and its environment. The deconstruction of *presence* must go back much further than the Greek's *parousia*. The biological relations of an organism and its environment are conditioned by the peculiar differences of space and time. These cosmologically *a posteriori* differences, such as the arrow quality of time, and other so called *a priori* axioms of time and space, are the effect of cosmologically emergent physical, chemical and biological phenomena, as seen from the perspective of such phenomena, for example, from the perspective of the human subject. *Presence* is effective presence for an organism, in an environment. The common sense metaphysics of presence reflects the human view of the evolved human-environment relation. Of course *presence* was always going to dazzle metaphysics, because all organisms have had to be dazzled by presence, for their own sakes.

Space is experienced as, or rather, it is the condition of *place*. Places or locations scarcely change, or rather, places may be usefully relied upon as effective environmental regularities, and that, at least, is how organisms like us have evolved to represent them. Until Einstein such regularity was thought to be absolute, belonging to the nature of the universe, rather than being an effect of the evolution of organisms and society. The fine details of relativistic time have not been in effect as selection pressures in the evolution of things like organisms. What were once the self evident axioms of time—that the same thing can be in the same place at different times, but not in different places at the same time; and that different times are not *coexistent* but *successive*—are the effective or virtual conditions for an organism in relation to its environment. The same place can be revisited at different times. Different times cannot be revisited in different places.

Space is intuited as the condition of an environment of coexistent, revisitable places, as a landscape. Unlike moments or periods of time, places don't just disappear. Their persistence, along with their accessibility to vision, makes them eminently suitable as tools of memory. Long before writing, the stable features of landscape were a store of memory. (It might seem odd that ancient rhetoric persisted with and systematically developed the old mnemonic technology so long after the invention of writing, but history is hardly ever so ruthless as to utterly wreck what was prestigious in the past, especially not the ancient human prestige of bodily eloquence and memory. Simonides saw that this was an anachronism that could sell itself as part of a professional repertoire.) Places persist as reminders of what happened there, and of the journeys whose paths passed by there. Remembering the times when events happened and the order in which they happened is a task in which landscape serves as a map. The story of a journey—the road, said Bakhtin, is a chronotope in which the unity of space and time markers is exhibited with exceptional precision—is a temporal map. It is written on the landscape.

Landscape, however, is not just memory. Rather its ancient and convenient function for memory is what lies behind its function in the reproduction of such social systemic information as myth and history. These forms of "social memory" are, strictly, no longer memory at all. They belong to the natural history of social systems rather than to the obscure workings of subjectivity. Landscape is not just memory because it is both a social mnemonic and a communicative technology. And it is an historical product. Landscape, which was once a durable, if ambiguous, document of myth, has, if only for that reason, become an historical document. Landscape is now history.

The subject is an index of temporal but not spatial presence. It is intimately bound to time. Spatially, most things are not present where we are. Temporally, things are only present in the *now*, where the subject is too. Time and the subject are co-present. Or, as Kant interpreted this: space is the condition of intuitions external to the subject; time is the condition of internal intuition, and only mediately of the external (1787, p.50).

A subject or organism that is not an index of its temporal presence would not be a subject at all. Living things live on despite time; for time is the condition of both life and its passing. Living things survive by effecting a virtual reality of timelessness and non-passing. An organism has to keep up with its experienced environment. It measures environmental time in and by its own processes. It is a set of cunningly devised correspondences between organismic and environmental processes. An organism could be read as a narrative in which the organism tells itself as a virtual identity in relation to whatever changes its environment dishes up. A human subject is accordingly a narrative of virtual self-identity.

Spatial intuition is not so inseparable from subjectivity. It is unlikely that Space would ever walk on stage—except as the spirit of Place. But with Time it is another story. As in the time obsessed dramas of the European Baroque, Time has contrived to take on the flesh of its children, its *dramatis personae*, coming on stage with them as prologue or chorus, to announce, as in Shakespeare's *Winter's Tale*, "I that please some, try all." Aristotle's question about whether time is possible without *psyche* (*Physics* 223a), Augustine's view that time's distension is that of the soul itself (*Confessions* p.274), and Kant's conception of time as the subjective condition of all intuitions (1787, p.49) are intimations that, for its children, time and its children are inseparable.

44.5 *The virtual reality of life*

The gene, according to Richard Dawkins,

does not grow senile; it is no more likely to die when a million years old than when it is only a hundred. It leaps from body to body down the generations, manipulating body after body in its own way and for its own ends, abandoning a succession of mortal bodies before they sink into senility and death. The genes are the immortals, or rather, they are defined as genetic entities that come close to deserving the title. (1976 p. 34)

Of course, particular genes in particular cells do not leap from body to body. At best they replicate. Each gene is a token or replica of a type of gene. Particular genes no more leap from body to body than particular bodies leap into other bodies. No more and no less. *Types* are the immortals: it is just that the type of a gene is a bit more immortal than the type of an organism.

Like a poet, or a propagandist, Dawkins equivocates two meanings of the term *gene*: the individual replica; and the universal type. In doing so he is imitating the cunning poetics of life. In a nominalistic world of individuals, the poetics of life make emergent phenomena, which, from the viewpoint and time scale of that from which they emerged, look universal and immortal. With genes, natural history produced a replicable likeness that was virtually the same as the original. Despite a nominalistic, historical universe of non-identical individual genes, gene replicas seemed to be virtually identical, and therefore virtually immortal.

The virtual identity of replicas, by means of which a gene seems to colonise the future, is a natural instance of what Kant (1787, pp. 195ff.) called an amphiboly of

reflection—an amphiboly being a misapprehension that proceeds from the equivocation of what are distinct kinds of cognition. The self-identity of an organism that must change itself in order to track its environment and thereby live on is a virtual self-identity, and also an instance of such amphiboly. What Kant insisted be distinguished as the proper places of two different kinds of reflection—empirical and transcendental—are, for historical, biological thought, the effects of operating at two different time scales. The empirical corresponds to what is sensuous and individualised in experience; the transcendental to what is subsumed under symbols or universals, and what thereby effects a seeming timelessness or *a priori* status *vis à vis* the empirical. For living things, survival and reproduction are the effects of a kind of natural amphiboly, a fiction which confuses distinct identities by forgetting temporal distinctions. Genes are the device or medium of a special narrative that represents timelessness and immortality as virtually real. (It's worth noting at this stage that empirical science's rule about the social observability of empirical observations was made possible by the insight that if particular observations weren't socially observable then that social observability could be made *virtually real* by the conventions of repeatability. Thus, for empirical science, even an empirical observation is a replica of a type.)

Virtual reality is a term for a narrative that blurs distinctions between text and reference, signifier and signified. It is a fiction in which the text or sign or symbol is a fetish that becomes more dazzling and functionally more astonishing than whatever it might have referred to. Like America, as Raul Ruiz said, it has been discovered many times. Despite frequent and prudent warnings against confusing poetic creation with Divine Creation or natural creation, narrative poetics and fiction have long played with the charming possibilities of a text that is more alive than its referent. The non existence of fiction's referent hardly discourages such play. The ancient seductions of virtual reality have been recognised throughout the history of fiction and its forerunners. It is in its self-recognition as virtual reality that fiction bears a portion of its truth. Rather than being excluded from truthful access to the real, fiction, like nature, demonstrates the insight of Gorgias of Leontini, the first Greek theorist of rhetoric: "Being is unrecognisable unless it succeeds in seeming, and seeming is weak unless it succeeds in being."

44.6 *Echo and Narcissus*

The representation of spatial information, of trans-temporal presence and of a certain self-transcending, objectifying viewpoint—in these lies the metaphysical prestige our physiological history has bequeathed to human vision. The representation of temporal information in a form that is itself a creature of time—this is the fate history has bequeathed to human narrative as embodied in language and gesture and music. The difference between these functions lies at the heart of the myth of Echo and Narcissus.

As in other mirror myths—lately and notably Lacan's and Kristeva's—it is in vision that the formation or grasping of self is effected. In Ovid's version of the story, Teiresias prophesies that the beautiful boy will live to old age unless he comes to know himself. Narcissus, the representative of obsessive visual abstraction and the captive of the mirror, is both transformed and preserved in the timeless, narcissistic self-identity of the flower.

The history of a myth is a history of variants, each pretending to master the virtually unmasterable material bequeathed by the mythographic tradition. Each mythographer is fascinated by all the old material, both as a fading image of some

desired original and authentic order, and as an opportunity to fulfil the desire for mythographic poesis.

In his own telling of his mirror myth, Lacan (1966, vol. 1, pp. 89-97) made a theme of this fascination, reflecting it allegorically and unconsciously in his story about the genesis of the *I*. He showed his own mythopoetic desire reflected in the infant's desire, in its *manque à être* or "want-to-be". He reflected the insufficiency of his own psychoanalytical means to his psychoanalytical task in the insufficiency of the infant's motor means to its desire. The device of the mirror is as much the rhetorical device of Lacan's essay—it has no special empirical significance—as it is the device of the infant's psychogenesis. And Lacan's own mythopoiesis is reflected in the infant's self poesis *dans une ligne de fiction*. The persistence of Lacan's mirror myth into the canon of post-structuralist thought demonstrated the same kind of fascination. This is why Freud's legacy as a mythographer is more fascinating than his legacy as a scientist: his science fades into scientific history, while his mythography lives on like the time defying phantasm of the parvenu, wannabe *I*.

In this hall of mirrors, Lacan's essay reflected not only the psychogenesis of the *I*, but the history of the myths induced in western metaphysics by the insufficiently understood intuition of time and space. Lacan's myth, and Kristeva's variant, both fall under the detemporalising spell that attends the phantasmagoria of vision. Both understand morphological mimesis in its detemporalised sense as a matter of "spatial intuition" (Kristeva, p.46), and as "an obsession with space in its derealising effect" (Lacan, p.92). Yet the mythographers, like the metaphysical tradition, repeat the mistakes of the infant dazzled by vision and its spatial information. All succumb to the ancient organic device of obscuring time in order to overcome it.

We see this illustrated in the notion that the achievement of the gesture of the *I* is to unite the disparate parts of the so called divided body, *le corps morcelé*. Lacan said that this *spatially* divided body shows itself in dreams and in art—such as in the paintings of Hieronymus Bosch. However this is to neglect the temporal non identity of the body which has long been shown in dreams and in stories of bodily metamorphosis, typically in those transformed by a libido that, precisely in the assertion of the self and its reproduction, threatens to disintegrate any individual self from moment to moment. This is a significant omission. After all, the gist of all narrative gists is transformation, and stories of metamorphosis are the epitome of transformation. Meanwhile, even if this is merely a sin of omission or forgetting or repression on Lacan's part, we have already seen this seduction by visual detemporalisation in Lacan's own unconscious mythographer's absorption in his own reflection

Narcissus then, with his reflecting surface of water, is the emblem, in the tradition of metamorphoses, of timeless self-identity, of abstract space without time. Lacan and Kristeva repeated the narcissistic metaphysics of all the generations of time transcending organisms. Meanwhile, Echo, punished by Hera for telling stories that were intended to distract Hera from Zeus's philandering, loses the power to narrate. She becomes the fleeting image of others' narratives, and of narratives in their fatefully temporal nature. All that she is allowed of self identity is to be the quasi-subject of the scarcely holophrastic ends of others' utterances. If only narrative weren't a creature of time, if only it were, as Barthes and Greimas insisted, merely *pseudodiachronic*, then it would be a merciful blessing for her. Instead, Echo is the victim of narrative in its thoroughly temporal, diachronic character. Her metamorphosis robs her of her narrative body, of the *it* where her *I* would, if it could,

become. She is the abject creature of abstract time without space, of the form that, as Aristotle reckoned, was accidental in its essence.

Narrative Culture

45. *The life of thought and science is the life inherent in symbols. (C.S. Peirce)*

It is an old custom to speak of the autonomous life of things like words, ideas, concepts and symbols. Aristotle (*Metaphysics* 1074b) had understood thought, in its supreme form, as autonomous, as *noesis noeseos*, or the thinking of thought itself. Hegel saw science in terms of the reflexive, dialectical life of the concept passing through successive stages of development. He understood the *idea* as ultimately its own object, something that “goes forth freely as nature.” (1830, #244, p.296). All sorts of things live metaphorically; indeed, as a metaphor, *life* has a life of its own. But as long as human life and living nature remained the last surviving divinities of secular culture, and as long as ideas and meanings were deemed to be the inalienable productions of free, individual consciousness, then the idea that ideas, symbols and meanings—and, for that matter, stories—have a life of their own that is sometimes heteronomous to individual human intentions was felt to be too fancifully and offensively antihumanist. Yet what used to be the bourgeois sensibilities of individual humanism notwithstanding, the likes of Aristotle and Hegel merely represent the tip of the iceberg of what remains the great western philosophical tradition. It may scarcely seem coherent—it has largely been a tradition of inklings equivocating between metaphor and ontology—but its genealogical persistence is either a sign of enduring validity, or of a perennially seductive delusion. And it has been seductive, perhaps, because it seemed to satisfy the old philosophical desire for transcendence of mere—especially others—subjectivity. Its persistence is, in fact, an instance of what it describes, an instance of autonomous, self reproducing culture.

For any theory of fiction, so much depends upon the fact that stories are told, varied and retold through a human population and through time. Like the problem of the origin of species in pre Darwinian biology, so many of the traditional categories of poetic theory and criticism are bewilderingly arbitrary and inexplicable without an understanding of this process: the secret ministry of artistic influence; innovation and originality; the canon, the classics and the judgement of history; structure and structuralism; aesthetic and critical theory; aesthetic change and the relation of artistic theory and practice; the history of genres and the meaning of generic “archetypes”; the ideological meaning of fiction; and the virtual reality of history and the relation of fiction to historiography. Being told, varied and retold, stories end up having a life of their own, reproducing themselves, in part or whole, in different contexts and different media, with different forms or meanings, historically drifting through an environment of mind after mind, text after text. The historical complexity of these processes is no reason for simply seeing what was called the *intertextuality* of texts as a fascinating, anachronistic textual array of borrowings, allusions and references, constitutionally defying historical analysis—even though this might be what the narrative artwork wants us to think. The apparently arbitrary temporal composition of the intertextual data—to a bewildered observer—is no reason for a detemporalising reduction of its historical complexity. The arbitrariness is a sign of history obscured, not of an essentially ahistorical phenomenon. Along with the history of ideas, the development of technology, the generation of scientific thought, the genealogy of morals, the evolution of language and symbols, the etymology of words and the

reproduction of social systemic structures, fiction's so called intertextuality (besides being, as Bakhtin showed us once and for all, the crux of narrative, poetic style) is a phenomenon belonging to the general problem of the historical production, reproduction, transmission and persistence of culture.

As "a symbol, once in being spreads among the peoples"—Peirce's words (1931, vol. 2, p.169)—as it gets copied, gets modified and gets retold, it is subject to the teleonomic selection processes of cultural history. The physical and psychological demands of communicative transmission, variation and selection constrain what can happen. They frame the field of contingency in the history of social processes. Thus, at time scales greater than that of the reiterated communicative replications—that is, over many generations of replication—relatively persistent cultural phenomena may be observed, whose cultural persistence and evolution is explicable in terms of the underlying teleonomic selection program. It is these phenomena—including symbols, ideas, genres, stylistic traits, social systemic structures—that, as elements in social systems of communication, exhibit a life of their own, beyond the autonomy of individual humans.

When Richard Dawkins proposed the idea of the *meme*—a replicating element of cultural information—it was very like a case of convergent evolution in the history of ideas. And if it wasn't convergent evolution, then Dawkin's concept, while it was consciously homologous to the idea of natural selection, was unconsciously homologous to a heritable cultural form—that of the great philosophical tradition encountered in the likes of Aristotle and Hegel, as well as in the diverse modern tradition of philosophical materialism. In some form, it is common to contemporary philosophers of science, like David Hull and Daniel Dennett, and to the contemporary theorist of social systems, Niklas Luhmann, as well as to the cultural critical heirs of Marx and Nietzsche, like Adorno or Foucault. Despite the memetically replicated cultural critical tradition of emphasising differences, disruptions, non continuity, and particularity, cultural genealogy is a concept whose widespread persistence bespeaks its adequacy to what is universal in the nature of culture. What is astonishing is that it scarcely impinges on the memetic tradition of common sense. It still remains outlandish or offensive for common sense.

For Dawkins (1976, pp. 206ff), the meme was a persistently self replicating, self referring element defined according to the operational requirements of a natural selection process: memes are subject to copying, variation and selection according to differential fitness in their psychic, social and textual or empirical environment. As examples he cited "tunes, ideas, catch phrases, clothes and fashions, ways of making pots or of building arches." He could well have cited jokes, those humorous, epigrammatic fictions, that are usually curiously unattributable to any individual author, and that are well known for taking on a life of their own as they drift through populations. Or he could have cited other kinds of stories, or narrative genres in general. As a joke or some other story passes from person to person, through a population and through time, it may vary (by embellishment, or editing, or forgetting, or mistaken replication, or combination with elements from other stories, and so on); that variation itself becomes an object of replication; and, depending on its fitness (a joke has to be funny and as a story it has to demand our attention and get itself retold) it may be selected as a self reproducing element, somewhat independent (as a gene or an organism is from its environment) of any one individual's intentions. At one level of abstraction—quite a natural one it seems for human observation—we describe a

story as a meaning produced by autonomous individual consciousness. At a different level it may be described as an evolving, self reproducing element persisting in an environment made up of many minds and many texts; that is, it is a self referring element in a self reproducing system of communications, or in other words, in a social system.

When considered as a scientific meme itself, the *meme* seems not to have found much in the way of an environment conducive to its selection. Daniel Dennett (1995, pp. 361-2) has suggested that the meme meme scarcely survives the selection pressure of the humanist minds at work in the humanities. Dennett likened the response of those in the humanities to immunological rejection. (Indeed memetic transmission has been seen by Sperber as a kind of epidemiology of cultural forms.) However the humanities, ever since they embarked on their radical critique of the concept of subject, or else in earlier notions, such as Hegel's of culture as the self alienation of spirit, have been especially intrigued by the notion of the alien social construction of consciousness and its subject. Dennett's own Austinesque title about the life of clichés, "How Words Do Things With Us" (1991) catches up, converges with, confirms, and even helps explain the by now old adage of the humanities, that language speaks us rather than just the other way around. Thus, I think the rejection of the meme meme lies not in any humanism that especially characterises the humanities.

In the humanities, the main selection pressures operating against Dawkin's meme lie elsewhere: in the suspicion due any book that sells itself with a catchy, ambiguous pitch like the one about selfish genes; in the often ill informed rejection of anything that looks like the application of Darwinian biology to human society, especially not in a work of pop science; or in the sceptical rejection of any reduction of psychic or social complexity to what purports to be a principled mathematical, biological description. Dawkins himself, it must be noted, has actually been quite cautious both about memes, and about the application of Darwinian biology to society.

As far as the catchy pitch goes, this is now a tiresome stock in trade of popular science and philosophy. Infecting many works (including Dennett's), it is characterised by a flip, almost trivialising style, designed to survive the demands of education, popularisation and especially marketing, all at once. Richard Lewontin has called Dawkins a propagandist of neo-Darwinism, but really Dawkins was advertising and selling his ideas and his book. Dawkins sold *The Selfish Gene* with a title that managed to vaguely suggest (as advertising is wont to do) that just as Darwinian biology had killed off the aging god of Victorian England, neo-Darwinian biology could kill off the reigning secular divinity of modernity—the cherished *socially constructed, autonomous self*. In appearing to reduce human behaviour to selfish biology, he probably damaged, initially at least, the reception of what are two important ideas—the idea of self-referring replicators in general, and, ironically, the *sociological* concept of the meme. This itself is an example of how the selfish memes for selling (and selling oneself) can parasitise and transform scientific intentions. In this case, I suspect they even parasitised and transformed Dawkin's intentions, because in the debates that ensued Dawkin's and his critics, like Lewontin and Gould, were often arguing at cross purposes, which is to say, that they were both arguing not only for their own purposes but for the purposes of another memetic phenomenon: a self replicating conflict system. In fact, the physical sciences—precisely insofar as, constitutionally, they are not (like the modernity of which they are so characteristic) reflexive and therefore do not make themselves objects of their own observations and descriptions—are well adapted to the memes of modern marketing. The two happily

feed off one another. But the same memes may be lethal for the reflexive projects of philosophy and the social sciences, which, because of their proper scientific curiosity, cannot avoid a critical observation and self observation of self altering ethical and political phenomena.

In speaking of *selfish* replicators, Dawkins used the term in its strict, functional, analytical sense; but in wanting to advertise his work by scandalising received morality, he played on the moral connotations of *selfishness*. Unfortunately, evolutionary biology is still often benighted by the confusion of these two meanings of *selfish*. Even if altruistic behaviour may be reduced to an explanation in terms of the selfish replication of genes, there is no reason to think that altruism is ultimately selfish in the moral sense. The fact of human unselfishness or generosity, though consistent with the selfish replication of genes, also needs to be reduced (or explained in terms of) the selfish replication of memes as well. Certain forms of human behaviour—social, communicative behaviour—are functional for both the organism and the society. As I have said elsewhere, functionalist reason is typically not functionalist enough. There is an excess of functionality: organic and social replicators feed off the same functional designs. And perhaps the function of social replicators for themselves is to be counted as an important selection pressure in the evolution of human biology. Though, historically, genetic selfishness is primary, we should not make the mistake of hypostatising genetic selfishness and making a metaphysics of genetic reductionism. What counts is not a first philosophy of selfish genes, but a last philosophy in which neither the selfishness of genes or organisms or memes or culture takes functional priority.

As for the humanities' suspicion of reductionism as such, the favourite reductions of the social sciences and cultural studies have been framed customarily in terms of the principles of power and desire. But as such psychically familiar principles, these are easily and mistakenly generalised into social structural abstractions, retaining the appeal of familiarity, while yielding little gain in explanatory power because, without a theory of cultural evolution, they defy easy explanation of their own new and Protean abstract forms.

Desire is primarily a psychic category and, like belief, it is an abstract category supplied by society, that psyche uses for its own self simplifying reductions. Power is a psychically familiar social relation that becomes increasingly counterintuitive when extended from relations between individuals to relations between elements of a complex, functionally differentiated social system—even though the relation is mediated by the often painful localised relations of individuals. Power as such demands explanation before it can explain anything.

Still, there is some considerable selection pressure *for* the meme meme, and for a theory of cultural evolution. Dawkin's, Dennett's and many others publicity certainly finds fertile ground in the culture of popular science and philosophy, where there is always a place to sell big, catchy, new theories. In particular, as the history of the philosophy of history has shown again and again, the selection pressure for a half useful reduction of social historical complexity has long been seductive to the point of self delusory—as has the selection pressure against what seems too popular. The main problem for the meme meme however is that there is a selection pressure in scientific culture for the empirical, explanatory validity of a scientific description, and against whatever does not seem to have such validity. If an explanation is new, and in particular if it seems inconsistent with pre-existing theory or common sense, then its validity and its proper originality is something that must be conferred retrospectively (like the memorability of a story or the originality of an artwork) by the scientific system building on it and so proving its worth. In the memetics of the meme meme

this can be analysed into two problems. Firstly, there is the problem of the unambiguous, operational definition of cultural evolution and of the *meme* and, along with this, questions about the meme's ontological status and its believability as an empirical phenomenon. And secondly, there is the problem of appreciating what phenomena memetic descriptions can actually be used to explain, and how.

The problems of defining and grasping the concept of the meme, and of observing memetic phenomena, can easily corrode confidence in the validity of memetic explanation. Memetic variation seems to occur at high frequencies so there seems to be insufficient fidelity in memetic replication to satisfy the principles of a selection process. There is a high degree of reticulation among branching cultural lineages, so there are consequent difficulties in distinguishing inherited from independently evolving and converging features or adaptations (as in the lineage of the meme itself). And often the same meme may be shared across quite different communicative media, so a written script can become a play or a film, or *Emma's* novelistic plot can reappear as the movie plot of *Clueless*, or Ovid's story of Pyramus and Thisbe can appear on stage in *Midsummer Night's Dream*, and again, with variation, in *Romeo and Juliet*, and then surface in *West Side Story*, the musical: What is the self same meme in all of this?

All these features make it difficult to frame a precise way of abstracting a discrete, persistent element to operate as a unit of replication and selection in a teleonomic process. To make things worse, memes are not only social phenomena, they inhabit a psychic environment, and to that extent they are hidden from empirical observation in the realm of meanings. And they are revealed only in the doubly contingent predicament of communication, and therefore as two meanings. They thus seem to suffer from the difficulty that so worries the human (and the historical) sciences—the violation of the empirical demand that their observation be observable and repeatable

The problem of defining memes interanimates with the problem of recognising what memetic descriptions explain. For what they explain—certain structural elements and historical processes of social systems—conditions the operational definition of the *meme* in the first place. It is in their operational context—that is, as replicators in a selection process—that memes, like genes, *define themselves*. This is the sense in which memes, like genes, are selfish. They are self referring, and the problem of defining them is a problem of recognising the natural bounds of memetic self definition. Since whatever has a history cannot be defined, a meme's self definition, like a gene's or even a species', is a matter of effective or virtual transhistorical persistence. As Dawkins said of genes, memes are virtually immortal; it is just that the time scale of a meme's virtual immortality is much shorter than that of a gene's. This discrepancy though is considerably improved if we understand time in relative terms—that is, in terms of generations rather than years.

A meme may be as brief as a cliché or catch phrase or any single word for that matter, or as long as *War and Peace*. Though there may be a lot of variation due to innovation or insufficient fidelity of replication, such variation, unless it is replicated and selected, has the same status as, say, a fatal genetic mutation, and falls out of the evolutionary process. And though reticulation of branching lineages, or convergence and merging, of separate lineages might seem to be a problem for defining memes, it isn't, because if there is reticulation or merging then it simply means that the merged lineage must then be treated as one.

The question of merging memetic traditions leads to some important misapprehensions in quasi historical searches for origins. The grail legend is an

appropriate illustration, especially those recent grail legends with historiographic pretensions, whose grail is the historical origin of the grail as legendary object. Like those ignorant and misguided quests of the less sainted knights, they end up wandering through a wasteland of hopeful leads, utterly missing the point. For like a river—and a braided one at that—the grail legend has not one but many sources. It no more authentically begins in some dark pagan or Celtic practice—which might therefore show some kind of iconoclastically satisfying unchristian character—than it begins at the last supper, or at some long forgotten, fascinated contemplation of a drinking vessel or a precious metal. It “begins” at all these places and many more.

Roberto Calasso (p. 281) said “The mythographer lives in a permanent state of chronological vertigo, which he pretends to want to resolve.” As I have already said, each mythographer is fascinated by the discoordination of all the old material, but, as yet another story teller, this fascination and the desire for a lost order feeds into the desire for a new mythographic poesis. Marina Warner (1994, p. xxiii) knows how difficult it is composing a genealogy of stories and their historical contexts when “they resemble an archaeological site that has been plundered by tomb robbers, who have turned the strata upside down and inside out and thrown it all back again in any old order.” This difficulty of tracing genealogy is itself an important conclusion for memetic science. Though sometimes possible when historically continuous tracks fortuitously enter the data, tracing genealogy is not the primary nor the most valuable task for the memetic understanding of narratives. But the fact that there *is* a genealogy is an important principle for any study into the evolutionary nature of narratives.

In defining the *meme* we have also to define its environment: it is an element of meaning in human minds, and in communications or texts. The meme is defined by the measure of its endogenous persistence in such an environment. It is a reiterated abstraction, but it is a natural one that, at the level of teleonomic description, rescues certain not unfamiliar social phenomena from what would otherwise be explanatory oblivion. The persistence is a matter of relative persistence—relative to individual replications or generations and therefore relative to the communicative acts of a human observer, and relative to other meanings in a system of communication. (Time is always relative to an observer, that is what the empirical is all about). Like fatal genetic mutations, myriad proto-memic phenomena are born and die in single utterances, falling through the net of the selection process. Other ancient lines terminate, even though no specific meme can rightly be declared extinct because to do so would be to revive its lineage: any memic fossil embedded in the archaeology of texts and away from the thaw of mind contains the germ of its own regeneration. Technologies of communication are clearly significant in this matter: memes persist in speech relative to print as, say, genes persist in a herb species with a small population, relative to a long lived tree with a big population. Ozymandias can thank Shelley for doing a big print run of his name; carving it once in stone was only a good idea up to a point. Selection processes are locally optimising, and an enduring text extends the temporal locality of the process; multiple reproduction does it spatially as well.

While memes are replicated, what causes the differential persistence of the replicators is what David Hull called “the differential extinction and proliferation of interactors.” In cultural evolution these interactors are, like the replicators, defined by the actual processes. However, they are not necessarily self referring—as are replicators. Rather, they are defined, in part and also by default, by the self reference of replicators, as entities belonging to what is not necessarily self referring, that is, as

entities belonging to the *environment* of the self referring replicators. Nevertheless, their operational significance within the selection environment of the replicators may well follow from their being self referring in other environmental processes. Thus Hull argued that, in the evolution of scientific concepts, the primary interactors are the individual scientists, and scientists, as human organisms, are self referring insofar as their own bodily and psychic autopoiesis is concerned. Such interactors are mental vehicles (and also environment) for memes, just as organisms are biological vehicles for genes. To some extent Hull's thesis about the importance of individual scientists may be a case of modern society's ideologically individualistic self description being reflexively reintroduced into the process of its memetic history. It is also worth noting that eventually the "individual scientists" that take on most importance in the memetic life of concepts are actually replicating names that are memetically linked to replicating concepts: Darwin, the nineteenth century man and now defunct interactor, is different from the replicator, *Darwin*, the evolving meme of statements like *Darwin taught that evolution occurs because of the struggle for survival*. The latter, like the *Marx* of *Marx proclaimed that the end of capitalism was an historical inevitability*, is a kind of fiction or myth produced by a memetic drift that loosens and transforms the connection between a name and its referent. I suspect that there are other candidates for the title of the primary interactors in scientific evolution, things like what Foucault (1969) referred to as *discursive formations*, or more or less unitary scientific disciplines characterised by systems of communicative interaction discussing common themes and referring to common phenomena. In the case of the science of society, the self reference of society's self descriptions seems to operatively define what is both a self referring, autopoietic system and an interactor in memetic evolution.

Narrative art is a different social process from science; and while Hull may be right about the evolution of scientific concepts, it does not follow that artists are as important in the selection history of narrative art. Audiences, critics, publishers, distributors and librarians are important local interactors, and so are the texts and media themselves. Yet all, in their memetic forms as *Homer* or *Shakespeare* or *the public*, or *Ulysses* or *Citizen Kane*, or even *books* or *the internet*, drift into the kind of mythologisation of reference that fiction's frankness has long been designed to redeem.

With fiction having severed itself from reference, it neutralised that most persistent selection pressure acting on scientific concepts—the demand for empirical adequacy. In the case of science this makes for the convergence of different theories—nature being pretty much the same for every scientist, because that is how the empirical principle of social observability and experimental repeatability defines empirical nature. Such observability through repeatability was greatly facilitated by print, and specifically by the scientific monograph as it appeared in the seventeenth century. In *Novum Organum* (Bk 1, #10, p. 107) Bacon foresaw the need for regulation when he actually complained that there was a problem for theorising when "there (was) no one to stand by and observe it" and make known the "insanity" of *unobserved* observation. Robert Boyle was right to say that Bacon wrote natural philosophy like a Lord Chancellor: in order to socially specify the nature of empirical nature, scientific society needed to produce texts that were subject to its own laws of evidence.

With narrative art, however, there is a different degree and kind of textual independence. No postmodern biologist need have read *Origin of The Species*, let alone Aristotle's biological works. For the sake of narrative culture though, the works of Shakespeare or Sophocles or Scorsese have an entirely different status. To

appreciate this, it is useful to consider the status of texts in narrative historiography. In the case of historical narrative, the principle of empirical reference applies too; however the empirical data are themselves, by and large, texts. This makes texts important interactors (as well as replicators) in the history of history. It is also a factor in the modern differentiation of science from philosophy, for philosophy keeps up its dialogue with ancient works more than science does. This is because philosophy, like history, is a reflexive science whose objects include itself and its texts. Concepts in the sciences of society and history take on a potentially unstable dialectical life, as do all of society's self descriptions under the peculiarly reflexive conditions of modernity. Hegel's ideas about the dialectical evolution of science were informed by his quite original insight into the reflexivity of both modern society's self descriptions and of any science ambitious enough to want to describe itself. The reflexivity that is characteristic of modern society and its self descriptions involves a series of replications: a self description; action in the light of, and usually at least slightly at variance with, this description; self redescription; further action; and so on. If Hegel's brilliant description of the reflexive and dialectical processes in the historical life of concepts seems somewhat obscure this is because these ubiquitous modern processes demand clarification in terms of a memetic theory of history.

Especially under the conditions of modern society, the peculiar memetics of reflexive processes not only produce history and historiography, they produce narrative art and fiction too. They combine with fiction's suspension of reference so that, from the reflexive dialogue that works of fiction set up among themselves in the response of later works to earlier works and to what earlier works set as the norms of narrative art, there emerges a wild memetic process. This process is seemingly ungrounded by considerations of empirical reality, except that fiction, for the sake of relevance, is still always in dialogue with descriptions of empirical reality. No one can understand the aesthetics of narrative art, and of modern art in general, without appreciating this process. More than any other work, Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory*, must be given credit for revealing to modernity the logic of the peculiar historical movement of its reflexive, artistic life. If some selection process—a library fire or a colony of termites—destroyed the last copies of *The Physics*, *The Histories*, *Oedipus Rex*, and *Origin of the Species*, narrative art, history and philosophy would be the poorer—but not (to such a significant extent) science. This is because populations of copies of narrative artworks are such important interactors in their cultural selection; their role in cultural evolution is far less localised than that of the interactors of scientific evolution, which, by dint of their localisation, Hull identified with individual scientists. Works of fiction refer to themselves as works of fiction. They also refer to earlier works and norms, and to historiographic narrative. The society of fiction, like the society of society's self description, is its own, self referring, autopoietic system, and, as such, an interactor in the memetic evolution of narrative and narrative art.

It might seem at first that, in the case of narrative art, individual authors are even more important than they are in the empirical sciences. But if we speak of *Shakespeare* as an interactor, it is important to distinguish the now dead man from the still interacting body of work. The term *Shakespeare* may refer to either. Living authors are interactors while alive, but they are probably more important as sources of inspired, designed variation in memes. The body of works that we refer to as *Shakespeare*—as in, *Shakespeare is still being performed in theatres all around the world*—is still an important interactor in a way that *Newton* (whether as man or body of work) isn't. The sense (or, strictly, reference) in which *Newton* refers to an important interactor is when the term is used to refer to the memetic descendents of

Newton's scientific works—namely to the still active conceptual, memetic lineage of Newtonian physics. If nothing else, these reflections on interactors should illustrate the peculiar memetic drift of names.

It is worth remembering that genes themselves are not so easily definable. When Mendel's work was surfacing and genes were still unobservable theoretical entities, there was considerable reluctance to acknowledge their empirical validity. An evolutionary gene is not simply a particular bit of DNA; it is an information structure that persists through the generations by dint of the fitness of the phenotypic expressions of its copies in an environment. And, of course, Darwin developed the theory of natural selection without anything like a definition of the gene, and with only the phenomenon of the persistence of what turned out to be the phenotypic expression of a genotype.

What Darwin appreciated, and what is most important for teleonomic descriptions generally, is that they rely on two descriptions: the functional analysis of the evolving entity (e.g. of the phenotype of a species) in relation to its environment; and a continuous genealogy of replications. The environmental conditions determine the functional demands of the evolving entity's persistence, while the inherited features determine the resources available for the required functional adaptations to the given environmental conditions. Darwin was thus able to base his description of the origin of species on the relative persistence and modification of organismic adaptations, without the jargon of genetics. Similarly, cultural evolution could be outlined without ever using the jargon of memetics. In a way the meme is a kind of supporting ontological form, and one could largely build the description of cultural history around it, like an arch around a form, and then put it aside. Or one could do without it altogether, and still build the arch by using a genealogically disciplined argument, like that of philologists inquiring into the history of languages, or like Darwin's. In a way, the proliferation of memetic jargon belies the meme's ontological lightness. Whether one believes memes exist, hardly enters into it. The point is not belief, but adequacy of explanation. It gives epistemological purchase. Memetics has been haunted by a need for memes to be concrete entities. The most popular contender has been the meme as a psychological entity. Certainly psychology is of the utmost importance for memetics, but psyche is primarily an environment of memes rather than their self-same substance. Or perhaps it is better to say that memes are multiple in their material forms, and that though there is an important distinction between psychological, literary, cinematic and other memes, they are all memes. Ontology and its naiveties should not be allowed to pre-empt explanatory science. The extension of the concept of self definition to a final replicating element like a meme, or gene, may be seen as part of a process of generalising descriptions of self producing, evolving, systemic phenomena. A teleonomic description of memetic phenomena is an explanatory description of self producing social systemic phenomena, the element of the meme rescuing certain phenomena that might not otherwise be explicable or even observable.

So what do memic descriptions actually explain? Compiling an inventory or memome of the world's memes, and charting patterns of descent and modification are valuable and demanding tasks. They have long been valued tasks of academic history. But they are matters of surveying data and compiling evidence for explanations of phenomena that appear at different time scales and different levels of description. Analogous to genes, memes best explain the selection, persistence and evolution of certain functional adaptations of communications. This raises the question of the

nature of a memic adaptation. So what is required are descriptions of these adaptations, based on the recognition that they are adaptations *for* memic and social systemic autonomy and not necessarily for individual, psychic autonomy. Memetic descriptions help explain and predict the autonomy of certain social systemic processes; they explain the nature and role of specific environmental selection pressures for memic adaptations; and they help distinguish a hierarchy of less persistent adaptations supervening on more persistent, more deeply sedimented forms.

In the course of a critique of structuralism, Edward Said (1975) noted the peculiar ontological problems that the idea of semiotic structure seems to raise:

Structure hides behind the actuality of our existence because it is the nature of structure to refuse to reveal its presence directly; only language can solicit structure out of the background in which it hovers. Structure is nonrational: it is not thought thinking about anything, but thought itself as the merest possibility of activity. It can offer no rationale for its presence, once discovered, other than its primitive *thereness*. In a most important way, then, as an ensemble of interacting parts, structure replaces Origin with the play of orderly relationships. A univocal source has ceded to a proliferating systematic web. The character of structure is best understood, I think, if we mark the nature of its status as beginning, its radicality, which derives from a mating of the spirit of Rousseau with the spirit of Sade, of existential and functional primitivism with moral primitivism. The central fact of primitivism is not just its precedence, but its unobjecting affirmation of its originality. It has no alternative but “to be”; we can see versions of such radical originality in the perpetual spiritual amateurism of Rousseau or in the continual, almost abstract repetitiveness of Sade—or in the “concrete” existence of Australian and Brazilian aborigines whose ways Lévi-Strauss has chronicled so well.

The rule of structure is its superconscious transgression of all conscious rules and the consequent establishment of a grammar whose persistence constrains all vocabularies and simultaneously repels thought and spiritual dimension. (pp. 327-8)

Said could see that structure replaces origin. But without a thorough understanding of how structure is produced by the web of a cultural selection process, the concept of *structure* remains resistant to analysis, and its reference defies clear observation. Darwin’s somewhat counterintuitive, biological species concept, insofar as it no longer referred to an archetypal or universal natural kind but to a particular historical lineage of organisms, is analogous to the concept of a cultural, structural kind. And Darwin replaced the notion of an *origin* of species, with an account of their evolution. Said’s critique was both a reference to and an instance of the confusion in conceiving *structure*. Its “non rational”, “superconscious” “*thereness*” is not the “radical originality” of an archetype that “has no alternative but ‘to be’.” Structure only seems to be given in this way to psychic experience that is still uninformed by the science of cultural evolution. Without a history of cultural selection there was no way for Said (or other proponents or critics of Structuralism) to think his way out of what he saw as the Structuralist predicament of wanting to denote something “superconscious” but being unable to offer a “rationale for its presence”.

In some ways of course, memes and cultural structures are far more familiar than genes, because it is the human psyche that reads and reproduces memes. But the meme is *what persists* in the environment of a social system relative to any particular reading or copy. So an abstraction must be made, and the resultant meme, a

social systemic structural element, is easily confused with the familiar and particular experience of the meaning of a particular communication, which is a psychic phenomenon. *Emma* persists through generations of reprints and readings, and there is an *Emma* meme relative to the time scale of an observer's single reading. Something also persists of the English novel, *Emma*, in the German translation, and in *Emma* the movie, and also in the movie, *Clueless*, which sets a similar plot in postmodern California. In each of these, what persists is a certain abstraction of the plot, each of these abstractions is a meme, and together they, in turn share a common, more abstract meme. The gist of a story—a brief but persistent thematic paradigm of its narrative argument—is a meme. At a more attenuated level of abstraction, and possibly at a greater time scale, something persists—some gist—in each of these *Emma* type stories, and in other works, of a general comic romance meme with a female protagonist.

It is inadequate and misleading to say that *culture* is something passed from generation to generation. Culture is transmitted by communication. The mention of *generations* tends to confuse social with biological inheritance—the ancient confusion that so benights racism, yet replicates itself still in the critique of racism and in the fight against racism, the nightmare of history again weighing on the brains of the living. At best, the mention of *generations* implies the relatively persistent character of cultural phenomena among social phenomena in general: in selection processes *relative persistence* is a significant value for an observer and a self-observer. The term *culture* denotes those social forms that are maintained through several replications (i.e. transmissions) and are, to that extent, relatively persistent. A *generation* is a pretty familiar and relevant measure of persistence for a human. The idea that culture is passed from generation to generation implies that it persists longer than an individual human; however culture may be much more shortlived. A joke may be told one year and then forgotten. Cultural forms may erupt like little eddies in social history and then disappear. The persistence that matters with culture is that measured by the generations of the meme in question. What matters for a self-replicator is a replication.

Because the environment of memes is a social system consisting of communications in particular media, and ultimately a population of human psyches, the selection pressures for persistent memes, especially the most persistent ones, may be too readily presumed to be phylogenetically determined psychological phenomena. However, any human psyche is also memetically determined. Ontogeny is not determined solely by phylogeny, but by environment, including the environment of communications. A relatively persistent meme, like the romance of the relatively passive female protagonist, cannot be sheeted home to some selection pressure resulting inevitably from the phylogeny of sexual differences; apart from misrepresenting the phylogeny of sexual difference, that would be to confuse phylogenetic and memetic processes. Memes persist in an environment of human psyches, which is an environment comprising other persisting memes. The psychic selection pressure for the meme of the romance of the passive heroine shows how phylogenetically underdetermined it is when the meme finds itself at the mercy of an environment of feminist thought—or even Jane Austin.

While a meme is an abstraction of what persists, it is still a matter of the relative persistence of *meaning*. Memic “replication with variation” is a matter of a self referring, self replicator in a hypercomplex environment. For that

environment—that is for human psyche and society—that “replication with variation” is an intuitively familiar experience of making a likeness of a representation. The relation between the expression of any meme and an immediate descendant is conditioned by the similarity metrics of human psyche. Although apparently identical memes may result from convergent evolution in similar environments of psyches, a meme that is the negation of its immediate ancestor replicates and preserves (in the sense of determinate negation that Hegel recognised) the meme it negated. The parent meme and its negation are homologous. After several generations of variation, intergenerational similarity may drift into utter transformation and apparent discontinuity, so that we may be surprised by what actually persists. All that persists of the ancestral humorous riddle in the spoof riddle about why the chicken crossed the road, is that it is a riddle with the memetic form of humorous riddles like: *Why did the ...? or What did the ...?* And it is actually the memetic form that turns out to be what the chicken riddle is about. The persistent expectation of an amusing, unexpected answer makes the boring answer—that the chicken crossed the road *to get to the other side*—unexpected by virtue of its expectedness. A child whose first encounter with this kind of riddle was with *Why did the chicken cross the road?* would not be very amused.

Because the scientific process of inducing the meaning of a meme from a population of meanings or communications is itself also a process of meaning, and because that process of induction depends on the same human similarity metric, memetic description is a process of memic replication with variation. We cannot just observe memes as we like to think we can observe physical phenomena. In any observation of a meme, the observer participates in the process of communication. The meme observed is one selected in the process of communicative uptake, and the meme described is a meaning selected for communicative utterance. We make memes as we observe them. In a way that seems to hopelessly confuse the issue, a mistaken understanding of an observed meme may go on to assume its own memic autonomy. As observers, we can’t extricate ourselves from this closed system of meaning. The problem of the unambiguous definition of the meme is itself memetic, and so always itself subject to the ambiguity of meaning. It is constitutive of memetics though, because the problem is not itself reduced by memetics, but preserved as a content that may be recovered at any time: memetic descriptions preserve the ambiguity of their memes throughout the selection process.

As has already been remarked, teleonomic descriptions couple two levels of description at two time scales of relative persistence. As a special case of teleonomics, memetics couples the level about meaning as a social systemic phenomenon to an explanatory level about meaning in a causally continuous series of individual psychic and textual phenomena—the ambiguities of meaning notwithstanding. This obviates the suspicions about brutal reductionism: memetics does not reduce the complexities of human meaning to some other principle; it reduces the complexities of cultural, historical processes to a teleonomic description based on repeated acts of communicated meaning. The reduction is always in terms of and to *meanings*. The reduction thus shows how meanings have a meaning for and in social systems and for and in consciousness. At the level of social systems, meanings are primarily adapted not to the intentions of the individual psyches that use them, but to a system of communications. A memetic adaptation is any function of a meaning that increases its differential fitness in the environment of that system of communication. That selection environment includes all the individual psyches and all the texts—whatever the medium—in which a meme survives and replicates. Arising from the social

systemic selection of meanings, there is the self production of society and its cultural themes and structures.

The self production of culture has a particular pertinence for the theory of fiction—not only because fictions and the concept of fiction are creatures of history and have to be understood as historical cultural phenomena. Rather, the wonderful processes whose inscrutabilities have been variously explained by the intercession of the muse, the mysteries of creativity or originality, the genius or the “death” of the author, or the judgement of history are, to an important extent, processes of social systemic selection—bearing in mind that the net of selection is largely a matter of the repeated passionate experiences of a great many individual humans. These matters are what distinguish the *mere making up* of any old story from the *art* of fiction, or even the personal favourite artwork from the judgement of history. The immortality of the artist is a metaphor—a light hearted ontological ploy with powerful epistemological purchase—for the memetic persistence of their attributed works.

Our accounts of history were and remain virtual history. History remains the virtual reality of persistent memes about what has happened; it is as the virtual reality of such cultural forms, insofar as they are a kind of self perpetuating second nature, that history is rendered at once possible and primordially flawed. Fiction deliberately aspires to this self productive, autonomous life of narratives; poesis aspires to autopoiesis—as has long been reflected in the organic form of narrative artworks and, since the period of aesthetic Modernism, in their being dazzlingly autonomous and a law unto themselves. Despite historiography’s proper pretence and function to be adequate in its descriptions of the historical environment and of the noumenous events in themselves, fiction realises, within its self organisational closure of narrative meaning, the power of the self production of meanings that constitutively infects historiography. Narrative art reappropriates the autonomous self production of narratives, not merely for the relatively trivial self edification of the author, but for the sake of human intentions and interests, not the least of which are things like truth, and beauty and love and cunning and high spirits and living the good life. Fiction has been a kind of memetic technology for human becoming, something narrative art cottoned on to long ago, and something quickly appreciated by anyone who has felt art’s emotional intellectual power. It has used the satanic, non human autonomy of narratives as they dance through the environment of human psyches and society for the benefit of the psychic autonomy of such social animals, for living the good life.

46. *Inner and outer memory; meanings, and texts.*

Ever since the Greeks, language—*logos*—has been philosophically considered as an entity. Heidegger (1926, p.201) made this observation by saying “we come across words just as we come across things, and this holds for any sequence of words as that in which the *logos* expresses itself.” Seen in this way, language, in its textual form, is an empirical entity: like the language of Swift’s Lagado academicians, or Samuel Johnson’s rock, you can practically kick it. Heidegger called this relation to something *vorhanden* or *present-at-hand*. However this is only one way of considering language, it is certainly not the only philosophical perspective, and the point is that there is a tension between two different perspectives that are not only appreciated by philosophers, but by naive reflection as well. From the second perspective, a speaker or a listener scarcely notices the thinghood of language. The fleeting empirical text, fashioned in air, scarcely seems present when one is experiencing the overwhelming presence of its meaning. In Heidegger’s terms

language is thus also *zuhanden* or *ready to hand*, a designation he used to describe the vanishing presence of tools. Tools or technologies such as dwellings, clothing, glasses, the whole extended human phenotype, including texts, seem to vanish before their relevant functional expressions. Heidegger said that we tend to notice tools as things or as *present at hand* when they don't work. When the thing-like character of language presents itself, it is typically when it is not doing its work—say when we hear a foreign language or when we encounter an utterance out of its meaning context (as for example, in many a philosophical example). And as Wittgenstein (1963, #132) said, it is when language is like an engine idling and no longer doing work that confusions about it arise.

Greek philosophy, insofar as it was concerned with the thing-like character of language, was probably still responding to the technology of writing. The written word has the typical *thing's* ability to stand by idly and look back strangely at us linguistic animals. Confusions arose and insinuated themselves into descriptions of linguistic phenomena, leaving their mark on semiotics and the theory of language. An important factor in the confusion was that the replication of linguistic memes could be a process of copying physical texts, as well as a process of replicating meanings.

The external, thinghood of language has dazzled structural semiotics ever since the Greeks, and no wonder, because language was always a way of bringing meanings out from their hidden innerness and displaying them in things. The whole discussion in Plato's *Cratylus* about natural and conventional signs is about the likeness of words as things to the things they name. Every act of communication involves this externalisation of intentions in a physical or empirical medium. This is what makes language much more interesting than telepathy, which is really a boring lie, or a boring wish. The relative persistence of a written text itself became functional in and for communication—if not necessarily, as Socrates told Phaedrus, for the good of individual psyche—by extending the memetic persistence of what is a kind of external memory. Though any selection process is only locally optimising, a long lived replicator or interactor increases the dimensions of that location. The science of communication is thus a science of media as much as of meanings, just as the science of genetics is a science of media (nucleic acids, proteins, organisms, etc.) as of intergenerational information. There are two intertwining levels of operative description.

To actually disregard the dazzling external form of language and to consider language in terms of an internal, psychological organisation for processing communicable information turned out to be a fruitful methodological move for the science of linguistics. Hence the emphasis that Chomsky (1985) put on the distinction between internal and external language. It was a move that behaviourist scepticism avoided in favour of inquiry into external language alone—after all, the twentieth century turn to the philosophy of language was essentially a turn away from the old philosophy of the subject and the mind. Chomsky and others have argued that a concern with internal language was crucial to the empirical investigation of grammar, because that grammar was a reflection of the workings of an internal human “language organ”. Though Chomsky himself has not been a proponent of evolutionary psycholinguistics, some, like Stephen Pinker (1994), have argued for the view that the neurophysiological workings of human language and meaning depend on a kind of language organ. This mental language module, in which the encoding of a universal human grammar is framed, is seen as the result of phylogeny.

If this is what internal language designates, then external language designates the universe of texts—that immense, empirical totality in which alone structural linguistics, semiotics, and the philosophy of language long thought they would be

able to discern the obscure workings of communication. As it turns out, despite the methodological importance of internal language for linguistics, and despite the fact that minds are obligate habitat for memes, the external character of language, and of meanings as embodied in other media, has also to be considered by an historical science of memetics. For it is precisely in the externalisation of symbolic representations that society and culture are born.

The internal language organ has usually been envisaged by means of a kind of projection into the brain of the structural characteristics of external language, that is, in terms of an internalisation of observable grammatical rules and structures. However there is no need to assume that there is some kind of mental language faculty or module that is somehow encoded according to general rules that have been induced from the grammatical structures of all languages. Nor is there any justification for such an assumption without there being a bit more evidence. The evidence traditionally cited has been that if it were not for some innate understanding of grammatical structure then the rules of grammar would be beyond the power of an infant to induce them from its limited linguistic experience.

To answer the question of how we produce the grammatical structures of external language with the claim that we have an internal language faculty for doing so is to give the simplest and easiest explanation. It is an explanation of sorts, but one that does little more than repeat the question. In Molière's *La Malade Imaginaire*, in the burlesque of a student's admission to the degree of doctor, the student opines that opium induces sleep by means of a *vertus dormitiva* or a sleep inducing principle. Both Fodor (1983) in his defence of faculty psychology, and Deacon (1997) in his critique of the assumption of a mental grammar module, mention Molière's *vertus dormitiva*. The ontological commitment to such a thing is one that should be made with an appropriate lightness. Theorising in the terms of such a thing is not so much wrong as inadequate. At some stage in the historical evolution of a science, positing a *vertus dormitiva* might be an important theoretical move. Positing a language organ is not all wrong: in a not entirely trivial sense, the brain is—among other functions and along with other organs—a language organ. But an adequate description of the nature—psychological and social—of language demands a more sophisticated ontology.

What Molière's doctor and the advocates of an evolved grammar module both do is misunderstand the *relation* of an observed phenomenon (the bringing on of sleep or the rules of grammatical structure) to some unobserved, putative phenomenon that is deemed to have caused it. The causal relation of internal to external language need hardly be thought of in terms of a hidden neurophysiological structure that reflects or encodes the structure of the latter. These metaphors of an effect being *reflected* or *encoded* in its cause are not very useful, even in the most simple and discrete causal processes: How is smoke reflected or encoded in fire, or a swinging pendulum reflected or encoded in gravity? *Reflecting* and *encoding* suggest, respectively, iconic and symbolic relations, and the relation of external language to both the language module and universal grammar have all too readily and inadequately been imagined in these terms; whereas the way an effect indicates its cause needs to be distinguished from these simplifying heuristics. Any causal relation between the brain (or so called internal language) and external language is not only a physiologically complex one, it is not all one way. Just as the cause of opium's inducing sleep is not all inside the drug (because it depends on the physiology of the opium taker) the "cause" of language is not all inside the brain; for language has its own external existence. So what is important is the relation between psychic systems and that system of communications we call *society*.

When, as Deacon has suggested, the causal relation between internal language—or rather, brain neurophysiology—and external linguistic grammatical structure is that of an environment selecting spoken replications of symbols, the grammatical structures resulting from the selection process will no more be reflected in or encoded in the structures of the selection environment than any other naturally selected phenomenon is reflected or encoded in its environment. By virtue of its causally distributed and locally optimised selection history, the outcome of a piecemeal selection process is typically a quite arbitrary and historically unanalysable index of the structure of the selection environment. In such a process, a curious lack of economy between cause and effect is typical.

Meanwhile, the reason why the grammatical structures of all the world's languages reflect a universal grammatical structure, is simply that, not only are languages genealogically related, they are subject to convergence under the common selection pressure of human neurophysiology and human symbolic processing ability. And as Deacon has argued, it is the child's neurophysiology that has been the crucial selection pressure. What might be called the *infantilisation* of culture has given us language as well as sliced white bread and Hollywood. This hot mix of ontogenetically conditioned selection pressures acting on the history of culture has been repeated in subsequent innovative episodes in communicative technologies and in the semiotic forms that those media have engendered. The persistent forms of romance narrative seem to have been selected by the persistent bottleneck pressure of adolescent desire. Meanwhile, in the present period of ceaselessly new, computationally engineered media, there are pressures for a generationist differentiation of society as well as market or class one.

Cultural evolution doesn't simply follow *after* the phylogeny of language, rather the evolution of language and culture proceed together. In fact, cultural evolution would already have been operating in pre linguistic hominid communication. Once there are replications of communicative transmissions, and selection of successful transmissions, the historical lineage of culture emerges, for culture at its simplest is the result of the adaptation of the communicative texts of a society (a system of communications) to an environment that comprises the population of communicants, the texts and their physical environment, and the other communications in the social system. Many animals communicatively transmit forms of action and behaviour throughout a population and from generation to generation—forms that are not genetically determined and transmitted but that are underdetermined by their genetic environment, that are transmitted by observation of conspecifics and that are adapted to, among other environmental selection pressures, the genetically determined phenotypes of the population and the physical exigencies of the environment: things like chimpanzee populations catching and eating termites on sticks, or regional forms of birdsong.

The kind of thinking that prompts the positing of a *vertus dormitiva*, or even of a universal grammar module, seems to be one that is deeply sedimented in the lexical, referential devices of the language that genetic and memetic history has bequeathed us. Language resorts to using analogous idioms, whether referring to empirical objects, to mental affects or attitudes, or to social relations. All fall under the conceptual category of *things*. In particular, psychic and social phenomena interanimate, so what language treats as psychic principles (desire, belief, ownership, aggression, self, etc.) and what it designates as internal, psychic “things”, are also very much social phenomena demanding description and explanation in terms of social relations and the “double description” of communications (Bateson, p.132). Whether or not this is a case of language preserving a kind of infantile ontology

because of the peculiar importance of infantile psyche in language's cultural selection, it *is* a case of the nightmare of history weighing on the brains of the living. Philosophy, of course, has long charged itself with the task of dispelling our bewitchment by language. Poetry turns the spell of language against itself, for the sake of enlightenment. Fiction does the same with narrative in general.

Narrative *representation* predates narrative *communication* in language, or in some other medium such as gesture. Prior to symbolic communication, the shared subjectivity of primates (their intersubjectivity) was largely limited to the phylogenetically and ontogenetically determined primate subject. This subject was the type of the individual organism, largely by virtue of shared biological design in a shared environment. The shared design of conspecific primates was itself the historical precondition for the shared assumptions, representational processes, similarity metrics and so on that made up the ancestral prelinguistic form of what Husserl called the *lifeworld* or what Wittgenstein called *forms of life*. After the evolution of language, human intersubjectivity, and therefore human subjectivity, were made up from the common share of communicated symbolic forms as well. This communication replicated symbols, including narrative symbols, with more or less accuracy through populations and through time, thus generating the shared cultural environments (or lifeworlds) of those populations. The communicated narratives have at every stage been evolving and adapting to their psychic and social environments.

Many of the problems that were encountered in the philosophy of language, especially problems about language rules and other replicated symbolic forms, were effects of not appreciating the significance of, and the distinction between, phylogenetic and cultural evolutionary processes in the evolution of the subject and society. Wittgenstein (1963, #123) rightly said that "a philosophical problem has the form: I don't know my way about." *Philosophical Investigations* was an impressive meditation on this predicament, but one that was also determined by it. Habermas, if I understand his claim in his *Theory of Communicative Action* (1984, vol. 2, p383), saw the problem of the history of the lifeworld in terms of the possibility of an unhistorical structural description of its rational content. But, like Wittgenstein, an heir to the behaviourism of the philosophy of language, he saw no way of tracing the historical development of these cognitive structures or of forms of life. Thus presuming a defeatism of empirical method, he conceived of the lifeworld as a mystifying, arbitrary structure. In linguistics and semiotics, *arbitrary* usually signals something that is so historical that it is too historical for analysis, so *it might as well be unhistorical*. Though there may be no way of thoroughly tracing the historical development of the cultural structures of the lifeworld, they are amenable to historical and functional analysis when understood as the outcomes of selection processes

The evolution of human communication enabled the emergence of social systems of communications and of human intersubjectivity. This communicatively generated and socially selected intersubjectivity includes anything from the shared structures of grammar to the shared concepts, narratives and norms of speakers. The replication of communications in the environment of human minds and texts set off a new kind of post genic evolution in which the differential reproductive success of certain meanings determined the emergence of culture as a kind of second nature.

The differential reproductive success of spoken meanings depended on successful communication, memory, and in turn, successful communication again. So memorability is a functional adaptation of the spoken memes of myth. It is embodied in such technologies as prosody as well as in a host of other mnemonic devices. The affects of features like rhyme, alliteration and rhythm probably play a part in learning

language in the first place by signalling phonologically recognisable redundancy—and thus semantic redundancy—in otherwise hypercomplex messages. Song and verse have always paid tribute to the physique of oral language, purchasing their pleasure and memorability in return, and replicating and being selected according to that pleasure and memorability. Semantic memorability is a feature of certain kinds of phylogenetically relevant stories, like those describing significant social relations—jokes, for instance—and those describing experiences such as journeys. It was upon memorable kinds of narratives, such as those involving visualised locations and paths populated by particular people and things, that the mnemonic devices of classical rhetoric—the systems of *loci* and *imaginis*—relied (Yates, 1966). Before the invention of writing, these various features must have been among the earliest forms of enchantment by the physical externality of linguistic communication, however fleeting. It is an enchantment that has had its own memetic life, such that today's silent readers still suspect that verse is to be said, not read—and not just for the sake of memory.

Tools of all kinds are replicated as cultural institutions or memory memes, along with the concepts and skills that go with them, so they have had affinities with the texts of communications. The long lasting linguistic and other narrative texts that are now such a feature of human culture are themselves tools of communication. Each medium is a replicated technological form. After spoken language and gesture, the other media each embarked upon their own process of cultural evolution, and each brought its own functional possibilities into the selection processes of that evolution.

Whatever the designs of its inventors, writing (as Socrates observed) quickly found many other social and psychic functions—that is, functions useful for its own memic self perpetuation and for the autopoiesis of psyche: to make communications last longer and so reduce the reliance on individual memory; to enable greater dissemination of communications and to increase the chances of reception; to enable careful work on textual meaning; to ensure accuracy of records; to emphasise the responsibility of the attributed author, and so on. Each of these functions contributes to the memetic fitness of writing, and to the fitness of the memes embodied in the written texts. Writing, as a tool and a meme itself, gets together with the conceptual meme for, say, *Oedipus*, greatly enhancing the persistence of Sophocles' narrative, though not only as a play.

Probably most new communicative media are memic adaptations that have increased the relative reproductive success and persistence of most of the conceptual memes they transmit, bearing in mind that different media exert different selection pressures and thus favour different kinds of memic content. Although the making and processing of persistent records is a common function of new media, other designs also enhance their chances of selection. Witness the fascination and hype accompanying each new technology of virtuality from photography, through audio recording, cinema, video, and cyberspace to virtual reality. The fascination with the virtual reality of hi-tech likenesses was one kind of psychic selection pressure for these technologies, albeit of a psyche already infected by self-perpetuating memes for innovations in clever technology. The fact that these technologies also provided new commodities meant that they were also adapted to the social environment of markets. Yet the history of media is also marked by inventions that fell on hard ground. The syllabic printing of the Phaistos Disk dates from about 1700 BC Crete, but it represents a technology that became extinct long before printing took off again in China and later Europe. The syllabic printing disk just did not seem to fall into the right environment for its social systemic selection. Only its physical durability saved it from utter extinction, but it did not save it from becoming a genealogical dead end.

The history of culture is constrained by what might at first seem like trivial contingencies that manage to insinuate themselves into the copying processes at work in the various media. Physical constraints such as the availability and durability of the textual material, the ease and method of copying from a master text, and the kind of information that may be represented all effect the rate of selective success. And, as textual scholars know, very often these practical contingencies can leave empirical clues, like replicated copying errors or specific technological forms, that enable the investigation of lineages.

Various psychic and social systemic functions in the textual environment, functions that motivate the expression and uptake of meanings—such as truth, power, artistry, fashion, hype, religious faith, nationalist yearning, profit (see Luhmann, 1984, p.183)—also effect selective success. Andy Warhol's thematic contribution to mid twentieth century art was to demonstrate the peculiar susceptibility of art after Modernism to the infection of artistic tradition by the memetic viruses of publicity, fashion, American nationalism, image and commodity replication, and replication as such. It is no minor matter that memes must survive in an environment of markets as well as minds. Jokes are free but that's a rare exception among narrative memes. Even the most profound work of narrative art must obey the imperative: Sell thyself!

Whether a copy is made by a mechanical process, or whether it involves memic innovation and recombination—like making a new film or novel—is vital for the fidelity of replication (which may enhance persistence) or for the production of intergenerational variation (which, like sexual reproduction, may enhance selection in rapidly changing environments). Stories and fairy tales get themselves replicated generation after generation, but with different meanings in different contexts. In one context *The Red Shoes* is a cautionary tale for young women, in another it is a romance about the thrilling fate of an artistic life. Contemporary fictions in contemporary environments are made from various old gists precisely for selection in contemporary societies.

Eventually the galaxy of communications has come to look like an autonomous world of persistent texts and meanings: a culture. By now somewhat alienated from its human, psychic origins, it is a social systemic galaxy whose gravitational force draws all human products and institutions into its semiotic orbit. As semiotics has long recognised, any empirical, environmental feature—whether deliberately constructed as a communicative device, or whether for some other use, or whether simply a sublimely observed object like the Milky Way—is a kind of text that we experience as part of the cultural order of meanings. Worlds are worlds of meanings rather than of things. Even what we recently used to think of as wild organic nature is now subject to social replication and cultural selection. A person's empirical, ontogenetic environment comprises the galaxy of communications as represented by the galaxy of texts. We all live in an environment of texts and we are ontogenetically in-formed by its meanings while we are still green. So the social, memetic norms of second (or social) nature can harden in our psyches and can look like first nature; while the second nature of the memetic galaxy contributes its own selection pressures for the subsequent genetic evolution of first nature.

47. Semiotics and memetics; or omne symbolum de symbolo.

Memes should not be thought of as such unfamiliar creatures. They have long been known as *symbols*. They are a kind of symbol and so only as mysterious as symbols. Conceiving memes in terms of the replication of communicated representations is what makes for this historical convergence with the intellectual

tradition of semiotics. Memetics conceives symbols in a way that is designed to be useful for understanding the history of culture in terms of the history of such symbols. Memetics is a kind of what Saussure called diachronic semiotics, and it is worth remembering that selection processes were obscurely discerned by philologists investigating the archaeology of languages, independently of the biological theory of natural selection.

Memes are symbols and need minds to interpret them. Genes are like symbols and they need an organic environment to “interpret” them. Each is involved in processes that demand two perspectives of description; and each perspective of description picks out its own exclusive set of phenomena. From a Nominalistic perspective each involves a host of actual individual replicas. These Nominalistic phenomena underlie and explain what are emergent or universal phenomena demanding their own separate description from their own Universalistic perspective. Though the universal is said to emerge from the bottom up, it is also said to govern things from the top down. Once a phenomenon is a symbolic phenomenon neither the bottom up nor the top down description takes precedence; each is mediated by the other. Even so, since each is an historical phenomenon, the so called universal is not strictly universal (i.e. eternal) but quasi universal by virtue of its relative persistence. Like species, symbols evolve, and like species, they are not strict universals but individual lineages. The bottom up description explains how relatively persistent social systemic phenomena (symbolic laws or structures) emerge from a selection process acting on many individual psychic acts of replication. The top down description explains how individual psychic acts of replication are causally conditioned by a selection environment of relatively persistent social systemic phenomena. The old argument between Nominalism and Realism (or Universalism) was really a symptom of there being two valid, interdependent and consistent descriptions, each with its own ontological commitment. Memes are social symbols whose nominalistic description is about individual communications. As far as the memetic description of cultural historical processes is concerned, any description of the emergent, social systemic phenomena must be consistent with, albeit a reduction of, the complex of evidence at the nominalistic level of individual communications.

When Peirce reflected on the historical life of symbols through successive replications, he offered what was a more or less Universalist description of memic or cultural evolution:

Symbols grow. They come into being by developing out of signs, particularly from icons, or other mixed signs partaking of the nature of icons and symbols. We think only in signs. These mental signs are of a mixed nature; the symbol parts of them are called concepts. If a man makes a new symbol, it is by thoughts involving concepts. So it is only out of symbols that a new symbol can grow. *Omne symbolum de symbolo*. A symbol, once in being spreads among the peoples. In use and in experience its meaning grows. Such words as *force*, *law*, *wealth*, *marriage*, bear for us very different meanings from those they bore to our barbarous ancestors. The symbol may, with Emerson’s sphinx, say to man,

Of thine eye I am eyebeam. (vol. 2, p.169)

The rule or law of a symbol may not actually be consciously appreciated, even as it is replicated and even though it may be subsequently abstracted or induced from a population of replications. Most importantly for narrative art, populations of

replicas, or more strictly historical lineages of replicas, are reproduced one by one as likenesses of earlier replicas. The actual meme or symbol is a suprasubjective social phenomenon. The so called law of a symbol is a description of the symbol by and for psyche; it is a theoretical abstraction and an *ex post facto* phenomenon describing what is already the *ex post facto* phenomenon of the symbol's genealogical lineage. Whether, as a description of the symbolic law, it is adequate is another matter, but any descriptive inadequacy simply enters the process of the symbol's evolution as a form of heritable variation. In fact, because a symbol is a particular lineage of replicas, any description of the symbol that describes it in terms of a universal law is, to that extent, inadequate and a source of heritable variation. One of the most astonishing features of the life of symbols is the way misapprehended symbols are self certifying—the derivation of norms from facts being one case of such misapprehension.

The abstraction of a symbol's law is made by the same psychic means, and so involves the same human measures of *likeness*, that are at work in processes of narrative mimesis. Narrative likenesses may be made in accordance with some assumed symbolic law or convention, or according to the more local concern of making a likeness of a particular pre-existing replica. An author's replication of a narrative meme may be understood and may understand itself at either or both levels of description. Genres, plot types, character types, gists, background concepts and even types of events, including communicative actions, may all be described at these two, interanimating levels.

As likenesses there is already a degree of variation introduced into the process of replication. Variation is also introduced in the unique recombination of likenesses that characterises any particular narrative artwork. There is already a selection pressure in the form of artistic intentions in the performance or the production of the narrative, as there is in the audience reception. These social processes take place in the environment of human psyche, conscious or unconscious, but it is already a memetically conditioned environment, and this affects both the kinds of likenesses and the symbolic laws that come into play. *Variation* and *selection* cover those areas of narrative poesis that go against (symbolic) expectations and yet discover new narrative symbols. As a making of likenesses, this whole complex of narrative poesis (from the viewpoint of psyche) or autopoiesis (from the viewpoint of society) has long gone by the name of *mimesis*. Narrative art uses the rapid iconic and symbolic processes of mimesis to hot wire new symbols out of old.

48. *Mimesis and likeness.*

Mimesis is a term with a heavy burden of philosophical usage. The ranges of its meaning, in terms of its role in narrative art, needs some clarification. A mimetic representation involves producing a likeness of whatever is represented, so to understand mimesis one must understand what a likeness is and how likenesses are used in narrative communication. This applies to communication that involves propositional forms and narrative argument, in particular those used in linguistic, dramatic and cinematic texts.

Language is a theatre of likenesses as much as it is an encrypted bloc of literal, diegetic descriptions. Metaphor, analogy, and mimesis in general are so important in language that they seem to have played a crucial role throughout its evolution. In so called *descriptions*, language represents an event or state by means of its grammatical propositional form being true of that event or state. But language usually represents communicative events like speech acts, quite differently. It reproduces likenesses of them rather than describing them—or, indeed, in order to describe them. As well as

being meanings, speech and print are external, empirical phenomena—texts—and like any such phenomenon they may represent other like phenomena. Thus when asked what Wittgenstein said in *Tractatus* (4.01), one might reply descriptively, and Hamlet-like, “words, words, words.” However, less perversely and more likely, one would reply with a semantic or textual likeness of what Wittgenstein said:

1. *Der satz ist ein Bild der Wirklichkeit.*
- or 2. *The proposition is a picture of reality.*
- or 3. *The grammatical form of a sentence is a diagram of the event or state to which it refers.*

None of these is a reply that uses its propositional form in a strictly descriptive manner to represent what Wittgenstein said. The state of affairs that each sentence refers to descriptively—namely, the iconic predicament of propositions—is not the answer to the question. The answer is the text (or its meaning) that refers to that predicament; *that* is what Wittgenstein *said*. Each reply represents that text and its meaning by being a likeness of it.

Just what a likeness is and how it is apprehended is an ancient philosophical question. Socrates highlighted the problem by arguing that the concept of likeness can be derived from its opposite, that is, from *difference*. Things are alike for humans according to some more or less universal, subjective measure of their similarity that is quite familiar to native consciousness in its native culture. The precise psychological embodiment of this similarity metric remains obscure, though it appears to be distributed over various psychic functions, insofar as we apprehend likenesses that are visual, linguistic, conceptual, auditory and so on. There is a similarity space, within which various phenomena can be apprehended, despite their variation, as comparatively alike. Such similarity is determined by there being a common body of relevant information that is inferentially accessible from any member of a set of representations of like things. Beyond the similarity space, any similarity is irrelevant or unapprehended or inferentially inaccessible; in fact it is unapprehended primarily because it has not been relevant historically—either phylogenetically, ontogenetically or culturally. As Sperber and Wilson (1986, pp. 232-3) have suggested, the likeness of propositional forms to one another is, to an important extent, a matter of the shared logical properties, in particular, the shared, relevant, logical and contextual implications of the propositional forms. (According to Sperber and Wilson, we are phylogenetically designed to process propositions for their relevance, and they describe a principled procedure for how we might do this. I have already used a similar procedure, on the beginning of *Carpenter's Gothic*, to show how a reader laboriously but unconsciously infers the meaning of a narrative text.) The three versions (above) of Wittgenstein's theory of propositions, though each different, share features of propositional form, including logical implications, that a human similarity metric determines as relevant. A video or audio recording of Wittgenstein, or someone else, uttering one of the sentences, would share the same relevant implications.

However, what Wittgenstein actually said about propositions being pictures of reality goes a step further and claims (rightly) that even the descriptive use of linguistic propositions involves a likeness—a likeness of the event or state it describes. It is not a likeness that is particularly obvious to human consciousness, unless that consciousness has been informed by a theory of language such as Peirce's or Wittgenstein's or their memetic heirs. Without this scientific information, the information required to make a judgement of similarity is not inferentially accessible.

Sperber and Wilson (p.230) thought, with validity, that *every utterance is a likeness used to represent a thought of the speakers*. To represent one's own or another's thought, one uses the propositional form of an utterance—as I did in the previous sentence to represent what Sperber and Wilson thought. Representation by means of likeness is not just some add-on linguistic device at the disposal of speakers. It is essential to language, or rather, it is deeply sedimented in the historical evolution of language, often without our being aware of it. For at least the same reason, and perhaps for others too, it is deeply sedimented into the development of narrative communication, as if the postmodern narratives of video or virtual reality were expected on Earth for ages, both before and after its ancient anticipations in dance and drama. The world has been virtual as well as physical ever since language.

In its capacity to represent by means of likenesses, language is typical, perhaps prototypical, of narratives in all media. Whether typical or prototypical is a complicated historical question about the evolution of human conceptual, intersubjective, syntactic, phonological, visual, actantial and motor processing. What comes first might not be the best question, or rather, whatever came first would not have been as we know it now anyway. What the incremental stages in the evolution of each of these kinds of processing might have been, what the relations between these kinds of processing might have been at the various stages, what selection pressures (natural and cultural) there might have been for certain kinds of interrelation, and what the possibilities were, given the underlying hominid neurophysiology at any of these stages, are all questions of interest, and not beyond speculation. To term this whole historical process *coevolution* is to bag a complex of possibilities under one reduced term.

Narrative uses the fact that spoken utterances, written texts, dramatic actions, movie shots, and the like are empirical as well as semantic phenomena, and so may be used to represent what they resemble empirically as well as semantically. An actor hands another a glass of coloured water. Empirically (at first glance, at least) this resembles someone handing another a glass of wine. Semantically it resembles someone's act of giving, or of welcome, or one part of an act of sale, or perhaps something else. To enumerate all the varieties of likeness used in narrative mimesis is to list the varieties of replication in the evolution of narrative symbols. A narrative artwork is made from likenesses of what it represents: likenesses of generic forms, of plots, of (argument) styles, of characters, of languages, of images, of actions, of events, of states of affairs. What all these likenesses represent are the objects—the things, events and meanings—that they resemble. Those likenesses that represent propositional objects (texts) or propositional actions by virtue of their own propositional form may be, as Bakhtin said, “double-voiced”. For they refer to propositional objects or actions (and their subjects) as well as to the events or states described by the propositional form. They may also refer to the proposition as both type and token.

Irony is a classic case of the double voiced quality of linguistic (or, more generally, propositional) mimesis. Accordingly, irony is not simply an act of saying one thing and meaning another. It imitates another's proposition or a social system's propositional meme, in order to say something about that proposition or meme, or something about the utterer, thinker or social system to which that proposition or meme is attributed. Hand held video scenes in a slick movie are instances of this kind of double voiced representation; so are parodic forms; so too is almost every sentence insofar as it makes some reference to something other than its literal reference. Irony was not some postmodern obsession, it has long been the obsession of a symbolic, mimetic species.

When a symbol (a meme) is replicated mimetically, each replica signifies (at least) whatever it imitates. If an actor mimics or parodies someone's speech that parody imitates the person being parodied or whatever they said. It also signifies an attitude to whatever it imitates—parody being typified by a mocking attitude. Mimesis does not simply replicate, it imitates and so refers to and objectifies what it imitates. What the replica refers to is the object of an attitude, just as the recursively embedded sentences *The senses provide certain knowledge* or *Albertine was faithful*, are objects of attitude in the expressions of propositional attitude *Descartes doubted that the senses provide certain knowledge* or *Marcel hoped Albertine was faithful*.

Humans use mimesis as a transform function that acts on any propositional form, such that the meaning of the mimetically transformed proposition is inferentially accessible by means of assuming its relevance in its context. Mimesis that is a likeness of form—but not only empirical, morphological form—is not necessarily a likeness of function or meaning. Rather it is a matter of the utter fluidity and transformation of function. Its function, or metafunction, is to multiply meanings. Mimesis is one of its most useful features of human communication. Fiction's mimesis is not just pretence or make-believe or making up, but the semantic possibility of each or any of these, and more. This is why Aristotle was so right to see mimesis at the heart of narrative poetics. Fiction is mimetic through and through; and it is not just the “mimesis of life” but the mimesis of other narratives. Narratives, however, belong to “life” anyway.

What makes mimesis interesting for the history of narrative culture is also what makes it an inadequate explanation for a child's “learning” of language. Mimesis of utterances is, by itself, no way to learn the already given rules of universal grammar, because these rules could not be induced from the inadequate data of a child's limited linguistic experience. If mimesis may be said to be involved in language learning, it depends entirely on the perspective of the person doing the mimesis, because seeing a likeness is always a matter of who sees it and how they see it. Mimesis is a knowing act to the extent that it recognises a likeness in certain shared features of the *icon* and its object. But mimesis of a spoken text requires neither conscious nor adequate knowledge of the grammatical rules involved in the linguistic production of the utterance. Insofar as a child learns language by mimesis, it is a matter of the child's experiencing language from just the right sort of infantile perspective, so as to induce just the right sort of unconscious quasi knowledge about the laws of linguistic replication: such quasi knowledge as has been self certified throughout the selection history of language. In an adult on the other hand, linguistic mimesis is already parasitic on the reflexes of grammar and it usually involves a knowing likeness of semantic intention, or of the external text, word for word, or of the agent of the communicative action. A symbol that emerges from such acts of replication would be likely to refer to the meaning shared by the population of textual replicas, or to the memetic form shared by the population of replicas of the eventually famous quotation, or it could refer by allusion to the author of the quotation. If it is a meaning, then heritable semantic variation in a lineage of replicas is quite likely to produce semantic drift in a symbol, so that the symbol's meaning becomes quite different from many or most of its ancestral replicas.

A likeness, by virtue of its difference from what it represents, usually involves a psychically familiar reduction of the complexity of what it represents. So it may be seen as involving a symbol whose law schematises this abstraction or reduction. This schematism preserves certain information and sacrifices other information about its object, just as a diagram reduces its object to its relevant skeleton. For the term *likeness* implies shared, relevant and accessible inferential consequences. The likeness

that an infant may discover from its limited sampling of speech would be unlikely to be governed by the schematism of grammar, but rather by some other simpler, indexical rule associating meaning with phonological form—unless the child was already grammatical, or the spoken symbol was culturally adapted to the child's ability to discern certain higher order likenesses.

Symbols do not simply emerge nominalistically from the bottom up. Each replication implies a meme at the same time—the symbol according to whose law the act of imitation reduces its object. To make a likeness, or to objectify a propositional or narrative form, is to discover a universal law from some relevant perspective of description, whether epistemological, semantic or phenomenological, or whatever. We make likenesses from various perspectives of reduction and thus the knowing quality of an act of mimesis depends on its epistemological perspective or perspectives.

The extent to which the proliferation of a population of likenesses becomes the emergence of a symbolic relation between each likeness and a regularly signified symbolic law is the extent to which a likeness becomes emblematic. What an emblem signifies can be different from what the ancestral likenesses used to signify, because they can signify other, earlier replicas. They are subject to the utter transformation of evolutionary drift. Thus an image of the Sydney Opera House can be used to signify (*iconically* or as a likeness) the actual Opera House, or a jester's hat; or it can be used as the replica of a *symbol* or emblem to represent Sydney, or opera houses generally.

Likewise all the replications of the sit-com genre both establish and discover the sit-com meme as a symbolic law. As such, sit-com replicas can be used to signify sit-comness. In *Natural Born Killers*, the film makers use the form of the sit-com stylistically to tell about Mallory's youth and coming of age: the mimesis of the sit-com signifies the suffocating, laughable banality of both the genre and its typical household subject matter. It is from a sit-com kind of household that the character, Mallory, escapes. Many a sit-com (*Frontline*, *Seinfeld*, *Fawlty Towers*, *The Simpsons*) signifies its sit-comness in order to be a kind of sit-com spoof—spoofing of genres being a typical style of comic fiction anyway. In a similar way Sergio Leone's westerns imitated the great genre of Hollywood historical fiction. They are almost western as spoof. They waver between the irony of parody and celebration by imitation. The symbolic objectification of the generic techniques from different perspectives hones the narrative artist's craft—it is, as Bakhtin emphasised, the foundation of narrative style. Eventually imitation becomes emulation. Sergio Leone's westerns are among the best of their genre. The apprenticeship of a narrative artist might be better spent doing parodies of the genres rather than launching prematurely into the all too serious transcendence of genres that is a typical ambition of many a modern novel or film. Shakespeare's is the epitome of a career in which comic, mimetic verve becomes the stylistic foundation for the most serious and original poetic intentions.

Likenesses of propositions and narratives are at work in all sorts of communications that don't actually assert their literal propositional references or their arguments. They urge an argument as a type, or they use a propositional form to refer truthfully to its type: they assert the truth of *these* acts of reference. Those standard phrases that open so many stories—*It is said*, *I heard*, *The word is*, *The story goes...*—introduce tales that are likenesses of some earlier narration. They could stand before any version of fiction as a reminder that Aristotle was right at least about the mimetic basis of narrative poetics. In indicating the niggling difference between events and their telling, the difference that inaugurates and contaminates

historiography, a phrase like *It is said* moves unobtrusively to transcend the difference by objectifying the text and making the communication, or rather its meme, the relevant event. As in irony, a propositional form is used by one person as another's or as *the Other's*. In the form *It is said that p.*, the proposition (or narrative) *p* is used by one person as a meme of a social system; authorship is attributed to the social system. The point is that the proposition or narrative is objectified and removed from the fateful subjective attribution that both authenticates assertions and pledges an assertion's constitutive, epistemological riskiness.

Even the acts of proclamation and announcement avoid this pledge, relieving the speaking subject of their burden of proof, and appealing to both the authority of a supra-individual authorship and a systemically recognised actuality. Such communicative attitudes play their part in a persistent memetic feature of essayistic stylistics, namely the sometimes unhappy norm of shunning what Les Murray (1997, p.55) has called "the heavy explanatory quality you get in all but the very best prose." Presumably, the heavy explanatory quality damages the essay's capacity for stylishly communicating personal wonder at its perhaps mundane object. In the era of scientific culture, avoiding explanation, or doing it lightly, may no longer be an option for good essayistic prose—not unless it wants to give up its trying to find what knowledge it can of its object. The persistence of this normative meme may be more an adaptation to the nostalgia for some kind prescientific literary culture dreamed of by the poetically literate victims of scientific progress. Sadly, I suspect that the kind of prose Murray values belongs more to a deliberately archaistic, contemporary version of the essay. This is the "literary essay", a memetic form that, under selection pressures stemming from the functional differentiation of social knowledge, has drifted from meditative inquiry to entertaining literary announcement, and to authorial self advertisement under cover of stylish proclamation. The strongest selection pressure comes from the pathetic desire to emulate the prose of literary art. Such prose is shaped primarily by its being narrative prose and therefore diegetically descriptive, or mimetically dramatic. It seldom resorts to explanation. Of course, ever since Montaigne the essay has been trying to do its best in this kind memetic environment: this was the point of the essay. But cultural evolution has kept on transforming the essay's environment. It was never easy to write good essays, but especially not now when so much of what was best in the tradition, including the epistemological risk, has been hived off into academic writing.

Though speech has the devices to distance an author from what would be a text's literal assertions and its associated validating explanations, the extension of the narrative phenotype into dance, drama, song, writing, print, cinema, TV, and other media does it naturally and effortlessly. These media seem to be made for the mimetic objectification of narrative text, far away from any author, that is such a feature of narrative art. Their invention seemed to answer a need to which language had already addicted us.

The copying and recopying of books or films or disks are mimetic, communicative acts as well as memetic or symbolic replications. A reprint of a film or novel objectifies the film or novel, yet again. Just because such copying is mechanical, it is still intentional and it is done because a mind or minds intended to transmit the work. The printing and reprinting of a work defines a meme which is the whole work, just as a whole organism asexually reproduces and defines an evolutionary "gene" which is its whole genome. In a way, narrative artists attempt to produce a work that is one big complex replicable meme. While the distributor or publisher replicates the whole meme, the author, in assembling the work, replicates many memes. Thus William Faulkner made *Absalom, Absalom!* from an unanalysable

complex of memes that flowed through his experience and memory—stories of old Mississippi, of people and families and towns, of the American Civil War, stories from elsewhere too, story upon story, gist upon gist, all woven together into a big thick rope of mesmeric prose that defies the unweaving of analysis. And the weaving itself is memetic, replicating the style of a kind of speculative recollective history, rather than that of, say, the everyday expressions and speech genres that novels full of dialogue replicate, a style that relates distant, dramatic, debatable events whose historical validity has become, by virtue of the memetic processes of social memory in a largely spoken and epistolary context, more like legend than matter of fact; and replicating a narrator's taking many perspectives, in which each perspective taken replicates the narrator's or another character's perspective; and replicating the gists of the speculated events as signalled by phrases like "which would have been when..." or "she must have seen him..." or "I like to think...", each of which introduces and stands in the relation of a speculative, cognitive or emotional propositional attitude to the events that they introduce; while the whole history seems like a turbulent sea, with events seen from before and after, from this event and that event, the teller and the reader just managing to keep an eye on the chronology, not like a navigator does on a star, but rather inferring the chronology from all this evidence and false evidence, and holding it in mind as best they can, as they would concentrate on a swinging pendulum, only to find themselves being mesmerised. One of Faulkner's narrators describes this kind of narrative:

Its just incredible. It just does not explain. Or perhaps that's it: they don't explain and we are not supposed to know. We have a few old mouth-to-mouth tales; we exhume from old trunks and boxes and drawers letters without salutation and signature, in which men and women who once lived and breathed are now merely initials or nicknames out of some now incomprehensible affection which sound to us like Sanskrit or Choctaw; we see dimly people, the people in whose living blood and seed we ourselves lay dormant and waiting, in this shadowy attenuation of time possessing now heroic proportions, performing their acts of simple passion and simple violence, impervious to time and inexplicable—Yes, Judith, Bon, Henry, Sutpen: all of them.

Years later a publisher replicates all these memes at once by reprinting the one big meme that Faulkner made. And years later again, someone reads it. Unlike science, fiction is especially concerned with its replicable textual objects: its *works*. The fact that a work survives and replicates as a whole in many social contexts, and not only in that of its genesis, gives it particular prestige. It gives it canonical status. Though a book that goes extinct need not be condemned for being not "great", the peculiar replicative unity of narrative artworks, their peculiar self referring, systemic autonomy, independent of any particular environment or context, does make the canon an important community of memes in aesthetic history. And though the judgement of history can be stupid, a work's independence from any particular context is actually a matter of dependence on and adaptation to many different social environments. The mimetic character of fiction and its making, its ability to make many meanings by being a theatre of likenesses, is one reason certain fictions (unlike scientific concepts or even historical documents—which persist for other memetic reasons) are so adaptable to so many contexts. They achieve many meanings in as many contexts. So many ages and many audiences can find their meanings in such works; and long lasting works are not only adapted to persistent social selection

pressures but, by virtue of their fluid, fictive meaning, they stretch the range of what can constitute persistent social selection pressure for narrative

Different kinds of speech acts, with different kinds of illocutionary force have long been given performative verbs by natural language: to assert, to insist, to proclaim, to declare, to promise, to apologise, to demand, to beg, to thank, to ask, to swear, to answer... Narrative art, of which fiction is the latest form, does none of these in particular. In a way it has been a negation of any particular kind of narrative illocutionary act as denoted by any particular performative verb. However it is what Hegel called a determinate or definite negation: it still results in what is another kind of illocutionary act. We cannot negate actually acting-in-language as such. Fiction might pretend that there is no subject who enacts any particular illocution, but the author still actually *performs* something else, which, as a determinate negation of any other authentic illocution is also a likeness of any such illocution that uses the same propositional form or argument. I am not aware that there is any English verb for this peculiarly and chronically negative movement in fictive illocution. Aristotle (*Poetics*, 1447a-b) felt a similar lack when, in his day, he noted that there was no name for what he called *poetry*. Nowadays we don't lack a name for the object made. The made narrative object is what it is all about, rather than the act of making. The name of the object is *fiction*, but it is an odd usage to say *I fictionalised* or even *It is fictionalised*. Or, for that matter, what fiction begins with the line *I imagine* or *It is imagined*? As a theatre of narrative, fiction's making, and the agency of that making is concealed off stage, and common English usage connives in this. Like Jurgen Habermas (1985, pp. 185-210), common usage pretends that there is no illocutionary force in fictive discourse, just its suspension or its absolute negation.

Fiction works this way in order to seem like a worked on likeness of narrative that is a freely persisting phenomenon of nature. In fact, in doing this, fiction abandons itself to social systemic as opposed to purely individual psychic determination, thereby acknowledging, and exploiting, the autopoietic character of systems of narrative communications. This has been dimly intuited in various notions throughout the history of aesthetics, especially in those notions that acknowledge that art involves something more than an individual author. It is there in notions of a muse; in the Aristotelean idea that authors should, like Homer, avoid referring to themselves (an ancestor to Barthes' "death of the author"); in the notion of the *sublime*; and in the idea that art is more than merely subjective. In good fiction, people take the risk of riding on these super individual processes of wild social systemic nature, in order to arrive at a human destination.

Schoenberg is supposed to have said that the painter paints a picture rather than what it represents. Likewise a narrative artist tells a story, rather than what it is about. But still a narrative artist also shows what it is to represent something by showing a narrative representing something. As audience, we enter the inner sanctum of fiction's nested recursion at once, and *there* something *is* being represented. Ah, the charms of this recursion! In a sense, what a work of fiction represents, by virtue of its being a mimetic likeness or icon, is itself, or rather its own symbolic law, its memetic form, its universal type. In this self reference, fiction stakes its life on its universality—a universality purchased according to the principle that there are as many kinds as there are samples. When pressed for an answer, those who have to pinpoint what is so important about fiction or what makes a great work, but who, nevertheless, really have not been able to think much about these questions, give an answer that always seems to be floating around in the memosphere of clichés—something like *It reveals universal truths about human nature*. This is so vague and passionless we usually just ignore it and take its irrelevance as proof of

fiction's ineffability. But one thing fiction does, at least, is make would-be narrative universals, and show humans making them. Aristotle seems to have appreciated something like this in his observation about poetry being more philosophical than history because it is concerned with what is universal. Narrative art shows what history is like—namely, that even though historiography is about events, what it does is tell a story. Yet what a fiction is about does not count for nothing. A work of fiction is more than a likeness of some contentless form; it is a likeness of a form's being used to represent events, and therefore it represents the events being represented too.

Right from the start, a work of fiction aspires to the symbol's universality and to memetic persistence, even though this might not be confirmed by the social systemic selection of a canon of works that we call the judgement of history. A fiction as a freely persisting phenomenon is seemingly subjectless and unauthored. The author is no longer present and we animals are so dazzled by immediate presence or absence that it is the text's presence that dazzles us. Fiction devises its escape from the poesis of its author in order to partake of the heady autopoiesis of culture, thereby to win whatever measure of relative universality that the still sublunary cultural perspective may provide.

With language, nature developed the device of a theatre of likenesses into the most cunning of external communicative objects. The second nature of narrative art has continued this development and extended what was once the still intimate connection of the voice and the body into more and more ecstatic theatres of virtual reality.

49. The wilds of culture; or the autonomy of ideology.

To conceive cultural history in terms of a program of the replication, variation and selection of symbols means, at the very least, taking on the discipline of historical science. This is not a kind of masochism that denies us the charms of so called "narrative history"—as if there were any other kind. Nor does it deny the value of marshalling a universe of fascinating evidence and incident and spinning it into a complex, heartfelt story. The point about "good read" history is that whatever the scope and rigour of its inquiries, its plotting is typically based on and in subjective, anthropocentric, or ideologically familiar interpretations, and it relies on the kind of rapid, emotionally engaged narrative nous that fiction usually relies on too. Fictivity enters into such historiography not just by way of the seductive charms of telling a good story, nor as lie, nor as political self interest, but constitutionally, as the result of the text's reduction of an otherwise ungraspable complex of events. Primarily, that reduction is made in the selections of incidents and evidence—often based on naive (though not necessarily misleading) anthropocentric assessments of relevance such as taste or even entertainment value—and various inspired interpretations of the relations between incidents. That is, fiction enters into the whole business in the form of the reductions of plot. Strictly, *fiction* is not quite the right word here; it is being used metaphorically. This is not a matter of making up so much as a matter of what is made of history by making do, given that, in the absence of unrepeatable empirical events, other than enduring texts and memories, verification becomes a matter of interpretations. Good literary and cinematic history seek to make a virtue of this constitutive predicament by means of their subjective narrative cunning or wisdom. Like fiction, history has to pick itself up by its boot straps, out of the miasma of ideology, yet by means of ideology. This however means that historiography has to take the wild ride on social systemic natural forces, if only to shake off its naive, anthropocentric perspective. But, all going well, this is just how humans have been

using their scientific system, since the modern advent of socially organised empirical research; on the other hand, it also is how the scientific system likes to use humans.

Rather than marshalling the fascinating evidence and then ingeniously plotting the heartfelt narrative connections, historical science proceeds more modestly, by placing strict limitations on its plot, and therefore on allowable historical data. It limits its plot to the replications and selections of a memetic program. In doing so it relativises perspectives—as Darwin did—in order to show how design may develop independently of any human subject. A common objection to theories of cultural selection is that, unlike biological evolution, it is intentional. It may well be so—at most if not all of its individual replications; but it also produces super individual intentions that were not primarily intended by us. Cultural evolution designs designs that are not ours but those of and for memes.

Though a detailed description of cultural selection pressures may be as difficult as a detailed description of the ecological selection pressures acting on populations of organisms, the notion of *selection pressure* is a useful one. Its appropriate vagueness enables it to capture an otherwise ungraspable totality—an environment—of causal factors. Selection pressures are, in this totalising sense, specified by their expression in memic (or genic) functional adaptation. This is not to say that the term *selection pressure* should be avoided because of suspicions of circularity. The term's validity is grounded in the operationally self defining, self replications of the meme (or gene). The replicator defines itself by distinguishing itself from its environment. Defined for science so as to rescue otherwise ignored phenomena for explanation, the meme, like the gene, is based on the conception of forms of self reference that are not subordinate to the self reference of the individual psyche that we call the human subject. One phenomenon that memetics recognises and explains is that of the autonomy of ideological forms.

The difficulties of specifying memes and of charting lineages among such promiscuously reticulating lines are not problems to baulk at. Nor are the problems of producing functional as distinct from genealogical descriptions. Rather, having been recognised and analysed, such problems establish theoretical limits on what could be claimed as evidence, on what could or could not happen within the structure of the plot, and therefore on what the theory is good for. The difficulty of tracing lineages through repeatedly selected functions sets the limitations on allowable evidence; it does not amount to an inherent methodological inability to generate useful theoretical outcomes. Primarily, this is because the theory of cultural selection, like the theory of natural selection, is better designed for explanations of the persistence of, and the hierarchical sedimentation of, adaptations; and in the case of cultural selection this refers to the adaptations of ideologemes to their psychic and social environment. In accordance with the principle that the nature of evidence is mediated by the theory—in this case the teleonomic plot of cultural selection—the limitation of the plot imposes a limitation on the kind of relevant data. Specifically, the operational definition of a meme limits the data to observable texts as evidence of continuous communicative replication, rather than to any events that such texts may refer to. The reduction thus made is not that of a hypercomplex of observable events to a historiographic, narrative text, but that of a set of replicatively related texts to a set of persistent symbolic forms or ideologemes in their evolving, adaptive relation to one another and to their environment. Thus we are dealing with a history of communications, and with the system of communications that Luhmann(1985) has called *society*, and with the self organisation of that system into the more or less persistent ideological structures that are usually denoted by the term *culture*.

The theory of cultural selection thus comes to terms with the problem of the ideological reductions of cultural, symbolic forms—and specifically, the inherent historiographic problem of the ideological reduction of the events of a story—by treating ideological reduction as its object. Though this analysis still involves its own ideological reductions, these too may be subjected to memetic analysis. Certainly there is circularity in this: by the plot of the theory, memetic analysis makes its own reductions—particularly in the abstraction of persistent symbols from texts—and these too are ideological. By the self reference of memetic theory, the meme is a meme too. However the strict limitation of the plot greatly limits the schemata of ideological reductions, compared to those of “narrative history”, in which every twist and gist of plot introduces new and problematic reductions, and is, besides, concerned with a miasma of many different social and psychic phenomena. The plot of the cultural selection of memes is clearly described, and the hypothesis that its theoretical validity is an adaptation to the selection pressure for the adequation of concepts to reality is, and remains, subject to disconfirmation by the same reality. Ideology critique is itself subject to ideology critique, but that does not make it all hopelessly relative. A theory that rescues phenomena from obscurity and inexplicability is working and demonstrating its adequacy to that extent.

Our felt estrangement from heteronomous social systemic processes has long been known in the phenomenon of alienation. Systems of power, morality, narrative art and markets all exhibit an intuitively familiar self governing character, despite their apparent genesis in human intentions. In *Grundrisse* Karl Marx described this situation as follows:

As much, then, as the whole of this movement appears as a social process, and as much as the individual moments of this movement arise from the conscious will and particular purposes of individuals, so much does the totality of the process appear as an objective interrelation, which arises spontaneously from nature; arising, it is true, from the mutual influence of conscious individuals on one another, but neither located in their consciousness nor subsumed under them as a whole. Their own collisions with one another produce an *alien* social power standing above them, produce their mutual interaction as a process and power independent of them. (pp. 196-7)

Marx’s critical observation was achieved without a good explanation. In its absence, the truth of his insight was not always preserved throughout the history of its memetic replications. In some lineages of its descent the insight degenerated under different selection pressures, from a poorly understood truth into an adaptation for obscurantist purposes, mystification, and for made-to-order ideology critique that could win any argument by using the all too handy charge that one’s interlocutor was an unwitting creature of unrecognised—usually bourgeois—ideology. (Any science, for example, can be described as ideological and as an instrument of power; and so it could be condemned merely for being subject to the critical and unavoidable predicament of all knowledge. For sure, science is a knowledge system of and for the powerful, but this is because science is such a powerful knowledge system. It has epistemic power and authority because it is knowing; but its stupidity is powerful because of its highly replicable and selectable authority. Such stupidity leaves its traces in things like the accumulated effects of technological history. The peculiar idiocies of scientific and technological history are sedimented in the form of the scar tissue that disfigures the face of nature.) Under the drift of its own symbolic evolution, and uncoupled from its empirical subject matter, Marx’s observation, like

his name, changed meaning by adapting its function to these pressures. It took on its own alien power.

The evolution of the Marxian science of history took place under the selection pressure not only for a made-to-order ideology critique, but for a handy technology of revolution. Marxism was always about the technology of social reform. The failure of its Soviet descendent lay in the way the programmatic of such technology tended to be designed to force reform against both psychic and social systemic intentions. Social systems continue to develop as self referring, self generating systems, and, especially when they develop as bitter conflict systems, they can quickly defy clumsy, mechanical reform programs by simply putting them to work for the sake of their own violence against people, feeding off their own children for the benefit of very few people. Marx's appreciation of the reflexivity of social science was ignored by scientistic pseudo-socialism right from the start of the Soviet experiment—something that Rosa Luxemburg diagnosed in her observations on the Bolshevik revolution. At present the triumphalist march of capitalism prevents mere subjects from countenancing a more human alternative. But just as humans have long struggled to develop technologies of ecosystem management, there is no reason why historical science should not be concerned with designing and managing the complex second nature that we call *society*, rather than just accepting the hardly disinterested judgement of those fortunate and self-serving individuals who insist that social systems and markets should not be engineered other than by and for themselves. In fact, in the reflexive context of society, this fundamentalist attitude to social nature is a kind of *de facto* social engineering anyway. There is a lot to be said for using the self generating power of social and market systems *ju jitsu* fashion, rather than just ignoring their selfish character and wasting efforts at reform by trying, Canute-like, to thoroughly reconfigure or absolutely negate such systems. A technology of reform would have to do something like this, while, at the same time, comprehending the complex and slippery reflexivity of a social science (and society) that is its own object. For the sake of becoming generously human, social reform has to proceed while riding on the back of wild social systemic nature, just as narrative art has long used the wild creatures of narrative culture for its own generous, poetic, human intentions.

Although cultural history has lacked a principled teleonomic description, culture has long been treated as a kind of second nature. Taking this perspective suggested that much was mythological in the accounts of traditional historicist inquiry. Particular historicist habits came in for repeated criticism: the rational reconstruction of continuous histories of ideas without regard to the transformative exigencies of a memetic genealogy; telling stories of origin to justify claims of authenticity; and telling biographical stories that misunderstand the nature of human autonomy in an environment of self governing social processes. However, without the natural selection plot, this second nature and its apparent ends had to be understood in terms of something like the formal move that Kant had made in relation to first nature. In the following passage Kant's subject matter is the teleology of things in the natural world, or the world of first nature, but in the cultural sphere, the term *ends* could well refer to the autopoietic functions of cultural symbols of second nature.

The actual existence of these ends cannot be proved by experience—save on the assumption of an antecedent mental jugglery that only reads the conception of an end into the nature of things, and that, not denying this conception from the objects and what it knows of them from experience, makes use of it more for the purpose of rendering nature intelligible to us by

an analogy to a subjective ground upon which our representations are brought into inner connection, than for that of cognising nature upon objective grounds. (1790, #61, p.550)

Selection processes are programs for the undesigned production of design, and thus they render non human design intelligible on “objective grounds”. A functional analysis of symbols is not just a formal move. But it can be a puzzling one, because in the functional analysis of symbols, the functional adaptations of the symbols for non human purposes are observed in the most intimately human matrix: they are experienced as human meanings. Such is the immanence of human meaning for humans. The design produced by cultural evolution will be the design of meanings or their symbolic forms to function and replicate in an environment of meanings, minds and texts. The designed meaning will be read as a meaning, but it will be a meaning designed to function *for* a meme.

Even if replicated as *my meaning*, this does not mean that cultural symbols might not have evolved in a way that is quite alien to *my intentions*. This is a schizophrenic, psychological way of putting what is a chronic and painful tear between people and their cultures and between psyche and society. The functional adaptation of a cultural form to its environment may be quite different from the intended function of the form for the individual human who replicates it. My intention may be to make a complex, dramatic film about female characters who spend most of their screen time revealing their characters in well written dialogue; but I have to do this in a given social environment, so my intention requires some socially mediating intention like applying for funding or seeking investment. In Hollywood, I might only be able to get funding for a genre film—perhaps a romantic comedy or a crime film. Unless my complex dramatic script replicates the elements of one of these genres, it is a non starter, so I turn one character into a prostitute, another into a woman stalked by a psychopath, and another into a female detective. Perhaps two of them will be “buddies”, and I can pitch it as a new post feminist take on some old cliché. The actors will have to have the same old young-star look. In Hollywood there is not much of a selection pressure for scripts like mine, so I end up stretching my script on the Procrustean bed of a genre film and, mercifully, the studio’s final cut eliminates any odd traces of my complex drama, and good dialogue. Altman’s *The Player* runs a subplot about the genesis and outcome of just such a selection process: from the artistic dreams of a screen writer’s pitch to the box office piece finally selected by the fiction system. It’s an old story.

But putting it this way is a genre piece itself: the film maker against the studio system. This old generic meme has actually led my example away from *my* precise theoretical point about the autonomy of symbols, to *its* point, which is its own survival. In this case it is the well known ideologeme about *the artist versus the system* that has survived; whereas it was really the less well known story or ideologeme about *the ideologeme’s reproduction and survival* that I particularly wanted to tell: the adventurous career of a symbol, the everyday genre from next door, surviving in an environment of selfish artist after artist, carping critic after critic, and transforming them in the process. Hollywood, the source of many a remarkable genre film, is of course an all too handy Babylon, in this all too familiar topic of ideology critique; but in one way or another the interanimation and antagonism of psychic and symbolic systems runs through all communicative endeavour. The primary activities of systems of communications like bureaucracies or corporations or scientific, artistic, educational or legal systems are communicative actions that perpetuate systemic memes. Failure on the part of an individual to understand and satisfy this

communicative demand results in incomprehension, or in charges of irrelevance, naivety, pretentiousness or tiresome difficulty.

Typically, just to communicate, we have to adapt to our communicative environment and use the other's meaning to piggy back our own. Frequently, an alien social systemic symbol represents the interests of some individuals and not others, yet everyone has to use it, because not to use it means not surviving in the social environment. Often though, any alien adaptive function is scarcely apprehended and simply denied—as is the anachronistically, antifeminist adaptation of most Hollywood movies by those who, presumably, haven't scoured video libraries for movies by, about and for adult women. Adolescent patriarchal forms still replicate in Hollywood—a kind of archaic, hi-tech, narrative haven, busily reproducing adolescent, antifeminist genres of fiction for their own sake—simply because of the nightmare of their incumbency and market conservatism. If an alien adaptive function is apprehended in some cultural institution—say when a market appears alien to someone without money—it is typically and easily advertised as an inevitability of social and human nature. Or if such a phenomenon isn't apprehended as social nature, it is simply accepted as an individual's own meaning—perhaps as another's if there is a conflict with one's own, or else as one's own. Above all, shame at our complicity in the injustices of social nature—should we ever admit them—is motive enough to preserve our passionless ignorance and cold hearts. However it is achieved, what better adaptation of an alien cultural form than one that perpetuates people's blindness to the horrors of its social progress, lest, in recognising them, people should also try to end it? What better conspiracy than one in which we all breathe the air of the memosphere, while inoculating ourselves against knowledge with ridiculous conspiracy theory diversions about the machinations of power elites or faceless others, when all the while the effective other is actually our society? What more cunning symbol than one that disarms our scepticism with accompanying assertions that all theories of its functional autonomy are paranoia?

The functional differentiation of society is a great contributor to its alien character. Once, the critique of functionalist reason could simply condemn courses of action in which possibly worthy ends were used to justify unworthy means. But society, for its own sake, managed to outwit good old humanist reflection. Now, functionalist reason does the opposite. By means of the functional differentiation of society, unworthy tasks are broken into piecewise processes. Society thus engineers itself. Functionalist reason thereby secures its own unworthy end by many individual human actions, none of which is unworthy in itself. The inequities of markets, the delays and diversions of managerial and bureaucratic culture, the inanities of narrative culture and the atrocities of wars are all achieved in this way.

Conflict systems are the oldest and best known of alien, selfish social systems—from the accursed, generational feud of the Atreides to the madness of *Catch 22*. In a way, an ancient culture of conflict is not simply an archaic curse weighing on the living; it is also intensely localised in time. It is ceaselessly renewed by local replication. A feud is only as old as the perceived wrong that revenge seeks to redress. And a conflict system, like any system, thrives on the tight loops of its own selfish logic, like the logic of *Catch 22* itself.

Another work of fiction that makes a theme of this kind of alienation of social systems from individuals is Terrence Malick's *The Thin Red Line*. There is no more alien social system than war. Against the voice-overs indicating the characters' psychic lives, the war stands as an alien, implacable and social nature. Utterly isolated, because the imminence of random death affirms their bodily isolation, the

soldiers retreat to these little islands of psychic reflection. Outside the mind, society or community have abandoned them to the only society that persists for them: the war. One voice asks what this thing war is: How does it start? But as wild, self generating nature, war demands not a question about origin so much as a question about the kinds of selection processes that result in the evolution of such a horrifying conflict system. When individuals take on their social systemic functions—usually as designated by rank—they voice, in speech, the alien law of the war as they have internalised it. The colonel (Nick Nolte) begins with a voice-over expressing his personal experience, while he is being given the system's orders by his commanding officer. Once the troops are on land and fighting, nearly everything he says is said out loud and is another's meaning, the war's meaning. It is the role he has little choice but to play: his local selection environment would tolerate nothing else. He knows this, and the drama shows that he knows it—such as when he encounters the anti-heroic scorn of the lieutenant that he wants to recommend for decoration. Then there is the captain who hesitates to send his troops into a final, deadly assault on the top of that big, beautiful, breezy Blady Grass hill (we only ever get the low, dangerous camera angle on it, never the sublime, strategic view). He is rational and human; so the colonel has to relieve him of his command. And all the images of the natural world, of birds and bats and rainforest, are not only the little psychic epiphanies oddly experienced by the soldiers in the midst of their suffering, they remind us that this terrible monster, war (What spark ignited it?), is also a kind of wild nature. Across the distance that separates wild social nature and wild organic nature, each watches the other with a familiar gaze.

Because our subjectivity is constituted (ontogenetically) in an environment of culture, and because human psyche is environment for cultural meanings, we all too readily take on an ideologeme's adaptive design not only as our own, but as constitutive of our subjectivity, even when it is not obviously in our interests: the poor embrace the inequitable market distribution of wealth, women embrace gender inequality, the religious embrace faith in the face of their own incredulity. Mill thought ideas were tested in the market place of free speech but he did not appreciate that they are tested for their selfwise viability, and not necessarily for their human functions like truth. Many ideas persist though quite unworthy of our embracing them. As Dennett (1995, p.365) said, "The haven all memes depend on reaching is the human mind, but a human mind is itself an artefact created when memes restructure a human brain in order to make it a better habitat for memes." Human subjectivity is beset by the problem of having to construct itself in and from a symbolic order of often contradictory meanings in which it becomes difficult to say what is one's own and what is alien. (Part of this predicament, and part of its solution for a subject, lies in meanings inherent function of being able to mean more than one thing. We may be of two minds, but meaning must always be.) This problem of the subject's contradictory constitution is the very problem that the psychic self construction of subjectivity is designed to solve—as long as our social environment hasn't already left us for dead. Subjective autonomy, the psyche's self reference, is a hothouse process of contradiction followed by selection for some kind of reconciliation. As Dennett (p.365) stressed, it is not a case of "memes versus us". The very autonomy of the human subject is parasitic on the autonomy of memes, and the autonomy of genes for that matter—but they are parasitic on us too.

Many persistent cultural forms are more important as memetic adaptations to their environment of incumbent cultural forms, than they are to individual human intentions. They thus appear to be either dysfunctional or downright inhuman. But since being *human* is normative and enjoined rather than being just factual and given,

it is easy to quibble over just what *human interest* is. It is political. But it is also ethical and aesthetic, and an abiding concern of narrative art. We see this contradiction played out in the way a narrative exerts its own shift on an alien symbolic order, yet by means of that same symbolic order. Aristotle saw it in the way a plot discovers a new narrative logic.

Though it applies to narrative art in general, jokes epitomise this kind of discovery—and its relation to pleasure, mirth and laughter. In the overturning of an expected narrative symbol, the autonomous life of such a symbol, and its functional adaptation for its own survival, is dramatised for the use of the joke. With its own epigrammatic narrative verve, the joke shows it, objectifies it and knows it, and so prepares for its narrative transformation into a new symbol that, in ceasing to function for its former self, becomes an image of symbols' functioning for their authors and audiences. Typical of fictions, the joke rides this alien logic of social systemic nature to an unestranged destination that it enjoins to be human and social at the same time.

These considerations lead to an insight into the intimate relation between art and morality. In a social environment that exerts selection pressures for communicative collusion, in which resources are exchanged, and in which bad is countered with bad, a principle like the categorical imperative seems to outline a good adaptation, for the social construction of psyche. It certainly has some wide cultural appeal, having been selected as a moral meme under widespread and persistent pressures of social organisation. It is especially well adapted to the familiar, less alienated interactions of people, and, I suppose, under persistent selection pressures stemming from the social environment of human populations, it could even emerge in some kind of genetically fixed form. Yet society is not so unchanging and there have clearly also evolved more, abstract and alien social systemic processes that defy it: markets, famously, work kleptocratically and so seem anti-human as far as such a moral principle is concerned; war, of course, even more so. As framed by Kant, the categorical imperative is not categorical for any particular self-referring system—neither for the organic body, nor for psyche, nor for society. It is not *categorical*, in Kant's sense of this term; rather, it is *hypothetical*, because it is conditional on a contingent principle of social organisation. If the society is organised under selection pressures such as those outlined above, then acting “only on that maxim whereby (you can) at the same time will that it should become a universal law (Kant, 1785, sec. 2, p268)” is a useful imperative. The so-called categorical imperative thus includes a common, psychically devised design principle for society, stipulating that psychically self-descriptive principles of teleological actions should not, if construed as the propositions of a single, self-referring, social systemic subject, find themselves in contradiction with any of the other communicative elements (in particular, those originating from other psychic subjects) within that social system. In constructing his categorical imperative, Kant ignored the fact of their being different systems, each with its own imperatives; and this was an inevitable consequence of basing moral as well as epistemological universals on a kind of universalised version of subject-centred reason. Except within the peculiarly restricted moral system that it defines, albeit one that is functionally well adapted to a population of human psyches, the categorical imperative does not have the categorical logic that Kant wanted. Designing socially constructed psyche through moral engineering inevitably leads to psychically registered antagonisms between psyche and both the body and society: human psyche is well known for registering these antagonisms as constitutive of its own, uncomfortable, self-antagonistic persistence. With the categorical imperative, as with the promise, words are enjoined to take on a life of their own, so individual psyche may well feel it is ceding its autonomy up to their irreproachable yet austere

and alien social logic. In this self antagonistic predicament of the social construction of psyche, it is the binding affection of comedy, not the categorical imperative that holds sway. Imagine a population acting universally under a symbolic principle of *acting only on that maxim whereby you could at the same time will that it should become a universal law*—such a Utopia would be extraordinary. It is extraordinary that we are animals who can at least seriously aspire to this, our selfish genes, bodies and minds notwithstanding. Comedy, in knowing all this, shows that it can know more than morality; and to that extent it can be more moral.

It might be assumed that untruth is a characteristic of the meaning of ideologemes that are heteronomous to individual human intentions—as if human autonomy and truth were cognate, or as if, in human evolution, there was an inescapable selection pressure for absolutely truthful representations, rather than for just working or adequate reductions. But in the hothouse of psychic selections and reconciliations from the multiple drafts of experience, human self reference is sometimes served by the untruth, or perhaps half truth, of self deception. For the practical demand that contradiction simply be resolved, willy nilly if need be, follows from the demand that knowledge, including self knowledge, be possible at all. To allow the persistence of unresolved contradictions is to allow the truth of any conclusion. The function of contradictions (See Luhmann, 1985, p.360) is to signal the need to move from the contradictory state to a new non contradictory state by whatever means we can, including self deceptive ones. Like the narrator in Beckett's *The Unnameable*, subjective contradictions say *I can't go on, I must go on*.

Self deception follows from the psyche's own reductive description of its own ungraspable complexity for itself. It is by means of such self deception that the psyche must yet imperfectly grasp itself. To call it self deception is to indicate the extent to which such self reference—and with it self production—is not necessarily a progression towards better self knowledge. After all, the process does not usually have at its disposal the social organisation that guides empirical science, namely that of the social observability of its observations. It is psychic self knowledge for the psyche's self and not for others. It is a matter of reduction made for the sake of eluding contradictions that threaten self production and, in the same process, eluding, to some extent, self knowledge too. It is not such a wonder that this expert at eluding itself for the sake of itself should have insinuated itself into philosophical description as a *something-nothing-everything*. The Delphic oracle and Buddha saw the problem, but it was not until Nietzsche and Freud, that modern science started to see the *function* of self delusion for the formation of the *I*. When the resolution of psychic contradiction works by forms of self deception, there is a wild selection pressure for symbols whose own self serving persistence may be particularly alien to individual human knowledge and self knowledge.

Frederic Jameson (1981, p.283) was certainly not the first to see these processes as a kind of "political unconscious". While we think we are acting and telling things according to our own intentions and interests, we are unconsciously acting in accordance with other designs—with those of a political unconscious. Yet grouping processes of ideological reproduction and persistence under the name of the *unconscious* should not be allowed to obscure the important selection processes of cultural symbols by glibly invoking that most prestigious and mysterious of psychic categories. The psychic unconscious should not be confused with the unconscious, super individual selection of culturally adapted semantic design. Freud's psychic unconscious, nevertheless, would enter into the process because psyche is the environment of meaning, and the Freudian unconscious was conceived as a kind of

scarce tissue of painfully contradictory meanings left in the wake of the subject's self-deceptive resolution of socially encountered contradictions.

Failure to pose the difficult problem of ideology in the most useful explanatory terms damages both political practice and narrative theory. Benjamin's (1955, p.258) once moving insight that the great works of civilisation are in complicity with the violence and barbarism of the victors of history, is not in itself enough to identify and disentangle the precise ideological designs of such works, unless we identify the increasingly risky way in which artworks have to be designed to use increasingly dangerous or horrific ideological designs for their own purposes. The almost universal adaptation of narrative artworks to the banal environment of markets is not in itself grounds to reject such works for their complicity in the barbarism inherent in the abstractions of markets. And nothing is more debilitating for cultural critique than the mere spectacle of critique. The fate of Benjamin's critique itself illustrates how good works can become the instruments of bad intentions. In the memetic persistence of insights like Benjamin's, the meaning of successive replications of the critique drifts from a detached caution regarding the violent historical use of cultural treasures to a shibboleth of rote critique. Under selection pressures (say) for the self-edification of the uncertain critic, the critique ceases to mean what Benjamin meant; its meaning drifts away and starts to work as badge that signifies that the critic has read Benjamin's essay on the concept of history, or that the critic does not like the artwork in question but does not quite know what to say about it other than to criticise it willy nilly. These evolved meanings are hardly the intended meanings of the critic, rather they are the meanings that the meme uses to perpetuate itself. So the critique becomes more barbaric than the works it ends up wronging. In the case of artworks, an eventual adaptation to brutal purposes need hardly be a matter of a work's semantic essence. Many a great work of a national artist has been used by a dictator for brutal nationalist self promotion. In another sense though, the work may manage to get past the censors and to use the very barbarism that would like to use it. Though this might damage future understanding of the work, surely such works, like the victims of history, deserve redemption, and await the coming of a Messianic reader.

The cultural symbolic forms of fiction have to survive and replicate in a symbolic environment of self-perpetuating symbolic forms assembled into a self-sustaining system of communications. Self-perpetuating symbolic ruts like feuds, violent conflict, market inequity, religious faith, superstition, racism, sexism, even scientific scepticism, all infect and perpetuate themselves in narrative art. It is the fate of all artworks in an unfree society to be tainted by that unfreedom. Yet it has also been an historic function of artworks to use the heteronomy of symbolic forms bequeathed by the violent history of culture in new meanings that prefigure their redemption.

In an ideological tradition of aesthetic theory that has replicated through many an academy, aesthetic hermeneutics has been yoked to ideology critique. This was partly an adaptation to social unease felt about offering opinions, with no more legitimacy than that conferred by an aristocracy of taste, on the already nugatory matter of art. At least cultural criticism could contribute to the serious undertaking of politics. But it was also an adaptation to an historically urgent need for a theory of art rather than just a taste for it. Curiosity about artistic quality won't take taste's word for it any more. Taste is now just another question for aesthetic theory; it has its own peculiar provenance in the history of art, and its own peculiar role in the appreciation of art's ongoing experiment with its own ideological constitution. Taste was always a kind of "seat of the pants" method for reducing art's experiment with the cultural

order to a thumbs up or a thumbs down. In the canon, educated taste gave its judgements the *imprimatur* of tradition—brute or enlightened. Aesthetic theory is bound to become ideology critique to some extent, because not only do cultural objects like artworks demand theorisation insofar as they are composed of ideologemes, artworks themselves theorise ideology, not so much for scientific consciousness, as for the rapid cognition of, for want of a better word, taste. Taste remains “the most accurate seismograph of historical experience,” Adorno said (1951, p.145), such that, “reacting against itself, it recognises its own lack of taste.” Scientific curiosity demands a science of ideology as part of aesthetic theory, and so does good taste.

Science too has its history of replications with variation and selection, and science too is subject to the autonomous evolution of its symbols and concepts. Though its researches are culturally directed, and its explanations are adapted to technological and market interests, science cannot allow these selection processes to disengage it from its explanatory references to the empirical events and objects that test it and to which it is beholden. The ambition of individual scientists is itself a selection pressure for this, as also is the selection pressure for useful theories upon which other researchers can build. As David Hull (1988) has said, science is able to use the individual’s desire for esteem to work in the process of selecting adequate, useable theories. So concerned is science with the selection of adequate or truthful theories that it is little troubled by plagiarism: the plagiarised individual may suffer but not the scientific system. Fraudulent or misleading claims, however, eventually succumb to selection pressures, and those who proposed them end up earning the contempt of their misled colleagues. Fiction however, through its apparent disengagement from reference, abandons itself to an exhilarating experiment in memetic life, a kind of ride on the roller coaster of ideological autonomy. Equipped usually with little more than the instruments of taste and the intuitions of symbolic form inherent in mimesis, and using primarily the mimetic forms and functions at hand, it undertakes a kind of Red Queen’s race with the evolving memosphere. The society of the spectacle is always upping the ante on art, adapting art’s meanings to heteronomous cultural purposes, and in turn pressing art to elude it by new means. Art puts wild memetic designs at the service of more generous human intentions. Truth will be among those intentions, especially truth in the ethical sphere, so too will admiration and wonder at the sublime memetic object—the artwork—wonderful in its almost extra human otherness. Unless, from coming too close to the bone of human experience, we simply encounter this otherness with a disarming incomprehension.

50. *The sedimentation of forms.*

The historical life of a symbolic form is an emergent effect of its population or lineage of replications. Though the symbol might be regarded as a type, this involves an idealisation or a reduction, for it enters the world of historical and social particularity as a related but diverse stream of replicas or tokens. This is true whether the symbolic form is a plot type, a character type, a genre, a gist, a scientific concept or a particular work of art. This is why the history of symbolic forms is ultimately a matter of inquiry into particular replications by particular people, even if some of these replications involve reductions that cover the tracks of their own history of replication and selection. If symbolic forms could simply be regarded as types expressed by sets of the same tokens or replicas, then it would not matter who told whom what, and when, and with what intention, and how it was interpreted. It would not matter who borrowed what narrative form from whom or whether the form was an

independent innovation. (See, Hull 1982, p.295) However, each replication is an incident in the teleonomic plot and as such must count as evidence in the archaeology of culture. No two replications of a symbol, not even two screenings of the same film, are identical. So for the sake of the history of culture, symbols have to be understood as related lineages and networks of replication rather than as abstract archetypes, even if the latter understanding might itself be the basis of someone's own acts of replication. Hence the appropriate use of terms like genealogy (Nietzsche) and epidemiology (Sperber) to describe the processes of cultural transmission from which memes emerge. The lines might get lost in a hypercomplex braid of reticulations, or innovations might introduce genealogically unrelated symbols that are nevertheless practically and functionally indistinguishable (to historical research) from similar symbols with a different ancestral line, yet still it is the particular details of replication upon replication, or retelling upon retelling, that makes cultural history. The perfect idealised symbol, a self same universal lording it over each replication, is just a reduction that obscures whatever historical evidence we may have. But it is a reduction that is itself a memetic replication, and it enters the history it describes, and so, quite often, fulfils itself.

The same kind of reduction is at work in the abstraction of perfect lines of cultural evolution from heterogeneous data. The critique of so called *linear* history, is a critique of idealised plots with reduced genealogies that relate unrelated traditions. The critique of continuous history is a critique of the idealisation that links semantically or functionally similar but genealogically independent cultural phenomena. Cultural history demands a plot that apprehends continuous lines of causal, genealogical relations between replications of symbols where there is evidence that they obtain; and, on the other hand, preserves discontinuities where there is no evidence of actual communicative transmission. To complicate matters, however, something like a reduced continuous history gets replicated and so, precisely as a mistake it manages to achieve a false synthesis that papers over actual genealogical discontinuities with its own actuality—a new reticulation of lines. We are all folk memetic theorists, and our mistakes in memetics have their own memetic life.

Meanwhile each replication of a symbol is unique, and seemingly identical replications may be used to mean quite different things. So despite a discontinuity in the meaning of a symbolic form, there may still be a genealogical continuity of forms. *Hamlet on Ice* may be a comic spoof, yet count as a replication and descendent of the tragic plot. A genealogy may both deny an apparent relation of almost identical forms on the evidence of their independent ancestry, and yet link opposites by simply recognising that one is a negation answering the assertion of the other. Continuity is a principle of the relation of generations of replicas, if not always of the relation of the meanings or functions of those replicas. The latter relation is subject to such leaping whims of consciousness as negation, irony, parody and many more. The uniqueness of each replication guarantees that the meaning of each is unique. As Nietzsche (1887, p.210) said, “While forms are fluid there meaning is even more so.”

It is often said that art in general, and especially comedy in particular, are resistant to functional analysis. This stems from the aesthetic tradition of their deliberately flaunting their uselessness. However, aesthetic, including comic, understanding, or what used to be called *taste*, have also had quite a functionalist justification too: they were for fast cognitive processing of highly complex aesthetic, ethical and historical information—matters that rely on human intuitive heuristic rather than socially organised methodological analysis. Or at least something like this has been the claim of the tasteful. Yet this function arises from an especially cunning feature of the function of meaning: the fluidity of its functions. What art exploits is

the fact that meaning functions by subliming functions and by endlessly varying the function of its function. Functional variation in evolutionary processes is usually seen as matter of changing the function of a biological or technological design. However humans have evolved to a point of teleological sophistication where they design functional designs: and meaning goes with this. Meaning functions by varying the function of symbolised information.

Where there is an apparent design people will find a function for it. In this they are like nature itself. If fictions were useless then anyone could or would have found a use to put them to. The critique of functionalism operates best by multiplying functions, not by impossibly and puritanically suppressing function as such. Utilitarianism and instrumental reason are just too unimaginatively useless. The aesthetics of disinterestedness, which received its great philosophical expression in Kant's *Critique of Judgement*, was just one recognition of the transformation of function being employed in the aesthetic critique of functionalist reason: disinterest was primarily an utterly absorbed interest in the phenomenon of *interest*. Fiction is a formalisation of the transformational function of meaning. Meaning's supposed first function—literal truth—is negated; or at least that is a way of putting it. In the new function there is still a kind of truth function at work, such as in the urging of the argument of a plot.

What comedy—as art—does is self-refer to this functioning of the functional instability of meaning, and it is in this that part of its cognitive character resides. It is also why comedy seems exemplary among the arts in defying explanation: what it says—and it is as if it says it to itself for itself—is about itself, as much as it says what it says about its literal content. In a way, we just overhear it, because we are in it rather than it being within us. In laughter—when we hit the funny bone of meaning—author and audience sense an astonishing communicative community, when meaning, in its utter fluidity manifests the wherefore of its super individual character, which is felt as ours and the other's at once. A technician of communication might call it a calibration of mutual understanding, and it is no surprise that so much so called idle conversation is taken up in amusing banter and repartee.

The uniqueness of each mimetic replication of a symbolic form guarantees that its meaning is or can be unique in its unique context. The meaning of a form may change with an author's intentions—or an audience's. In *Natural Born Killers*, Oliver Stone presented quite conventional images of generic screen forms. The film takes the familiar plot type of tragic criminal romance that we find in *High Sierra* or *Badlands*—a plot type that had degenerated into its contemporary adaptation to largely violent criminal subject matter from its being anciently adapted to nobler (though still violent) settings. It then exaggerates the plot type's potential for depicting irredeemable murderous carnage, and tells it as romantic adventure comedy. Beyond good and evil, the film's carnival of bloodshed turns out to be in a great tasteless tradition of comic fiction (such tastelessness of course being a form of taste). Witness the events in Book 4 of Rabelais, when Panurge drowns the sheep merchant and the shepherds, while preaching to them about the blessings of eternal life! The film's final escape sequence is told both as cinematic escape adventure and as live to air news telecast. All this copying threatens to escape from the screen. The film flaunts this and the aggrieved and their lawyers know it: replication with variation is a tradition with a long appeal to would-be murderers; its postmodern forms include serial killing and copy cat crime. Whether a fiction is about something or a party to it—this is a recurring predicament of narrative art, the irritation at its ethical centre. Comedy, especially, always seems to be reminding us of our worst side by treating it

too lightly. The talking rather than the shooting kind at least has the virtue of having more varieties of barbarism at its disposal; its own light hearted cruelty can avoid the reassuring distances of comic book style. Whether this film works best as a sociological symptom, a theoretical example, or as a work of comic art is its biggest aesthetic problem. Comedy may know more about morality than morality does—but it has to be comedy and not the formality of comedy, and it has to find its audience in order to be so. This is why art has to be judged on its audiences and their reception: and *this*, along with art's fascination with things like enduring greatness, and the universal and objective aesthetic judgement, is a social selection pressure for aesthetics' having placed so much store on the memetic audience of the so called judgement of history. The trouble is, comic art knows that even this would-be universality, like the categorical imperative, is a bit of a joke. Meanwhile, risking its poetic autonomy on a flurry of semantic feinting, the visual narrative shows other kinds of visual narratives, and makes its own story out of them, copying their forms to show the forms, and what they show, with a new narrative meaning.

This is the kind of recipe for fiction which, as Bakhtin knew, shows images of other narrative forms to tell a narrative about other narratives about other narratives. This is not just a clever, formal postmodern game of allusive and elusive leaping from one narrative level or perspective to another, nor is it an endless hall of mirrors in which narrative reflects on little more than itself. It is fundamental to narrative—and linguistic—style. Concerns with personal style and authenticity seduce too many stylists into ignoring their indebtedness and taking the credit for the wealth that they have pilfered from what is more properly a social systemic subject or cultural heritage. Whether you write as sparsely as Carver, as elaborately as James or Proust, as mesmerically as Faulkner or Fuentes, or as poetically or imagistically as Woolf—or many a contemporary, pop-literary novelist—style makes the author, not the other way round. Eventually (very quickly in fact) the ultimate reference of all the mimesis is that ultimate reference of all human mimesis: human life.

The point is that narratives, of course, are themselves such important events and actions of human experience that recursively nesting a few or juxtaposing them in a narrative artwork is anything but dismally clever formality; making it a clever formality by transforming a fact about narrative into a normative device of narrative elaboration is where things start to get dismal. Sorting through communicative intertextuality is the daily fare of human communication. It is part and parcel of getting at almost any communicated truth or meaning. And fiction, after all, is constituted in this very act of narrative, mimetic recursion; it celebrates it. Each level of recursion indicates a different systemic perspective, a different function and a different meaning. These various shown narratives both mediate and are the subject matter, although information that would discriminate individual narrative actions and discrete levels of recursion may well be reduced in order to leave a constellation of degenerated images of generic forms, resistant to any thorough historical analysis. Thus in *free indirect style* the narrative shifts between images of direct and indirect discourse; and by means of what Pasolini called a hither and thither of the spirit (See Deleuze, 1983, p74), it normatively re-enacts and elaborates the ancient fact of the decentred subject—the social perspective shifting that enabled both the sublime, objectifying stance of transcendental subjectivity and symbolic communication at the same time. This non self identity of self referring psyche in turn repeats the old ploy of organic life in its adaptations for the problem of an adequately objectifying perception. As Robert Gray's Epicurean epigram puts it:

The senses can mislead us,
it is true—when we rely upon
only one of them.

Among narrative theorists, Bakhtin is the best teacher of how to make narratives. A narrative artist only masters the forms bequeathed by tradition by being their servant, in actions that copy the forms of other actions in order to transform their meanings. The disparaged and lowly humour of parody instructs the greatest comic artists, and in turn, comedy has been a wellspring of narrative artistic verve. Perhaps, just as all Shakespeare's plays seem to spring from a comic verve, all that is now called fiction does too. Perhaps it is this mimetic fluidity rather than just the apparent democratisation of character, that is behind the comic quality of modern fiction. Or perhaps the two are linked in the historical process of the mimetic degeneration of cultural forms.

One of the chief goals of establishing a hierarchical organisation of adaptations is to distinguish between the forces that initiated the development of an adaptation and the secondary degeneration that the adaptation, once developed, permitted. (Williams, 1966, p.266)

So George Williams wrote of organismic adaptations, but it is a claim that had its predecessors in theories of cultural as well as biological evolution. Darwin certainly noticed the way that one physiological feature, evolved as one adaptation, could, given a change of environmental selection pressures, be coopted for another function. Darwin recognised that the orchid labellum was one such adaptation, upon which secondary adaptations have supervened. Another that he considered was the way humans grit and bare their teeth when angry. Darwin suggested that initially, for one of our primate ancestors, this was part of preparation for fighting. Subsequently it became a sign of aggressive intent, and so perhaps a way of avoiding fighting. The behavioural form still persists as a index of emotional experience, but its functions as a preparation for fighting or even as a sign of aggressive intent have progressively degenerated.

When it comes to cultural evolution one example that has developed a memetic life of its own is that of the qwerty keyboard. The story goes that it was originally an adaptation for slowing down typists to a speed commensurate with the limited mechanical performance of early typewriters. However, after this selection pressure was relaxed, that is, after the engineering of keyboards that could cope with the fastest typists, the qwerty configuration was maintained because of a new selection pressure: it was the one all typists had practised and knew. The configuration, despite its imperfection, had become *sedimented* into the design of keyboards, although not without the possibility of eventually being superseded. This example seems to have had a peculiar memetic success, not only in books on evolutionary theory (see Gould 1980 for an early version) but (with variation) in office and training myth. However, in the evolution of cultural and narrative forms this phenomenon of the *sedimentation* of a functional form and its secondary degeneration is well known and very widespread.

An image of an image or a likeness of a likeness often has the peculiar effect of turning what it copies into something like the original but with a new meaning or function: a typical, new meaning is to show the old meaning without actually meaning it. The likeness that is preserved in the mimetic replication gets ascribed not to meaning so much as to the more stable or memetically persistent category called *form*.

The form might be said to be more deeply sedimented than the meaning; the meaning, as Nietzsche said, is more fluid. The form of *Natural Born Killers* uses the sedimented form of cinematic criminal tragedy, which in turn uses the even more deeply sedimented dramatic tragic romance. As in the case of biological phylogeny, we can recognise a nested historical hierarchy of adaptations in which more recent functional adaptations supervene on the design of features that were selected as adaptations to earlier selection pressures. The old generic forms of comedy and tragedy are sedimented (and persistent) forms from the ancient medium of drama; romance is a sedimented, written form deriving from older oral forms and persisting in the modern environments of novelistic and cinematic fiction. The action adventure and the TV news are generic forms from image media, supervening on earlier sedimented forms—the former on romance and the latter on topical, journalistic historiography, or even rumour.

Sedimentation is a term that gets used, metaphorically, in cultural theory to describe this kind of historical phenomenon, as it is observed in the social sphere of cultural transmission. Certain forms and their meanings are selected initially, and if they subsequently become the means at hand for subsequent designs in a different social environment, they get sedimented into the symbolic form. Thus ancient racial and religious hatreds may get sedimented in the political divisions of modern secular cultures. Persistent forms of cultural replication become the historical material for use in subsequent meanings. At the start of *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (p.437) Marx put the principle in its most famous form. Though already cited, it is worth quoting it again in this context:

Humans make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly found, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living.

The Eighteenth Brumaire was a remarkable work of journalistic historiography. It actually begins with a description—itself adapted from Hegel—of one kind of sedimented form being adapted to another meaning: “All great world historical facts and personages occur, as it were, twice...the first time as tragedy, the second as farce.” This “law” of history’s repeating itself is applied to describe Louis Bonaparte’s *coup d’état* of 1851 as a mockery of Napoleon’s coup of 1799. The principle actually describes a kind of process that takes place in the cultural evolution of narrative genres: if the cultural selection pressures for a noble, tragic form change, the tragic form of events may keep its plot but it may well be adapted to farcical circumstances. Likewise the form of tragic drama, in the absence of aristocratic political structures, degenerated into a form adapted to material set in the tyrannical social milieu of criminals. In turn, in *Natural Born Killers*, the criminal tragedy degenerates into romantic comedy, under the selection pressure of an image media society self-referentially bent on innovations in image production and replication for the sake of innovation.

As has been increasingly apparent throughout modernity, innovation through mimetic transformation of meaning has become an explicit stylistic norm, and it has insinuated itself much more into the autopoiesis of fiction. There is probably no cultural process that has been more influential in the history of fiction. Gargantua, and with him the novel and fiction, were born from a giant of a mother, parodically and allusively (after Athena), through the ear. Descended from pre-existing genres, and

conceived by just such mimetic processes as parody and allusion, the modern novel was never the end of genre, but its supersession by Rabelaisian excess. This applies whether a novel speaks in its most seriously authentic poetic voice or whether it appears to defy generic universals and be a law unto itself: the authentic poetic voice is itself a style evolved through cultural history, there for the use of any author who can rise to its historically specific and exacting demands; while the utterly autonomous work always preserves the image of the generic forms it appears to supersede. Fiction has been the deliberate historical development of mimetic excess in an ongoing elaboration of media and genres.

Once invented, writing left its inventor's purposes for dead. We see the same kinds of functional transformation happening year by year now with silicon information technology, defying predictions almost as fast as advertising generates them. Writing could speak from the grave; it is constitutionally apocryphal. It enabled, once and for all, the detachment of communication from an immediate context of interpersonal interaction, relaxing the pressures for the maintenance of the traditional semantic functions of propositional and narrative representations, and thereby enabling the early forms of fiction, and philosophy. Printing and silent reading universalised the environment of this detachment, ushering in the great period in which mimetic transformation of the semantic uses of what was written became the foundation of novelistic poetics. Screen media have scarcely had time to try the gamut of their potential mimetic transformations, yet all the while, the technology and its possibilities are changing beneath its feet, faster than the human capacity for mimetic experiment and innovation. Perhaps, after Modernism, the functional form of narrative *innovation* was well sedimented, and, under new selection pressures, degenerated from innovation in technique to innovation in technology. The market, generational differentiation, the sheer, unsustainable exuberance of Modernism, and the dazzling new media themselves, would all count as environmental pressures.

The transcendental detachment of communications from the speaking, human body was especially conducive to narrative formulations designed, perhaps inadvertently, for unforeseeable historical semantic circumstances. For such circumstances would eventually amount to the pressures for selection, or, as they say, for the "judgement of history". Hence the selection pressure for the artistic ambiguities of narrative representation. The ambiguous, mimetic texts typical of narrative art seem to have been more persistent than the texts of scientific theories. The latter had to be designed as explicit representations adapted to specific pre-existing explanatory systems and therefore specific cultural contexts. Image media, rather than superseding propositional communication, actually multiplied the semantic potential of what were now their own hypercomplex visual and audio propositions, multiplied the narrative genres, and multiplied the mimetic capabilities of communication, extending the narrative phenotype into increasingly detached organs. Under the free floating condition of this textual detachment and mimetic transformation, prior selections of narrative form become the basis for subsequent selections, and thereby become sedimented into the continuing processes of selection, making thorough historical deconstruction less and less feasible. As the social system's increasingly technologised autonomy takes on the previously human functions of thought and imagination, the cognitive and imaginative role of the human functionaries in that system may degenerate because they are no longer necessary. But then historical predictions are made to be defied.

To speak of form and meaning—or form and (in this case semantic) function—is to refer to categories that are not so easily differentiated. The task of clearly differentiating this traditional pair is impossible without a theory of the evolution of symbols. As long as it is conceived on the basis of the external and internal aspects of communication, form is prone to being distinguished and abstracted from meaning as the external morphology of the text is from its semantic intention. Implicit in these distinctions is the sense that form is a matter of morphological structure and pattern imprinted on a medium, while meaning is a more mysterious, inner matter. Thus, in the case of language, form is thought of in terms of syntactic structure, and meaning is thought of as semantic. This notion is related (by a bit of a functional twist) to the conception of form as that which is preserved in a replication of a symbol: the symbol's law being a law of form, form being what is alike in each replica—still often mistakenly assumed to be just the empirical shape or structure—and meaning being what, as meaning, is variable and varies. Most of this mistakes the concept of form, by taking the morphological metaphor behind its coinage literally. However it does suggest that the distinction is related to that between the two levels (and time scales) of description required to describe the evolution of symbols: accordingly, form is what persists and thus it refers to the memic character of meanings, which includes whatever persists of meaning. Form is thus itself a semantic category referring to what is more than individual—or what is social systemic and persistent—in a meaning.

When it comes to the question of symbolic forms in art, the term takes on the kind of mystique we encounter when artistic communication misconceives the problem of itself, and reproduces itself in the light of that misconception. This mystification of form has left its traces deeply sedimented in artistic practice and theory—and, of course, in the concept of form itself. The vague sense that an aesthetic category such as beauty, or even the aesthetic as such, somehow always has to come down to a matter of artistic form is as old as theories of art. The theory of beauty has long sought to achieve universality and objectivity by abstracting form from functional or expedient design. Aesthetic form has thus been conceived, most notably by Kant, as design in and for itself, design in abstract. Even evolutionary theorists (See Pinker 1994, p357) are forced into an apparent theologisation of *design* when they talk about apparent design, without being able to specify any particular function. We may well ask how such design-as-such may be recognised, and one plausible answer is that it is highly selectable biological design to be able to recognise biological design, and hence life, in the things that surround us. This same ability to recognise design has become, in turn, a psychic basis for the social evolution of a culture of design recognition and innovation. Kant's philosophy has turned out to be a brilliant meditation on the formalities of natural history, the formalities wherein he thought he found what was unconditioned, objective and universal. It is not surprising then that for Kant, nature was the first and last object of aesthetic contemplation, while artistic form was derivative artifice.

But whether natural or artistic, form's persistence as *the* aesthetic category bespeaks certain selection pressures: the prestige of vision and space for psyche; and the yearning for the abstract, the universal and the timeless. Form is after all the epitome of what is timeless, for, as in the beautiful tautologies of mathematics, all that is particular and temporal has been abstracted. It is these pressures that have led to the kind of naive, formalistic theorisation of art, the kind that is blind to the social and historical intentions of art, and yet also the kind, that in turn enters into the historical production of art as a theoretical impetus for both artistic tradition and artistic

innovation. This situation is exacerbated by art's self conscious attempt to create more than just historically specific meanings. Even—or perhaps, especially—Modernism still exhibited this, which is why Bernard Smith's term for it, the *Formalesque*, is not inappropriate. Modernism, with its intensely modern reflexivity and, consequently, its intensely innovative bent, formalised the form of innovation-as-such, particularly in the form of innovation with the forms sedimented, and thereby made to look timeless, by history. So despite belonging to an age of historicised self consciousness, Modernism's formal innovation was also, ironically, a kind of apotheosis of art's ancient, almost timeless formalism. Adorno is commonly dismissed as an old fashioned, even Modernist, theorist of Modernism. But few have so well understood the historical, social evolution of art, and seen so clearly into its blind spots. "The reason why the concept of form has remained uncharted territory in aesthetics down to Valery is that everything about art is so inextricably tied up with form as to defy isolation. Despite its centrality, form itself is no more identical with art than is any other moment." (Adorno, 1970, p.203)

What artistic form demonstrates about symbolic form in general is that the apprehension of form is mediated by its sedimented functions and meanings; form is not merely formal. So called form cannot be adequately described in terms of an abstract signifying structure imprinted on a substrate of abstract matter that we call medium, for that would be to deny its thoroughly historical character as design and our character as meaners. Even a medium though comes replete with its sedimented historical meanings. To see form as merely formal is to see it with an estranged eye—as eternal, dehumanised, and non intentional—which is not what artistic form means at all. Form has been theoretically construed in this bloodless, eternal way precisely because of the all too anthropocentric self delusions of naive abstraction. But the social selection of sedimented forms is always selection of sedimented *semantic* forms, of meaning, so the naive abstraction of meaning from a symbol does not leave one with form at all. But it does leave us with a form of form.

To conceive or reduce form in this abstract way is primarily a way of conceiving it, willy nilly, in terms of its presumed difference from meaning. However, just as there can be no signifying text without a mind to read its meaning, the perception of a symbolic form cannot be isolated by methodological fiat from what people take it to mean. For a long time empiricism in the human sciences has been damaged by ineptly premature attempts to transcend intentionality, to the extent that empiricism hasn't really been empirical. The problem for philosophy is not to isolate form from meaning, but to describe the precise relation. As Adorno (1970, p.207) said, "Form is the law that transfigures empirical being." I would add, though, that even "empirical being" is, for us intentional animals, a symbolic form itself—one that is mediated by its social meaning, even if its function is to signify what lies beyond human intentions. The empirical manages this and is constituted symbolically by its own law of the generalised observability of scientific observations. Form is not amenable to transsubjective, transhistorical or even strictly physical description because it consist in what persists of earlier sedimented functions and meanings—a feature that explains its being less changeable than everyday meaning.

Because form has been taken to mean things like the abstract physical pattern imprinted on a medium, or even to be "identical with art", these are meanings that have been historically sedimented into the cultural form we call artistic form. In this process a misapprehension has been fed back into the history of art and into the historical production of the concept of artistic form, and it has taken on its own objectivity—that is, its own symbolic life. Art, especially abstract and formal works,

has been created in the image of this theoretical idea of form, and this has exacerbated the difficulty of isolating form, and of analysing its entangled historical emergence.

Mimesis can be just parroting without appreciating the earlier intentions sedimented in the imitated form. Propositional form in a familiar language resists parroting somewhat—so deeply sedimented is language's semantic function in psychic experience. But non conceptual, non representational arts like abstract painting and music are testimony to the familiarity of not only scientific consciousness with these abstracting processes. When it comes to the mimesis of propositional and narrative forms, like sentences, gestures, actions, gists, and plots, the extent of the abstraction involved in the actual symbolic law of the form, and the extent to which the mimetic intention reduces yet again the law of the symbol it is replicating, are major forces for variation between replicas.

All this follows from the predicament that for humans everything is mediated by mind and communication, everything is meaning. Even the symbolic forms engendered by mistakes, or the laws of symbolic form induced by inadequate abstraction, become reified components of social reality insofar as they are perpetuated by replication. Memetics, envisaged as a science of self replicating symbols, is a reflexive science, itself immanent in meaning. Whatever artistic form has become, it has evolved and been selected under the pressure of artistic practices undertaken under the governance of theories of artistic form—whether intuited or explicit. Modern innovations in artistic form have been governed by some such insight as this into the reflexivity of artistic culture and of ideas about artistic form. Fiction is, among other things, a symbolic form that embodies a purpose whose end is the elaboration (or even the perfection) of communicative design with the intuitive means at hand—and typically without an adequate theoretical, functional analysis to boot. The form of fiction has been selected with a social design—if not a conscious psychic intention—that bears within it the intuition or the implication that these means at hand are symbolic forms that have their own cultural life. Fictions are like experiments in heterophenomenology, that is, experiments in conceiving the elusive meanings of others, or the elusively evolving semantic forms of a generalised social systemic Other, and rescuing these self generating social forms for the sake of becoming human.

52. *What song the Syrens sang; or the past selected.*

There aren't any old times. When times are gone, they're not old, they're dead. There aren't any times but new times.

The Magnificent Ambersons

What Aboriginal people thought and did about colonial invasion, or whether the Gulf War or postmodernity or Auschwitz really took place, though puzzling questions, are not beyond all conjecture. Yet the observability of observations—the basis of socially organised empirical science—limits the scope of history's validity claims. Since the past is another country never to be seen again, then even by the seven o'clock news the selections of historical records necessitate an empiricism of texts rather than events.

Though the ultimate reference of history may be to an irreducible *once upon a time*, historical records are empirically already reductions. 'Life consists of propositions about life', said Wallace Stevens. What events we choose to tell, how we

describe them, what kind of attitude we take to them, and how we combine them into a narrative—all these things affect the truth or reference of history. Can we ever tell history, in Ranke's phrase, *wie es eigentlich gewesen*—as it actually was? As far as validation is concerned, empirical events—events whose observation is observable—are less problematic than communicative events, and communicative events are less problematic than intentional events. But for the most part even empirical events leave only communicative events as evidence of their having taken place: history consists of propositions about history. Historically selected primary sources become the basis for subsequent retellings and selections, so that the historical accounts of some ultimate reference—whether the responses of the Aborigines to colonial invasion, or the events of the Gulf War or postmodernity—may only persist through a genealogy of accounts. What gets selected, even if under the selection pressure of avowed allegiance to truth or primary sources, is always a reduction, always a selection of selections, and always prone to adaptation to other societal selection pressures that supervene on the avowed intentions of individual authors. Told and retold, depicted and redepicted, even the experience of genocide and mass torture may eventually leave only an emblem as its trace: a picture of a pile of skulls; the caption, *Holocaust*; or an argument about whether it took place. By the 1980s and 1990s when the term *Holocaust* finally became the convenient and much repeated way of referring to the millions of anti-Jewish atrocities that had been perpetrated half a century earlier, it all too readily reduced and simplified the events so that they could, holus bolus, be tidily slotted in to whatever point was being made at the time, and so it came to function, despite the subjects who uttered it, less as a prayer of remembrance and more as a mantra for the transformation of meaning.

In the history of the penal colony in NSW, any authentic Koori story about whether or why Pimulwi and others speared the colonial governor's gamekeeper, McEntire, (Did they, for instance, think he was responsible for murdering their fellow Kooris?) would itself be a reference of postcolonial Pacific historiography because, if it could be found, it would be a station on the way to the theological, irreducible event. But now, probably any such story would itself be as unrepeatable as the killing. Such problems are typical of the documentation of the confrontation of Aboriginal and British interests during the colonial invasion of Australia. So a major reference of postcolonial historiography becomes the colonial encounter of societies characterised by different communicative technologies: the indigenous oral or pictorial ones and the written, printed and photographic ones of the colonising modernity. The historical reference becomes a temporalised self reference to the historical problems of post-colonial historiography, complete with embedded references to the available documents.

These matters cannot be dismissed as merely abstract or technicalities. They determine the bulk of what is empirical in empirical historiography, and empirical historiography in this case is about historiographic reduction and selection as kinds of historical events. The observable deeds of state, law, economy, science, education, art, and historical inquiry itself are, by and large, communications whose meanings reduce their historical situations or references in terms of the respective functions of state, law, economy, etc. Restaging a handshake for the TV cameras is no more inauthentic than formally signing the peace accord: they are both deliberate communicative actions, making history by making its documents. It was ever so. What's empirical can scarcely be (any longer) the first, unrecorded handshake, the unrecorded word given in private discussions, or the long lost but irreducible thoughts

and feelings that motivated Pimulwi and his colleagues to spear McEntire. Instead it is these processes of communicative reduction, textual replication and selection, and what persists of historical reference as a result of these processes.

Given the selection pressures operating on the history of the Gulf War, what may well persist are just those video selections dished up by the satellites and military, not the brutal facts of war and suffering, or even its victim's recollections, but the postmodern TV entertainment. Victims, it is said, seldom write history; or should it be that victors seldom reproduce their victim's accounts? It is not Baudrillard's title, *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*, that is monstrous, but the self-reproducing, historiographic life of the news entertainment business, whose reductions and selections the title mocks, but whose reproductive fitness and profit make a mockery of the mockery.

A distinguishing feature of recent postmodernity was an habitual critique of postmodernism. The critique (and its reference) replicated and persisted in the environment of a certain popular literary culture, and a degenerate conflict system that had spun off ancestral social antagonisms between right and left and between the sciences and the humanities. Straw dummies loosely labelled *postmodernism* or *postmodernity* were skewered for the sins of *relativism*, *jargon*, *the denial of any real referent*, *attacks on scientific knowledge* or *the literary canon* or *Enlightenment*, *the study of minor works*, and so on. Meanwhile, on the back of what were partly self edifying authorial intentions (what author can fail to look good beside a straw dummy?), postmodernity, if only by documentation, persisted with a life of its own: the efforts to negate it preserved it, albeit in a form adapted to the self edifying purposes of those who, in alarm, offence or nostalgia, undertook its denial.

Perhaps postmodernity was too peculiar a referent to start with. Insofar as it is distinguished from the aesthetic movement called *postmodernism*, the temporalised negation of modernity indicated by the temporal operator, *post*, produced a term whose function has been more like a search for a referent rather than an actual act of reference to something concrete. The whole process was more like a symptom of "radicalised modernity's" (Giddens 1990) desperate desire for a modernising self description. No doubt there was a need to name the aesthetic-cultural logic that came *after Modernism*—Adorno (1970, p. 22) for one used the term. But descriptions of the referent of *postmodernity*—including descriptions of the straw dummy—mostly just condensed around the term after its coinage, like castles in the air. Nevertheless, such vaporous phenomena can become effective objects, merely by having been referred to often enough—a feature which is itself especially symptomatic of modernity's own reflexivity. And throughout the modern era especially, other historical references demonstrate a similar kind of drift in actual referential functions.

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Any history is a temporalised self reference to the media of its telling. The topical, television history of the present—the news—is also a contemporary history of the medium. In a political election campaign, say, news is not primarily about so called *real political issues*, it is about *the news*: the day by day history of what the reporting media determine to be the relevant *new* events that occur during the campaign. It is a history of the candidates' struggles in their media environment, or rather, it is a history of the media's mediation of the candidates communications. The great events of this history are those that are deemed to effect, and thereby *do* actually effect, the whirling recursions of opinion that are called *image*: candidates' gaffs; the media response; the players' tactical moves; voter, business or candidate confidence;

the feelings of the media entourage; opinion polls; expectations of outcomes; and so on. Much of the news media's day by day telling of and comment on history consists of speculation about the future effects of current events. It is not only organisations, as Luhmann (1992, p. 105) has said, that write their memoirs with their plans; the news media write our memoirs with their predictions for the future. The media's generally non technical, folk descriptions (and self descriptions) of these phenomena, and the terms used, commit to a familiar ontology of *image*, *public opinion*, *voter feeling*, *real issues* and the like. But whatever these obscure things are (and they are especially obscure when we use psychic categories like *feeling* or *opinion* to refer to social phenomena), or whatever they become by dint of their coinage, use, and referential drift, it is hard to imagine how they could function better in what must surely be their operative adaptation for the task of hiding aspects of society from itself so that it may continue to generate its own obscure form.

So at the theological, unrepeatable origin of history's selections, what is truth? Though primordially flawed, the discipline of history is not hopelessly mired in a dismal relativity of texts and cultures. But it does have to be a kind of romance quest with an eternally elusive actuality as its desired referential goal. I use the term *romance* to describe the historian's aporetic, difficult to define project; and after all, as narrative historians rightly like to believe, telling history is an art. Whether historical events occur as tragedy or farce, their telling occurs as romance or satire: the romance of telling the past 'as it actually was'; the satire of telling it as a critique of what has been told. In quest of the historical goal, empirical inquiry must at least theorise the problem of history's reductions and selections in order to prove or test the adequacy of its references to that elusive, once only actuality. The adequation by which logic has defined truth—the adequation of the representation of events to the events represented—is an adequation *to* the referent. But to test the adequacy, and therefore the quality of truth, the question becomes one of adequacy *for* what? What is history for? A functional analysis of the evolution of historiography—part of an empirical approach—reveals the way its manifest norms and self-descriptions themselves reduce the project of historical inquiry, concealing both its contingency (note the role of the straw dummy, *relativism*, here) and its unmanifested, unintended functions.

To conceive history's function on the basis of political wisdom, morality and ethics, as Cicero did when he said that without a knowledge of the past we remain children, is to remain within the familiar and intuitive ambit of the already mentioned romance quest. The romance, then, consists in having to attain some quite obscure objects of desire: as well as the original or primary referent, there is also the *good* of wise political or ethical historiography too, the difficult specification of which belongs to the task of the quest itself. The conditions of romance, and thus those of historiography-as-romance, are well known in the natural history of knowledge, wherein wisdom must pick itself up by its bootstraps: the object and values are contingent, the means flawed, the task imperative.

When it comes to things like interpretation of documents, and reading off the ultimate references of history, even the discipline of a strict empiricism of texts remains beholden to their semantic—and therefore possibly ambiguous—character, and it is thus bound by the human predicament of the immanence and reflexivity of meaning. The act of reference is designed to transcend this immanence—virtually anyway—but this virtual or effective transcendence is still only attainable in, as and by meaning. This is why good narrative history, which is, after all the only way historiography can divulge the detail of history in its exclusively narrative

particularity, begins with the particularity of the documents. Like Herodotus telling the story of Psammenitus, it lets us draw our own conclusions from the past's reports. Romantic as the historian's project may be, good narrative history is not historical romance. (And historical fiction, from Shakespeare's history plays to Don DeLillo's *Underworld*, is fiction, and claims its truth as such.) History does not leave you wondering where reference ends and romance, fiction, decoration, entertainment or some supposedly licensed historian's subjectivity begins. In fact the narrative history that fills in the details in order to bring the past back to life usually shows, despite its pretensions, the immense weight of the objective present in the embarrassingly predictable generic details of historical romance. At its most indulgent, good narrative history is like irony—the *ju jitsu* of discourse. It uses the communicative force of documents—of writings, myths, rumours, buildings, tools, artworks, and landscapes—to reveal their truth despite their intentions.

Romance narrative art, and after it, fiction have been responses of narrative meaning to this kind of romantic desire of historical narrative, suspending reference and moral stipulation in order, by contrast, to *manifest* narrative's self constitutive inadequacy and thereby begin to pursue its obscure, now aestheticised, object with an honesty that, if maintained, should at worst be its own reward. History might have to remain silent about what song the Syrens sang: the world knows the Syren's themselves guarded the myth about their song on pain of death. No wonder then that Kafka's story simply said the song the Syrens sang was silence.

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Myths, rituals and repetitions, and the awe of mysteries are, in part, the effects of selection pressures in oral cultures. It is not too obvious to point out that what literary history is adapted to is written society, and that its selections are conditioned by the technology and the society of writing—almost always at the expense of the oral accounts of the long dead, but now sometimes at the expense of screen and audio history too. Cinematic and television and multi-media society so far seem to have selected primarily for what is still only advertised by news media corporations as a dazzling visual historiography of the present or the immediate past, or the advertised future. Whatever hopeful monster gets selected under such conditions, it is not what is advertised. Perhaps now, one monstrous design that supervenes on the best of intentions in functionally differentiated, multi media society is the self differentiation of different historiographic disciplines, each clustering around its medium, its mythos more or less closing unto itself. Already, the perception that something like this is happening, and that scholarly, literary history is suffering, seems to have raised some alarm about the death of history. For now though, rather than indulging in historiography's wildest desire and telling histories of the future—in this case histories of the future of historiography—it should be said of the past that history is always dying and always rising up to haunt us from the grave like the living dead.

Myth is not mythological as such. Its problem lies in the too rapid slip and drift of the conceptual and referential content of replicated symbols in an oral and pictorial society, and in the lack of oral and pictorial forms that are able to maintain some persistence of precise symbolic reference against the drift to error. Relatively persistent forms may well be poor in propositional content precisely because such poverty would enhance fidelity of replication, probability of selection or textual durability. Under the stupefying selection pressures of colonial invasion, the conceptually rich oral content of the traditional Dharug and Dharawal cultures

withered to near extinction, while their sandstone engravings still just endure. Printed narrative, on the other hand, is as conceptually rich and explicit as speech, but it is designed to persist on its own and to facilitate dissemination, comparison and correction. In the oral narratives of myth, although the local psychic and social function may well be historiographic truth, a content can evolve into something completely different over relatively few replications, as—without any mendacity—memory, mishearing, misinterpretation, mythopoiesis and elaboration are enough to provide a hot bed for conceptual variation.

Compared to this then, written historiography became construed as the disenchantment of myth, even though history's repudiation of myth would be like Hal's repudiation of Falstaff. Historiography is properly a kind of recursive discourse: *its mythos* refers to discursive events, including myths, and has done so ever since the fabulous stories of Herodotus's *Histories* or the rumours reported by Thucydides, such as the ones about the mysterious damage to the steles of Hermes prior to the Sicilian expedition. As a recursive discourse, history is emulated by fiction; and fiction well knows the mythological character of history. No wonder then that the object of fiction's wonder is so often disenchantment as a kind of transcendental social experience. Narrative art has evolved under the selection pressure of this enlightenment disenchantment. At least since *Oedipus* it has sublimed the chronic revisionism of history, by, among other things, making revision and recursion its subject matter. Like Marcel we all discover that those fascinating Guermantes are not quite what we had childishly imagined. Or else, as readers, we ourselves discover that the light-hearted man who loved children was to leave a heavy legacy.

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In individual or biographical history, we traditionally cultivate the ethical function of historiography, and we feel it in a peculiarly familiar and concrete way, in our identifications with the players. The *concrete*, however, denotes just what is familiarly intuitable by more or less ordinary consciousness in its native social context. Being conditioned by social context, the *concrete* itself demands an historical account of its own. Nowadays this would have to include an account of how the utter psychic familiarity and utter functional abstractness of feelings makes them so prone to adaptation by and for social systemic functions. Contrary to the enduring delusions of naive aesthetics, art has always taught us about this kind of thing, producing orgiastic spectacles of the emotions precisely in order to scrutinise them for other artistic purposes—like *disinterest*. This is why art can manage to be both passionately emotional, and passionately knowing about emotion. And this is why knowing historiography can also be an art; but only if it is knowing about its narrative arguments, before they, with their received affective devices, use historiography for their own perpetuation *as* self-perpetuating devices.

The kinds of personal, emotional identifications that are solicited by biographical history and make it so familiar to our experience, are also the kinds of identifications that surreptitiously solicit the projection of non-existent incidents, emotions, causes and motives into others' lives. More generally they encourage the conceptual reductions of plots that have been selected for their being good stories, and in doing so maintain the persistence of incumbent, sedimented, narrative forms. For good stories are primarily good for themselves. Though the data may not make sense, a story will make sense of the data. Again and again, just to get things done, humans make what sense they can of complex historical contingency by choosing the conceptual means at hand—the not always adequate narrative reductions bequeathed

by a social history whose selections have often favoured what is merely entertainingly plausible. Our quickest way of judging an historical account is by whether it reduces things to the plausible, and by the fast emotional assessment of whether it is entertaining and therefore relevant and explanatory (notwithstanding that such a psychically domain-specific assessment is hardly infallible). Historiography of the good-read variety invites the kind of historiographic licence that thinks it can fill in details of interpretation, or worse, of historical or personal experience, and thereby make up for irretrievable empirical data with empathetic or emblematic reconstruction—as is done in historical romance.

In this vein Plutarch told the emblematic story of Solon's unimpressed encounter with the riches and vanity of Croesus, king of Lydia. According to Plutarch, Croesus twice asked Solon if he had ever known anyone more fortunate than he, and twice Solon replied by naming dutiful and deceased, but not rich, Athenians. The exasperated Croesus finally burst out and asked whether he, Croesus, was included at all among those whom Solon deemed to be happy; to which Solon's reply was to caution against admiring someone's prosperity while there was still time for it to change. Plutarch insisted that, despite defying the rules of technical chronology, the story should have been true, regardless, because it "bears the stamp of Solon's wisdom and greatness of mind." With its threefold question and answer, Plutarch's story bears the stamp of the selection pressures operating on story telling. Such habits of emblematic variation, even in Plutarch's day, were symptomatic of a sense of the loss of the possibilities of narrative wisdom beyond any but the narrow confines of the familiar dramatic plots of family and simple societal life—a sense that was, along with historical inquiry itself, conditioned by the invention and social adoption of writing, and the unleashing of intuitively unfamiliar social systemic processes.

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Romance narrative was a reaction to the sense of loss that accompanied the disenchantment of societal differentiation, technological development and scientific enlightenment. It was also a reaction to what a story teller in Cormac McCarthy's *The Crossing* calls "the false authority that clings to what has persisted." In this way, romance narrative was, and remains, a response to the technicality of historical science, for that technicality clings to what has persisted in scholarly accounts. Romance was a kind of counter enlightenment, yet for the sake of enlightenment, rescuing wise intuition from the estrangements of history's selections and of scientific explanation—a dialectic that necessarily infects the project of historical inquiry. Empirical historians are like Odysseus in Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*: any of their efforts to know what song the Syrens sang necessitate a loss of the song's affective meaning and communicability. The Dharug and Dharawal rock engravings on the sandstone in around Sydney invite dialogue with a terrible poignancy, but the dismal misrepresentations of sentimental projections silence them in a din of wrong meanings. Alternatively, technical historiography's fastidious refusal to acknowledge any but the original intentions silences them too. Methodology compels researchers and engravings to stare blankly at one another across an unpeopled void of incomprehension, while letting the engravings erode and disappear into the pure authenticity of the original stone. In the inventory of national treasures, with all its devices of self edifying nationhood, what can hope to approach these great works—through which roads have been cut, over which day trippers scuff, and on which the makeshift foreign city across the sandstone ridges was thrown up.

Could it ever be, as Mikhail Bakhtin (1986, p. 170) once hoped, that someday “every meaning will have its homecoming festival?”

Even past meanings, that is, those born in the dialogue of past centuries, can never be stable (finalised, ended once and for all)—they will always change (be renewed) in the process of subsequent, future development of the dialogue....The problem of *great time*. (p.170)

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The term *narrative* is often used in a restricted way to refer to intuitively familiar plots, like Plutarch’s about Solon. A social systemic history, though still narrative, commits itself to rescuing phenomena that are estranged from everyday narrative intuition. Its characters are not only human individuals but systemic elements, namely replicated symbols—whether written documents, or kinds of landscape. Perhaps people want non technical historiography precisely to avoid the alien rigours of explanation and its defamiliarisations, or to seek solace in a gossipy conversation of received wisdom. The literary norm about the best prose not being heavy with explanations is itself a modern literary response to the alien character of scientific systems of communication. But, as suggested earlier, in non fiction the norm prescribes the replication of a merely abstract and now archaic characteristic of an old, meditative, essay form, as it is thought to have been before the onset of the functional differentiation of the sciences. Sadly, the norm has itself managed to alienate the all too self consciously literary essay from the essay’s proper wonder.

In the advocacy of *literary* and *narrative history* (the terms are often used by an unduly alarmed and nostalgic pop literary culture for what history should be) we may perhaps diagnose a desire for historiography that is confused with a desire for narrative art in its current canonical form as fiction. This everyday desire has of course been an impulse in the historical emergence of fiction—ever since someone made up some incident in the course of elaborating on tidings. These selection pressures for the evolution of modern fiction are already detectable in things like Plutarch’s loyalty to wise, emblematic apocrypha. In fiction, the old moralistic historiographic values like wisdom have evolved and taken on new designations. This was what *taste* was for in the eighteenth century. Now, fiction and art in general have even to redefine taste, lest it degenerate into an impulse for consumption or a tool of legitimation for overbearing decorators. Meanwhile, the selections of the TV news producer, like the gossip or rumour monger, exhibit an ongoing commitment to the apocryphal, and—in the absence of any gesture like Plutarch’s admissions or the storyteller’s passive *It is said...*—a mendacious one, signalled by misleadingly active phrases like *sources say*.

The hardly unfamiliar criticism of the news coverage of politics—that it concentrates on sensational, dramatic or gossipy presentation—is actually both a description of the social systemic predicament of electronic news, and a critique of the still longed for personal, non technical, “narrative” history. It is the function of the sciences to provide explanations, and history that wants to avoid technical explanations abandons this scientific function. As TV news exemplifies, historical records can be selected to take on the confusing social functions of priming, driving and steering “concrete” emotional responses. These responses, though concrete and sincerely felt, are abstractly coded as offended or unoffended, alarmed or calm, fascinated or bored, or just pleasantly irritating, and so they have a simple but obscure

economic form that renders them readily translatable between their psychic and social functions. In the psychic provenance, the emotions remain and function as the cherished concreteness of individual experience and belief (or what's left of it); in the social provenance, the expression of these emotional responses enables the social systemic function of registering, however vaguely, the society's environment (a population of individual human minds) and responding to it in a way that maintains the society's persistence.

The very term, *news*, acknowledges this genre's function of conveying information about the new, a function that is immediately antagonistic to the past for the sake of the localised purpose of psychic relief or entertainment; meanwhile, the social systemic function of forgetting social history uses these psychic functions for the self-perpetuation of the society's memetic elements. Journalists are supposed to be able to sniff out a story, but just as everyone is a connoisseur of sporting news, everyone is a connoisseur of the news news; and the connoisseur knows that in the news truth is always boasting that it is stranger and newer than fiction. Consisting now, therefore, of the received forms of strangeness and newness, the news is selected for this adaptation to psyche and society. So fiction has to tell the other stories now, just to put history right.

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Biographical narratives, whether of 'great lives' or the everyday, are told in the terms of a number of received plots: The sinner who comes good, the old war horse, the mellowing of age, the bright young thing, the harmless eccentric, the ambitious career path, the sex life of the artist, the liberation of the housewife, the migrant experience, the gay or lesbian experience, the redemption of the addict, the hero of childbirth, marriage, parenthood or childlessness, the self-destructive romantic, and so on. These biographies are reflexive too. We tell them to ourselves about ourselves. We understand our own and others' lives in their image. Samuel Johnson (p95) wrote "I have often thought that there has rarely passed a life of which a judicious and faithful narrative would not be useful," thus stating a central tenet of biographical individualisation and esteem. He went on to justify his modern, democratic individualism by an appeal to the sociological or biographical universals that, paradoxically perhaps, underlie individualisation: "For, not only every man has, in the mighty mass of the world, great numbers in the same condition as himself, to whom his mistakes and miscarriages, escapes and expedients, would be of immediate apparent use; but there is such a uniformity in the state of man, considered apart from adventitious and separable decorations and disguises, that there is scarce any possibility of good or ill, but is common to human kind."

Now, when biography is the dominant genre of popular historiography—especially in topical television documentaries and magazines—every life seems to have been hedged in by the whole depressing set of received stories. What were once principles of democratic individualisation have become, by dint of relentless, clichéd repetition, a prison for experience. The reflexive individualisation of these biographical narratives is too often spoiled by their repeated abuse in the hands of the tiresome pop ideologies of celebrity, self-help, self-fulfilment, or (on the negative side) self-destruction. Nothing is a greater challenge for the authors of literary biography, documentary makers, biopic directors, or just individuals telling themselves to themselves, than to transcend these received forms. For instance, the only good biopic I can think of is Scorsese's *Raging Bull*. At present, almost the only relief from this oppressive narrative system lies in fiction. And only in good fiction.

Modern fiction tends to use these generic biographies against themselves. Proust still used the classic novelistic forms of disclosure and disabuse. Half a century later, a novel like *Herzog* depicts the maddening situation of being trapped in other peoples' received narrative versions of oneself.

The dismal popularity of biography seems to lie in things like the mean spirited prurience or *Schadenfreude* of watching others pinned down by received biographies, or in giving these depressing biographies a schmaltzy glow. One way or another biography can thus warm the heart of mediocrity—and this the genre that Johnson knew as 'delightful', 'useful' and most 'worthy of cultivation'. It has reached the point where, unless we can embed a biography within another narrative—say a social history—we can hardly escape the contagion. The best biographies are those one reads when researching a particular historical period, and they are seldom contemporary ones by contemporary authors. This is not the fault of the contemporary authors. It is their predicament. The biographies of today will presumably come into their own in 100 years time, when historians want to learn not only about individual life around the turn of the millennium, but about the received, reflexive biographical forms of millennial modernity.

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There is no denying the importance of individuals in history, especially not the importance of individual's history for individuals involved in historical processes. The ethical value of historical accounts of personal experience remains. The demonstration of the effects of alien historical processes on individuals, the display of good and bad political actions, or even the reiteration of the categorical imperative against cruelty (and what more important lesson would history teach?) still persist as major themes, if somewhat ineffective social functions of history. However the historiography of individual deeds and experience is important for one undeniable reason: so much history is written this way that it must simply be treated as a major memetic component. Moreover, in the process of historiography, individual historians act as interactors in the selection processes of history. But who are these individual historians? Not only, I think, the Gibbons, Hobsbawms, Clarkes, Braudels and Schamas. So many of the significant individual deeds of history—and especially the remembered ones—are long lasting communicative deeds in which the significant individual actors are themselves historians of one sort or another. These actors add their own texts to the selection processes of social "memory", by signing the treaty, declaring the war, addressing the parliament or conducting the door-stop interview. In his six volume history of the Second World War, Churchill was oblivious to the most disastrous war time event to befall the subjects of British rule—the famine in West Bengal—so four million individual's stories start to fall through the net of selection. Meanwhile, Churchill himself, in his radio speeches more than in his six volumes, is both an actor in and a recorder of history as it goes on. Wars, famines, plagues, migrations, revolutions, technological changes—all are counted as great historical events, but the great historical events for communicative animals are communicative deeds. So gossip, anecdote and letters are madly selected to tell the education of young Winston, and the marriage, career and sex life of Winston; while, for want of an ollock of rice, people die, and for want of a text they die again.

The rigours of technical historiography are not to be ignored (Plutarch, it should be said, mentioned both the problem and his ploy.). We may clearly recognise the ethical function of historiography in biographical history, but hardly by

unethically denying what technical considerations tell us. Moreover, how can we tell about the history of individuals without a history of this thing called *the individual*? Such an account would demand a social systemic history, and a technical one at that. How can we write individuals into history without writing about the technically describable processes of social systemic history that individuals often painfully, or often with exhilaration, encounter, and that implacably condition their concrete personal existence? One of the best works of Australian historiography, Eric Rolls' *A Million Wild Acres*, manages to be a good narrative about many individuals by being, primarily, about the social and natural historical processes that are the condition of their lives. Rolls' commentary on these conditions cites the conversational comments and stories of a great many individuals in a laconic democratisation of historiographic authority. The book is about the individual by being about many individuals, but it avoids the preciousness and autobiographically engendered predictability that so often infects the collection of personal recollections and 'oral histories'. Too often, personal recollections simply replicate the received generic forms that people feel they are expected to tell, and so they cease to be individual. Rolls' big, laconic evocation of landscape processes understates the heroism (even to use such a word in *describing* Rolls' history seems excessive) of individual life and thereby gives it its due. Narrative history like this has conceptual opportunities that even fiction has never quite been able to exploit. Despite its freedom, fiction can be about personal life, but fictive histories of societies and populations, like those we encounter in science fiction, are more in the province of romance's schematically emblematic worlds.

Any ethical understanding of the how and why of individual actions that is not technically informed will, in a complex society, not be understanding at all. That is why we need scientific or so called technical history. A gossipy, personalised account of events might entertain the bored spirit. The account itself might even become an historical event if it is the prime minister's fireside chat with the nation. But just what kinds of communicative deeds make history, how they become part of the spectacle of multi-media society, and whether it is individuals or groups or the media or social systems that enact them, and why, are questions that scarcely register in the historiographic spectacle of contemporary society that we call the news. And for the sake of the spectacle, they are easily ignored. Meanwhile, what this spectacle refers to (It refers to and feeds off itself.) and why politicians, great or despised, cannot explain things (because their communications are highly selected and unwritten and not scientifically explanatory), why they cannot listen to voters (because voters can only communicate by the scarcely articulate grunt of a poll or a vote), why their function is to begin as bearers of impossible hope and end as the butt of offence and naive cynicism, and how this cynicism is an adaptation for the smooth functional coupling of individual consciousness and society, will all, by and large, remain beyond both social and individual representation.

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While the longing for non technical, "narrative" history has affinities with the longing for the maintenance of mythic enchantment in modern historiography, the enlightened response has long been to separate fiction from history. This has been a selection pressure for the sedimentation of a narrative artistic sphere that differentiated the narratives of romance and fiction from the narratives of both myth and history. Attic drama, or even Homeric epic, were protofictional forms selected early on in the context of this pressure, as were the early prose romances. Less clearly differentiated perhaps are Plutarch's apocrypha or the Gospel stories. Myth, which we

might wrongly think of as being more like fiction, is actually a form of protohistorical narrative, and its replications are properly embedded in the recursions of historiographic texts, not just as social documents, but as accounts with their own referential functions. As its own conceptual and referential functions have been differentiated from other narrative endeavours, historiography has become a special process—a science of history. In subjecting all myth to disenchantment, it subjects its own myths and their grounds—their concrete context of origin—to disenchantment. As well as being, among other things, a great meditation on the passing of wild nature, Cormac McCarthy's *The Crossing* is a reflection on the predicament of history. There is a character—a *gitano*—who has good reason to wonder about just what may be said to speak for the past. Having been engaged to find the wreckage of a plane that had crashed in the mountains of northern Mexico, he and his band have salvaged an old, crashed aeroplane, then lost it in a flood, and then found another identical plane. The question that matters for the *gitano* is whether he has ended up with the authentic aeroplane. "In the world that came to be that which prevailed could never speak for that which had perished but could only parade its own arrogance." The truth inherent in the romance reaction to the limitations of history lies in the attempt to redeem history's silenced voices. Within the discipline of history, hope lies in the possibility of revision rather than in irrevocable authenticity.

It is precisely the irrevocable past that is always being revoked by historiography—which is always revisionist. This could rightly be called the modern historical project of historiography—to rescue history from its past selections, by no other means than that of inquiring into the fact of those past selections. Witness the revisions (like those of Henry Reynolds) of the history of the European invasion of Australia. Past histories become stories embedded within the histories that supersede them—the same historical movement as that already epitomised by the disenchantment of myth. History is charted by a kind of recurrence relation which writes contemporary historiography as a function of the historiography of (usually the most recent) past. When, within its quotation marks, a story asks us to reinterpret its relation to truth, or it asks us to read it regardless of its truth or untruth, for its own sake, then it suggests fiction.

When the spectacle of history becomes more substantial than its referent, the differentiation of history and fiction seems to become a new kind of problem, but this spectacular character is only a matter of the selection, with variation, of a social systemic function that was operative from the time history started to be written. It is not only TV that has history artificially staged for its cameras; in things like the ceremonial signing of acts and treaties and declarations, writing has long had history artificially staged for its pens.

Nowadays, with the obsolescence of wisdom, and perhaps also taste, and with the misleading potential of visual electronic historiography, the differentiation of history and fiction is still undergoing a constant reprogramming. But whatever might be superseding fiction, it still takes its meaning from the poignant limitations of individual history. The problems of history's primordial inadequacy, and of its various social uses remains a great impetus for innovations and original performances in both narrative art and contemporary history. It is the dismal predicament of historical narrative that fiction, like romance before it, sublimates—at least insofar as fiction itself has not been put to some alien, social systemic purpose. In fiction, historical narratives of personal life imagine their redemption, but generally they have to sacrifice both explicit reference to actual individuals, and moral stipulation in order to do so.

Whether a thought meaning for consciousness or a communicated meaning for society, meaning epitomises what is irreducible. The actuality that an historical narrative refers to consists of the more or less logically accessible worlds with which any indicated actuality is replete. From a purely *indicated* actual world, conceptualisation leads, inferentially, to any of the possibilities of such a world, all of which await confirmation or disconfirmation on the strength of other meanings involving other concepts. Meaning is designed to be restless and variable, in order to enable meaners to inferentially trace their way through confirmations and disconfirmations to some relevant, but still variable (and therefore irreducible) meaning—even to history’s ultimate referent.

This is a design evolved to make the task presented by historiography in its primary oral forms feasible, while yet, for consciousness, still problematically bound by the immanence of meaning in all its dialectical character. The elusive reference of history is matched by the cunning variability of meaning, designed to recover actualities otherwise lost by its reductions. Human meaning has evolved, culturally if not genetically, under a selection pressure for interpreting second hand observations. Empiricism itself is one such cultural adaptation. The environmental circumstances of this selection are those of a social, communicative animal that must ceaselessly search for empirical actualities through the representations of others, and for the meanings of others through the empirical data given by hearing, vision and the other senses. This is why, for meaning, the past is replete with possibilities and not simply irrevocable at all. Meaning was selected to track the empirical and the social through others’ meanings, so it was an adaptation for tracing historical references even before the complication of the memetic phenotype by myth, writing and other media.

This design of meaning is clearly related to its function in dialogue for tracing another’s meaning. Something Bakhtin wrote about interpreting the meanings of foreign cultures gives a sense of the redeemable meaning of stories from the foreign cultures of the past (so long as a trace of the story still persists).

A meaning only reveals its depths once it has encountered and come into contact with another foreign meaning: they engage in a kind of dialogue. We raise new questions for a foreign culture, ones that it did not raise itself; we seek answers to our own questions in it; and the foreign culture responds to us by revealing to us its new aspects and new semantic depths. Without *one’s own* questions one cannot creatively understand anything other or foreign. (1981, p.7)

This insight, for what it is worth, relies on the very feature, indispensable for human communication, that purely empirical historiography feels compelled by method to suspend: namely, that an interpretation of a text depends upon the questions—or the assumptions implied by such questions—that one frames in the search for the relevance of a text. The strategy of asking questions of other’s meanings is a bit like getting an editor to read what one has written. For writers, such readings reveal their own unapprehended meanings. The social, dialogical character of meaning and the fact of different interpretations imply that the meanings of the past are not so much lost as multiplied by a proliferation of accessible possibilities. What results from applying Bakhtin’s insight? Doesn’t it still catch us in the horns of the same dilemma when confronted by the “radical indeterminacy of [the] translation” of past texts? Don’t we still only avoid the silences of a strictly empirical method by deafening ourselves in the din of sentimental misunderstandings? Though this kind of dialogue may be the best we can hope for, it is not nothing. After all, it is all we ever have

when it comes to communicated meaning. In the romance of historiography, as in the romance of communication as such, the ethical value of the quest amounts to the ethics of dialogue.

History's task is to redeem meanings that previous reductions and selections had all but foreclosed, not to arrive at theological actualities delivered from all possibility that things might have been otherwise. History's referent is only contingently and virtually actual; and history has to acknowledge its reductions, which means it has to acknowledge the virtual character of the actuality it asserts.

Designed to make the best of the problems besetting historical reference (and communication), the cunning of meaning and the immanence of intentions conspire to disguise the primordial limitations of historical assertion from doubting self consciousness, in order to encourage a kind of animal confidence in the adequation of historical truth and in the validity of historical arguments. But the use of fiction implies an appreciation of the limitations of meaning for history, and so of history itself. For fiction can pretend to be adequate unto itself, insofar as it pretends to be bound by the horizon of meaning's immanence. The curtailment of its reference makes it whole unto itself—any thing else ends up on the cutting room floor—as the classical notion of a narrative artwork's organic wholeness appreciated.

Fiction may thus live by lightly leaping from the ground of historical reference and riding on the back of the evolving life of stories. The transformation of the meaning and reference of a narrative form is, in the realm of concepts, like the transformation of the function of a physiological feature in the realm of the evolution of species. A picture that inspires a new story, or a story that inspires an allegory or a parody, is analogous to the bones of a reptile's jaw evolving into the auditory bones in a mammal's ear. And the transformation of the meaning of a story, like the mythic transformation of an ancestor into a tree or a rock or an animal is historical transformation epitomised—a *metabasis eis allo genos*. Some say (Graves, vol. 1, p.15) that the story of Eurydice's death by snake bite and of Orpheus's failed attempt at her rescue from the underworld, is a misinterpretation of an earlier picture that showed Orpheus in Tartarus charming the snake goddess Hecate. The mythopoetic reinterpretation of myths epitomises the narrative autopoiesis that scientific historiography must scrutinise as its object; but it is what fiction lives off. Meanwhile history's romance task is ultimately like Orpheus's attempt at rescuing Eurydice; Hades' ban on the impulse to look back when it is inappropriate to do so is like the methodological ban of empirical historiography. Both seem inhuman, but to outwit such inhuman intentions requires an almost inhuman resolution.

When Kafka told his story about the four versions of the legend of Prometheus and the rock to which legend said the hero had been bound, he traced the fate of the ultimate reference of the legend through the successive transformations and degenerations of the legend. In the end "there remained the inexplicable mass of rock. The legend tried to explain the inexplicable. As it came out of the substratum of truth it had in turn to end in the inexplicable."

53. *The persistence of generic forms.*

The persistence of narrative symbolic forms is itself a persistent theme of mythographers and theorists of genre. The narrative forms in question are legion, and just what they are is usually thought of in terms of a typological scheme. There are kinds of plot distinguished by the relation of protagonists desires to the plot outcomes, and by the kind, number and causal relations of acts and events. There are character types distinguished by class, ethnicity, gender, and by the good or evil intent of their

actions. There are types of settings or worlds specified by their kinds of empiricity, and by the symbolic importance of their furniture, flora and fauna. As well as these criteria based on the conceptual content of the narratives, there are also crucial matters of the pragmatics of performance, including the kind of medium used, and—what was traditionally the concern of rhetoric—the performative force that signals how an audience is to receive the performance in its relation to actual events. This performative context is indicated by such generic labels as history, myth, legend, rumour, fable, apocrypha, recording, allegory, parody, mimicry, lie, joke, fact, fiction, re-enactment, and so on.

Just as the word *genre* has always sounded clumsy on the lips of English speakers, the concept has never deftly designated the categories of an unambiguous or operatively useful schematics of narrative kinds. There is always a sense of a certain unfathomable arbitrariness, as we should expect of historically evolved and evolving schemata whose usual function has been to catalogue, but whose categories of classification have been chosen *ad hoc*, principally for their function of classifying willy-nilly rather than according to any consistent and principled taxonomic differentiation. A modern reader of Aristotle will probably still be familiar with his division between tragedy and comedy, but to base it on whether the characters are serious important people who are generally more noble than their audience, or whether they are mean, trivial and inferior, seems somewhat quaint to an age that at least extols democratic values. Given his insistence on the dramatic pre-eminence of plot over character, it is surprising that Aristotle based such a fundamental genre distinction on character type, even if that character type was a function of social class. The distinction says more about his cultural environment than it says about tragedy and comedy, either then or now. Ever since the likes of Shakespeare, whose works epitomise both the emergence of modern individuality and tragi-comic hybridisation, evolution in character typology and in the notion of character itself has made the basing of genre on character type an increasingly dubious exercise. Characters have become so various, and an individual character need no longer be an indivisible character. Surely then, for the modern student of genre, tears and laughter better divide tragedy from comedy, even though as Kierkegaard (1843, p.140) thought, what makes people laugh can be absolutely different at different times.

Despite all this, when Northrop Frye (1957) began his classic study of literary narrative kinds, his citation of Aristotle's criteria for dividing tragedy from comedy had a certain historical validity, for the criteria still, to some extent persist for narrative artists and audiences. Hence from *Scarface* to *The Godfather* trilogy to *The King of New York* the common but tragic criminal is ennobled by his genre; and no doubt modern novelistic fiction does have, as Samuel Johnson (p.67) said, a certain comic quality precisely insofar as it avoids the mystique of characters who are nobler beings than their audience.

Nowadays, when people catalogue narrative kinds they are more familiar with the categories in the video store, or with whether a TV show is a sit-com or a cartoon, or a cop series or whatever. *Drama, action, horror, thriller, western, sci-fi, comedy, doco, family, musical, adult, arthouse, world, ...*, these too are quaintly specific to their time (or, in most cases, to Hollywood). Yet merely for having been designated, according to certain familiar criteria—we are all experts in the theory of genre—narrative kinds enter the world of cultural transmission to participate in their own symbolic evolution.

A video can't be conveniently stored in two genres. To devise a typology based on a number of culturally familiar, convenient abstractions, whether you are Aristotle, or Northrop Frye, or the owner of the video store, is probably a recipe for

both obscuring the genealogy of genres, and for launching that arbitrary obscurity of conception into its own life of symbolic replication. We appreciate this in biology when the intuitively familiar concept of *species* turns out to be quite difficult to conceive in the properly explanatory terms of a genealogy of historical populations. Conceived in these evolutionary terms, a species is not a kind, but an individual: a lineage of a population. Such populations can usually only be divided into species by means of a conceptual violence which at some stage must divide mother from child. When we catalogue narrative forms into kinds, the forms being catalogued are the effects of complex historical processes. The categories insofar as they designate kinds attempt to reduce phenomena whose convoluted historical genesis is irreducible because they are not strictly kinds but lineages; and in turn, the categories and the criteria of classification themselves, however inadequate, have their own historical persistence. Descriptions, as symbols, re-enter history as symbolic phenomena. What are emergent effects of a complex genealogy of symbols are interpreted and classified not according to their historical formation (which is likely to be resistant to intuition and inquiry) but in accordance with the historically localised functional design of a classificatory system, that projects its own meanings into the phenomena.

54. *The romance of romance.*

There has never really been much of a science of narrative structure. What has been called narrative theory gives itself away with the term *theory*. It suggests a practice that has is still gazing in contemplative wonder at its all too complex object without quite knowing how to go about its researches. The tradition that ran from the Russian Formalists to the French Structuralists to Poststructuralist academia has petered out in the byways of contemporary cultural theory, having all but ignored the deliberations of theorists of history in the biological and social sciences. Yet while this tradition now fades from people's minds and settles onto old bookshelves, it now seems to be survived in active expression by an older mythographic tradition with a fascination for mythic archetypes and deep psychic structures. In this tradition, James Frazer, Carl Jung, and Joseph Campbell are replicated (with variation) in New Age spiritualism and in the Hollywood script formulaics of George Lucas, George Miller and the Disney corporation. In both lineages though, one gets the impression that the child's fascination with fairy tales and romances persisted in the theorist's fascination with particular kinds of narrative. Witness the repeated gaze directed by, on the one hand, the likes of Propp, Lévi-Strauss, Greimas, Barthes, Jameson, and on the other, Campbell and Hollywood at the folk tale and its related romance forms. Narrative theory has itself been a kind of romance quest, unconsciously taking the same form as its object of research.

Science, of course, is no passionless replacement of the searching quest by the program of method. In scientific endeavour, the socially organised rigours of method are the trials that test the research protagonist as well as the hypothesis; they are like the tests a Merlin imposes on a young Arthur. Concepts live and science works by adapting the romance impulses of individual curiosity and ambition to the social systemic construction of an interanimating web of empirically adequate descriptions.

In Vladimir Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale* we see the results of one famous quest into the wilds of narrative culture. Propp undertook theoretical examination of a set of data (an extensive sample of Russian folktales), and, envisaging induction (that hopefully and frequently felicitous bit of heuristic cunning) as a distant gaze across time at the phenomena in question, he picked out those schematic similarities that delineate the idea or outline of the folktale form, as if the

outline so resolved were like a kind of distant prospect. An archivist and an historian of genre, he was inspired by the conviction that “as long as no correct morphological study exists there can be no correct historical study (p.14).” And how fascinating his findings were for generations of theorists to come!

The structural description that he produced—of a plot form that is replicated in many folktales and other quest romances—is itself a persistent meme of structuralist narrative theory. The pressures for *its* selection are not to be ignored. They are so persistent and widespread that whether or not the mythographies of Frazer, Jung and Campbell, and ultimately Miller, Lucas and apparently many a Hollywood studio executive are genealogically related, they would nevertheless represent a convergent functional evolution under social selection pressures for a theology of archetypal determinations of human narrative and of humanness itself—and, in Hollywood, for sure fire commercial success. When people are unclear, until after the fact, about what makes a good story, having a description of not only *a* but *the* narrative plot structure is like having a magic wand.

The notion that every Russian (or European) folk tale is made up of the same set of events in the same sequence is likely to fill us with astonishment or incredulity; but from long before Propp’s time, such seemingly outlandish claims have fascinated folklorists, mythographers and structural analysts of narrative. It is one thing to note the persistence of a simple character type like the hero or the villain, but Propp listed a sequence of thirty one different types of events with a cast of seven character types, and he argued that these features were common to all Russian folktales. And after Propp, other narrative theorists proceeded to apply the model to romance genres in general. Propp’s sequence of events went as follows (The terms in parentheses are those subsequently used by Greimas 1966). Rather than explaining each type of event, or illuminating the sequence by relating it to a familiar folk or fairy tale, I shall let the sequence stand as its own obscurely abstract narrative.

1. Absence. 2. Interdiction. 3. Violation. 4. Reconnaissance (inquiry). 5. Delivery (information). 6. Fraud. 7. Complicity. 8. Villainy. 8a. Lack. 9. Mediation, the connective movement (mandate). 10. Beginning counteraction (hero’s decision). 11. Departure. 12. The first action of the donor (assignment of a test). 13. The hero’s reaction (confrontation of the test). 14. The provision or receipt of magical agent (receipt of the helper). 15. Spatial translocation. 16. Struggle. 17. Marking. 18. Victory. 19. The initial misfortune or lack is liquidated (liquidation of the lack). 20. Return. 21. Pursuit, chase. 22. Rescue. 23. Unrecognised arrival. 24. See 8a above. 25. The difficult task (assignment of a task). 26. Solution: a task is accomplished (success). 27. Recognition. 28. Exposure (revelation of the traitor). 29. Transfiguration: new appearance (revelation of the hero). 30. Punishment. 31. Wedding.

Propp’s heirs, Lévi-Strauss and Greimas, sensed the power of Propp’s schema, but they also sensed what seemed like an embarrassing, all too arbitrary, all too anthropomorphic hotch potch of events. Campbell’s similar version of quest narrative would inspire the same sense of arbitrariness. Propp seemed not to have got far enough away from his object, or not to have looked with enough of an estranged eye. In a way, the disquiet indicated a methodological insecurity on the part of Lévi-Strauss and Greimas. Right through his career, Lévi-Strauss (see 1964, pp 1-32) wrestled with the problems of empiricism in the human sciences and with the way that the researcher’s categories mythopoetically projected human meanings onto their objects, which were themselves human meanings. In Propp’s morphological

description, each text was seen as a version of a single master text. Lévi-Strauss's methodological ploy was to downplay the importance of any one mythic structure and to emphasise instead the transformational relations between historically or geographically linked myths. Both approaches still suffered from the fault of what, for empirical science, amounted to being trapped in the reflexive immanence of meaning: they merely described the structures of the meaning of the folktale or myth in terms of the same kinds of meaning structures, instead of describing them at a different and explanatory level of description.

In *The Raw and The Cooked* (p. 1), Lévi-Strauss was (rightly, I think) careful to emphasise that he was not concerned with finding an especially archaic, simple or complete myth as the opening or *key* myth of his researches, but his charting of genealogical networks throughout his data set of South American myths still only yielded very little epistemic purchase. Derrida rightly diagnosed this in his essay on "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences" and saw that the mythographer's problem was one of distinguishing between several qualitatively different discourses on myths (1967, pp 287-88). The question was, are all discourses on myth only as good, or as mythological, as one another, or are some more scientifically powerful than others? Derrida however did not have the stomach for the seemingly violent kinds of reduction that give empiricism its explanatory, epistemic power.

The epistemic diffidence of Derridean deconstruction became a replicated norm of what was now thereby a disempowered theoretical project. Yet despite (or because of) this deconstruction, the problem remained that the idea of a different level or quality of description was still habitually thought of in terms of more distance or greater abstraction. However this intuition repeats the same half cunning heuristic device that so anthropomorphically underlies the process of similarity detection involved in induction. The *distant prospect* paradigm of theory, a way of envisaging the elimination of noise from the data, simply eliminates some data, and preserves and privileges other data. Such a ploy actually makes historical description more difficult, yet a different and explanatory level of description depends upon describing this history and understanding it in terms of a selection process.

Greimas (pp. 222ff) was responding to his unease with Propp's event descriptions when he attempted to reduce the sequence of events to a more general structural description. The value of Greimas's subsequent reduction of Propp's schema lay in the fact that he recognised and recorded underlying patterns in Propp's material that, indeed, any story teller or any audience has to recognise in order to inferentially process the narrative information. Greimas, firstly, coupled related consecutive events such as 2. *The Interdiction* and 3. *The Violation* of the interdiction. Secondly, he recognised that there were sequences of events—not necessarily in continuous sequence—that were connected by virtue of belonging to what I have called a gist. A challenge or *behest*, its *acceptance* (making a contract), its undertaking in the form of a *confrontation*, the *success* of its prosecution, and its eventual *consequence*—together these constituted the gist of what Greimas called a *test*. Greimas also noted that Propp's schema involved three tests: a *qualifying test* at which the hero succeeds and as a consequence receives some powerful or magical device (a *helper*) from another, often ambiguous character called the *donor*; a *main test*, the central quest of the tale in which the hero undertakes a journey in order to restore what, through some villainy, the society has come to lack; and a *glorifying test* in which, on his return from the main test, the hero earns his social recognition and is revealed as hero. Lastly, while each test begins with a behest and a contract and proceeds to the test's consequence, the tale as a whole describes a kind of test of the

society, beginning with a violation of the social order and proceeding (via the three tests) to a consequence in which the protagonist accepts the object of desire in the consummating social contract of the *wedding*, thereby achieving both sexual and social reproduction.

Accordingly, the events of the following table (Greimas, p.228) are embedded within the story of the greater test of the society. The opening exposition of the society's test is contained in the early events of Propp's sequence (i.e. from 1. Absence to 8a. Lack) and the other events of the society's test (such as the hero's departure, which initiates the hero's long absence from the society) are interspersed with the events of the three tests.

<i>SCHEMA</i>	<i>QUALIFYING TEST</i>	<i>MAIN TEST</i>	<i>GLORIFYING TEST</i>
1. behest	first action of the donor	mandate	assignment of a task
2. acceptance	hero's reaction	hero's decision
3. confrontation	struggle
4. success	victory	success
5. consequence	receipt of the helper	liquidation of the lack	recognition

Greimas's reduction was based on a functional or operative analysis of the episodes, so it did not sacrifice irrecoverable information merely for the sake of finding a simple, general schema. Instead, it actually suggested or predicted that certain kinds of events that were missing from Propp's original schema could well turn up in an actual tale. In particular, some of the events in some of the tests were commonly left out (the gaps in the table), suggesting that though, perhaps, they may be commonly elided, they might not always be; and if or when such events were implied or actually recorded in a particular tale then audiences would be able readily to infer their function. In a sense, the tale is wiser than the teller. And the audience. And the theoretician. All live under the governance of the same forms of life or experience that the tale replicates.

Greimas thought that his process of reduction would result in a description in which the narrative phenomena would be explained at a non-narrative level. Along with other structural narratologists (Levi-Strauss, Barthes), he thought that the narrativity of a description, including Propp's notion of an obligatory *sequence* of functions, was itself a sign of the anthropomorphic, and therefore unscientific, limitations of the description. Ironically, such methodological concerns gave rise to the reproduction of the very thing that worried the theorists about empirical method in narrative theory: Greimas's reductions apprehended the inferences made unconsciously by audiences, but his procedure could never thoroughly abstract all narrativity from a description of a genre, without practising the most pernicious anthropomorphism. For a generic form is not an eternal natural kind but an evolving symbolic lineage, and what more interested, anthropomorphic and indeed biological gesture than the attempt to detemporalise historical phenomena into transhistorical forms with a non narrative description. Distancing the theoretical gaze more and more is a heuristic ruse of humans for detemporalising narrative experience—both the experience of a narrative (in the case of a gist) and the explanation of narrative experience (in the case of the structural theory of a genre). A structural description may, as did that of Greimas, more or less predict the occurrence of certain kinds of

events in certain kinds of tales, but to explain gists and generic structures one must turn to descriptions at the levels of phylogenetic, social systemic and ontogenetic history. Only historical narratives—and reflexive ones at that—can explain the gists and structures of a form like the folk tale, and the fact that such structures are only *more or less* predictive. There is no ultimate level of description that is transhistorical.

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It is one virtue of a good theory that it predicts otherwise unobserved phenomena and rescues them from obscurity or oblivion. A well constructed model of narrative structure may reveal answers to questions that had previously been so ill conceived as to stymie solution. Compare a tale to Propp's—or better, Greimas's—model and previously unrecognised features may reveal their presence or their function, or they may reveal that they have rudimentary, degenerated or transformed functions in relation to the type; or certain expected features may be conspicuous by their absence. As it turned out, instead of just accepting the claim that Propp had revealed the general form of the Russian folktale, narrative theorists used the model to describe fairy tales in general, and the vast territory of romance and the novel. Greimas (1966) applied the model to a psychoanalytic narrative, specifically, to a psychodrama told in the form of a detective story—the detective story being one heir to the romance tradition.. Barthes (1977) used it to show how it might clarify features in the story of Jacob and his struggle with the angel. Frederic Jameson (1981, p.120) integrated Stendahl's odd, episodic beginning of *La Chartreuse de Parme*—the events in which Fabrizio heads off to the Napoleonic wars—by noting that they belong to kind of qualifying test. Jameson decided that women, specifically the Duchess Sanseverina, play a kind of donor role in Fabrizio's life. Or, in the case of *Wuthering Heights*, Jameson (p.127) suggested that Heathcliff is not to be taken as a romance hero, but that, in his restoration of fortune and his reinvigoration of passion, he too functions as a donor.

Jameson was much taken by the figure of the donor, a catalytic figure, and the bearer of often magical, often ambiguous power. To find a figure in a modern narrative who plays the prestigious donor role may be to suggest the maintenance of a certain archaic enchantment in modern fiction. Whatever it suggests, I don't think it is simply a matter of a theoretician's overweening projections onto the text. If the character, Baines (Harvey Keitel), in *The Piano*, reveals something of the power and function of the donor this is because Jane Campion has a sure narrative artist's intuition in her replication of romance construction. Similarly, Ada's final struggle with the sinking monster of the piano is related to the final struggle of the glorifying test—like Jacob with the angel or Odysseus with Penelope's suitors. If Ada had not chosen life she would have been not so much the tragic as pathetic victim of her masochism and the patriarchal sadism that was its condition. It might have been a legitimate ending, but it wasn't Campion's. Instead, Ada is transfigured, her heroism revealed, and the wedding ensues.

What, if anything, justifies reading all sorts of modern narratives in terms of a plot structure belonging to folktales? Can we say, with Greimas (p.247), that “the farther removed the domain of application of the model from its place of origin, the more general its scope will be?” Or is Greimas just using distance as a not very reliable device for transcending the phenomena in question? How do we justify the model historically? What is its genealogy? What lies behind its persistence? What kinds of meaning are sedimented in the structure? Is the model structure

genealogically sedimented in the argument structure of those modern narratives to which it is applied, or is it a continuously and independently reinvented adaptation for a persistent narrative art environment? And could we just apply the model to any narrative whatsoever—including those that predate the folk phenomenon from which it was abstracted—in a kind of transhistorical dialogue of meanings?

Though Propp emphasised the need for a correct morphological study prior to a correct historical study, neither Propp nor Greimas undertook the task of an historical morphology or a genealogy of forms. Nor did they note the interdependence of morphological and historical descriptions, and the consequently historicised rather than archetypal character of morphological kinds. One of the limitations of both Propp's and Greimas's morphologies is that the reductions undertaken actually obscure historically determined differences. This limitation, as it turns out, is related to the structuralist methodological concentration on the traditional phenomenon of semiotics—namely, coded textual form. An historical treatment cannot simply take the external appearance of texts as its data, because texts occur in a social and historical environment of minds, and minds occur in an historical environment of texts.

In undertaking theoretical analysis of symbolic forms like narrative plots and characters, it is crucial to bear in mind the distinction between historical description (genealogy) and functional analysis. If what is being sought are *natural kinds* of plot sequence or character, then what is required are kinds that look persistent and regular enough to seem lawful or universal from a human perspective. I have tended to use the term *natural kind* in accordance with the spirit of epistemology naturalised. Traditionally though, the term has designated a kind that is universal, eternal and archetypal, independent of an observer, and not itself an historical, individuated phenomenon. Natural kinds in this sense give any science that uses them in its explanations the kind of referential extension and explanatory power that we expect of science. It enables predictions: the universal description explains or predicts the individual case. However in naturalising the specification of *natural kinds* I have made it so that the term designates not only kinds that are given to the observer by the observed, or, more generally, by metaphysics or theology, but kinds that observers, when observing themselves, find apparent in their observations of the observed. What makes things look lawful and regular enough to seem like natural kinds in this sense is their effective or virtual extension. In evolutionary contexts this is especially a matter of extension in time—or persistence. In the cultural evolution of narrative meanings, the only regularities that can even begin to make a claim to being natural kinds will be those that are a matter of evolutionary convergence under persistent environmental selection pressures for regular functional adaptations. This rules out any theology of human narrative archetypes or of the universal human. It also means that homologous features of narratives passed from generation to generation will not, in themselves, do to specify a narrative kind.

Scientific explanation and concepts are, of course, themselves subject to conceptual evolution; but that evolution may well be progressive in the sense that its conceptual adaptations are progressively adapting with more and more adequacy to the persistent selection pressure of what we like to think of as that constant reference: nature (See Hull, 1988, pp. 457-476). I must emphasise that I mean *progressive* in this limited sense and not in the peculiar, and now much criticised, mythological sense that it has assumed in the ideology of modernity. Insofar as the environmental selection pressures of a science vary—whether due to variations in the science's psychic, or its social and conceptual environment, or even in its referent—the

science's conceptual evolution will be more like the evolution of a species and hence not really progressive: It will be tracking a moving target. Its naturalised natural kinds will only maintain their conceptual, referential adequacy in a spatiotemporally localised context. Even so, there is still at least one natural kind that will give narrative theory something of the power of the natural sciences: that referred to by descriptions of the general process of replication, variation and selection.

Though we may be able to define the folktale (or romance) in terms of formal structural features, it is in its relation firstly to the genre's interanimating psychic and social environments and secondly to the historically available narrative means that its persistence is explained. The first is a concern with the psychic and social systemic functions of a genre and demands a functional analysis of the genre in its adaptive relation to its social environment. To some extent such an analysis might seem transhistorical—similar psychic and social selection pressures produce similar generic adaptations, like convergent evolution among organisms. However, social and psychic environments change, and so, therefore do the kinds of selection pressures. Modernity produces somewhat different genres to ancient culture because it has quite different forms of social organisation and individuation as well as quite different operative narrative technologies.

The second is a concern with the actual genealogy of a genre, with its being wrought from replications of the generic means at hand. What I have distinguished as the sedimented *form* of a meme, as opposed to its locally selected semantic function, is important because it is evidence of genealogical relation, and not just of functional convergence. The problem remains though of how to abstract a locally selected yet quasi-universal functional role from a genre's particular, inherited, genealogical embodiment. Clearly, generic means are dependent on the narrative technology, so medium is an important consideration in genealogical as well as functional descriptions. However, in functional description, medium is important as a component of the genre's environment, whereas, in genealogy, medium is important as a heritable feature of the genre. Since genealogy is traced through replicas of replicas of replicas, and so on for generation after generation, genealogical description will be concerned with the replication of incumbent sedimented forms. And since such forms may bear no necessary relation to the selected function of a genre, that is, to a meaning which could be expressed or paraphrased in other ways, the historical traces preserved in a genre may well lie in external, morphological or empirical features like the medium—the very things that get abstracted out in the process of paraphrase. On the other hand, plots get replicated, and paraphrase is a kind of plot replication, and therefore it is a concern of genealogical description too.

The big problem for narrative theory is that not only are its natural kinds not really universal in the strict sense, the only way to disentangle a functional, semantic role from its genealogical, textual embodiment is by means of a more or less pernicious abstraction. This is the anthropomorphic problem: this abstraction must take account of its own imprisonment in the immanence and reflexivity of human meaning. When it comes to inducing a generic plot or character type, the similarity measure that must be brought to bear has to weight certain plot features according to their relevance. That relevance may be theoretically determined and may depend upon whether we are concerned with genealogical or functional relevance. But what is relevant, and whether it is genealogically or functionally relevant, is still going to be a matter of interpretation and therefore a matter of meaning. So it is no easy task to produce a description of a plot type that is not open to objections that it is "anthropomorphic" or "too meaningful": not only is content anthropological and semantic, the description of a quasi-universal functional morphology may only

eliminate genealogical specifics on pain of increasingly vacuous abstraction. One of the most important things to remember in genealogical description is that such description may be the only way to explain what, from a functional perspective, seem like quite arbitrary features of the object under consideration; however an actual and adequate genealogical description may simply not be humanly possible. All that we can do is provide the functional analysis, describe how the function is pragmatically implemented or embodied in the object (that is, show how it works) and by way of explanation for how it is as it is, provide whatever empirical, genealogical evidence is available. For the rest—the arbitrariness—we must cite unobserved historical contingencies.

Persistent narrative forms may be explained functionally on many occasions. Many folktale features are recurring, “best adaptations” to recurring features of social environments. Gists such as the test, and the quest for sexual and social reproduction are functional adaptations to pancultural environmental pressures that select for pancultural narrative forms. However, environmental selection pressures do differ between societies. This means that even apparently pancultural narrative forms exhibit culturally specific meanings—as my description of the kind of society implied by the folktale (See 41. *Gists, plots and ideology*.) should make clear. In particular, the selection pressures exerted by the available narrative media of a society can result in the same narrative forms having different meanings. What look like two almost identical, forms may not, in fact, be a case of convergent evolution. Rather, they may well involve a common ancestry in which replications have preserved the ancestral form but in diverging meanings. Archaistic genres constitute just such a case. They are homologous to archaic generic forms, but they are adapted to specific and local modern selection pressures for archaism, rather than to pancultural features of human societies.

The claim that all folktales or romances are versions of one archetypal story—of *the* story—is related to this problem of localised archaistic function, and it is given the lie by all the different (even if similar) versions supplied by all those different narrative theorists. All of the versions of the so called archetype and all the individual stories from which they are induced are comparatively similar and inferentially accessible from one another. But any purportedly archetypal story, whether one supplied by Propp or Campbell or Graves or whoever, is just one other individual in the genealogical population or lineage. It is adapted, however, not only to the same selection pressures as the individual stories, but to specific selection pressures for theoretical archetypes as well.

The persistence of the folktale form in European fairy tales and in modern narrative genres is due to environmental selection pressures for the form, and to genealogical inheritance of the form, albeit with new functions. The folktale itself is descended from an oral form, but it now persists in the captivity of folkloric prose, in children’s literature, and in the perpetuation of the craft of story telling into literary and cinematic romance. In its oral form one important adaptation is memorability. Greimas’s reduction shows how Propp’s thirty one events can be memorable if they in fact make up only three similar sequences, each of which is a test. The argument structure of the folktales is generated from a small number of memorable gists linked in a small and memorable set of ways. The gists, as described by Greimas, need not be presented continuously—the different tests may overlap in their chronological unfolding—although the precise social or psychic function of each of the tests in the overall argument does limit the chronological order, and to a lesser extent, the order of presentation in the narrative performance. And though the general form has three tests, one or two of the tests may be left out.

Every teller of an oral folktale has once been an audience at its telling. Indeed in order to be an audience and make the inferences demanded by the narrative argument, one needs to know the gists involved, or at least enough of them such that in the context of the narration one can make all the relevant inferences. Audiences are all to some extent like the characters in Wes Craven's *Scream*—authors. Horror, action thriller, romance, western, and crime genres are all heirs to literary romance, and all are known for their predictability up to a predictable point. That predictability is a result of an author's need to construct a narrative argument from given, socially shared argument structures.

The gist for what Greimas called a *test* is well known and memorable. Each event in the test-sequence is expected once the sequence is opened. These events are so much the objects of expectation that their textual omission is remedied by the enthymematic response of the audience. But why three tests in the general form of all these folk tales? Even though combining three tests is no problem as far as memory goes, why does this particular number persist? And why, for that matter *tests* and not some other gist? (Here and now, the answer to this last question is that the *test* is *the* form of teleological endeavour and romance is *the* narrative embodiment of human teleological desire.)

The kinds of gists in a genre, and how many there are may be understood as adaptations for a specific social environment of texts and meanings. Repeating the same kind of gist three times makes for the kind of memorability that stories need to survive in the environment of human psyche and oral narrative reproduction; and these incumbencies are replicated when the originally oral form gets replicated in print or on screen. Yet as well as to memorability, the threefold test of the folktale is adapted to individual interest in the fulfilment of desire—both sexual and teleological—and to social interest in the reproduction of the society and its notion of what is good.

Part of the affect of the folktale and romance genres lies in their representation of vicariously experienced individual gratification; and the expected production of this affect is part of the selection pressure for generic replication. However there is also a selection pressure for social good. Tales that are not adapted to this normative pressure run the risk of censorship or of damaging the very society that they depend on for their reproduction. At any rate, their persistence depends upon their occupying a profane or pornographic niche—which depends on the functional differentiation of the society—or even on contributing to the transformation of the norm about what is good.

The simultaneous, often contradictory, demands of individual desire and social good—demands that frame the modern problem of freedom—create a third selection pressure for stories that at least reconcile the two, or, better, for stories in which each is mediated by the other. The three tests of the folktale genre can be seen as embodying adaptations to each of these three interanimating environmental pressures. The threefold replication might even reveal an historically ordered hierarchy of adaptations to the evolving narrative environment. To begin with, protagonists have to prove themselves, and as they say, three times proves it. The Greimas model can itself be seen as a special case of a general case involving any number of tests. That the number is rarely more than three, and that 'three times proves it' testifies to a folk version of the principle of induction. In testing the protagonist three times the tale is a recipe for success against all contingencies.

Performance structure also has to be crafted to audience curiosity, response and memory, and so the demands of beginning, middle and end lead to the modulation

of the tests into an overture, a main theme and a finale. However the reconciliation, or mutual mediation, of individual desire and social responsibility in a folk genre adapted to transmitting the storyteller's experience to the young leaves its mark on the genre in a quite clearly schematic way. The folktale, and other romance genres, right down to feminist crime fiction or even horror, thriller or crime cinema, have sedimented design features that indicate a persistent adaptation for tendentious and didactic purposes. Usually then the consequence of the main test is the restoration of social norms (the liquidation of the lack) and the test proves the social mettle of the protagonist, particularly the protagonist's ability to strive for the social good at personal risk. The consequence of the glorifying test is individual fame and the consummation of sexual desire. It comes after the first two tests, as a reward for hardships endured. The actual struggle of the glorifying test is an exhibition of the protagonist's prowess both for the society and, as narrative finale, for the audience. Between them then these two tests achieve the goals of social and sexual reproduction.

The qualifying test is the sequence in which the protagonist's desire is often represented as coming into conflict with social norms. Greimas noted that of the sequence of events in a test, Propp's qualifying test left out the *confrontation* and the *success*. These are elided from Propp's morphology because they are commonly internalised in the protagonist, taking place in the realm of intentions rather than actions. The *donor*, at whose behest this test takes place, is an ambivalent and therefore fascinating figure, because the behest sets the protagonist against apparent social norms. The donor represents truth or knowledge, but that of ancient wisdom or nature or of a new order. In *The Piano* this test takes the form of temptation to adulterous love, and success lies in recognising the love and not resisting it. A typical folktale version is for a youngest child to pass this test by reacting differently from the corrupt norm exhibited by older siblings. The first and second sibling are at best rewarded in the short term under a system of social norms that the third sibling's character shows to be wanting. Happily, the protagonist's own natural desire proves to be the means for the renewal of a social good that has otherwise been corrupted. The social good is thus not only figured in the terms of the liquidation of a lack, but in the terms of historical progress which in turn is understood in terms of the continuance of authentic, perhaps more powerful, or perhaps more natural values embodied in the character of the donor. In the figure of the third child, the folktale shows the nightmare of the past being left behind, and teaches that the wisest course is, as Benjamin said (1955, p.102), "to meet the forces of the mythical world with cunning and high spirits."

The modern appeal of the donor lies in its being an adaptation of an archaic form to particular selection pressures in modern society. These pressures, though seemingly contradictory, are in fact related: the necessity for innovation, and the nostalgia for superseded cultural forms. The special prestige of the donor lies in its being an adaptation for both: the donor recognises the innovative, modernising character of the protagonist, and bequeaths to the protagonist the power and prestige of authentic, uncorrupted, albeit wild or magical, tradition. Thus the old, stagnating order must change, but the future is envisaged as a kind of "tiger's leap into the past," or as the fitting restoration of past greatness and authenticity.

In its successful replication from teller to teller, design that facilitates replication gets replicated. Memorability, the demands of individual desire, the social good, and their mutual mediation, and the demands of audience attention are all among the selection pressures for the relatively persistent adaptive form of the folktale. Another set of selection pressures for the folktale may be discerned in two of

its related features: archaism and its appeal to the young. The form is highly didactic, yet in order to teach something wise it has to take its setting in a premodern society that is not so much functionally differentiated, as it is organised hierarchically or by a difference between centre and periphery. The protagonist's quest typically moves from the periphery to the centre, from the lower to higher social strata. An easy and familiar narrative form set in and adapted to an education for a modern functionally differentiated society perhaps does not exist—if only because modern social structure is not well understood by popular wisdom, which now has to rely on little more than rat cunning and humour. Popular wisdom has had to retreat from a general social wisdom to a wisdom exhibited in subsystems (and old ones at that) like the family, or the circle of friends, or the street gang—subsystems that have affinities with premodern social systems.

While the folktale, or more generally, the romance form persists in modern genres—indeed the folktale insofar as it persists *is* a modern genre, albeit an archaistic one—other kinds of modern narrative exhibit its features in sedimented forms. Thus, in a kind of qualifying test, Cordelia, the youngest of Lear's daughters, gives Lear the honest answer, the one that clearly marks her as the bearer of heroic intentions. This test preserves the function of identifying heroic character in terms of its being in conflict with a superseded and corrupt ideology of the good. But it identifies it in order to show that an individual's honesty and desire is not enough in the face of corrupt society. Tragedy recognises that the strength and justice of individual desire is not enough for its fulfilment. In tragedy no one really qualifies. For her virtue, Cordelia receives, not heroic prestige but the anger of the past, the anger of the old regime. In tragedy there is no fulfilment of desire, nor any timely reconciliation of individual desire and social good. The sacrifice of the tragic protagonist may be descended genealogically from earlier rites of sacrifice, and may be selected by an environment characterised by a persistent fascination with death, but it is a sedimented feature that is also adapted to enlightenment intentions. The qualifying test may persist, but its meaning is transformed in a narrative genre that is designed for different selection pressures, one of which is the social need to demonstrate the frequent inadequacy of romantic intentions.

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The folktale is a particular kind of popular artisan form worked on by generations in societies experiencing the transformation from oral to printed media. The population of works in which the genre is embodied includes many variations on the type as outlined by Propp or Greimas. One of the tests, for example, may be elided or abbreviated, but the overall argument of the fulfilment of individual desire and social reproduction in the face of a universe of difficulties persists. The widespread persistence of a relatively complex kind of argument structure is not only an effect of persistent environmental selection pressures due to persistent phylogenetically determined desires, it is also due to a relatively persistent environment of social organisation (which itself also determines its own kinds of individual desire) including the institutionalisation of other narrative genres. These conditions, both phylogenetic and social historical, obtain in various societies, so the folktale form is replicated with reasonable fidelity in various cultures. One source of its distinctive functional adaptations is the social move from the oral to the print medium, a move that is reflected in adaptations to generationalism, or to print society's scientific, historiographic and nationalist archivalism. No doubt ethnically specific forms have functional similarities with stories from other societies in which similar

environmental conditions, social and psychic, prevail. On the other hand, the genealogical relation of a common ancestry shared by the various cultural versions of a story would be difficult to demonstrate for every single version, because each case would require documentary evidence—especially when genealogical relation can underlie functional (i.e. semantic) transformation. Though genealogically descended from oral forms persisting in early print culture, folk and fairy tales persist as modern literary forms, and so have to be reckoned now as modern. The archaistic modern form of these genres finds its main audience in those recapitulating that long historical transformation of narrative media in the brief course of their ontogeny, that is in children. The childhood and adolescent themes of reconciled individual desire and social reproduction are pancultural, and in the cultural evolution of narrative, genres that must pass through the selection bottleneck of childhood and adolescence, are more likely to appear universal. In this they are like the grammatical universals that must pass through the selection bottleneck of the infant brain.

Very similar selection pressures have operated, often on the same genealogical material, in the selection and maintenance of romance form in general. So the morphology of the folktale is a model that may be applied to many quest romance works to infer meanings of which the author may not have been aware. At some point though the model is likely to become no longer adequate to the text in question. The species, *romance*, hybridises, or only some of its components are replicated, or too many of the replicated components take on new semantic functions. Ultimately, even a general taxonomy of the genres—say Frye’s schema of *romance*, *tragedy*, *comedy* and *satire*—like any classification of what are historical phenomena, becomes inadequate.

55. *That archaic Universal Hero*

The symbolic forms of myth persist, that is true enough, but they persist mythologically. When the film maker, George Miller, was inspired by his reading of Joseph Campbell’s mythography, to say that the Mad Max movies had tapped into something called the Universal Hero myth, he was affirming the persistence of archetypal symbolic forms from archaic narratives and from all cultures right into the works of the contemporary narrative industry. Now, such persistence seems to suggest a persistent selection pressure for such a symbolic form or meme, and in its most abstract persistence that Universal Hero form would seem to be adapted to what is universal in its historical environment of minds and cultures—presumably something as universal as human nature whatever its cultural constitution. The Universal Hero is taken as testifying to the Universal Human. But can we really say that this Universal Hero persists as long as human narratives have a protagonist, and as long as propositions have a subject or gestures an actor?

Hardly. What about female characters like Ripley (Sigourney Weaver) in *Alien*, or Britomart in *The Fairy Queen*? Certainly these are genealogically related to the heroes of western romance; and, having already licensed the most ruthless of abstractions, surely there is no reason to be bound to the specific symbolic forms of gender, or even the biology of human sex, and quibble over the gendered definition of the Universal Hero. The same ruthless abstraction that made our Hero universal should also make him a Universal Heroine as well. Meanwhile the Bandjalung hero Birugan, or the Arjuna of *The Mahabharata*, or Virgil’s Aeneas are much less amenable to a common genealogical description (they may be distant cousins I suppose), but by virtue of their warrior exploits they and Mad Max would seem to be much more closely related to Odysseus than his direct descendent, Leopold Bloom, is.

The Universal Hero is the bearer of symbolic forms whose supposed universality, along with its supposedly authentic and profoundly human credentials, is posited on the supposedly archaic character of the symbolic forms. This archaic character is thought to guarantee the eternal, universal character of a so called human *archetype*. Yet all it really guarantees is that abstract, archaic forms of good and evil, of gender, of social organisation, of warfare, and of the natural world, belong to the so called Universal Hero myth, while the memes for advertising, for the salaried job, for the popular songs of early twentieth century Dublin, and for a million other traces of everyday modernity that construct the consciousness of Bloom or Molly or Stephen, are deemed, by dint of their modernity, not to be universal. However it is everyday particularity—a truly universal feature of human experience, and a feature of such historical importance in the particularistic representations of narrative—that the Universal Hero myth likes to expel from the experience of its consequently ponderous, semi-human Heroes.

The way modernity constructs its archaic Universal Hero is nowhere more evident than in the lack of individuality. Individuality, wrongly conceived as the opposite of what is universal, is constructed according to such symbolic forms as those for of the division of labour, and for other of aspects of everyday life. These evolving symbolic forms are the quasi or effective universals that frame and enable individual human experience. You couldn't be a social worker, or an engineer, or an electrician or a film maker or unemployed in the kind of society that the Universal Hero comes from. You couldn't be a hunter or a gatherer either. You could only be a Universal Hero, or one of its symbolic functionaries, like a Universal Villain or Victim. The heroic worlds of science fiction—in which the future is routinely imagined archaistically—look hopelessly inadequate, as far as the division of labour goes, to the detailed task of getting a big bit of sophisticated technology like a space craft into orbit. Are they launched by millions of Egyptian slaves? Or by poetically licensed technological magic?. Even small or ancient or technologically simple human societies that lacked the functional differentiation of postmodern culture didn't lack individuality the way that the Universal Hero's archaistic ones do.

The Universal Hero myth is not just a matter of the persistence of an archaic, let alone authentically human, symbolic form. It involves a sedimentation of meanings, archaic and modern, in that form. George Miller did not unconsciously tap into a particularly profound myth, rather, he unreflectingly used the most familiar of generic means bequeathed by cultural history to make postmodern meanings about doomsday, the future, and what is supposedly universal. To the extent that he and others use the writings of Jung or James Frazer or Joseph Campbell, they are replicating *their* twentieth century mythographic theories.

There is a specifically modern symbolic form for *archaism*. It does not only extend the symbolic life of the likes of the Universal Hero—an archaic, mythic protagonist—into the culture of modernity, it uses its mythic forms as modern memes with their own modern functions. Such archaism infects much of what is mythological in common sense theories of culture. Thus the archaic meme of culture as a unitary, heritable form of ethnic identity (it is, equivocally, an inheritance of blood and/or tradition) gets mythologically perpetuated, complete with its own archaic nightmares. Mythologically, archaic, ethnic culture gets credited with authenticity. Meanwhile, a cosmopolitan tradition of multi-ethnicity may get memetically abandoned, for want of any supposed authenticity, while the function of ethnic authenticity becomes no more than the functionary of some alien, self-perpetuating system of conflict.

The Universal Hero is a figure whose lumbering actions reflect the kinds of simplifying abstractions produced by selection operating on repeated replication. These abstractions are just like those of repeated rituals, in which what gets replicated and selected is merely what can readily replicate itself with high fidelity in almost any selection environment. There is nothing necessarily profound, let alone archetypically human, about such ritual forms, except, perhaps, the fact of ritual itself. Childhood and adolescence are more common than adulthood or old age. More of human culture must survive the bottleneck of such memetic environments, so as in the case of the evolution of language they exert especially influential pressures on the evolution of cultural forms. The notion that romances are primarily narratives for the young registers something of this. The persistence of pancultural and childish or adolescent interests select for sequences of deeds such as leaving home, undertaking a journey in quest of some good, achieving that goal and achieving sexual reproduction, but in itself, what is selected is abstract rather than profound. In fact such abstraction reduces the Universal Hero to within an inch of its life and its humanness.

The persistence of the archaistic Hero and his tale results from selection, not only by these pancultural and bottleneck pressures, but by the modern memetic environment. So the form has its own modern adaptations: moving image media seem like they were made to be the bearers of the Hero's typical action plot; the plot can therefore sell across linguistic borders in an image culture that is not reliant on linguistic transmission or that is otherwise taciturn or inarticulate; it can be sold to a market that can be entertained with plain action and that lacks appreciation of ethical nuance; it can be sold to an adult as well as a pre-adult market that lacks the kind of narrative nous that demands better, rarer art; it can be used as indoctrination (romance and fairy tales have long been didactic genres for the young) into socially handy forms of life like nationalism and warfare; it can be readily adapted to marketable, quasi feminist purposes by dressing a woman in the Hero's armour; it can, in its abstract morphology, supply a ready made plot that not only has the *imprimatur* of expert mythographers, but of Hollywood producers; it fulfils the consoling conservative purpose which equates the archaic, mythologically, with universality and the human-as-such; and it answers both a modern yearning for spiritual profundity, and a yearning constructed in the seductive forms of nostalgia, with the instant quasi-profundity of archaistic ritual.

Attempts by mythographers to identify a female counterpart of the Universal Hero myth—a Universal Heroine myth—are guided by the same processes of abstraction, the same delusions of spiritual profundity and the same confusions arising from the historically encrypted arbitrariness of symbolic forms. In his essay on “The Biology of Literature” Peter Goldsworthy (1998 p.149) outlined a kind of female quest as described by Walter Burkett: “A virgin leaves home, there is a period of seclusion or wandering. A catastrophe interrupts, usually the introduction of a male. Various tribulations, trials or imprisonments follow. Finally, there is a rescue, by another male, and the story finishes in marriage and children.” This form still appears to be genealogically related and structurally analogous to the Universal Hero's romance folk tale as it is modelled in Propp's morphology of the male quest plot (a model that is itself specific to a certain kind of society). The female version adapts episodes from the same folk romance model to its purposes of culturally specific gender differentiation. The plot outlined by Goldsworthy though sounds like an especially patriarchal version of what the female folk romance should be: its universality might be predicated on its archaism, but its archaism seems to be predicated largely on its patriarchal credentials.

It involves a memetics of what might be interpreted as a gendered passivity, but only if we take social and communicative actions as passive, and fighting as the epitome of the active. Myriad folk and fairy tales told by women to girls about girls show what true action is (See Warner 1994). Generations of story tellers use the same old tales again and again, but the meaning and the detail changes with the story teller and the context. The Universal Heroine folk tale simply follows from making the appropriately patriarchal, archaistic abstractions from all those given tales. Thus, the mythographic description itself ultimately and unconsciously replicates the modern symbolic form of archaism, which is typically characterised by mistaking a form specific to a certain kind of ancient society for the universally human.

Even Hollywoods feminist versions of the Universal Hero are, by virtue of their archaism (and their sales pitch), conservative and conformist. Part of the inadvertent archaistic meaning of *Alien* is that it perpetuates an archaic, action-flick memetics of passivity and activity; whereas in modern culture, warriors actually occupy what is quite a passive, powerless role compared to other jobs. Though fictions like *Alien* go with an archaistic, postmodern sensibility, they are more old fashioned than *Pride and Prejudice*. One of the ironies of Hollywood and US television culture is that for all their pride in being the latest, they so often seem to be as far behind the rest of the world as they believe the rest of the world is behind them. This follows from their marketable combination of generic and social conservatism. Despite the feminist sales pitch, those productions that slot female leads into genres like the “buddy film” or the action film rarely if ever free themselves from the nightmare of the past that is sedimented into the received, archaic genres they archaistically and respectfully (instead of mockingly) replicate

At certain historical moments when scientific progress or cultural evolution are experienced as the construction of concepts and other symbolic forms that are alien to those schooled in traditional forms—the chronic condition of modernity—romance comes into its own. Romance and archaism are symbolic forms whose evolution parallels and responds to the progress of scientific concepts and social differentiation, and to the evolution of the concept of progress. They also respond to perceived progress in art—Hollywood being, in many instances, a populist, marketable reaction to the difficult adult fiction of modernist narrative.

Very often, romance preserves narrative arguments that progress in the conception of the empirical and the social world have found wanting. The victims of progress responded to the supersession of myth with their own simplified vision of the archaic. We may see this in the way that the narrative arguments and the consciousness of time and history is less sophisticated in the popular prose romances of Greek and Latin than in, say, the Greek tragedies—the tragedies being an attempt to represent the two edged, Promethean energy of enlightenment. We see it also in the special persistence of romance in the period of Christianity. The slaves religion Nietzsche called it, and despite the enlightened ethics of the Gospels, Christianity perpetuated the superstitions and resentments of those victims of progress who were seduced by religion’s promise of magical salvation. The end of romance is the fulfilment of desire—including the socially conservative desire for old plot forms. And in the telling, that end is foreshadowed in the overcoming of whatever resists desire, an overcoming represented emblematically by the magical transformation of empirical reality. Romance is a kind of narrative that inscribes the phantasms of desire and fear onto the empirical setting. The world is present as these phantasmic symbols of good or evil: the waste land, the greenwood, the bower of bliss, the dark tower, the magic sword, the holy grail.

Romance may have its consoling, archaistic function and the genre may be adapted to the environment of adolescent psyche, but it also has its function for enlightenment. This follows immediately from the fact that any one narrative form is always available for any number of narrative meanings. Magical transformation is the fate as well as the content of countless stories. The theme of magical transformation seems to define romance as much as do the quest or marriage themes; and zealous faith in scientific progress may, in some minds, relegate such transformation themes to mere children's entertainments or to folk superstition. The literary fairy tale tradition often tried to objectify this folk context by preserving traces of oral transmission in the literary retellings, or by attributing the stories to old wives or Mother Goose. The literary genre of the transformation tale was thriving as an archaism for the emerging literary culture long before the Grimm's collection. Long before the fairy tale emerged as a literary genre for children in works like Charles Perrault's *Contes de Ma Mère d'Oye* (1697) the supernatural transformation tale was well known in collections like Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. This objectification of the form, though facilitated by writing, was no doubt also a feature of its older, oral versions. It is probably as old as the figure of the storyteller spinning her yarn. Again, this follows from meaning's multiple use of form. The transmission and evolution of enlightenment occasions the transmission and evolution of the romantic, but not only for the sake of counter-enlightenment. Coleridge's "willing suspension of disbelief (1817, p. 169)" referred to tales of the supernatural within the context of the romantic response to enlightenment. In contrast to Wordsworth's subjects "chosen from ordinary life (p. 168)", Coleridge's contribution to the *Lyrical Ballads* "was to consist in the interesting of the affections by the dramatic truth of such emotions as would naturally accompany such (supernatural) situations, supposing them real (p. 168)." This is now a standard form of justification for such stories; but along with the idea of "poetic faith" it indicates a kind of enlightenment objectification of the romantic response to enlightenment. Kant's meditation on the sublime is emblematic of this dialectic, and it is in the memetic adaptations of the sublime that this dialectic persists in modern fiction.

56. Character and individuality.

The Universal Hero myth does not get us far in understanding plot and character in the progressive tradition of modern fiction. Though its advocates suggest it gets us to the depths of human experience, it seems utterly inadequate to the task of understanding the emergence of the modern *character*. When it comes to the richness of character that is all over the surface of something like Shakespearian drama, searching for the archetypal depths is like quarrying fill from a flower strewn heath. The quick and easy profundity of archetypes does not help explain the change in the way modernity represents character, either in fiction or in our own or other's everyday experience. Though Shakespeare is by no means the historical agent of this change, no author more epitomises modern fiction's revolution in character. And though tracing the influences of Shakespeare on modern English language fiction may seem like a curiously inappropriate thing to do (Either he is an unrepeatable monument or his influence is as pervasive as the air narrative artists breathe.) because he so epitomises the emerging modern understanding of character and individuality, and because his plays have themselves been so amenable to selection and interpretation, generation after generation, the modern understanding of character is almost always replicated in a genealogical tree that leads back to Shakespeare at some stage.

The revolution in character is entwined in a revolution in plot, since it requires, in Jamesian terms, multiplying the kinds of instances and sequences that illustrate character. In Shakespeare this is especially a matter of speech as action. In the modern novel, it is frequently to be found in the everyday ethics of dialogue rather than heroic deeds. But just as the novel's plot was enriched by displaying and combining an excess of older generic plots, modern character exceeds reduced, universalistic generic expectations. It generates its new characters in original recombinations of replicated character types, or in replicated plot sequences that illustrate character. This might sound like a formulaic way to describe or explain the genius of innovative characterisation, but the way it works—its chemistry, as it were—may be seen even in such an original and elusive character as Hamlet. It is no easy formula for good characterisation though, and like any truly original work in narrative art, the *mystery* of Hamlet's artistic genesis is best understood, not in terms of a formula for predicting and generating original art. Prediction is impossible, and generation, for now at least, needs artists who in most cases, rely on inspired generation, testing and amendment. So instead, it is best understood by recognising that the mystery lies in originality being something that is only conferred retrospectively, by the selection of audiences and theatre companies working on the memetic life of the artwork. Time and again, *Hamlet* has prevailed in an environment of the most demanding minds.

There are many typical narrative characters. We recognise them again and again as certain kinds of plots demand them. Their historical persistence is appreciated in the likeness of one after another, but it is impossible to trace a lineage through the promiscuity of allusion and inspiration. Our experience of narratives delivers us a whole swarm of similar figures. When Northrop Frye described what he called the *eiron* figure of comedy—*eiron* being the Greek for a dissembler—he did not describe a symbolic form with its own genealogy, but instead plucked instances from a kind of eternal array of a timeless character type, and cobbled together a little, quasi genealogical account for the telling—a rational reconstruction:

Another central *eiron* figure is the type entrusted with hatching the schemes which bring about the hero's victory. This character in Roman comedy is always a tricky slave (*dolosus servus*), and in Renaissance comedy he becomes the scheming valet who is so frequent in continental plays, and in the Spanish drama he is called the *gracioso*. Modern audiences are most familiar with him in Figaro and in the Leporello of *Don Giovanni*. Through such intermediate nineteenth century figures as Micawber and the Touchwood of Scott's *St Ronan's Well*, who, like the *gracioso*, have buffoon affiliations, he evolves into the amateur detective of modern fiction. The Jeeves of P. G. Wodehouse is a more direct descendent. (1957, p.173)

The cheeky, often little, sharp witted character is so common in comedy that Frye's genealogy is incredibly selective. He could have mentioned Panurge, or the servants in *The Alchemist*, or the Marx Brothers, or Bugs Bunny, or the personae of any number of stand-up comedians. This kind of character typically functions as a representative of the less powerful against those whose power is exposed as pretentious. In Frye's scheme the type of pretentious power is called the *alazon*. One of the favourite butts of comedy is the pretentious Hero himself. In Marx Brothers movies the romantic leads are reduced to rudimentary characterological forms. While the novel's multiplication of main characters (strictly speaking, I suppose, there can be only one protagonist) democratises character, the *eiron* has long been round to test

and undermine the pretentious, would be hero. In this, the *eiron* shares function and genealogy with the trickster, donor character of Propp's morphology.

The difficulty of tracing a genealogical line and the remarkable persistence of this type are related: the functional persistence masks genealogical relations. The persistence indicates the persistence of a selection pressure for this kind of characterological adaptation. The variations of the type indicate specific social selection pressures acting on a sedimented genealogical form. The social distribution of power which pits the servant against the master, the poor against the rich, the powerless against the powerful, takes different forms in different kinds of politically structured societies. Instead of Frye's genealogy, what can be traced is the genealogy of the environmental memes that constitute the selection pressure for the different variations of the sedimented form: a genealogy of the socially organised distribution of power. One could do likewise in the case of the various forms of romance hero.

It is not only narrative artists constructing characters but individuals constructing themselves that use such symbolic forms. And, especially in modern fiction, narrative artists represent this kind of self determination. Thus Shakespeare has Hamlet use the *eiron* in his attempts at self determination. In his pretended madness, Hamlet plays the tricky slave ("O! What a rogue and peasant slave am I.") to Polonius's *alazon*. He takes on the part because, in the political upheavals in Denmark, he finds himself displaced into a powerless position. This section of the play (Act 2, Sc. 2) is a meditation on the relation of narrative forms to life ("What's Hecuba to him or he to Hecuba"). We see Hamlet construct his individuality from the forms bequeathed by the history of narrative. *Il se promène en lisant le livre de lui-même*. Even what I have called Hamlet's *pretended madness* is a kind of self constructed affect based on a norm of madness, and whether the madness is actually pretended or genuine is not so much a question of textual interpretation as a question about the cultural construction of individual emotional life immanent to the world of the drama and the mind of the prince. Hamlet's own question about the emotions generated by the play acted suffering of Hecuba makes this explicit. Character and emotional life are constructed from social systemic means; indeed individuality is social systemic. *Hamlet* shows a new appreciation of the nature of subjective self consciousness and self construction, and so it registers a certain stage in the social history of individuality. Unlike the individual of Christian free will, Hamlet's individuality is constructed not as an expression of some authentic inner being, but as a kind of constellation of personae about a centre voided by the crisis he confronts: self consciousness is a consciousness of itself as another constructed from alien and inconsistent social symbolic forms. Hamlet's freedom is experienced as the alienation of all the available symbolic forms of personal agency, until, unable to seize upon a symbolic form as his own, he himself is seized by the meanest of forms and thinks he, as avenger, can just angrily and blindly stab a "rat" lurking behind a curtain in his mother's chamber. From this fateful deed the tragedy ensues.

Hamlet is an individual looking for a non existent genre. Genre is something of which Polonius has a surer, because duller, appreciation—something he demonstrates when he pedantically lists the generic repertoire of the travelling players. Hamlet is more like the figure of the novelist vis à vis the traditional storyteller: "The birthplace of the novel," said Benjamin (1955, p.87), "is the solitary individual, who is no longer able to express himself by giving examples of his most important concerns, is himself uncounselled and cannot counsel others."

The cultural persistence of the romance genus, of which the folktale is a species, justifies the use of a plot model derived from forms like the folktale in interpreting modern works—either those that are related by descent, or those that are adapted to similar social or psychological environments. In addition, these similar environments may themselves be related by descent, or they may be functionally convergent. As the social and technological environment changes, features adapted to earlier environments, features like the memorability demanded by oral forms, may well only persist in sedimented features whose function or meaning has been transformed. Thus the three test structure need no longer persist for the sake of memorability, or inductive generalisation or the mutual mediation of individual desire and social reproduction. Instead, it persists primarily because it fits the social, psychological and physical demands of dramatic performance, cinematic exhibition or audience attention. The Hollywood three act drama is itself descended from, or at least functionally similar to, the beginning, middle and end of ancient dramatic form with its exposition, complication and resolution. The novel, on the other hand, does not have to meet these demands. Its length is much better adapted to the longueurs of bourgeois domestic leisure, so dramatic three part or three test structure should not be expected to persist in novelistic prose romance. Prose romance—one need only think of Mallory or other Arthurian collections—usually multiplied the tests and distributed them over many more episodes or many more characters.

When a work invokes the semantic inferences of romance plot, meanings discovered by processing the work in the context of a theoretical romance morphology are, however phantasmic, phantasms we must treat seriously—if only because an audience is likely to entertain them. In the middle of a feminist romance like *The Piano*, a male character (Baines) is interpreted as having something of the power and prestige of the donor; or the piano itself seems to become a kind of monster threatening Ada's social life to the extent that she must finally struggle against it in order to regain both her oral, erotic life and her social, linguistic life. Interpreting a narrative in the light of a theoretical morphology is very like searching for its relevance in the context of untold contextual assumptions. The theoretical morphology helps to reveal and specify meanings. Using it to reveal meanings though raises questions about the adequacy of the model. For the more general the model, the greater its extension, and the more latent interpretations it specifies; but at the same time, the more inadequate the model, the more hidden the meanings it reveals, the more fantastic the meanings, and the more irrelevant they may be.

Besides checking for evidence of common genealogical descent or for functional convergence under common selection pressures, the other way to justify a model is to test it. A well constructed model is tested by comparing it to the phenomena it describes until any inadequacy in its formulation is revealed by resulting, unacceptable conclusions. This is the way to finding a better understanding of the narrative phenomena in question. The problem with this though is the same as that encountered in abstracting the functional from the genealogical aspects of meaning: when one's phenomena are texts and meanings, the adequacy of models and the acceptability of conclusions are themselves matters of meaning. If we are to push a model to an unacceptable conclusion in order to reveal the precise nature of its inadequacy, the question of whether the conclusion is unacceptable becomes, at worst, a matter of taste, or else a matter of dialectics, or of collusion between author and audience. Thus in using the morphology of Propp or Greimas to reveal things about *The Piano*, are the conclusions about Baines as donor or the piano as villain or monster unacceptable phantasms? unexpected revelations of nuance? or artificial implications generated by the rigidities of method, and therefore simply signs of the

model's inadequacy to the data? Who decides the acceptable meaning of a work? Does memetic history decide this, as it decides the composition of the canon?

Consider the claim of Greimas (p.247) that "the farther removed the new domain of application of the model from its place of origin, the more general its scope will be!" In a way he is right, but the cost of increased generality of meaning is increased vacuousness: the most general meaning tells one virtually nothing about virtually everything. A better way to look at this might be to consider how anything purporting to be a predictive model of narrative structure would be just asking for some particular work of fiction to come along and disconfirm it. In practice, this is just how fiction looks at it; and it is how meaning, as a dialogical and inferential matter, works. The fact that many works of fiction persist long enough to be in a continuing dialogue over many readings and generations, and the fact that they are actually designed in this way and selected accordingly, suggest that fiction makes dialogue with generic norms one of its central aesthetic concerns. It is for the quality of its dialogue with generic norms, especially as a modern phenomenon with innovative aspirations, that fiction gets selected.

If Jane Campion were to say that the piano as monster or Baines as donor is not what she meant at all, can a viewer insist that, even if Campion is unaware of it, *The Piano* cannot help but express these sedimented ideological functions of the romance form? Can we say that when Marleen Gorris in *Broken Mirrors* used the horror/thriller genre as the bearer of feminist intentions (many have done it since), that she was unwittingly being used by the sedimented misogyny of a genre that has been deemed to function variously as a way of training women to be afraid of men and the night, or a way of perpetuating middle class female paranoia and with it privilege for safety's sake? Are crime films like Martin Scorsese's *Goodfellas* inevitably trapped by the ideology of a genre whose most deeply sedimented meanings are things like turning violent spectacle into box office, and the gender differentiation of men as violent and stuck in a gang mentality and women as either helpless wives or prostitutes hopelessly stuck on violent men? And is Clint Eastwood fooling when he says his violent western, *The Unforgiven*, is about the dehumanising effect of a life of killing? Can it be about this and be a good old western shoot up as well? Or is the genre of the western itself dehumanised by the devotion of its own life to killing? And were Samuel Johnson and eighteenth century theatre goers right to treat the tearing out of Gloucester's eyes or Cordelia's death as unfortunate ideological left overs of Shakespeare's less civilised times?

In a way, the question of a morphological model's adequacy and whether it predicts latent ideological meanings or whether it is made to be superseded by the next artwork, seems like a fundamental problem of the theory of narrative art. It also seems as if the problem has been a theme or motive both within narrative art, and of its historical life. In fact, these things follow from the dialogical nature of communication, from the double contingency of the author's meaning and the audience's interpretation. Not only the meanings of the theory, and the interpretation of the data, but the data themselves are interpretations. It is the sense of the untranscendable immanence of meaning that encourages the view that theories of narrative art, and narrative art itself must be abandoned either to radical subjectivism or to the radical heteronomy of alien ideologemes. Both views identify the very psychic and social conditions in which narrative art, as something else, must thrive.

This seemingly fundamental problem belongs to the problems of describing memetic processes generally. There is no operational concept of meme that is reducible beyond the level of intentions, because no matter how memes are replicated in texts and no matter how they are defined and symbolised in the cybernetics of

memetics, both the textual embodiment and the symbolic reduction to a replicated form may well abstract a particular phenomenological (or heterophenomenological) character of meaning, but neither may abstract the semantic as such. A trace of the dream of reducing semantics to syntax (an old dream of structuralism) is perhaps still present even in the conception of the phenomenological and the heterophenomenological as fictive. In fact, this dream of transcending or objectifying meaning is partly constitutive of fiction, insofar as a fiction is made as a narrative that can somehow just stand on its own like a text snatched from its intentional context and from the function of reference, and like a text that shows its meaning in the pure structure of its argument. And so, we see how a theoretical desire—and often a wrong theoretical conclusion that is induced by that desire—actually enters into the constitution of art, making art in its image. However, it is not as a pure and persistent objective structure that a fiction stands on its own. It is only as a Protean entity that can change in its various interpretational contexts that fiction achieves its appearance of autonomy.

The relation of an abstract, persistent generic form to its replication and use in a particular work is not just a problem for narrative theory, it is a problem internal to the performance and transmission of fiction. It is why fiction is a kind of intuitive, immanent critique of narrative interpretation, a kind of laboratory of experiments that preserves the contradictions and inadequacies between a given generic form and its replica in a new work. This is also why the task of narrative performance can involve using given generic forms without necessarily having one's particular meaning kidnapped by alien generic intentions.

The ideology critique of popular narrative art cannot just cite the replication of persistent ideological forms and say that the film maker or dramatist or novelist is their unwitting servant—not when it is precisely out of such forms that narrative artists signify new meanings. But neither can artists smugly indulge themselves in generic replication as if the replicated symbols were never characterised by stupid, inhuman or dangerous designs. The overwhelming pervasiveness of certain Hollywood genres, especially of genres about fighting men and fantasy women surviving fantasias of destruction, and of genres designed for exploiting markets of adolescent audiences who need only be poor speakers of English, says something about the peculiar adaptation of cinematic narrative to consumer capitalism, even if it doesn't tarnish the individual works of film makers who manage to make good films under the received historical constraints. These constraints frame the successes of Hollywood film making, as well as its dismal predictability.

In Australia, feature films are more likely to be adapted to a cultural environment which finds it difficult to conceive of a more important meaning for art of any kind than its meaning for the concepts of *Australia* and of some desired *national culture*. The film *Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* is a cheap cocktail of generic forms using precisely those mean spirited, alien, and even inhuman meanings that are adaptations for memetic perpetuation rather than bearers of passionate and intelligent aesthetic intentions. Thus it uses the road movie's adaptation of lazy episodic plotting; it uses Rabelaisian humour to ridicule (hypocritically) such humour, and also to ridicule the Filipino character who displays her Rabelaisian skills by popping ping-pong balls out of her vagina—all in the service of a misogynist mateship; it uses the venerable Homeric theme of reuniting the father and the son to evoke mawkish, family value sentimentality and show that transvestite men are real men and real fathers too; and it uses transvestite men to redeem fatherhood with the gloss of queer sensibility. It is ostensibly a tale of sexual and social liberation set before the mythic image of Australian landscape, which is, as ever, represented by its clichéd, official

form: the desert centre. As such it is really all made to sell itself and the ideology of official, reconciled culture, family sentimentality, misogyny and national pride.

Now more than ever art not only depends on publicity, it is a kind of publicity. There are even cultural theorists who like to confuse art and advertising in order to make a point about the world historical convergence of the two, even though, in doing so, they misunderstand art. For unless art objectifies and transcends any advertising content, its functional convergence with advertising would call for the announcement of its world historical death. In cinema, the design for publicity is maintained by such powerful market selection pressures that all the features of a work can become means to this end. In such an environment adaptations of narrative design drift into designs for the self advertisement of alien culture. In *Priscilla*, each ideologeme is evoked for its brute replicative design, even the once cheeky ideologemes of gay culture. It is a movie made by sleep walking through the landscape of received symbolic forms. But as they say, it is a case of sleep walking all the way to the bank.

The process of testing a generic model against particular narratives in order to identify its inadequacies, is not such a cunning way of testing one's theory of a generic form because narrative artworks use the socially persistent gists and generic forms as the unexpressed, contextual assumptions needed as keys for inferring the artworks' meanings. What might look like a procedure for scientific testing is much more like the unconscious procedure of processing narrative argument. This is why what looks like a fundamental problem of the theory of narrative art—the question of interpreting the adequacy of a generic model—is really a theme *of* narrative art, rather than just a theoretical problem. It is also why an audience can apply a theoretical generic model like Propp's in order to reveal unapprehended meanings, just as a scientific theory may be applied to make predictions about unobserved phenomena. This is a situation that might be approached by a functional analysis that takes account of meaning as a matter of the functional transformation of semantic function. It is as a function changer that meaning is so useful. Any theory of narrative art, particularly any generic model or gist, becomes an unexpressed assumption of future narrative arguments.

We can understand what a narrative is about only by entertaining remembered pre-existing forms as assumptions, and processing the text in the context of such assumptions. By reflex, the audience entertains given narrative forms—symbols that mostly, but not always, belong to the shared lifeworld of authors and audiences—and, in processing the narrative argument, it makes inferences that strengthen or invalidate earlier assumptions or inferences therefrom, and that themselves are subject to strengthening or invalidation in the light of subsequent events. Identifying the inadequacies of an assumed generic model or a memorable gist is a typical event in narrative experience. The variation of function that characterises meaning is registered in the variation of the adequacy of our generic assumptions.

We sense this not only in difficult works but in popular ones as well. Adrian Martin says he can't process all the information in *The Big Sleep*, though he says that some of his friends say they can. Mystery narratives are like this of course, though they are generally far less mysterious than genres devoted to the representation of the everyday incomprehensibilities of experience. Accurate predictions of crime fiction outcomes are relatively easy, given the persistent generic constraints. Predicting the outcomes of naturalist fiction is not so easy. Our gists fail us. Artless people condemn difficult artworks for being incomprehensible when questions seem to remain unanswered at the end, oblivious to the fact that the incomprehensible is what is being communicated.

Testing assumed, memetically persistent argument forms against particular arguments structures of new stories, finding the old forms wanting, and identifying their inadequacies—these are cognitive processes at work, consciously or unconsciously, in narrative experience. When narrated events happen against expectation but nevertheless as a consequence of one another this is just when a narrative is urging its own, novel argument. And as Aristotle observed (*Poetics*, 1452a), this is just when a narrative causes most amazement. Its meaning is a variation on the inadequate pre-existing meanings. The scientific procedure of structural and genetic theories of narrative, a procedure that seems to be as ponderous as the archetypal forms themselves, is executed with unconscious alacrity by each and every audience. This science of narrative is practised with a vengeance, rapidly and intuitively, in the everyday experience of narrative. It is insofar as we see fiction as innovative and *making up* that we see this conceptual process at work. The historical life of concepts is staged before our eyes in the laboratory of fiction.

Science, for Hegel (1807, p.55-6), was always already the restless cognitive process of experience. He even recognised that the origination of what he called “the new true object”—which in narrative experience would be the new, valid argument—takes place behind the back consciousness. Had Hegel applied his insight to a science of narrative, he would have anticipated Freud, who was the first to assert the unconscious processes of narrative interpretation in his books on dreams and jokes. Jokes and comedy are anarchical or innovative in the way that they flout the received narrative wisdom of the symbolic order. Yet the pleasure they evoke is not just, as Freud suggested, psychic relief from the repression of childish pleasures. In the intense community of laughter, individual human cognition celebrates the victory of what matters for it against what matters for the alien designs of narrative symbolic forms. Of course the community sanction of laughter and the manipulated outbreak of infantile pleasure can both be put to repressive and unenlightened social systemic use as well: like the police state, those who have laughter on their side have no need of argument. There is a kind of arms race over which one out of the psyche or the social system uses this function for itself. Just as science uses personal ambition and curiosity for its social systemic ends, art works by the psychic and social systems each mediating rather than trying to cancel the other. Comedy dramatises what Pasolini called the hither and thither of the *I* precisely in the context of its constitutive social environment. Not the least of what matters most for human psyche is truth. Not the least of the pleasures of comedy is knowledge.

Fiction, the narrative art of modernity, has been characterised by such persistent flouting of given generic forms that its pre-eminent literary form, the novel, seemed for a while at least to the eye of nominalistic critics and theorists, to signal the end of genre. All works were supposed to be judged by their own merits, by their own laws of form. Novelistic plot deliberately eluded the slow evolution of the generic types that persisted in archaic and archaistic works. Archaistic forms, representing the perpetuation of myth into modern fiction, were inadequate insofar as they preserved and even exaggerated the simplifications of relatively simple argument structures that were adapted to archaic social environments. Fiction, especially in the novel, comes on the scene as a new species using the promiscuous recombination of narrative memes to produce a frenzy of thematic variation. Its cognitive task of demonstrating the argument structures of complex, irreducible, yet merely everyday experience turned Aristotle’s insight about what causes amazement from a fact of poetic theory

into a norm of plot innovation, all in an age when narrative art was equated with made up stories. Foreshadowed in the incipient modernity of Attic drama, fiction emulates the progress of science in its restless testing and overturning of myth.

However, as the novel itself has shown, the gists and generic forms of the past have lived on, but with different functions. Just to have survived implies that they have to confront a different social environment and have correspondingly different meanings. (Sadly, some of the greatest works now seem to survive primarily for their museal meaning as historical relics. This is true even of modern works explicitly devoted to artistic progress, to “things unattempted yet in prose or rhyme” like *Paradise Lost*.) The novel overturned the old forms by multiplying them, dismantling them, re-arranging them, objectifying them and superseding them—anything but simply cancelling them. When Beckett tells a little tragic romance at the end of *The Unnamable* (“They love each other, marry, in order to love each other better, more conveniently, he goes to the wars, he dies at the wars, she weeps, with emotion, at having loved him, at having lost him, yep, marries again, in order to love again, more conveniently again, they love each other, you love as many times as necessary, as necessary in order to be happy, he comes back, the other comes back, from the wars, he didn’t die at the wars after all, she goes to the station to meet him, he dies in the train, of emotion, etc...”) it is almost too brutal to say that he is simply parodying the form of tragic romance, or parodying commonplaces about its artistic purposes. (“...there’s a story for you, that was to teach me the nature of emotion, that’s called emotion, what emotion can do, given favourable conditions, what love can do, well well, so that’s emotion, that’s love, and trains, the nature of trains, and the meaning of your back to the engine,...”) Art undertakes its own ideology critique with such art. The story is tragic, and comic, and self critical all at once. “There’s a story for you.” If there is progress in narrative art, it is to be apprehended not only as innovation in plot, but in the proliferation of types of plots and characters and in the increasingly complex community of plots originating in various historical periods.

It is not only the democratisation of character and social setting, but the cognitive quirkiness of its new arguments that give novelistic and cinematic fiction their comic quality. Long before Samuel Johnson (p.67) called the new domestic fiction of his day “the comedy of romance”, we can see evidence of the affinity of progressive narrative art with comedy. In Rabelais or Cervantes we see it for sure. Both preserve but parody what Johnson (p.68) called “the wild strain of the imagination that found reception for so long, in polite and learned ages,” the romances that would vanish if deprived “of a hermit and a wood, a battle and a shipwreck.” *Don Quixote* epitomises this historical movement, and it is remarked (albeit ironically) in the preface to Part One that “a satire on knight errantry is so absolutely new, that neither Aristotle, St Basil, nor Cicero ever dreamed or heard of it.” Even in Aristophanes we see this comic objectification of received narrative forms. Perhaps we see it at its most astonishing in the comic spirit in Shakespeare’s tragedies: in Lear’s Fool, in the sly wit and comic carnage of *Hamlet*. Actors who insist on declaiming Hamlet’s speeches in sonorous homage to the grand tradition, who in awe and trepidation play the part to advertise its greatness miss the point. This is especially obvious when the drama moves from stage to screen, yet a performance like Nicol Williamson’s in Tony Richardson’s film is still the exception.

Though, like any historical species, we may not be able to pin point its precise origin, fiction is a species of narrative art designed for the memetic environment of

modernity. Its habitat includes modern science and historiography, and the social systemic and communicative outcomes of technological innovation. Its often symbiotic relation to these is really a kind of dialogue with them, or a critique. Along with these it deliberately replicates its own institutional memes for progress and innovation. Even what we would now call a romance is a different species from the old literary romances of early novelistic prose. Though they live side by side, the old forms replicated in the habitat of the mouth and the press, while it is their descendants that replicate not only in print and on screen, but in the modern minds of modern artists, where the meme for innovation and the cognitive impulse of fiction are so strong that the most astonishing thing of all is that we still recognise in romantic fiction the genealogical persistence of the archaic form.

Since we are scarcely likely to ever actually knowingly witness a species emerging before our very eyes, it may be that fiction is already the ancestor of a new narrative species. The problem of distinguishing a new species though is made particularly difficult by the profligacy of memic reticulation, and by the unlikelihood, in global culture, of anything but a sympatric evolution—assuming that culture is truly global and not undergoing technologically and economically mediated, functional segregation of different kinds of narrative art. At best we get a sense of a successor to fiction when we compare digital, television, video and cinematic narratives to the novel. But the obsolescence of fiction is not necessarily to be discerned, as Frederic Jameson (1991) suggested, in things like the fictivity of TV or cinematic historiography. These are the postmodern versions of those age old and alienated historiographic categories—myth, rumour and the lie. Meanwhile fiction still has a different function: to transform or sublime these alienated functions of narrative. And whether, in this task, it can keep up with the evolution of myth, rumour and lies, let alone make progress in this narrative arms race, is not only a question about fiction, it is a theme of fiction as it enters into, displays, and reflects on new media and genres.

But what does it mean to speak of a function of fiction? When each of a dozen cultural theorists can assert a different theory of the function of something like the horror genre, and also trot out a critique of functionalist thought as well, what hope is there of discerning an overarching function of fiction? And if anyone did, wouldn't that be pretext enough for a fiction that flouted it anyway? Fiction, as we see in the way it is always changing the functions of generic forms, is a Protean creature. And this feature is itself part of fiction's semantic design for outwitting the alien functions of other cultural forms, including mendacious fictions. If fiction is an agent of enlightenment, then this too could change. Fiction could disappear and its memetic successor, "postfiction" could be a kind of delusory, social systemic control function. There have long been mendacious fictions, and perhaps the emergence of postfiction is happening already in the machinations of the narrative business. On the other hand it has been happening for a long time in so called pulp fiction, and it is precisely in an environment of socially evolving, alien narrative forms, that artists and audiences have selected fictions—even apparently pulp fictions—that are adapted to outwit the drift to alienation. So I don't anticipate the extinction of fiction just yet. Still, perhaps this function of fiction will eventually disappear, and fiction will remain in name alone; and because it is changing anyway from work to work and medium to medium, it will all be over before anyone notices and despite every Jeremiad warning against it.

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Fictions, if not fiction, age. Comedy, especially, is thought to be of its time; though I suspect that the passage of time damages nearly all works. Panurge is probably not so funny any more, and Milan Kundera's time will come. Reading *Don Quixote* is almost as alien and as seldom undertaken as reading about Amadis of Gaul; instead of episodic quest romance, we encounter an episodic comedy-of-romance satire consisting of almost the same joke again and again. (In fairness to *Don Quixote*, the revelation and re-revelation of an iconic comic character in incident after incident is still the method of popular comedy. Witness the characters of sit com!). *Gulliver's Travels*—the most matter-of-fact prose in the language, and never yet out of print—is duller than *Robinson Crusoe* for most audiences now, and less appreciated, despite its literary fame. Fame is the last infirmity of a narrative work's life.

Roman Jakobson's essay "On Realism in Art" (1987, pp. 19-27) describes the kind of historical innovation that novelistic verisimilitude had to repeatedly undertake just to achieve verisimilitude by remaking its conventions and thus countering the alienations of time and cultural selection. This essay is a brilliant early description of the temporalised aesthetics of Modernism, and therefore, because of the demands of this reflexive temporalisation, it is both description and manifesto. Way back then, narrative art and aesthetics could still catch and ride the wave of cultural evolution. Nowadays though, change in narrative technologies, casts all forms under the shadow of their congenital obsolescence. Perhaps it is from fearful contemplation of this ubiquitous obsolescence, that so many contemporary works—from Hollywood genre flicks to the standard two hundred page literary novel—seem to cling to traditional forms. Or perhaps they cling to traditional forms because the social generationism engendered by technological innovation and marketing selects for a resurgence of infantilised and therefore archaic narrative culture. Art cinema notwithstanding, this has happened already, in the case of the post literary, culture of popular cinema. The phenomenon of popular narrative culture has been partly, like language itself, conditioned by the selection environment of young minds. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that each new narrative medium, or at least each of the three great non-corporeal media of narrative art—writing, film and digital screen—has encouraged its own infantilisation of narrative plot, and that this has been precisely due to the fascination with whatever new functions the particular medium advertises. Working on and editing text enabled the writers of prose romance to readily arrange plot in chronological order, and they seem to have been bewitched by this function for a long time. Being able to digitally work on image narratives enables authors to depict whole, supernatural, albeit sparse and schematic, worlds—a function that video games and science fiction have exploited with a vengeance. Yet, sharing a pre-adult selection environment with such an astonishing thing as language suggests that the infantilisation of narrative culture need not simply lead to conceptual regression. Infantilised cultural forms can assume a position of tyrannical dominance of a culture especially through market dominance, but not all infantilisation is fluffy white sliced bread. If regression is to be avoided, something like fiction will still have to sublime the infantile adaptations of new, technologically mediated, narrative forms.

Like all futures, the future of fiction is unpredictable. The past however indicates the eventual extinction of fiction by reminding us that, like *Homo sapiens*, it has not been around for ever. People may have always told stories, but the functions of those stories has changed. Things like pretending and its conscious or unconscious functions in deception and self-deception, imitation and parody and their functions in self construction, and even the cognitive functions of being entertainable by marvellous phenomena all seem to be matters that were part of the prehistory of fiction, and all persist in fiction itself. And since the present becomes the memetic

environment for the persisting works of the past, we are ready to apply the term fiction retrospectively and anachronistically to earlier made up, parodic, mimetic and profane narratives, even to myths and superseded histories. But it is historically misleading to project the modern dichotomy of fact and fiction onto the narrative universe of the past, as if its works were designed for such a social dichotomy and selected by the same cultural pressures. I don't think that the meaning of narrative art exhibits any astonishing about face throughout its history, or that fiction is an utter transformation of its ancestral forms. But this is partly because its functions have long been various and there has been no one function to dramatically turn around. On the other hand, the functions of narrative art, and art generally have proliferated, and the cultural environment has, in its own growing complexity, created pressure for more functions. So fiction's historical emergence is still a kind of *metabasis eis allo genos*; while even the surviving narrative artworks of the past persist now as fictions, and for different environmental reasons than those that prevailed at their first performances. Sometimes, as I have said, their function now is dominated by sheer historical, documentary or heritage value. Once dramas that we now experience as mythical fictions must have been much more like history plays. Even though we might have seen bigger changes in the modern period simply between works in different media—between the novel, say, and the film of the novel—these changes are actually constitutive of modernity, and fiction belongs to this modernity. Modernity, rather than being just a time period, is a memetic phenomenon comprising market capitalism and scientific and technological systems, each with self-perpetuating designs. Fiction, along with other kinds of modern art, is part of the self-critique and self-overcoming of this modernity.

58. *The sublime.*

In the history of narrative art, the norm of innovation is likely to act with a peculiar memetic effect. Under its influence persistent memetic phenomena become subject to transformation. The task of charting genealogies, already complex enough, becomes even more so. However the theory of genre, conceived along the lines of taxonomy and cladistics, is not the only, nor the most important task of a memetics of fiction. Besides, even in the complicated networks of crossing lineages and transformed functions genealogies can often be traced and persistent adaptations identified, along with the selection pressures that maintain them. The important point about reducing cultural evolution to an algorithm of cultural selection is to show how alien memetic design happens, despite individual intentions. Selfish memetic adaptations emerge as natural events, rather than as the actions of any subject, whether individual or collective. They are a kind of transcendental Other, available for our use or abuse, but they also use us for their purposes. Like the gun that a hand tears from a belly in David Cronenberg's *Videodrome*, inhuman designs are born in the most intimate matrix of cultural transmission and memory: interpersonal communication.

The main problem for the philosophy of fiction is not one of charting fiction's genealogies through the maze of modernity's innovations—or, for that matter through the mysterious psychic transformations of artistic influence, the bread and butter of biographical criticism. Instead, it is to chart the persistent functions of innovation for fiction—a set of practices based on the fictive and innovative principle of *making up*.

Innovation is a norm that fiction encounters in its psychic and cultural environment. It includes the innovations in science and technology, and in all the multifarious phenomena of this famously “rapidly changing world.” It is remarkable

how often it is said that there is widespread fear of this change. This persistent little myth—a congener or descendent of the bourgeois notion that all things solid melt into air—is itself a meme adapted to the self edifying paternalism of the sellers of new technology who want to psychopathologise any consumer resistance or apathy as a kind of phobia. The real epidemic fear is one of stasis and inertia, since, in the frenzy of advertised innovations, what jaded taste discerns is the immense stasis of a persistent spectacle. The supposedly postmodern apprehension, that things and events have become less substantial than their astonishing representations, was not some fantasy or delusion. Long ago it was implicit in Peirce's semiotics because, long before Peirce, it was always there in the virtualities of human communication. It is a fundamental problem in the epistemology of representations, first appreciated by Kant, that though representations must reduce the complexity of whatever they model, they are all that is available to a subject whether phenomenologically closed unto itself, or heterophenomenologically bounded by the society: environmental things and events, like Kant's noumenon, are just 'out there' and not, in themselves, phenomena. The apprehension of a persistent spectacle of change was an intimation of the rapid evolution of alien representational design in the teeming memetic matrix of modernity, a representational design that Guy Debord (1967) called the society of the spectacle.

Innovation in fiction, like sex in biology, is a design for variation in reproduction, a way for narrative art to outwit infection and parasitism by clichéd, alien intentions. Art does this with audacity, taking received memes and, sometimes by no more than displaying them *as received memes*, using them for new purposes. This is what fiction's reshuffling and revaluation of generic forms amounts to—at least until its innovation itself becomes an alienated form.

The concept of *the sublime* might sound like a fossil from Burkean and Kantian aesthetics. Kant restricted his application of the term to the aesthetics of nature, and as nature itself has withered, the sublime has degenerated into a descriptive term for quaint tourist vistas. Oscar Wilde registered this long ago with his comment on being shown Niagara Falls. He would have been more impressed if it had flowed the other way. For Kant though, the sublime was defined by the subject's sense of transcendence *vis à vis* the might of nature; it was an apprehension of the subject's intelligible transcendental ego, experienced when it apprehends its safe distance from and overcoming of otherwise overwhelming natural forces. Nowadays something like this experience persists, but not only at waterfalls and lookouts. Modern art has discovered a kind of sublime affect in turning its gaze on the powerful and alien natural forces of culture—that is, on what is apparently a kind of overwhelming second nature. We see this emerging in the way Baudelaire gazed in sublime apprehension on the streets of Paris rather than the peaks of the Lake District. Despite Kant's restriction of the term *sublime* to nature, even premodern art confronted and represented more than just the overwhelming natural forces in the human environment. It represented overwhelming natural and cultural forces such as the elements, the body, sexual desire, social taboo, fate, death, war, arbitrary power, the gods, received narrative wisdom. Yet art too (as Plato and the censors of art have long known) has also been apprehended as a dangerous and overwhelming force. As the very model of theoretical contemplation and objectification through representation, the sublime and its aesthetic ancestors and descendants seem to replay the sense of heady power in human self differentiation from nature, both in the long struggles of culture, and in the subject's own ontogenesis, when self formation involves a process of using and being used by culture to supersede one's self. While humans use culture in this struggle to tear themselves out of the nightmare of their

natural history, as a kind of second nature, culture itself has become something demanding sublime transcendence of its own nightmarish incumbencies—even artistic culture.

The norm of plot innovation—governing everything from making up characters and plots, to transforming the meanings of generic plots, to depicting the unspeakable and the profane—is not just about abstract novelty for its own sake. Artists don't just make up any old plot. Innovation in fiction's plotting is about the sublime contemplation of narrative arguments. This is the engine behind the simultaneous persistence and transformation of generic forms and their meanings.

Diverse aesthetic phenomena in the history of fiction fall under the heading of sublime apprehension. In American cinema from *Scarface* to *Reservoir Dogs* or *The Bad Lieutenant*, tragic plot shows that its modern American provenance is in criminal life. (One has only to think of plays like *Macbeth*, not to mention all those revenge tragedies, to appreciate that this characteristic of modern tragedy was already discernible in Elizabethan and Jacobean drama. It was even foreshadowed by the Greeks, in the notion of *hubris*.) Some see this as a disturbing and immoral feature of such films, because they assume audiences identify with a certain ambiguous grandeur that the violent criminal possesses. But it shows that, in modern times, tragedy, like Kant's nature, must retreat to a relatively archaic enclave. Outside this enclave the social and technological forces are so immense as to make individual hubris look puny and laughable. (That contemporary film maker most consistently drawn to tragedy, Abel Ferrara, is one of the few to actually make tragedy out of contemporary domestic life—in *Blackout*, a tragedy of alcoholism, love, and ultimately, snuff video.) Only from inside the confines of the criminal world may the protagonist demonstrate the requisite, tragic superiority to fate and the gods. These films are a sublime contemplation of tragic plot, very like Kant's sublime contemplation of nature: both kinds of the sublime now register a sense of the loss of the old might and grandeur; both want to preserve possibilities that modernity's overcoming of nature forecloses; both therefore are sublime apprehensions of modernity itself, in terms of what modernity once overcame, and now would like to preserve—at least in an image or index.

Martin Scorsese, a popular film maker using popular generic forms, has scrutinised modern social systemic forces by looking at the alienation of generic plots, and at driven characters whose all consuming hubris turns out to be so puny it is scarcely even registered. So what might have been a tragedy is swallowed up by the news media and incorporated as just another bit of good news. Under the glare of the TV lights tragedy is transformed into farce. In *Taxi Driver* the sublimely fascinating object is not just the violent and pathetic action of the expected tragedy, instead it is the alien social systemic design of the media fame that transforms the tragic into a comic ending. In *The King of Comedy* what is alien is what media celebrity can and has made of the comedian—someone to clap as joke-making hero rather than someone who makes us laugh. Comedy is shown not just in its propensity for social systemic functions, but as a narrative form whose function has been alienated into a celebrity publicity machine. In the character of Rupert Pupkin, the traditional cheekiness of the little guy, the beloved *eirón*, is shown for its contemporary power function alone. The fame generating machinery turns comedy into power without humour. In Rupert Pupkin, Daffy Duck becomes truly menacing, and we look on, fascinated.

The sublime though, does not only work under menace and the threat of violence. Attempts to plot everyday social experience, whether in the novel or the

feature film, depend on sublimely contemplating all the banal and trivial gists that would shape that experience. This is not just a matter of revealing the truly fascinating and sublime character of everyday life. It is not an exercise in redemption, but in disclosure. The sublime is a matter of fascination and knowledge and of the power that comes with it. What is fascinating for the sublime contemplation of the everyday is the banal obscurity of the familiar. So moving a world away from the violent American genre film to the cinematic incarnation of a kind of novelistic comedy of romance, we still see the sublime at work in fiction's contemplation of everyday forms of life. We sublimely contemplate someone like the young protagonist in Eric Rohmer's *Conte d'Été*, imprisoned in the half apprehended plots by which he constructs his actions. His desire is wayward because it is at the behest of a string of sexually oriented romantic plots that he only half forms for himself, and he never really chooses to follow any particular course. The memetic constitution of such a desire makes it fit for the twin functions of attempted deceit of the women who are vaguely its objects, and for self deception as well. He is greedy for sex or experience or something, clumsily and unsuccessfully manipulative in the cause of the most abstract, multiplotted desire (the women are not so easily deceived), unable to close down options or to passionately take up others, wanting to have his cake and eat it too, and incapable of achieving anything much at all. The kind of sublime impulse that motivates so much fiction is not to be mistakenly restricted to heroic or grand contemplation of the received sensational or grandiose themes: sex, death, war, violence, revenge, and such. It is also present, just as typically, in things like the fascinated contemplation of everyday conversation as depicted in Rohmer's moral tales.

In narrative art generally, the sublime impulse is to know the generic form—whether it is encountered in art or life—and show it in order to scrutinise it from a relatively safe distance and thereby mean something else with it. Bakhtin's idea about novelistic prose showing images of languages is a special literary case. The origin of the sublime lies in native reason's way of safely encapsulating the look or idea of a dangerous or alien environmental phenomenon and getting the feel and the scope of its alien or dangerous character. In terms of processing information, it is a way of tokening information and nesting it in a recursive structure, as a proposition is nested in the attitude a speaker holds towards it. Fiction nests its whole narrative in the attitude of fiction. What Habermas (1985) called fiction's bracketing of illocutionary force is, as such, a kind of recursion. Habermas thought fiction bracketed its narrative off from any attitude or from any illocutionary force, that fiction involved absolute bracketing or recursion as such. But he was fooled by fiction's ploy, by the charmed arch of the proscenium, the glowing screen against which the probing finger can only click, the painted horizon up against which Truman's boat bumps, the horizon that chapter by chapter recedes before the fictional reader of *If on a winter's night a traveller*. It is all very like the ancient symbolic act of recursion that underlies consciousness itself. (See Dennett 1991, p309) Conscious representations are nested in unconscious representations, just as fiction is nested in all the backstage machinery and all the performative collusion that enables its production as a seemingly self contained narrative object. This is why the affect of the sublime, rather than being one of ethical transcendence, is primarily one of raw cognitive power. In the fascination with its object, the sublime is an intimation that this is what matters most. Look on if you dare! Look at the kinds of narratives that can shape our lives! Look at what stories can do with us! How strange they are, whether they walk on screen in their most familiar generic form, or whether they are just the forms of everyday life!

The idea that the narrative artwork itself—as well as the generic forms it contemplates—is a dangerous object of sublime contemplation is one of the most cunning, fascinating and dangerous ways in which the sublime enters narrative aesthetics. As I said above, this was something of which the censors have long been suspicious. It surely has much more to do with art's persistent fascination with cruelty and violent action than any cobbled up moral justification like catharsis. I walk out of the cinema after seeing *Pulp Fiction*, go into the all night supermarket and expect somebody—maybe me—should pull out a gun at the check-out. If this film was cathartic it didn't work very well. But neither does it encourage me to violence unless I'm deranged already. Instead the audience is fascinated by the cruelty woven into a plot not simply as if deluded by the fiction's illusion (after all it isn't really happening), but because the film up there on the screen is a dangerous object contemplated from an exhilarating but reasonably safe distance. It is not that such films are really just much violent ado about some redeeming moral centre. This redemptive escape clause may serve to ease the guilty reviewer's conscience, but it misses the point that there are many moments of meaning in a work of fiction, and morality is only one of them. The plodding, governing morality invoked to justify an irredeemably amoral work—and to ease the guilt of the sensitive critic who took such wicked pleasure in it—is precisely the kind of wild and alien social systemic force that amoral artworks sublimely contemplate as an instance of the might of alien second nature. When fictions submit an edifying moral gist to sublime contemplation we see the affinity of the sublime with comedy: The object of contemplation moves from the sublime to the ridiculous. In these moments of sublime experience, the transcendent affect of looking on is not one of moral edification, but of knowledge. It is morality that is being transcended.

Fictions are more like astonishing natural objects than communications of edifying narrative arguments. They may well involve the sublime spectacle of immorality—they have to if they are to show such immorality. In films like *Videodrome* and *Crash*, David Cronenberg deliberately explored this version of the sublime by depicting both the disappearance of the safe distance that guaranteed the sublime Kantian disinterest, and the evaporation of those luxuries of civilisation so dangerously yet so insouciantly close to the horrors of that blind self perpetuation of society that calls itself *progress*. Recognising that sublime spectacle may, as is well known, degenerate like a tourist attraction into a merely fascinating selling point for the narrative industry, Cronenberg submits the spectacle of the sublime itself to sublime scrutiny. In *The Fly* he lets us all watch an act of sublime contemplation, when the journalist gazes in wonder at her lover performing on the horizontal bar; but as it turns out, the sublimely powerful gymnastic performance portends the man's terrifying transformation into a giant fly. In *Videodrome*, the sublimely contemplated object is depicted erupting from the screen, crossing the safety barrier of representational recursion. In *Crash*, the disinterest of sublime contemplation is revealed for what it always was—fascination. For the sake of knowledge, disinterest was always an erotic rather than an ascetic discipline.

The idea that what is depicted should not arouse viewers—the idea, say, that erotic art should be above Eros—is one that art has superseded, if in fact it was ever anything more than an apologetic ruse to fool conscience or the censors. The sublime disinterest that was supposed to quarantine the viewer from the fascinating object is more a kind of recursion of fascination: disinterest is fascination with the fascination with some event or person or object. Thus in erotic art, sexual fascination is an aesthetic experience which in turn becomes an object of another aesthetic experience

in which it is nested. Both moments are essential. Art induces affects in order to scrutinise them. Again it must be said that this recursive process is very like the process of experience as Hegel (1807, p.55) described it, in which experience makes a new object for itself out of itself. Hegel (p.56) recognised that this recursive process was a scientific one. Narrative artworks continue to stage and display this erotogenesis of knowledge.

Just why depictions of sexual action and violence fall together so often in cinema and other media is probably because they have been historically crucial in the formation of subjectivity—phylogenetically, socially and ontogenetically. To the comfortable, well behaved citizen the yoking of sex and violence seems like an arbitrary imposition; and no doubt it has become an arbitrary imposition of a social systemic kind, insofar as it has become a cliched selling point in patriarchal narrative markets. The arbitrariness is a sign of contingent incumbencies persisting throughout phylogenetic and cultural evolution. Passing on one's genes despite danger and despite others is a famous evolutionary strategy, but it is a heavy historical burden for social animals endowed with a conscience and the ability to make promises. And besides, cooperation is also a famous and powerful strategy. The sublime—especially in the artistic contemplation of violence and sex—is about the formation of social being in the teeth of this dilemma. It registers the way subjectivity is formed by its own self transcendence of its own self antagonistic constitution.

It may be asked whether the sublime impulse is genetic or memetic. The constitution of subjectivity in a process of its own self overcoming is implied in Kant's transcendental subject and in Freud's super-ego. Any genetic predisposition to intentional consciousness is also a predisposition to self objectification and to a subject that is always reconstructing itself by eluding this self objectification. Such an elusive subject would count as a good biological strategy for dealing with changing environments or a change from one environment to another, because it would have the ability to reconstitute itself if need be. And such a strategy would be a good basis for framing the cultural evolution of the sublime and its role in the constitution of subjectivity. The fascination of looking on, and of transgression are both ways of constituting a subject negatively as not what is being looked at, and as not what is being transgressed. The subject lies in the aboutness, and not inside the brackets. Looking on and transgression are shared aspects of the fascination with sex and violence, and each generates a kind of transcendence of its object. Transgression, in particular, is the form taken by the transcendence of social systemic moral norms insofar as they constitute a kind of alien second nature. But this does not mean that the sublime is a genic design adapted to overcoming alien symbolic determinations. Rather the genic and memic contributions to subjectivity amount to a crucial instance of the very kind of antagonism that the sublime works on. The sublime is a culturally evolved adaptation of a socially mediated psyche selected for its function of differentiating an ego from the environment upon which it is nevertheless utterly dependent.

The sublime impulse is clearly a memetic phenomenon when it comes to the social and technological self overcoming of modern *progress*. The sublime of modern aesthetics is a case of progress being expressed in the aesthetic sphere. Both the aesthetic sublime and technological progress are instances of an aspect of human biological self constitution (of the genetically determined intentional stance) transformed and extended into a powerful device of the social self constitution of personality. In *Crash*, technological and aesthetic progress are represented as having delivered three sublime machines—the car, the video, and the sublime itself. Machines, as Arnold Toynbee (p.164) said, are ambiguous in their essence—their

functions may change. And as a device, the memetic replication of the sublime and technological progress is itself mechanical and so itself ambiguous. Once the sublime becomes an habitually replicated aesthetic form it threatens to crash into the very abyss it is supposed to transcend.

When Kant confined the sublime to the aesthetics of nature he was registering a specific historical moment. In that moment, the same technological mastery of nature that rendered the might of nature safe for sublime contemplation was also apprehended as presiding over the passing of that wild nature. Nowadays the repetition of the old sublime stance towards nature has become ridiculous and the aesthetics of nature is trying to shrug it off or sublime it, because the nature so contemplated is not so mighty any more. Mighty nature has now diverted its power elsewhere, into things like the antiproductions arising out of technology's environmental transformation: nature eludes the objectification of the old sublime or of progress; it enters into an arms race with technological progress. In the realm of art, *Crash* is trying to sublime the old sublime too. *Crash* explores the archaic relations of power, violence, sex, and sublime fascination, and their place in the self construction of the postmodern human. The memetics of technology and of the sublime itself up the ante for the subject by extending the power of the subject's gaze, movement and self overcoming. The self antagonistic constitution of subjectivity, the essential motion of the sublime, means that sublime technologies and aesthetics are as dangerous as any safety they afford. The safety afforded by the recursion of fascination threatens to crash into gratifying self destruction.

The onlooking subject's transcendence is not just one of safely overcoming the dangers of alien power—the danger is not neutralised and the safety is a condition of the sublime rather than a result. The subject's transcendence is a kind of self transcendence in which one apprehends and surpasses the alien limits of one's own nature, both genic and cultural. The transcendental subject was this emergent process of self constitution as self negation and transcendence, hypostatized. This corresponds to Kant's version of the sublime in which the subject recognises its own naturalness, its own dependence on the alien might that both confronts and empirically constitutes it, and yet, for now, it recognises its own life, its own consciousness, against the run of play—for Kant, its own noumenal character, its freedom. In a sense the sublime is something very old. Its raw cognitive power looks like a genetically provided function, but it is one that modern art has adapted to its specific, culturally transmitted function of gaining its own cognitive power over received aesthetic and ethical wisdom. It is not the case that a human subject or personality is some authentic ethical agent caught between selfish genes and selfish memes. And modern narratives, with all their unconscious undercurrents certainly don't address themselves to such a subject. A subject is genetically and memetically constituted, and any inevitable antagonism between the two is also constitutive for the subject as well. But in the sublime, the subject is no longer something positively constituted. The fascination of the sublime lies in the sense that somehow it is beholden to or mired in what is being contemplated, and yet somehow, by looking on it and seeing it, it frees itself from all that. It is the primary gesture of recursion, of putting what is, in parentheses, and by default putting oneself elsewhere.

The Origin of Fiction in the Origin of Reason

59. Apology for parasitism.

59.1 An old debate in the theory of narrative art.

It is a strange thing to tell stories about non-existent people doing things that never happened. Alone and writing before the abyss of such non-existence, few novelists would have entirely avoided the occasional sense of despair. In fact, making such despair unfounded is just one challenge for the art of fiction: fictions that don't impress us with their necessity don't even manage to entertain us. Workers in film, theatre and television at least have the consolation of working in company or what Helen Garner (1996, 119) calls "the slightly crazed pleasure of collaboration"; meanwhile for audiences, fiction is usually relegated to the less important, recreational department of life. Even for an age when fiction can claim to be one of the great spiritual projects, and when the fiction business is big business, the common sense persists that fiction is neither a normal, essential, primary nor serious kind of narrative endeavour, but just a bit of pretending. And something like this has persisted at least since Plato saw how fascinating all this idle, pretentious mimesis could be, and duly expressed his reservations about it. Narrative art continues to worry the workaday conscience.

Certain theories of fiction are symptoms of this worry. Take John Austin's view of fiction, and of other literary uses of language, in his influential lectures on the theory of speech acts, *How To Do Things With Words*: "These are aetiologies, parasitic uses, etc., various 'non-serious' and not full normal uses (104)." Replicated through the tradition of speech act theory, as well as through popular common sense, this assumption eventually prompted Jacques Derrida (1972, 307-330) to respond across the gulf that separated English language analytical philosophy from European critical philosophy. Austin held that a promise spoken by an actor on stage was not a serious or binding promise, but that it was a derivative or parasitic use of language. In Austin's terms, a fictional or stage promise suspends the binding illocutionary force of a normal promise?the illocutionary force being the binding, interpersonal warranty that a speaker, in saying something, gives to a listener about how something is to be taken and how the truth of what is said can be validated or made good if need be. If Austin's assumption was one of those periodic attacks on art, in the Platonic tradition, Derrida's response belonged to the tradition of apologetics. Indeed together, both sides make up a kind of apologetic syndrome?a kind of self-perpetuating conflict system. Derrida went on the attack?with a kind of exaggerated turning of the tables. He claimed language was essentially fictive and that so called serious linguistic behaviour or normal usage was itself a kind of role-playing.

Actually there are two levels of apologetics. Firstly there is the apology for poetry or fiction, inaugurated by Aristotle's *Poetics*; but then there is criticism of narrative art, and the discipline of criticism is a kind of second order parasite. It is parasitic on fiction, which is in turn parasitic on serious, literal communication. So criticism is especially ashamed of its parasitism and especially given to an apologetic syndrome of its own. Its symptoms are various, ranging from journalistic triteness (deliberately light, supposedly unpretentious, bantery reviews, especially of film and

television) to would-be-artistic bombast (pseudo-profound, frisson-seeking stylistic displays, especially in matters of literary taste) to busy, academic desperation (brave, grave, attempts at critical theory, popularly ridiculed for their postmodern jargon). All this is another story, except to say that most of what we might call the theory of fiction has been shaped by this doubly apologetic predicament.

Ever since Aristotle's appeals to 'catharsis' and 'universal truths', the apology for fiction has typically resorted to claiming some kind of useful (often moral) function for it. This applies even to Derrida's claim that so-called serious communication is actually parasitic on fictional role-playing. Critics and theorists of fiction have liked to equip themselves with some of the prestigious props of their canonised art, flashing a bit of showy literary style, or the odd cadence or metaphor to signal the ineffable profundity of literary taste or experience, a bit of fictive licence to free theoretical speculation from the mean spirit of literalness or empiricism. For academic literary critics especially?still perhaps worried by their unconscionably frivolous object, not to mention attacks on university funding or the sensed demise of literary narrative?Derrida's view was probably comforting. Their job, rather than being primarily scientific or even scholarly could be, or had to be literary, and therefore blessed with a certain aesthetic-cum-philosophical dignity (and terminology) of its own.

A response to Derrida came from John Searle, one of Austin's most thoughtful heirs in the theory of speech acts. Searle insisted again that fictive uses?simulations, quotations, irony?were parasitic, because, as Habermas (1985, 195) repeated it in his own support of Searle's contention, "logically they presupposed the possibility of serious, literal, binding use" of language. Meanwhile, Derrida insisted that calling something parasitic was really just a kind of pejorative, ethical or political claim dressed up as a theoretical one.

There is no doubt that art worries all sorts of consciences in the context of apologetics, but for someone supposed to be advocating a literary, rhetorical reading of texts, Derrida was strangely unappreciative of the ironic deprecation in the term parasitic. I suspect that Austin, for instance, actually liked his example of parasitism?John Donne's song about catching falling stars and getting mandrake roots with child?and that he originally used the word parasitic both provocatively and fondly. Unfortunately, the divide between analytical and critical-theoretical philosophy created a context for ignoring irony and, for the sake of arguing against the other, compelled misunderstanding the other. Austin's use of the term parasitic wasn't just a bit of British phlegm. It was parasitic too. It involved the kind of irony Nietzsche complained of in Socrates, and promptly employed himself. It was the kind of irony employed by wisdom when it plays the raven, inspired by the intoxicating whiff of carrion coming from its dearest fellow creatures. And as for *How To Do Things With Words*, even its own didactic function was parasitic on the kind of measured pace of novelistic disclosure that we find in fictional entertainment forms like the detective novel.

Perhaps the disapproval, expressed by Habermas (1985), of the violation of the divide between the literal and the literary genres is justified: perhaps Austin's own parasitism on fiction damaged his argument, for in the inbred world of language philosophy, the kind of essayistic freshness of insight that Austin seemed to have, may have been hybrid vigour, replete with the instabilities of fiction. Ironically it was a case of Derrida the literalist for rhetoric against Austin the rhetorician for the literal. By the time Habermas had prolonged the same critique of fiction and non literal communication well into the 1980s?especially in the context of what he saw as Derrida's dissolving the distinction between fact and fiction?the vexed relation of

fictive and literal communication had been embedded in so much self-perpetuating debate that the reference of the debate?the actual relation?could scarcely be traced back beyond all the recursions of discursive toing and froing.

Perhaps the debate limped on for so long because the two sides were arguing about different things, or else neither side was clear what the argument was about. Arguments can be like this, each side deluding itself about the other by self-interestedly and self-deceptively mistaking the other's intentions?an easy task when irony is being employed and meaning's functions are changeable, and a task that exemplifies the ironic (?) Derridean thesis that every reading is a misreading. These contending theories of fiction are best seen as symptoms of the limitations of the apologetic syndrome. The contender's theoretical position has usually already been taken, either by unconscious psyche, or in unreflected processes of affective life?like taste or conscience?while arguments scrape together theses to provide a retrospective validation.

59.1 History of Communicative Functions

There is a selection pressure for the apologetic syndrome: bewitchment by ontology. Science has emerged from this, and so, long ago, did fiction?it's just that this enlightenment has long been ignored or trivialised by the naive ontological sensibility for the concrete. In turn, the apologetic syndrome is a kind of cultural selection pressure for the persistence of certain arguments in the theory of fiction and critical theory. Rooted in the task of justification, they confuse norms and facts, hardly pausing to think about the historical interactions between the two. Both sides of the apologetic syndrome located the problem extratemporally in the context of questions about what communication essentially is, and what it ought to be, all too readily assuming that what it is is something essential and obvious to intuitive introspection, and that what it ought to be is to be observed by honouring what it already authentically is. Instead, as is usual in questions of historical function and significance, the problem lies in the fact that functions change, and in how and why they do. Most significantly, biological functions like communication

(i.e. functions for an organism), and social functions like symbolic communicability (i.e. functions for a symbol or meme) belong to the great class of historical phenomena (eg originality, memorability, promises, the artistic canon, friendship, beginnings, origin, etc.) whose actual nature is only confirmable after the fact, and whose inheritance through time is always subject to future changes and disconfirmation.

In the context of the two thousand year old tradition of apologetics, the difficult questions about the functions of communication?its means and its ends?and the historical developments and transformations of those functions, both phylogenetic and cultural, remain. These questions of the historical function and meaning of communication are all too commensurate with the human capacity for wonder, but they might seem to be beyond the historically supplied means of empirical research. This hot combination of fascination and aporia was well known to scepticism, which was duly suspicious of any speculation on the origins of language or of fiction. But there is no escaping these questions. The difficulty of addressing them, and even of properly asking them, is not the kind of predicament that can be turned into an injunction not to ask them. This though was the luxury the philosophy of language long thought it enjoyed?and the predicament it could scarcely avoid.

Thus when Time came on stage in descriptions of human communication, it was scarcely recognised. Usually it entered, as it did in traditional metaphysics, dressed as Logic. The term priority is used as a relation in both time and logic, that is,

in both narrative and deductive arguments. Speech act theorists like Searle and Austin used the concept of parasitism to direct philosophical priorities according to seemingly logical priorities in communicative function. As Habermas said, serious, literal usage had to be a logical presupposition of the parasitic uses. But what is parasitism if not a functional relation in which the literal and binding is seen as the means to fictive, non-binding ends? Austin's, Searle's and Habermas's assumption was a procedural move really, with little empirical support, based on an unexamined, metaphysical intuition, and motivated by the need to direct "initial spadework" at the supposed foundation of language. This foundation was imagined as the essence of language, language in its authentic form, and the ground of any other?and therefore non-essential?use of language. Such a move was evidence of the residue of first philosophy in the philosophy of language and the theory of speech acts: demonstrating its genesis in the supersession of origin myths, metaphysics was long grounded on questions of priority detemporalised, asked and answered with steadfast avoidance of historical reflection. If first things can be worked out first, then everything else should logically follow! And the foundation of language, the "normal," "binding," "primary" "literal" use was obvious, wasn't it?

Well, no! This intuition involves the kind of native idealisation made by intentional idioms. It feels right, but it is not the kind of judgement that science and philosophy can be happy with. At the very least, science and philosophy are not just a matter of the self-observations of psyche, but of the social observation of psyche's self-observation. Common sense intuition about the normal or basic function of language may come from the horse's mouth, but what comes from the horse's mouth is no royal road to science. Opinions and norms about the function of language are the object of philosophy, not philosophy itself as a kind of natural birthright. Despite Peirce's (131) call for a "barbarous" terminology to distinguish philosophy from the "natural language" that is its object?an object that makes itself mysterious to itself by what Wittgenstein (#4.002) called the unconscious "silent adjustments" of the common idioms used to refer to intentional experience?philosophy has been and remains a discourse in and about intentional idioms. This has always been a particular problem for the analytical philosophy of language, which, for all its achievements, has always been imperilled and inspired by a deceptive mix of half understood intuitions and a myopic bemusement at the banal minutiae of intentional idioms. This is why philosophy is a self-critique of "natural language" and its familiar intuitions?the difficult predicament of the reflexive science par excellence.

59.2 Relevance

Of course, explicit propositional assertion?the literal?is of the utmost importance in linguistic communication. Its meanings are rapidly processed in the search for relevance, because the information is available in an inferentially accessible form. But speech act theory was always rightly concerned with language use as a way of acting in speaking?of promising, declaring, announcing, demanding and so on, as well as asserting. It thus helped direct philosophical attention away from the narrow concentration on the purely denotative, assertoric use of language, and emphasised the fact that there is a whole range of symbolic, communicative actions and that these are governed pragmatically by the intersubjective norms and social institutions in which they are embedded. It should also be emphasised that philosophical attention needs to be directed to all those symbolic, communicative actions that are not spoken but sung or written or screened or staged or whatever.

None of Austin, Searle, Derrida or Habermas was especially concerned with reflecting on the history of communicative functions. Their concern was with the

functional state of human language, as if what language is now for intentional consciousness is language in its essential form once and for all. At the very least this ignored the way that language, and symbolic communication generally, change their functional workings in different or new media. To determine relations of functional priority without reflecting on the history of functions was a way of thinking about an historical phenomenon that remained reassuringly and misleadingly ahistorical: “logically”, the so called parasitic uses presupposed the possibility of normal, serious, literal, binding use. However just why promising, declaring, announcing, and asserting were normal, serious, binding and primary uses, while quoting, copying, being ironic or metaphorical or fictive were non binding, parasitic, johnny-come-lately uses, is unclear. Unless there just is a natural and original norm of binding, literalness.

Take first the question of binding and non-binding uses. The illocutionary force that binds the parties to a speech act so that they know how to take what is said (or how to take it as relevant) seems to be just as important and fundamental a function in fiction as in other communicative actions. Mary Louise Pratt (1977) applied the theory of speech acts to literary fiction just to argue this point. Habermas thought that fiction suspended or bracketed the illocutionary binding force. But in doing so it sets up its own binding force; it doesn’t say all semantic, intersubjective bets are off. A promise made on stage in a play may be null and void as far as the actors are concerned when they go home after the performance. But the fiction played on stage, in which the promise is embedded, is certainly not null and void as a fiction in the world of the actors and audience; meanwhile, in the world of the fiction, the promise is a promise to be made or broken as promises are. Someone who takes fiction otherwise?as a fact, say?will have wrongly ignored its binding force as fiction.

All this of course can be framed in another already anticipated way, without relying on the speech act theory concepts of illocutionary binding force, and normal, literal use. In Sperber and Wilson’s (1986, 122) terms, communication, whether fact or fiction, normal or parasitic?and, I might add, regardless of medium?involves inferences from a principle of relevance: the audience interprets the text on the basis that it is relevant in the context, and therefore has some psychologically significant effect in that context. This relevance is determined by the degree of contextual effect relative to the degree of information processing effort (that is, to the degree of inferential accessibility) involved in inferring the contextual effect. This characterisation of degrees of effort is determined by shared human psychology (and so may depend on fast, content specific processing as well as on general deductive processing), and the inferences are undertaken using premises available as a shared culture of mutually manifest propositions. According to this characterisation, relevance may be assessed intuitively by effect, and may be represented in comparative judgements. The principle of relevance is thus a way of understanding illocutionary binding force in terms of the amount and benefit of information processing involved. Parties to dialogue assume relevance, and then, based on that constant, infer the variables such as what kind of communicative act is being enacted. That is, the audience infers the precise intersubjective force of the communicative action?whether it is literal or ironic or metaphorical or fictive or whatever?and what manifest, cognitive context it implies. Take a case of metaphor?William Grey’s (2000) example ‘Richard is a gorilla’. If it is manifest that Richard is a man and we were to interpret this sentence on the assumption that it is a statement about primate taxonomy, this sentence would rapidly be judged as false. Instead though, we process it for its relevance (and truth) by attempting to find what the context and the case

would be if it were true. What Grey calls the ‘semantic depth’ of a metaphor is a metaphor for the inferential accessibility of its meaning.

Calling certain uses of language normal may have been a way of deciding the procedural priorities of philosophical inquiry, but it pre-emptively “solved” certain practical problems for the inferential processing of communication: it hypostatized so called literal, normal, serious and binding uses of language, and relegated the processing of other functions to a matter of inferring departures from the norm (Sperber and Wilson, 230). Positing a formal solution to a problem may be convenient, but whether humans actually communicate this way is another matter. This formal solution has little empirical support, and little to do with the historical relation and development of different communicative functions, literal, fictive or whatever.

59.3 Two Useful Metaphors

Derrida, Grey (2000) and many others have described the literal by using metaphor?that the literal is frozen or dead metaphor. This itself is an ailing metaphor, one that, as Grey would say, is “on the way to expiring”. I would prefer to emphasize metaphor’s historical, memetic career and say that the literal is a kind of persistently replicated and selected metaphor. As such, the function for which it has been socially selected has become rapid generation and interpretation in the majority minds. Significantly, the term literal is itself just such a term. Literally, it meant according to the letter. It has been used so often to refer to a certain kind of rapidly interpreted sense of a text that this has become its most inferentially accessible semantic function. In the process of the selection of psychically and socially adapted self-descriptions of human communication, this function has been referred to by emphasising its difference from other semantic functions that have been designated metaphorical, fictional, and non-normal. This socially selected semantic function has been acknowledged after the fact by giving it the title of the literal (and no longer the metaphorical) meaning of literal. Even so, the most commonly offered definition of the new literal meaning of literal is the older, metaphorical one. Other much-replicated, clichéd metaphors are often socially selected for what Roman Jakobson

(71) called the phatic function of keeping lines of communication open, or for padding out one’s speech to keep and extend one’s turn in dialogue, or to hold the floor as the socially acknowledged communicator, or to impress people with one’s mastery of eloquent repetitions. Social and psychic functions that were paramount at the initial coinage of a subsequently much-replicated metaphor, including wit, entertainment, amusement, relevance and truth for a particular audience, may no longer be important. The literal has no mortgage on truth. As the slightest reflection on literal lies reveals, truth has much to do with intersubjective intent, as falsehood has with misapprehension. Meanwhile, dead metaphors have a life of their own. At best, for us, they have a literal truth function or maybe just a degenerate phatic function. For themselves though, ease of generation and interpretation is an adaptation to human psyche and society that may evolve to be quite contrary to our interests, particularly to truth. Such an adaptation may lead to their epidemic explosion or persistence. As Daniel Dennett (1991) has said, it’s a case of “how words do things with us.”

Many narratives have similar self-serving adaptations. Good fiction is like good metaphor. It uses narrative for our interests?like truth?rescuing it from the self-serving functions of received, clichéd narrative. Significantly, like the term literal, the term fiction has a selection history characterized by metaphorical use. Etymologically, its primary English reference, like that of poetry, may have been to a

fashioned or fabricated narrative composition, and its references to things feigned, imaginary, fanciful, misleading, deceitful, dissimulating and so on, may be johnny-come-latelies. Even allowing appeals to the Latin etymon *ingere* (to fashion), just what sense is primary and what is metaphorical is a question about the contingencies of the selection history of a term bandied about in the psychic and social environment of the self-descriptions of human communication. Like questions of origin in the context of any selection history, it is not going to discover any authentic, original meaning, nor the truth about the phenomenon of fiction. Any truth about fiction is going to have to be about fiction right up to now, when the term has various literal meanings ranging from fabricated untruth to a work or kind of modern (usually literary, cinematic or televisual) narrative art. For a modern artistic project designed to do such things (among many others) as test the adequacy of factual reference, any theory of fiction is likely to be sorely tested by time, if only because fictions themselves will continue to test the adequacy of theories of fiction. No wonder then that theories of fiction resort to fiction in order to be true. We might be tempted say that one of the most frequently voiced theories of fiction is a lie: namely, that fiction is a lie. However, it is a fiction; and read as such, quite true.

59.4 The Selection of Functions

Questions about functional relations in communication really need to be considered in the historical context of the coevolution of the brain and symbolic culture. In this context, functional analysis must be directed at the result of what are two interanimating selection processes: genetic and memetic. Bearing in mind that the actual terms *literal* and *fictional* are both etymologically specific to written culture and somewhat anachronistic (and metaphorical) when extended beyond that context, let's assume that they may be extended, metaphorically and as they are, to non literary linguistic acts and then make the following assumption: the claim that fictional language is parasitic on what is deemed to be the normal, binding, literal use of language implies that there is an evolved neurophysiological and social symbolic use for language in its literal form and this in turn provides the functional means for communicating in fictional forms; further, it implies that we could have literal usage without fictional usage but not vice versa. It might mean something else depending on whether we take parasitism to be a logical, ethical or functional relation, or one of various other relations of historical priority such as evolutionary or teleological. In this assumption I have taken it to be the functional relation of a functional means to an end, a relation which, from the micro-perspective of the functional process, is historical, causal and asymmetrical, even if, from a greater time scale, functional relations might be effectively detemporalised and treated as the functional states of systems. None of Austin, Searle, Derrida or Habermas reflects on this all too handy ambiguity that infects the concept of functional relation. Consequently the ambiguity infects claims and counterclaims about priority and parasitism.

It might also have been better to have considered a functional relation between literal and fictive uses of human symbolic communication generally. However this would have been a less intuitively clear assumption. Even so, when dealing with the restricted claims about language, it is important to reflect on the general case; and it should be noted now that, despite the assumed authenticity and historical precedence of spoken language, the ancient multimedia nature of human symbolic communication is something that, right from the outset, would seem to speak against the assumption of any special priority or normality of the literal.

It is my contention that the assumption of the functional priority of the literal is wrong for the following reason: The communicative means supplied by

physiological and social evolution are capable of both literal and fictive communicative uses, and both these usages depend on each other by virtue of the peculiar nature of human symbolic communication. The interdependency of the literal and the fictive?and of other uses of language whether deemed to be normal or non normal?arises because the kind of conditional inferences that underlie the processing of symbolic reference and narrative argument demand counterfactual as well as factual assumptions. For a symbolic, social and intentional animal, the world is not only a totality of facts; it is a totality of facts and counterfacts. It is a totality of manifest meanings not of things, a totality of possible representations of events and states.

In the context of the coevolution of the brain and symbolic communication, a particular neurophysiological design or capability has been selected because it was the means to useful symbolic representational and inferential processing and communicative transmission. This new symbolic ability was the functional, neurophysiological means upon which a number of psychically and socially distinguishable communicative uses were parasitic. Most important amongst these uses in terms of phylogenetic selection advantage are things like the communicative representation of goal-oriented processes in a contingent environment, in particular social goals in a social environment, and especially communicative goals themselves. It is precisely such representations, in the face of time and others, that construct the world as a totality of contingent meanings. As I argue below, in order to infer what others mean from what they say we have to entertain a number of counterfactual conditions.

The kinds of communications produced by such a neurophysiology have their own social evolution. And, indeed, present neurophysiology has probably evolved in a selection environment where symbolic communications had already become a major phylogenetic selection pressure. Deacon (345) has suggested that the emergence of symbols as the principle source of phylogenetic selection is “the origin of humanness”, “the diagnostic trait of *Homo symbolicus*.” Social symbolic evolution (or physiological evolution for that matter) is complicated enough, but this coevolutionary process would seem to be especially tangled. At the very least we need to distinguish functional designs of organisms for genetic selection from functional designs of communications for cultural selection. While communication has its phylogenetically selected “biological” functions, other “social” functions such as communicability are culturally selected and supervene on the former. The former are physiological adaptations that ultimately favour the survival and reproduction of the organism’s genes. The latter are social adaptations that ultimately favour the survival and communicative reproduction of social entities and include things like memorability, learnability, ease of generation and interpretation, replicability, communicative relevance (e.g. truth, beauty, entertainability) and textual persistence for human psyche. Still other individual “psychic” functions are those personalised communicative functions that a subject uses or takes as her or his own meanings. The scare quotes are to indicate that when we are talking about humans, the biological, the social and the psychic subsume one another: society is biological; and psyche is both social and the environment of society (see Luhmann 1984). Especially in the context of social history (but I suspect also to some extent in the context of phylogeny in a cultural environment) functional designs are being adapted and transformed willy-nilly to new social, psychic and organismic purposes. In the social sphere, they may well have been leap-frogging one another throughout their evolution, just as, now, the literal, fictive, ironic and metaphoric functions of communication may all use and leap frog one another in a single sentence or narrative. In such a context, which function

comes first hardly seems to matter compared to which comes last. Besides, whatever came first was itself parasitic on something else anyway. Parasitism, like mediation, is universal.

59.5 Naïve Categories in the Self-Description of Linguistic Communication

The functional differentiation of literal, ironic, metaphorical and other uses of symbolic communication is a culturally evolved categorisation resulting from social selection processes. As a range of categories that divide up linguistic functions in particular at around the micro discursive level of the proposition rather than the argument (which includes dialogue), they are not mutually exclusive nor sharply divided categories, nor does any one category exhaust another. We might say, though, that they parasitise one another. They are somewhat arbitrarily chosen, according to such localised social selection processes as have applied when naïve psychic and social self-descriptions have replicated throughout various historically specific contexts. Except for important differences in communicative technologies, the selection pressures for the categorisation are largely inherent in linguistically constructed psyche and society, so they are largely pan cultural, and to that extent the evolution of the categorical structure has been convergent in the various human societies. This is most evident in the case of society insofar as it is born in a pancultural medium like speech, although once other media take up an important place in communicative transmission, new selection pressures begin to operate with consequent changes in the precise structure of the functional differentiation. Traces of the cultural/technological differences in the categorical structure lie in features like the etymology of the term literal itself, which is literally applicable only to written society.

Insofar as these categories are dependent on the history of communicative media and the history of scientific concepts, they are culturally determined and historically specific. They have different institutional forms for modernity in comparison to their ancestral forms in oral societies without written science and history. While the historical importance of speech and speech acts is undoubted, new media transform earlier functions. They selectively parasitise the functions of earlier media. Even if there were normal and parasitic uses of language in speech at a particular stage in its history, the norms are not the same in written language, and they are different again in, say, cinematic communication. What would be the normal, literal, binding uses of film? Does normal, non-parasitic, filmic action lie in documentary or fiction? And what are the different literalities or factualities involved in, say, the direct telecast of court proceedings, a staged re-enactment of the proceedings, a quoted transcript of the proceedings, a silent movie of the proceedings, an edited replay of the proceedings, a summary, diegetic report of the proceedings telecast from the courthouse steps and a feature film of the trial?

As opposed to such categories as literal, ironic, and metaphoric, the categories of fiction on the one hand and history, theory, myth, and poetry on the other (i.e. non fiction) are more strictly applied to the macro level of argument structure, rather than to that of the proposition. Though metaphorical and ironic use of language may be thought of as somewhat fictive, the term fiction is not usually applied to use at the propositional level. Fictions are narratives, and narratives are arguments. A proposition is only fictional insofar as it is, as Peirce (154) suggested, a kind of rudimentary argument. This functional categorization at the level of a work's argument structure is also a socially (i.e. memetically) selected one. Though it might seem to correspond to the divide between the literal and the other uses at the micro level of propositional communication, this is not a strict correspondence. Rather,

during the course of the social selection of the categorisation, the division at the micro level of propositional use has served as a ready analogy for categorisation at the macro level of argument. But this analogy is a bit of a Procrustean bed. These oh so familiar terms demand reflection on their own memetic constitution. As categorisations of the functional differentiation of the use of communicative symbols, whether at the propositional or argument level, they get replicated and selected because, to the intuitions of socially (particularly linguistically) formed psyche, they are easily learnt and communicated; and they are adequate for most everyday (if not for scientific) purposes. In particular, of course, they are perfectly adequate, and therefore all too seductively replicable, for self-descriptions of their own culturally selected, normatively construed ontology of linguistic and symbolic use.

59.6 *Mimesis*

Non-fiction?factual, referential discourse?though it makes an overall validity claim for its representation of actuality, does this by employing propositions and sub-arguments that do not necessarily make such claims. Factual and literal discourse can and must use counterfactual propositions, consider possible worlds and display assumptions without asserting them, if only to represent the fact that people think or might think about these things. Something as important to factual discourse or normal, literal discourse as the interrogative, may involve the display of an assumption, a likeness of which, if true, would be regarded by the questioner as relevant (Sperber & Wilson, 25). Similarly, the imperative?including Donne's "Go and catch a falling star"?does not represent an actuality. Irony, metaphor, examples, jokes, allegory and so on are all non literal elements of declarative, factual discourse, and all function as premises in the inferential processes of factual discourse. Metaphor, in particular, though the epitome of what is not literal, is, even in its classically lyric context, strongly referential. As Richard Wilbur asked, "Why is a thing most itself when likened?" Meanwhile in fiction, factual and literal premises are employed as part of the fiction's argument, while fictional works, as social facts, are to be read as significant historical documents.

All these actions that transform literal and factual communication, and that fiction shamelessly exploits, involve the kind of leaping in function or meaning upon which a selection process might eventually confer its imprimatur. In poetic metaphor and in the art of fiction we rehearse the transformation of literal and factual forms insofar as they are self-replicating social norms or symbolic forms that may be antagonistic to human interest?especially the human interest in truth. At the propositional level, ironic and metaphorical uses may involve the attenuation of reference: the inference of the reference is not immediately accessible. However of all the categories, fiction is the one that persists in maintaining the attenuation of reference throughout its entire argument. Whereas irony eventually refers mimetically to something?whether to an earlier speaker of a text or to an earlier expression of a text or to a socially replicated attitude to a text or ambiguously to all three of these things?a fiction's attenuation of reference achieves a kind of self-reference to its own would-be narrative autonomy. A work of fiction is a kind of monad, but one in which all the windows are left open.

Given the prevalence of imitation in primate nature, it is unlikely that the evolution of communication would ever have been free from mimetic, proto-fictive communicative actions. Such imitative actions may well have copied the empirical form of a communicative action, but in the service of a new function or a new meaning?perhaps a learning function, or a socially binding function like that of ritual, or (as in irony) reference to the first meaning or to its meaner. Making copies and

likenesses is an action with the potential for extraordinary utility: the terms replication, imitation and mimesis each suggest slightly different functional values within this field. Language is not alone among symbolic systems in remaining deeply imitative or iconic: the relation between each of the empirical event, the perception of it, the concept, the utterance and the report of the utterance, The cat sat on the mat, is one of likeness. As Peirce (158) and Wittgenstein (#4.01 - 4.022) suggested, the sense, including the literal meaning, of the utterance involves or refers to a likeness of its schematic propositional form?namely, to the perception or concept of the empirical event. That is, as likenesses, they share logical implications. And this means that we still have to process the proposition in the context of some assumptions about a possible world even in order to reveal its explicit, literal meaning or what Sperber and Wilson call its explicature. The literal usage demands that we entertain assumptions about which cat and which mat, and when, and what kind of sitting.

This is simply in accordance with Frege's (1892) insight into the truth conditions of a sentence: to understand a sentence is to know what would be the case if it were true (Wittgenstein #4.024). Such a counterfactual way of putting it immediately suggests that even a literal meaning depends on assumptions about a possible world or context. For even if the sentence is about an ostensibly indicated empirical phenomenon?even if a cat has just sat on a mat before our very eyes?we could still take the utterance to be referring to another cat or mat, and it would still be doing this literally, because literal meaning is not restricted to immediate, ostensive reference. If someone said to us "The cat sat on the mat" when this was empirically obvious and redundant information, our search for the relevance of the utterance might, depending on context, lead us to assume that the speaker is talking?and still literally?about another cat or mat. The point might be that the speaker is trying to tell us that this is not the mat we had assumed it was, but one that we particularly didn't want to get cat fur on. Stress on the verb might be used to indicate such a sense. If the speaker uttered the sentence without such intonation, as if it were simply an announcement of a particularly mundane event that was manifest to both of us, then most likely, and less literally, the relevant sense might lie in the speaker's noting that a stock phrase in English pronunciation had just been enacted before us, or the speaker might even be giving us a lesson in English pronunciation, or being sarcastic about stock phrases used in pronunciation lessons. If I were to write, "The dog lay on the log," you would be right to assume that I was referring to the sentence "The cat sat on the mat."

When language refers to linguistic acts or texts, the mimetic, not the literal, is the norm. Wallace Stevens was pretty much right when he said, "Life consists of propositions about life." Such a lot of communication is about communication, and has had to be throughout its biological and social evolution. The reflexive and mimetic are at least as 'normal' or as 'prior' as the literal. Primarily, gossip is about gossip, rumour is about rumour, legend about legend, myth about myth, history about historical documents. Fiction is about narration?among other things. And these 'other things' follow and are recursively embedded in a spoken or unspoken, written or unwritten Have you heard that...It is said that...The story goes that...The records show that.... Aristotle said that the art of narrative consists in the mimesis of life, and, he might have added, especially the mimesis of communicative, narrative life.

59.7 Symbolic Communication

Whether a sentence is literal or a fact is not the primary thing. Language has to represent possibility as much as it has to, and in order to represent actuality, whether communicative or otherwise, in all its contingency. The representation of what is not

actual is one kind of function of human communication upon which the culturally evolved functions of fiction and literal communication both supervene. In the context of an essay 'On Freedom', Leibniz wrote about how he eventually came to understand the importance of recognising the contingency of things. Though his thinking is couched in terms of an ontology of possible and existent things rather than in terms of representations of actuality, it is an incipient recognition of the connection between the practical (we might say biological) exigencies of representing contingency and, eventually, the evolved, cultural practice of fiction.

For if certain possibles never exist, then existing things are not always necessary; otherwise it would be impossible for other things to exist instead of them, and so all things that never exist would be impossible. For it cannot be denied that many stories, especially those which are called 'romances', are possible, even if they do not find any place in this series of the universe, which God has chosen?unless someone supposes that in the vast magnitude of space and time there exist the regions of the poets, where you could see wandering through the world King Arthur of Britain, Amadis of Gaul and Dietrich von Bern. (106)

All of this is related to the nature of human symbols, and to how a symbol is not simply an index.¹ The symbol-to-symbol relations of language?the syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations of word to words and phrases to phrases, and the inferential relations between sentences, rather than just the indexical relations between words and things or sentences and events?are the kinds of relations that are primary for symbolic language, even for literal use. Certain kinds of words have been selected to have an especially prestigious relation to what has been selected (to some extent culturally) as the especially ontologically relevant category of things: the singular term can be used as a kind of symbolically devised index of an individual thing, and such words can in turn function (symbolically and in a context) to tag a sentence's indexical relation to its referent?that is, to an event or state involving the particular thing. Demonstratives are also used to signify this indexical use of symbolic reference. Insofar as language is symbolic, syntactic, conceptual and inferential it is always something other than the simple, indexical relation, in terms of which the literal is naively thought. Even those classic examples of an index?the pointing finger and the arrow?are, in their now inevitably social context, mediated by human symbolic nous, as is the indexical, empirical (and therefore social) relation of an effect to a cause. (Empirical science's methodological rule about the social observability of empirical observations was made possible by the insight that if particular observations weren't socially observable then that social observability could be made virtually real by the socially selected conventions of repeatability, or, more accurately, quasi-repeatability. An empirical observation is thus a replica of a type, and as such, a symbolic act; and the empirical, like so many things in the natural as well as the cultural world, depends upon the ruse of a virtual reality.)

For humans, the relation of a singular term to a single thing is never as simple as that of a pure index, for concepts inform such terms and what they refer to. The terms have a conceptual constitution, and concepts belong to a web of interanimating concepts. They are not even self-identical. Furthermore, the utterance of a single term like "Cat!" is immediately interpreted as a one word sentence, the sense and reference of which demands interpretation. It might mean, "There is a cat." Or it might mean, "The word that I have been trying to remember is cat." Since the truth of propositions is not just a matter of adequacy to some event or state but also of adequacy for some teleological (including, typically, communicative) purpose, the conceptual breakdown

of a term can and must be variable, as metaphor demonstrates, and as the historical, memetic drift of the meaning of terms also demonstrates. The notion of a normal, literal meaning of a term is clearly problematic. But when we speak of literal use we are usually referring to the use of whole propositions to refer to events or states, and propositions have an even less direct indexical relation to their referents.

Roland Barthes (1973, 9) said that literal “denotation is not the first meaning but pretends to be so; under this illusion, it ultimately is no more than the last of the connotations.” He wrote about literal denotation turning back on itself and indicating its own existence. Such reflexivity, it may already have been gathered, is a crucial and remarkably useful functional device of human symbolic communication. Indeed, self-reference is a defining characteristic of symbols; any replication or communicative embodiment of a symbol refers to a rule?as Peirce claimed, the symbol itself is actually the rule?which is the condition of interpretation of the communication. Many imagine the directness of the literal to be guaranteed by the direct, unequivocal character of the mutual apprehension of solid empirical objects, but in the context of the dynamics of symbolic nature and the drift of historical meaning, this directness relies on the symbolic self reference of language to reconstitute, as it were, its social pretension to ‘natural’, direct indexical reference. The literal, supposedly spelt out letter-by-letter and word-by-word, is a very useful fiction in a symbolically mediated conceptual web.

If we understand the symbolic reference of a sentence according to the Fregean principle about knowing what the case would be if it were true, we are not dealing with indexical truth. The notion that we are probably lies behind the common sense assumption about the functional priority of the literal. We cannot confirm our knowledge of what would be the case simply by observation of the empirical context of the utterance, especially when the context is that of a philosophical example. Instead, even in literal use, we are dealing with counterfactuals?with what would be the case if it were true. In order to speak literally and to say what we mean, we still have to mean symbolically.

The phylogenetically evolved ability to communicate symbolically is, at the same time, an ability to process and to learn to process quite complex conditionals. Linguistic symbols themselves are not simply directly coded rules or laws for generating interpretations; in order to learn linguistic symbols, a child has to learn by postponing obvious or primary associations like indices. The symbolic association is not so simple as that of sign and object or even sign and event or state, because learning the relation between symbols and what they mean is conditional upon other, higher order information, or higher order patterns of association?that is, those that need not be obvious in such a small sample of instances of usage as an infant is likely to encounter before learning grammar. The particular symbolic associations of linguistic grammar are those that could, in Deacon’s (137) terms, “colonise ever younger brains”, because the higher order conditionals involved in learning them demand the very shifts of level that younger brains are most readily given to making. Deacon claims that the traits or rules of linguistic grammar are adaptations to the peculiar memetic selection pressures that are brought to bear by the inferential processing of developing infants. Meanwhile, a competent speaker must still process the complex conditionals of narrative and other discursive inference, suspending primary interpretations, while seeing the propositions as opening onto many possible strings of various and calculable likelihood, whose eventual outcome may well reconfigure some supposedly obvious initial interpretation.

Such reconfiguration of interpretation is a necessity in human communication, and one of which narrative art makes a virtue. As Aristotle said in the *Poetics* (1452a),

a plot in which the narrated events go against expectation and yet, as it turns out, are consequential, thereby causes poetic wonder. The fact that some genres of fiction make a fetish of this only proves its significance to narrative aesthetics. In addition, the gratifying character of such a fetish is probably a case of human emotional experience providing evidence of the evolutionary importance of just the kind of rapid, processing of conditional inferences that symbolic communication demands. What I call gratification is a content specific emotional affect that, however urgently, only engages limited cognitive and emotional resources. In terms of psychological evolution such gratification is an affective encouragement for and indicator of useful and rapid, information processing?the kind of psychological adaptation that is likely to have had a selection advantage during human evolution. Of course there is a trade between speed and accuracy. Mere gratification is emotionally and therefore cognitively restricted, and such an affect may be deceptive. Like the senses, the emotions can mislead, as Robert Gray says, 'when we rely upon only one of them.' Good art engages us more sensually and in doing so testifies to its greater intellectual engagement.

Symbolic language and communication, at both its argument level and at its propositional level, relies on a brain that can deal with complex counterfactual conditionals. Symbolic communication and human counterfactual conditional reasoning are coevolved and parasitic on one another. So the notion that fiction is parasitic on some logically or necessarily presupposed normal, literal use of language must be regarded as a superseded conceptual relic left over from the unreflected, folk psychology origins of the philosophy of language.

60. *Reaching understanding.*

There is another question of priority in the philosophy of communication: Which comes first, language or the kind of self conscious subjects who speak it? Is the super subjective, social character of language the result of already self conscious subjects putting their thoughts into words, or is language prior to these subjects and a condition of the formation of human subjective self consciousness. The former view is the common sense one. Phenomenological events are deemed to be the basis of linguistic expression: thoughts are put into words and thereby communicated to others. In its plausibility this view satisfies the intuitive prejudices of self observing psyche, it is speciously supported by the fateful bodily self integrity of the organism, and it grounds the pathos of solipsism.

The second view—that the super subjective social character of language is the condition for the formation of individuated consciousness, or that there is no subjectivity without intersubjectivity—is sometimes epitomised (and sometimes ridiculed) in the terms of the structuralist saying that *language speaks us*. Putting it this way—that is with some wit and irony—was an excuse for the literal minded to mock the idea, but as Jürgen Habermas (1985, p.379) has pointed out, there is a long history of making such claims. It stretches from Willhelm von Humboldt and takes in such different thinkers as the American pragmatist social psychologist George Herbert Mead, and the later Wittgenstein, not to mention many a structuralist semiotician; and the claim is now, in some version, widely accepted in the humanities. Habermas has recognised that the tradition (or the convergent traditions) is central to the philosophical discourse of modernity, and he has tied it in to what he thinks of as the linguistic turn of philosophy in this period. For Habermas, this turn to the philosophy of language was seen as a way of shaking free from the limitations of the philosophy of the subject after the withering critique of subject centred reason. It was

also a way for both anti-psychologistic sceptics of the philosophy of mind and those who asserted the irreducibility of consciousness to take language, rather than the unimaginable hypercomplexities of the generation of consciousness, as their proper object of inquiry.

Habermas was in some sense enslaved by his discerning version of the history of modern philosophy. His move to a communicative rather than a subject centred concept of reason seems somewhat like a conveniently prescribed historical move, an instance of abstract innovation in theory based on extrapolation from his chronology of philosophical progress rather than on curious inquiry into the phenomena. Consequently he is hemmed in both by expectations about the historical course of philosophy and by unreflected prejudices about the irreducibility of consciousness. His dismissal of English language analytical materialism and its interest in the mind/body relation is couched in terms that make a revealing appeal to philosophical fashion, and therefore to the innovative principle of modernity in its most abstract form.

In Anglo-Saxon countries to this day analytical materialism keeps discussions of the mind/body relationship alive; to this very day, physicalist or other scientific background convictions underwrite the demand that everything intuitively known be alienated from the perspective of a natural scientific observer—that we understand ourselves in terms of objects. (1985, p.384)

Apart from an understandable impatience with what have often been naive analyses whose task was always going to be, and remains, a difficult one, the appeal to fashion is just facile. And the pejorative term *scientistic*—though often justified when, especially technocratic, scientific institutions degenerate into memetic, anti-scientific ruts—cannot be summoned just to support some dogmatic critique of the perspective of either the empirical sciences or “analytical materialism.” Hegel’s critique of scepticism remains as enough warning that the critique of science, or the various critiques of positivism, or empiricism, or analytical materialism, are not absolute, but are each stages in the history of science.

Habermas represents the culmination of the tradition he sees as the linguistic turn in modern philosophy, the tradition of the philosophy of language severed from psychology, or, as he puts it in his essay on the critique of the theory of meaning (1988, p.57) “removed from the formative context of a specific psychology of language.” Even his more sociological approach seems itself to be somewhat removed from the formative context of a specific sociology of language, because of his scepticism about a science of society. He is troubled finding a role for philosophy among the functionally differentiated modern sciences, so, while he is careful to quarantine his thought from the theoretical consequences of the claims of these sciences, he ends up leaving philosophy with only a residual bridging function, as he says (1985, p.208) for translating between expert cultures and common sense.

His unwitting commitment to a determined version of historical development is ironic in a writer who has, as he has said, attempted “to free historical materialism from its philosophical ballast (1984, vol 2, p.383).” More ironic perhaps is the repudiation of objectivist understanding in a philosopher of language who stresses the importance of speakers’ making criticisable validity claims about something in the world. For Habermas,

The telos of reaching understanding, inherent in linguistic structures, compels the communicative actors to alter their perspective; this finds expression in the

necessity of going from the objectivating attitude of success-oriented action, which seeks to *effect* something in the world, over to the performative attitude of a speaker who seeks to *reach an understanding* with a second person about something. (1988, p.81)

It must first be stressed that an empirical object is not simply the object of a subject's success-oriented, autopoietic attitude to it but, as Von Foerster (1981, p.280) intimated, it is the object of a social observation of such subject centred observations. It is thus more like Habermas's mutually understood something in the world, though even this way of putting it misses the importance of the recursions of observation involved in the observability (or repeatability) of observations of empirical objects. (More on this, though, later.) It is precisely because an empirical object is an object of mutual understanding (and therefore no longer merely "intuitively known", but "alienated from the perspective of a natural scientific observer") that it is an object of successful, effective actions: empirical, and *ipso facto*, mutual understanding informs effective technology.

It is on the basis of the mutual relation of speakers to *something* in the world, that Habermas insists on the propriety of the distinction between normal, literal and binding uses on the one hand and other non normal, parasitic uses. He seems to feel compelled to hold on to a notion of the normal character of literal use because he thinks it provides the only ground for speakers to reach agreement about something; otherwise communicants are severed from their coordinating relation to the world and intersubjectivity is dissolved into the relativism of myriad subjectivities. The world as the reference of literal speech acts is needed as a kind of standard for the coordination of subjects. *Intersubjectivity*, a concept that picks out an unsteady, miasmal phenomenon to say the least, needs the grounding of a real world that is the referent of the normal—i.e. literal—use of language, and that just *is*.

Unable to countenance an objective theory of mind, Habermas has to limit his objectivity to that of the familiar objects of literal language, and use consensus about these as the unifying standard for the super subjective construct he calls intersubjectivity. He thus recognises a coordinating world insofar as it is the familiar background ontology of the common sense lifeworld but not insofar as it is the unfamiliar ontology of the special sciences. His communicative reason is thus grounded on the sedimented and often superseded ontology of memetically evolved common sense—like what Searle has called the *Background*—although this grounding is not so much because such common sense is somehow authentic (it is often a nightmare from the past weighing on the brains of the living) but because it is *common*. As his guarantee of intersubjectivity, he not only ignores shared psychology and coevolutionary ancestry, he prefers simply to use the old intuition about the preponderance of objects, in which objects are still understood in contradistinction to and as the nemesis of subjects—that is still as the unchanging or refractory material things that ultimately defy subjectivity—rather than as, also, effectively stable tokens in the social recursion of observations. The literal, understood as the explicit reference to such objects, is assumed to ground communicative, intersubjective reason as opposed to the old subject centred reason, because otherwise there is no possibility of "grounding *my* understanding of something with reference to the *possibility of consensus* we reach with one another concerning it (1985, p.382)."

Habermas is in particular need of things in the world as a coordinating standard because he can't or won't assume psychological or sociological coordination, let alone shared psychological architecture that actually processes information about others. Such architecture is evolved, and it is also intersubjective

architecture. Intersubjectivity in this sense is part of subjectivity; we are born into society and to be social.

Habermas's notion of an inherent *telos* of language looks like another case of a claim about an historical phenomenon couched in transhistorical terms. The successful use of human linguistic design is the reason for its selection, so like any evolutionary *telos* or function it is a matter of historical fact. Language seems so variously useful that pinning down one inherent function is hardly a simple task. To refer to individuals reaching understanding about something, or managing to enlarge their shared cognitive environment is to refer to a general communicative function that seems it would be, and has been, eminently useful in evolutionary terms. But then, the function of deception would be and has been useful too. Certainly a purely expressive function for language seems less useful than a communicative one. Expression would have a use perhaps in self formation, or in planning (by orally documenting and memorising) the sequence of extended courses of action—especially if it were parasitic on communication anyway—but in these cases it would not be purely expressive. Assuming even the historical priority of a communicative function, there is no essential function or inherent *telos* of linguistic communication, there are only the historical functions that language has actually been used for. And, perhaps now, there are functions that, teleologically, we think we can use it for, or that normatively, it is to be used for.

The question of the function of communicative symbolic meaning is a question about the meaning of meaning, and given the variability of human meaning, one suspects that it would be selected for its very function of varying communicative function. The variety and range of communication's functions now, suggests that, throughout the coevolution of the brain and language, different functions may have predominated. The history of language may have been one of turbulent leap-frogging, parasitism and transformation of functions, some leaping into historical prominence before themselves being parasitised for other purposes. All this would have taken place in the hot house environment of a social creature whose own emergent designing consciousness would have accelerated the processes of the coevolution of mind and language. In one life, in one day, in one conversation the functional leaps between truth and deception or self deception, between explicit or ironic representation, or between diegetic or mimetic use epitomise the turbulence of the functional history of language. Perhaps, at different times, truth has been parasitic on deception, and deception on truth, diegesis parasitic on mimesis and mimesis, which is always parasitic, parasitic on diegesis; and perhaps agreement and reaching understanding have been parasitic on disagreement and misreading, or vice versa.

Saying what you mean about something by putting a thought about it into explicit lexico-grammatical form is a familiar formula for the literal use of language. It is consistent with the notion that finding words for internal events called thoughts determines linguistic expression. Indeed there is a connection between the common sense notions of the priority of subjective agency and the priority of "normal, literal, binding use." The subject is presumed to be the original author of thoughts in some proto propositional mental form, and then the thoughts are uttered. Yet whatever a thought is, I doubt that it is in any simple way a determinate, subjectively authored, pre-existing mental representation that is then encoded directly into an explicit literal utterance. At the very least there is no thought and no sentence that is not dependent for its meaning on its conceptual context. Even the most explicit, literal utterance still needs to be inferentially understood in a context.

In particular, propositions are uttered as the objects of certain attitudes. While a thought might be given an explicit propositional form, the speakers attitude towards

the proposition—whether they believe it, wish it, hope it, deny it, imagine it, suspect it, doubt it, mock it or just wonder about it—is a kind of accompanying, embedding affect, and this affect is often not signified by propositional or verbal means. Unless the attitude is actually stated in sentences like “I believe that....,” the inference of attitude depends on things like intonation, body language, or discursive context. The non propositional character of this aspect of communication signals that its interpretation is typically a matter of affective experience. This experience has a peculiarly social rather than a solipsistic, subjective character: it is a matter of our evolved capacity to process information about others, a matter of social nous. The manifest attitude of a speaker towards an uttered proposition determines what kind of speech act the utterance is, and what kind of attitude the listener should take if the act is to be one of felicitous communication.

I suspect that the mental process of formulating a proposition for utterance is also used to construct or formulate a so called thought for consciousness. The process of formulating a proposition for utterance picks a thought out from many other related but unconscious representations. Daniel Dennett (1991, p.309) has suggested that a conscious proposition is recursively embedded in a “higher” unconscious representation. I may say or think *This paragraph has just begun*, or embed this in the higher order sentence *I think this paragraph has just begun*. We rarely embed a thought or a proposition in more than one more level of recursion. Fictions prefer to leave their embedding context unrepresented altogether. Dennett cites the argument that “ what distinguishes a conscious state from a non conscious state...is not some inextricable intrinsic quality but the straightforward property of having a higher order accompanying thought that is about the state in question.” The conscious thought, the one we attribute to an *I*, or the one that occurs to *me*, is a representational reduction of a web of mostly unconscious representations. That reduction involves abstracting the thought from its embedding representations. In turn, the subject or putative agent of that consciousness—the *I* of the propositional attitude—is, as Mead (1934, p.174) appreciated, a kind of *ex post facto* phenomenon, not a noumenal ego-in-itself, but a remembered affect: “If you ask then, where directly in your experience the *I* comes in, the answer is that it comes in as an historical figure.” Though Kant, in his chapter on the Paralogisms of Pure Reason, recognised a logical distinction between the determining and the determinable subject, the true distinction is an historical, narrative one, rather than the merely logical one that Kant was willing to recognise. Subjectivity has to be produced by empirical, historical processes. The *I* and its apparently originary function is a kind of historically produced phenomenon that is only appreciated after the fact in the memory of that which has already been the attitudinal condition of a thought or uttered proposition. As Von Foerster (p.268) put it, “I am the observed relation between myself and observing myself.”

The principle that each proposition or thought is expressible in some sentence of every natural language is trivial if a proposition is just an expressed mental representation. It may be though that some imaginable or visualisable proposition (or quasi proposition) may only be verbally expressed in a reduced form, and that for all practical purposes grammar abstracts and loses information that video or drama, for instance, might save. Saying what I mean by putting it in syntactic propositional form, or showing what I mean by putting it in dramatic or video form, is a way of making what I mean and making conscious what I mean at the same time, and it is therefore a way of making an ego. Not only does an individual’s ontogeny take place in a social, linguistic environment, ontogeny uses language for its construction of ego. That is, self conscious subjects are made from propositional acts, and cannot simply be posited (as self-describing psyche might like to do) as the self-identical, pre-existing

authors of propositions. As we extend our communicative phenotype from speech and gesture into the disembodied media of print and screen we extend the possibilities of self consciousness. Nowadays experience can be like a movie.

We don't only use words and propositions to make ourselves. We make narratives out of propositions, and we make narratives to make ourselves for ourselves and for others for the future. We risk being the creatures of our own and others plots. By our own self description, we are designing animals, and intentional consciousness designs its designs on the future as those of its precious *I*.

In performative, communicative actions like the promise, in giving my word and keeping it, I make myself. That is, my psyche makes itself not simply as an organism persisting against the depredations of time, but as a persisting and tolerably consistent set of narratives for itself and for others. By 'tolerably consistent' I mean that apparent contradictions may be treated as having inferentially accessible resolutions. Promises need not in fact be literal: a promise to fly someone to the moon will rarely involve space flight. In any particular ethical context a promise is not just a case of the austere and onerous duty of the categorical imperative, or of the stoic Kantian resignation in which the autonomy of the will is parasitic on, and to that extent susceptible to damage by, the heteronomy of alienated words and their sentiments. Such words are doing things with us, yet they are words of a language whose meaning is contingent upon historical context (the intersubjective context of a marriage vow, say, can collapse) and whose inherent telos is no guarantee of truth, and no guarantee against deception or self deception. Practical reason cannot be categorical because pure reason cannot be pure.

Our freedom is not just the freedom of an unconditioned cause, or of a fabulous transcendental subject that the self delusory native cunning of intentional consciousness might like to make itself up into. There is no getting out of nature for the sake of freedom. Throughout the period of modernity, freedom has been noted for its antinomical character. One version of this is that in order for freedom to be a fact it has to be a kind of fiction. Kant put the fictive, performative character of freedom thus; "Every being that cannot act except under the idea of freedom is just for that reason in a practical point of view really free (1785, p.280)." Freedom as such is something socially convened, something counterfactual, a fiction. While it might pretend to occupy the obscure areas, the accidentality that defies the principles that map out empirical causation, in fact, like fiction, it occupies the performative, semantic opportunities that the temporality of meaning opens in the fabric of history. Freedom is experienced as the performative imagination of future courses of action. Freedom only arises from the possible worlds our narrative arguments or teleology can make for ourselves in nature. So freedom is the sublime telling of oneself and keeping on of telling oneself, the emotional and intellectual task of facing and risking a narrative struggle imposed by the words and deeds one makes one's own. Merely to speak of the felicitous use of the speech act called promising does not capture the awful fascination of responsibility for a creature mired in a language whose function has been both truth and deception. Promising is a cultural institution, a memetically perpetuated moral norm; but, as the psychology of conscience and intersubjective social reckoning suggests, it is more than that. What Nietzsche called nature's breeding an animal with the right to make promises is a task that humans have performed memetically upon their memetic selves.

Habermas felt constrained to derive the supersubjective status of language as something prior to subjects from a claim about the logical priority of literal, binding uses of language. Such a claim is not only a lifeworld prejudice, it is consistent with that other lifeworld intuition about the priority of isolated subjective consciousness,

so it seems to be a way for linguistically constructed intersubjectivity to pick itself up from the predicament of the subject's organismic isolation. However Habermas did not need to posit this assumption about the priority of literal use, nor should he have without empirical evidence.

Speakers reach understanding about events and states in each of the empirical, phenomenological and heterophenomenological worlds they inhabit, and they enlarge their mutual cognitive environment without speaking literally, without saying what they mean, and without putting conscious calculable thoughts into explicit propositional utterances. Literal uses are not so much a norm as a limiting condition: a text that only communicated what its propositional form encoded would be an unusually impoverished one. Even a literal use relies on some inferential development of its contextual meaning before it yields its explicit meaning, while any derived implications are communicated non literally. Usually we have several communicative goals, and several assumptions we want to make manifest to one another, and we choose our words accordingly—or they choose us. Rather than a convention of normal or literal use, a situation of intersubjective collusion is what is needed. In the situation of communicative collusion, speakers frame their speech acts in a context of action that has evolved as socially self defining in the context of speakers' individual, contingent and recursive representations of each other.

People can do this because, for one thing, they have a psychological design for perceiving socially significant signs and processing them so that they yield socially significant information about others' intentions and attitudes to events and to people and to what they say. Their psychological architecture is already doing the intersubjective work unconsciously, behind conscious linguistic and other communicative actions—something that Freud appreciated, and that has now been recognised by evolutionary psychologists (Cosmides and Tooby, 1992, p.90; Dennett, 1994, p379). They do it by means of inferential processes that do not need the explicit propositional forms of literal usage. Neither gestural communication nor the interpretation of body language involve syntactic propositional forms, so their meaning has to be recovered without resort to the grammar of linguistic propositions. This kind of non verbal, non literal and often unconscious communication was presumably an historical condition for the evolution of linguistic communication. Language and consciousness are both supported by a lot of unconscious mental activity and representation. As Von Foerster (1981, p.268) argued, "Communication is an (internal) representation of a relation between (an internal representation of) oneself with somebody else." However, linguistic communication probably created conditions for an even more sophisticated form of social processing on the part of the human subject.

61. The objectification of meaning.

In order to talk about consciousness, and what we or others are conscious of, we use what Russell (1940, p.210) called expressions of propositional attitude. With consciousness still unexplained, we have no other way of referring to what goes on in the invisible inscape of our own and others intentional experience other than by these peculiar *intentional idioms*, the idioms of the self description of psyche: *to believe that...*, *to hope that...*, *to imagine that...*

Brentano, who revived the scholastic term *intentional* for these inner phenomena, made the empirical inexplicability of intentional consciousness fundamental in his own, even more poignant version of the great Kantian divide between the empirical and the rational: that intentional idioms are not reducible to

idioms about non intentional objects. For modernity, Brentano's move accomplished two things at once. As a methodological move, it licensed everyday talk in intentional idioms, according unimpeachable philosophical dignity to the kind of common sense embodied therein. And for those disenchanted by modernity, and increasingly worried by the imminent demystification of consciousness, irreducible intentionality was to be secular modernity's consoling residue of theology. Brentano need not have cited Aristotle's distinction between *Form* and *Matter* as the source of his distinction between intentional and external experience. He could have cited the prehistory of intentional psychology in the natural idioms of what American philosophers of psychology have called "folk psychology" or "belief and desire psychology". The evidence is that we are phylogenetically designed so that from a very early age we can think about ourselves and others as believing, desiring, thinking creatures; and that the history of social selection has provided us with the relatively childlike conceptual vocabulary for doing so. If we were to accept Brentano's strict division of the intentional from the empirical, the folk science of intentional consciousness that expresses its theories in intentional idioms would itself be the only way to a science of intentional consciousness and, as Hegel might have put it, it would itself already be science.

The philosophy of consciousness as undertaken in irreducible intentional idioms has increasingly had an air of swansong about it. Even the linguistic, semiotic turn in modern philosophy—the move from a philosophy of the subject to a philosophy of language—was a ruse for finding something a bit more objective about subjective experience without getting psychological about it and having to switch to an alien level of empirical description. Initially, an empirical explanation of consciousness seemed unimaginable, but eventually it was as if an empirical psychology of consciousness would, in explaining intentional idioms at a computational or neurological level, reduce them and render both them and the philosophy that needed to employ them obsolete. However these idioms are much more resistant than this; for not only would they otherwise not demand explanation in the first place, any explanation in computational or neurophysiological terms would still need intentional idioms to bring these explanations into the kind of comprehensible, communicative form that intentional consciousness demands.

The way things are represented affects what is represented. To speak of attitudes and propositions is an effect of the schematics of grammar. In order to represent the propositional object of an attitude we recursively embed one sentence in another so that it becomes the grammatical object of a verb of intention. Whatever might seem arbitrary about such a schematisation would be whatever was more an artefact of the culturally evolved and neurological framed mechanics of syntax than it was an adequate representation of the intentional or neurological event or state. It is grammar's symbolic recursions that turn a sentence from a sentence that is true or false into an object of a verb of intention. Our terms have been selected so that, given the exigencies of grammar, we can readily turn the propositional object of social and empirical verbs like *to say* or *to see* into the object of intentional verbs like *to think* or *to believe* or *to fear*. Only a fabulous creature—a proposition—would be at home in either habitat: an abstraction, an idealisation, a fiction. Paul Grice (p.358) has said that we use systems of representation to represent things that cannot represent themselves. So we use sentences to represent propositional objects of intentional attitudes. A propositional object of an intention might seem, if it were, say, an object of belief, to be an originary, authentic subjective meaning. Yet, as an object of any of the gamut of attitudes distributed throughout a population of speakers, a proposition seems more like a kind of universal, objective meaning—as Frege (1892) and Husserl

(1913, pp 209-17) construed it—but both this intuition and the objective character of propositional meaning are themselves artefacts of the biological and social contingencies of human communication.

Whatever is effectively universal or objective about propositional meaning is an effect of the social selection pressures for reaching mutual understanding between speakers. What Quine (1960) called the “radical indeterminacy of translation” is to linguistic evolution what the second law of thermodynamics is to biological evolution. It is the problem communication must overcome. It is also the context and condition of that overcoming. There is no complexity without chaos, no communication without the indeterminacy of translation, or what, after Talcott Parsons, has been called the “double contingency” of communication (Luhmann 1984). Along with the way solipsistic isolation gives way to intersubjectivity, and the way a child learns language from a paucity of linguistic data, the fact that communication is not, in actual social practice, thoroughly indeterminate points to the biological and social universals that frame communication, and must frame it. Whether the functional telos is deemed to be “reaching understanding”, or (as is more in keeping with the actual psychological and social nature of human communication) “enlarging a mutually manifest cognitive environment”, or even if it is deception, there is a selection pressure for such de facto universals, both phylogenetic and memetic.

Even the identification of physical objects as the almost noumenal gold standards of reference—upon which Habermas placed so much reliance in his theory of reaching communicative understanding—has its organismic, proto-subjective, biological aspect, insofar as there are “natural kinds” that the human organism has been selected to represent. The objectification of discrete, human size, extended objects has an ancient biological pertinence. If I point at a rabbit and say *gavagai*, an anthropologist from the distant time and shore of New England—a “radical translator” whose research is methodologically tempered by cautious awareness of the radical indeterminacy of meaning—should think that *gavagai* could mean *there is the fur collar for my coat*, or *there is a very large and uncounted number of hairs* or myriad other things. But a dog, by natural selection initiated into the mysteries of objectification, and untroubled by scepticism or philosophical cavilling about the indeterminacy of meaning, knows the relevance of a self-referring, autopoietic, rabbit organism as well as the translator and I do, and without ceremony chases and eats it. The phylogeny of the design of an organism’s representational functions at the same time designs relevant environmental phenomena for the organism as effectively natural kinds of represented objects. The organism-environment relation is as tight as this.

Besides a shared communicative, brainy, body, what renders communication determinate enough are social, idealising acts of co-ordination such as the institution transmission and social selection of intersubjective norms, and the social systemic identification of self-same, communicatively denoted, empirical objects—as described by Von Foerster. For all of this we might read *lifeworld*, but Habermas did not countenance the shared, sophisticated communicative body, explicitly removing his approach to a theory of meaning from any formative psychological context, nor did he countenance the self definition of self same objects in the context of communication’s recursion of representations of self and other. And he cloaked the nature and origin of the lifeworld in clouds of mystery because he had no way of describing its genesis in the coevolution of psyche and society.

Whatever the individual's authentic contribution to an entertained proposition, it is mediated by the environment of linguistic expression—by the social system of communications. So this contribution is an effect of the way utterances not only refer to and make states and events explicit, but, as uttered, also exert an inward influence to make one's meanings explicit for oneself. These meanings would not have been so, but for having been so put. It is impossible to say what one's authentic individual belief is until one uses others' words to fish belief up from the inchoate, unconscious streams of psyche. We think, as Austin put it, that we do things with words, but as Dennett put it, they do things with us too. There is no reduction of communicative phenomena to solipsistic psychology, let alone to "our genes". We have to take the environment of psyche into account. Strange as it sounds, society is not simply part of the environment of psyche, the population of psyches is part of the environment of society. "The macro-level up to which we should relate the microprocesses in the brain, in order to understand them as psychological is more broadly the level of organism-environment interaction, development and evolution. That level includes social interaction as a particularly important part (Dennett 1987, p.65)." And the level of social interaction has its own history of social selection processes. The selected symbols and norms of a population of speakers shapes the most private intentions of individuals.

We can only say *believes that p* by saying *p*. *Belief* as we now use the term is parasitic on grammar. Functionally and historically, *belief*, as we know it and talk about it as an attitude to propositions, cannot come before the grammar of propositions. On the other hand, whether an individual can believe or entertain or think something before it is grammatically proposed is a question determined at the everyday time scale, and it depends on whether the term *belief* applies to unconscious, pre communicative representation. Our already evolved manner of speaking enables us (and restricts us) to using such a concept as *belief* precisely to *imagine* a preconscious act of intention directed toward a pre communicative representation of information. At the everyday time scale belief may be prior to its grammatical utterance, but at the time scale of social evolution the intentional act called belief could have no object until grammar supplied it with propositions. Such is the leapfrogging of functions and priorities in the history of communication and psyche.

The ontological affect of embedding a sentence or some other quasi proposition inside a sentence, and turning it into a propositional object is strange and wonderful enough. But the ontological affect of referring to various acts or events of intention towards those propositions is even stranger. What the action *belief* insouciantly refers to is only intuited through intentional idioms; to explain it objectively or empirically is so difficult that many still say such intention is irreducible. The problem for intentional idioms is how to refer to intentions so that what we are referring to is mutually manifest. Intentional terms and idioms have been socially selected precisely for this function.

Some acts of intention refer to propositional objects that have a specifically subjective provenance: it seems that only I can say what I believe or desire. Other acts, like *knowing* or *saying*, chart a movement away from the subjective provenance. Unlike observation of the empirical world, the self observation of psychic inscape is not observable. However even my external world—my body's environment—is different from yours. In fact, it is only *like* yours. And the same goes for my internal world as described in my psychic self descriptions: it is like your internal world. Coordinating our references and reaching understanding involves employing descriptions of worlds which are not identical but alike. As we shall see, it is the fact of this being a matter of likeness rather than sameness that makes it more appropriate

to speak of what Sperber and Wilson called *mutual manifestness* rather than of reaching (the same) understanding. Worlds that are logically accessible from one another are *alike*. Communication's enlargement of a mutually manifest world (or cognitive environment) involves the parties to a dialogue inferentially accessing that world, or rather worlds like that world and like one another, from their own egological worlds.

When we analyse intentional idioms we quickly appreciate how hard it is to pin them down precisely. Right from its inception, philosophy came unstuck and had to resort to dialectic in order to come at their meaning. We have Socrates in *Theaetetus* wondering whether *knowledge* is *true belief*, and then, having found that definition wanting, wondering whether it is *true belief* combined with *reasons* to explain it—thus launching the epistemological quest for the grail of certain grounding. We also have Hume distinguishing *belief* from *fiction* on the basis of affect, or the “strength of sentiment”. These are instances of trying to define strictly what dialogue treats as variable but within limits, and what it has therefore selected throughout its history for this function of limited variability. Intentional acts like *belief* and partly intentional, partly social hybrid acts like *knowledge*, and even empirical events are used to refer to different worlds, internal, social and external, in their *comparative similarity*.

To understand another's intention and another's attitude to a proposition are not just exercises in the use of intentional idioms, they are goals or stages in the evolution of communication. Or rather, they are goals and stages in the history of language, as expressed in the *post hoc* language itself. We speak of animals, including our ancestors, as *intending*, *knowing*, *recognising*, *wanting*, and even *thinking* and *believing* propositions, even though these intentional acts are, to varying degrees, strictly human. We speak of other animals this way because we are always using these terms only more or less strictly. Exhortations against anthropomorphism are all very well, but they become like behaviourism: someone who refuses to treat a dog as an intentional animal will not get very far with it. At the very least we have to apply the teleological estimate, as Kant would say, at least problematically. We might say we are speaking metaphorically, which is another way of saying it is a matter of effective or comparative similarity. Likeness is all, as long as it is, as in good metaphor, useful. In the case of fellow humans, their intentional worlds are very like our own, we share the same kinds of brains and we share the same languages to refer to these worlds, and accordingly they are inferentially accessible. When we report another's intentions, or when we indirectly quote another, we inferentially or imaginatively project ourselves into what we infer the other's intentional world was or is like. The indirect quotation or the report of another's inner life is a case of what we would say if we were in that inner world. As Quine (1960, p.219) said, “Casting our real selves thus in unreal roles, we do not generally know how much reality to hold constant.” This is just the kind of problem that we strike when considering counterfactual conditionals: when considering a world where kangaroos have no tails, we have to decide how much of the real world to hold on to when concluding, say, that the consequence of such a condition is that the kangaroos there fall over all the time. When it comes to inferential access to another's intentions, sharing human brains, and sharing conceptual categories and lifeworlds provides a lot of reality to hold constant.

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When philosophers of language tried to analyse the communication of meaning in terms of a speaker's intentions they placed a heavy reliance on the

recursions employed in expressions of propositional attitude. More than any other, the person who launched and pursued this course of inquiry was Paul Grice.

Grice's analysis and his formulations of a speaker's and audience's intentions in relation to one another, have been subject to many criticisms and subsequent reformulations. What most of the formulations and reformulations share is that they employ a number of levels of recursion of the kind we employ in expressions of propositional attitude. Grice (p.283) actually said that meaning was a matter of "nesting intentions". I offer the following formulation then, not as a definite description of a speaker's communicative intentions, but as an illustration of the kinds and numbers of recursions involved if we are to employ intentional idioms to describe the relations between a communicator's and an audience's intentions. Hence:

A communicator (S) *intends* to inform an audience (A) about something by means of some propositional sign (*p*). Moreover, the communicator (S) *intends* that the audience (A) *recognises* that the communicator (S) *intends* to inform the audience (A) of something.

Or:

S intends that (A recognises that (S intends to inform A that p))

The many reformulations have usually attempted to include uses and aspects of communication that the earlier formulations did not seem to cover. They were often prompted by efforts to find exceptions to Grice's description, or to distinguish "genuine" communication from provisional or seeming forms. As Grice himself has noted (p.309), these exceptions or counter examples usually involved "sneaky intentions" on the speaker's part, that is, undisclosed and deceptive intentions that do not become objects of the audience's recursive objectification of the speaker's intention. Such sneaky or deceptive intentions involve a functional transformation of the use of the Gricean formulation of communicated meaning, and the process of recursion has to be extended to capture them.

Communication and language are so variously and changingly useful that as historical phenomena they have no defining or essential function. So all the reformulations and their seemingly chronic inadequacy suggest that the phenomenon of communication in total is being tracked rather than captured. Someone, it seems, can always find a shortcoming in any of the formulations. Perhaps it is uncapturable and only trackable, and perhaps *this* is the most remarkable, functional characteristic of communication. These dispositional terms suggest a counterfactual way of expressing it: if someone were to describe how communication works, someone else would come along and use it in a different way. Such a formulation is especially true of fiction and artistic communication. A speaker can always sneakily add their own higher level of recursion—or in fiction they can add it and leave it to the audience to infer that they have.

We can illustrate the problem of sneaky intentions here as Grice (pp. 299-300) did. The counter examples generally posed were such as to suggest that an infinite regress had to be used if something like Grice's formulation of meaning in terms of a speaker's intentions were to adequately describe all uses of propositional communication. Suppose a speaker, S, utters a sentence to an audience, A, to mean *p*. The formulation above can be put as follows:

S intends A to think *p*

Moreover,

S intends A to think p , on the grounds that A recognises that S intends A to think p .

That is,

S intends A's recognition of S's intention to be grounds for A's recognition of S's intention that A think p .

That is, the grounds for A to think that p are a step behind whatever S thinks are the grounds for A's thinking that p . So the formulation has an infinite form:

S intends A to think (p , because S intends A to think (p , because S intends A to think (p ,...

If the speaker, S, has a sneaky intention, then, whatever A thought were grounds for thinking that p , S would actually have some extra, covert intention up his or her sleeve.

Philosophical reflection on this kind of problem goes right back to Aristotle's attempt to formulate a first principle of reason. In his demonstration of the existence such a first principle, Aristotle (*Metaphysics* 1006a) noted that even "in overturning the *logos* one remains under the *logos*." Grice's response to the problem was, firstly, to suggest that communication involves a kind of deeming provision whereby the unfulfillable condition (the infinite regression) is deemed to satisfy a kind of idealised closed condition anyway. That is, the parties collude in the pretence that the regression is at some stage closed or completed. Secondly, a sneaky intention is deemed to cancel the licence to deem whatever the speaker is doing to be a case of meaningful communication in the proper or ideal sense. Grice's analysis alerts us to two things: firstly, the potential for deception that is chronic in communication; and secondly, the use of a kind of collusive pretence—a fiction—in grounding meaningful communication.

In practice, because we are dealing with recursions here, deeming closure may be unnecessary if the recursions result in an expression that becomes cyclic. This is the case when an expression involving k recursions is equivalent to the expression involving $(k - 2i)$ recursions. For this to happen though, A's representation of S must be somehow invariant despite perturbations by S (Von Foerster, p.268). I shall return to this theme of deeming closure or invariance in due course. For now it is the nature of the recursive representations that is of concern.

In the original expression

S intends that A recognise that S intends to inform A that p .

the three levels of recursion chart S's representation of herself via A's representation of her (S). That is, communication involves a kind of self representation that is mediated by the representation of another's representation of oneself. This suggests that human communication is parasitic on a socially mediated, self conscious subject.

Such self consciousness would have its own selective advantages. As G. H. Mead put it: "A man's reaction toward weather conditions has no influence upon the weather itself....Successful social conduct [however] brings one into a field within which a consciousness of one's own attitudes helps toward the control of the conduct

of others.” This passage from Mead’s “Social Consciousness and the Consciousness of Meaning” is quoted by Habermas (1988, p.175). Habermas comments, “This functionalistic argument directs attention to the situation of interaction as a place where particular advantages of adaptation are to be expected for the emergence of self consciousness. Yet,..., the real problem remains the following: How can a self relation that is rewarded in this way arise under conditions of interaction *in the first place*, *before* there has developed a linguistic medium with speaker-hearer perspectives that would allow ego to adopt the role of an alter ego toward himself?”

This of course is a chicken and egg question, an artefact of detemporalising thought, and a symptom of not being able or not wanting to think historically. Apart from ignoring the fact that communication-as-such did not begin with language, it ignores the way that selection processes build functional designs that may afterwards turn out to have other, new functions. As evolution continues, it then selects the designs for their other, new functions, and then, in turn, builds on those new functions. What comes before what, in this essentially evolutionary process, is a matter of reciprocal causal relations between the functional precursors to language and self consciousness, each parasitising one another at different stages in the coevolution of mind and language.

The question obscures these considerations by being phrased in terms of phenomena that belong to subsequent evolutionary stages. Given the transformations that evolution may bring about, it is likely to be anachronistic to refer to “ego” or “alter ego” before their historical emergence. Just as there is no Eternal Chicken there is no Eternal *ego* or *I*, or *alter ego*. Von Foerster’s (pp. 267-8) remark about *communicabilia* (symbols, words, messages, etc.) deals with a similar and related problem: “if a ‘theory’ [or “a formalism necessary and sufficient for a theory”] of communication were to contain primary *communicabilia*, it would not be a theory but a technology of communication, taking communication for granted.” Communication is a function that comes from something else, that, in retrospect is recognised and selected for having become communicative. Likewise, an historical phenomenon like the human *ego* or *alter ego*, has to come from something else.

The kind of reckoning or proto-intentionality that was the precursor to human meaning needs to be distinguished from human meaning. To forget this is to lapse into the mythology of origins, to project our ends into the embryo of their beginnings, and to ignore the historical rule of thumb, that contingency makes historical narrative a *metabasis eis allo genos*, a transformation of *kind*.

Mead’s account of the origin of self consciousness assumed that an organism must experience an “auto-affection” by means of its own external vocal sign if the organism is to learn “to understand its own behaviour from the perspective of the other and, specifically, in the light of the other’s interpreting behavioural reaction (Habermas 1988, p.176).” The organism is supposed to hear its own vocal gesture, feel the affect itself, and so learn the vocalisation’s affect on others. In this way an instinctive vocal gesture, such as an alarm call that accompanies and is part of an affective response to danger, would be objectified for its utterer and become known as an object bearing its particular affect as its meaning.

This is a bit of a just so story, encouraged by the quite valid insight that a history of symbolic communication can’t start with *communicabilia*. The story’s fixation on vocalisation and its auto-affection, and its reliance on the idea of *learning* to understand one’s own behaviour in terms of the other, are probably both cases of projection from the misunderstood present into the unobserved past. In an important sense, the learning required must itself require the intellectual capacity to learn such a thing; so Mead’s behaviourist way of putting it misses the importance of an evolved

psychology that could well pre-empt the need for external auto-affection altogether. Learning may occur during ontogeny, but whatever may be learnt is framed by and depends on phylogenetic 'memory' (the brain's evolved capacity for learning) and, eventually, cultural 'memory' (culturally replicated and selected information). The common view that language is largely a matter of semiotic and syntactic codes rather than of symbolic and inferential processes is allied to this ontogenetically restricted, behaviourist view that self consciousness is developed in the learning of the coded significance of one's own vocal gesture. The failure to appreciate the inferential character of intersubjectivity is a failure to appreciate all the evidence in communication—the whole face to face, body to body encounter in which the other has an immediacy that is effectively as immediate as one's own self experience.

The notion of a primary auto-affection has had a certain fascination, whether for a culture that is suspicious of the notion of human instinct or for a culture that is suspicious of the scientific value of descriptions of intentional events. Auto-affection is an important theme in Derrida's (1967, p.166) reading of Husserl: "In emerging from itself, hearing oneself speak constitutes itself as the history of reason in the detour through *writing*. Thus it differs from itself in order to reappropriate itself." Though language is a social phenomenon, external to psyche yet reinforcing psyche, the recursion and objectification of representations may be accomplished by the psychological and inferential means supplied by our phylogenetic and cultural evolution, and not necessarily by an auto-affection occasioned by a vocalisation or some other external index. The self objectification may be auto-affective but it is not necessarily auto-aesthetic; it need not be a matter of *hearing or seeing or otherwise empirically perceiving oneself*. (In Lacan's mirror myth, seeing oneself occupies the same auto-affective function, though in a confabulation whose subject matter is unambiguously ontogenetic.). I suspect that vocalisation and self hearing are invoked because language seems to be essentially or at least primarily vocal, and because a human organism (without a mirror) does not perceive its other bodily gestures in the same way that it can hear itself. So, despite the potential auto-affectivity of kinaesthesia and the widespread zoological phenomenon of gestural mimicry, facial and other gestures are presumed to have been locked into unreflected, instinctive, and neurologically domain specific processing of stimuli, with no auto-affective way out of solipsistic instinctive states. However, to speak of learning by auto-affection simply avoids the need to speak of the phylogenetic and cultural evolution of a heuristic means of representing another's representation of a mutual cognitive environment. This would involve an ability for a kind of psychological calculation or inference of another's attitude to oneself. It might seem that such an ability must have preceded human intentionality and language, but again this would be to mistake the nature of evolutionary processes. Such an ability would coevolve along with the coevolution of human self (and other) consciousness, and language.

Wittgenstein (1953) said language was primarily for communication and only secondarily for description. However, communication is biologically prior to humans and their language, while language and symbolic representation seem to be so useful precisely *because* of their descriptive, and thereby conceptual as well as referential, functions. Symbolic communication, whether in images or language, has a different communicative nature to other, earlier kinds of communication that work through the *icons* (imitation) of the actions of conspecifics or through the *indices* of the affective experience of conspecifics. These indices of affections may now be signified propositionally (i.e. symbolically) in the idioms of propositional attitude. As indices, they are still observed and interpreted in vocal intonations and body language, and their communicative function is still evident in things like the empathy induced by

laughter, or crying, or cries of alarm. As indices of one's own affection, they don't really have to be heard or seen in order for one to objectify their attitudinal meaning. And as indices of affections, they indicate what affects indicate. Emotional responses, more than anything else, function as fast, psychologically domain specific, cognitive representations (see Griffiths 1997).

Whatever information is *communicated* by empathy inducing affective indices is limited, but the observation of an affective index in a particular environmental context may provide the premise for inferences that yield quite rich and relevant information, without the benefit of any symbolically mediated propositional communication. However the richness of that information depends on the conceptual and inferential sophistication of the organism. One particularly valuable kind of inference would involve positing oneself as part of the other's environmental context so that the other's gesture may be taken as indicating its attitude to oneself. The ability of an organism to process information about the attitude of its conspecifics, and more particularly about the attitude of conspecifics to its attitudes—the processing of information about social relations—is a condition conducive to the meaningful communication modelled by Grice; but meaningful symbolic communication is itself also a condition conducive to the processing of information about social relations. The inferential and conceptual sophistication of the organism determines the sophistication of its representations of its environment, including its conspecifics attitudes, and including its conspecifics attitudes to its attitudes. It is also an important condition, one would have thought, of being able to use symbols to communicate concepts, and thereby greatly increase not only the explicitly communicated information, but the implicit or inferable information as well. These two mutually conditioned abilities are coevolved, and they are both conditional upon underlying neurophysiological and vocal tract evolution.

Symbolic communication severs gesture from any indicated affective state. Grice (pp 292-297) actually told a myth that proceeds “in a teleological kind of way”, a myth about the stage by stage, recursion by recursion development of human communication, and about this severance of a “natural nonvoluntary sign” (an index) from its affect so that it became a “non natural voluntary sign” (a symbol). Though he insisted that it was not an historical or genetic account, its narrative form signals a desire for history that was well founded. Though Grice's description of the workings of human communicated meaning uses recursive expressions, and though selection processes involve the recursive development of new functions from already existing functions, it does not follow that the simple temporalisation of the recursions in Grice's formulation of communicated meaning should match any actual evolutionary recursion of functions during the history of human communication. In the end, not only is Grice's story a myth, it is a myth about a pretence or a fiction, and it implies a connection between pretence or mimesis, the symbolic, and freedom. Grice's story requires that somehow a “non voluntary” index of an affective state be imitated “voluntarily”—though, in an evolutionary context, instead of conscious, intended pretence, just an unconscious pretence would initially be enough. Grice's choice of a vocal sign indicating pain as his mythic proto symbol would seem to be less felicitous than, say, some more social or empathetic sign, or, better still, some action or sequence of actions that evokes an expected affect or an expected empathetic affect in the other. Such an action would already be uncoupled from any significance as strictly an index of affect. One possibility is a mimetic action that imitates the other, or better that imitates oneself (in a different context) for the other.

One candidate would be, say, a repeated act of mock aggression followed by laughter. Deacon (1997, pp. 401ff) suggests something like this in his version of the

evolution of symbolic communication as a way of representing and establishing a social contract. Whether the act is voluntary seems to be less important than its being mimetic. Will and freedom as we know them are more likely to be *post hoc* phenomena, evolving socially in an environment of linguistic animals. Certainly modernity's concept of freedom is specific to its times. Laughter, and subsequently mutual laughter following repetitive or ritual acts of seeming aggression would signal that each communicating party had affectively and effectively understood that what might have formerly been taken as signalling aggression had to be reformulated. This assumes that laughter then, as now, accompanied the cognitive reconceptualisation of interactions in a shared environment, and that its empathetic character would enable the social transmission of that reconceptualisation. In other words, it assumes that laughter had already been naturally selected for its communicative, socially binding function. In his remarks on "a formalism necessary and sufficient for a theory of communication," Von Foerster (1981, p.268) noted that "the nervous activity of one organism cannot be shared by another organism," and that "this suggests that indeed nothing is (can be) 'communicated'." Unlike, say, pain, mirth is (or was) much more likely to break across the barrier of solipsism—it almost can be shared by another organism. The impossibility of communicating "nervous activity" or affective experience is made virtually possible. Mock aggression signals conditional non aggression: if you honour your promise then I will honour mine. The initial action, in being mutually reconceived and understood as mimetic, ceases to be an index of aggressive intent, and, though it is *like* aggression, its meaning is the negation of aggression and by this negation it ceases to be either indexical or purely mimetic and becomes symbolic.

Stories about laughter as the origin of language are hardly unknown: in *The Raw and The Cooked* (p. 123) Lévi-Strauss gave an account of one told by the Tereno people of Brazil. Perhaps telling myths like this is just a kind of idle entertainment, but the entertainment can be extended to speculation about the relation of all this to fiction. The mimetic representation of violence is reproduced again and again in narrative art's representations of violence and cruelty, and it still represents the negation of actual violence, as if the great yet uncompleted task of the symbol were to overcome the nightmare history of violence. Violence on stage or screen is not cathartic, it is the spectacle of violence, and our long fascination with it, and our almost mirthful pleasure at its sublime contemplation in tragedy does not seem to be at odds with the (albeit highly speculative) notion that mock aggression was a proto symbol of human communication.

Just as there is a kind of reckoning or unconscious representation prior to human self consciousness—I mean *prior* in the context of the human organism's processing of information, not in some version of human evolutionary history—I suspect that Grice's formulation of the communication of meaning as involving at least three levels of recursive representation is suspect in its use of the verbs *intend* and *recognise*. These terms are artefacts of the way Grice's formulations relied on intentional idioms to refer to what is the largely unconscious mental activity of subjects. The use of the verbs *intend* and *recognise* might presume to attempt to address this problem by means of some assumed general or neutral character, but they are only neutral within the context of a human, intentional, cognitive system: they are terms of a human psychic system's self description and self reference and not necessarily adequate for descriptions of unconscious (or, for that matter, ancestral, hominid) psyche. The kinds of representation of intersubjective relations that Grice's formulation describes in terms of propositional attitudes to another's recursively embedded propositional attitudes to oneself still goes on, for the most part, behind the

back of consciousness or beneath the level of intentions. They may be inferable, but native psyche hardly troubles to infer them, which is probably why it took philosophers two thousand years to disclose what, after all, seems so banal.

A speaker, in speaking, calculates (to use a computational rather than an intentional term) what a hearer would calculate about the speaker's utterance: that is, the speaker calculates herself as speaker, as if she were in the audience. And in reaching understanding of the attitude of the speech act, the hearer calculates himself as audience as if he were in the speaker's shoes. This kind of conditional thinking seems to involve similar conceptual processing to the kind that Deacon (p.413) saw as important in overcoming "the central learning problems that make symbolic associations so hard for other species: the learning of higher-order conditional associations." Not only does an audience, on hearing a speech act, calculate that the speaker is calculating on informing the audience of something (two levels of recursion), he calculates that the speaker calculates that the audience will calculate that the speaker is calculating on informing the audience of something (four levels of recursion). That is, not only does an audience calculate that a speaker is calculating on informing the audience, he calculates on her calculating on communicating with him. In fact, simply hearing speech is usually enough to direct anyone's attention to a communicative action—unconsciously—and then the communicative act becomes, at its propositional level, conscious. These *calculations* and their discrete levels of nesting are not all represented or calculated in the transparent way that the formulation in intentional idioms implies: some of the information about levels of recursion may be lost in the reduction of the representation and to that extent may be irrecoverable, in particular, for consciousness and at the level of intentions. Once we get past the first cycle of recursions to a second level of the speaker's intention—and have thereby embedded one intentional system within another—subsequent recursions can cut down on the amount of processing required by chunking this two recursion cycle under one token and substituting the new simplified token into a new recursion. An expression of a fourth or higher order recursion of calculations can be processed like a second order one (see Dennett 1987, pp. 244-5), or as quoted from Von Foerster above, an expression involving k recursions may be treated as one involving $(k - 2i)$ recursions. This cyclic character enables the at least quasi, and thereby effective, elimination of "perturbations" such as mistakes or differences in representation between speaker and audience, or "sneaky intentions"; and it results in the social systemic self definition of stable values for attitudes, and for empirical and propositional or semantic objects—even in lying. For even in lying there is collusion up to some level. The intersubjective recursion of representations of one another that makes communication possible is a matter of intersubjective *collusion*.

Some of the chunked information may be inferentially accessible, but only at the expense of the extra processing involved in making the inferences. Sperber and Wilson (1986, pp. 38-42) call this kind of inferentially accessible information *manifest* (rather than the stronger *assumed* or *known*). An individual's *cognitive environment* is the set of facts manifest to her or him. A mutual cognitive environment is a shared or collusive cognitive environment in which it is manifest who shares or colludes in it. What Austin called the illocutionary binding force of a speech act, need not depend upon an assumption shared by speaker and audience about the communicator's attitude to what is said, the communicator's attitude need only be *mutually manifest*. It need only be *mutually inferentially accessible* information rather than shared, conscious information or knowledge. The problems that Grice's deeming provision was supposed to solve are answered by the collusive situation that the cycle of recursions sets up from the initial distinctions between

subjects' perspectives. So what matters primarily is not the conscious judgement of any mutual deeming so much as mutual seeming. This is enough to ensure that a speaker's and an audience's representations of one another are invariant and that the recursions of intention are cyclic and capable of being chunked. It should be remarked though that when we represent another's view of ourselves, we represent the other as *we* view them, and we represent what others mean by what *we think* they mean. This, of course, may be *misrepresentation*—the cause of many a dispute. In this situation, more processing is required in order to arrive at the other's meaning. An audience need only incur the effort of extra processing if the relevance of a communicative act for it is not established on the basis of the inferences already made.

The difficulty and effort required to process several recursions of symbolic representation is actually used in certain forms of communication to distract the audience and conceal the latent psychic or memetic functions of the communicative act. Margaret Morse in her essay on "The Ontology of Everyday Distraction" (1990), refers to the recursions of television, as when a news reader throws to a reporter in Hong Kong, who then interviews an eyewitness about someone else's newsworthy communicative deed. Morse calls each recursion a hyperdiegetic link, in that it links different embedding levels of narration; and she traces the way such links attenuate and distract historical thought. In the case of many news stories—another dead Kennedy or Windsor, a televisual war, an election campaign—the media event itself may actually be a major story. In many cases the media event itself is driven by the sheer availability of vision and file footage. News media seldom tell, explicitly or critically, the fascinating story about themselves. Of course much the same story about the media would need to be told again and again; and this would be a good excuse for keeping quite about, it if it weren't for the fact that much the same stories crop up again and again as new news anyway. Instead of the story about the media event, the media tell what is almost a pretext story about the dead Kennedy or the election campaign, which is really a story within the story of the media event; and the pretext story feeds off all the excitement of its embedding media story. The story of the media event is inferable from the news presentation; but the media and the public are distracted or they pretend that the story of the media event is not manifest. There is nothing essentially sinister about this—it was ever thus—unless it is not acknowledged or recognised. Narrative art has long recognised this predicament, and made a virtue of the need to tell stories within stories.

As I suggested above (in *What song the Syrens sang*) hyperdiegetic links between embedding and embedded stories are part of the problem for historical reference, not only for print and post print culture, but for the evolution of communication. They belong to the general problem of observers' observing their own and others' observations (See Luhmann 1992) in the absence of any self assurance, such as in the case of a rationality self assured by the guarantee of an immediately observable reference. This might seem like some specifically and dismally postmodern formulation of the problem of reason, but it is the same problem that organisms and natural systems have long had to deal with. In the act of dialogue, two descriptions—the speaker's and the audience's—refer to one another and their truth is contingent upon one another. The game-like uncertainty that attends such a doubly contingent system is one in which the enactment of further inferences is conditional on the outcome of inferences up to that point. The inferential as opposed to coded nature of human meaning, with its temporalised and contingent unfolding, and the (at some level) collusive relation between a speaker and audience, would have evolved under pressure to function in such a game-like situation.

62. Principles of reason

What speech act theory called *illocutionary binding force* is more than just a matter of a speaker's intending that an audience recognise her attitude to what is being said. This may all be unconscious, so it is better conceived in terms of mutually manifest—that is, inferentially accessible—information about a speaker's and audience's attitude to what is being said, and hence what kind of speech act is being performed. It is also a matter of any communication's being processed by the audience on the assumption that it is relevant in the context. Recognition that an act is a communicative one creates the expectation that it is relevant, in the light of which premise processing proceeds.

For Grice, this recognition of communicative intention created the expectation of what he called a cooperative principle. He formulated this principle in terms of a number of maxims (pp. 26-7) that standardise the manner of a speech act and the quantitative, qualitative and relational features of speech acts. These maxims work as premises in the audience's inferential interpretation of a speaker's meaning; without them another's meaning may remain ambiguous. Sperber and Wilson (pp. 34-38) argued that Grice's maxims had an *ad hoc* look about them, and that while they help to provide intuitive reconstructions of how speech acts may be disambiguated and interpreted, they are not psychologically realistic. This is important because if there is such a cooperative principle it must be psychologically embodied. In order to show how communication exploits a mutually manifest cognitive environment, Sperber and Wilson developed the idea of processing an utterance so that it is relevant in that mutually manifest cognitive environment. When a speech act is processed, the attitude to its propositional form—to what is said—is inferred from both the principle of relevance, and from gestures of face, body and intonation which, like the attitude they indicate, embed the speech act in an affective context.

Grice's cooperative principle, and the principle of relevance are both put forward as assumptions whereby parties to communication can reach mutual understanding. In speech act theory it is the embedding of speech acts in social institutional norms, by the means of an illocutionary binding force, that enables interlocutors to coordinate their understanding. There are two important and entangled questions about the status of these communicative principles. Firstly, to what extent do they describe the actual working of human communication rather than just supply possible explanations; and secondly, to what extent are the principles normative and memetic as opposed to psychological and phylogenetic (Grice's own distinction between *conventional* and *conversational* principles seems to be very like the distinction between the memetically normative and the phylogenetic).

There is another similar pair of principles that Quine (1960, p. 219) mentioned in the context of his thoughts on propositional attitudes. He pointed out how “in indirect quotation we project ourselves into what, from his remarks and other indications, we imagine the speaker's state of mind to have been, and then we say what, in our language, is natural and relevant for us in the state thus feigned.” While noting how strikingly this contrasts with “the spirit of objective science”, Quine acknowledged our propensity for this kind of anti behaviourist projection: “Casting our real selves thus in unreal roles, we do not generally know how much reality to hold constant. Quandaries arise. But despite them we find ourselves attributing beliefs, wishes and strivings even to creatures lacking the power of speech, such is our dramatic virtuosity.” Thus Quine puts forward a principle of projection whereby we access another's likely mental state as comparatively similar to our own—as *like*

ours, but not the same. Such a principle depends on the counterfactual condition: *If I were you.*

Elsewhere, Quine (p.59) mentioned a “principle of charity” according to which we assume that an interlocutor is reasonable and we interpret the interlocutor’s utterance, however silly it might seem at first, on the basis that it is in some sense true. These two principles, like those of Grice and Sperber and Wilson, are ways of explaining how one might coordinate communicative understanding with another. All are principles of reason. They are, as such, principles of fiction.

Humans carry on a great deal of calculating of their social reality unconsciously, and, as observation of other species suggest, the ability to do so is to some significant extent prelinguistic in an evolutionary sense. This is firstly an historical claim that must stand or fall on empirical evidence. The phenomenon of autism, understood as impairment of the human ability to calculate others’ attitudes and to calculate oneself from the perspective of others, would seem significant in this matter. (See Barkow, Cosmides & Tooby, p. 90; Dennett 1995, p.379). Human brains are designed to undertake the representation of others’ mental processes and to conceive of others’ behaviour in terms of imaginatively attributed attitudes and intentions. Humans are naturally and socially anti behaviourist psychologists. Secondly, the evolutionary claim about such evolved, socially canny psychology being prelinguistic does not discount the likelihood that linguistic nous that was parasitic on socially canny psychology should be, in turn, a precondition for more social nous that was itself parasitic on linguistic nous. To say that social relations are culturally constructed—which of course they are—does not license wiping clean the slate of the biological history which was the precondition that framed subsequent memetically persistent, normative contributions to intersubjectivity. Where Adorno (1966, p.218), in his essays on freedom (for freedom is what is at stake in reflections on self and other) said, “By no means did it occur to Kant whether freedom itself—to him an eternal idea—might not be essentially historic, and that not just as a concept but in its empirical substance,” he can be taken as meaning empirical substance in its full biological, historical sense. Ontogeny and cultural history need hardly be called on to recapitulate what phylogeny has already accomplished. Rather, the infant learns in an environment of culturally evolved social norms, and on the basis of its inherited skills at social and self cognition. Meanwhile, that environment of social norms is one of memetically evolving symbols: kinship systems, economic systems, narrative systems, social mores and institutions (like freedom), systems of social science, etc. These norms supervene on the shared architecture of human psychology, which must be seen as selection pressure in their evolution; and perhaps, if they are persistent, they in turn amount to selection pressures in the environment of human evolution.

What *reasonable* people ought to believe or think is based on the intuitions of we intentional creatures about what we actually do think or believe *reasonably*. Norms are based on facts; *ought* is derived from *is*, even if illogically. Given this frenzy of feedback, Sperber and Wilson’s reflections on relevance have the virtue of concentrating on a psychologically feasible process of communicative inference, while avoiding the vexed question of untangling normative principles from *ad hoc*, intuitive explanations of communicative reason. Meanwhile the principle of projection, with its dependence on the comparative similarity of human minds suggests that understanding others depends on being able to make inferences or *reason* according to counterfactual logic, along the lines of *If I were you then my state of mind would be such and such*. Such projection, however much it is phylogenetically determined, is also determined by norms because though there is some vagueness in “how much reality to hold constant” between my mental world

and yours, norms or shared idealisations are precisely what one may hold constant in accessing your world or cognitive environment from mine, and they are precisely therefore what cultural evolution selects in the course of the history of reason.

63. *Reason's uses of imagination: implicature and collusion.*

Often in communication we are primarily communicating not what we say but something else that follows inferentially from what we say. And if we are not doing this primarily, we are very likely anyway to be communicating in this way as well. Language—and also cinema and any quasi propositional medium—can be seen as having two poles of operation, as Grice pointed out. Firstly, it may, more or less, restrict itself to *explicature*, that is to the literal communication of the information available in explicit interpretation of the propositional form. Or secondly, it may involve the derivation of *implicatures* from the linguistic or cinematic performance. Implicatures are inferred, deductively or heuristically, from the explicit propositional information, and from the mutually manifest cognitive environment, in particular from other explicatures and implicatures already derived from the text, and from the principle of relevance (or some other principle of communicative reason). Such implicatures may be more or less inferentially accessible, and, the implicatures of a particular proposition may not become apparent until quite a long way down the textual string. Explicature may be seen as a more localised interpretation of a proposition, involving the normal, local lexical and syntactical symbolisation of meaning. The explicature of an utterance might be better described as the most inferentially accessible of its implicatures, and it corresponds to what is called the literal or denotational use of language. Meanwhile, implicatures involve inferences based on other propositional information and therefore involve the normal, dispersed symbolisation of meaning and the activation of what, in an artificially isolated sentence, is sometimes called the connotation. The reading given of the beginning of *Carpenter's Gothic* illustrates these localised and dispersed aspects of symbolic communication. A similar reading of a cinematic work would derive localised explicatures from what is explicitly shown in a particular shot, and implicatures from the more or less remote information distributed throughout the symbol string of text, and beyond, in its social context. In a feature film, for instance, the first contextual implicature is that each shot is a fiction.

The way we derive explicatures and implicatures depends on some principle of communicative reason. Grice felt that this framing principle could be seen in terms of what he called conventional and conversational components. The conventional principles were to be seen as more culturally and historically localised, while the conversational principles were understood as more universal. The conversational principles included a principle of cooperation between communicants, and a number of regulatory conversational maxims, including a principle of relevance. A principle of cooperation, or something like it, is something that has a phylogenetic as well as a cultural history. It is effectively, universally human—though there are effectively universal memes as well—and it was probably a condition of the evolution of language in the first place: It is hard to imagine symbolic language evolving and coevolving without a pre-existing cooperation in the exchange of pre-linguistic information.

As exchange, human communication developed in the environment of the development of a hominid exchange economy. What is the nature of the cooperation that developed in this environment?

Truth is an ethical, communicative category and not just a logical or epistemological one. It is not only an adequation of thought *to* things *for* some autopoietic subjective purpose, it is an adequation of the *communicated* representations of things to those things, for some social purpose or for others. Offering information usually costs the informant little, while what is offered may be true information or misinformation. In addition, so called cooperation in communication is very much a matter of implicature, and certainly not always a matter of explicit propositional, or literal, assertion. Even what is called literal is never dead literal. An audience will make ready inferences from the explicit information it receives, and a speaker (or film maker) will calculate on what the audience is likely to infer. Dead literal symbolic communication, if it existed outside of indexical signification, would be a most inefficient and unlikely way to communicate. Despite its seemingly functionalist rationale, it would not be very functional at all. Human communication is much more cunningly designed than that, by both phylogenetic and memetic nature. As Mallarmé said, language is wise because it belongs to nature; and the same with cinema.

Given this process of generating implicatures and inferentially tracing a network of more or less relevant, more or less likely and more or less inferentially accessible information, and given the possibility that the information exchange is imperilled by the untruth of lies, not to mention mistakes, and that the lie or the half-truth may be cunningly concealed by an equivocation over any of these pathways of inference at any of the inferential nodes in this network however inferentially remote it may be from the explicature, then it is much better to call the relation between communicative parties one of collusion rather than cooperation. For there is a kind of play between the parties, in the context of a kind of game with a game theoretical strategy, and each, like Sterne's Uncle Toby, finds that her or his "life is put in jeopardy by words." Or by images. Reason only works by calculating the likelihood of unreason. This, which seems like human communication's flaw, is its strength, or rather, its remarkable achievement.

64. A note on the relation of the logical space of meaning and its worlds and the physical space of the empirical environment; or the origin of logic.

Meaning, with its characteristic of being more or less logically accessible in logical space, parallels the empirical environment in which places are more or less physically accessible. "One learns about space from logic. Just as it is impossible to build a house where a house stands, it must be impossible to conceive a house with the exact same properties as another (Luhmann 1984, p.385)." It is in our evolved, neurologically embodied principles for the representation of space (and time as a special kind of asymmetrical space), principles that have been selected to avoid representational reductions that produce contradictions such as two different events or things occupying the same spacetime, that we find the basis for the memetic abstraction and persistence of logical axioms.

Meaning is a Pandora's box. It is designed by evolution to be replete with possibilities rather than stable and unequivocal. The unequivocal (like the literal or denotation) is just one handy specifiable, idealised limit possibility. Meaning is designed to be changeable because we can't "mean everything at once" and we can't necessarily predict what is semantically accessible until new meanings are encountered along the way. Likewise, we can't be everywhere at once, and the physically accessible places of our empirical environment are, from an ego's perspective, also a matter of changeable possibilities, because we can't necessarily

predict what lies around the next bend in the river or over the next hill. (The sublime perspective of the mountain top vista, like the planner's map or satellite photo, is a diagrammatic reduction that gives the illusion of being everywhere at once.)

In communication we have to coordinate accessible egological worlds. So the rules of logic are normative to the extent that they are a coordinating norm of propositional communication. But the norms, even insofar as they might be cultural or memetic, persist universally in human cultures to the extent that their memetic persistence is an adaptation to the already persistent and shared neurophysiology of our phylogenetically evolved representational nous. In their memetic character they are a product of the memetically evolving science of logic. That science's task is to describe (and so to reduce) the regularities of thought that make knowledge possible, and these regularities, since they are selected by the most general pressures and exigencies of physical environments—things like the spatiality of space—may be expected, more or less, of any creature that has evolved in a physical environment, depending on how sophisticated its environmental representations are.

65. *The other.*

sweet intercourse

Of looks and smiles, for smiles from reason flow,
To brute denied, and are of love the food,
Love not the lowest end of human life.

Paradise Lost

In the philosophy of the subject, from Descartes to Husserl and on into its even more virulent but disguised form in Heidegger's fundamental ontology, we see the eternal recurrence of first philosophy. Every retreat to the apodictic, every search for the unconditioned, every desire for a ground of grounds, every brandishing of Being with a capital B, was a kind of strategic move away from *the other*, and into the safe vantage of the self and the same, a repeat of the primary, self distinguishing, self certifying constitution of organic life. From such a position it is only by the most flashy metaphysical capers—such as we see in Husserl's (1960, pp. 81 ff.) meditation on "monadological intersubjectivity"—that an escape can be imagined from the artificial situation of the transcendental solipsism that such philosophy walled itself up in. For the effort of securing the vain power of the apodictic, the philosophy of the subject was stuck with the vain apodeixis of solipsism. Fear of the uncertain plight of truth, distrust of the senses and the affections, and of the body and the embodied, fallible mind, weariness of empiricity and inferential guesswork, and scepticism of what is at best premised on but seems to be beyond empirical evidence—all these are impediments to thinking about the *other*. Yet thinking about the other is the crux of what was and should remain the first and last question of philosophy: how to live the good life.

For the other is not the self, but its self—and I am not so sure about what this elusive, death-defying self is anyway. The other is not "inside" and phenomenological. And the other is not an object; it is not just "outside" and empirical. It is further away, and different, and yet more like *me*. It (she or he) is "inside" what is already "outside" my inner phenomenological life. It is what Dennett calls heterophenomenological. It is beyond the empirical and so beyond the decorous limits of epistemology. Yet it is so urgent and immediate in my affections that it is also the closest thing, as intimate as is the fact of one's birth from another. It is not an

it but another *I*: a *you*. And in my likeness with the other there lies, and I am struck by, that other attribute of the other—its difference, its freedom—which reminds me of my own freedom, and my own possible difference from myself. Like consciousness itself, the apprehension of another seems epistemologically mysterious and irreducible, until we realise that like life, the consciousness of another consciousness and of another's consciousness of me is the kind of magic sense that only evolutionary history, in the immensity of its tinkering and testing, could bequeath us.

Our subjectivity is designed to be intersubjective. I don't only represent the other as an abstract other, as a physical object of sensory perception that I charitably or sophistically regard as another subject. The other is manifest as an intentional subject, like myself. Affectively and effectively I *perceive* the other. This kind of perception of social relations is precisely what is needed to make sense of human actions. Symbolic communicative actions depend on the perception of others' attitudes to propositions or gestures. Along with even social interactions like *giving* and *taking*, they cannot readily be given a general and exhaustive physical description. Intentional animals like humans perform a whole host of actions that can be adequately conceived only in terms of intentions, and their perception requires a heterophenomenological perception of an other. Human interactions elude conceptualisation, unless in terms of meaning. Humans perceive each other by physical means, but what they perceive or what their perceptual processing represents as perceived is not only physical, it is semantic.

We perceive the other in the body. We are designed to read it in non informative and non communicative actions, but especially in informative and communicative actions, conscious or unconscious. We are such communicative interpreters that all actions seem to speak. We are astonishing but fallible mind readers, and symbolic communication is *collusion* in mind reading. Language was and is parasitic on heterophenomenology; heterophenomenology is, in turn, parasitic on language; and such mutually parasitic functions are coevolved. Communication is a process of collusive heterophenomenological inference.

Humans dimly commemorate the evolution of their heterophenomenology in the emblem of the eye. Not in the sublime gaze of theoretical contemplation, but in the exchange of glances, when, while the other calculates me, I calculate the other as another calculating me. Strictly and empirically the other and the self are incalculable, but there is no sense taking theological solace (or despair) in this. Biology and psychology direct us to this conclusion: we *do* calculate others within some arbitrary level of precision or reduction. I perceive the other, not empirically but heterophenomenologically, and I perceive myself being perceived by the other; so somehow phenomenology itself (modernity's version of first philosophy) is parasitic on heterophenomenology. For there is no ego that is immediately *mine*, that is not also mediately another's other. Eye contact is a kind of *ur*-sign, as no doubt are other facial and bodily gestures. Initially pre-semiotic, after it was eventually parasitised by communicative semiosis it could be either a communicative sign in a symbolic context, or still just an unmeant index—a reflex, a symptom or a give away—uncalculated for me, at least until it has escaped me and I have perhaps seen the other calculate it and me, despite my intentions.

“If we ask ourselves now in which particular organ the soul appears as such in its entirety we shall at once point to the eye. For in the eye the soul concentrates itself; it not merely uses the eye as its instrument, but is itself therein manifest. We have, however, already stated, when referring to the external covering of the human body, that in contrast with the bodies of

animals, the heart of life pulses through and throughout it. (Hegel 1818, vol. 1, p.206)

In saying the soul concentrates itself in the eye, Hegel implied something suspect about language—surely *the* heterophenomenological medium, and the richest source of soul evidence. For although language is designed for mind reading, it is also designed for misreading. This is the risk we take with it, its corruption compared to the honesty of the eye, its corruption in which also its advantage consists. Even the magical image media of postmodernity can't tell the soul's life without using language's idioms; and it is this virtual monopoly of language on intentions, with its combination of truthful and deceptive functions, that demands a fictional attitude to intentional idioms, or a sceptical objectification of them which is, as Dennett (1991) has suggested, the heterophenomenological analogue of the Cartesian phenomenological scepticism.

Of course we sometimes master the eye and close its direct window to the soul. The evolution of communicative media traces the course of the disembodiment of texts, along with the increasing objectification of the communicative object. The objectification of propositional objects, such as we find in expressions of propositional attitude, is a feature that is parasitic on language, and it is one that self calculation and other calculation put to use. It is language's severing itself from the body and from the body's indices of its affective life, its production of an external textual object, however airy, that makes language less uncalculatedly revealing of one's own or other's intentions than the giveaway eye. So language increases the opportunity for self formation, deception and self deception all at once. At the same time, linguistic intersubjectivity, as propositional, is richer in the amount and explicitness of information than the eye, face or body. It can show more, inform more and deceive more. Typically the truth or felicity of communication is less a matter of explicit propositional form and of literalness than of the mutually manifest attitude to that explicit propositional form. We detect deception less in the words than in the body and the eye. These betray the inadvertent symptoms of attitude, and so the kind and authenticity of the speech act, and how we are to take its propositional objects. Thus the eye is the emblematic organ of what comes first in communication; it seems to sense fallibly, and to disclose honestly what is mutually manifest.

Mutual manifestness depends on the parties to a dialogue both being expected to make similar observations or inferences. What is mutually manifest is only *observable* or *inferable*. These are dispositional terms and so can be framed in terms of counterfactual conditionals: If need be, the speaker and audience would make similar inferences or observations but each from his or her own cognitive environment. Such an expectation is one that may break down if the actual observations or inferences are carried out. This principle of expecting similar perceptions and inferences is a principle of rationality. In the case of the mutually manifest, such a principle applies to the self and other, but it is an idea of the other; that is, it is a possible other accessible from my actuality, and not an actuality in itself. Any manifest element of a cognitive environment (a proposition, say, or an other) is an element of a possible world.

The idea of the other—or even of a universal *Other*, let's say—applies to both self and other. I am not self identical: my self descriptions are reductions of my complexity whereby I simplify myself for myself. I am like myself and like an other and like the Other as such. The comparative similarity of self and other, that counterfactual conditionals enable us to think, also enables us to think about a self

calculated on the condition of how another calculates it as variable. This has important consequences for the formation of the *I*.

Something of the non identical character of the *I*, and of the non intentional, non volitional character of *I* formation is suggested by idioms like *It seems to me*, *It occurs to me* or the archaic *methinks*. Somewhere in her letters the young George Eliot played the pedantic, stylistic stickler for a particular rationality of linguistic forms. She complained that in the expression *It would seem* the conditional *would* was a word-mincing redundancy. On what condition, she asked rhetorically, could the already conditional epistemology of *seeming* further depend. However, hers was an ethical and stylistic objection rather than a logical or epistemological one, for it is just this kind of conditional that is used in the notion of a manifest cognitive environment. To say that a proposition *p* is manifest is to say *If the assumption p were needed to infer the communicated implicature of one's own or another's utterance then it would seem to one or to the other that p*. As Sperber and Wilson (p.41) argue, it is precisely the weakness (or mincingness) of *manifestness*, compared to *knowledge* or even *assumption*, that makes it suitable for a psychologically plausible account of a mutual cognitive environment. It is the weakness of possible and accessible assumptions that *would* seem if need be, as distinct from actually apparent assumptions that *do seem*, that makes a cognitive environment inferentially accessible from quite different psychic perspectives, and hence mutually manifest, and hence a psychologically plausible basis for reaching a similar communicative understanding.

What is mutually manifest, including the ideal of the other—the Other—is what Aristotle called the starting point or principle (*arche*) of rationality. It is what is required in order that something signify both for the self and the other, so it is that which is demonstrated (*apodictic*) even by someone trying to deny it: “For in confuting the *logos* one submits to the *logos* (*Metaphysics* 1006a).” The wiles of language and communicative reason are parasitic not on any firm ground of grounds but on a slippery, non identical primary connivance, free to deceive or not within the immanence of meaning.

So the principle of rationality—the grail of first philosophy—is as elusive as the shimmering sangrail itself, or the end of the rainbow, forever receding before those who seek it. It must defy explicit representation because it must primarily be only logically accessible, the merely virtual ground of a connivance that is the most mediated and epistemologically dubious of manifestations, not first philosophy but last philosophy. It is epitomised by the heterophenomenological perception of the other perceiving oneself. It is only a quasi knowledge, neither belief nor disbelief, but collusion, and not wholly conscious at that, and lacking guarantee. The other and the mutually manifest are manifested by means of the empirical and premised on the empirical evidence of the senses, but heterophenomenological experience involves heuristic inferences that take us beyond the empirical world. So the connivance of reason is premised on the likeness, not the sameness, of the other and the self. It is also ingrained behind the back of consciousness, just as it was ingrained before linguistically mediated consciousness. It is a quasi cognition that is effective or virtual, and heuristic rather than intelligible or explicit or demonstrated; and it is made and framed away from the clear light of reason in the contingencies of biological and social history. It is not a matter of truth or of mutual knowledge. Being unrepresented, it is not a matter of an adequation of any thought *to* what is being thought, that is to the other and the self for the other—it is thus not a thought or a proposition or what Fodor (1983, p4) would call “a *bona fide* object of propositional attitudes”—but it is more an adequacy of feeling (of the other and the self) *for* communication. Not so much Derrida, but a counterfactual *Derrida*—Derrida, if he were Emmanuel

Levinas—put it this way: “Ethics is therefore metaphysics. ‘Morality is not a branch of philosophy, but first philosophy.’ (1967, p.98)”

It is an astonishing thing, and one that commands our attention, this other ego that we perceive. And this perception of another is astonishing insofar as we read it in the physical body. There is only external, physical evidence for the inner actions of another. Hegel (1818, vol. 1, p.207) called it “the heart of life that pulses through and throughout” the external body, and continued, “in much the same sense it can be asserted of art that it has to invent every point of the external appearance into the direct testimony of the human eye, which is the source of soul-life, and reveals spirit.”

It is art, not ontology or metaphysics, that has honoured and not neutralised the ethical intuition of others. Ever since Parmenides’ goddess driven chariot took him “as far as his desire reached”, ontology (like the non reflexive sciences) has had something of the infantile, gratificatory, romance to it, soullessly and nerdishly ignorant of others, and dulled by lack of feeling and intersubjective wit. But as I say in the essays on fiction, metaphysics or first philosophy is primarily a matter of emotion. The emotions are the most abstract and general condition of cognitive experience. It is in emotion that principles of reason lie: The emotions are skilled workers and the servants of reason. Art has had to attempt to represent the impossible, the soul-life of another, merely in the external, textual means at hand. In this, art has to repeat something like the *tour de force* of heterophenomenological perception. It is *the other* that is apparent in art’s astonishing appearance.

Art makes up to reason for the wrongs done to it by ontology. Fiction is an ethical response to ontology, including to the illogical reduction of the other to the same in the name of an ideal other and a grounded principle of rationality. Thus what looks like a negation of the act of reference in fiction’s performances is a sign that fiction is sensitive to the references and worlds of others. It refers *as* one would refer if one were another and in another’s world, or rather in any other’s world—the world of a universal Other.

We sense this in the kind of propositional attitude struck by fiction, the attitude in which we collude. It is not that in fiction we refer as other solipsistic subjects would in making references to their own subjective attitudes. Art has been socially selected to be too intersubjective for that. It is anything but gloriously and one sidedly subjective—as Habermas (1984) and common sense have too readily presumed. That is just how ontology reduces art. It is gloriously intersubjective and heterophenomenological. The attitude of fiction is not that of Coleridge’s *fancy* (which would be a psychic rather than a social attitude), but rather, it is like his *imagination* insofar as the two are distinguished by what Coleridge (p.50) could only call “a certain collective unconscious”, and insofar as imagination is almost a kind of social pretence in the negation of attitude—pure recursion without an embedding attitude—so that we are together left with a kind of pure propositional or narrative object. Perhaps we collude in this pretence, or the environment of society selects it, by deliberately foregoing a performative verb that means *to fictionalise*, and this has been enough to make some people think that fiction suspends illocutionary binding force all together. Fiction makes a kind of heterophenomenological reduction, rather than the phenomenological kind, bracketing claims off from their authorial subjects, whether self or other, and from their attitudes, and taking these propositional objects, or more fully, these narrative objects and putting them on show. It is fiction’s aspiration to a more than merely subjective character that fits it for selection by the “collective unconscious”—that more than merely subjective process of social selection.

This process of disembedding narratives from subjective attitude, and therefore from the pathetic subjective investment in truth claims and belief, is like the way Dennett transformed the phenomenological program of doubt—of which Descartes' *Meditations* were the first great instance—into a heterophenomenological program for suspending and objectifying claims about subjective worlds. This is the opposite of phenomenological reduction, which withdraws into a subjectivity that is overweeningly rendered world transcendent, and more like the way Freud treated the secondary elaboration or retelling of dreams. It is how fiction, as an historical syndrome, takes advantage of the fact that narratives live by their own autopoiesis and reproduction. It is also why it seems that, for fiction, there is nothing outside the text.

66. *Delusion and illusion.*

It seems to me that the enduring significance of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, and of Freud's analysis of the genesis of neurosis, the *I*, and narrative unconscious lies in the attempt to sort out the mystifying and often painful antagonisms of phylogenetically determined, and normatively and memetically regulated structures of psychic reality. Or that is one way of putting it. Another, perhaps more accurate, way to put it is in terms of the antagonism of fast, psychologically domain specific, emotional cognition of social reality on the one hand and of linguistically generated, socially evolved and normatively regulated, social cognition on the other. It is not simply that society imposes repressive norms of rational order on selfish or authentically biological human impulses, or that we are phylogenetically adapted for some pristine Pleistocene environment and not for the modern environment of autonomously emergent, alienated social systems. Going beyond these important but still essentially romantic and idealist formulations (which are consistent with Kantian or Hegelian theories of the subject), Freud pursued the insight that these antagonisms were basically more historically complicated and deeper seated (and therapeutically refractory) than such neat rationalistic interpretations suggested. The genesis and autopoiesis of psyche occurs courtesy of, and in conflict with, the genesis and autopoiesis of the organism and of the society. (There are, I think, some echoes here of Grice's problematic distinction between conventional and conversational implicatures. The latter seem conventional and normative, but are not quite. They involve the phylogenetic psychology of communicative inference rather than just the purely memetic sociology of norms: processing communicative actions for their relevance is not merely normative. Or rather, often what is called *normative* is not purely memetic or social, but an unholy mix of memetic and genetic interdetermination, played out through phylogenetic, social and ontogenetic history. Such "norms" are in a sense natural—unnaturally natural: they develop during the socialisation of biology and the biologisation of society that characterises the coevolution of body, mind and culture.)

Freud took a biological perspective on the subject and, properly appreciating the importance of reproduction in phylogeny, gave sex its due in the ontogeny of the ego. One of his problems though was the still very limited understanding of human genetic and symbolic evolution at the time. Without a genealogy of morals, which Nietzsche, in his truly inspired essay on the problem, called the task of breeding an animal that could make promises, and without the findings of empirical psychology regarding the organic human capacity for calculating social relations and for symbolic communication, Freud could not appreciate just how the structures he called the *It* (*Id*), the *I* (*Ego*) and the *Ideal I* or *Superego* (or for that matter the ideal *Other*), all had both phylogenetic and memetic histories that mediated one another in an

incredible tangle. As Nesse and Lloyd (1992) point out, in the context of Häkel's view about ontogeny recapitulating phylogeny, Freud made a virtue of the necessity of having to confine his analyses to the historical level of ontogeny; and, as he made clear in the preface to his case study of the Wolf Man, it was an ontogeny as reported by adult memory rather than empirical observation. He obscurely recognised, and tried in a still rudimentary way to chart, the way our felt intentional autonomy *vis à vis* society is discomposingly and painfully yoked to and driven by an unconscious, proto intentional biology for calculating social reality. A species that represents a self and an other and social relations in competing, multiple drafts—many of which are calculated by fast, domain specific emotional processing, many by symbolically mediated and often counterfactual self narration, only some of which reach the attention of self consciousness, and some of which most effectively construct the subject self-deceptively—is probably a good place to look for some selective advantage to arise that, from the perspective of the organism's affective experience, is painfully contradictory. That is, there is a selective advantage to be had in going beyond the pleasure principle. It is in the teeth of this self antagonistic, and often self deceptive predicament that communicative reason is built.

Habermas has argued that the way out of the philosophical ruins of subject centred reason lies in the turn to communicative reason based on a paradigm of subjects capable of speech and action oriented toward reaching mutual understanding. The extent to which the calculation of social reality, and in particular the calculation of mutual understanding is either contradictory, or unconscious and behind the back of intentions and beneath the level of communication is the extent to which communicative actions need not be carried on in the clear light of a Habermasian reason. The *I* and the *other* of communicative reason are, from the immanence of intentional consciousness, not transparent to themselves in their own unconscious unreason. Yet this unconscious unreason provides the supporting architecture for communicative reason. The *I* and *other* of intersubjectivity in the Habermasian sense are to be “removed from the formative context of a specific psychology of language (1988, p.58).” But this methodological move obscures the coevolutionary genesis of the *I* and the *other*, including the fact that they are not, as naive intentional consciousness might tell itself for itself, discrete, consistent, wholly intentional, characterological beings. Rather, the terms *ego* and *alter*, or *I* and *other*, each stand for multiple, interacting, not necessarily consistent, and in large part unconscious drafts of reality.

Calculating oneself from the perspective of another is as much a recipe for self deception as for self knowledge—just as it is a recipe for misrepresenting others. In representing the inscape of psyche, as in representing the landscape of the external world, it is selective advantage—in either the phylogenetic or memetic environment—that matters, not what, under the sovereignty of our intentionality we take to be transcendent truth. When it comes to mental experience, the kind of pragmatic empirical perspective we get through the multipersonal viewpoints of communicative reason, the same kind of perspective that enables us to correct perceptual illusion, is not so readily available, except through the kind of coevolved, natural self objectifications achieved by the global and symbolic processing of the various domain specific representations of perceptual and affective experience. The capacity for certain kinds of self deception, calculated on the basis of another's perspective on oneself, is tantamount to the capacity for “sneaky intentions” or for deceiving the other through not showing or revealing, inadvertently, the signs of any intended or unconscious deception: Humans are skilled cheat detectors and one way of fooling cheat detectors is to deceive oneself as well. Such deception through

unconscious self deception—which Nesse and Lloyd (1992) identify with Freudian “repression”—is consistent (for consciousness) with not violating the principles of Habermasian reason, and with sincerely pursuing the reaching of communicative understanding. In such circumstances, one unconsciously pursues a concealed and unconscious *perlocutionary* purpose (Austin’s term for a speaker’s purpose in speaking insofar as the speech act affects the audience) such as manipulating the other, but one does so by consciously and sincerely pursuing another openly intended perlocutionary goal. Rather than being a case of deceit in which hidden strategic aims are parasitic on dishonest communicative actions, in this case communicative action and the sincere communicative reaching of understanding is parasitic on unconscious self deception. Since the deception is based on the selection for consciousness of only certain of the multiple drafts of mental processing in the context of an accessibility relation between successively selected drafts that allows a least risk or least disruptive move—as in excuse making—it is quite easy for humans to self deceive and to become chronically self deceptive. Any proposition can mean whatever someone wants to take it to mean. A proposition denotes a set of possible worlds, and psyche can choose the most convenient.

An aside on generosity. In a sense our genes have taken on much of the disreputable burden of selfishness, enabling us to pursue an innate, if flawed generosity. It is flawed because its phylogenetic basis lies in a capacity for reciprocal exchange (including symbolic information exchange) and a narrative capacity for calculating delayed reciprocity. Generosity is an almost generalised capacity for giving (comparable to the generalised capacity for communicative collusion) coevolved in an environment of fellow hominids compelled by an affective indicator of their exchange indebtedness: the capacity for what now goes by the name of conscience. Socially, generosity is specified by particular memetic, normative forms of moral culture. But of course the burden of selfishness is easier for nature to contrive than the burden of generosity or even reciprocal exchange. Despite nature’s quite remarkable contrivance of social animals with a conscience, the barter relation and eventually the whole memetic machinery of the market system are ready ways of legitimating the burden of exploitative exchange, particularly insofar as such exchange contravenes moral norms. Rather than being just the internalised form of perhaps repressive social norms (which have certainly evolved socially and colonised it) the capacity for conscience is more a psychologically framed capacity for reckoning or measuring or remembering social exchange indebtedness in terms of feeling, in particular the feeling for what others feel about you.

In the context of infant development, when self deception is especially uncheckable by anything like the kind of confident self knowledge that might rescue the infant from the naive self simplifications of psyche, and when social experience is laying down a kind of grammar of memetically evolved social relations, the development of the capacity for reaching understanding (with parents say) is a history of primal illocutionary guarantees, promises whose accumulated indebtedness to others constitutes the onerous burden of what Freud called the superego. It is a burden made more or less supportable by the repressions of unconscious self deception, which includes deceptive self formation. In such a context, practical reason conceived in terms of the austere clarity of the categorical imperative, or even in terms of the principle *Do unto others as you would have them do unto you* is riven by painful contradictions; for in the case of the dependent child of unethical or even troubled parents, or the child born into a kleptocratic, mendacious social system, the assumption of unforced reason and undeceived self consciousness breaks down.

Especially in the context of reason built on mutual understanding reached through a certain amount of self-deceived self-consciousness, the coordination of language games is not a matter of the parties applying the same norms or rules. It is a matter of likeness rather than sameness. The point about this *likeness* is that it enables mutual understanding framed by the comparative similarity of communicative aims to be reached from individuals' inevitably different, but nevertheless similar, cognitive environments. *Likeness* is the most conveniently vague and ambiguous of relations—a mathematical virtue that nature has long exploited. Thus, reaching understanding is a matter of *collusion*—playing with and against at once, even with and against oneself at once.

To talk of comparative similarity is to suggest the logic of counterfactual conditionals. As David Lewis (1973, p.10) put it:

Counterfactuals are related to a kind of strict conditional based on comparative similarity of possible worlds. A counterfactual, *If it were the case that ϕ then it would be the case that ψ* , is true at a world if and only if ψ holds at certain ϕ worlds (i.e. possible worlds where ϕ is true); but certainly not all ϕ worlds matter.

As if the similarity of possible worlds were not vague enough, Lewis added:

Counterfactuals are like strict conditionals based on similarity of worlds, but there is no saying how strict they are.... I suggest, therefore, that the counterfactual is not any one strict conditional but is rather what I shall call a *variably strict conditional*. Any particular counterfactual is as strict, within limits, as it must be to escape vacuity, and no stricter.

The point is, as Lewis (p.91) said, comparative similarity “is vague—very vague—in a well understood way.”

Reaching mutual understanding by way of taking up the perspective of the other towards oneself is like *my* considering the logically quite difficult but intuitively quite familiar counterfactual *If I said that p to you, then you would take it to mean what I would take it to mean if I were you*, while *you* (the other) consider the counterfactual *If you said p to me, then you would mean what I would mean if I were you*. Each of these counterfactuals (admittedly I have written them in an intuitive way rather than in a formal way that would require a lot of subscripts in order to designate whose *I* or *you* was being referred to) is true at the set of mutually accessible, and therefore comparatively similar, possible worlds—those at which I might be you (i.e. at your egoistic world as accessed from mine) and at which you might be me (i.e. at my egoistic world as accessed from yours). Reaching mutual understanding of p is a matter of searching for the intersection of two sets of comparatively similar worlds.

Consider the proposition *I have spent the last week with a new lover*. For another who has never actually met this new lover, what this proposition means is different from what it means for the *I* who utters it, unless the other pretends that there are possible worlds where what is manifest to *I* is manifest to *other*. The question and answer of dialogue can zero in on these possible worlds and thus, *other* could determine whether the new lover is an acquaintance of theirs too, or heterosexual, or whatever. Reaching understanding is a dialogic process in responsive (and to that extent responsible) media. When a medium or context curtails dialogue—and this is typical in the case of the great media of narration, whether print or film or even drama

or oral recitation—reaching understanding involves greater processing effort and a correspondingly higher risk of ambiguity, two virtues (and necessities) of narrative art. Significantly, the act of reference when using the higher order conditional associations of symbolic as opposed to indexical systems is dependent on a kind of pretence very like fiction, because it is dependent upon reaching mutual understanding about something from the perspectives of different cognitive worlds, without the mediation of a shared empirical observation of the referent.

The act of symbolic reference then is parasitic on pretence, or on what might be called a fiction about possible worlds. As Gareth Evans (1982, p.369) argued, the old logical chestnut about understanding singular negative existential statements such as *The present king of France does not exist*, demands “a serious exploitation of a game of make-believe.” The hearer must engage in the same pretence as the speaker for the speaker to communicate such a fact. As Lewis (1978, p.40) said: “The worlds we should consider (in fiction)...are the worlds where the fiction is told, but as a known fact rather than a fiction.” In dialogue the *other* confronts an *I* from another egoistic world, and simply to understand, the *other* has to go to (that is, inferentially access) that world, like the audience of a fiction. So the making up or pretence of fiction is itself already a feature of the design of the kind of selective mind reading that human language functions as. This is not to say that fiction is historically prior to factual or historical discourse—the terms *fiction*, *fact*, and *history* are anachronistic at the evolutionary world such *priority* refers to. Rather, some kind of pretence, unconscious in its oldest instances, even perhaps unconscious like a mistaken representation, needs to be adapted for the purposes of symbolic reference. This follows from the fact that symbolic reference is not just a matter of arbitrarily coded, generative symbolic rules. The “rules” of symbols are more dispersed than that, and their adequate referential use depends on inferences about the likelihood of the possible worlds that the symbol strings might describe. As for the relation of the communicative functions of fiction and fact now, if fiction is parasitic on “normal, serious, literal” usage it is because “normal, serious, literal” usage is parasitic on fictional usage.

Now suppose that I say to someone: *I love you*. A declaration of love is just the sort of case in which my taking the perspective of the other might lead to self deception. Narrative art has built a great tradition on the theme of self deception, especially erotic self deception, using fiction’s pretence to display the kind of delusions that have beguiled people since long before Oedipus became king of Thebes. In cinema, one of the comic masters of this theme is Eric Rohmer. In his *Conte d’Été*, the young male protagonist tries to tell three different women, and himself, of his affection for them. Unconsciously, to a degree, he tries to manipulate each of the (more circumspect) women according to the vacillations of opportunity and his weak, untrustworthy desire. He is self deceptive to the point of dissolving his subjectivity into a kind of constitutive passivity. In the end, only the excuse of external events gives him the power to clumsily extricate himself from the tangled web that he has weakly and dishonestly woven himself into.

Such behaviour in adults is called infantile with good reason. It is a caricature of the condition of being at the mercy of both innate organismic impulses and already socially formed others—the natural, and vulnerable predicament of infant development. For the sake of pleasing and so manipulating others and gratifying oneself, the pretence of love may declare itself *as love* into intentional and social existence. Implicated as it is in the process of the self formation of a subject, this kind of performative self construction in self delusion leaves a painful self antagonistic representational trace which enters self consciousness as the experience of shame. In

particular, in the vulnerable situation of an infant's desire for love during development, self construction by repressive self delusion can be especially virulent—particularly in the presence of others who are themselves ruled by self delusion and social unfreedom. This self constitutive, self antagonistic self representation is like the scar tissue of all the delusory intersubjective warranties made in the developing infant's self performative communications. Freud called it *neurosis*. And the *Other* in whose eyes and in whose image the child imagines and self deceptively constructs itself, and that is thereby woven into its ego instead of just lording it over the ego, is what Freud called the *superego*.

Not only do deception and self deception make great themes for narrative art, their likelihood for communicative animals is an environmental condition of reason. Deception is a *function* of communication and therefore part of the game. Fiction is a cunning response, not merely thematically but functionally, to communicative reason as both beset by and beholden to the likelihood of deception and self deception. It is a kind of self enlightening technology of pretence.

In its obvious diversion from empirical actuality, and compared to science, fiction might look like it has given up on truth, and become an escape or a diversion or a little game for exercising our narrative, symbolic skills. But fiction is concerned less with the problems of scientific reason—at least insofar as the term *scientific* has been limited in the memetic division of labour and society to empirical, non intentional phenomena—than with the problem of practical reason and ethics. What disempowers fiction when compared to empirical scientific validity is what empowers it when compared to the claims of an ethical treatise or a moral code. Eventually, in its appreciation of the nature of communicative reason, fiction says something about scientific debate anyway. Treating a text as a fiction is not a way of neutralising differences in validity claims and in interpretations—including the sometimes deliberate misinterpretations of scientific debate—it is a way of using the differences by showing them. In fiction's theatrical character lies its theoretical character.

Fiction's response to the predicament of communicative reason is somehow to scrutinise the entanglement of the deceptive and the truthful functions of narrative and to see through this tangle. As a merely formal move though, fiction may itself be used mendaciously, although this damages its artistic value because it collapses the narrative back into the communicative game it had only just managed to overcome by means of its sublime self scrutiny. In fiction, communicative, narrative reason dramatises its own collusion, inviting the different parties—the author and the audience—to the world of the fiction where they fictively act out the drama of collusion for themselves.

The common, future-gazing assumption that fiction will inevitably extend itself into an interactive form because it now has interactive media at its disposal, not only ignores the fact that speech has always been an interactive medium, it all too often ignores the difference between fiction and games. Dazzled by the hype for new media, for interactivity and for virtual reality, the daydreaming about the future of fiction forgets just how well fiction already knows both the wonders of virtual reality, and the dismal ruts of interactive games. When fiction makes use of interactive media (and it has always done this to some extent in live drama) it does not do it by becoming something else, by ceasing to be fiction and becoming instead a functionary of some kind of screen sport or computerised contest. Interactive fiction may well, for instance, involve an audience making plot choices throughout an interactive text that is an algorithmically generated, many-branched narrative with an indeterminate end, but it won't be a matter of being stuck in the rut of a game. Why would the art of

narrative give up what the astonishing evolution of human symbolic meaning has achieved against all odds? Even while almost always being a one sided performance, fiction is always interactive in one profound sense—in the sense of its being made from the ceaselessly active inferential devices of human meaning as it has evolved in the interactive context of dialogue. The astonishing thing about narrative artworks is that their typically self possessed, organic form is able to anticipate and respond to such diversity in its audiences' responses. Somehow, this self possessed form contains semantic multitudes. It does this by being an experiment conducted in the environment of the game-like predicament of communicative reason, and thereby being about that predicament. This involves taking up the sublime perspective of a new level of collusion. The trap for interactive fictions that work by an audience making plot choices is that they easily end up being too plodding. They fail to be anywhere near as agile and responsive and multiplotted as human meaning already is anyway. And if only envisaged as many-branched narrative trees, interactive fictions may too readily sacrifice the virtuoso quality that gives us all this multiplicity in one astonishing artistic object. It may be that the organic unity of the work of fiction is not just an historically specific norm that can be sacrificed by artistic innovation. After all the supposed attempts of modern art to destroy this norm, phoenix-like and sublimely transformed, the organism of the artwork has risen again and again from the ashes of memetic history. Indeterminate, interactive narratives could not afford to destroy the peculiar self reference that artworks demonstrate in the environment of human psyche, unless the autopoiesis of whatever kind of creature such narratives were to become were to be selected by and put at the disposal, not of human psyche, but of some other non human system—in which case they would not be narrative artworks any more. For fiction to turn back into a game and so deliberately limit itself, it would have to give up its pretence to being fiction, for it is the scrutiny of the risky and uncertain decisions in the game of reason that fascinates fiction. Rather than being a player, the audience of a fiction joins the spirit of the work in being a player, a rule maker and a spectator all at once.

The indeterminate character of aesthetic judgement is actually a reflection of the way fiction not only preserves but uses the differences between the parties to communicative collusion. It is not merely a sign of the old purported "subjectivity" of artistic taste, but of its being a social object that is not simply to be objectified under the regulation of a universal subject or universal norms or the universals of subject centred reason. The non identical, inferential character of collusion guarantees that there will be someone who won't play along with this—whether innovator or Philistine—a fact that informs modern artistic innovation. This is why Kant's attempt to reconcile the subjectivity of *taste* with an objectivist notion of artistic quality is flawed, even though, as so often, he did not renege on facing the problem in its proper difficulty. Kant tried to show that a principle of artistic judgement "while it is only subjective, being yet assumed as subjectively universal (a necessary idea for everyone) could, in what concerns the consensus of different judging subjects, demand universal assent like an objective principle, provided we were assured of our subsumption under its being correct (1790, Part 1, Sec. 1, Book 1, #22, p.493)." There is no assurance of this subsumption—neither in the case of a social, pan subjective norm nor in the case of some kind of (perhaps genetically) determined universality of aesthetic feeling.

While Kant's regression to an objectivity grounded in the subject might seem, as Adorno (1970,p.235) thought, more valid in aesthetics than in epistemology, it isn't. The indeterminacy of aesthetic judgement reflects the fact that the problem of establishing aesthetic standards is a problem of aesthetics because it is already a

problem that is thematically internal to artworks. Indeed it is the crux and the condition of the artwork's content because the contingency of meaning and reference is both the problem for and condition of communicative reason. The norms of art do not just frame art, they are, in their problematic character, its content. Though seldom explicit, they may be inferred as implicatures. The notion of an artwork being a law unto itself is just the emphatic, Modernist expression of this much older artistic phenomenon. We see it in Aristotle's notion of the artwork as an organic whole. Narrative artworks are selected by history, not because they are consciously deemed to have satisfied standards of aesthetic judgement, but because aesthetically they reflect on, or at least use, the contingency of meaning and reference; and they use it as the ethical subject matter of their apparent narrative reference as well. Unless they fail to take advantage of this contingency, narrative artworks are capable of surviving in an environment like that of communicative reason where such contingency, whether aesthetic or ethical, is never in short supply. Maybe the different judgements of a work—even by the same person at different times—are better thought of as moments in the life of the artwork as, in evolving social environments, its meaning is adapted to new communicative demands.

2

On the Philosophy of Fiction

Theses on Fiction

1. The theory of an elusive object.

Any theory of fiction will be tested in time, especially by a genre whose very truth has been to test the adequacy of references to the world. This is why theories of fiction may well look like they have arrived too late at the scene of the crime. Indeed it might be that the distinction between fact and fiction appears obsolescent because traditional theories of fiction are no longer adequate to their cunning object. Apart from a few popular platitudes—that fiction is "willing suspension of disbelief," that fiction is a lie, that it answers some universal need for escaping objective reality, or that it is an exercise for training our narrative, or moral, faculties—it almost seems as if there has never really been much of a theory of fiction. Fiction itself could be implicated in this state of affairs. Its meaning, as the condition of certain genres in certain media, is always hiding behind the scenery. It is designed to remain behind the narrative, as a metanarrative, as something untold and at best intuitable, the ineffable condition of that other, non-factual, truth.

In the face of a phenomenon that deliberately eludes what theory would say it was, and whose precise meaning, in its very effort to mean, has involved a circumvention of explicit meaning, it has probably seemed easier to take what fiction is as something given and obvious, in order then to busy oneself with such seemingly pressing critical matters as the arbitration of taste or ethical or ideological critique. But the nature of fiction only appears obvious because of widespread collusion in the pretence that it is. Such collusion is probably a conspiracy against damaging the astonishing experience of fiction with the dead hand of domineering rationalisation. Fiction, after all, has long countered the domineering unity of one rationality with the conspiracy of its more cunning reason.

Yet, even while fiction eludes description, descriptions of fiction have a propensity for becoming prescriptive. They at least indicate a specific historical issue for fiction, and a specific historical poignancy. Even if they are being superseded, such meanings declare themselves, perhaps negatively, into the process of what fiction becomes. This is because fiction is a narrative syndrome, constituting itself in critical dialogue with what the history of discourse dishes up as fact—including facts about fiction.

2. Fiction is a lie: a fiction.

It should come as no surprise that the most enduring theory of fiction is a fiction: that fiction is a lie. If this were *not* a fiction then it would be a deluded theory, a mistake or a lie. What such a fiction has demonstrated is the cunning of fiction. For fiction *is* a lie for those who refuse to collude in its fiction, and it is true for those conspirators who read this little fiction for its truth. The trouble now is that in an era when transgression is becoming a sentimental act, this theory is cheek as schmalz, and therefore a case of fiction as lie.

3. Willing suspension of disbelief.

Coleridge's phrase about supernatural romance is the English language commonplace of literary theories of fiction. But fiction would not be ideally defined as a modality of belief. Belief as we now know it is a contingent historical phenomenon. Concerned with the subjective experience of truth as something gratifying, cherished and one's own, belief has been an issue in the West since whenever it was that truth became something alien for the victims of progress. At least from the time of the Gospels, it has involved a project for rescuing the cherished marvels of narratives whose truth has been superseded. The peculiar longing for the gratifying affect of truth has given belief an affinity with and fascination for the affective spectacle of narrative. The story in Luke about the apostles on the road to Emmaus—surely a story that deserves to be redeemed as fiction—drew its representation of marvellous revelation from the spectacles of fabulous story telling, which it then projected into the factuality of everyday domestic pathos. It used the rhetoric of spectacular plot—of pathos, discovery and reversal—to define belief and vindicate it. The subjective fire kindled by the unknown stranger in the apostles' hearts confirms and is confirmed by their eventual recognition of Christ in a moment of wonderful and fleeting empirical observation. "And their eyes were opened and they recognised him; and he vanished out of their site."

Because the longing for belief has so often imagined the subjective experience of unalienated truth in the form of narrative gratification, it is probably not surprising that questions of fiction's truth should have raised the issue of belief. Despite the passages in the Bible about the importance of belief, or about that abstract shell (and ersatz form) of belief called *faith*, even the Bible is, like fiction, more concerned with truth. The themes of belief and faith, however, are well designed to ensure their own self-replication and the persistence of Christianity in and for itself, but in doing this they reveal their alienated character and their parasitism on human hope.

Perhaps now one would scarcely believe in belief if it did not linger on like an exhibit in a lifeworld that has become a theme park of archaic needs. "Something to believe in" was only ever a psychological necessity because it was a function in the social order. After Protestantism fully realised the idolatrous potential of belief, belief became an impossible privatisation of truth, and eventually, something tailored to private consumers in the market place of spiritual needs. Nowadays belief might scarcely seem to linger where it did for modernity: in crisis. Crisis has always been its habitat, but now it is only a crisis of supply and demand.

So fiction is not a modality of belief, nor is belief a significant psychic response to fiction. When it comes to psychic relations to fiction's meaning, the verbs *to think*, *to suspect*, *to assume*, *to imagine* or *to contemplate* are all closer to the mark than *to believe*. In fact, the verb *to know* is closer to the attitude of fiction than the verb *to believe*; for at least fiction involves a knowing attitude to the story's meaning. Throughout the history of epistemology, the notion that knowledge is a kind of true belief has always been inadequate. As Socrates intimated, knowledge is a social rather than purely psychic category, because its validity claim must answer to the demands of intersubjective *reason*. Knowledge must be true (and therefore it risks itself against the disconfirmations of unfolding scientific history) and psychically, it is a case of a thought (not a belief) that one thinks (rather than believes) is true. Fiction is not primarily an epistemological modality of psyche at all, but of the social phenomenon we call communication—like *declaration* or *assertion*. Yet it is a kind of communication that does not care for what is often supposed to be an essential function of communication—the function of *sending* a meaning. Rather, fiction *shows*. In this, fiction still exhibits its closer relation to *knowing* or *thinking* than to *believing*.

Fiction is a thoroughly social collusion in truth, and since belief has become something utterly subjective fiction has little to do with it. Now it is precisely in its sovereign disdain for belief that fiction signals its concern for what is true. Science shares the same disdain, avoiding saying *I believe* for fear of falling out of scientific genres into those of private opinion. Fiction presents the image of science's concern for objectivity.

Coleridge was a true poet and therefore—as Blake said of Milton—of the devil's party. Resorting to a remote semblance of a double negative—*suspension of disbelief*—he actually signified that, even in his own time, fiction and romance had little to do with belief in any positive sense; that is, with belief as something private and ultimately as something no longer prepared to risk its claims against the negation of others' critique, let alone negation by objects themselves. Belief probably only got into his definition because it was a familiar historical issue, a handy term into which he could quickly translate what seems like the epitome of the ineffable.

In ultimately distorting the world according to its own designs, emphatic belief distorted fiction along with it. We see this in things like the platitude about fiction being merely subjective—which is a fiction in the pejorative sense. If fiction, the spectacle and the image have taken the place occupied by belief in the sphere of private life then this is no loss. Coleridge's saying is nicely wrong when applied to fiction, and it can be paraphrased to describe the proper situation of fiction: the happy suspension of belief as such. The experience of the move from belief to disbelief, and the troubling experience of disenchantment that is part of both the ontogeny and the cultural history of knowledge is not quite that of fiction. Instead, fiction is *about* this experience. It smiles on it, which is why even disturbing fictions are a joy. The historical fact that knowledge keeps on superseding belief calls for a culture, like that of fiction, that puts belief in its place.

Like fiction, let's have it both ways. On the one hand fiction's illusion is tantamount to pure psychotic delusion and this is what belief has become. On the other hand, fiction's collusion nullifies the nostalgia for belief, and by nullifying belief it embodies what belief yearns for anyway: unalienated truth.

4. Fiction, symbols and making up.

Qu'il est facile de faire des contes, said Jacques le Fataliste, how easy to make up stories. It could almost be a motto for fiction. Even if a story might sound made up, merely arbitrary and not quite art, it would still be fiction. To make up a story—this children's definition—could almost stand for the essential fictive act. No wonder children sometimes think that Shakespeare cheated when they learn that he took plots from other authors and didn't make up his own.

Names and symbols are like mini works of fiction. They say, "Let us say this stands for that and all of its kind." Fiction too is a kind of "Let us say..." To be struck by the famous arbitrariness of symbolic signs is to be struck by the way they are merely made up. But we are hexed by arbitrariness if it seems to be merely *mere* arbitrariness. The so called *merely arbitrary* describes what is an other's intention in its guise as alien and so seemingly meaningless or unmotivated. The apparent arbitrariness of names, symbols and fictions is an inscrutable face disguising the complex lexico-grammatical depths of their social and historical intention. As Lewis Carroll's Humpty and Locke's Emperor Augustus both found, making up words was beyond the resources of any single person. It might be easy to make up stories, but art is not easy. The more-than-merely-subjective social meaning involved in making up a

work of fiction is evidenced by its aesthetic value, without which it would be like Humpty's made up words—impenetrable (or trivial) for the want of a collusive audience. Any work of fiction that wants to find an audience may be made up, but its make up must strike the audience as more than just arbitrary. In a way it might be better to call the sign itself fictive rather than arbitrary, but call it what you will, the art of fiction makes a virtue of this arbitrariness. The fullest spatiotemporal expression of the symbol's synthesis—the narrative sign—makes up the connection of a beginning and end as it makes up its connection with what it denotes. The art of fiction makes good all this making up.

5. *History becomes fiction.*

As histories are superseded, as their connections with the context of their utterance fall away, what is left of truth is stored up as art in the spectacular ruins of their immense narrative labour. In dialogue with modernity, the truth of such dislocated narrative labour is redeemed as narrative art. So many works of formerly historical narrative—Homer, *The Bible*, Herodotus, etc.—must now yield their truths when read as we would read fiction. In doing so they also school us in the way all historical narrative is to be read: as apocryphal.

6. *Pretending.*

A child has much to learn before it can pretend. (A dog cannot be a hypocrite, but
neither can it be sincere.) Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, p.229

Some form of making up is at work in every narrative performance, even if only at the level of the symbols—the names, pictures, actors, sets, props—made up to carry the burden of denoting things. So pretending is at work in every narrative performance, as in every signifying act. Fiction would be inconceivable without it, deliberately making a virtue of it. The groundless, temporalising, propositionality of narrative invites the making up of narrative detail for its own groundless sake. And it is pretence that makes it so hard to distinguish what fiction is from what it pretends to be. As it turns out, contradictions between what it is and what it pretends to be belong immanently to fiction's make up. Intent on narrative performance, fiction pretends to what Austin called the felicity of the *performative* use of communication, virtually enacting its truth in the very act of its declaration. To do so it pretends not to refer to the real world as it pretends to declare its own world. This, of course, is all pretence. The reference of fiction to the world, its truth, is intricately woven into this pretence.

The essence of fiction lies in its pretence, that is, in its negation of what essence refers to. Hence the kinship between pretence and appearance, which is also the negation of what essence refers to. In the art of fiction, the immediacy of art's appearance requires collusion in its pretence. "He will blink in rapture at the brilliance of the Book." says Bruno Schulz of the reader, "For, under the imaginary table that separates me from my readers, don't we secretly clasp each other's hands?" Horace's pun—*Ars est celare artem*—refers to this tension between brilliant appearance and concealed pretence.

By social collusion in genres that advertise the antagonism of essence and appearance like a big sign at the doors of the performance, fiction frees acts of reference to what's real from the way that the epistemology of validity regulates the

antagonism, and from the way ontology obfuscates it. Meanwhile inside, fiction gets on with a performance that shows what is at stake in acts of reference to what's real.

7. *Collusion and performance*

Collusion in pretence is intensely contextual and therefore thoroughly historical. It works with the norms and media that history supplies it, but, freed by its pretence, it does not even bow to the propriety of norms nor to the “sameness” of the rules of language games, let alone the truth of factual assertions,. It is a terrible parasite on the historical tools for communication, tampering with these norms as it exploits them. It was no accident that the individuation of modern artworks, with the pretension of each to originality and to its own governing laws, took place while the market cultivated the individuation of consumers and the development of new commodities both to create and satisfy demand at once. The precise value and signifying form of fiction's pretence has been marked by the relentless innovation that became generic in that genre pretending to be a post-generic innovation: the novel.

Fiction is nothing if not collusive, the pretence of its appearance demanding the collusion of its audience. Collusion is the general condition of the social force that binds author and audience—what speech act theory called *illocutionary binding force*. It consists in the way all communicative actions, in their context, are self referential to the extent that they imply how they are to be taken: fiction has ‘fiction’ written all over it. However it recognises the non-identity of what each party understands in communicated understanding, and it honours communicative honesty by being cheerful about it rather than pretentiously serious. At work in all communication, it is more than just a guarantee to make good claims to validity by furnishing the grounds of rational persuasion. Though this describes collusion in the pragmatic signifying conventions necessary for the communicative understanding of facts, fiction recognises that all these quasi-necessities are pragmatic contingencies. They are rules of play that are themselves subject to play, fleeting moments of timely universality, infinitely malleable metafiction. Thus collusion is an unformalisable conspiracy where the intention of each communicative party may be put in jeopardy by the other. The act of fiction envisages a Utopia that does not skimp on the fictile resources of such collusion, recognising that mere agreement over terms is just a safe abstraction for the sake of coordinating the parties to a factual claim. Fiction's collusion involves an audience's playing against as well as playing with the author. Its authors anticipate the play of such collusion and provoke it. The virtuoso quality of narrative art, its blissful display of its performance, is just this anticipation and provocation, and the demanding of an audience equal to it. That works of fiction must anticipate, from within their self-sufficient form, the audience's jeopardising response, only makes the performance all the more spectacular. The collusion of fiction manages to fashion an appearance which is just like what is objective: it withstands the critical gaze of its audience, standing against the audience's orthodox expectations while displaying its own marvellous logic.

8. *Smoke and collusion*

At the end of Wayne Wang's and Paul Auster's *Smoke*, Auggie the tobacconist (Harvey Keitel) tells a Christmas story to his friend Paul the writer (William Hurt). He tells how once, in 1976, a shoplifter stole some magazines from the tobacconist's store. He chased the thief but managed only to recover the thief's wallet, which was dropped in the chase. Struck by the photos in the wallet of the

young thief and his grandmother, Auggie could not bring himself to take the wallet to the police, so he just held on to it instead.

Auggie goes on to tell how, come Christmas, he finally returned the wallet to the thief's blind grandmother. Granny Ethel he calls her. The grandmother at first mistakes Auggie for her grandson; and then, apparently recognising her mistake, she seems to pretend that Auggie is her grandson, for the sake of sharing her Christmas dinner with "him". Auggie colludes in this pretence. After the meal, Auggie ends up taking one of a pile of stolen cameras that he finds stacked in the woman's toilet. Thus Auggie is confessing to his own act of theft as well as telling us about his act of kindness. His act of kindness collapsed so easily into an act of exchange.

As the plot of the film demonstrates, there is more to Auggie's story than this, as there is to the history of the camera and the identity of the thief. Auggie "gives" the story to Paul so that he can retell it as the Christmas story he is writing for the *New York Times*—"the paper of record". Paul recognises that the story is somewhat made up for his sake. "Bullshit," he smiles, "Bullshit is a talent." And he gently quizzes Auggie. What is the truth? Is this really how Auggie got his camera? The same camera with which, every day, the tobacconist has recorded the street in front of the shop? There is a long meeting of the eyes as the two friends smile and establish the parameters of their collusion, the limits of their communicative connivance. They seem to be weighing the truth of the story between them, an action like "weighing someone's soul" or "weighing smoke". Then, as the film's credits roll, we see Auggie's story on screen, in black and white. In the great tradition of the comic bonus we get the story again, but this time replete with differences that are either the bonus of cinematically conveyed information, or perhaps the facts that Auggie changed.

This is partly a matter of what films show and what stories hide (and vice versa). The film shows things like the photos on Granny Ethel's wall, or the way Auggie "carves" the chicken with his hands. It doesn't show the pile of stolen cameras. Earlier in the film, when Paul is looking through Auggie's photographs of the street outside the shop, all he sees at first is the same shot of the same location, day after day. Auggie tells him he is going through the photos too fast. When Paul slows down and looks he sees the stories in the photos. He even sees a photo of his own wife before she was killed. A photograph of one thing shows other things. There is an optical unconscious and a cinematic unconscious that falls through the net of language's selective schemata. There is a big difference between media: stories originate in language and belong to language. Film is another kind of narrative. *Smoke* is a film about stories and thus it embodies and is also about the kind of tension that many bad films just do not appreciate: the difference between verbal stories and cinematic stories.

Do we ever get the truth about Auggie's experience? After all, we do see the film that runs under the credits. And isn't film supposed to be imprinted evidence? While story, on the other hand, represents by means of the opaque, biological notation of syntax, and the conceptualising grasp of words, both of which may conveniently omit things the teller would prefer to withhold. The question though is not so much about the dichotomy of truth and lie, or whether any particular medium has evidential prestige. It is about the jeopardy of communicative collusion. The retelling is a bonus. It says that Auggie's story exists as an oral story, and then as a film. Take it or them as you please. *Take it as you please* is what the long exchange of looks and smiles between Paul and Auggie says. Collude, connive! Fiction tells not what may or may not have happened, but what should or would be told. Its truth lies in its *told* character—and *it* is told twice, in two media. Twice told tales are tales worth telling. And Paul will tell it again. And I have told it too. We take a story as we please, but

the *as you please* of fiction's collusion must be able to rise up from the jeopardy of pretence. A story must be able to rise to the occasion in order to please. Without virtuosity in the telling there is no virtuality of the told.

The opacity of intentions, the cryptic character of another's experience, what R.D. Laing called "the invisibility of experience", these are among the features of our environment that human communication evolved to overcome—more or less. In a way, we are virtual mind readers—or would be. But our main evidence of other's experience is others' stories: *the told*. As animals, we are skilled heterophenomenologists. What is of primary philosophical interest is not the bracketing or *epoché* of phenomenological inquiry into one's own mind, it is the bracketing or *epoché* of heterophenomenological inquiry into another's mind—that is, inquiry into what has been *told*. Fiction understood this while epistemology frittered away its efforts on phenomenology. The question of the possibility of the phenomenological *epoché*, the question Derrida (1967, p.167) thought could not be answered, is not half so interesting as the question of the possibility of the heterophenomenological *epoché*. Nature ignored the question by just getting on with the task of realising the possibility, as best it could, by coming up with language. The spiritually inclined—the spiritually jaded—dream about telepathy, as if they cannot bear to look on at such awesome natural phenomena as human communication. There is scarcely another window on the soul. Or, for that matter, on history. Fiction has understood this.

Just to understand Auggie's story we have to go to the world of the story, wondering what would be the case if it were true. That is what truth demands. Stories are made up of propositions, referring to many events and states of affairs, so even if just one of the many propositions is false, the conjunction is false. So chances are, most stories are in this sense false. This is one reason why belief is a bit of red herring when it comes to narrative. In Auggie's *story*, the thief's name—Roger Goodwin—is actually that of one of the jewel thieves killed in a shoot-out. (Auggie has been reading about the shoot-out in the newspaper just before telling Paul his story. Moreover, the thieves pictured in the paper are the same as those from whom Tom (otherwise known as Rashid), a young man who had sought refuge in Paul's apartment and whom Paul and Auggie have helped to reunite with his father, had stolen a paper bag full of cash.). In the *film* of Auggie's story the wallet thief looks to be the same person as the killed jewel thief. Yet, if he is the same person, then he has not aged between 1976 and the present. And neither, for that matter has Auggie. In addition, the theft shown in Auggie's story looks suspiciously like another theft that we have seen earlier in the plot. In both cases Auggie throws an empty Coke can at the escaping thief, although in one case the thief is white and in the other black. So so much for the veracity of the filmic "evidence". The film, like the story, like any story, is somewhat *made up*, albeit only in what some might call (but who's to say) irrelevant detail.

The predicament of truth in fiction is not quite, as some, including David Lewis (1978), have suggested, that fictions are bracketed by a kind of sentential operator of the form: *It is fictively the case that...* A better operator would be: *We collude in entertaining the claim that...* For fiction is primarily an intersubjective, social phenomenon, and not because it is not an objectively referential phenomenon, but because it is *about* the intersubjective, social character of objective reference. In order to grasp a story, we have to collude and go to the world of the story in order to seek out its truth. In fact, even facts require such collusion. Intention requires pretence, just to get both the teller and the audience to the same world—not to the

actual world, which we indicate with an index, but to the shared image of that world, which is not exactly the same, nor unambiguously and wholly shared.

The story that we grasp is like the smoke in the (apocryphal?) story that Paul tells one day in the tobacconist's. Raleigh is supposed to have demonstrated to Queen Elizabeth that cigar smoke was something that could be weighed—by weighing the cigar and weighing the ash and subtracting the latter weight from the former. The information in the story is a kind of spectacle, like smoke—a meaning we grasp in the story's tellability and toldness. Rather than its meaning lying in the substance of the story's referent, it lies in the semantic substance of the story as story. The potential for fiction lies in the way propositional communication works by being designed to both mean and denote, and also in the way that it is designed to denote itself as meaning and denotation or as a likeness of meaning or denotation. Paul says weighing smoke is like weighing someone's soul. Fiction is a kind of attempt to weigh the semantic smoke of a story's truth or a story's soul

Fiction is the image of story. How appropriate then that Bakhtin, that most remarkable theorist of fiction, should be the subject of another of Paul's stories—the much told (apocryphal?) story about Bakhtin's having to smoke his manuscript because he could not get cigarette papers during the war. When Paul goes to his bookshelf to provide evidence for this story he is diverted by, well, another story. Apocrypha are stories that demand to be told and retold, regardless of their origin or authenticity. In a sense, all stories are apocryphal because all communication is: stories come out of their hiding place in the invisibility of another's experience. Fictions redeem the truth claims of apocrypha. They come into the common world—the world of others as Heracleitus called it—made up in the image of stories.

9. Truth.

With facts, truth is tested by the things referred to being as the text says they are. This is the famous adequation of traditional logic. This adequation of concepts to things is itself subject to epistemological collusion in regulated communicative conventions.

Fiction's collusion plays with the regulation of adequation. Among other things then, it tests the adequacy of adequation, as well as the meaning of its own text and what the world says about itself. Fiction's truth is not with reference to some world so much as in its dialogical relation to works which include those that claim validity in the world. In this sense fiction is in dialogue with the real or rather with the reified.

Fiction's truth is tested by the truth of its collusion. Because it is a show of narrative, it not only shows the forms of narrative but also their contents. Narrative references to things are not extrinsic to fiction. Rather, they are all the more profoundly intrinsic. Fiction's truth then is tested by whether it shows what is true or false in the narrative it shows. Hence, in return for its quarantining itself off from the world of facts, it may avoid contagion from the world's untruths. It may sublime the mendacious potential of narrative.

Because fiction's performance enacts its truth by showing it in its act of declaration, any lies or mistakes forsake social collusion and are present as unhappy delusion. So the authors of such delusion have firstly to delude themselves. Thus ethical failings—lies—are also epistemological failings and aesthetic failings.

The strict separation of art from morality consists in this: fiction may show morality's untruth, but only by avoiding contagion from it. It transcends moral pronouncement as it does factual assertion, so it might seem amoral but only when it

has taken on ethical concerns at a more profound level. Almost always, fiction's lies are present as contagion by morality's untruth. Edifying instruction, advertising, propaganda, schmalz and pornography all teem with this contagious infection by morality.

Because fiction depends on collusion, all interpretation offers a weak power of redemption, just as it does in the case of superseded histories. The audience may ultimately be able to take the wrongs of a narrative as shown despite themselves.

10 To understand a narrative...

To understand a narrative means to know what is the case if it is true (See Wittgenstein 1922, 4.024). This essentially Fregean insight is a kind of key provided by nineteenth century logic to the unspoken logic of nineteenth century fiction. To understand a narrative—this aspect of a narrative action—is no more an end of narrative than is truth. Any one of *understanding*, *truth*, or *the case* is theological in so far as it is abstracted from the other two and from the context of the narrative act. Bourgeois fiction—the most recent and still living ancestor of fiction as we still well know it and sell it—might have wanted to dispense with the theological capers of what was empirically ‘the case’, but it usually had to excuse its ‘altering of real life events’ by appeal to some vaguer, more theological reality. Hence something metaphysical would be all that would be true of such fiction, this truth being still a matter of adequation but the referent being something falsely theological. This was the bourgeois version of the theory of fiction—the higher reality theory—the one that professional apologists for fiction still wheel out if they are feeling a bit guilty about being paid to spend their time gossiping about what others wallow in at their leisure.

Asking whether and how a narrative can be verified is only a particular way of asking ‘How do you mean?’ This paraphrase of a remark in *Philosophical Investigations* (#353) points beyond a narrow logic of adequation. The answer is a contribution to the rhetoric of the narrative, including whether or not it is fiction. Rhetoric mediates logic. To some extent dialectical thought is the attempt to think the truth of any proposition. Among other things, fiction is the attempt to think the truth of any narrative. This also means that, for the sake of truth, it is against truth.

11. Hélas pour moi

At the beginning of Goddard's *Hélas pour moi*, a story is told as a kind of invocation:

My father's father's father, when he had a difficult task to undertake, went to a place in the forest, lit a fire and said a prayer. My father's father, when *he* had a difficult task to undertake, no longer knew how to light the fire, but he went to the place in the forest and said the prayer. My father no longer knew how to light the fire, nor the words of the prayer, but he knew the place in the forest and went there. I no longer know how to light the fire, nor the words of the prayer, nor the place in the forest. All I have is this story.

For a story it is remarkably like a prayer, a prayer for those facing a difficult task. As an invocation this is only appropriate: invocations are typically prayers addressed to some muse. And as a story, it is an appropriate invocation, given the difficult narrative tasks ahead. For into the plot of Godard's film are drawn memories,

imaginings, different versions and iterations of the same events, and the narrative's own metanarratives.

I don't pretend to understand *Hélas pour moi*, but what it is to understand a film is one theme (as I understand it) of this film. I expected, when I first watched it on video, to be entertained in the way one is by a film one falls asleep to. This is a private pleasure made legitimate for me by a remark of Raúl Ruiz. When I am tired, and unwilling to make the effort to keep up with the itinerary of a Hollywood entertainment, I am happy to relax with a "difficult" film. Instead of falling asleep when watching *Hélas pour moi* though, I found myself held by a calmly moving wakefulness. The opening story so captivated me with its narrative about the genesis of narrative, that every event in the film seemed to work as an event in some forgotten, inscrutable plot that I could not understand, and that was itself a reflection on plot. Though I suspected that the film was a trumpery of cleverness hiding an impoverished or even sentimental underneath (a marital tale about memory and, alas for me, regret and infidelity), my suspicions were not confirmed. Perhaps if I had watched the film with more attention, the whole thing may have lost the allure of mystification and fallen apart into a hotch potch of passionless filmic play on the subject of abstract narrative. Perhaps it was a work just made for the dreamy wakefulness with which I viewed it.

In an essay on Godard's *King Lear*, Jonathan Rosenbaum says it struck him as a film in which "narrative incoherence reigned supreme (p.187)." The question for me is, if I watched *Hélas pour moi*, again (and again,...) would its ultimate narrative incoherence be revealed as the pretentious emptiness of a film with nothing to tell, or would its incoherence resolve into a wonderful enthymematic plot, or would it confirm my impression that narrative incoherence was the film's own well wrought theme. I suppose that all I need to do to find out is watch it again (and again...).

Again and again, from father to son, the opening story is repeated—or rather, it is repeated for the audience in a story that begins by telling about actions and ends up telling about telling about those actions. Memory is usually memory of stories rather than of actual events, a secondary elaboration rather than experience itself. As the story and the course of action are passed from generation to generation, the details of the action are gradually lost, while the story remains. The final sentence is an instance of that device wherein the end of the story is the story itself. However, the entelechy of story telling is no mere device. It is more like a vital organ, and a reproductive one at that. A story, a complex narrative symbol, has an evolving life of its own. It lives and reproduces by repetition. Storytelling, wrote Walter Benjamin, is always the art of repeating stories. The final sentence of this story represents the repetition of the story; it is like a seed. It is the next telling in seminal form. All communicative actions somehow refer to themselves and to how they are to be taken. In the device of entelechy, the story refers to itself as story, and to how it is to be taken and repeated as story.

If I were to watch *Hélas pour moi* again and again, would I see something like this happen? Would the substance of actions dissolve and resolve into the stories about those actions? (Strictly, of course, there are no actions here other than that of the video running. Right from the start it is all story, all representation, all video.) Would this be *understanding* the film, or have I already understood it by being joyfully, dreamily-wakefully curious? In the invocatory story we get four stories. If I watch *Hélas pour moi* four times, do I get four different stories in one or do I just get the *real* story.

Understanding is not a matter of discovering some set of eternal propositions, of which the story is just the earthly paraphrase. The habit of thinking of

understanding in terms of being able to reproduce the story in paraphrase or summary probably gives rise to the notion of there being some proper, eternal paraphrase. With all narratives, however, and spectacularly with fiction, what you see or hear is all you get. Paraphrases and summaries are replications with variation. So I won't summarise the plot of Godard's film. Better to rewind the tape and watch it again.

12. Intention

In the common sense view, a narrative has been misunderstood if its authors' intention has not been taken up. Empathetic uptake is practically the definition of communicative understanding, but it can't be said that this defines narrative as such. What it does define is a set of specific pragmatic conventions of certain genres, especially factual and workaday speech genres; and as pragmatism, it depends on assuming a little fiction about narrative being a message sending action in which, as John Searle (1969) put it, "normal (*sic.*) input and output conditions apply". The quasi-necessity of such a fiction is certainly not to be hypostatized as a foundation of narrative as such, and certainly not of fiction.

Just what an author's meaning is, and how it is constructed as self-identical depend on collusion in social pretence. In everyday experience probably nothing better manifests 'my meaning' for me than another's obstinately mistaking it—and then arguing against the mistake that is said to be my intention. Otherwise the shimmering, self identical presence of 'my meaning' is the cunning, predatorial contrivance of the same contextual conventions that enable what in literary texts is called literal meaning. Literal meaning contrives by means of conventions alone to make a text's meaning independent of context, and therefore paradoxically, independent of mere conventions. Literal meaning is supposed to just be there in black and white, just as the unambiguous facts are just captured on newsreel; but really it is a case of the most developed semantic contrivance being taken as the most immediate meaning. This last resort of meaning is turned into a first principle—a *husteron proteron* or last thing first—a first principle especially beloved of fundamentalist interpretation. It is also the *husteron proteron* that, as a shimmering intellectual vision, has long dazzled philosophy: the Idea, in the presence of which meaning grows immaculate and sheds not only its connection with mere custom, context and convention, but even with the earthbound textual stuff in which meaning is alone signifiable. However, different media, different ways of meaning. Non-literary media, more polysemic and less strictly regulated than writing, remind us of the truth lost in the regulation of literal understanding and intention. Certainly, some develop their own regulated genres such as eye-witness film or video, while others such as drama and dance scarcely recognise any such regulation as literal meaning. Fiction's mimesis, in whatever medium, maintains the iconic, polysemic capability of narrative, which literal meaning was designed to restrain.

Philosophy's relentless drive to see beyond another's intention, or to get the better of it and say *I know better than you, I even know better than you what you are saying* has never been far from an attempt at domination. In claiming the high ground of the Real or the True, what better ruse than that of building up my meaning into meaning as its own object, the *noesis noeseos* that "goes forth freely as Nature", as Hegel (*Logic* #244, p. 296) put it. Such a meaning's truth could as well be "spoken by oak or rock." Author's of fiction anticipate a reading that is at least as relentless and testing as philosophy's. Wanting to avoid anyone's getting the better of a work's mere intention they design works in which meaning goes forth freely as Nature and from which authorial subjectivity falls away like scaffolding, making artifice look natural.

Stories that make illegitimate factual claims, such as ghost or alien or occult stories, are ripe for reading against intention. Their meaning ceases to be understood as the denotation of the text and becomes instead a symptom of something delusory or pathological in the tellers. The reading that does not empathise and take up one's symbolised intention, the reading that instead knows better, objectifies one. Thus occult stories that assert the supernatural may be understood, against intentions, for their psychoanalytical meaning. Or, at a social level, the supernatural—that world that sadly and desperately seeks to defy the empirical by presenting itself as its mere parody—attests to an impoverishment of experience in the reified world. The supernatural is a reaction to what the individual experiences as the alienated character of what cultural evolution dishes up as the empirical.

Meanwhile, fiction assumes the non-identity of communicative intentions, and is designed to make a virtue of the likelihood of misunderstanding, that is, of the likelihood of the authors' intention not being preserved in the interpretation. With their self-sufficient, non-dialogical pretence, narrative artworks are not primarily concerned with communication of intention, which, instead, becomes a subjective aspect of a content that is displayed rather than asserted. As a result, the negation of dialogue that is instituted by the narrative artwork's pretence of autonomy, preserves the dialogical aspect immanently, in renditions of dialogue, in the dialogised or 'double voiced' symbols and images that display the meaning that others have stored up in them, and in non-identical intentions. This would explain the commonplace that art is about ambiguity.

The idea that interpretation is a productive practice can scarcely be denied. But to turn this description into a prescription would be unwise. There is no ignoring intention and the notion that all interpretation is misunderstanding was only a provocative slogan for illustrating how, in narrative art, knowing interpretation differs from common sense communicative understanding. Even so, naive readers who read too much into a work demonstrate something about reading. Despite the fact that they are distracted by their own intentions, they show how works respond to their readers' intentions, and hence, how all reading is *reading into* just as fiction's making is *making up*.

A critic can hardly say that a work has been misunderstood if its interpretation is at odds with its author's intentions. This is especially true of works, which no matter how esteemed, seem to be losing their meaning with time, as their contexts and the social semiotic bases of their meanings fade. This degeneration effects all narrative artworks. The academic attempts to rescue such works' intentions by scrupulous researches into their authors' times actually distort a work's narrative artistic essence, which is that of a shifter between historical contexts. This essence is a matter of pretence and of a work's capacity to respond collusively to the jeopardy in which any reader's questions puts it. Borges' character, Pierre Menard, thought that "To be in some way Cervantes and reach the *Quixote* seemed less arduous to him—and consequently, less interesting—than to go on being Pierre Menard and reach the *Quixote* through the experience of Pierre Menard." No doubt such an approach, enriches "the halting and rudimentary art of reading."

Of few English writers would it be more true to say that "fame is a form of incomprehension" than of Milton. *Paradise Lost* has long been closed off from the atmosphere of immediate aesthetic experience—a predicament registered by Samuel Johnson's ambivalent opinion of the grandly intended work. Even the best critics, despite criticising it for such sins as "a mythology which would have been better left in the Book of Genesis" (Eliot 1957), for the use of "foreign English" (Eliot), for its "want of human interest" (Johnson 1971), for the burdensome duty of its reading

(Johnson), and for its unimpressive grasp of ideas (Eliot), still seem constrained to award it consolation prizes for “euphony”, for “control of so many words” or for being “what Aristotle requires”. Talk about incomprehension! Nowadays, *Paradise Lost* is best read for and across a distance that would not be out of place in its own phantasmagorical cosmos, in the expectation that the light of meaning that crosses such a distance will be all that more strange and wonderful. For us now, Milton’s wonderful revolutionary, melancholic poem marks the passing of Providence into something archaic, superseded by Progress. As an historical logic, Providence becomes something fictional. Grand theological narrative presented as incipiently anachronistic epic monument in an age when all narrative art is subject to decay into mere fiction, succumbs to that decay, and, as we may see now, made it a theme. The fallen angels are an allegory of the way theological narrative ruins are present as allegory. Providence itself is asserted, but only as a ruin; Milton’s narrative, infused with images from contemporary science and engineering, shows this ruin from the perspective of Progress.

In the theatre, where an *interpretation* means a particular production, those doing the interpretation demonstrate the way that actors and audiences must become authors. The playwright’s script, like the playwright’s no longer verifiable intention, becomes a mere organising aspect of the drama’s content. When Hamlet says, “What a piece of work is man” is he uttering a commonplace of renaissance humanism—or sexism—or a mockery of it? When he refuses to kill Claudius at prayer, is he just making excuses for avoiding the deed, or is he committing the sin of diabolical hatred by preferring to kill his victim in more damning circumstances, or is it just a case of contrived dramatic delay. In *Measure for Measure*, is the Duke just a residue of providential conventions left over from earlier romance sources, or, having entrusted Vienna to the corrupt Angelo, tricked Isabella and Mariana, played with Claudio’s fear of death, condemned Lucio to an unfair punishment, and presided over a mockery of a happy ending, is he a mockery of the archaic brutality of providence as such. Long lived works ask to be reinterpreted in the times of their production suggesting that only the intentions of new dramaturgical collaborators illuminate a content that exceeds all interpretations.

When narrative artists are hesitant about discussing their work, this is not simply subjective coyness. Wanting a work to stand on its own is only in accordance with the enduring socio-historical (and socially selected) design of artworks. Artists don’t want to hedge in a work’s intentions. What artist, having made the effort to produce a work, would send it off as the mere bearer of their paraphrasable intentions? As the Hollywood producer said, if you want to send a message, call Western Union. The other side of this is that, however much a work aspires to self sufficiency, criticism only honours a work by responding to it, and to do so it must go beyond the work: it brings its own meanings and so reveals unintended meanings; and it answers the work and the way the work questions other works. In the act of editing, artists are confronted, as it were, by their own narrative, as if it were that of another. On the one hand, the work considered as one’s own is merely cause for pride or shame. On the other, the work is sent off, not merely as the bearer of one’s measured semantic freight, but as with Dicken’s *David Copperfield*, like a favourite child with intentions other than one’s own. Surely it is only in the way that an artwork is other than intended that it even opens itself up to understanding.

13. Epistemology of fiction

It is not enough to make the change from the old subject centred epistemology to one that theorises the epistemological problems of subjects in general. Kant himself did this long before epistemology was naturalised. In order to write about narrative and fiction we need to acknowledge the historical specificity of the kind of subject—the human kind—that can perform such representations. Fictions are produced not just for their representations of environmental phenomena, but for their being, apparently, representations for their own sake. I say “apparently” because no doubt many non referential, counterfactual representations are made for the purpose of modelling possible environmental phenomena such as those that are likely to be encountered during a planned course of action. In other words, narratives that lack a referent may find one in the future and thus reveal their human teleological function. Though fictions may sometimes function as counterfactuals and prepare us for future contingencies, they also put their counterfactuality to other purposes.

Fictions are produced for the sake of (or perhaps later find a function in) representing our human representationality and representing or demonstrating the capacity or incapacity of our narratives to be adequate to their object. This, for a start, demands that fictions do refer to events and objects, even if non existent ones, for only by doing so may they represent representationality. Fictions, like all communications, refer to themselves insofar as they refer to how they are to be taken (namely, as fictions). They also refer to themselves by virtue of their negation of the function of reference to actual events or things. That is, they refer not to what representations represent but to the fact that representations represent events and things.

One of the general features of the epistemological problems confronting subjects is the necessity of reduction: any model or representation reduces the complexity of whatever it represents. A fiction, by representing what is not the case, contradicts a representation of what is the case. In doing so it restages the human subject’s need to run contradictory stories at the same time in order not to lose information discarded in the abstractions of reduction and in order to keep track of the inferentially accessible actuality of the world that non-fiction alone is supposed to be able to refer to. Whatever a fiction or a non-fiction is about, or whatever the represented actuality of perception or experience, it is only accessible by such an inferential process. In that process, we test the meaning of a plot or of experience by assuming gists and testing them against subsequently narrated events.

The fact that fiction is concerned with representationality is evident in the way that the experience of fiction is a matter of our observing ourselves testing the adequacy of narrative representations, that is, observing the testing that must take place simply in order to follow the fiction. The relativity of assumed gists—supplied, say, by generic convention—to the made up incidents and plot of the fiction restages the epistemologically constitutive relativity of a subject’s peculiar standpoint and of its peculiar take on its environment. This relativity is the practical problem that reason’s claims to truth must pragmatically overcome, lest its constitutive character, which is both the problem for and the condition of knowledge, should end up conditioning nothing but dismal relativism. It is a nice exercise to deconstruct all epistemological pretention. Given the ungrounded conditions and all the ruses of reason, claims to knowledge are so wonderfully pretentious. Without the pretence—the uses of which, fiction is so pleased to show us—there would be no knowledge worthy of critique and therefore worthy of the claim to know.

The gist of the *test* has, no wonder, a central place in the plots and themes of fiction, because fiction itself is a test of adequacies in a sea of relativities. The test of characters lies in trying their adequacy to their predicament. The test of a

representation lies in trying its adequacy to whatever it represents. Especially in the context of the highly reflexive self knowledge of modernity, the test of fiction lies in the adequacy of its testing and in the adequacy of *adequacy* as the measure of truth. By testing replicated plot types against plots, and vice-versa, fiction tests representations, and tests of representations. Since *adequacy* is a matter of adequacy *for* a function as well as adequacy to events, fiction, like all modern art, has ruthlessly tested *function* and *functionalist reason*. Hence the famous non utilitarian reputation of art. Function in narratives like as those of fiction is typically going to be seen as moral or ethical function. In these matters the importance of emphasising the ambiguity of function becomes vital—especially for the sake of ethics, into which modernity's reflexivity has transformed morality anyway. Ethics is not so much a matter of personalised or individuated morality; rather this individuation, anticipated long ago in Aristotle's concept of *phronesis* or practical wisdom, follows from the self critique of morality under the conditions of modernity. Fiction is self critique of narrative and narrative art—and its functions, whether ethical or otherwise—under the same modern conditions.

The process of watching or reading a fiction involves testing the theoretically manifest or expected narrative gists of plot against the text, and it involves inducing new gists from the datum of the text's plot. On the one hand, this testing is part of the normal course of reading or watching. It is the very process of inference that any narrative demands of its audience, so it is part and parcel of such typical features of narrative pleasure as mystery, delay and suspense. On the other hand, in difficult Modernist narratives especially, the replicated gists to be tested (or which we, at the same time, use to test the meaning of the text) are inadequate to the plot. The plot, in some way, flouts expectations; it works to change the norms of plot by demanding their reformulation. In reading or watching fiction we practise something like the methodology of scientific testing and verification just in order to follow the course of meaning. Of course the kind of science we are talking about here is the reflexive one which includes itself as its own object. In the descriptions of a culturally persistent type of plot and the plot of a fiction, we encounter the staging of the relativity of two subject's standpoints: the former exhibits the autonomy of socially replicated cultural phenomena; the latter the autonomy of an author or an audience. Fiction tests the adequacy of culturally autonomous representations to human psychic intentions, and it does so both in the author's selection and performance of representations and in the audience's selection of a communicated meaning. In fiction, the social life of narrative ideas is parasitised by and for human psyche or human life.

14. Universal and particular.

It was a feature of modernity to contrast its narrative art of fiction with the art of allegory. Allegory was seen as an earlier form of narrative art in which universal truths descended to earth and put on particular, exemplary forms. It was then, an historically specific predicament of fiction in a nominalistic age that any fiction that began with theories of the world and then gave illustration of their abstract meaning courted failure. Goethe said as much in his time (See Benjamin 1963, p.161), and this commonplace has exerted a prescriptive power over modernity, even if one not justified by any great descriptive validity as a theory of allegory. Actually, allegory is alive and well in fiction, especially as an extended conceit of particular historical processes rather than of universal theological truths. For modernity, history itself became theological; it became the anagogical key to modern allegory. In what may be read as Fassbinder's historical allegories of modern German history, universal and

personal history are organised around certain melodramatic spectacles, so that the spectacles of world and natural history are repeated in the banal melodrama of the life of citizens. Eventually, plot itself—indeed melodramatic plot—rather than history, emerges as the most theological thing, the anagogic structure of both national and private history. Perhaps it is the melodramatic quality of the plot that signals the allegorical implications anyway, while the astonishing application of plots from universal history to the events of private life is precisely what produces the startling image of particularity.

Such allegory reveals the shortcomings of modernity's straw dummy version of allegory. Fassbinder's allegory is like all allegory—even if only insofar as people might not agree that it is allegory. It is the icon of plot that shines out as the anagogic principle of both fiction and allegory. The particularity of the experiences of Spenser's Britomart or Fassbinder's Maria or Lola are only such by virtue of the universality of their plots. The difference between allegory and fiction is a reflection of the universalistic and nominalistic propensities of the different epochs which they have dominated. Allegory's resources, such as romance and masque, are fiction's too.

So fiction maintains its critical dialogue with facts and theories, which allegory is deemed to have once merely illustrated. It has made a show of particularity in order to show what evades the universal web of concepts, and to give an intuition of truths that concepts fail to conceive. Fiction is not an extended metaphor that fleshes out psychological and sociological models. It mixes metaphors, as it were, to show the inadequacy of such models. In doing so it reveals a speculative character. It presents something universal—a spectacle of narrative particularity—and thereby speculates on what is universal.

15. Fiction's universals.

Fiction, by deferring reference, is a search for another kind of relevance. Although a work of fiction refers to what is utterly particular, it prompts a search for a universal rather than a particular reference. Fictions refer, as likenesses, to universals, that is, to like arguments or plots. And the plot is everything in fiction, not just some reduction or paraphrase of the fiction. So a fiction is its own universal. Still, fictions look like they are referring to something in particular, and this makes for a highly idiosyncratic universal. Its rule, like those of Aristotle's ethical wisdom, is malleable and it fits the infinite peculiarity of circumstances that are as elaborate as a novel's plot. In fact, a novel's plot is just such a rule.

You have not heard these rules before. They avoid redundancy and urge the kind of argument—complex, unique, impossible to reduce—that is demanded of ethical and political life. It is this originality that scorns attempts at reduction, and that answers the yearning for the truth that is lost by ethical reductions. The aesthetic sensitivity that used to be called *taste* seemed like a way of recapturing some of the truth, and therefore some of the beauty, lost by reductions—which was why it was characteristic of the difference between art and science.

This has implications for the theory of fiction. When we test theories of fiction against works of fiction, we have to remember that artworks are made to test theories, to test them to the point of their inadequacy and beyond, to expose where their universals made brutal reductions and to urge their own unique universality as disconfirmation. Once this may have been an unconscious, reflexive function of narrative art; but once described, it became designed, and, in the form of modern

fiction, it took on its own life in the historical drift of narrative innovation. Its *is* became an *ought*—and sometimes an *ought not*.

16. *Necessity and possibility.*

Fiction's image of necessity presents the counterfactual, not just to reveal the necessity of its telling, but for its revealing the possibility of possibility. I suppose this might be what people mean when they suggest that we like fiction because we long to escape from "objective reality". Hence fiction's hedonistic propensity, even in tragedy, for representing what we call "hoping against hope"—that is, hoping against the hopeless hope that is all the spectacular necessity of empirical reality would allow. Yet, as the slightest reflection on tragedy alone would confirm, fiction does not and cannot do this by modelling Utopian worlds. Those ancient tragic protagonists who, open eyed, inaugurate their drama and their eventual catastrophe, are similar to those bourgeois or professional citizens who would "like a bit of drama in their lives". They want *more*. Like Hamlet, Quixote or Emma Bovary they are seduced by narrative pleasure and subject their lives to the fateful pleasure of a fictivity that thereby becomes lived. So narrative art, in the image of the self reference of each and every communicative act, has long represented its own status as a social fact and its delusory potential as such. *Hubris* is an ancient form of the subject's self fictionalisation of life, a self fictionalising subjectivity that so characterised the novel that *Don Quixote* has, for novelistic culture, been taken as the novel's inception. In this self reflective tradition, fiction recognises that hope itself is damaged by the empirical or social reality in which, as a consoling diversion, it has become a function for anything but what is hoped for.

The *spectacle*, a term drawn from visual imagery, is a metaphor for the sign as such, in which something has its own substance derealised in order to signify something else. With no more resources than this *spectacle*, fiction has to make a spectacle of spectacle, and in doing so, it makes a spectacle of the whole metaphysics of the sign versus substance. This does not mean that everything is mere spectacle and therefore only as good as everything else. Sure, *relativism* is the all too conveniently fearful charge levelled against almost anything that is not theology, but when epistemological relativity is the predicament of knowledge, one of the most seductive delusions of a society of the spectacle is the reification of relativity. Relativism makes a theology out of the risky predicament of knowledge, and thereby underestimates knowledge. Fiction's spectacle changes perspective by means of collusion in restless epistemological shifting. In the temporal icon of plot, appearance itself is pitted against the world's glib appearance of necessity. Artistic form—frankly false abstraction, as Adorno called it—is pitted against the world's false concreteness, to show how abstract and how semiotic it all is. What hope there is in fiction is the hope that somehow things could shake off this monkey of their supposed givenness. Fiction's "imaginable" is not hope's "possible", nor fear's. Rather, the categories of *possibility* and *necessity* are themselves put at a remove, in a change of perspective that only the wild hope of domination would call transcendence. Both categories, and their metaphysics, become part of the spectacle. Narrative time puts their counterfactual timelessness on show. On behalf of time, narrative art redresses the wrongs done in the name of timelessness. It is the joyful, thrilling or horrific immediacy of narrative art with its erotic, bodily effects, that redresses the sensuous immediacy of reified reality's advertised timeless givens. Fiction's spectacle of necessity is an image of reality's. Possibility or credibility are also, in narrative art, removed to their rightful place as merely spectacle. The art of fiction makes a

spectacle of universality too. Its own universality is utterly negative and is represented by its utterly sensuous immediacy.

17. *What would be told.*

When Aristotle (*Poetics*, 1451b) wrote about poetry telling what was universal he put it in terms of grammatical modality: history tells what did happen, fiction what might or would happen. Such a comparison partly obscures what it is trying to illuminate. The meanings signified by the genre conventions of fiction are unlike grammatical moods if only because what signals fiction's meaning is hidden behind the scenery, while grammatical mood is signalled in the text. This is made obvious by non-verbal narrative media: a lexico-grammatical rendition of fiction's meaning would be utterly inappropriate in the case of what theatre and screen narrative just show. Fiction doesn't tell what might or would happen, because it is less a modality of events than a modality of telling. It doesn't mortgage declaration to a subjunctive mood in the same way that it doesn't mortgage necessity or actuality to possibility. Fiction happens to tell what would be told. It is much less concerned with the possibility of events than it is with the necessity of telling. In wanting to look like it is more than merely arbitrary or subjective, fiction presents an image of necessity.

In this, fiction elaborates the principle of the sign itself as C.S. Peirce described it in his *Speculative Grammar* (1931-1958, vol 2, pp 134-135): for pragmatic reasons, the sign involves a quasi-necessary truth (a rule) in order that it may embody meaning for whomever it addresses. This image of necessity is a metalinguistic fiction or metafiction, that conditions any signification, fact or fiction. When mistaken for necessity itself, such metafiction was called metaphysics. First philosophy was really a kind of first fiction, a *proton pseudos*, a collusion in the pretence of a ground. While metaphysics was deluded by this pretence and took its fiction as fact, fiction honoured it by elaborating.

18. *As rather than as if.*

Fiction is sometimes seen as presenting an *as if* world. But rather than seeing fiction as an *as if* or an *as it were*—that is as the metaphorical or allegorical bearer of a resemblance to something real—fiction is more like a sheer *as*. *As if* at best makes a display of the tension of likeness and difference that Aristotle saw as the sign of good metaphor (*Poetics*, 1459a). *As* on the other hand, displays the tension of the essential metaphoricity of all declaration and all narrative. In its appearance, the reality declared is always declared *as* something, that is, it appears as mediated by its narrated character. This tension is thus the tension of essence and pretence in all appearance and all declaration. Heidegger (1926, p.201) hankered after an even more primordial *as*, “the *as* of an interpretation (*hermeneia*) which understands circumspectively and which we call the ‘existential-hermeneutical *as*’ in distinction from the ‘apophantical *as*’ of the assertion.” This was Heidegger's version of a kind of precatatorial understanding. However fiction's *as* is the image of apophantic, declarative understanding, and so it recognises nothing that is not mediated by narrative declaration.

19. *Embellishment of facts.*

Rumour, anecdote, embellished news, tall tales, urban myths, bush legends—all these proto-fictive, pseudo-factual genres say something about narrative

pleasure. Though narrative wonder is related to the cognitive wealth stored up in the labour of plot, the principle of pleasure can make a fetish of that wonder at the expense of truth. In accordance with the metapsychology of a pleasure principle, Aristotle noted that the desire for narrative pleasure gives rise to narrative elaboration and to misleading embellishment. This kind of lie arises less out of a desire to mislead than out of a desire to entertain; and the desire to entertain often arises out of a desire to advertise the entertainer. Ostensibly, fiction has no interest in lying; instead, it sublimates the misleading potential of gratifying narrative embellishment. Of course, at another level, this sublime reputation makes fiction an ideal vehicle for lies.

The lying fact is well served by narrative means that facts borrow from fiction. With audiences still unschooled in the regulation of screen's references to the world, screen news is especially subject to fictive embellishment. The glorious fictive capability of the video edit, combined with the merely specious validity that video gets from its camera *really having been there and getting an actual print of things*, gives most TV news the character of an historical fiction of the present.

Whether assuming the existence of a subjective pleasure principle or not, the repeated play of narrative embellishment and its incorporation into the conventions of news, means that any subjective character becomes irrelevant anyway. The society systematically distracts itself with the banal embellishment of banality. In a televisual age Rumour no longer enters "painted in tongues", but is transfigured in Vision's glowing screens.

Stories or lineages of stories that survive the replications, embellishments and selections of generations of psyches are well known for generating that peculiar pleasure or that "haunting quality", to which the prestige or profundity of myth is often to be attributed. This pleasure may be seen as a memetic adaptation to psychic gratification: the embellishments persist that have most persistently given pleasure. However the pleasure of myth is hardly that of mere gratification, and more than that of, say, mere rumour. The selection environment of these myths has somehow selected what gives narrative pleasure again and again because it is so important for what is cognitive and intersubjective in human experience: beauty, happiness, truth. Myth is rumour transfigured. Fiction has set itself the task of achieving, in one work of creative authorship, what felicitous cultural evolution takes generations to do. Fiction is to myth as teleological intention is to natural selection. Myth works on the embellishments of each retelling. And fiction hardly starts from scratch; it has all the worlds stories at its fingertips.

Video lacks the generations of retelling needed to hedonistically transform rumour into myth—not because it is quite new but because texts endure and betray future embellishments. Untrue TV news will never be redeemed as myth. Its only redemption lies in its being historiographically reinterpreted and displayed as a lying document. Fiction is a blessing for video and cinema; without it they have no chance of embellishing narrative. Happily, the very virtue of being an *actual print of things* that makes video and cinema such historiographically prestigious media, is also what makes them so fictive. If there had been no such thing as fiction before the invention of moving image media, art would have had to invent it.

In fact, writing also makes enduring texts, and printing makes lots of accurate copies of them, and fiction was invented or at least selected—that, is told or at least interpreted as fiction—long ago in order to satisfy the desire for the coexistence of embellishment and truth in post oral narrative culture.

The slightest reflection on fiction reveals that it is not solely a literary or verbal phenomenon. Yet a linguistic quality leaves its traces in all narrative—even mime and program music—precisely because language, too, presents a likeness of the things that it denotes, a picture, not only in space, but a *temporal* image of things passing through time. All narratives are like sentences in that they are symbolic syntheses that present a likeness or icon in spacetime which is put forward as a likeness of symbolically denoted things. Peirce, Wittgenstein, Jakobson, Bakhtin all rightly suggested the way in which linguistic declarations—what Aristotle called the *apophantic*, the shown forth—are pictures of what they denote. It is therefore precisely in its linguistic character that telling involves showing right from the start. Its grammatical, diagrammatic structure shows that language is not all a matter of the famous and opaque arbitrariness of words. Verbal narrative involves showing in order to tell and in doing so prefigures narrative's seeming fulfilment as showing in screen media and show business.

In traditional grammar, the categories of subject and predicate took on the respective functions, more or less, of making a denotation and presenting a likeness. Character and plot divide the narrative firmament as subject and predicate do the sentence. Fiction works on elaborating the likeness that narrative presents, that is, on elaborating the icon of plot. But in doing so it has to play with the conventions and modulations of truth value, regulating the way the narrative refers to things in order not to become a mere lie or mistake. Different media have, in their different ways, determined the nature of fiction, but what characterises narrative art in all media and genres, from the joke to the feature film, is this elaboration of plot. Fiction works on what, in a fact, would be its likeness of the world. It is because part of this work comprises abstracting likenesses of likenesses, that fiction involves an act of universalisation. It shows what narratives are like and it builds icons to this likeness. These icons, and their characteristic shaping of time, define the various genres or modes of romance, comedy, tragedy, satire, drama, series, serial, soap,... Fiction's concern with likeness is pursued right down to showing how narratives are alike in their concern with the particular. So even the particularity or originality of fiction is inseparable from its universality.

21. *The spectacle of narrative.*

Fiction is the spectacle of narrative. Its work on plot makes a spectacle of plot. This seems especially to be so at this stage of history. For though this is not the original age of the spectacle, it seems to be; and after all *seeming* is the characteristic logic of spectacle.

Spectacle has long been contrasted with the serious references of factual truth, but even acts of reference to the real world make a spectacle of their validity. And in response, fiction has made a spectacle of this. Spectacle is perhaps too readily used and taken as a pejorative term, replaying Plato's misgivings about mimesis or Aristotle's wariness of visual spectacle in drama. The word fiction, of course, has been used pejoratively too, denoting untruth as often as it has denoted a specific kind of artistic narrative composition. Yet probably all those writers who have squeezed what poignancy they could from the ironic redemption of denigrated terms, would not want terms like *spectacle*, *copy*, *simulacrum*, *imitation* or, indeed, *fiction*, to become as respectable or pompous as *real* or *authentic*. The spleen with which Bacon, say, used the word *fiction* in *Novum Organum* would only have augmented the cheek of those who used it to designate that artistic sphere of discourse which deliberately set itself apart from the sciences. Anyway, *spectacle*, precisely in Debord's phrase "the

society of the spectacle" has hardly ceased to designate something which is tawdry and lacks substance. The media spectacles of postmodernity elicit only blasé response from the children schooled in their banality. Even so, in presenting narrative as a spectacle, fiction only carries the sublime, iconic character of narrative through to its most developed expression, in order to make a spectacle of spectacle, and save it from the danger of its own tawdry insubstantiality

22. *Sublime spectacle.*

The importance Aristotle placed on affect—on fear and pity—is evidence of a poetics of spectacle. The poetics of spectacle is designed to create the illusion of the immediacy of affective experience, as if it were prior to the mediation of symbolised meaning. This is why the grammar of spectacle is all a matter of such easily interpretable signs as those that signify grandness and catastrophe—signs whose signification looks natural or pre-semiotic. Aristotle probably felt compelled to justify this indulgence in affect by citing art's therapeutic, social-systemic role in purging unruly emotion.

Yet the sublime spectator, more or less safe from the dangers of what is being contemplated, is in a position to make a spectacle of spectacle, and this is consistent with claims in favour of narrative art's role in enlightenment. The sublime spectator's fascination is a stage in the objectification of what is being contemplated and in the objectification of fascinated contemplation: enthralled interest becomes fascinated disinterest. So fiction shows the spectacle of narrative to enable our emergence from its spell.

Sublime disinterest—essentially an eighteenth century conception of aesthetic experience—has itself been subjected to historical change. Even so, modern fiction that is apparently designed to elicit a more visceral response than eighteenth century disinterest, or sublime contemplation that casts its Gorgon's eye on the problems of the sublime itself, is still acting under the influence of the evolving concept of that sublime disinterest.

23. *The spectacle of plot.*

Essentially on the side of spectacle despite himself, Aristotle located precisely the most knowing moments of narrative art right at the heart of its most spectacular marvels. Indeed it was not despite himself but despite that mythic version of "Aristotle" which has had the function of the eternal, old fashioned, straw dummy for modernity's imagination of its own originality. What is most marvellous is that which goes against expectation yet, in doing so, gives an intuition of a higher narrative logic than orthodoxy had conceived (*Poetics* 1452a). This logic of plot is the narrative, temporal form of metaphor's role in poetic diction. Aristotle was not captivated by the spectacle of language in poetic diction, and he warned against diction becoming a diversion (1460b). Despite the much repeated view that as a theorist of drama he was over-concerned with script and diction, his first concern was with what is universal to all narrative media—plot. When it came to poetic diction, even his theory of metaphor saw good metaphor as a theorisation of unexpected likeness (1459a): the revealing unexpectedness of spectacular plot is concentrated by lexical metaphor in the arena of the name.

Though Aristotle valued plot over visual spectacle, his great poetics of plot—of entanglement and denouement, of discovery and reversal—is precisely a

poetics of the spectacle of plot. In an age of the visual narrative image, it is not always clear that the iconic character of plot is especially important in giving narrative its spectacular potential. The so dazzling optical spectacle of cinema can sometimes limit an audience's or a film maker's capacity for appreciating spectacle. Too often audiences are satisfied with less than what the senses are capable of. It is common for films to exhibit a style that advertises itself as spectacularly cinematic—the kind of style that might not translate well from the big screen to video, say—while forgetting that there is more to cinematic spectacle than the predictabilities of such optical self advertisement. This is the only way to explain my feeling that there is more spectacle in, say, Gary Oldman's *Nil by Mouth* than in Alex Proyas's *Dark City*. Even so, cinema's potential for optical and aural spectacle has greatly inspired efforts to unfold the medium's full potential for spectacular narrative. True film makers are canny enough to know that cinema's optical and aural spectacle is a temporalised spectacle. It is not just a big noisy picture, it is a moving picture. And the most moving spectacle is the spectacular movement of plot.

It is not surprising then that a film maker like Quentin Tarantino, who seems to regard cinematic plot as a spectacle, should have produced a spectacle of Aristotelean tragedy in the criminal setting of *Reservoir Dogs*, and a spectacle of not just Aristotelean but novelistic, cinematic and urban-mythic plot in *Pulp Fiction*. This plot spectacle is present in its complete form not only in the film's rich temporal diagram—on its own the mere abstraction of plot—but also in the minutiae of dialogue, in what Aristotle would have called diction (*lexis*) and thought (*dianoia*). However, in appreciations of Tarantino's films the localised spectacle of this dialogue seems to have blinded critics to the spectacular plots as a whole. Tarantino has said of his lurid tales in *Pulp Fiction* that he was inspired by the cinematic potential of novelistic time. Mikhail Bakhtin's insight that novels are written with the images of languages is a recognition of fiction as the spectacular image of narrative. Tarantino was, of course, far from the first to understand that what follows what in cinematic plot need not only use the hackneyed device of flashback to avoid chronological sequence. Tarkovsky called narrative, sculpture in time. The complex spacetime icon that it carves is plot in the fullest sense. It does not just present an image of abstract chronological time but rather of the narrative temporality of all experience, including pre-eminently hermeneutic experience. In *Pulp Fiction* even the banality of casual clothing or the origin of a fiction—the fiction about what happened to someone who gave Marcellus Wallace's wife a foot massage—is explained by the spectacular means of the sculptured hermeneutic plot.

The circular hermeneutic plot of *Pulp Fiction* is not just flashy style. If it were, it would probably have been neater. As it is, the spectacular circularity is disrupted by the middle story: the most chronologically advanced action—when the boxer and his lover ride off on Zed's chopper—is shown in the middle of the film. When the two small timers in the cafe imagine a new kind of hold-up, and then start to carry it out, they find out—as we realise much later in the plot—that they are small fry whose plans are a mere fiction in a bigger plot. What is shown as a series of romance episodes within the crime kingdom of Marcellus Wallace, would be seen from the viewpoint of a bigger plot—from the viewpoint of the modern state—as just crime. The interminable US civil war escapes notice as such because it is fought as crime in the urban theatres of drug deals, gambling, robbery, rape, murder and revenge. Like the small timers in the restaurant, the crime world is set within a bigger plot of state law that is scarcely mentioned, except by a kind of anachronistic non-feudal citizen who advises the bruised Marcellus Wallace of her support as a witness

to his ramming by a car. Mirroring feudal modes of social organisation, this crime kingdom lends itself to modes of romance narration that are traditionally both spectacular and cinematically popular—heroes and villains, murder and revenge, loyalty and temptation, magic potions, fabulous weapons, legendary wizards and patriarchal providence. The levels of narration and the levels of fictivity, such as they are revealed by the hermeneutics of the plot—correspond to levels of social organisation.

24. *Poetics of time*

It is so often lost on literary critical tradition that Aristotle's *Poetics* was a poetics of narrative concepts. Compared to the *conceptual* character of literary art (or dramatic or cinematic art) the *musical* quality is relatively unimportant. The music of language cannot be abstracted from its primary semantic function—except insofar as art is “frankly false abstraction”, and poetry's work on the abstract music of language strangely and movingly reconfigures its conceptual character. The urge to work on concepts is a poetic principle of narrative art—one that fiction has developed in a reflexive, self unfolding fashion, submitting the principle to its own principle. It does this primarily by working on the argument structure of plot, and submitting the turns of plot to historical transformation. From ancient times narrative art made up stories, and to that extent, made up narrative concepts. The simple form is to make up characters by naming them, and to then submit them to the incidents of well known chronological sequences. Fiction though makes up new kinds of stories for narrative to tell. It expands the possibilities of narrative, and therefore works on the concept of narrative itself by working on the possibilities of the plotted forms of time.

One of the most striking demonstrations of this is Bakhtin's history of the *chronotopes* or forms of time used by narrative artworks. Bakhtin (1981) charted the increasing complexity of plot, from the linear prose romances of early Greek and Latin novels, through medieval prose romance, and into the modern novel. In the modern novel, plot leaps back and forward in time, and bends and weaves and reconnects chronology into an extraordinary hermeneutic graph. The increasing complexity of this topology demands an increasingly sophisticated understanding of temporal relations. For the audience this involves an exhilarating experience of its own, and the author's, inferential prowess. Nevertheless, this complexity is anticipated in other media and contexts. One has only to consider the complex temporal relations made available by the unconscious command of linguistic tense and aspect to realise that, in sentence by sentence speech, we leap back and forward in time with an apparent abandon only made possible by our sure and remarkable ability to calculate and hold on to the underlying chronological order. The increasing sophistication of plot has been a way of using the often unreflected complexity of plot that is exhibited at the microlevel of everyday speech to inform the macrolevel of narrative plot.

One of the most astonishing things about Bakhtin's essay on “Forms of Time in the Novel” is the observation that it took novelistic prose a long time to recover a plot complexity commensurate with that of, say, Greek drama. It is more astonishing when we realise that it was hardly commensurate with the temporal alacrity of everyday speech, and that dramatic plot itself was quite restricted by the temporal demands of staged performance. In drama, the time travelling usually takes place in speech rather than in the order of staging. The chronotope of quest romance is typically modelled on the simple chronology of a journey, and such a simple form of time was still dominating prose narrative as opposed to dramatic narrative two

thousand years later in the time of Shakespeare. Perhaps it was thought that the time travelling excesses of speech could be and therefore should be eradicated by the discipline of writing. Perhaps the long journey along the line of prose seemed more like the journey through time and therefore more realistic. Anyway, fiction eventually followed drama—indeed it was able to outdo the stage-bound temporality of drama—by showing narrative in all its time travelling excesses.

25. Fictional worlds

An especially serious consideration in the logic and ontology of fiction, one that grew out of the discipline of the logic of counterfactuals, was the analysis of fictional texts in terms of their references to fictional or possible worlds and of the inferential accessibility of those worlds from the actual world (See Pavel 1986 for a good overview). This relation of inferential accessibility between worlds is important in the interpretation of all human discourse and all narrative meaning; fiction just takes advantage of this unavoidable semantic process in its own special way.

A lot is made of these merely possible worlds and fictional worlds—in accordance with the specific kind of unreflected mystique that ontology has for us. Ontology has this mystique because whatever is relevant is explicitly represented or implied, and representations and their referential implications imply an ontology. But the ontology implied by a representation should not be treated as an onerous commitment: an organism's representations of its environment are curiously solipsistic insofar as they are representations for the subject in itself and not for the environment or the thing in itself. Even if the function of reference were a primary one in narrative communication, that function uses another function of narrative: its use of meaning as a system of inferential access to non explicitly or incompletely represented worlds. This seems to illustrate that it is not so much ontology as conceptual processing and inference that is of prime importance in narrative communication.

When ontology takes on its typical, naive mystique, some misleading assumptions quickly come into play. One is the theological view that *actuality* is some kind of stable *presence*, rather than being (for the representing subject) a network of accessible, possible representations. This is related to a second theological assumption: that *worlds* are big places furnished with lots things, or perhaps big states of affairs made up of lots of things. However even as human language construes it, there are other ontological categories besides things and states. There are events and properties and paths too. Worlds are not states of affairs made up of things disporting themselves; they demand understanding as systems of meaning and inference. Such terms as those we need in order to refer to whatever is epistemologically relevant for organisms engaged in representing their actual environments—terms like *thing*, *event*, *memory*, *time*, *change* and *invariance*—are all interrelated, and imply one another (Von Foerster 1981, 265). Systems of representations, with their differentially inferable implications, are primary when understanding the actual world in terms of its possibilities. The traditional thing-based ontology that still appeals despite the onslaught of modernity, reduces the world to things and states, sacrificing adequacy for the sake of the security that attends the simplification and familiarisation of environmental complexity. Even though such an ontology has its own, familiar and quasi natural emotional prestige, it owes this to the effect of contingent cultural selection processes. The prestigious, ontological emotion—the affect of Heidegger's "vague ordinary understanding of Being (1926, p.25)"—is just what fundamental

ontology sought to abstract from experience and to invest with the existential poignancy of “Being-in-the-world”. By exploiting what is most abstract and (obviously) most affective in experience—namely affect—Heidegger answered the yearning, otherwise disappointed by the ontological levity of modernity, for a philosophically heavy ontology. As Adorno’s critique (1966) demonstrated, Heidegger wronged experience and the reflexive, subjective and social processes that animate it, in the process. Modernity has been characterised by a change in the societal pressures that operated in the selection of traditional ontological commitments, most notably, modernity has been characterised by the ontological consequences of selection pressures exerted by scientific explanations. Even the ontological prestige of the *concrete* as opposed to the *abstract*, is nourished by an historically specific ontological commitment that is culturally sedimented as intuitable by a specific and contingent cultural “consciousness”.

Meanwhile the practical accessibility of textual (including fictional) worlds or meanings is not a matter of a generalised or global procedure of abstract, logical implication. Pavel (1986, p.89-90) was sceptical of David Lewis’s notion that certain accessible worlds were closer and therefore quantifiably more accessible than others. Yet Pavel himself also suspected that access to certain fictional or textual worlds was more laborious. Accessibility *is* somewhat quantifiable in terms of inferential labour—labour which any text demands—and this is a consequence of that accessibility not being a matter of a global procedure of generating logical implications, but of its being mediated by the particularities of embodied human inference. The distinctive peculiarities of human inferential processing have evolved to seek certain implications—that is, to access certain meanings or worlds, depending on their relevance for our ancestors. In turn the semantic elements making up those worlds have themselves culturally evolved, according to the selection pressures exerted by human minds and societies.

By mixing up ontology (and the attendant sentiment of belief) with the process of logically accessing different worlds throughout the course of narrative interpretation, we risk making the mistake of thinking that fiction is defined by the demarcation of fictional worlds from what is theologically claimed to be the actual and believed world. At best, the demarcational view of fiction and fictional worlds has been a particular meaning of particular fictions. Calvino’s *If on a winter’s night a traveller*, insofar as it looks like an attempt to break out of its demarcated or bracketed fictional worlds and into the reader’s “actual” world, is *actually* a fiction that *uses* this meaning of fiction. Woody Allen’s *Purple Rose of Cairo* uses it and contradicts it. The idea of the demarcation or bracketing of fictional worlds misunderstands the actual world insofar as it forgets that fictional and possible worlds belong to the actual world. Only a theory of types, posited in the service of some arbitrary function, would want to separate these representations out from actuality. Such a function will scarcely matter when some other purpose is at hand. If it is a demarcation of worlds that defines fiction (as it is for some works of fiction), then it is one based on little appreciated inferential processes whose particular human embodiment has its own functional history in the evolution of human communication. Not the least of the functional problems of this history of communication has been the problem of the apparent coordination of two egological worlds coming together in a predicament of double contingency: communication is contingent on one’s successful representation of another’s intentions, including that other’s intentions towards one’s own intentions.

In attempts at defining the communicative functions of fiction, and at defining, in turn, the functions of fiction for people and societies, the traditional method of

running through past theories, or various competing contemporary versions, only to criticise them and propose a new and more general one, is misleading—especially given the reflexivity of both narrative and modern culture. Such definitions may at best be manifestos for a new “ism” in narrative art. Otherwise they amount to exercises in tracking the historical trajectories of fiction and its self transformative, self referential, self organising processes.

Fictional communications are constituted as an autopoietic system in the jaws of the dilemma of communication’s recurrently produced double contingency. The instability of fiction, its resistance to all definition of the once-and-for-all kind, lies in its irreducibility to any particular function, logic, ontology or meaning. By beginning in contradiction—the contradiction that some see as its demarcation from the actual world—fiction chronically destabilises communication by compelling a boundless search for relevant truth; for otherwise the constitutive contradiction would imply the truth of any statement. It is as if this destabilisation were to remind us of communication’s chronic and constitutive instability. Fiction uses constitutive instability for its own purposes: it takes the function of logical contradiction—with its momentary restoration of indeterminate, unreduced complexity, in which everything is possible (Luhmann 1984, p.373)—and puts it to work in order to remind us of the indeterminate complexity of anything that representations purport to reduce. This reminds us that things could always be otherwise, and it ensures a persistent, cognitive alert, provoking, by interrupting again and again the security of relevance, a limitless search for relevance.

26. *Ontological relativities; or plot and storyline.*

We live in many worlds, not one.

The old narratological distinction between the chronological order of storyline and the poetic order of plot, including the particular distinction between beginning at the beginning or beginning *in medias res*, is related to the distinction between actual and possible worlds. And like possible worlds, fictional and poetic worlds persist in the unconfirmed moments of an incomplete actuality.

When Horace referred to rushing into the middle of things, he was probably referring just as much to the middle of things actual as poetical, albeit the poeticised actuality of things mythologically recorded and transmitted. There was not quite the same delimitation of reference as there is in the case of modernity’s differentiation of fiction and non-fiction. Thus, for Horace, just where a work should begin was a problem of a narrative’s reference to the world, whether the world of history’s particulars or poetry’s universals. By the time of the Renaissance, beginning in the middle had become the norm of grand narrative poetics. In his letter to Raleigh about the structure, intention, and abrupt beginning of *The Faerie Queene*, Spenser justified “thrusting into the midst” for its making possible a “pleasing analysis” of “thinges forepaste” and “thinges to come”; while “a historiographer discourseth of affayres orderly as they were donne, accounting as well the times as the actions.”

Any historiographic narrative or any myth is a text unto itself; it may only refer beyond itself from within itself. Traditional historiography—as Spenser’s remarks make clear—often made or was supposed to make a deliberate and antirhetorical rhetorical gesture of matching its textual order to the chronological order of its referent, as if to reinforce the illusion of an identity or adequacy of the historical text to the historical events. Romance narrative thought naively that it had to follow the example of historiography. As it has turned out, one function of fiction

has been to disabuse us of this conceit. It is quite wrong to assume that the historiographic selections, which inevitably reduce the complexity of historical events anyway, can somehow redeem themselves by using plots that preserve chronological order. The redemption of historiography's gap-riddled selections lies rather in plot's ability to fill in the gaps in chronology whenever truth demands, and in an audience's ability to keep track of chronology by following the plot. Though not matching the difference between poetry and history, the difference between plot and storyline is an immanent textual trace of the difference between the text and the reference, or between observer and environment, or between the world of immediate presence and the many worlds that actuality encompasses.

For authors, the problem of the exposition of the earliest chronological events in a story is often present as one of arousing and maintaining the audience's interest in what may seem like the burden of initial narrative spadework. Leaving this exposition till later in the plot, when audience curiosity about the causes of initially related events has been aroused, ensures audience attention to what, at first, might have seemed like boring, irrelevant details. Delaying detailed exposition of the earliest chronological events was thus assumed to be a licensed rhetorical device proper to poetry rather than historiography. Thus, though the order of exposition was seen as being related to the question of reference, the precise nature of its relation to reference, and its significance for fiction was not clearly appreciated.

A text, in its exposition of its earliest chronological events, whether as plot preliminaries or as delayed revelation, is selecting the relevant incidents and thereby reducing the complexity of its referent or world. In its concern for the past of that world, narrative *exposition* (I am using the term, as Sternberg (1976) did, to refer specifically to the narration of the earliest chronological conditions of the story) roots the narrative in a way that quite strongly determines the possibilities of the inferentially accessible worlds in the present of the plot's unfolding. Because of time's asymmetry, pasts are more strongly determining of futures than futures are of pasts. The thing about missing chronological beginnings is that without them the chronological end will be open. It is typical of certain genres to end their plots by detailing information missing from the beginning of the plot. In delayed exposition, as in, say detective stories, the information about the past completes a line of narrative argument, qua argument. So the completeness of plot, the organic quality so praised from Aristotle on, is, in the very closure of its self reference, an image of narrative's reference beyond itself to a referent or world. This is true of both historiography and fiction, except that in the case of fiction, this self referential quality of all narratives, precisely at the very heart of their reference beyond themselves, is used in different ways. This constitutive inadequacy of this solipsistically conditioned reduction becomes the constitutive mechanism for the various functions of fiction.

The need, often felt in the middle of a plot, for an exposition of earlier and as yet untold events, the need to tell or be told that, years before, Oedipus had met and killed a stranger on the road, is a cognitive need to develop a hitherto open but unrecognised or unfollowed direction of inferential accessibility or to access a hitherto unsuspected world. Such an exposition might explicitly access a past world (such as that in which Oedipus met the stranger), but implicitly it steers access to a new and hitherto unrecognised world in the present (in which Oedipus and the Thebans discover the reason for their afflictions). It means the audience (or the characters) change worlds midstream. It means all our inferred references as audience, or the world that we have followed them to, are but "fictions" compared to the newly accessed world—a world in which Oedipus, who had been a great and virtuous king, has become a father killer and a mother fucker.

In the difference between storyline and plot, the effect of the retrospection of delayed exposition is a matter of world changing, like a dispelling of delusion, or a disabuse of deceit. The inaugurating act of fiction, its *making-up*, imitates the experience of world-changing, referential catastrophe, the overturning of worlds or ontologies. This is not at all an uncommon experience; in fact it is a normal one when we reach mutual understanding with another or when we change from one kind of scientific system to another. For such communicative creatures as humans, the communicative relevance of narratives is constant. Much as we would like to look to it for security, ontology is what changes. While watching or reading a fiction, the contradiction of the fictional and the actual world—a contradiction which like any other excites its own chronic state of attention—is restaged in the need to run contradictory stories together within the fictional world, just as it is staged in the experience of history—whether history-the-text or history-the-events. In historiographic communication, in experience and in fictive communication, things both are and are not. Like the ghosts in *The Turn of the Screw*, or the suspects in crime fiction, or the atrocities in *Lost Highway*.

Curiosity, audience interest and suspense are not just rhetorical fetishes of narrative art. Though they can be fetishised, they are the affective drives of narrative inference, of the search for relevance and of the journey to new worlds in which what was once just some MacGuffin turns out to have been the whole point.

27. Character and plot.

A pair like Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, character and plot haunt the theory of fiction, as inseparable as grammar's subject and predicate in whose image they were made. Old acquaintances from schooldays, they hang around to mark their banal division of narrative, inviting efforts to dispatch them. However, from *ethos* and *mythos*, to *actant* and *function* narrative theory has run through what are terminological incarnations of the same old division. In abstract, character is imagined as that which endures, as substance, through time, and includes place as well as person. Yet it is subject to time in what happens to it and in what it does. So plot gives character its temporal life, that is, its character.

On the other hand, narrative turns abstract time into plot by giving it a hero, or a character. But abstract time is time thought mathematically as empty space and hence no longer time at all. For us narrative animals, character always infuses cosmological time, even if only to plot its inevitable bent towards the future. Plots, like predicates, or like the categories of Kant's Transcendental Logic, are schematic relations in time. They are shaped by the gravity of characters. Character infuses and is infused by plot.

It is a matter of historical intention, especially as it is deposited in genres, which one of plot and character has taken precedence in narrative art. According to Aristotle (*Poetics* 1450a), plot was both the first principle and the end of tragedy, and character was then something taken in along with the course of the action. As far as the organic self-sufficiency of the narrative artwork was concerned, this was determined by plot rather than by any unifying presence of character (1451a). Authors of biography and biographical fiction have never been able to ignore this, despite the fact that epic, romance and novelistic structures have been somewhat loose, like ecosystems, rather than being as tight as an organism's self reference. All too often, in biopics and biography, either the history isn't historical or else the drama isn't dramatic. On the other hand, in *An Angel at my Table* the system of a plot—the development of the artist—is used to exert a unifying gravity autobiographically

against the awful centrifugal forces of subjective disintegration. Or in Scorsese's *Goodfellas* the plot is a whirlwind of crime into which Henry Hill is sucked, in which his character takes on the whirlwind's energy as his own, and out of which he is finally spat, almost characterless again. Or in Proust's great quasi-autobiographical novel, the plot—or multitude of plots—is not a course of life hopefully organised around the unifying presence of one character; it is *about* the astonishing course of an action of memory which recovers a multiplicity of almost lost, unexpected meanings in experience and in society. In historiography the priority of plot might take the form in which the plot of historical events tends to choose its own great historical figures rather than their being an historical figure commanding the events. This view though, would be historically specific and somewhat contrary to the spirit of an individualistic age, in which conventions of plot supplied the individual with the narrative means to self-determination, if not quite on the stage of world historical events, then at least in the suburbs.

Despite the precedence he gave to plot, Aristotle (*Poetics* 1448a) actually saw the ethical differences of characters as definitive of the differences between genres. Genre specific characterisation may well be seen as an after effect of plot differences between the genres anyway, but the issue of ethically based differentiation gives an intimation of what has been an important function of character throughout much of the history of the novel: character, as the object of ethical interest, has provided the image of cultural processes of individuation. In the great age of the novel, characterisation became essential to the art of fiction

Bakhtin's concept of *chronotope* was a way of seeing narrative time as something we may read off the structure of narrative place—off the chronotopes of 'the road', or a geological structure or a biological community. As it turns out, character too is a chronotope. Landscapes, cities, buildings,...all these are characters and chronotopes at once. Each may display time's passing in its physiognomy, like the two moustached men—one twenty, one forty—in *Le temps retrouvé*. Or, for that matter, unlike Wilde's *Dorian Gray*. The novel took great advantage of this. Human characters in the novel took on, as it were, the structure of the plots they lived through as their (not just physical) character. In novelistic characterisation, what modern culture called *personality* was represented as the spectacular crystallisation of novelistic plot. The chronotope of character was a show of novelistic, morphological forces. The spectacle of plot was appropriated by and for the great novelistic spectacle of character.

28. *The spectacle of character.*

In the great tradition of the bourgeois novel the spectacle of character became dazzling. It was a spectacle staged using the epistemological means of the time: the referential loopholes that were eventually sketched by a theory of language that was only just emerging from the bewitching prestige of the proper name, and of the world conceived as a totality of things. This theory of language theorised what had long been intuited by the cunning of fiction and reason. In his essay "On Sense and Reference", Frege extended the referential force of the name to whole sentences, but fiction, and indeed everyday speech, was of course already in practice extending it to whole narratives. Reference pointed toward some indeterminate totality—the world or the True, which, as Wittgenstein was to put it, was "a totality of facts". Meanwhile, by abstracting reference from meaning, Frege could strictly identify the reference of *Morning Star* and *Evening Star* in accordance with the conventional procedures of empirical objectification, even though in actual communicative actions the difference

in meaning could just as well be used and taken to indicate a difference in reference. Once *Morning Star* and *Evening Star* had unambiguously distinct references, as, I would say, they still do—in some *senses*. Similarly phrases such as, *the people of Asia* and *the peoples of Asia*, or else *the Prime Minister's organs*, *the Prime Minister's tissues* and *the Prime Minister's body*, may either share their references, or make slightly different references depending on the sense in which we use and interpret them. References depend upon a whole system of knowledge, a web of facts, a world, an ontology. We cannot, other than by convention—that is, socially replicated agreement on *meaning*—abstract reference from meaning.

The world may well be a totality of facts and not of things; but facts themselves usually pretend it is a totality of things. Or that, at least, is a prejudice about facts shared by most who assert them, probably because the totality of a linguistic proposition—an event or state—appears to be made up of things. Fiction reminds us of the narrated character of the world, as opposed to its abstract thinghood. It reminds us that there is something fictive about facts too—especially insofar as they are isolated and purely propositional—and it also reminds us that there is something fictive about any such thing as a consistent totality of them. Indeed it reminds us that there are many worlds and that they are made of arguments and that they are therefore more than merely propositional. They are conditional totalities of facts and counterfactuals, actualities and possibilities.

Facts regulate the meaning of narrative. Abstracted from their *totalities* or *worlds* and uttered as particulate truths, they curtail the horizon of its semantic freedom. Such facts are the common currency of truth, governed by the principle of the agreed semantic exchange value that Frege called *reference*. Fiction on the other hand dreams of a commonwealth of narrative riches prior to the value of epistemic fungibility. Yet facts too participate in the gamut of nuanced validity. The precise nuance is signalled by a range of rhetorical schemata. Metaphor, irony, polemic diatribe, exaggeration, jokes, wisecracks, parody, and above all the unresolved reference of semantic ambiguity, all involve signalling a social relation of the tellers and those told not only to objects and events but to the acts of referring to objects and events.

In the matrix of this problematic of at once highly specific and attenuated reference, novelistic characterisation could present a spectacle of specific, personal identification aided and abetted by a general, non-specific reference to an indicated world. Usually the realistic world of modern fiction is *indicated*; fiction's images of things in particular are indices of a world that lies beyond them in all its particularity. The world of a romance on the other hand usually has to be described in its totality, as a god (or a philosopher) would enumerate all the predicates subsumed by *being*. Because of the extent of such a task, romance worlds are typically sparse, schematic and emblematic. Venture too far and you will fall off the edge of the world or travel into wilderness or wastelands or vast empty space. When common sense realism was still concerned with credibility and with fiction as illusion—despite assertions such as Johnson had made, in praise of Shakespeare and against the self-deceiving neo-classical critics, that no fiction was either credible or ever credited—the seeming truth of a character's identification could be seen as an effect of its clever mix with references to the real world. It was easy to shuffle a fictive meaning into a world that was conceived as an indeterminate totality of facts. In one of the nooks of this recognisable world several (usually) unknown characters—pure meanings surreptitiously shuffled in amongst all the valid references—could very well be going about their lives as existent people.

The phenomenon of historical fiction had to chart its way through the shifting mix of referential forces in such a way that it traced the established collusive contours of this central problematic of modern fiction. As with so much in the history of modern fiction, it is in the example of Shakespeare, in this case in his history plays, that we see, long before, say, the novels of Walter Scott, just how fiction could weight its historical and non-historical references in the service of fiction's truth.

At the start of Book 8 of *Tom Jones*, Fielding quotes Pope's *Peri Bathous*: "The great art of all poetry is to mix truth with fiction; in order to join the credible with the surprising." If nothing else, this would show how fiction was something different then, if it weren't that we still like to misunderstand it in this way. "Poetry" was still the way to refer to literary narrative then, before poetry's sovereignty diminished to cover little more than lyric. Fiction was put into contrast with truth and in art the two were mixed—or muddled. Such mixing would no longer be seen as a dab combination. Any subtlety in Pope's mix was a matter of misleading advertising, promoting the surprising with an admixture of the credible—such was the belief in belief. Aristotle (*Poetics* 1460a) minced almost the same concepts 2000 years earlier: "Better to take a likely, impossible course of events than an unbelievable, possible one." This is the standard of narrative art that makes a spectacle of plausibility. But Aristotle, to his credit, also located the knowing character of poetry in this deceptive dialectic. Where Aristotle the philosopher located the knowing quality, Fielding the artist, with true bourgeois cheek, located the persuasive, illusory and misleading character. Of course knowledge and its simulation will share the same narrative means; they will be alike.

The common sense of the age, bewitched by credibility and naming, could disguise fiction's meaning in what was left unspoken; but philosophy's task has long been to question what common sense conceals behind the epithet *obvious*. The real loopholes in Frege—and in the early philosophy of language that he helped to inaugurate—were in the brief, throw away protocol phrases such as "sentence concerned with the reference of its words", or in observations that quotations and sentences uttered by actors lack their "*usual force*" (p 64) These indicate the *self-referential* action of sentences, and the collusive force that communicative actions have in a particular context, and, ultimately the relation of the search for truth value and the search for relevance in the temporal unfolding of meaning. The understanding of these matters awaited the development of a theory of the communication of meaning such as we may discern in Peirce's semiotics, Bakhtin's poetics, Wittgenstein's language games and especially Austin's description of performative sentences. Whether a person exists or not is only one matter among many in the collusive reading for truth that goes on behind the scenes of a narrative.

The spectacle of characterisation was so dazzling though, that it forestalled any clear theoretical articulation of its means. While, on the one hand, the non-existence of made up characters was emblematic of novelistic fiction's empty reference, on the other hand the novel's truth value—its reference—was seen as lying precisely in its characterisation, especially in its edifying function for readers learning about life while being entertained with renditions of surrogate ethical self-determination. This apparent contradiction, though happily embraced by the play of fiction, was not resolvable in Frege's terms. But, of course, Frege was really only undertaking some important, initial exploration. Because he was concerned with the concept of *reference* in a quite narrow sense that at least differentiated it from *sense* or *meaning*, Frege was far too hasty in dispensing with the question of the truth value of the sentence "Odysseus was set ashore at Ithaca while still asleep." Within the context of his particular concerns, he constructed the sentence as belonging to that

most peculiarly fictive of genres, the philosophical example, a genre in which theories embody themselves in a spurious particularity in order to advertise their spurious universality. The fictivity of examples is a result of their designing themselves as surreptitious context shifters. In this case, the relevance, and with it, the reference of the sentence changes precisely when the search for its relevance is the issue. Ask readers of Homer to confirm or deny the assertion about Odysseus and they would probably confirm it, understanding, *in the context*, that it referred to a literary act of reference rather than to an historical event involving an historical person. In the context of a paper on logic we are asked, illogically, to imagine that the assertion is about precisely what it is not about, which, of course, is pure fiction. In dealing with the case of the statement about Odysseus, Frege (p.63) not only cited purism of meaning, he was reduced to citing the mysteries—or is it trivialities—of aesthetic delight, in the felt absence of any real concrete object for scientific investigation. The reference or the real event that the example actually conceals is part of a famous meme—the much replicated act of (now at least) quasi-reference, called *The Odyssey*. Making an example of an example like this shows just what cunning means meaning has bequeathed to reference and exemplification, and therefore to fiction.

The poignant sense of the lack of characterological substance was a symptom of the peculiar concreteness demanded by the bourgeois age, a demand conditioned as much by its common sense theory of things and naming as by its triumphant scientific nominalism. It is a demand that provokes the peculiar ontologies of antimaterialist, spiritualist thought, in which anything supposed to be spiritual or supernatural proves its reality by dressing up in tawdry, reified, empirical garb, like a ghost in a sheet. That this demand provoked its own delusions was actually intuited by narrative art: from the savage and deformed figure of Caliban to the monsters in *Forbidden Planet* or *Solaris* we may discern demons produced by the idolatry of abstract concreteness as it colonises and populates its worlds with its own fictions.

The novel's overwhelming characterological interest—in which its truth value was thought to reside—determined that literary taste, and almost the theory of fiction by default, became dependent on a command of the ethical distinctions specific to the novel reading classes. Eventually, one's capacity for literary judgement could even be seen as dependent upon the breadth of one's ethical experience, or the grandeur of one's world-weariness. No wonder literary biography and biographical criticism still dominates the literary pages of newspapers. If the theory of fiction never totally succumbed to the habit of equating ethical and artistic judgement it only avoided doing so by an appeal, like Frege's, to a non-rational left over sometimes called the aesthetic sphere, the ineffability of which was both a product of and the excuse for the vagaries of gossipy taste and literary causerie being raised to the status of an academic discipline. F.R. Leavis's (pp. 211-222) distinction between philosophy and literary criticism was drawn to defend such a quaint discipline.

Novelistic characterisation was specific not just to the medium of the novel but to the capitalist, print culture in which the novel thrived. The genres of characterisation used by the novel to stage its spectacles were the same resources that bourgeois culture had at its disposal for the social processes of individuation. What structural analysis fastidiously called the agent or *actant* in order to avoid the psychologism of individual *personality* has, nevertheless, long been the bearer of individuating, personalising intentions. The novel expanded the characterological resources of narrative art, even presenting likenesses of inner speech genres, or of consciousness itself—that so called stream—in order to map the inscape of unique personal life. Even though in a screen age certain personal experience is sometimes “like a movie”, this phrase usually describes a kind of momentary self-voyeuristic

dislocation rather than the kind of personal self-determination that became the stock in trade of novelistic characterisation. Yet this dislocated *I* has, in fact, a famous history in the novel—consider the battle scenes in *War and Peace*, or the narrator of *Notes from the Underground*—where character was shown in what, for itself, is experienced as its non identical form. The novel both described and prescribed the forms of personal identity; and the fictive collusion that the novel’s illusion of identification required, was also used in the social collusion in an individual’s self identification. Novelistic characterisation persists in postnovelistic media because such characterisation became sedimented into the society’s characterological norms.

The reference of fiction to its own nature as an act of reference mediated reference to what was universal in character, no matter how individual. What was universal in novelistic characterisation was not the weak, allegorical universality of a character as representative of class or gender or whatever. Novelistic character presented the universality of *individuality*. Johnson’s praise of Shakespeare—that “in the writings of other poets a character is too often an individual, in those of *Shakespeare* it is commonly a species”—sounds like a commonplace that disparages the particular and edifies its object by citing its affinity with the universal. It was probably meant this way; but the *species* of a Shakespearian character is the species of *the individual*. Though not a novelist, Shakespeare is a seminal artist for the fiction of modernity, and especially, as noted above, in matters of characterological reference. In his characters we see the individuating processes of modernity writ early and writ large. As spectacle, fiction’s characterisation was unconcerned with particular existence; and untroubled by existence it could wax universal and present spectacular individuality in its universal form without fear of the existent’s ultimately negating any mere concept of individuality. We see this in things like the way even the most inarticulate of Shakespeare’s characters is given, by virtue of art’s “frankly false abstraction”, spectacular speech. In modern fiction, conventions of realism demand that few characters display such eloquence; indeed, those that do, like the protagonist of Mike Leigh’s *Naked*, may well do so as a sign of manic disposition.

The spectacle of universal individuality was realised in the general sociological phenomenon of readerly identification. This phenomenon was remarked in the philosophy of consciousness by the view that another’s being, as Kant (1787, p. 236) put it, “is nothing more than the transference of this consciousness of mine to other things that only thus can be represented as thinking things.” It persists in Husserl’s conception of *monadological intersubjectivity* in his fifth Cartesian Meditation. However, as subject centred reason, such a view neglected to recognise that “my consciousness” is only mine by virtue of the thoroughly social means of language. In the naïvetes of romantic projection, the edification of role modelling, the gossipy or ironic fascination with the embodiments of class peccadillos, and in the liberal generosity of the great sentimental, novelistic tradition, the sociology of self identification was rehearsed as the psychological experience of readerly identification. Heirs to the quest heroes of romance, the protagonists of novels represented the historical situation of individual identity according to the more or less “progressive” spirit of bourgeois, post-bourgeois, professional and “multi-skilled” classes. The possibilities of self-determination and personal development were economic and social projects reflected in and expedited by all sorts of novels from the early *Bildungsroman* to the postmodern feminist *Entwicklungsroman*. Self transformation was imagined and reimaged from the gradual self-sufficiency of Crusoe to the dawning discernment of Emma to the wry, disabused self remembrance of Frederic Moreau and Délauriers to all of Leopold Bloom’s Sinbads, Tinbads, Jinbads and Xinbads, so that the various Eddie Twyborns, whether there was still

much ambiguity of character or not, were as familiar to late twentieth century readers as off-the-shelf varieties.

29. *Author, audience, subject.*

The subjective response to art was never enough to build aesthetic theory on, and accordingly aesthetics, which thought it could soar on the wings of the subjective appreciation of beauty, joined studies like rhetoric in some dusty museum. Aesthetics humbled was readily replaced by reviewing and criticism, which cultivated the virtue—in a nominalistic age—of concentrating on particular works; or by biographical criticism, which could feed the desire for news from the authorial front. In the narrative arts especially, where the head tilted in appreciation of beauty is hardly the only aesthetic response, an aesthetics based on beauty and its subject, the beholder, was never going to get very far. The beautiful is a category that might seem to have little if anything to do with the narrative essence of fiction. In fact though, beauty has long been tied to what is called artistic form, so the sense of beauty is so deeply sedimented into all art, that it permeates fiction through and through. And such sedimentation—as an historically evolved, objective feature of art—testifies to the more than merely subjective character of beauty after all.

Like painting though, novelistic fiction created or cultivated the appearance of individual authorship and readership and so helped to perpetuate the notion of the gloriously subjective character of art that has so shaped art in the last couple of centuries. Something as everyday as the unrelenting censorship of editors' names from the covers of novels is as utterly and deliberately delusory as crediting a film to its director and no-one else. It is worse than plagiarism—the natural impulse of narrative artists whose raw material is found in others' narratives—because it does not know its crime. The individual author simply fits into and justifies the powerful socio-historical processes of individuation: the artist alone in the garret was the sublimely ridiculous incarnation of such processes, and one that the art markets sold to hopeful individual consumers. Individual artists are often the first to be deluded by the very pretence that they and everyone else like to practice.

The whole historical process of individuation has made ready use of that most dazzling of all nature's unities: the organism. But the organism's self-referring unity is compelling enough without redoubling its exigencies with the seductive charms of pride. At the same time, the difficulty of theorising a collective agency in fiction's production or reception foundered on the Utopian status attributed to any idea of a collective author or subject who could resolve its antagonisms long enough to produce that self-sufficient organism that the artwork was supposed to be. However, though a collective may be riven by antagonisms, so too are artworks, which cannot help but reflect social antagonisms even in their deepest inner being; and so too is the subject; and so too is nature's blessed *organism*, the ultimate vehicle for all this frenzied metaphors that so bewitches aesthetics. Drama, film and television, all intensely collaborative, all reflecting the inescapably social character of fiction's collusion, may well have provided a less distracting basis for theorising both the production and reception of fiction. But such sway did the authentic individual carry that bad movies were said to be bad precisely because they were designed by committees. Such authenticity has always been the standard lurking behind the critique of reification and alienation; that it is a dubious standard though is concealed in this case by the form of argument which does not distinguish between a committee of financial interests and a film crew. So while auteurism became the norm in arthouse films and bums-on-seats the standard for financiers and distributors, each was

a logical conclusion of the process of abstraction that produced the subject—authorial or audience—as something isolated from its constitutive intersubjectivity.

Subjectivity is of the utmost importance in narrative artworks, but it is therefore somewhat trivial: without it artworks would be just like any other dead, mute object, that is not subjective and not artworks. But in both individual and collective productions subjectivity is only an aspect of what is intersubjective and scarcely unified. Fictions are a counterpoint of more or less antagonistic aspects. Harmony is the closest they get to unification and harmony is just a unifying convention like any other, and subject to change. The propensity for comedy in collective media like drama, film and TV is because comedy is such a genre for collective happiness in the face of social contradictions and antagonisms. Works from Shakespeare's comedies, to Marx brothers' films to *Strictly Ballroom*, to *Frontline* show the charms of collective comedic production.

Perhaps reception aesthetics attempted a kind of phenomenology of the reading subject because in most media it is the audience, not the author, who is most readily conceived in the abstract isolated form of *the subject*. Aesthetic feeling in its abstract subjective form is both manipulable and, as bums on seats or thumbs up, measurable. A theory of the consuming subject is no more than recommended “world’s best practice” in narrative market research. High Modernist fiction, in its reaction to popular art and the narrative industry, tried to shore up authentic subjective production and response against the market's manipulation of functionally isolated, abstract feelings. However it was an instance of what Benjamin called somewhere the attempt to fight progress from the standpoint of subjectivity. Subjectivity had already been lured across to the other camp, that is, it was already all too objectively, socially determined. The tendency to assert the importance of the reader in narrative theory—whether in Iser's *The Act of Reading* or even in Barthes' (1977) essay on “The Death of the Author”—can look like a concerted and obsolescent attempt to still conceive of the subject of fiction in accordance with two great traditions of bourgeois culture: the novel and the theory of the subject. To pass from a theory of the subject of fiction to a theory of fiction's intersubjectivity is to illuminate both fiction and the subject and to reveal that fiction's canonical form, the novel, obscures certain essential narrative features in the process of its own specific kind of pretence.

Reception aesthetics was a last ditch attempt to identify a narrative subject as a refuge for a phenomenology of the experience of fiction. It is not so much, as Iser (1978, p.22) argued, that aesthetic experience is irreducible (like subjective consciousness) and robbed of its unique quality the moment one tries to explain it. Trivially, the explanation and the thing explained are not the same, although aesthetic theory has often wished that, affectively, they were. Nothing damages criticism more than the resultant shame that forces it to pass off precious style as a substitute for both critical thought and aesthetic feeling. Aesthetic experience, in its immediacy, is subjective, yet this subjectivity is just another collaborative aspect of what is always thoroughly social, namely the artwork. All the ways of suggesting the ineffability of aesthetic experience, especially the concept of ambiguity, are evidence of the antagonisms in intersubjectivity and of what is not self identical in the artwork. The ineffability of aesthetic experience, like the elusiveness of fiction as a concept, is a product of pretence

30. *The spectacle of the author and audience.*

As part of their intersubjective, fictive pretence, narrative artworks appear less as a communication between authors and audience and more as an elaborate self-sufficient presentation, a marvellous narrative object. Though narrative might be seen as essentially communicative, fiction pretends otherwise. So fiction even challenges the metaphysics of *communicative action*, for which it gets called “parasitic” and non-serious by the likes of an Austin, a Searle or a Habermas. The appearance—the mimetic effect—gathers whatever the text refers to into the fiction’s spectacle, including anything it refers to as an author or an audience. According to the logic of spectacle, any traces of an implied author or audience are present as the spectacle of an author or audience, or else as the spectacle of their absence. Everything from an omniscient author to canned laughter points less to a communicative subject than to characters within the self-sufficient work. Or at least that is how narrative artworks are normally designed, and more importantly, that is how they are received and selected by history—the historically localised seductions of the cult artistic heroism notwithstanding.

Any medium determines a specific suite of mimetic resources, such as a suite of voices or a suite of image styles, available for the representation of contrapuntal *points of view*. These resources are available for fiction’s illusion of character and include those available for referring to a communicative author or audience such as the *I* and, less often, the *you, gentle reader* of literary fiction. The gravity of fiction’s appearance of self-sufficiency is usually greater than the centrifugal force of intersubjective communicative action. Authors, and the whole tradition of narrative art, make use of what Kant identified as an inescapable predicament of the *I* of rational psychology: they design their own insubstantiality. As Kant argued in his chapter on the Paralogisms of Pure Reason, the *I* is only a logical form or function, not a substance. It is determining and not determinable, *constituens* and not *constitutum*, or as linguistic theory later put it, *enunciating* and not *enunciated*. The authors of fiction only need to go along with this, for the authorial *I* was only ever a spectacle of substance and the spectacle of fiction makes a virtue of this. Whoever takes an author as a substantive reference of their fiction would not only break the fiction’s appearance of self-sufficiency, they would repeat the paralogism or fallacy that Kant diagnosed in terms of his transcendental distinction.

Barthes’ announcement of the death of the author was always an ambiguous metaphor. What sounds like a traditional tool of fictive mimesis—the tool that Aristotle said Homer demonstrated by speaking as little as possible in his own person—is equivocated with what sounds like an oracular announcement about an historically specific demise of authors. Like much of what became the canonical theory of postmodernity, it was, like fiction, deliberately untrue for those who took its rhetorical charms the wrong way. In fact it was a case of narrative mimesis taking advantage of a corollary of the theory of transcendental subjectivity. The authorial *I* was the epitome of spectacle, a representation whose reference constitutionally lacked substance.

The narrator in, say, *Tom Jones* or even *Middlemarch* might seem to amount to an unwanted authorial intrusion into the fictive spectacle, but as a fictive aspect of essayistic prose anyway, this kind of narrator breaks out of authorial subjectivity into a spectacle of *authority*. In contrast to the self advertisements of autobiographical writing, great essayistic prose from Montaigne on, exhibits a movement between the object and the *I* which is always weighted towards the former. The subjectivity of the essayist is primarily present as an empirical mediator of the contemplated object, that is, as yet another fascinating object, or else as a kind of allegorical reference of the object. It is therefore more than merely subjective. Like the Greek chorus, only more

so, it points to what Kierkegaard (1843, p.142) called “that extra which will not be absorbed in individuality.” George Eliot even imitated this movement from subjectivity to what is more than merely subjective in her choice of the objectified patriarchal authority of her pen name. While such authority—patriarchal, ethnic or otherwise—is one of the readiest illusion’s of screen fiction’s authoritative camera, documentaries often take their handy essayistic means for granted and either squander them or wallow in their mendacious misuse. Lacking the instant historiographic authority of the camera eye, the linguistic medium of the novel had had to develop its own fictive resources in order to detach itself from intersubjective dialogue and look like a self sufficient thing. To achieve this detachment, the author or narrator could readily imitate the already objectified, essayistic author. Sure, subjects use such social, communicative resources in creating their selves, but in the novel they use it to create their novels. And the social life of fiction, especially once it is detached from its author and sent to brave the wilds of cultural history, ensures that the narrator’s *I* in the novel is never more than quasi-autobiographical. Proust epitomises this problematic, and makes a spectacle of it, when his narrator briefly suggests, somewhere, that we might call him, let us say, Marcel.

Barthes’ announcement was specific to the medium of the novel and to specific novelistic technique. Gass (1971, p.37) too gave an instance of a specifically literary understanding of fiction when he wrote that Polonius was “a foolish old garrulous proper noun.” In drama and screen narrative the symbolic function of names is taken by living actors or their screen images. Recognising that actors are authorial subjects—in screen and theatre the author is collective—it is clear that while the corporate co-authors practice the death of the author, actors or stars often practice the artist as hero. Such a hero, a character of fiction, seems to come to earth in a number of incarnations: Bogart as Sam Spade, as Rick, as Philip Marlowe. Stars become figures in historical myths in which fiction and fact feed off one another in a frenzy of characterological feedback. To identify Bogart with Rick is logically not unlike identifying George Eliot with the narrator of *Middlemarch*. Rick and the narrator are both fictional characters. In a sense, authors who believe this fiction of their own heroism and who develop pride in their status plagiarise the immense social wealth stored up in such long evolved narrative institutions as the omniscient narrator or the hero. But then all individuals live off the characterological universals supplied by social history.

Though screen fiction inherits the characterological resources that are the heritage of novelistic culture, such media specific techniques as the interiority of first person prose are at odds with dominant screen technique that presents the spectacle of authoritative visual observation. Screen presents the first person by voiceover and sometimes by the camera’s point of view. Neither of these techniques is likely to last for long periods in a film. Cinema’s images have seemed to be materially better suited to representing the phenomenality of a pure transcendental consciousness rather than the experience of an individuated or empirical consciousness, the kind that Henry James meant when he wrote in the preface of *The Golden Bowl* that he wanted to “register the consciousness of characters”. Even so, James was influenced enough by novelistic, mimetic tradition and the philosophy of the subject, to want to register individuated consciousness dramatically, that is, as though just presented by a transcendent, authorial showing. This, as it were, pure consciousness of an absent author was like the transcendental ego. The transcendental ego was what was left over after the phenomenological *epoché* had bracketed it off from the empirical world, just as the author was what was bracketed off from the world of the fiction. Meanwhile

any omniscient authorial voice persisting in the novel was a piece of the fictional world and therefore like the empirical subject.

For a culture besotted by both abstract individuality and subject centred reason the phenomenological *epoché* was a good emblem of fiction's relation to the world, especially the fiction of the novelistic author. In fact the hardware of a narrative conditions the form of consciousness it imagines; the history of consciousness is bound to the history of media. The phenomenological *epoché*, as Husserl (1960, p.20) said, suspended "the natural believing in existence involved in experiencing the world." Its disembodiment is the after-image of disembodied narrative media. Even epic prosody, as both a decontextualising and mnemonic strategy, is a stage in the disembodiment and self-sufficiency of narrative art. This disembodiment and self-sufficiency is reflected in the objectification of any communicative text: this objectification is a process of decontextualisation and when the object is a text it involves the removal of the text from its immediate communicative context. In the archaeology of consciousness the development of writing marks a turning point; afterwards consciousness became, to some extent, an artefact of writing. Transcendental subjectivity, conceived as isolated like the body, was always a characterological fiction, an abstract moment of something thoroughly social and intersubjective. Though this subjectivity was supposed to be something that had shed "all the formations pertaining to sociality and culture (p.19)", it remains the case that the transcendental subject was, as Kant had said, a logical form or function, not a substance, and that as such it was only identified by virtue of being violently abstracted from its necessarily social constitution in human linguisticity or narrativity. Like any fiction or any logical form it is something normative, a matter of intersubjective collusion. Even the pure phenomenality that screen fiction typically pretends to present is a form of fictive collusion. For in fact screen mimesis uses camera position and movement, montage, dialogue, voiceover, music, captions, filtered colour and so on to produce not just the fictive appearance of pure phenomenality, but, like novelistic "points of view", a counterpoint of characterological styles. Like the word in the novel, the image in film or TV is "double-voiced": a hand held shot refers to its style and the context of such style as well as to what it shoots. Cinema too is "a tissue of quotations".

Interactive fictions design themselves as self-sufficient spectacles of intersubjective dialogue between characters and an audience which itself becomes a character within the fiction.. They are usually understood as little more than games despite the interactivity of the ancient medium of drama whose authors (the players) have long played *to* an audience's responses. Drama might not seem to be interactive, but only because the medium of the living body does not exert the hi-tech mystique of dead hardware animated by clever software. Indeed, sentence by sentence or shot by shot all fictions stage the interactivity of collusion. In the now much advertised possibility of interactive narrative, the readers or viewers or players join the actors to become or to represent characters in a spectacle of their own freedom. The subjectivity of the interactive viewer is identified with and by the cryptically objectified character of the implied viewer already programmed by the corporate author.

Freud and aesthetic Modernism both represented a restatement of the enduring tradition of Western thought, namely that of the inadequacy of the particular, empirical ego to the transcendental Ego signified by the all too universalistic pronoun *I*. The narrator of Beckett's *The Unnameable*—the name of all authors of fiction—was hardly the first to disarticulate the Idealist equation $I=I$. Indeed Hegel himself may well have read the inequality of his own equation by means of his own

non-identitarian logic. Anyway, the *I* that Hegel called a kind of universal receptacle at the start of the *Encyclopedia*, had become a drunken boat for Rimbaud, and a relic of superseded belief in Beckett's trilogy: "I, say I. Unbelieving"

31. Originality

Whatever the spiritual project—whether artistic or scientific—originality is the most highly valued quality. Though pop psychologist commentators nowadays tend to be sceptical about the psychology of *genius*, they still wonder what *creativity* is—as if it were somehow less mystifying—and, like journalists covering great events, they like to ask artists and scientists what being creative *feels like*. Like creativity, originality is one of those ineffable things popularly reputed to escape the grasping machinations of thought while yielding itself up only to the glancing insight of unsolicited feelings. As the evolving concept of genius eventually did, the concept of creativity credits originality to the individual. Yet both originality and individuality are unthinkable precisely without the society and its universals that mediate them, and from which they manage to appear to set themselves apart. This was something Emerson appreciated when, in an essay on Shakespeare, he observed that the greatest artists are the most indebted.

Originality is a quality of those turns of events in the history of art (or science) when something unexpected yet consequential is produced. In other words, something like the Aristotelean formula for poetic wonder migrates from the poetics of narrative art into the poetics of the history of art. Originality is clearly a narrative concept, and insofar as it is original, an artwork or a scientific theory is an instance of an astonishing turn in the narrative of the history of the particular art or science. In its originality, a work of fiction implies a new universal in the history of fiction. As the quality of origins, originality is the quality of what, in the terms of the history of art, was not there before, yet turns up eventually, seemingly as if it had always been promised. Artistic originality is experienced as the happy fulfilment of aesthetic promises, promises which we seem only to "remember", in a sort of Platonic sense, after their fulfilment. The quality of originality lies in a kind of *should have been* that was simply not articulated—except perhaps in some Platonic heaven of universal aesthetic forms—until it was embodied by the artwork, and then recognised after the fact. As such, originality involves a norm, but not a formalisable one. Like the freedom of the individual, that Kant had to ascribe to a transcendental subject, artistic originality apparently implies a certain freedom to transcend time and its attendant mechanisms of causality.

In the context of artistic history as played out under the governance of the possibility of originality, artists have had to be those practised in the determined gleaning of what succeeds, even though such success is only to be recognised in retrospect. Fiction's wit does not amount to "what oft was thought but ne'er so well expressed." Pope's formula, even in his own time, would have been at best a fictional description. A work of fiction is a narrative that presents what was not there before—a narrative text and the world to which it refers—as something made up out of nothing. It declares itself into existence as a social fact. The act of originality is teleological, but it cannot begin with its goal in mind. Its task is to define its goal in the same process as achieving it. The nature of the goal can only be known afterwards; it was not thought until it was actually well expressed.

Such a process is not really so mysterious; it may be described, perhaps too prosaically for many tastes, by the program "generate and test"—the program of

natural selection no less. This is where the social, supra-individual genius of originality is demonstrated. The retrospection that confers the status of originality on artworks is that of its social reception and selection. Individual authors generate their works out of their social heritage as it mediates the representation of contingent experience. Society's selections recognise that which in the work is a new adaptation to the work's social environment—the first bit of society that artworks encounter being the self-critical artists themselves. Such original adaptations are indicators of what had been unrecognised features of that environment, and such features are, in turn, continually being generated by the changes wrought in society by ongoing artistic and scientific originality. Originality is the form that so called genius takes on under the conditions of modernity's reflexivity.

The individuation of works and of authors is conditioned by these social processes. Originality is so tied up with the individuality of both artworks and authors, that authenticity, auteurism, and maxims about not being able to make art by committee tend to obscure the collaborative nature of all artworks. Even the writer in a garret responds to and collaborates with tradition. Nevertheless the concepts of originality and individuality are historically related, because the autonomy of both original artworks and of individuals, in the context of a reflexively described society, is tied to the same set of historical processes and the same narrative logic of apparently time transcending, retrospective recognition. With some justification, Adorno (1970, p. 247) argued that the question of the originality of archaic works was anachronistic because originality presupposes an emancipated subject. And it should be stressed that such a subject is dependent upon the forms of freedom that have evolved under the conditions of modernity's reflexivity. However societies and subjects have always been reflexive, and though modernity has been characterised by its quite unprecedented reflexivity, it is not quite anachronistic to see such reflexivity at work in traditional societies, and especially not in proto-modern societies characterised by such reflexively powerful media as writing. Narrative artworks have long been symptomatic of this reflexivity insofar as they have long been characterised by a kind of constitutional anachronicity. They have to have been, in order to survive beyond their times. Another name for this anachronicity is originality.

32. Inspiration

Originality is a social category that applies to works in the context of their social history. Inspiration is psychological. What the yearners after spirituality cite as its ineffable quality is what I would cite as evidence of its complex, biological character. Metaphors supplied as attempts to describe the supposedly indescribable—in the mechanical belief that only poetry can describe the poetic—are usually downright literal. Lloyd Rees said that after working on a painting he had no memory of painting because, he believed, the spirit of creativity led to forgetfulness. Anyone who has ever done inspired work would understand this. But then, so would anyone who has looked up from driving, only to realise that they have forgotten about the act of driving for the last few kilometres. The spirit of driving leads to forgetfulness too. When someone is painting or writing or driving, or doing any engrossing task, they are thinking about it as they go along, but that thinking need not make it into consciousness or memory.

When asked where his inspiration came from Vladimir Nabokov said, "I don't find it, it finds me." Again, such a remark should be taken literally, like the one about language speaking us.

33. *Fiction and the real.*

Epistemological collusion as the condition for the truth of fiction is not the be all and end all of fiction. It is only the start. In showing narrative, fiction shows what is of the utmost importance in narrative: its references to eventful worlds. Only the strict regulation of the world into the most abstract categories of real and fictitious would lead anyone to think that fiction does not refer to real things. Fiction refers to what is imaginary in real things by showing their inescapably narrated character. The art of fiction makes a spectacle of the seemingly fragile and arbitrary fictivity that generates the immense institutional might of the objective facts of social reality. The regulation of the world into real and fictional is only a foothold for knowledge supplied by genres; to make it into something fundamental impoverishes the real and turns it into a mere exemplification of reified discourse.

Brian McHale (1987) has argued that certain postmodern fictions (by the likes of Barth, Pynchon, Calvino, and Pynchon) care less for the kind of epistemological justification that tied Modernist fiction to some kind of reality—even if only the reality of a narrator's subjective experience, however haywire—than they do for creating or declaring worlds. According to McHale, the concerns of Modernism were epistemological, while those of Postmodernism were ontological. Concentration on the ontological capers licensed by the play of fiction's collusion may well appear to be an historical feature of certain prose narratives—usually by men—in the period of postmodernity. In fact it is as old as romance narrative. Undertaken at the expense of fiction's suggestive epistemological relation to its referent, it can lead to naive romantic gratification; or, as ironic play, it can lead to an abstract ludic quality which ends up degenerating into something like the landscape and characters of a video game or an allegory without an anagogical reference. The trouble is that fiction, like humans, has nearly always indicated worlds rather than, like God, declaring them predicate by predicate. The play of epistemological collusion has always enabled fiction to indicate worlds which, in all their narrated ambiguity, are like historical worlds. Their complexity, on the other hand, is beyond total declaration.

Insofar as they playfully declare worlds and make the mystique of ontology fundamental, fictions inevitably declare threadbare worlds, worlds that look like they have been constructed from abstractions. Even if ironic, they risk repeating the unredeemed ontological naiveties of romance. Such works make the mistake of thinking that fiction is about making up worlds (as totalities of things) rather than making up stories. In fiction, it is not ontology, but story that is declared, not worlds but their narrativity. In fact, from Calvino to Barth to Murray Bail, it is story, not ontology, that inspires so many of the novelists that McHale would call postmodern, story after story, story piled on story, story within story. If there is an historically limited form of consciousness at work in this kind of fiction, it lies in constructing stories that replicate archaic notions about what story is and in thus making an abstraction of *story*.

In the context of a sustained attempt to defend the epistemological means for reaching factual understanding, Jürgen Habermas has criticised the blurring of genre distinctions between fact and fiction. In this context he has written a critique (1988, pp. 211-225) of Calvino's *If on a winter's night a traveller....* He concentrated on the novel's attempt to move through several levels of narration from the real world into more and more deeply embedded tales within tales until eventually the novel seems to be trying to issue through, on the other side, into the real again, having miraculously transcended its fiction by means of successive acts of embedded fictionalisation. What interests me about Calvino's novel is not that it shows, as Habermas reports, the

limitations of fiction despite all its supposed efforts to transcend them. Rather, it is that a novel that begins with such verve should end up in empty play. It is so hexed itself by the reified division between the real and the imaginary that it directs its attention away from what stories matter most and towards fiction envisaged as abstract play with mere props, like theatre without characters. It accepts a fundamental divide between real and fictional, experiences it as something alien, and then tries to escape its own self-imposed delusion by playing not so much with conventions, as with the furniture, in a trite way that is reminiscent of Escher's picture puzzles. Such a purism of fiction would bleed fiction of what is essential to its narrativity, especially its reference to complex, ungraspable worlds.

The device of the tale within a tale has long fascinated narrative artists, not as a mere formality but as a way of enabling the tale to objectify itself, or something about itself, within itself. But in a world of strict separation between the real and the imaginary, when that divide is reflected in the divide between one story told in the real world and a second told within the first, then any leap from a mundane level to a marvellous one represents the gratification of a desire. It is a desire, however, that arises from the institution of the counterfactual division in the first place. And as such it is related to the old problem of belief, which would be enough to make it an anachronistic theme of fiction.

The logical regulation of levels of narration—between the tale and the tale within the tale—has always been more clear cut than any epistemological or material distinctions that it might be taken to imply. Each descent from one tale to another tale within the tale might be a descent into fiction, or at least away from the specificity of the author and the context, but if it is a collusion in truth it is not a confusion of epistemological distinctions. Outside the distractions of everyday experience in a world that is full of narrativity, narrative levels, and the social reality of fiction, such confusion depends on being bewitched by the desire for the virtual to become actual, or rather, for the gratifying to become virtual. Such a desire is the dream image of magical human power exerted over intractable objects. Especially in romance, such an image has long inspired artistic pretence: narrative appearance could hope for no more spectacular behaviour from its medium than that it derealise itself and then rerealise itself as the virtual thing to which the text referred. Yet the same desire is also bewitched by what it takes as the absolute non-existence of some fictive world or protagonist. Leopold Bloom might not walk out of the pages of *Ulysses*, but he is referred to as a social fact outside those pages. And, in its own way, Dublin walked into and out of *Ulysses*.

Borges' succinct, apparently provisional fiction, *Theme of the Traitor and the Hero*, is an imagination of a dramatic fiction becoming an historical fact, of virtuality becoming actuality. Virtual reality, what is *effectively* real, is something that the principle of causation would have to recognise as reality. Reality has always been merely virtual. As the medium for a new art of fiction, so called Virtual Reality would show what other media have shown, namely, what a spectacle this reality has been. Fiction scarcely invents a world. It shows the narrativity of the world, a world in which what is real becomes so by virtue of having being narrated. In doing so it demonstrates that no human production is creation *ex nihilo*. Even the mystique of artificial intelligence consists in imagining that it is something created *ex nihilo* instead of in an ecological habitat surrounded by an intelligent linguistic object called a human population.

Real and imaginary, real and copy, actual and virtual, fact and fiction, object and subject are not quite discrete domains. In their defiance of concepts, objects are as paradoxical as this: their habitat is not one of unambiguously regulated logical levels,

but one of the most cryptic epistemological embedding and manoeuvring. Metaphysics, the *first fictions* that we linguistic animals institute in order to be linguistic, cannot be disentangled from physics, for want of an impossible transcendence. Attempts, such as Kant's, to regulate the separation of the two by outlawing what he called the amphiboly or mistake of confusing the transcendental with the empirical have to resort to the same amphiboly in order to outlaw it. Such attempts belong to the tradition of wild unfettered life trying to crawl out of the primeval sea of nature by suppressing the dialectics of a nature grown naturally fictive. Likewise, when Habermas tries to bracket fiction from fact, his brackets look like stop gap barricades erected in the commonwealth of narratives, in the interests of verbal facticity or even in the interests of certain departments of academic life. The brackets are designed to coordinate actions on things.

Without incorporating its derealised things, without being replete with the imaginary, with imitations, with fictions and fakes that prove the real, the real would not even be real enough to be derealisable. No symbol is a mere symbol, no image a mere image, no fiction a mere fiction. No logic can eternally disentangle fiction from fact, meaning from medium, subject from object, signifier from signified, by a mere act of regulation—despite all the protocols of logic that historical collusion has built into the epistemological resources of genres for the sake of objective knowledge.

Why should the logicians of fiction quibble over whether logically impossible worlds are imaginable, when it is the real world that seems to be utterly and astonishingly impossible.

34. *Entelechy*

To reverse the chronological order of a narrative and tell the story backwards is one form of the oldest and most profound narrative of ploys. Jane Campion and Helen Garner used it in their beautiful little film, *Two Friends*. A story might begin with a prophecy and tell its fulfilment, or it might begin with what finally happens and the rest is like a big clause beginning with *because*, and so forth. Perhaps such a ploy strives to incorporate the thrilling remembrance of the all-seeing second viewing into the singular immediacy of the first viewing's unfolding suspense. Or it tries to put on show what Aristotle said about the end of a plot: that the actions and the plot are the end, or telos, of a work, and in everything the end is the most important of all things (Poetics 1450a). When the chronological end is told at the start everything told afterwards is fitted to it. Such an exposition is a dialogue of two chronotopes, the representing and the represented, the plot and the storyline, and, viewed in this light, it might stand for the mediation of the particular by the universal.

There is another form of this striving for an *entelechy* of narrative that is especially widespread: the story that ends with its own objectification as a story and with its subsequently being retold. This happens in traditional story telling—where entelechial circumstance is given a formal place in routine epilogues or prologues—and it continues into the narratives of modernity: Rama's sons recount *The Ramayana*; in Proust, the narrator's life is redeemed in a memorial retelling that both refinds the past and, defying time, foreshadows the narrator's immediate future as, at last, a writer; Altman's film *The Player* turns out to be a fictional Hollywood retelling of the “real” events just seen; and so it goes on.

What lies behind this narrative form is the old trope in which *end* or *telos* stands for various abstractions such as *aim*, *purpose*, *intention*, *result*, or *whole*. So often repeated and so much a part of common sense, this trope exerts its fascination despite all its cliched repetitions. It enables the particular textual end to take in the

universal ends of the whole work—such as the metanarrative aims or intentions or results. As a convention of narrative elaboration it instigates the feedback of the narrative, symbolised by its end, back into itself, and at the same time, like any narrative universal, it constitutes whatever narrative one sees or reads as amenable to it. This might at first seem to be no more than a pleasing formal trick. Yet, for a start, it is an image of the way in which the end of a narrative reconfigures the beginning, which is itself a model of the process of knowledge. As such it is employed in the context of theoretical discourse to produce the illusion that time, which eventually dissolves the validity of any narrative meaning, is defied. And if this seems like a mystical desire it should be remembered how often knowledge has claimed everlasting truth, whether in myth, or in the atemporal disclosures of deductive logic, or in *pure reason*, or in metaphysical principles,...or throughout the history of theory in general. If narrative entelechy is just a formal trick, it is pleasing in art because of its long history as both the image and a ruse of both life and cognition. Narrative shows its theoretical quality, its logical shape, but by the ruse of time devouring its own tail instead of its children; thus the metonymical discontinuity of narrative consecution is smoothed out into a sequence of anamorphisms that preserve continuity in the iconic manner of metaphor and, for that matter, of deductive logic. The sheer discontinuity of beginning and end, and the sheer indeducibility of end from beginning—that quality of narrative transformations that is the image of the sheer positedness of enunciation and denotation—despite all the conventions of all the world's causations that are designed to reduce narrative diachrony, by means of symbolic reduction, into logical deductions, is bled of time's illogicality and recalcitrant diachrony by the respatialising turn of entelechy. It projects narrative diachrony back onto the synchrony of timeless *logical space*, and back into the textual immanence of deductive logic.

Consider how often entelechy has come to the rescue of philosophy. Its great classical expression is in Aristotle's concept of psychic entelechy—psychic actuality as the intrinsic possession of its own end. Until the dawn of the theoretical awareness of unconscious psyche, some form of entelechy provided rational psychology with a theory of the psyche based on a narrative of remembered life: consciousness was the end of a remembered autobiography whose conclusion—the conscious present—was the self present at every moment of the life story's unfolding. The self-sufficiency for which entelechy was designed is the model of the self-sufficient *I*.

As mentioned right at the start of these reflections on narrative, Kant, in his chapter on the Architectonic of Pure reason, discussed a familiar problem in the pragmatics of writing, namely that a writer must begin with an idea or aim as the basis of writing, but that it is only after much subsequent research and writerly effort that it actually becomes possible to view that idea in its fullness. In other words, the result does not accord with the aim and one then has to rewrite with one's initial aim being replaced by a new aim which was the outcome of one's first effort. In this sense, entelechy is an image of the reflexivity as well the self containment of narrative. In a narrative genre, Kant's dilemma can itself be invested with a certain narrative resignation, from the melancholy of Eliot's

...Because one has only learnt to get the better of words
For the thing one no longer has to say, or the way in which
One is no longer disposed to say it.

to the comic despair of Tristram Shandy, who, in telling about his life, realises that he will have to tell about telling about it, and then tell about telling about telling about it, and so on. "The more I write," writes Tristram, "the more I shall have to write."

Fiction's entelechy was an image of the most seductive of symbolic substitutions. On the one hand, this symbol is an image of the autopoietic memetic processes of reflexive society; on the other, it creates the beautiful illusion that one can grasp the whole both as an omnipresent unity and as the particularity of all those moments of presence; that one can turn the presence of the now into the now of everpresence; that one can defy time, conceived as the becoming and passing of presence; that one can convert the temporality of narrative into the pure all-presence of a picture; that one can actually conceive—as metaphysics has long desired—of time according to the everpresent spatiality of a purely spatial icon even if one thereby throws out what is inconceivable yet essential to the concept of time (Derrida's critique of presence was a critique of the entelechy of presence, especially his critique of the concept of *fulfilment* in Husserl's semiotics); or that one can, as in Proust's aesthetic, contemplate one's narrative all at once yet therefore as a new more pregnant meaning. Life almost seems to have taken this beautiful, autopoietic fiction and made a virtual reality from it: autopoietic life itself. The enchantingly beautiful form of the device of narrative entelechy arises from its being the image of the sedimented form of life's struggle against time: the story telling itself to itself for itself is the image of the self reference of autopoietic systems like organisms; and the story as the embryo within its own matrix is the image of its own reproduction and its memetic life.

To revert to an entelechy of entelechy: only by exploring all of its meanings and their negations in fiction and non-fiction will the narrative variations of entelechy come to reveal all that is behind the employment of the device. But there is no first principle behind fiction's entelechy other than the very sort of "lifeless universal" that the trope sought to avoid when it was coined in the first place. It is a ploy for keeping in the particular what is threatened with dissolving into empty abstraction. But isn't this just like the ploy of fiction itself: to represent, as Aristotle said, what is universal, but only by particularising it as an image of the particular.

35. *The fiction of "I".*

"I" is only a convenient term for someone who has no real being. (Virginia Woolf.)

Actually "I" is a kind of fiction referring to something whose real being is also quite imaginary. Despite the guarantee of my body's substance, when I try to determine what I am, I come up against or with a fiction. And it is a fiction that is as real as the brick wall one comes up against in the empiricist's example of a hard fact. Behind all the dazzling advertising of and for subject centred reason and experience, western thought has primarily been characterised by its profound concern with the elusiveness of the "I". As Kant (1787, p. 287) said, "I cannot present myself as an object. I am always determining things and never determinable myself as a self subsistent being or substance."

This way of putting it—this "logical form" which Kant was careful to distinguish from "substance"—is irreducibly a form of narrative logic. In his account of the social genesis of individuality G.H. Mead (1934, pp. 174-5) saw "I" as "not directly given in experience" ,but as "an historical figure". To paraphrase

Kierkegaard's maxim about history, a subject's experience is lived forward as a fiction and understood backwards as a fact.

A narrative conception of the psyche for itself, to some extent always a fiction, has been around since Aristotle's *entelechy*—the psyche's actuality in so far as it is the intrinsic possession of its own end. What experience cannot grasp in its immediacy is signified as something self-sufficient through time by a narrative of past life whose end is the narrative itself. Playing on the meanings of *end*, as both an organising principle and a temporal culmination, the story that ends with its own objectification as a story, feeds time's tail (as I have said) back so that it devours itself rather than its children. This is the most seductive of symbolic substitutions. It entertains the programmers of artificial intelligence, as well as the reader's of Proust's *Le temps retrouvé*, and a thousand and one other stories. It defies the logical regulation of levels of narration, not by defiance as such, but by its fictional representation, thereby using the epistemological means at hand to refer to this real fiction, *I*. What looks like a formal narrative trick—actually it feeds the conditioning form back into the content it conditions—is used to render what is a formal, empty abstraction—the *I*—as something with a particular content: *me*. As I have said, this is the ploy of fiction itself: to represent what is universal, but only by reparticularising it as an image of the particular.

Perhaps Freud best put the narrative character of the ego's psychogenesis out of social and physiological things: "Where It was, there shall I become." Aristotle's *entelechy* reconciled the irreconcilable logical levels of narrative by means of narrative alone, a natural sleight of hand for turning psychogenesis into a neat developmental process of a self-identical psyche. But such reflexive autopoiesis is no guarantee of self identity. The fascinating charms of reflexivity have long induced theories in the image of vain hopes—whether the hopes of rational psychology's self identity, or the hopes of a rational sociology that would change the world in the image of its hopeful interpretations. In Freud, the irreconcilability of the moments in the psyche's reflexive psychogenesis are present as the narrative irreconcilability of beginning and end, of the *It* and *I*, the *Id* and the *Ego*.

36. Narrative logic, and the real.

Deduction is a logic of purely textual connection. It has little to do with truth, other than formally; it does not risk its truth against negation by things. Its axioms are about how text can be manipulated while preserving its truth value.

Induction is not really a logic in this sense at all. It has to risk making something up—a universal claim—before it can test the claim's deductive consistency with something else made up from empirical observation, namely the description of a particular observation. This making up is what Popper (1934), in his critique of inductive scientific method, called our only instrument for grasping nature, thus getting at the true organon of Bacon's Promethean ambitions. Induction is only a logic in the sense that narrative is a logic. Its risk is like narrative's risk.

Barthes (1977, p99) said that time belongs to the referent, not the text. He dechronologised narrative for the sake of understanding it as a timeless textual logic, as a great big diagram. In the act of objectification, the sublime gaze of theory abstracts from narrative what is dangerous, but also what is essential—the apparent accident of time. As he was aware, this abstraction was a typical gesture of structural analysis from Aristotle to Greimas. It was an illusion made easy by the technology of writing, by the eternal book as opposed to the fleeting spoken word, an illusion whose

epistemological uses were exploited in the emergence of philosophy and its immortal hero, Being. But turning text into a timeless, synchronous representation of a temporal world robs narrative performance of its reading or watching time, and so of the very dimension in which a likeness of the real time that so interests narrators may be represented. Narrative texts, unlike still pictures, are always making an issue of their real, temporal character. Narrative plot is a spacetime, and not just a spatial, likeness. The before-and-after of narrative performance, unlike deduction, is a likeness of the before and after of the time of the referent. In comedy, as in all narrative, the timing of performance, the order, duration and rhythm, is of the utmost importance. Though somewhat spurious in their rigidity, the unities of neo-classical tragedy, like the strict chronological order of the romance of the journey, are precisely an emphasis on a strict likeness of representing and represented time. Unlike drama, epic, cinema and TV, the time of a novel's reading is beyond the author's control, so any apparent detemporalisation of reading time is a tool of novelistic pretence. However the order of reading is set in time, and there is no better known way of spoiling the experience of its fiction than by reading the end first.

The naive view that narrative is somehow a logic of things and their real connection to one another, contains a germ of truth that structural analysis sacrifices for the sake of a timeless logic of what is an impossible textual presence. This logic robs its text of its temporal body, in the way that the Idea has long involved the censorship of the shameful way that the flesh of rhetoric must embody it. The real, and logics of real connection, of one thing somehow being in a relation of causation, inherence or spatiotemporal community with others, are narrative logics. And as Peirce said of each quasi-propositional or narrative sign, it refers to real things in the world by being an *index* of those things, by having a real connection with things, as a thing among things.

The question of which comes first, narrative or the real connection among things—both of which depend on each other like chicken and egg—only becomes a problem when what is a thoroughly narrative situation is detemporalised in the vain but persistent desire to reconcile logical (deductive) and temporal priority, that is, of reconciling, amphibolously, two discursive levels. Only then do the antinomies of causation arise, for how could the Eternal Egg ever precede or succeed the Eternal Chicken, in the way that its empirical incarnations have done. The narrative logic of making up or of putting things before or after one another, without necessarily furnishing rational persuasion, is, as such, the image of real change. Hence the peculiarly strong connection of fiction to narrative rather than to other types of signs.

Deduction changes nothing; its premise is a spatial pattern—a pattern in logical space—subjected to ingenious manipulation. Its *after* is an anamorphism of its *before*. Narrative on the other hand negates its premise through the duration of its performance in an attempt to represent real change. So narrative is a 'logic' of text that attempts to represent the real by showing *in* text how the real *outside* text defies text. It is in the temporal quality of narrative performance—something that is inherent in a text's being a thing among things and an event among events—that a narrative connection is representable by a text, that is, a premise, unfolding to negate itself.

From the middle of things all ends are only imaginable. The imagination of outcomes, their being unexpected yet somehow consequential, is emblematic of the sheer fictivity of narrative experience. In the history of the art of fiction this is experienced in such phenomena as originality. Experience, which is to say, narrative experience—for there is no experience without the mediation of narrative—is always in the middle of things, always being lived forward as fiction, even if understood

backwards as fact. Even narrative beginnings, whether *ab ovo* or not, are all more or less deft plunges *in media res*. So works of fiction make a spectacle of this ineradicable fictivity of what it is to be at the middle of the narrative experience of real time.

37. *Too, too thoroughly imagined.*

The threshold between possibility and impossibility, between concept and object, is exemplified by the body of the narrative animal: the object where the subject is to become.

Medium has been thought of as the material substrate of a narrative. As such, medium was a real thing that inevitably effected the texts made in it, above all in determining genres, and how a narrative is to be connected to the things to which it refers. The way that we imagine a medium, the fictions by which we tell it, determine its reality. The body, in speech and gesture, is the first and last medium. Yet the body is also cited as what ultimately distinguishes text from the real world, fiction from reality. According to the epistemology of pain and suffering, hard steel is no mere text when it enters the flesh. But it is not only some living feeling body that proves the reality of torture—such a body is a mere abstraction—rather, it is the imagining body of narrative, social animals. The knife entering one's flesh is keener for the horrific narrative imaginary of waiting, fearing, feeling, losing, panicking, passing. Death itself is not experienced. It is objective but not subjective. Torture is experienced as a narrative spectacle whose enormity is in a narrative of delay, discovery and catastrophe, a spectacle of the imaginary of one's pain and passing written into one's body by a cruelly arbitrary other. Like the archetypal writing machine in Kafka's *Penal Colony*, it inscribes its law into the living flesh, until it negates its meaning in the moment of its fulfilment. It is not obscene to suggest that torture is a text, rather, it is precisely its textual character that is its utter obscenity. The torturer treats an other as a medium in which to carve an horrific narrative whose end is suffering presented, despite and because of its substance, as a spectacle of suffering, a spectacle signifying the necessity of an end and the end of the subject's impossibility.. The all too real murder and torture of all those wars was too, too thoroughly imagined.

38. *Postmodernity; or history as fiction.*

Perhaps nothing better illustrates the fictivity of history than an age that designated itself by a name that referred to its present by its future. Or was it an ironic reference to the past? Whether collusive or not, postmodernity sounds like a fiction.

We recognise history as a performance of narratives that come into being by their sheer declaration in such archaic phenomena as prophecy and fashion. In fashion, a logic of commodities appears as a happy consequence of a particular logic of history. The imperative of the spectacle of novelty gives rise to a fictive history of the future. It is a principle deeply embedded in the process of capitalism—the system that is forever young, all its juices flowing as it colonises the future. No wonder postmodernity is marked by the consumption of gratifications produced by the narrative, music, and fashion industries for a market that is forever young. It is not capitalism that gave rise to continual renewal. Society, as capitalism anthropologises it, was ever subject to it; whatever ignored it did so at the price of survival: if it wasn't new no one would buy it, not even Nature, let alone History.

As it is in advertising, a future declarative character was present in the everyday historical thought of postmodernity as a stylistic feature of its self

descriptions. Such descriptions avoided the question and answer style that is a traditional feature of expository prose—which furnishes reasons and so argues as well as narrating. History now only proves itself by being a history of the future and therefore prophetic fiction. The universality of fiction is put at the disposal of historiography: histories of the future—a major genre of what is called news commentary—have the audacity to sell their own unstated but intuitable versions of universal history. All too often the assertions of postmodern prose were kerygmatic or oracular announcements rather than answerable judgements that deign to make good their claims. Its commonplace declarations about the death of certain forms of life—God, Nature, the Referent, Grand Narratives, the Author, the Novel, Fiction itself—were instances of history enacted as a fiction. Such declarations were haunted by and modelled themselves on a moment from the past: when the disembodied voice of that oracle in Tiberias’s time carried from the land out across the sea, announcing, “The great god Pan is dead.” In this sense, postmodernity was “a tiger’s leap into the past”. Postmodernity’s grand narrative was a fictive history of the future; meanwhile the much replicated declaration of the death of grand narratives, which began as a reasonable throw away line about the epistemology of historiography, drifted from meaning to meaning through the culturescape of postmodernity, only to be selected finally as an example of postmodern mythology.

The fictive history of the future was really just another form of Progress, the great historical narrative form of capitalist culture which has been written onto all sorts of subject matter, both natural and cultural. Bacon’s *Novum Organum*, that great Promethean work which is steeped in the modern notion of progress, is also a forerunner of those postmodern advertisements for the technological future that use the grand narrative mode best called the historiography of the future.

Now that the past is all colonised, historiography colonises the virgin wilderness of the future, proving, or rather declaring, the validity of its narrative historical logic by its own declarative performance. As a kind of advertising, it proves the wisdom of its author in a self-fulfilling prophecy. In these advertisements for the future, the sales pitch is consummated epistemologically and economically all at once. Advertisements for the wares of the eminently narrative cyberspace are bewitched by the prostheses of technology and re-enact the mythoi of sibylline and oracular prophecy. Profit, prophecy and fashion have concatenated their logics and called it history. Fiction advertises itself into fact.

39. *Poetics of destruction.*

There is a grammar of destruction that is at work in so many genres of narrative—from ancient tragedy to cinema’s action dramas to TV news. It is such a simple grammar that it is understood in some form by any linguistic animal. Catastrophe is the emblematic form of the narrative *turn of events*. In narratives of destruction, the affect overwhelms the inferences of meaning, on which it must be based. The illusion is that affect is everything. To say that there is meaning in destruction, that destruction *means*, would probably prompt the response that destruction is meaningless: destruction only becomes meaningful, terribly meaningful, when it constructs its magnum opus—the *clean slate*—in spectacles of catharsis, repristination, sacrifice and vengeance, preparatory to a denouement of victory or redemption. The almost universal understanding of the symbolism of destruction makes its meaning look like the simplest of matters, so that problems of interpretation dissolve before the sheer affective strength of what the sentimentalists of alimentary

intelligence call the *gut reaction*. Even the affect of comedy and the convulsions of laughter cannot but allow the sense that the pleasure is derived from the felicities of well performed meanings. Whereas the performance of destruction is an anti-performance, an anti-meaning—the more poignantly so, the more sophisticated the destructive means. Hence the intimate affinity of destruction with the illusion of the immediacy of sheer spectacle, and with the so called immediate media of spectacle. Animals would not laugh at a comedy, but they would almost understand the spectacle of destruction.

Though circumspect about spectacle, and though the advocate of *logos* over *opsis*, Aristotle's poetics of tragedy sided with affect. Meaning, and all the performative skills of the poet, are at the disposal of fear and pity. Spectacle is the affective illusion of the obvious, of the immediate, unmeant *meaning* of sheer affect, and *meaningless destruction* is thus its pre-eminent and most meaningful form. The *unbelievability* of genocide, the *inexplicability* of torture, or even the *incomprehensibility* of vandalism, are everyday illusions of the genres of destruction. In a culture whose primary narrative grammar is one of destruction, whose definition of method is to treat the bulk of things as debris and clear a way through, whose pragmatic happiness is to be as blithely at work as the vandal, whose objects—including subjects—reveal their noumenal reality as a kind of weak effrontery toward which society can no longer be nice, whose knowledge is represented by the simplicity of all things—as Benjamin (1978, p. 301) once put it—"when tested for their worthiness of destruction", we who are mystified by destruction reveal our careful ignorance of the replicated social form that so conditions us. The rhetorical skills of newscasters, uncatalogued for the majority of viewers, consist in presenting spectacle as the illusion of the obvious. Fear, pity, anger and fascination are greatest then. The audience is most united then, while the cultural differentiations of language—and hence the means of critical discrimination—dissolve into a shared sheer sociality that thus appears to be non-linguistic.

The historical popularity and the profitability of stories involving dramas of murder, violence and destruction are consistent with the accessibility of and the fascination with narratives in which meaning bows to spectacular affect—the meaning of sensationalism. The theory of catharsis suggested the sense in which the affect of narratives of destruction is a substitute for the affect of the actual events referred to. The body, as it were, feels the narrative almost as it would the experience of what is narrated. The virtual experience of fear and pity becomes almost as affecting as the actual experience. The spectacle of destruction approaches the spectacle of its actual observation—which is as close as one gets to pain through the distancing perception of the eyes. Tragic art is a kind of double sublime: the sublime view of the fiction is above the sublime observer of the catastrophe—a chorus, say—each member of which is, in turn, above the sordid and obscene pathos of lived suffering.

In news disaster spectacle, the narrative means strive to outdo the vantage of the physical observer of aftermaths, and the tendency of virtuality to become actuality is facilitated by actuality itself—by a connection of the viewers to the thing viewed that is, thanks to video, more or less real, even if attenuated. All this makes the narratives of destruction all the more fascinating. For there is nothing more fascinating in the history of narrative than the movement from virtuality to actuality. It is the epitome of human power, virtually the realisation of the image of a magical power over things, and of the image of subjectivity releasing itself from the negative shackles of its own objectivity. In the case of fiction, this fascination affects both

those who would watch violent narrative, and those who would censor it, for fear of its actualisation.

The narrative spectacle of sexuality also enlists the body's affections in the blurring of distinctions between virtuality and actuality. The politics and the pragmatics of the epistemological distinctions between virtual and actual, and representing and represented, become frenzied in narratives of sex as well as violence. The confusion of epistemological and experiential distinctions is reflected in the blurring of distinctions between the represented fields of violence and sexuality. There is an erotics of catastrophe and a catastrophics of Eros. Not only sadomasochism, torture and rape, but even orgasm itself express various historical modulations of this meaning complex. The cries and gestures of orgasm communicate the catastrophics of Eros in the homophony of pain and bliss. In what Guy Debord called the society of the spectacle, the snuff movie was the profane epitome of the spectator's indulgence. But that is history now; the snuff news video is its almost legitimated contemporary counterpart: murder displayed on the seven o'clock news. The erotics of catastrophe is nothing if not progressive.

The virtual becomes actual, the representing becomes the represented, the fetish the fetishised, primarily through the most obvious logic of the spectacle itself, that is through the logic of the image or the copy. Destructive act copies destructive act, terrorist copies terrorist, sadist, sadist, serial killer, serial killer, in Narcissistic series. The historical or *narrative* logic of the spectacle, as opposed to its pure iconicity or image logic, is a logic of Progress. The mass murder practised by the Nazis was viciousness and destruction as subject to the law of Progress, the striving for originality in the medium of torture. In the destructive spectacle, progress is present as the technological development of the media of the spectacle, and in the means of destruction and in the symbolic weight of the thing destroyed. It is a logic of pure *more*. These logics, primitive to the point of seeming pre-logical, relentlessly develop the narratives of destruction—in the spectacles of history and fiction. And these spectacles, born of the exaggeration of the spectacle of suffering beget, in turn, the augmentation of suffering.

The art of fiction sublimates the destructive potential of violent destruction, now as always. Certain violent genres—Jacobean tragedy, or crime cinema—look amoral because they emphasise the spectacular forms of violence. They are comic though; killing becomes laughable as the moral vision flees the grasp of intuition. Such works must make a spectacle of violence and destruction before they can make a spectacle of the spectacle. As risky as that, the energy of the violent artworks sublime efforts is easily put into the service of what it would sublime. Likewise, tourists, if they are mad enough, can easily throw themselves, or others, into the chasm they sublimely contemplate. The practice of catharsis, in so far as it was ever more than a mistaken theory, exploited sublime ecstasy as a means of social therapeutics. But the theory, in striving to excuse art, sided with art's adversaries, inadvertently undoing the sublime moment and refurbishing violence and destruction as social systemic tools.

40. Emotion and fiction.

How does one know, in one's own mind, if a judgement is true? How does one know, from within the horizon of psyche's self sufficient phenomenological experience, if an inference is the right one, or a powerful one or a relevant one? The answer seems to lie in emotional experience. And what then are the functions of emotional experience?

The functions of the emotions will be a matter of the natural and cultural selection of these functions. But according to what typology do we dare to differentiate the emotions in the first place? The answer to this question is largely a matter of the terms culturally selected throughout the evolution of language to make the self-description of psyche simple enough to be possible, relevant, replicable and communicable. The resulting typology need by no means be adequate to the complexity of emotional experience or of neurophysiology, and hence by no means capable of denoting such a theological referent as “what the emotions really are” (See Griffiths 1997). Making a right judgement and the feeling or “sentiment” of belief are presumably, as Hume suspected, functionally related. The uncoupling of the emotion of belief from true judgements is an effect of modern science and its alienation from traditional or naive consciousness. Throughout modernity, the search for epistemological grounding and for tenseless certainty was itself an effect of the systemic unbelievability of belief. Religion is now a kind of epidemic of emphatic, abstract belief, an epidemic of archaistic adherence to superseded belief in a vain attempt to recover the authentic emotion of belief that was once the naturally selected affective indicator of true judgement.

What about the aesthetic emotions, so called? Are there aesthetic emotions with an exclusive aesthetic provenance? Or should we speak of the aesthetic emotions as having evolved for other functions? Almost certainly the latter I should think, if only because in natural and social selection it is the norm for later functions to supervene on earlier functional designs. Aesthetic experience is a culturally evolved form which works by and through various biologically and culturally evolved cognitive and perceptual processes. Certainly art is very old, but it also has a distinctly modern, emphatic sense. Once, what was to become art seems to have been tied to religion. But then religion used to work as, among other things, a kind of social system of knowledge—that is, as proto-science as much as proto-art. Now that religion is an emphatically perpetuated form of traditional life and a symptom of dislocated belief, art and science have divided what is their inheritance of the spiritual process that was once conducted by religion.

Bear in mind two types of aesthetic emotion. Firstly, there is the emotional experience of fiction’s “virtual reality”: things like Aristotle’s “fear and pity”, the tears shed for the unfortunate tragic protagonist, the horror and thrill evoked by certain genres, the yearning and erotic pleasure of romance. These and like forms of vicarious experience are deeply inscribed in narrative art, and underlie such aesthetic theories as the those that refer to tragic catharsis, or those that refer to audience identification.

Secondly, let’s consider the emotional experience of admiration for a work, the wonder or pleasure at appreciating a work’s cognitive richness, and also those related pleasures (how often, in carving the emotions at their psychically plausible self descriptive joints, the primary division is between pleasure and displeasure): the pleasure of musical processing, of the music of verse and prose, of fine cinematography, and of good plot. These are all emotions that are functionally associated with cognition. The musical experience of language probably has its historical basis as a functional pleasure in its value for linguistic (and conceptual) ontogeny—in the infant development of aural perception and phonological discrimination. These kinds of pleasures have a propensity for being sublimed throughout an individual’s life; mediated by culture, there is a kind of ontogenetic progress in these pleasures that is described by the phrase *acquired taste*. There may, perhaps, be good evolutionary reasons why humans like a grassland prospect framed by trees, but there are good evolutionary reasons for being able to overcome this and

learning to like, as humans do, a tangled viny scrub, or a desert, or a city, or a moonscape. The emotion of admiration, of recognising the cognitive richness of a representation or an artwork, and taking pleasure in one's own or another's interpretations, is a kind of sublime emotion. The emotion of objectification is well developed in such objectifying creatures as us.

Into which of these two kinds does the mirth evoked by comedy fall? The cry of horror or fear or sadness that epitomises tragedy is experienced vicariously, but the laughter that epitomises comedy is not simply a matter of the vicarious experience of mirth. The audience laughs but the characters don't; indeed a play or film in which people did a lot of laughing would risk being unbearably tedious, like would-be comedians who laugh at their own jokes. Mirth belongs to the second kind of emotion—the objectifying kind. There is a dissymmetry here between comedy and the other genres, a dissymmetry that reflects the dissymmetry between the uses of pleasure and the other emotions. The smile is the epitome of the gestures of pleasure and of communicated pleasure, and we smile when experiencing the objectifying admiration of an artwork's cognitive and emotional richness, whether it is tragedy or comedy or whatever.

Nature does not have to go beyond the pleasure principle to find useful emotions. Humans are laughing animals, and laughter is a socially contagious, and hence automatically communicable, reflex response to a socially manifest objectifying representation. For Freud, humour and laughter were concomitants of socialisation. They were moments of release from the super ego, which is itself the effect of the development of a social ego. But comedy does not just cock a snook at all the regulation of our decorum. It is not simply some romantic return to our otherwise alienated animal pleasures. It is much more insidiously insinuated into human reason and social cognition than that. It is highly social, and in fact, would play its part in the construction of whatever the super ego might be. An audience breaks out in almost repressed snorts of laughter when Barry Humphries says it is a great talent to be able to laugh at the misfortunes of others. But at the same time, in this wild and seemingly greedy response to such an ungenerous sentiment, the audience paradoxically seems to tame itself or socialise itself. In such cruel laughter one laughs cruelly at oneself, and laughing at oneself is the easiest, the most pleasurable and the most effective form of socially mediated ego construction and self objectification. At the same time as it is self enlightening, it is also knowing about the world. The two moments are inseparable: in laughing at other's misfortunes, comedy shows us how a dismal situation that is serious and "no joke" is also ridiculous and "a joke". This paradox is not so paradoxical as long as we appreciate the non identity of our selves with our selves, the kind of unstable, non identity that is inevitable in such a reflexive process as human self construction. Nevertheless, in a situation of such instability, the potential for delusion is ever present, and laughter has often been used for malicious purposes. Laughter seems to epitomise the instability of reflexive reason. No wonder then if, in some ages, the comic perspective seems to epitomise that of narrative art. No wonder then if, in this age of fiction and "the comedy of romance", comic verve seems to be a well spring of narrative art.

Narrative art, and art generally, has been a kind of knowledge represented, not by means of the estranging, objectifying devices that science often uses. It works much more by means of the native idioms of intentional life. The essentially social subject matter of narrative art is complex to the point of irreducibility. Any attempt to explain social, intersubjective phenomena in terms of objects that are non intentional, or any attempt that constituted a reduction to another objectifying level of descriptions defies the ordinary understanding of ordinary language or ordinary visual

or aural perception or ordinary social inference. Objectifying descriptions (like science's) might explain a phenomenon, but they don't communicate what that phenomenon feels like, or even what the desired explanation should feel like. Narrative art avoids these kinds of reductions altogether. It strives to tell about emotional, cognitive and social experience in terms that are amenable to emotional, cognitive experience.

Art is mad about objectification. Its subliming ways carry our objectifying propensity to extreme lengths. Art makes emotions; or rather, by means of its being virtually real, it induces them in an audience, only to then embed them as tokens in a larger discourse. It makes likenesses of feelings and it takes this "feels like such and such"—that is, "feels like someone in love" or "feels like someone has been murdered" or "feels like whatever mad thing it can dream up"—and makes this feeling into a token that is embedded in some other expression. This is how art uses what is familiar or ordinary or intuitive, and what is ordinarily not thought of as a particularly knowing or wise aspect of experience, and uses it as the emblem of experience in a larger cognitive structure. Science never does this. Sure, there are scientific emotions, and there is science about emotions that is expressed in terms that have a completely different emotional resonance to the subject matter, but science does not run the emotional experiments and models that art does. Or it might in the lab, to some extent, but not in the paper or the publication. It does not tell about social experience, in all its emotional and cognitive complexity for consciousness, by using that same experience or a likeness of that experience. The virtual reality media of narrative art—drama, language, screen, or whatever—seem to have been made in heaven (they are eminently selectable) for art's objectifying mania. They can be used to make a spectacle not just of something or some event but of what that something *feels like*.

Highly developed, difficult art is an interesting phenomenon that declares that there is progress in art—that is, cultural progress conceived in the image of ontogenetic progress. In difficult art, artists express this progress as an aesthetic norm and they effectively perform it into existence. Highly developed cultural phenomena become part of the lifeworld, and so part of the natural material of art. Our media, as they become more technologically sophisticated enable forms of narration that are still highly accessible to human understanding. The inferential processing of narrative art is itself an historical phenomenon that, along with other highly developed cultural phenomena, insinuate themselves quite readily into the developmental experience of humans. Thus a supposedly difficult novel like *Ulysses* is actually a recognisable development of many other familiar generic forms. It is a kind of variation on those earlier, dominant generic forms. It amounts to an inferentially and emotionally accessible development of familiar forms.

Narrative art is an elaboration of a suite of emotional and cognitive experiences, a kind of virtuoso presentation of such experience as, firstly, but not always, vicarious or virtual experience for the audience, and secondly, as an experience of the objectification of that experience. These amount to mutually responsive, mutually critical moments of fiction's dialectic. The self objectifying propensity of narrative art was long ago exhibited canonically in the differing perspectives of Oedipus, the chorus, Teiresias and the audience to the events in Thebes. The drama's moment of discovery is really a suite of discoveries about such discovery: Oedipus observes himself; the chorus observes Oedipus observing himself; Teiresias observes Oedipus observing himself, and the chorus observing Oedipus observing himself; and the audience observes all of this observation of observation. This is why it is irrelevant that the audience already knows the plot of the Oedipus

story, and why the plot, like a well known piece of music, never fails to give us a sense of revelation.

The processes of objectification and self-objectification are apparent in the artistic quality of spectacle. What critics since Aristotle have complained about as *mere spectacle* is really the trivialisation of spectacle and so of narrative art's most powerful and vital characteristic. Even if fear, pity, dread, horror, delight or whatever are emotional effects of an artwork, they are deployed as skilled workers in the production of a spectacle of such emotions. Moreover, art is not only knowing about the emotions, it is knowing about them by being emotional about them.

Fiction doesn't only objectify the emotions. Human nous objectifies things by means of the multiple perspectives of the various emotional, perceptual and inferential processes. Like a society, these perspectives observe one another. Art's supposed indulgence of the emotions is actually used by fiction to objectify fiction's very own pretension to the recursive objectification of emotional experience. Fiction shows up its own objectifying ruse. No fiction can simply corral the emotions in its recursive parentheses: they break out. So the art of fiction uses the wild way these unruly emotions respond to the illusion of its virtual reality to objectify in turn its pretension to anti-referential objectification of narrative argument. Concepts have something to learn from the wild kind of scepticism that the emotions direct toward concepts and towards the objectifying pretensions of fiction. Perhaps the theory of catharsis was always just a clumsy metaphor for this dialectic of narrative art. This is why the syndrome of emotional responses denoted by a term like *identification*—whether romantic, erotic, tearful, fearful, horrified, amused or whatever—cannot simply be dismissed as adolescent, even if, in its dialectical movement, the artwork itself reminds us that it could be.

Hitchcock, that most precise and controlled of film makers, the one who took such a technically informed, objectifying delight in his fictive world, was also the one who took such glee in rattling his audiences and putting the wind of fear and uncertainty up them. With his own characteristic spirit of play, he practically invented all the devices of the cinema of fear. As Hitchcock himself said, he knew how (if not why) “audiences like to dip their toe into the cold water of fear.” He liked to scare audiences almost in order to embarrass them by tricking them into seeing themselves so rattled, and into seeing themselves take delight in being rattled. He does the same thing to his characters. He did not simply take perverse, misogynist pleasure in taking those icy blonde heroines down a peg or two. Rather, he liked to faze cool, debonair types—male or female. Perhaps we forget this because we are quite used to seeing a comedian like Cary Grant in this kind of role. The blondes didn't always have the same kind of comedic resources or acquired cinematic persona that would readily enable us to laugh both with them and at them. If there was an antifeminist element in this, it lay in the absurd patriarchal culture which demanded that blondes should not be beautiful, cool and comically self deprecating all at once; but surely Hitchcock's heroines are a critique of such a culture. In nearly all his films, fear and laughter are never far apart. Embarrassment, like mirth, is an emotion experienced in the course of socially mediated self objectification. This is why it is quite wrong to say that Hitchcock's cinema is a cinema of fear. Probably only *Psycho* could be called thoroughly terrifying. Even *Rear Window* and *Vertigo* are more haunting than terrifying, and generally, Hitchcock's films are *scary*, in the sense that they use fear for fun. They are more a case of dipping in the toe rather than everything. Like his contemporary, Buñuel, Hitchcock's is as much a cinema of lightness and fun and social satire. And perhaps the haunting narrative wit that we find in David Lynch is the most worthy successor to both of them. As it was in what Aristotle simplistically

thought of as the cathartic fear of tragic drama, so narrative art is still an immanent critique of the emotional and cognitive dialectic of experience.

41. Cause and affect.

A frequent criticism of philosophers has been that they explain or excuse art according to their own interests, that is, according to its cognitive function or truth value. One problem with this though is the increasingly dubious assumption that philosophy's most cherished standards are knowledge and truth. Besides, plenty of narrative artists and fiction junkies promote their films or books by saying much the same: that fictions organise and make sense of events that would otherwise be experienced as lacking rhyme or reason. Another version of this apology is that fiction's paradigmatic narrative plots compress sequences of events, make connections, and provide understanding. But is this actually what one finds in fiction? For in fact contemporary, reified life is itself a frenzied spectacle of the explained, while fiction marshals inexplicability on behalf of expression; and this is only consistent with fiction's dedication to *appearance*, in the face of whatever or however reality would like to make itself appear. Fiction's devotion to appearance repudiates reality's secret devotion to illusion. Fiction is organised appearance and the knowing aspect of this organisation seems more a matter of an artwork's knowledge of its affectivity, including the affectivity of knowledge, than a matter of concepts. Aristotle (*Poetics*, 1452a) intimated this when he saw narrative wonder as an affect of poetic causality, of things happening through one another yet against expectation. Wonder is a moment when things and events, in shaking off the disguise of the expected or the explained, reveal themselves at last. Though astonished apprehension is close to regression to myth, it is actually, like its idle sister curiosity, a stage in overcoming myth.

Aristotle (*Poetics*, 1452a) might seem like the typically rationalistic philosopher when he declares that what works best in the reversals of plot is what seems likely, inevitable, or necessary. But Aristotle, who, of all the ancient philosophers, made the most strenuous effort to theorise time, knew most poignantly time and history's formidable accidentality, and therefore their resistance to theory. Causality was reason's ruse in the face of that resistance. In the case of narrative art, the appearance of causal likelihood is still manifest as appearance. The apparent or quasi likelihood of fiction's causality actually preserves the wonder of history's accidentality in the wonder of the narrative synthesis by means of which it negates the accidental. Always somewhat trumped up, fiction provides an almost safe, almost sublime vantage for gazing into the teeming chasm of time. Each work of fiction, in the image of the dialectic of narrative synthesis, pits the perhaps of fiction's quasi-necessity against the perhaps of happening's accidents.

In *Pulp Fiction* (1994) Butch Coolidge (Bruce Willis) thinks he is safely driving away from his troubles when who of all the people in Los Angeles should cross the street in front of him but his would be nemesis Marcellus Wallace (Ving Rhames). This is sheer coincidence, by all causation unlikely and unexpected. It is even against the expectations of the artistic propriety called plausibility. The plot blissfully employs an accident against the world's accidentality, which would almost surely not have allowed such an event. How in any way does this accident follow what has happened before? Only in fiction's way; and it has only the affect of fiction's frankly false forms, of its quasi-necessity, to marshal in its defence against

the charges brought by the somewhat less than frank falsehood of reified empirical causality: it is just another stage in the spectacular cascade of plot complications. As it appears in fiction, causality is a satire on itself.

In his *Poetics of Cinema*, Raúl Ruiz (p. 77) imagines a poetic object whose rules “are unique to each film and must be rediscovered by each viewer; they can not be described *a priori*, nor *a posteriori* for that matter.” This is not just some nostalgic postmodern manifesto for what might sound like the old modernist artwork’s aesthetic autonomy; rather, Ruiz daydreams a movie that pushes the narrative dialectic of causal synthesis and non-causal diaphoresis to its wonderful limit. “What matters are the magical accidents, the discoveries, the inexplicable wonders, and the wasted time.” According to narrative synthesis, things happen through one another but that does not annul the narrative difference: that each event is still other than what has already happened. Things could have happened absolutely otherwise; and this must surely be the secret knowledge of fiction’s affect. Fiction is the wonderful representation of this *absolutely otherwise* in and for itself. Ruiz’s daydream has been realised in his (and others’) fictions, to the extent that they are different to previous works of fiction. So this *absolutely otherwise* is represented not only within the fictions plot and storyline, it is represented by the work’s relation to previous works.

Kant imagined two kinds of causality: that of nature and that of freedom. In a way, fiction could imagine as many as there are acts of narrative synthesis, and even a kind of retroactive causality as well. Causality, even in Kant, is a kind of tool for conceiving what is inconceivable—the temporal relation of particular events as a necessary determination. That Kant (1787, p.251) could only think causality by thinking up an absolute totality of causal conditions—an Idea which could be required but not experienced—makes empirical causation seem as impossible as freedom. This is a nice way of seeing his third antinomy, the negative way, fiction’s way. That other causality—freedom’s—was a way for thought to think its way out of the necessary determination of empirical causation that it had thought up for itself in the first place. It was therefore the fitting form for fiction’s order, the spontaneity and originality of the emancipated subject matching the autonomy of the artwork.

The autonomy of fiction implies a cosmos of more or less autonomous syntheses. Fiction’s linking of events is much more polysemic than scientific causality would normally regulate things. Narrative as such covers the gamut of that polysemy. While genres divide up these causalities into kinds, against which they each measure their plausibilities, the universe of narrative is a hotch potch of empirical, teleological, symbolic, divine, miraculous, and whatever linkages, all of which parley under the auspices of narrative spatiotemporality. In the autonomy of its syntheses, fiction honours the insight whereby Kant (1788, p.120) resolved the antinomy of pure speculative reason, namely that “events and even the world in which they occur are regarded as only appearances (as they should be).” What might be said to happen in a fiction is certainly not confined to a world that the work refers to. Fictions, as all artworks, demand consideration as astonishing poetic objects themselves, notwithstanding the fact that they refer to something else beyond themselves. What follows what in the performance mediates what follows what in the events performed. The former’s affect is in dialogue with the latter’s effect. It is the utmost importance of the former, its astonishing experience, that stresses the importance of sheer appearance—and not merely in the sense of “subjective

appearance". Fiction has not only celebrated the sovereignty of appearance merely by dazzling illusions and virtual realities but also, and even more so, by its own dazzling appearance as a poetic narrative object among other objects. The history of cinema demonstrates this with its quick development of montage and the rapid obsolescence of cinema as the kind of virtual reality machine that could terrify patrons at the image of an oncoming train. The cut in a film dispels any illusion of virtual reality, primarily by breaking, if not necessarily rearranging, the chronological flow of the narrated events. All those non-chronological orders in film and literature are offshoots of this feature of the performance, appearance and experience of narrative objects. Whether a main clause followed by 'because...', a shot followed by an explanatory flashback, a self reflexive entelechy, or whatever, all non-chronological order emphasises the dialectic of appearance and causality. In turn, this dialectic suggests, against the advocates of narrative synchrony, the kind of retroactive diachrony whereby ends reconfigure beginnings.

Plausibility refers to an emotion, a banal feeling for the rightness of a narrative connection. It is a case of feeling the right way, almost like the way Kant describes the feeling of that ancient moral protagonist called "personality" in his chapter on the drives of practical reason. Plausibility is a matter of genre, with even an outlandish narrative connection feeling right in the proper context. In epochs dominated by belief, credibility has been the dominant form of plausibility. What is plausible pleases according to a law—as Raul Ruiz (1995, p.77) puts it, "the pleasure comes from sadistic adherence to a program". As banal pleasure, a peculiar combination of logic and feeling which is generally called habit, plausibility indicates something about narrative art, namely that the way to understand narrative art's connections is affectively. What happens *post hoc* is intuited as *propter hoc*, but that intuition is, in its immediacy, a feeling for the fiction's form rather than a conception of that form. In fiction effectivity is inseparable from affectivity.

Hegel rightly alerted aesthetics to the problems of affect—to its vague and abstract character—and Adorno (1970, p.487) noted that reflection on affect is only more difficult when the "culture industry tends to pervert the subjective response to artworks." However this manipulation of affect demonstrates the importance of affect and the historical need to undertake a critique of feeling (and not just aesthetic feeling). The subjective response to a fiction may be obscure, abstract and manipulable, yet precisely because this is a problem then it is, in its form as a problem, taken in as a part of the fiction's content. The emphatic self reference of fictive acts refers to this problem as something which itself arouses feeling; the problem itself is experienced as feeling. This has been the case at least since the seductive pleasure's of romance were felt in *Don Quixote* as amusing. Likewise, almost any Hollywood genre film is experienced as a feeling for a feeling for genre. This is why to understand fiction we have to be open to the feelings it arouses. You can't expect to experience good fiction through a tight arse. Yet paradoxically it is also why feelings like Aristotle's "fear and pity" have essentially as little to do with fiction as Hollywood schmaltz, or even the late modernist critics' *disturbance* and *anxiety*. Such emotions may all be felt in the presence of the work, but they are only momentary and contingent aspects, and if they were all that was felt, then that would indicate a certain inability to experience the work. The signs of such atrophied experience may often be discerned in readers or viewers who are willing only to justify or condemn a work—if they managed to endure it at all—rather than respond to it. Plausibility, in its banal character, becomes tied to such justifications. What

pleases in the plausible is the commonsense ideological character of paradigmatic plots which make sense of what happens by stiffening the polysemy of narrative connections. Thus, presenting social phenomena such as resentment, revenge and torture in the plausible form of family value schmaltz is a routine formula for making violence obscene and getting it a general exhibition rating. The violent sentimentalism of *The Crow* (1994) is an example. Why not just present these events as shocking objects of wonder? The censor might misunderstand, but art and even precious morality would be better served. David Lynch's wonderful film *Blue Velvet* goes one better and presents schmaltz along with torture as an object of wonder.

Sometimes fiction is like a child who half covers its eyes yet cannot tear its gaze from what is horrible. Although that gaze is attended by a feeling of horror, or "fear and pity", isn't it that other feeling, the one that holds the gaze, that *entertains*, that is the most remarkable affect of fiction? This complex of feeling is obscure and irreducible other than to things like those physiological signs of wonder, awe, sadness and happiness: tears, laughter, thrill,... And these signs are themselves signs of what, in the subject, surpasses it or might threaten it, as happiness or sadness suggest: mortality, the capacity for suffering, the fleeting sense of transcendence or love. Whatever knowledge fiction contains is inseparable from all this feeling. Returning then to the notion of a critique of feeling, fiction would demonstrate that the obscure, abstract character of feeling implies that in some sense it subsumes thought, that even thought is a kind of affect. Imagine a history of philosophy if Descartes or Kant had begun with "I feel" or even "we feel" instead of "I think"; or if Parmenides had asserted the identity of *feeling* and *Being*.

So the importance of narrative affect in narrative cause and effect goes beyond the banality of reified plausibility. Fiction has been the becoming of the critique of plausibility. The importance of affect was always the result of the particularity of narrated events, and of the autonomy of artworks, including their autonomy in relation to the heteronomy of plausibility. Because fictions make a spectacle of the groundlessness of narrative and the particularity of events, rather than argue, they demand neither assent nor approval but only the irresistible apprehension of their appearance. Even philosophy, which constitutionally tests all grounds, is consequently haunted by the spectre of groundlessness; so the common misapprehension is that philosophical theses vie in an unseemly relativity like mere opinions—or mere artworks. However artworks and philosophy pit their indeterminateness against the pragmatistic assuredness and sameness of the scientific argument and laws that are thought to justify the plausible.

Everyone who likes art has had the experience of completely different responses to the same work on different occasions, whereas scientific argument and mathematical proof more or less demand assent regardless of the reader's mood. The researcher's mood is the first thing abstracted by the methodological imperative of repeatability. Long before Kant's *Critique of Judgement*, taste was a way of making what seemed subjective reveal an objective aspect; that was precisely what snobbery latched on to in "good taste". Not even the Hegelian turn to the artwork's content could escape the fact that what is objective in artworks is first of all that most cunning of objects, the subject. Assent to science's proofs and the repeatability of its experiments becomes much more uncertain when its object is the subject. The vagaries of taste were a result of the momentary and contingent affect of artworks for different subjects at different times, which in fiction's case depended on the way the poetic object contained its own subjective aspect as manifested in the affective

polysemy of its causality. What is called ambiguous in works of narrative art, and what distinguishes them from other objects is that meaning vies with meaning, an antagonism that reflects the collusive constitution of the subject and fiction alike. The singularity of narrative connections, their *perhaps-once-only* quality, can only give an intuition of the fiction's causality; and in their autonomy fictions can only expect different responses, not repeated assent. The incipient knowledge implicit in fiction's mimesis is experienced with or as feeling. The fact that fiction is concerned with truth only negatively, or in showing truth and falsehood rather than asserting, is related to the fact that in its immediacy it is concerned with the feeling of truth, with intellect as affect, and with intellectual emotions like curiosity, interest and wonder—that is, with the secret drives of philosophy. On the other hand, even as something vague and abstract, mood or feeling is quasi epistemological—a feature that plausibility has exploited.

When Roland Barthes (1977 p.94) said that "narrative would be the systematic application of the logical fallacy denounced by Scholasticism in the formula *post hoc ergo propter hoc*," he was probably describing the "would be" of narrative plausibility. For plausibility exploits the banal feeling—the habit—that what happens *post hoc* happens *propter hoc*. Narrative, on the other hand, is a dialectic of *post hoc* and *propter hoc*, arising from its being both a synthesis and a diaphysis at once. This fallacy should actually be called the fallacy of causality. Causality is a principle whose falseness—or fictivity—may be derived from the principle itself. As Kant said in his chapter on the System of Cosmological Ideas, causality demands the idea of an absolute totality of conditions; meanwhile empirical science, which hankers after discrete, isolated causes, and proceeds by deeming most things to be causally irrelevant, increasingly has trouble abstracting particular objects and events from the totality—especially an ecological or social totality. Causality begins with the ecological insight that no object can be isolated from other objects, so, from the viewpoint of such causality, any object, anything in its pure particularity, is therefore an abstraction. Yet whatever necessity there is in empirical causation derives from this abstraction, the very abstraction that characterises the social process of empirical objectification.

The other side of the attenuated character of causality, and of the idea of a causal totality, is that any particular event is caused more or less by any other particular, preceding event. Fiction then has three terms to work with: the idea of causality (causality remains a "transcendental idea" for fiction because it is a principle of the spatiotemporal narrative sign); a particular before and after; and particular laws of causation such as those of nature, or freedom, or the divine, or the supernatural, or whatever. Plausibility regulates before and after according to the bans of a certain commonsense causation. Its negation—only ever determinate—is the source of wonder that poetics, from Aristotle to Ruiz, invoke. For then the processes of objectification—the cunning of abstraction, the particularisation of before and after—are shown as poetic processes. Again, I stress, this is especially the case when it comes to social phenomena. Non reflexive, empirical sciences are the soft sciences as far as fiction is concerned; and when it comes to fiction everything is social, everything is a meaning rather than just a referent. The poesis of fiction emulates the poesis of all objectification, revealing the obscurity, perversity, interestedness or neurosis involved in the immense subjective and socio-historical labour of objectification. Fiction is an interest in such interestedness, hence its relation to the

old aesthetic of disinterest. Rather than despair at the doubtfulness of things, and rather than stand smugly or idly before them, it rehearses what Hegel called the wisdom of wild animals and devours them. "What is really captivating in a representation of any sort," writes Adrian Martin (1994, p.198) "is rarely the external commonsense particulars (however well crafted), but a deep phantasmic logic that can only be fleetingly glimpsed as it churns and spits up hard fragments of its vision." That phantasmic logic emulates the obscure phantasmagoria of causality and objectification; the hard things it spits up could be everyday objects themselves in their uncanny defiance of all conceptualisation. Fiction is full of them: a white whale, a purloined letter, a blade of grass in a suburban lawn,.... Kant, in thinking of the *thing-in-itself* as the *noumenon*—that which is only intelligible or may only be thought, rather than that which just *is* or *is real*—perhaps understood the relation of the real world to consciousness as something that consciousness represents for itself in order to get the measure of its own fallibility. What fiction imagines, however outlandish, stands in for what is real, in order to display the inadequacy of facts.

As the conditioned responses of genres, narrative emotions risk banality, especially if left unreflected. However even an apparently idle emotion like curiosity is probably only condemned as idle as an after effect of efforts to suppress it because it is an emotion of thought. Those who warn against killing fiction's affect with too much thinking about it are perhaps half right, but only half as right as art. They are wrong for having so rationalistically abstracted emotion from thought in the first place. In fiction, as in all art, emotion is intellectual, that is, our bodies think in feeling; in fiction the knowledge of effect is intimated in affect. It is the likes of Hades or the God of Lot that would stamp out idle curiosity. The praise of mere grandiose truth and the trivialisation of idle curiosity enables the deliberate concealment of certain strategic phenomena for the sake of theology or commonsense. The ostensible reasons for the ban on curiosity may vary, but the implacable punishment meted out in cases of curiosity is proof of the political and social importance of the otherwise threadbare illusions that even "mere" curiosity may dispel. Idle curiosity may have killed the cat but it was also enough to see through the emperor's new clothes. The story of Orpheus's bitter loss of Eurydice suggests something akin to tragedy's repudiation of a cruel archaic law that the protagonist could accidentally, idly and wonderfully not help but transcend by his irrepressible act of looking back. Hades' ban was like that commonsense law of narrative order—the ban against reading the end first. The dialectic of narrative is the terror of the arbitrariness of beginning and end, and the terror of overturning it to find its groundlessness. Staged in the curious play of plot against chronology, narrative art is the sublime spectacle of this terror.

42. *Metaphysics of feeling*

To have cited wonder, thrill, amusement, fascination, curiosity or whatever, and to have traced art back to the importance of its affect is actually to have gotten nowhere. These feelings are all incipient questions—as the phrase *I wonder* shows. The point about theorising these affects is that by citing them we have passed beyond what excites them: and that is what they are wholly concerned with. Affect is no explanation when it comes to fiction; or, if it were, it would be a case in point of the tautological emptiness of explanation as such. When it comes to fiction's subjective affect, the audience and the artists are like the philosophy student who failed the exam

because he did not know the answers: he therefore actually passed it. The audience or artists who still wonder what a good artwork is have somehow understood art; for art is this problem. No wonder response is so variable; no wonder categories like good or bad, high or low, fall away from art as though it were resistant to them. (When Adorno remarks somewhere that the idea of bad art is oxymoronic, perhaps this is what he means, and not that to be art is to be good art. Actually, artworks are themselves oxymoronic, as Adorno too might well have said.) Judgements about artworks are, at their worst, facile rationalisations of the artwork's immediate affect. Though this is the most common and least helpful way to think about art, it is anything but wrong to start from affect, because it is certainly not much good to conclude there.

Those rationalisations after the affect are the kind of "double talk" that Adrian Martin dismisses at the beginning of his book on the "phantasms" of popular culture. *Phantasms* "begins from a not uncommon experience: the feeling that something you have just seen (a film or a TV show) was powerful or intriguing, but mysteriously so." That is, it begins with the feeling of wonder, or of wondering. Martin's essays (both in print and on radio) follow the great traditional movement of the essay, from subjective wonder at the object to the social and aesthetic reality of the poetic object itself. He begins with affect and traces the dialectic of its genesis in the artwork and in culture. Thus as he writes in his essay on Martin Scorsese (and in the context of Sam Fuller, Michael Powell and Vincent Minelli), "It is Hollywood's taboo against artistic expression in the high-flown sense, that pushes its filmmakers to invent (consciously or otherwise) ways of displacing their own impulses within their work—and to generate emotional and intellectual curiosity from the necessary act of sublimation (1994, p.150)." Despite its reliance on the aesthetically dubious notion of sublimation (as opposed to the sublime), it does explain the peculiar predicament of affect in the art of Hollywood, and why an expression such as *the art of Hollywood* is anything but oxymoronic.

The affect of fiction is tied to its collusion. It is doubtful whether any appreciation of a work of narrative art is not attended by the affect of collusive happiness, an affect that points beyond its aspect as subjective pleasure, to the collusive, intersubjective felicity that alone enables the sublime vantage of fiction. Or to put it differently, and to avoid the idea of pleasure that the mention of happiness conjures up, it is hard to imagine an appreciation of a work of narrative art that was not, at the most highly abstract level of its collusion a matter of a certain identity of collusive feeling. When Wittgenstein says something must be "the same" in communication, or when Aristotle demonstrates the necessity of some ultimate moment of identity in logic, neither suggests that what must be the same was a feeling. Wittgenstein was talking about the rules of a language game, Aristotle about a first principle of reason. That first principle has not been theorised as something affective, yet this might be the last interesting sense of the word empathy—the shared affect of artistic, or scientific, collusion. It is the moment of mutual affect, implicit in entertainment, that the narrative business harnesses to sell product precisely because art, and consciousness and reason itself, cannot help but harness it. But, as something abstractly subjective—that is separate from intersubjectivity—it is something terribly vacuous and abstract as Hegel (1818, vol 1, p. 43) first suggested: "What is felt remains cloaked in the form of the separate personal experience under its most abstract persistence."

Feeling is more abstract or universal than intellect because intellect is just another kind of affect. Feeling, as a mathematician might say, *governs* intellect; or perhaps, intellect *is reducible* to feeling. Reason is the slave of the passions in the

sense that reason is a kind of passion for intersubjectivity or the communication of meaning. In a way Hegel's critique of affect misses its utmost metaphysical significance in so far as feeling is a higher universal than reason. It is as if mutual feeling is an instance of the natural-historical eruption of the universal, an eruption marked by bodily responses such as laughter, tears, sighs, thrill, frisson and the like.

Fiction's collusion however is ultimately non-identical. When it comes to subject matter and intellectual content, fiction is an elaboration of the non-identical, polysemic essence of narrative collusion. And this non-identity extends right through to the passions that might be supposed to be the principle of identity that governs the non-identical content of the experience of fiction. Hence the need for a "last philosophy" of art as much as for a "first philosophy" of Being. Indeed in the context of narrative art it is a philosophy of middles—of being in the middle of things—that seems necessary; not simply a method but a philosophy of universal mediation. So to cite wonder when talking about the affect of fiction is not to cite an identity of affect in the parties to a wondrous act of fiction. Wonder, like happiness, or the affectivity of art or reason in general, is a term for the non-identity of the intersubjective affective content of semiotic collusion. Such concepts refer to their irresolvable non-identity, albeit creating—as concepts do—the illusion of identity. This in itself would be enough to show their emptiness when cited in explanations of art, and to show that they, as the affects of the artworks that excited them, are the affects of questions not answers. It also shows why responses to artworks, whether intellectual or emotional, are all so different, no matter how much the artwork aspires to and, indeed attains, its own objectivity. Indeed they prove the artwork's objectivity for an age when the object has at last come into its own. Once, in the great epoch of the subject, objects were merely mechanical, but that was only because, in asserting the subject, subject centred reason had to set up the object as a mere straw dummy. At last, we can appreciate how subjects are just the most wonderful objects.

To return to Adrian Martin: his resort to a quasi-Freudian metaphors of the unconscious and of sublimation is actually an intimation of the non-identity of affect in narrative art, a non-identity that is essential to the intersubjectivity of collusion (and therefore to communication) and even to the intersubjectively determined and supposedly self identical subject. Freud's unconscious and the theory of sublimation always registered the non-identity of the subject. Martin (p. 2) actually registers this more explicitly when he writes: "Sometimes cultural phantasms are utterly unconscious, but more often they appear semi-conscious, half recognised, *both courted and evaded in the same desperate moment.*" This "both courted and evaded" could stand for the sublime quality of fiction's spectacle. It is typified in the audience half covering its eyes against horror or half stifling its laughter. Longinus saw the sublime in terms of that incipient, naturally social, self-alienation called ecstasy; Kant saw the dialectic of the Sublime as a stage in the subject's formation. Fiction rehearses the subject's sublimely non-identical genesis in semiosis.

So, after Adrian Martin, what about this scene from a video ferreted out of the horror section of the video store, a scene from David Cronenberg's *The Fly* (1986). The journalist, (Geena Davis) discovers her new lover, the inventor (Jeff Goldblum), performing gymnastics on the horizontal bar. Aroused, she cannot quite keep her lips from parting in erotic wonder (or maybe this is just the nature of Geena Davis's lips). He is performing with sublime power, having woken in the middle of the night. Her gaze is that of one coming to discover the unknown power in one's beloved. It is like Psyche gazing on Eros, or the angel watching the trapeze artist in *Wings of Desire*. Yet this wonderful scene is also an early sign of the inventor's horrifying Faustian transformation. Soon his inspired talk is wavering between Marlovian grandiloquence

and stoned, excited babble. Soon his actions are the antics of a fly; soon his love is the lust of a fly; soon his body is the body of a fly; and soon she fears giving birth to a giant maggot. Like her, we gaze at the gymnastic spectacle in the many questions of its wonder.

43. *The function of aesthetic affect: function for whom or what?*

It is a commonplace of the theory of fiction to say, as Samuel Johnson did in his *Preface to Shakespeare*, that “the first purpose of the writer, by exciting restless and unquenchable curiosity, is to compel him that reads the work to read it through.” This is not just a principle of popular culture. It has persisted before and throughout the course of the hedonistic discipline of Modernism, and beyond. Allurement, delight, suspense, the power of attracting and holding attention are no doubt crucial functions that no theory of fiction can ignore. However, the first question is: functions for the sake of whom or what?

Exciting curiosity is a function that supposedly ensures communicative uptake and, consequently, the selection of a work by an audience, a public or by history. It is a function therefore of the artwork *for the sake of the artwork*, in an environment of psyche and society—the artwork being a kind of self-referring, self-perpetuating entity in that environment. And it is a function embodied in the cognitive design of the work—that is, in the plot. It is strange to find that at the heart of a popular and, one would have thought, humanist commonplace there lurks a non-human perspective: the perspective of the life of the artwork.

From the human perspective the analysis proceeds differently. It was for the sake of human organisms—for their survival and reproduction—that human thinking and knowing were selected; and it was for the sake of thinking and knowing that emotions like curiosity were selected. (I might add though, that curiosity and other emotional states, although they might be framed by organic nature, take on normative forms in modern culture.) The cognitive design of a plot is only cognitive design for humans, and perhaps, in some dramatic cases, for some other species. It is only cognitive design in an environment of mind. From the perspective of human mind or psyche we might just as well say that the primary purpose of curiosity, and perhaps all emotional experience, is the cognitive one. This cognitive purpose is the primary purpose for the writer because it is primarily that which is of cognitive relevance that excites the audience curiosity in the first place; and it is also, in a sense, the first function of the artwork, because it is primarily in its cognitive design that the artwork is able to arouse the curiosity that in turn enables the completion and replication of its own communicative form.

Only for the sake of the non-human autonomy of the artwork does curiosity also become somewhat autonomous, and somewhat abstract and disembodied from its human function. This raises questions about whether such abstraction alienates emotions like curiosity. Does it give rise to an arousal of curiosity that is not for the sake of knowledge but for the sake of the work’s self-reproduction and for the sake of delusive or even self-delusive intentions? The sheer entertainment value of an artwork is just the kind of thing that alienates works from humans and makes them into inhuman monsters. The entertainment industry is well known for exploiting the emotional response to artworks by dividing and ruling the senses and the emotions, targeting the gratification of one narrow kind of response, and avoiding exciting other emotional responses. Infantile, pornographic and flashy narratives are all like this. By limiting the range of emotional responses such works jam the cross-checking between the different kinds of emotional registers that is so important in facilitating the

cognitive function of emotional experience. The emotions are skilled workers but only if they work together. One of the great pleasures of narrative artworks comes from the semantic resolution (or ambiguity) of a subject's conflicting emotional responses to a work. So called sensational or gratifying entertainment is just not sensational or gratifying or entertaining enough.

44. *Entertainment.*

As the spectacular presentation of narrative, fiction is compelled to concentrate on the spectacle of performance. And as a kind of narrative that makes a virtue of the collusion of authors and audience it is compelled to the provocative and anticipatory play of virtuoso performance. It would follow from both of these things that fiction would be a form of entertainment.

Entertainment—etymologically, the sheer holding of attention—is one abstract moment of narrative performance. The communicative interest in unimpeded symbolic exchange mirrors and provides for the market interest in unimpeded sale. It also mirrors the interest of institutional power, which, having won the audience's attention, has also won the narrative privilege that goes with authorship, namely of putting that which would not be so but for having been so put. Of course the power that comes of this is that of any story—history or fiction—that is entertaining, and whatever its truth value, the measure of it is not *man*, let alone *the real*. All that is required is that such stories are true primarily for themselves. They may, perhaps, also be true secondarily for those who sell them, and lastly, for those whose subjectivity ends up being fashioned in their image. The Orphic spell of narrative entertainment is now the ultimate form of commodity consumption; such derealised time as pure timeless gratification amounts to what Guy Debord called the "consumption of the very process of consumption." No wonder the narrative market is dominated by entertainment commodities, whether facts or fictions. And no wonder narrative goods—both hardware and software—are among the driving commodities of the present age of screen capitalism. They take the fiction that Marx recognised in the commodity fetish and turn it into a commodity itself. Debord's (1967, #34) remark about commodity fetishism reaching its absolute fulfilment in the spectacle is, equally, a remark about fiction—fiction being, after all, the *spectacle* of narrative. This is why the way fiction restores truth to narratives is by making a spectacle of this spectacle.

45. *The body, ecstasy and metaphysics.*

Disembodied fictional texts, in such prosthetic media as writing, film and even drama and epic, use their disembodied media as the pretext of their generic means, thus signifying their distanced or transcendent relation to things and to communication itself. As with spoken narratives, the shared physical affect of the medium is implicated in the moment of collusion. Epic, whose prosody marks the incipient disembodiment of what remains an oral medium, also marks its physical relation to things by the same prosody. The poet's song sings the body, while, on song's wings, which are given to it by the biology of social collusion, the body imagines its own ecstatic transcendence, even though that transcendence is experienced in an utterly gorgeous and immanent bodily affect. Ecstasy is an erotic experience of the social, collusive body, of the body as happily more than something mortal, brutish and alone. It is the physical affect of signs that signify the

transcendence of the physical, and by virtue of that physical affect it affects virtual transcendence. As such, it is an intimation of metaphysics, which metaphysics dishonours as soon as it separates the transcendent, socially instituted being from the empirical, brutish body, and calls the former *soul* and the latter mere flesh. The pernicious correspondence of this division with the systemic division of intellectual from physical labour is exacerbated by the body itself balking account. Metaphysical foundations are a form of that balking, barricades erected in the pretence of transcendence.

46. *Escape, and the dialectics of ecstasy.*

As we may read in Longinus's discourse *On the Sublime* (179r), the old metaphor of artistic *ecstasy* implied a transportation of audience members beyond themselves, just as art's sublime performance was displaced beyond the discourse of everyday persuasion. As one of a succession of forms of artistic ecstasy, the modern phenomenon of *escapism* has been so named as a banal displacement outside the regulation of banal selfhood by means of fiction's assuming autonomy from the regulations of non-fiction.

Whereas once such an ecstasy may have implied a sacred or profane purpose, escapism puts its somewhat profane facilities at the disposal of secular recreation, casting off ties with the ethical edification of the Sublime, and so relinquishing, to some extent, narrative art's special project of subliming the misleading potential of narrative.

As a phenomenon belonging to the prehistory of postmodernity, escapism was inseparable from related contemporary phenomena: alienation and the division of pleasure from work; the division of privacy and leisure time from public job-time; and the separation of entertaining popular culture from high art—the latter joining science to make up the proper domain for the deliberate spiritual labour of modernity. Escapism became part of the system from which it promised escape. Lest it be too like the tedium of alienated production, it opted for easy consumption, relieving the consumer of any onerous effort in fiction's collusion.

Whether curling up on the sofa with a novel, or veging out in front of the TV, escape by fiction became a profitable determinant in what the market deemed to be private life, and in the week by week recreation of labour. Of course the content of this recreative private life was eminently and systemically determinable by the narrative industry, whose "popular culture" was a matter of systemic consumption and reproduction rather than of any such thing as popular production.

Still, there is often something farcically censorious involved when fiction is labelled *escapist*—something that implies that it is escape from that convenient Utopia of the mean spirited they call the "real world". And the censorious tone is found in glib condemnations of the commoditised pleasures of fiction. Such condemnations eventually degrade Marx's critique of the commodity form into a moralistic, rhetorical formality. The commodity form is a fiction about equivalence of value, taken as a fact. Bans against the pleasures of fiction, as if they were hopelessly compromised by the systemic commoditisation of escape, would probably be symptomatic of a yearning for some pristine, pre-fictive factuality, and so at the service of the mistake that blithely takes the fictivity of commoditisation as a hard fact of the market place. Escape has now become total; it is co-extensive with the "real world". Ecstasy is the intrinsic norm of a society in which the fiction of the commodity has become total: the world, that "totality of facts", is also a totality of commodities, and therefore a totality of fictions.

The revolutionary narrative art of high Modernism responded to the dawn of this predicament by taking upon itself the prestige of hard, unalienated labour and difficult pleasure. It turned its sublime gaze on a world whose falsehood rendered its pleasures false. As Adorno (1970, p.18) said, "For the sake of happiness, happiness is renounced." But fiction's dialogue with the world of facts has again moved on. Drawing on fiction's autonomy from the world of facts—which is what enabled fiction's critique of that world—narrative art has not dreamed of relinquishing either its ecstatic or its hedonistic potential. Instead of fighting some desperate rearguard action against the untruth of escapist fiction, the art of fiction flaunts itself in media in which it can make good a situation where escape can no longer be seen as condemning that which is escaped. Where the ecstasy of escape is the intrinsic social norm, critique cannot transcend its object. Critique, which has worked itself up into an ecstatic frenzy, is no longer critique at all, but its spectacle. But dialectical thought has long recognised that critique must counter its object from within, with the very devices of that object, that is, in this case, with fiction. Though this is not without risk, risk is the habitat of fiction's truth. At present, as always, narrative art that fears pleasure is totally reappropriated by social systemic functions, if not for want of pleasure then by virtue of fear itself. Now, the relinquishing of pleasure remains as a cheap device in pretensions to that niche in the narrative market called high art. Adorno, a great theorist of aesthetic Modernism, and of the incipient reactions of postmodernity, should have the penultimate word: the reaction to Modernism "prefers to join forces with reified consciousness rather than stay on the side of an ideology of illusory humanness (1970, p.22)." Fiction now makes a spectacle of escapism. It pretends to be escapist in order to escape the illusion of escape.

47. The unacknowledged reductionism of taste.

Scientific theories of society and psychology do not explain everything about their objects. But what does? Especially not when these more or less reflexive sciences—more in the case of social science, less in the case of psychology—reconfigure their objects as a result of the process of describing them. This predicament often drives the scepticism of cultural theorists and psychologists towards each others disciplines, and towards each other's theories of art.

By considering the reductions of our own psychic representational schemata, light is cast on theoretical reductions in general, and on the reductions made by aesthetic theory. The popular resistance to aesthetic theory, and also the popular critique of scientific reductionism involve quite valid objections to the loss of information that inevitably results from the imposition of representational schemata. No concept matches the complexity of its object. This is both the strength and weakness of concepts: the strength because only by reduction may an object's complexity be grasped by a subject; the weakness because any reduction reduces the adequacy of a representation to its object. The neurophysiological or psychological processes involved in the emotional and intellectual experiences of consciousness are more complex than any reduction to a neurophysiological or psychological description of them.

The emotions have a peculiar place in this problematic. On the one hand they assess our psychic representational reductions by, for and within psychic experience—that is, they assess (with more or less accuracy) truth value for psyche, and do so by psychic means. But on the other hand, precisely in doing so they themselves make the most perniciously reductive of representations: they reduce the human organism's representations of its environment or itself to feelings, and therein

lies their highly abstract and reductionist nature. Their reputed, non abstract character is based, presumably, on their own irreducible character in and as psychic experience. The theoretical reduction of the emotions to a descriptive or explanatory representation—that is, to a theory of the emotions or, say, to some aspect of the theory of art—would be a stark case of the non identity or, indeed, utter unlikeness of concept and object. For the object in these circumstances is not something that is readily amenable to naive urges for descriptions of something that is concrete. It is only something in, as and for psyche and for intersubjective communicability; but it is utterly beyond the empirical observation of another observer. This in itself was a powerful motive for aesthetic theory's concentration on objects other than those of abstract emotional life—a move made explicitly and deliberately by Hegel in his aesthetic theory; but one that is certainly anticipated by the objectifying role of the transcendental subject in Kant's *Critique of Judgement*; and one that is continued by aesthetic theories of the twentieth century, with their various ontological commitments to events of authorial biography, to the psychoanalytic subject, to texts, their historical context and to artistic history, to ideological, ethical and cultural norms, and to other social systemic entities. So despite the popular feeling that art is primarily about subjective feeling, the popular feeling about theories of feeling and aesthetic theories of feeling is typically one that would reject such theories' claims to adequacy: rightly, because all representations are a reduction of adequacy; wrongly, because only by the inadequacies of reduction may any description or explanation be undertaken.

The niggling worries that the aesthetic is being rendered obsolete by scientific theorisation, or that it may be dismissed as merely subjective or a mere matter of feeling, or that one's aesthetic nous (or taste) will be left without academic tenure, may be justified when one is considering the social selection pressures operating in educational and scientific systems. However, such worries are not a reliable emotional index of any valid, absolute critique of either aesthetic theory or art itself as intellectual disciplines. The aesthetic and (the perhaps now obsolete category of) taste are not to be reduced once and for all by explanatory theory, and not to be superseded once and for—at least not until art itself, and humans with it, are superseded. The fast, heuristic, emotionally indicated understanding of aesthetic phenomena, that has been said to be undertaken by that aristocratic faculty called *taste*, is a cognitive process for psyche, and a process of social cognition at that. Like any form of cognition—especially socially mediated cognition—it benefits from being theoretically informed. In the case of fiction it is informed not just by watching a lot of films and plays and reading a lot of novels and stories, and not just by the rich experience of ethical life (ethical experience being the primary subject matter narrative art). It is also informed by theoretical reflection on and communication about such social processes. The theory of fiction does not simply negate the old aristocracy of taste; rather it is about art and taste and supersedes taste by means of taste's own reflexivity.

Perhaps the critique of taste has now proceeded so far as to make the term and its reference look anachronistic. Even Kant's *Critique of Judgement* was an attempt to go beyond the self-edifying irrationality of taste. Taste (or whatever supersedes it) can no longer be a self-described (and thereby self-deluded) anti-reductionist expertise in the unconscious reductions of aesthetic feeling; it can no longer be the handy ploy of Adorno's "solid citizens, for whom art can never be irrational enough (1951, p.75)."

When the hitmen joke and banter on their way to a brutal execution at the start of *Pulp Fiction*, the comic devices of narrative identification deliberately seduce the audience. No amount of talk about their being the agent's of a kind of just vengeance within the crime kingdom of Marcellus Wallace could justify their comic glamorisation. Talk of justice can't justify capital execution anyway. Or rather, all it can do is *merely* justify it. As narrative art, *Pulp Fiction* makes a theme of justice. It is the justice of a crime world, and that crime world is as much the merely banal customary subject matter of Hollywood, as it is any real crime world; or it is the justice of the state police system, which as systems go is not unlike the system of revenge that the movie depicts. But as art, the scandal of humorous and likeable killers, one of whom is granted an indulgent resurrection by the grace of narrative time, presents the spectacle of violence as banal spectacle, thus making a spectacle of the very banality of violent spectacle. Some adolescents are merely taken in by the banality, such banal violence hardly shocks them, they miss the spectacle of banality and find the film boring.

Once upon a time, the death of Clytemnestra occurred off stage—the culmination of a banal series of acts of vengeance—and it was heard, or reported by a horrified chorus. The dialectics of banality and spectacle in representations of violence was controlled by bans on its representation—the norms of tragedy. The adulterous “Third Wife” in Zhang Zhimou's *Raise the Red Lantern* is executed by indistinguishable agents of a distant and obscure patriarchal order in a horror chamber glimpsed across snow covered rooftops. The bans, or niceties of tragic representation are observed with horrifying effect. A grandchild of the society of the spectacle, Tarantino makes a spectacle of the banality of horrifying spectacle, but then so too does Shakespeare in plays such as *Titus*, *Lear* and *Macbeth*. When Johnson in his notes on *King Lear* (1971, p.317-318) worried about the destructive violence in Shakespeare, about its straining credulity—the extrusion of Gloucester's eyes, the shocking death of Cordelia—he, like the censor, was zeroing in on the dramatic gist.

49. Disturbance

In the end there may be some truth in that ultimate accolade bestowed by the narrative industry's advertising blurbs—“Disturbing”—just as, long ago, there was in the related affect of catharsis. Schoolish critics still wheel out the judgement—supplying the blurb writers with something to quote—sadly displaying their own late, late mastery of an antiquated modernist cliché. Or rather, it is a kind of half mastery presented as a kind of boast: the critic as hero, as brave and honest as the artist hero, has survived what is disturbing amongst bourgeois art's luxuries, and lived to write the review.

What there is of fear, pity, horror, trembling, anxiety, boredom, despair or disturbance in fiction is only an aspect of the work, a momentary affect. Despite its being an immediate affect on audiences, it inheres as an affect in the unreflected subject matter; whereas the artwork reflects on or makes a spectacle of the affect.. Any anxiety that fiction prompts in its audience, any affect carried from the cinema out into the street bespeaks the kind of unresolved tension that is immanent in the artwork. But it is *in* the artwork. The artwork is not disturbing; rather, as something social, it restages the transcendental subject's becoming in the form of a sublime overcoming of what is disturbing or threatening. If there is something primal about all this, it lies in the archaic struggle of subjectivity, joined by society, with what would destroy it.

What is disturbing in the artwork is like the cataract under the sublime gaze of the romantic—something wild, deadly, enormous, yet also something, as Kant stressed, at a more or less safe distance. That is, an entertaining distance, which, unless we are psychotic, we survive. Kant's restriction of the aesthetics of the sublime to things natural was mistaken. Everything from the sublime violence of revenge tragi-comedy, whether Tourneur's or Tarantino's, to the sublime exhilaration of a tragic aria proves this. This is not to regress to something like Kant's bourgeois disinterestedness as the unchallenged mode of artistic apprehension. Rather, fiction emulates the historical construction of the knowing devices of the Sublime's safety, testing them as it goes. What looks dangerous is this testing. What is disturbing is that, as testing, it must test up to the breaking point—which is what the artwork represents. The relation of art and life then, is like that of an experiment to experience: both go beyond the limit, so art is also dangerous. Someone might get too close. Everyone who is open to works of fiction has experienced works too painful to finish. Probably we have encountered them when we ourselves were living in the madness they made their matter.

50. *Sex in the cinema*

Martin Scorsese has wondered at how difficult it is to show sex in the cinema. It was not the office of censorship he was worrying about, more the superego of the cinema, and how it co-opts the most intimate meaning for inhuman intentions. In bondage to a master like *promotion*, sex is there for sales; and like action and violence, it is there for the sales of a non linguistic plot to an adolescent audience—in which case it must be “suitable”, which means it must be banal. In bondage to bondage for its own sake, sex is there for the unthinkability of there being no sex. Or perhaps I should say “sex”, because what is shown as sex has evolved into a peculiarly limited and highly stylised generic form of on screen behaviour. The problem is probably limited to a particular moment in the history of cinema—a moment that is probably already passing, and, of course, many films manage to avoid the problem. When the censor was seen as the problem, the defenders of *sex scenes* (this term indicates their conventional character) had to argue for them on the grounds that they were “not gratuitous” and “advanced the plot”. They scarcely do advance the plot any more—if they ever did—beyond signalling, say, a consummation that could, like anything else in art, be signalled otherwise. Besides, who is to say what “advances the plot” or what is “gratuitous” when artworks are a law unto themselves. Gratuitousness might just be the point, as it often is of sex. Though once a sign of social change and sexual liberation, the sex scene became primarily a sellable surrogate for these things—a set piece interlude of promotional kitsch. By virtue of its self referential, self perpetuating replication, the sex scene became a curiously detached element and almost no longer plot at all, and therefore, also, devoid of the most erotic element—character.

In bondage to old advertisements about male fantasy, women recline, pant, moan and come before the camera's eye, the actresses contriving the received forms of spontaneous ecstasy. In hundreds of movies, the camera moves over the woman's body, or rather over strictly limited parts of it, and on to the face—the place of registration that this little set piece has come to its climax. In bondage to an old fantasy about men, the men are scarcely watched, except as surveyors of the female body-scape. The functionaries of rooting-as-relief, their cocks—insofar as they exist at all—slip in unhandled and unseen, and the men thrust and grunt their bit of

gratification. It usually all resembles a half censored rape fantasy, complete with a woman who's "asking for it". How strangely and coldly the cinema polices any hint of pleasure.

It is instructive how much banality derives from the bans: bans on the use of hands; bans on touching, showing or mentioning clitoris, penis, labia, testicles; bans on male bliss and female passion; bans on curiosity, play and laughter; bans on dialogue; bans on variety, accidents and incompetence; bans on most body shapes and ages; bans on married sex or sex between accustomed lovers; bans on male but not female homosexuality; bans on the problem and therefore the pleasure of another psyche; bans on sentiment; above all, bans on narrative originality. The great universe of Eros is constricted by the iron intentions of a no longer human other. It is all a matter of the autoeroticism of the cinematic superego.

Some contemporary cinema has been about the straightjacket of these bans, and it has used representations of sex to reflect on the alienation of Eros in our representations. It has depicted, for example, the contemporary cinematic form of the ancient nexus between sex and death (In Freudian terms, we might say that the cinematic superego reproduces the sex scene, over and over again, out of a longing for death.) There is Cronenberg's *Crash*, for instance, a film about the confusion of the human body with the car body—a confusion that could be said to epitomise the Hollywood sex scene. Or there is Pasolini's *Salo*. But as far as *Salo* goes, I don't know. The censor, who is the functionary of the autoeroticism of this monstrous cinematic superego, has to ensure that sex scenes that might not be pornographic are banned. So *Salo* is banned, I suspect, because it isn't pornographic enough.

Some films do rescue Eros from the bans, sometimes they even rescue the sex scene, although perhaps we no longer recognise it as a sex scene in the banal sense, because there are no kitsch erotica or sleek automotive lines. There are talking human bodies, not car bodies. Character extends into the sex scene, instead of being shed with the clothes. Or sex extends into other parts of the film.

Incidentally, even a film like *Crash*, and indeed any film that replicates the aesthetics of disturbance—whether replicating depictions of violence, violent pornography, banal violence, or banal erotica—enters a galaxy of social replications that kidnap its meaning. The repeated treatment of these themes—especially in the hope or expectation that that therein lies the path to artistic seriousness or artistic achievement—effects the transformation of their meaning: endless films on the banalisation of violence or erotic experience find their own meaning rendered banal, if not by their own intentions then by the alien social processes that they unhappily abandon themselves too, in order, narcissistically, to win themselves a bit of fame. For want of a story to tell they too become subjects of the cinematic super-ego.

51. Poetics of comedy.

The oldest complaint against poetic theory is that it is not as wonderful as the wonders it theorises, and especially not wonderful in the same way: poetics is not poetic; the poetics of comedy is not funny. Freud's book on comedy is no joke. Even the jokes in it seem to suffer from their theoretical context, although, as joke books prove, this especially oral genre does not thrive in the printed context. If Socrates discourse on comedy at the end of the *Symposium* had not been wasted on a drowsy, inebriated audience, or if Aristotle's poetics of comedy had not disappeared we would have had to destroy them, because comedy is famous for its ineffability. If either had captured the truth about comedy, then for the sake of laughter, it would have had to have been suppressed. The humourless monks in *The Name of the Rose* may have

been doing comedy a service, despite themselves, by censoring the lost section of the *Poetics*. Ultimately, of course, comedy would have made so much fun of any theory of comedy, that the truth would have drained out of the theory anyway. If we had not fallen asleep—as Aristophanes did during Socrates discourse—we would have laughed it into extinction. There is a scene in Rowan Atkinson’s comic TV essay on comedy where the comedian illustrates Freud’s theory of comedy by, among other things, squeezing into a kitchen cupboard. Freud’s theory is dissolved in laughter, which, if it were not too late, might actually have been be a kind of proof.

Comedy has a special place in fiction as almost the generic epitomisation of narrative joy. Talking about *The Games*, John Clark has said that as well as a laugh track, he would like to think there is a kind of comedy that has a smile track. In a way, all good fiction has a smile track. It is like nature, and we look on unable to suppress our joy at its wonderful, generous creation.

Comedy only exists as narrative, perhaps only as fiction. Even topical satire has to have that little bit extra, that bit of what is frankly *made up*; it is probably only by means of such making up that it can truly refer to what is laughable about history. Like *The Games* did, and before it actually happened.

Many people, and often narrative theorists, don’t recognise a narrative when they see one. However, when people talk about non narrative cinema or novels, they almost always mean a kind of narrative that is distinguished from other supposedly normal narrative forms. They are talking about the determinate negation of these normal narrative forms. Like atonal music, which is *too* melodic, non narrative narrative is often simply *too* narrative. There is too much information, but then, narrative is nearly always a matter of the excess of information. Uncertainty and entropy are characteristic of the particular referents of narratives. It was something like this excess of narrative that made Peter Goldsworthy think that so many Modernist novels were not very good narratives. When Neale and Krutnik (1990, p14) wanted to distinguish the “neo-classically defined” happy-ending comedy from so-called “non-narrative” comedy, they assumed that an ending implied narrative, and that laughter generating forms like jokes, gags, slapstick and stand-up lacked development and endings and were therefore non-narrative. However, each of these forms is thoroughly narrative. It is hard to imagine a narrative that ends with greater finality and cognitive reconfiguration than a joke. The joke is the essence of narrative. In fact stand-up is made up of narrative after narrative, joke after joke, gag after gag—lest the comedian die on stage. A modern Scheherezade would probably do stand-up, albeit while lying in bed.

“The doors of laughter are open to one and all,” said Bakhtin (1986, p135). Jokes, wisecracks and comedy generally assume a shared social pre-understanding about their butts, and fall flat in its absence. Laughter is one among a number of bodily shudders, such as thrill, shivers, sighing, crying and *frisson*, that link the cognitive nuance of particular genres and particular rhetorical schemata to shared narrative physiology. Tragedy and comedy, those broad, but neither exhaustive nor exclusive, categories of narrative art, are the highly socialised culminations of the cry

and the laugh. In the thrill of horror or the irresistibility of laughter, social communicative accord is staged at the level of the common necessity of the body of the narrative animal. Narrative media—the body and its narrative prostheses—are the more or less extended, phenotypic substance in which narrative is embodied. Hence the specific relation of certain genres and their bodily shudders to certain media. No wonder myths about the origin of language so often turn to these paroxysms as signs on the cusp between nature and culture. The thrill and laughter of fiction imply, from the depths of their animality, a kind of sublime overcoming of sheer animality in something elaborate and social. “It is the constitutive orientation of the subject towards objectivity which joins Eros and knowledge (Adorno, 1970, p.455).”

Nothing better illustrates the collusion of fiction’s genres than these bodily shudders like laughter. Their contagious physical irresistibility is the image of natural collusion as opposed to arbitrary community. They are also therefore the ideal instruments of unfreedom. The subject of comedy—both author and audience—is, as it were, immediately and naturally collective: the *we* with whom we laugh, not the other *at* whom we laugh. It is not surprising that comedy has an affinity for theatre, where the audience laughs with one another and with the cast at the characters. TV sitcoms are often recorded in front of a live audience or dished up on screen with canned laughter in order to construct the illusion of a collective in the midst of domestic privacy. No matter how much canned laughter is a joke itself, it more often than not manages to construct a unified class of narrative consumers.

Getting audiences to laugh obviates any need for argument. The social systemic role of the narrative business takes advantage of a genre’s ability to construct a collective audience. That collective, an *a priori* of the comic act, draws on laughter as a ready weapon against any who protest against unfreedom. Political satire has long been a tool of the old order, putting what Northrop Frye (1957, pp. 169-170) rightly saw as comedy’s ability to overthrow the unfreedom of illusory belief with socialised knowledge to work for the forces of unfreedom after all. Of course, this only puts comedy in much the same predicament as all fiction. And, of course, the great joy of fiction, comes from seeing just what it can make of this predicament.

52. Experience

In Gillian Armstrong’s film of *Little Women*, the main character, Jo, at one stage blasphemes against what was long doctrinal in the ideology of fiction, namely, that a novelist must write from her own experience. Armstrong’s film is based on Louisa May Alcott’s novel of a century before, and so perhaps there was always going to be something anachronistic when nineteenth century novelistic sensibility was translocated to late twentieth century cinema. As things have turned out, isn’t the ideology of authentic experience one that is especially novelistic and somewhat dated? Indeed, mightn’t this dated quality itself be an instance of this twentieth century film’s ignoring authentic twentieth century experience? For though the ideology is still commonplace—especially in schoolroom, writerly culture—Jo’s ignoring her own experience need no longer strike us girlish inexperience. It may well strike us at the end of a century of aesthetic upheaval as just another cheeky rejection of an old chestnut—were it not the hoary old standard of Hollywood aesthetics.

Little Women, the novel, has probably played a special role in the history of English language fiction. A portrait of the artist as a young woman, it is by, about, and for females. The modern novel has been a genre in which women, as both the

bulk of readers and the best of authors, have fashioned modernity and their gender for themselves, by critically illuminating what was the historically received and restricted domain of everyday domestic experience. As novelistic characterisation has demonstrated, this domain has been a rich vein for modern fiction's psychological and social analyses. Accordingly, novelistic fiction pursued the tasks of ethical and social history that the romances of grand deeds and magical transformations ignored. Lest anyone should still insist that fiction "affirmeth nothing", the novelistic fiction of experience has been a great repository of references to ethical and social history. The historical relation of the novel and women is deeply implicated in *Little Women's* ideological intentions. Typical of what is thought of as "serious" fiction for the young, *Little Women* is a tendentious work, and it has no more emphatic ethical and aesthetic lesson than that eventually pronounced by Jo's mentor and future husband, an emigrant German philosopher who represents an enlightenment that is remarkable for its peculiarly patriarchal, mock-philosophical, and even anti-fictive ideology. He is the one who urges Jo to stop turning out romances and to start writing from her own experience. Yet, as the film demonstrates by virtue of its own cinematic aesthetic, and despite that of its source, there is something to be said for the naughty kid—busy not reading "young adult" fiction, and probably watching a comedy sci-fi action thriller, or, at least, a sentimental girl's romance—who, though hopelessly conditioned by pop ideology, smells a rat in all this schoolish tendentiousness. Perhaps she or he offers a hope of redemption for Jo's fascination with the fabulous—her authentic interest after all, and not some trumped up authenticity imposed by authoritarian common sense and weighed down by heavy philosophical pretensions.

In the novelistic cult of experience and the related bourgeois cult of passion and self esteem, the philosophy of experience, such as it was articulated in the likes Locke and Hume, and later Kant and Hegel, formed the basis for aesthetic and ethical norms. While the philosophy of the subject was to declare that, phenomenologically, experience was what was, fiction was already making a virtue of it.

What is experience? After Montaigne's seminal essay on the matter, and especially after Hume paired experience and reason as epistemological means, there were few more crucial concepts in the philosophy of the subject, nor in the lifeworld of that historically specific subject. After Hume, Kant (1787, p.140) had said quite simply that experience was the cognitive synthesis that determines an object by means of perception. Hegel, by recognising that the notion of the immediacy of experience was misleading and by intellectually experiencing experience reflecting on itself, placed the concept at the heart of the *Phenomenology* (p.56): it was not only the way to philosophy it was also already philosophy. For Hegel (p.55), the "dialectical movement that consciousness exercises on itself, and that affects both its knowledge and its object, is precisely what is called experience." This is not "pure apprehension" but rather a process of "the reversal of consciousness itself." The course of experience is a reflexive one in which what first appeared as the object of consciousness gives way to a new object. The new object of the new consciousness is no longer the first *object in itself*, but *consciousness of that object*. Hegel's was a cognitive and temporalised concept of experience, rather than the ontologised, primordialised, presubjective one that has appealed to existentialist philosophers. Hegel (p.55) saw that "the succession of experiences through which consciousness passes is raised into a scientific progression."

Experience is a temporal process, just as its object is also temporalised. Already for Hume, experience was seen as supplying the knowledge of cause and effect in its thoroughly narrative form of a disjoint *before* and *after*: "For the effect is totally different from the cause and consequently can never be discovered in it (1748,

Sec. IV, pt 1, p.459).” Its attestable narrative, temporal character combined with its seemingly lived, primordial quality, ensured that, in whatever way experience was philosophically described, it would in turn prescribe canonical narrative forms.

Personal accounts, lyric self apprehension, the essay in its typical concern with the subjective moment of knowledge, the novel as encrypted autobiography, all participate in and construct the modern canons of experience. At the ground of these canonical forms there lies modernity’s theodicy of personal life, in which experience, passion, love, esteem, authenticity, individuality, and being true to oneself all form a system of mutual definition and justification. This theodicy, besides authorising the kind of biographical criticism which reads fiction as an allegory of the author’s experience, is deeply implicated in the aesthetics of characterisation and in the second rank status accorded by would-be high novelistic culture to adventure, science fiction, romance and other popular, extra-experiential genres (to the critical disadvantage of such remarkable narrative artists as Stevenson, Poe, or Wilde).

We may appreciate Hegel’s scientific notion of experience in the distinction we draw between stages of experience—between the naive personal experience of a first encounter, and the experience of an *experienced* person. This distinction is a matter of the individual’s finding a new way to look at matters by using the cognitive means provided by society’s narratives—by what Hegel would have called the mediation of the universal. All experience, in the sense that it is not immediate or pure apprehension, is mediated by the inherited wisdom (or madness) of narrative forms. It is always more that one’s own subjective experience, or rather, in order to be one’s own, it must be mediated by other’s experience. There are two connotations of experience that go with this notion: experience as an adventurous encounter with the new; and experience as the stuff of everyday life. The tension between these connotations is actually what energises the concept of experience and makes experience a matter of passion, for as a kind of attempt at getting to know its successively renewed object, experience connotes what is adventurous in the everyday, and what is everyday in the adventurous.

Jo’s naive, romantic desire is the desire to narrate or confabulate in superseded romance forms. The exhortation to draw on personal experience was conditioned by the age, and it is misleading if experience is wrongly taken to be some raw, unmediated given or some obvious biographical or psychological actuality. There is no uptake of one’s personal experience without the narrative forms used in the uptake. In Jo’s case, her personal experience consists, in part, of her reading experience. In this she follows a lineage of fictional protagonists—notably Quixote, and Uncle Toby, and Emma Bovary. In the movement of her experience she comes to scrutinise her naive, romance-besotted, younger self. Her novelistic self transcendence comes, in her being able to tell the story of this self transcendence in the novel about her childhood and her family that she calls *Little Women*. This puts *Little Women* in the thematic company of novels like *Tristram Shandy* and *À la recherche du temps perdu*. The latter is well known for its novelistic emulation of Hegel’s *Phenomenology*. The former is still the most wonderful and joyful satire of the autobiographical novel’s pretensions to novelistic self transcendence—and yet also the warmest and most generous portrait of human experience.

Jo’s narrative, which is supposed to come out of authentic experience, is actually represented as coming out of a romanticised version of experience as authentically unmediated. In fact, it comes out of the forms that evolved throughout the history of all those eighteenth and nineteenth novels of individual development. The movement of Jo’s experience recapitulates the cultural history of the novel. More fortunate than Quixote, she gets away with abandoning romance confabulation by

taking up novelistic confabulation and thus avoiding the sad knight's grand, sorrowful anachronicity. Like the bourgeois subject that made it and read it, the novel is the genre that eluded itself and did not recognise its own generic character. In its naive incarnations it thought its content was just given by experience in its authentic immediacy. The infinitely gentle, infinitely sensitive, infinitely critical Sterne saw right through this kind of thing and delighted in its novelistic possibilities almost before anyone else even started to delude themselves with this self elusive movement of the novel. Tristram is to the novel what Quixote was to romance; except that the novel belongs to modernity, and so Tristram, preoccupied by playing catch up with his own self narration, demonstrates the constitutional anachronicity-in-simultaneity of modernity's experience. Equal to Sterne in its generous sensitivity, Joyce's account of one day in the life of Leopold Bloom demonstrated, once and for all, this predicament of modern experience.

In 1750, in the fourth of his *Rambler* essays, Samuel Johnson wrote:

The works of fiction with which the present generation seems more particularly delighted, are such as exhibit life in its true state, diversified only by accidents that daily happen in the world, and influenced by passions and qualities which are really to be found in conversing with mankind. (p.67)

Johnson seems to consider them slight works and does not actually cite any, even though he cites Scaliger, Horace, Juvenal and Swift. He sees the works as so many twentieth century films and popular fictions are seen: "These works are written chiefly to the young, the ignorant, and the idle, to whom they serve as lectures of conduct, and introductions to life (p.68)." Johnson gives us a kind of side-line commentary on the great eighteenth century revolution in narrative art, the revolution that stamped itself irrevocably on the physiognomy of fiction. In what was, perhaps inadvertently, a recognition of comedy's power to objectivise and transcend its subject matter, he called the new fiction *the comedy of romance*, saying that it could "neither employ giants to snatch away a lady from the nuptial rites, nor knights to bring her back from captivity (pp. 67-8)."

He briefly wonders how heroic romance could have found reception for so long—a fascinating historical question, which for want of the historiographic means, he avoids by a reference to the capitalist theodicy of supply and demand: as long as readers wanted such works authors could easily satisfy them with books "produced without fear of criticism, without the toil of study, without knowledge of nature, or acquaintance with life (p. 68)." For Johnson, the task of the new fiction though is different:

It requires, together with the learning that is to be gained from books, that experience which can never be attained by solitary diligence, but must arise from general converse, and accurate observation of the living world. Their performances have, as Horace expresses it, *plus oneris quantum veniae minus*, little indulgence and therefore more difficulty. They are engaged in portraits of which everyone knows the original, and can detect any deviation from exactness of resemblance. Other writings are safe, except from the malice of learning, but these are in danger from every common reader; as the slipper ill executed was censured by a shoemaker who happened to stop on his way at the Venus of Apelles. (p. 68)

Thus Johnson puts the new status of experience in narrative, and thereby registers an historical change in experience and its subject. He also recognises how aesthetic interest in such experience not only raises a new version of the old Platonic problem of art as a rather lack lustre copy, it raises moral, didactic problems in the context of the old Aristotelean distinction about who is an appropriate character and what is appropriate subject matter for an impressionable audience. He takes the conservative view:

It is therefore not a sufficient vindication of a character, that it is drawn as it appears, for many characters ought never to be drawn; nor of a narrative, that the train of events is agreeable to observation and experience, for that observation which is called knowledge of the world, will be found much more frequently to make men cunning than good. (p.70)

Modern fiction, in this, its early bourgeois form, gave its loyalty to experience—even bad experience, and experience of the bad—and it turned the problem of the ethical-aesthetic antagonism identified by Johnson into an immanent theme of fiction as such, its proper and authentic subject matter. Experience, which stands as guarantor of these works, is, after all, in itself and as science, dialectical, and consists in contradictory stages.

The movement of narrative art to fiction's characterological finesse was, in English, partly accomplished by those Elizabethan and Jacobean writers who were both lyrical poets and dramatists. The personae of lyric were a wellspring for characterisation based on personal experience—probably as important as the personae of other personal genres such as the essay, the letter and biography. (In regard to the latter, Johnson's own *Life of Savage* was a great, seminal work.) It was Sidney's Astrophel who dithered through his first sonnet until reaching a conclusion worthy of Jo's philosopher, and a commonplace of theories of creative writing: "Fool said my muse, look to thy heart and write." Lyric's emphasis on troubled personal experience was transformed by the influence of incipient liberal capitalism; personal experience came to be understood as the first and inalienable possession of anyone aspiring to individual worth—the more difficult, the more passionate, the more worthy. However the value placed on experience, guaranteed even in its most dismal and contingent pathos by the impeccable collateral of unexchangeable personal *existence*, testifies to the poverty of those who own little else and who are forced to mortgage it for the chance to experience dismal, but alienable labour. Worse, as a commodity, personal experience has been damaged by inflation. All too many narrators assume that, as subject matter, personal experience guarantees its tellability as such, while remaining unaware of just how abstract and empty personal experience becomes when, on the assumption of authentic individuality, connection to the life support of social existence and to the immense social and conceptual wealth of narrative forms is severed.

On the one hand, personal accounts suffer degeneration into the repetition of trivial self advertisement or the clichéd picking over of sores, almost devoid of experiential substance. Such accounts are on a par with proud tales of train spotting, or self help, or "how I made my first million", or maundering reminiscence, or how I came to terms with being a man or a woman; yet they make up a good proportion of radio, television and literary non-fiction, and migrate into what is barely disguised, adolescent first person, and third person fiction. These developments in narrative culture reflect a certain damage done to experience itself. While the novel was registering the chasm that had grown between individual experience and the social

means for the understanding of that experience, and, while its most pressing theme was the want of wisdom and counsel, damaged individual experience—which could not experience this predicament of its own modern experience and thereby make it, as Hegel might have put it, its “new object”—was obsessively busy counselling and being counselled.

On the other hand, artistic biographies that mine their subject’s works for clues or confirmation of biographical experience, and that reduce the artwork’s hard won objectivity to idle gossip about the artist’s subjective life, offer the pitiful consolation of romantic identification. And they do so under cover of what is usually the unnecessary illumination of works that would better stand alone as the worthy objects of passionate response and critique. In a way, Johnson’s *Life of Savage* became the first of many biographies that have provided artists in garrets aplenty to replace the hermits and knights of earlier romances.

Narrative artists do well to experience and try themselves in genres that go beyond personal experience, if only in order that they may thereby enable experience to go beyond itself in order to experience itself. Those who trust naively to pure personal experience are like the playwright in Woody Allen’s *Bullets Over Broadway*, who ends up being amanuensis to a gangster’s minder who, as it happens, also knows how to tell a story.

The truth of personal experience became important in its critical relation to the empty husks—or the empty suits of armour—of the old romance subject matter. Such subject matter was made up of the “shadows of imagination” that Coleridge (1817, pp. 168-9) thought required “from our inward nature” some “human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure... willing suspension of disbelief.” Detail in a fiction that fails to ring true for lack of experiential substance cannot simply be excused on the basis that art licences any possibility whatsoever. There is no spectacle of narrative in what is merely logically possible or imaginable, nor in the easy, licentious solution to aesthetic problems raised by self reflective artistic history. Such problems demand response. Fiction cannot simply forsake the real and then carry on as if anything goes. The kind of possibility that fiction is concerned with is the possibility of experience that the forms of narrative argument bestow upon us, not the possibility of the chimeras and fabulous objects. Kant (1787, pp. 167-8), when considering what he called The Postulates of Empirical Thought, granted the former an *a priori* status, while of the latter he said “their possibility must either be cognised *a posteriori* and empirically, or it cannot be cognised at all.” They must be pieced together after the fact of experience. As creatures of narrative art, chimeras and the like have always represented experiential rather than ontological possibility, which is what Coleridge meant when he spoke of their origin in “our inward nature.”

Fiction is not a concern with the pure world creating or world disclosing function of narrative, nor is experiential detail just a cunning device in the production of fiction’s illusion. In the new fiction of Johnson’s day, and its subsequent tradition, experiential detail was vital to its character as spectacle, because it is a spectacle of experience. This, in turn, is vital to fiction’s ideological and moral meaning—that is, to its concern with the truth. Fiction exploits the gap between Kant’s two kinds of possibility (the *a priori* and the *a posteriori*), that is to say, between the intelligible necessity of substance, sequence, causality and coexistence and the empirical aporia of an ontology of substances, sequences, causes, and coexistents.

There is a contradiction between the fabulous genres of romance and the experiential details of everyday life, but, like the moral-aesthetic antagonism, that contradiction has been subsumed by and animates fiction. It animated that famous valedictory comedy of romance, *Don Quixote*, and it animated *Little Women*—despite

its tendentiousness. What is more fantastic and romantic than this novel that Jo writes as the culmination of her girlish romantic desire? Romance and the fabulous participate in experience too, just as personal experience can be the stuff of romance. What more romantic desire—after the desire to become a novelist—than the desire for experience as such?

53. *Soap and tendentious fiction.*

It seems trivial to say so but there is hardly any work of fiction that is not a narrative about people or personified things. Accordingly, the great speculative theme of fiction, as of all personal histories and narratives, is not “pure reason” or the metaphysics of being, but “practical reason” and the metaphysics of communicative reason: ethics, morality. It is the commonplace of the aesthetics of the novel during its bourgeois, European heyday that the highest achievements are to be exhibited in the field of characterisation. This kind of fiction exploits what Kant (1788, p160) called “the propensity of reason to enter with pleasure upon the most subtle examination of practical questions [put to the young].” This remark made on the subject of moral education refers obliquely to the ancient propensity of the young for narrative art—something not lost on the narrative industry’s makers of “fantastic romances”. Kant however (pp. 161-2) was aware of the “so-called (super-meritorious) actions, which fill our sentimental writings” and advised that the teacher search for examples from biographies ancient and modern, taking special note of the examples of duty rather than of grandiose self opinion. Nothing would better illustrate the method with which fiction, as fiction, has long broken, were it not that the problematic and ideological relation of fiction to life keeps on throwing up such edifying monsters as *role models* in order to excuse itself for what it does best. And, besides, fiction has changed since Kant’s day: nowadays, bad, sentimental fiction does not only present overly meritorious actions, it presents overly dramatic actions—whether meritorious or not—actions that are too dramatic for the impoverished characters who enact them.

Producers of serial romance, sentimental television directors, and pulp or “category” romance writers like to say that they tell stories to entertain, not to educate, but really, there is no more relentlessly edifying, thoroughly moralistic, didactic genre than pulp romance, especially in its form as television soap. All its entertainment is sugar coating on an insipid or bitter ideological drug. This ideological education is usually dismally and habitually consumable as entertainment, because it has to sell in order to sell its message—a message that, more often than not, is about the comforts of consumption and, at the same time, consolation for never being able, like those laughably shallow people on the screen, to consume enough. Content is kept to a minimum because the small-dose theory of education and the antididactic pretence of soap coincide: soap uses fiction’s collusion to hide its ideological, didactic character.

Soap is the modern heir to tendentious fiction and the capitalist correlate of socialist realism. Its historical relation to soap advertising is an index of its current tendentious function for consumer capitalism, but its ideological thematics extend beyond consumption to family values, pop psychology, self help, civic ideals and, indeed, anything that goes by the name of a social *issue*. An *issue* is a theme given by the social system for reducing the mental effort of communication. People even “have issues” that they “work through” with counsellors—a sign that gossip is not enough any more. Soap works by being a kind of quasi-fictive gossip—but neither gossip nor fiction—consumed by the “community” of its audience.

What damages soap and tendentious fiction in general is that the aesthetics of plot are made secondary to the ideological or moral drama at issue. Soap is basically comic in its subject matter—viewers know how laughable, albeit wealthy, the characters are—but the plot is downgraded into something serious, and dished up as frothy drama. In this, soap outdoes avant garde art when it comes to pretentiousness. Almost all good pop television and film fiction is required to redeem its genre, which is why it is often seasoned with a sense of spoof. A spoof of soap is comic and therefore not soap. Soap's muddying of comic insight is related to the insipid, high-drama plotting and the unstable characterisation that we find in it. The reason why soap characters fluctuate between weak and moody and strong and high spirited in different episodes is not because everyone is subject to such changes but because the ideology of a life of high domestic drama demands distortions of character in order to support the high-dramatic distortions of the plot. Of course, as part of the ideological purpose of soap, all the characterological instability is consumed as consolation by an audience that *is* subject to unstable spirits and identity.

54. *History as judge*

In the saying that “history shall be the judge”, sheer temporal duration takes on a critical role in aesthetic judgement. Few would risk the hubris of denying this notion. Most seem to think that we must rely on time to provide the kind of distance that might at least make aesthetic judgements less subjective and reflective and more objective and determinate. The longevity of an artwork is taken as a sign that its truth and artistic merit is proven insofar as its timelessness is proven. “What has been longest known has been most considered,” wrote Samuel Johnson, “and what is most considered is best understood.” Ignorance and untruth, however, endure just as well as their opposites. That what survives is good, and that what is good survives are propositions that belong to a kind of bad social Darwinism of artworks. Rather than relying on any empirical content, this tautologisation of historical process in the history of art relies on things like the definition of ephemera, and a peculiar operational definition of what is good: past artistic ephemera, no matter how momentarily glorious, can never be brought to judgement again, because otherwise they would not be ephemera; and what survives defines what's good.

In fact, what survives the stupidity of history often does so by means of the stupidity of history, especially by means of the kind of ideological accretions that build monuments. What persists as a monument rather than as an artwork ends up being valued primarily for its monumental persistence. Such works can lose their power to speak, and end up only inviting the deadly, sentimental incomprehension that is respectfully accorded to what has “heritage value”. This stupidity of history complements the reduction of aesthetic judgement to the almost inarticulate response of a thumbs up.

The phrase, *the judgement of history*, constructs history as one authoritative voice, whereas it is actually a history full of performances, readings, showings and responses. Along with canons, the univocal judgement of history is a device for neutralising differences of taste. Differences of taste, however, are less important as subjective responses to art than as an indication of an objective quality of artworks, namely their ambiguity. Given this ambiguity of art, probably what drives the unquestioned acceptance of history's sovereignty is something utterly subjective like the critics' desire for some surety, for something solid and determinate amidst the competing currents of reflective aesthetic judgement. Better—it seems to me—to list meticulously one's personal favourites than to repeat the subjective wish for

something more than merely one's own subjectivity. No wonder prudent deprecation of one's role as a critic, platitudes about the ontological priority of art *vis á vis* criticism, and other disingenuous claims begotten by false modesty, are so often accompanied by proud ownership of any judgement that history, in the short term at least, supposedly proves right, and by a barely concealed desire for the recognition of a certain heroism in the speculative risk of the critic's judgement.

The prestige of the judgement of history is a symptom of criticism's forlorn and desperate modesty. It is as a *response* that criticism need make no excuses for itself, because art itself demands response. It lives by such responses. Criticism should not be hoodwinked by any such doctrine as the ontological priority of art, nor by the skill with which artworks, in their aspiration to autopoiesis, like to make sure that they have the last word. Like all ontological primordially, that accorded to art is delusory; and having the last word, or, at least, the self sufficiency of artworks, is part of their wonderful, fictive illusion—and not something to be deluded by.

Certain artworks and probably art as we know it are absolutely and gloriously ephemeral. Like happiness, they cannot last. The sadness that we feel at the end of the performance or the reading of a good work is an afterimage of its ephemeral character. Its ephemeral character, like its anachronistic character, is, as it were, eternal.

The history of narrative art has been greatly affected by the durability of its media, especially the durability of script. From Aristotle to Samuel Johnson to Adorno, theorists have unhesitatingly asserted that drama is as good or better on the page than on the stage. However, they haven't much choice. While reproducing the old ascetic discipline of non-spectacular art, or else old taboos on images, they are only making the best of a situation that makes reviewing a scene in production rather than in the script almost impossible. Secondly, drama has long cultivated its affinity with literary production: dramaturgy has long used the script for its writerly function of facilitating careful work on the text (i.e. the performance). Shakespeare's or Beckett's plays are objects of literary studies as much as are Shakespeare's poetry or Beckett's novels, but film scripts are seldom the objects of literary study. In a way, the prestige that writing still has in drama preserves an ancient form of much the same kind of technological fetish that we postmoderns indulge, in primitive awe, towards the latest narrative technology.

Adrian Martin (1994) has used the idea of *accessible culture* as a working definition of popular culture. But unless he means *inferentially accessible* rather than *physically* or *economically accessible*, it is the other way around. In practical terms, the printed texts of narrative high culture are easily accessible in libraries and book shops, while popular culture is often rendered inaccessible or "once only" by the limitation of exhibition and distribution, the expense of technology, and by the transience of performance. The lack of access that, in drama's case, an Aristotle or a Johnson redressed by distorting the performative essence of theatre and resorting to scripts, has scarcely been redressed in the case of cinema—neither by elite film libraries, nor even by video which still leaves a scarcity of all but the latest work, and which is, besides, a different medium from film.

Over centuries, printing and education re-organised the accessibility of literary works, making them available to more people. Film and video accessibility, on the other hand, are still subject to the limitations of what looks remarkably like organised scarcity. They make the lie about the market naturally providing access to demanded goods manifest. For those outside film schools or particular cities, the majority of the world's movies are as inaccessible as Bresson's animal film on the nativity or Milton's *Arthuriad*—they might as well never have been made. Practically

unrewatchable, film, like drama must make the most of its being once-only—a predicament that deeply affects the form of its fiction, especially its length and its plotting. Dramatic events, sensational scenes, spectacle, simultaneous discovery and reversal, and comedic timing and immediacy are all conditioned by medium.

The peculiar situation of film is suggested by Frederic Jameson (1991, pp. 69-70) who remarks that it is neither Modernism or Postmodernism, yet it is still the pre-eminent medium of twentieth century narrative. This situation is attributable to its once-only quality—an effect of its expensive technology and its peculiarly theatrical exhibition and reception. Film has to be popular in the sense that its once-only exhibition must attract enough consumers to make it a marketable proposition. None of these things—ephemeral, theatrical exhibition, expensive technology, market distortions of content—seem to fit the serious aesthetic expectations that history has sedimented into high Modernist and Postmodernist culture.

Movies and TV fictions, in their once-only forms, look ephemeral. Seemingly in contrast to monumental art or the difficult or canonical works of high culture, they are designed for immediate sensation. Film has a public exhibition combined with a darkness that atomises the audience and plunges each viewer into a dark, solipsistic recess, as private as the novel reader's absorption. The theatre foyer is always more convivial than the cinema's, where people, still stunned by the spectacle, blink, cannot find their voices, and pass quickly outside into the privacy of the night or the crowd without discussion. Not only do films seem too transitory for the magisterial weight of history's judgement, their spectacle momentarily stuns us into critical silence; and a moment is the time we have to respond before something else comes up. How can history judge such works properly?

Well, history has always judged works according to its own logic of cultural selection, not according to preconceptions about aesthetic virtue—or, at least not primarily. Yet this actually says something about what aesthetic virtue is. The transitoriness of exhibition and reception, though at odds with the canonical endurance and persistence to which durable and reproducible literary fiction has the most privileged access, is more in keeping with the happiness of great narrative art—a happiness that consists in finding the right moment and the right audience without forcing things. Shakespeare's concern with performance and entertainment rather than with the collection and publication of his world historical artworks is in marked contrast to, say, Milton's serious cosmological, historical purpose. Milton strove to make monumental artworks according to the kind of universal aesthetic and historical theories that fiction has long taken delight in undermining. Even the Aristotelean poetics that Milton used to map out his career path through the genres get lost under the weight of Milton's ambition, so that the happy marvels of Aristotelean plot give way to the awesome monuments of obsolescent providential theology. A true poet nevertheless, Milton's longevity suffers for his having thought he could defy the local happiness of artworks by designing his works for an eternal audience. It may not be so much that entertainment, lightness, silliness, play and pleasure are somehow essential or originary elements in artworks, but there is certainly something to this. Even Adorno, who could fail (as most do) to recognise the pleasure, the comedy and the lightness of Kafka, or who could dote on Beckett for his resistance to the desire for entertainment, could still see how important silliness was in art. Ironically, works that deliberately seek to predict and colonise the canons of the future, often age prematurely, while those that give themselves over to the happiness of the moment—and therefore to the momentariness of happiness—endure, it seems, by virtue of their fleeting timeliness. They exploit the fact that cultural selection

processes are localised around each and every replication. Aesthetic teleology can't afford to telegraph its ambitions while neglecting its next audience. And lest artists try to seriously exploit the non serious attractions of art, they should take note of those less than successful recent works that ponderously emphasise their ludic quality. In processes of cultural selection, such design is too clever by half: functionalising the playful transforms its function into what the term *ludic* now connotes, namely *the ponderous*.

Works of narrative art don't last by being able to demand that history stand still in their monumental presence. Lasting is their last concern. Hence their quota of happiness and the insight they give into what Utopia might be. Only the latest lasts and only what lasts becomes the latest. As collusive, they are always obeying the law of their own becoming, anathema to monumental heaviness. As any aesthetic concept of fiction is eluded by fiction in time, any judgement of an artwork will be eluded by the becoming of the artwork. Even history is not ultimately the judge, because there is no ultimate judge—except, perhaps the living artworks themselves, and whatever theory can keep up with them. In the twentieth century Adorno best understood the historical life of artworks and aesthetics:

The concrete historical position of art implicitly raises concrete demands, and aesthetics sets in when these demands are reflected upon. Therefore aesthetics is the sole agency capable of making out what art is. Art and art works are what they become. Aesthetic theory cannot rest content with an interpretation of existing works and their concepts because it is impossible to dissolve their inner tension and also because history ends up attacking the idea of such a dissolution. In approaching the truth content of works, philosophical aesthetics goes beyond them. Paradoxically, the philosophical awareness of the truth in works of art is akin to the most ephemeral form of aesthetic reflection, i.e. the manifesto. One methodological principle that seems to me compelling is to try to shed light on all art from the perspective of the most recent artistic phenomena, rather than the other way around, which is the case with a history-of-ideas approach. The latter, deep down in its bourgeois mentality, wishes there are no changes and that everything stays the same. (1970, pp. 491-2)

55. *Fiction and progress*

For modernity and for capitalism, the standard narrative form of history has been called *progress*. Capitalism itself, as it has been designed by market processes or theorised, whether by a Smith or a Marx, relies on a concept of progress. Given its reflexivity it has even to rely on a concept of progress in its progress, so that what was called progress in industrial society is no longer the same as progress in the variously named forms of post industrial society. Along with all things in such circumstances, fiction too shows itself under the sign of progress. Yet merely to account for fiction as a result of progress from superseded narrative forms would be to employ an historically limited historical concept, which is what the concept of progress itself has always been and remains. For progress must always think itself according to something or someone or other's teleological interest, yet at the same time it must disguise itself, as divine teleology did, as simply the objective nature of things as such. It is as such that progress, as doctrine and practice, prescription and description, is reproduced, and it is insofar as it is reproduced that it thereby wins its objective character.

We may well be unwilling to countenance the proposition that there is progress in fiction. Fiction itself would like to appear ageless. Artistic production, in its virtuoso quality, has to anticipate its future reception; even insofar as they are communicative, narrative artworks are teleological in their intention to colonise the future. Art can do this much more effectively than science, if only because fictions don't lose value by being disconfirmed, and because their social and ethical subject matter survives in many more social environments than the culturally and technically specific, ontological commitments of science. Combine this enduring subject matter and teleological virtuosity with art's ruthless self critique and its refusal to countenance false progress and one sees why progress in fiction is a proposition widely resisted: How could someone say that Shakespearian drama is better than, say, Greek drama? But that is not the way to look at artistic progress. Our reluctance to grant the fact of aesthetic progress is partly a way of rigorously testing claims about art's capacity for progress. Taken as a null hypothesis, the claim that there is no such thing as progress in narrative art need only be relinquished on good evidence. But art itself will see to that.

The critique of the notion that there is no progress in fiction is usually far too quick to dismiss the question, as, say, Isaiah Berlin did, in order to emphasise the incomparability of "cultures". To make his point, Berlin (1991, p.81) accepted the by no means mistaken view "that it is absurd to range artists in linear [chronological] sequence—to think of, let us say, Dante as more developed than Homer, or of Shakespeare as an inferior of Addison (as Voltaire did)." From this, though, I suspect that Berlin implies that Shakespeare's art was better than Addison's, which would also imply that artworks from different times are in some sense comparable. And Berlin, in an essay on what he rightly saw as Vico's remarkable and unprecedented cultural history, even made the mistake of saying that not only did Homer write in a brutal culture, but that "in his marvellous celebration of savage and truculent warriors engaged in cruel butchery" Homer "clearly admired the values of these frightful men (p. 66)." This deeply misrepresents the nature of Homer's art, for the Homeric attitude to *The Iliad's* subject matter is not that of admiration or celebration. Homer *shows* us this world with that remarkable, frank and unflinching gaze that is so striking for any reader of Homeric narrative. True, societies are self referring, but art like Homer's (though not all art) refers to itself and persists as its own object in many a social environment. *The Iliad* is also of our own war-ridden times—even more so, I think, than a progressive work like *Don Quixote*. Homer lets us see Achilles, Odysseus, Agamemnon *et al* for ourselves. And as Aristotle said, Homer avoids saying *I*—the *I* in which the society of his times may well have advertised its barbarity. The past may well be another country, but its enduring works are still part of the galaxy of texts that constitutes the historically sedimented heterogeneity of modernity or postmodernity. Two texts—if they are *The Odyssey* and *Ulysses* say—are better than one; and in this merely cumulative sense at least there can be a kind of progress in art, as long as we don't, as we are wont to do, lay other cultures to waste.

The historical co-existence of cultural phenomena—especially of quite different technological cultures—which abstract progress would represent as belonging to successive historical stages, is enough to cast doubt on the kind of abstractly conceived progress that Benjamin saw as merely development through homogeneous, empty time. Instead, as a reflection of history, fiction not only progresses, it is fraught with the evolving concept of progress, and it is the way this concept of progress has informed the evolution of fiction that is my main concern here. It is immanent in the practice, the conception, and the autopoietic life of

fiction—a situation registered negatively in the misapprehension that fiction can be explained as a modality of belief; for it was progress that made belief an issue in the first place.

Certainly some early capitalist narrative art exhibits the features of modern fiction, and therefore of progress. Attic comedy was reflexive and innovative in making up plots and characters, it registered the tensions of old and new forms of life, and, in its being granted a chorus by the Archon, it was a stage in the commodification of narrative. The fact that Aristotle's distinction between poetry and history had become obvious in drama's making up of both plots and characters suggests that fictional innovation in narrative art was related to its emulation of historical facts and the progress under which those facts were deemed to unfold. Eventually the dialectic of progress was felt, seismically, in what is unambiguously modern fiction. Foreshadowed in works by the likes of Chaucer and Rabelais, the fiction we encounter in a work such as *Don Quixote* registers progress in and as a show of the society's self-understanding superseding the formalities provided by old genres, and in the pathos of the individual's self-understanding under such circumstances. This pathos is the affect induced by historical changes in narrative registers and the shift in intersubjective conditions occasioned by social and technological developments.

The same social changes may be read in the comic spirit that runs through the tragedies of Shakespeare or Lope de Vega—comedy that is there not to relieve the calamity but to make it more bitter. Tragedy without comedy was no longer tragic enough: without comedy, the individuals that suffered were insufficiently individuated and could not suffer enough. "All isolated individuals," wrote Kierkegaard (1843, p. 142), "always become comic by asserting their own accidental individuality in the face of evolutionary necessity." Once, when the protagonist needed only to be distinguished from the chorus and the gods, mere hubris was enough. Eventually hubris became just another kind of laughable individuation. Both hubris against the gods and comedy against tragedy were signs of progress, and progress was the condition and the theme of both the old and the new tragedy. Progress in fiction is present in what is called originality—in making up, but not merely arbitrarily. Social changes left what once might have known, collusive narrative forms looking obsolescent and delusory. Insofar as it is original, fiction demonstrates this obsolescence, usually by using the old forms against themselves in order to bring about their semantic self-transformation. This is how original fiction demonstrates that progress is both one of its themes and one of its conditions. The citation of progressive elements in narrative art two thousand years apart is a reminder that while fiction turns the principle of progress into something immanent, there is actually no continuous, progressive history of fiction. But neither is there one of society.

The heavy seriousness with which the New Age, Jung, and postmodern film producers (and even those who parrot Nietzsche's theory of Apollonian and Dionysian forces) have invested *myth*, and myth's status as the bearer of eternal verities are probably signs of nostalgic reaction against fiction. At best they are a critique of false claims of progress. When Robert Altman said that "they don't move enough, those myths" he was articulating something implied by the hubris of the tragic hero moving against the eternal law. There is no need to invoke mythic Dionysian forces any more to understand the modern form of this movement. Instead of the ride with a wild, inebriated band of Bacchantes, there is now the roller coaster ride of unleashed second nature. Inebriated by excitement and anxiety we call this ride progress. In the form of such progress, history elaborates its old answers into

riddles and fiction represents the riddles presented by history's progress. These are present as expression rather than myth, in things like fiction's ambiguity. Such expression lies in individual moments imbued with subjectivity rather than in anything that aspires to eternity. Something similar may be seen emerging in dramatic expression in the *confusion* that Benjamin (1963, p.95) said was such an important choreographic principle in Elizabethan and Baroque Spanish drama. Fiction's own obsolescence would be evident in any inability to pass from its ride on second nature to subsequent rides on third or fourth or nth nature.

Arising from the refraction of meaning through displaced genres and through the reconfiguration of the narrative artwork's self reference, modern fiction emerged as a form whose practice works on its concept. Its self renovating character is recorded in the term *novel*. The novel's novelty emulates that of historiography's *news*. The concept of fiction is elusive because of fiction's progressive character. This elusiveness is related to the autonomous status that art assumed in bourgeois European culture. It designed fiction, and art, in order to elude what modernity had come to understand as the dangerous grasp of scientific and historical rationalisation. That grasp was seen as threatening to pull fiction into the grinding mechanisms of progress and cheat it of its sublime ride.

Accordingly, autonomous fiction's progress emulated that of science and technology. The Romantic separation of art and technology was, in part, a specific historical response to social antagonisms generated by technological development. Art asserted the lie of progress by designing its own progress for itself. In order to do so it ensured that older technologies with long programs of artistic elaboration survived as vehicles for much needed expression. Initially, such expression was still beyond the capabilities of the puerile imagination that was usually the quickest to colonise new media. Thus, at various stages throughout the history of modernity, highly productive antagonisms generated by the dialectic of progress have been reflected in such things as handicrafts competing with industry, architecture with engineering, painting with photography, the novel with film, and cinema with TV and video. Great art has come out of these moments, and artistic progress has often been achieved in the face of the regressive potential unleashed by technological innovation. In part such antagonisms have been present as generationalism, but ultimately they persist as market competition.

Technological developments have thus occasioned conspicuous changes in artistic form, both in the new and the old media. Genre is not simply a matter of technology, but of the social collusion and the consequent meaning invested in the media in which stories are told. After the romances that had been recorded and replicated in the medium of the manuscript, fiction was at first the child of print technology. The historical significance of print—its easily replicable, commodifiable form, its consequent associations with the institution of copyright, the relation of copyright to individuated authorship, and the relation of authenticatable copyright to authoritative credibility have all left their marks on fiction: in things like its concern with the everyday ethical experiences of the reading public that print markets created; in the artistic authority garnered by works that manage to get past the test of publishers and thereby onto the canon of printed books; and, in contrast to the credibility of new scientific and historiographic printed texts, in fiction's suspension of credibility and belief in favour of a work's autonomy, and in the quality called artistic *originality*. Inspired by the technological innovations of market capitalism and by the social changes occasioned by the intense reflexivity of modernity, fiction has worked on its own concept by working on its form. For novelistic fiction, intent on

maintaining its autonomy and emulating technological progress, its work on narrative form took the form of renovating norms.

In Modernist fiction, the elusive, innovative character was a contingent defence against sheer technological determination. The immense sophistication and labour of the high Modernist novel was a kind of swansong in the face of new narrative technologies. It was a case of artistic progress against advertisements for progress. The social antagonism between those with access to either progressive or obsolescent technology took the form of a crisis in the novel's claim to being the privileged medium of narrative imagination. But crisis is also opportunity. At what was both its zenith and its crisis the novel grew pregnant with this antagonism, which was present in *Ulysses* as a yearning in the literary medium for the narrative power of all genres and all media. In *Ulysses*, the novel reflected progress in the form of the novel's own obsolescence. Employing generic forms determined by their relations to the various media of speech, print, and drama, Joyce showed how modernity (and progress) is experienced in terms of a dialogue between different kinds of imagination belonging to different media and genres from different historical periods. Modernity is not homogeneously modern. The novel looks like the last narrative form to have, as Aristotle says of tragedy (*Poetics* 1449a) found its own nature. John Anderson thought that it would be a long time before the novel would go beyond *Ulysses*. Film looks like the first great narrative form that will have to perfect itself posthumously. Yet this anachronistic character is really not so very much at odds with art's aspiration to autonomy.

Now that technological innovation has overtaken the renovation of norms, the non-technological avant gardism of Modernist and even Postmodernist art often looks archaic. But so, in another sense do the advertised new forms of fiction. The very concept of *virtual reality*, in which sheer appearance takes over from collusive pretence by concealing any trace of mimetic machinery, may be seen as marking a return to the old dream of art as total illusion free from the shame of its mimetic origins. Modernist fiction, on the other hand, flaunted its mimetic means, displaying its generically and technologically mediated content rather than concealing it. Postmodern cinema has done the same. Progress in technology gets taken up as a commodity and a fetish in the narrative industry. Novel wares, hard and soft, become the driving commodities of the narrative market. Technique gets left behind as technological innovation outruns the social capacity for developing new collusive forms. Even cinema, as Peter Greenaway has said, hasn't started yet. Though the contradictions of this predicament are actually promising material for fiction, not having time to master the narrative potential of new media could mean that fiction may give up being art and regress into something more like a game or a ride, in a way that corresponds to historiography in screen culture being replaced by sport. Art, however, has long cultivated its autonomy by cultivating the illusion of its ahistorical or at least its ageless character. Actually, insofar as art has been responding to history in this way, it has been intensely historical and progressive. For fiction to cease doing this would be surprising indeed.

56. *The film of the book; or archaic Hollywood.*

Anyone who has searched the shelves of a video store understands the arcane classification of the genres. Somehow, everything has to be sorted into Drama, Action, Comedy, Sci-fi, Thriller, Horror, Western, and so on; and the anomalies—like putting Lumet's *Prince of the City*, Antonioni's *The Passenger*, or Richardson's *Hamlet* in the Action section—only confirm our shared sense of the brutal subtleties

of generic classification. Perhaps genre theory fell from literary critical favour during the great age of the bourgeois novel and high literary culture, but after Hollywood it was back with a vengeance. Everyone now is a connoisseur of genre; everyone has to be in order to make or interpret the simplest films—especially the simplest films. It is second nature.

It is still also second nature not to be struck by another anomaly: Where are the films about and by women? They hardly appear at all in the Action, Sci-fi and Western sections. Drama and Comedy account for most of them, but they're thin on the shelves, seldom from Hollywood, and often classified as Independent or Art House. And even then, a cast of women as thick on the screen as the cast of men in a Crime or Action film would be a rare and provocative thing indeed.

It is by virtue of the relentless reproduction of the genres, and especially of certain kinds of plot, that Hollywood could be called a cinema of men without women. This is not simply an ideology critique. Such a critique has so often been made that its status as ceaselessly reproduced cliché forces people to be suspicious of it, even while Hollywood's ceaseless generic reproduction only has audiences clamouring for more. In this respect, the narrative business has certain advantages that cultural critique does not enjoy. Heaven knows, genre is a great wellspring of narrative meaning and narrative "product". It is just the casual, empirical observation of someone who has often scoured the shelves for videos about and by women, and come home with another one about men.

Just why Hollywood's reproduction of its genres turns out like this is a question for the social evolution of cinema. Why are there no cinematic genres that women dominate the way men dominate Action, Crime, Sci-fi, and all the rest? Probably the only kind of modern narrative art that women have come to take as their own—or at least they share it with men—is the naturalistic novel. Many social systemic phenomena are at work in what, in the most general terms, might be explained by the long cultural persistence of patriarchy: marketing strategies, gendered technological command and directorial ambition, and, most importantly, the incumbency of certain entertainment values in certain long standing forms of plot. There are plenty of female consumers in the market, and plenty of inspired female narrative artists, but the aesthetic and financial incumbency of certain kinds of plots, aided and abetted by an ideology of technology that affects the ideology of film content means that, in Hollywood especially, where all is supposed to be as modern as the future, the past weighs heavily on the present, not like a dream factory but like a nightmare factory. Hollywood, is a weird anachronism, a thousand years behind the times—and 'ten years ahead of the rest of the world'. But then, in the culturescape of fiction, time is out of joint. Narrative artworks not only dot the culturescape like edifices from different ages arranged willy-nilly, internally they reflect this juxtaposition of times. With the aid of dazzling technology films show monstrous romance forms erupting from the past or touching down from distant galaxies in postmodern cities.

Conflict and death are great themes of narrative art. Putting them together generates violent and murderous plots. These matters are of great historical human interest to both men and women, but men have been the ones who have done most of the dirty work, while women have usually only suffered it. The genres of Action and Crime and the Western belong to the ancient narrative tradition of telling about violence and killing. Historically, these have been male genres, probably because men are the only ones who can think of themselves as victors in this sort of behaviour, and victors, by and large, are the ones who get to tell the tales. Moreover, in cinema these genres enjoy the reputation of doing what movies do best—that is, move.

From the time that the novel emerged as a form that described the contemporary ethical, political and domestic life of modernity, it looked like a form that had superseded genre as such. Compared to its prose ancestors, it looked so novel that historians of literature imagined that it was a new, post-generic form. Part of the process of developing novelistic techniques to achieve the appearance of ethical reality lay in continually superseding the felt inadequacy of the traditional generic devices that the novel inherited from romance. Conflict in the novel was likely to be the ethical conflict of love, adultery, personal betrayal, frustrated desire or ambition, or the political conflicts of class, ethnicity, gender and ideas as much or more than it was conflict staged for the sake of depicting murder, revenge and war. Women came to make up the bulk of its readers and its big themes belonged to the kinds of experience that even patriarchal gender could not ration.

In the representation of conversational drama and ethical conflict, especially before talkies, film could not compete with the novel. After sound, novelistic or domestic conversational cinema found a place, mainly in drama and romantic comedy, and often in adaptations of novels and plays. The film of the book, however, has always suffered the stigma of posteriority and inauthenticity—especially in the minds of those literate heroes who pride themselves apparently for enduring the long hours of lying on a sofa reading a novel, and who like to advertise the particularly literary rewards of their suffering and experience. The saying goes: *the book was better than the film*. But then often, of course, it is the other way around. As archaic Hollywood itself has often shown, fiction is always turning priorities upside down, especially chronological ones in the history of fiction.

Certain women—and I am thinking, in particular of Gillian Armstrong, and Jane Campion—have excelled in the tradition of naturalistic film making, and in bringing the naturalistic qualities of novelistic fiction to the screen. Both Armstrong and Campion have adapted period novels, and Campion's *Portrait of a Lady*, though poorly received by reviewers, is among the best in the tradition of adapted novelistic period dramas—on a par with such works as John Houston's *The Dead*, Joseph Losey's *The Go-Between* and Scorsese's *Age of Innocence*. They are certainly not just makers of dull uncinematic adaptations. The novelistic films made by Merchant-Ivory and scripted by Ruth Prawer Jhabvala are conventionally condemned as period pieces, but their best films are hardly as quaint as many dated action and science fiction anachronisms generated by what used to be called “high tech” special effects. *The Remains of the Day*—whether the film or the book—is actually a meditation on the self-deceiving potential of anachronistically constituted modernity. On the other hand all these films belong to and have helped to constitute a well known cinematic genre—the period drama—a genre whose embedding of the now slightly archaic form of novels from or about a hundred years ago in contemporary cinematic forms is as obvious in its own way as science fiction's embedding of archaic romance plots in its imagination of the future.

Meanwhile, in films like Armstrong's *Last Days at Chez Nous* and *High Tide* and Campion's *Sweetie* and *Holy Smoke* they are naturalistic film makers, perhaps in the sense that Gilles Deleuze (1983) has said Losey and Buñuel were. Even so Losey (to an extent) and Buñuel especially were a bit like Hitchcock insofar as they were naturalistic in way that never sought to transcend or sublime cinema's famous capacity for the fabulous—the capacity that so feeds cinema's propensity for fabulous generic anachronisms. Contemporaneous, naturalistic, cinematic fiction—cinema that strives to depict everyday contemporary ethical life by transcending the immense gravity of cinema's generic constitution—is still rare. Most of Hollywood's efforts end up

falling back into the genres of romantic comedy, issues drama, true stories or soap. Many of the best popular films about contemporary domestic life rely on clever generic embedding and a certain wry distancing that replicates the naturalism of which Deleuze spoke—a naturalism that never quite achieves the depths of character that, say, sentimental fiction (a staple of great novels from Sterne to Joyce and beyond) can achieve. *American Beauty* is such a film. Those contemporaneous films by Armstrong and Campion negotiate their way through this aesthetic territory. *Chez Nous* is probably the one that is closest to being a sympathetic portrayal of contemporary ethical life. This is not so surprising given that it was written by Helen Garner—herself a novelist in the sentimental tradition. But then, one starts to wonder whether this aesthetic of the fiction of the everyday is not itself anachronistic, a hangover from the sentimental or bourgeois novel. Few films manage to elude this nightmare of aesthetic history. We have a saying in our house whenever we see a film that is archaic or infantile in its depiction of contemporary, everyday, ethical life. Even if the film in question were *Jaws* we would say “But it wasn’t Eric Rohmer’s *Jaws*”.

In many ways, cinema was a kind of boyish reaction to the novel. Right from the start the technology dazzled with its presentation of virtual reality, which meant that it was used to make the unreal virtually real; and the kinetic essence of cinematic representation was parleyed into an aesthetic norm of blatant, self advertising movement. The more movement the better, and to boyish eyes there seems to be much less movement in the drawing room or at the kitchen sink than on the battlefield or the express train or the highway. The technology seemed to be made for the love of gross movement, and the action and fabulous adventure genres of popular fiction. Genre cinema, and other generically conventional forms of narrative art are infantilised forms (See 57. *The comedy of romance*). Incidentally, the Hollywood ‘teen movie’ would be one example of infantilised cinema that is designed for a female as well as a male market. Hollywood is such a fount of highly stylised generic film making that, of course, it produces works that demonstrate that generic infantilisation results in extraordinarily good as well as extraordinarily awful cinema. Indeed, they feed off one another. For example, as in the ‘teen’ genre, the good ones parody the bad ones, and the bad ones replicate generic forms from the good ones but alter the semantic function of those forms so that they are used to sell the very kind of ideological mush that the good ones like to parody. So, as in the case of the evolution of language, the charge of infantilisation is not necessarily one of condemnation. The fact that childishness and silliness can lurk in the very best artworks is proof enough of this.

57. *The Piano as comic romance.*

Music, awake her: strike!

’Tis time: descend; be stone no more. (*Winter’s Tale* Act V, Sc. iii)

Belonging to the romance tradition of the tale or the story, *The Piano* begins with and unfolds a single remarkable circumstance: Ada’s (Holly Hunter) forsaking speech. And before there is any mention of the unconventional, the unsettling, the mysterious or some other mystifying quality, it must be said that *The Piano* is a popular film because it ruthlessly exploits long popular plot conventions of romance and comic storytelling, and it does so with a conspicuous display of its makers’ constructive ability. It is like a feminist screen version of Robert Louis Stevenson, or even of Shakespeare’s late “romance” plays.

Speaking of Emily Brönte, Jane Campion has said that “Hers is not the notion of romance we’ve come to use; it’s very harsh and extreme, a Gothic exploration of the romance impulse.” But, of course, “harsh and extreme” describe the wasteland of every romance tale from *The Fairie Queen* to *Wuthering Heights* to *Alien*. Indeed one critic said *The Piano* was like a cross of Emily Bronte and *2001*. Cinema’s persistent affinity with romance arises because romance emblematics are peculiarly suited to screen narrative’s iconographic essence. In romance the world is present as a universe of emblems. It appears as an emblematics of ethical, political and metaphysical antagonisms whose ultimate terms are good and evil. The landscape and characters of *The Piano* are stereotypical emanations of such a world: Stewart (Sam Neill) is a damaged piece of this wasteland of presbyterian colonialism; tightly clothed Ada is a captive woman in this land, who can or will no longer speak; Baines (Harvey Keitel) bears his colours into the ravaged black and white world of dark mud and dead white trees and smoke, of Victorian clothing, and of the piano’s keyboard itself; the Maoris are benevolent Nature’s attendants; Flora is the flower child; there is the tangle of supplejack vines; Baines’ green cottage in the green forest; and the ocean as inchoate nature and death framing the romance island as arrival and departure, beginning and end.

Just as cinema readily took to the emblematics of what with romance had previously been a predominantly literary narrative, it also took to the conventions of the predominantly theatrical narrative of comedy. In a pantomimic medium, romances tend to be comic: not only are Shakespeare’s romances comedies, romantic comedy is one of the great genres of the feature film. If romance is about desire, comedy enacts desire’s fulfilment in a revolution of the social sphere, across the archaic divisions of female and male, youth and age (See Jameson 1981). In *The Piano*, the characters divide accordingly into four divisions, with the exhausted patriarchal, presbyterian values bearing the brunt of the comic revolution. Thus Stewart, the elder would-be patriarch, is a figure of comic pretension, with his suit that is too small and his greasy, combed forelock; Aunt Morag, a female representative of this spent patriarchy, is a type of comic, pantomime dame.

To some extent, the romantic couple are, as is typical, exempted from the comedy’s laughter, so Ada, the (at first) aged female, has in her daughter Flora, the young female, a cheeky, Arielesque servant figure who runs around in fairy wings; or Baines, the “younger” man has his friends the Maoris, who right from the start are parodying Stewart’s pretentiousness. Still, there is the sexual comedy of Baines and Ada, which imports an ironic, comic form into the romance, the comic-erotic centre of the film being when Baines’ finger finds the small circle of flesh that shows through a hole in Ada’s stocking, a comic feminisation of the old phallic emblematics of sex. In the comic unfolding of the plot, Ada, like a comic Beowulf, snatches life from the jaws of watery death; and in fact, we are given the comic bonus of two endings: the ironic tragedy of Ada, in skirts, floating in the blue, yoked to the monstrous piano is contained in and superseded by the resurrected life, bought by the cunning expedient of her trading her shoe. The same bonus of comic Utopia is also there in Stewart, who having brutally mutilated Ada, is finally reconciled to her departure with Baines; it is even there in the benedictory mark of Ada’s prosthetic finger.

What some might see as a fuzziness or even emptiness of plot—in things like the success of Baines’ (is it) seduction (?) of Ada or even the seemingly bizarre device of Ada’s muteness—only demonstrate how, in the comic romance plot, there is a logic of the marvellous: the paradoxical is consequential because what follows what is not a matter of empirical causation so much as of a logic of the emblematics of romantic desire and comic revolution. What might appear as emptiness arises from

the conventional character of the plot. It is a simple tale with quite stereotypical characters. What is conventional in *The Piano*, all that is a likeness of other stories in the comedy romance tradition, becomes the narrative basis which the film mobilises to tell its particular tale at the particular historical moment of its telling. In the telling, the strict conventionality of the genre is brought into fruitful conflict with its feminist subject matter. So the patriarchal romance quest—in which Baines would be the protagonist—gives way to the struggle of Ada as protagonist from her initial, defiant (but self debilitating) muteness to her climactic Beowulfian struggle in the oceans depths. Ada's muteness is, in one sense terribly communicative, a defiant repudiation of patriarchal *logos*; yet, in another, it is a terrible, masochistic sacrifice of expression and oral pleasure, in which only the piano and Flora may sing for her. The pinched tightness of Ada's mouth is a bitter emblem of the old contradiction of individualistic freedom, because it is, at the same time, willed, and also the scar of an alien, patriarchal will. In Propp's morphology this dialectic would correspond to the dialectic of interdiction and its violation. Ada actually violates the ban against anti-patriarchal antisociability by being antisocial. The other emblem of this dialectic is the piano itself, in its being both an encumbrance and yet expressive. In the end the piano represents that against which Ada struggles—the villain; and yet, again as a bonus, it comes back from the depths too. While the romance sets up this contradiction, the comedy moves from the essentially narcissistic and oral drama of the contradiction by breaking its deadlock and mobilising freedom in a socialising erotic revolution.

In Propp's terms, Ada is the protagonist of this tale, and Baines occupies the position of Propp's *donor*, whose function is to transfer the tale's magical agent—in this case erotic love—to the protagonist. Baines thus has a kind of powerful, magical function, an interesting feature in a feminist tale. But then such is the prestige that Eros invests in the beloved. The donor is typically an ambiguous character and so an ambiguous, antagonistic relationship between the protagonist and the donor is not unusual. The themes of doing deals, of seduction and even of prostitution are in keeping with the ambiguity of this relationship.

The comic-erotic and its attendant political revolution are told partly in the terms of the traditional iconography of dismemberment—what, in patriarchal psychoanalysis was theorised under the concept of castration. Dismemberment is also associated with the theme of bodily or erotogenic differentiation which is thematised in images of touch and the fingers. In the comic revolution, tactile, clitoral pleasure replaces puritanical mutilation. Thus we have a whole suite of images: the initial sacrificing of the organ of speech; the dumbshow of Bluebeard's decapitated wives; the dismembered piano key, an erotic emblem which Flora, after witnessing the “primal scene” of her mother's love with Baines, delivers up to the scrutiny of the patriarchal law; Stewart's terrible attempt to “clip Ada's wings” by chopping off her finger; the climactic and comic sacrifice of the shoe; the tapping steel finger; and, in the end, Ada's darkly veiled head amidst the finale of transfigured white, as she seeks to re-embark on the search for self-signification by means of the pure wanting-to-be of speech, which, as a comic bonus, is already there in the voice-over anyway.

The Piano would be very dull if it were nothing but rehashed generic forms. Instead, the ideological content of these forms enter into a tension with the film's historical, political context. These tensions attract both ideology critique, and, in turn, a defensive response: either the rhetoric of castration belongs to patriarchal discourse, or else dismemberment is a symbol of the law's mutilation of all; either the Maoris are treated patronisingly as innocents at the dumbshow or as a scarcely individuated

mob, or else, as benevolent romance figures and cheeky comic figures they are no more stereotypical than the colonial figures; either Ada is rescued by prostitution and seduction, or it is Ada who struggles against death and who “chooses life”. These antithetical claims, here presented as part of a critical dialogue about *The Piano*, are actually part of the intrinsic, ambiguous fabric of the film: they arise from and are deployed in the anachronistic juxtapositions of the various formal and thematic elements of the work.

Watching *The Piano* one is confronted by several historical stages at once—an apparently anachronistic hotch potch of forms. There is the old, literary romance plot re-emerging with a vengeance in screen narrative. There is the historically vague Victorian setting in a quasi mythic island colony. Aunt Morag’s complaint about Ada’s strange music explicitly raises the question of the anachronistic form of Michael Nyman’s score which stands as an emblem of Ada’s twentieth century subjectivity while being played in the wilds of this Victorian Aotearoa. This is of course quite consistent with the non historical quality of conventional romance, because the romance mode deliberately preserves mythic, ahistorical elements discredited by the history of historiography.

In an article in *Sight and Sound* (Oct. 1993) Stella Bruzzi briefly compares Ada to “a New Zealand Madame Bovary” in a “stifling bourgeois marriage”. Of course the word “bourgeois” sounds anachronistic in colonial New Zealand, but such anachronism actually materialised in history with the forcible juxtaposition of British capitalism and Maori culture. Colonisation is an old source of antagonisms that have been commonly absorbed into romance emblematics, with the division between invader and invaded being almost as archaic as those between male and female or good and bad. It was really not surprising at all to discover colonialist themes in *The Tempest*: whatever Shakespeare’s own ideological intentions, as the author that Emerson called “the most indebted”, it was inevitable that he would use the ideological material stored up in the generic forms available to him.

While Madame Bovary was very much a character belonging to the novel’s critique of romance, Ada belongs to late twentieth century feminist, screen, comic romance. Screen narrative belongs to a later form of capitalism, the emblem of whose mode of production is not the machine but the screen itself. The related, increasingly iconic character of narrative broke the novel’s bond of “realism”, ignoring the old mimetic shame and redeeming the archaic and popular pantomimic forms of comic romance. In addition, we find in *The Piano* that the screen romance form even absorbs the form of yet another earlier narrative mode: the ironic, erotic comedy of Ada and Baines displays the plot conventions of post nineteenth century novelistic “realism” itself, and as such, it reminds me of the ironic comic romances of Eric Rohmer. Jane Campion has elsewhere demonstrated her skill in novelistic cinema in *Two Friends*, *An Angel at my Table* and *Portrait of a Lady*.

The strictly conventional forms of popular feature film also bring antagonistic elements up against *The Piano*’s feminist, revolutionary theme. Cinema, as social spectacle, adopts the job ethic definition of art as luxurious and work as ascetic, thus sharing with advertising the propensity for a rhetoric of luxurious imagery. In *The Piano*, framing, composition and camera movement capture symmetries, proportions, and colour variations that are designed, like advertising to seduce and enchant. There is an undeniable kinship between romance and advertising emblematics. Both promise the fulfilment of wild desires. Consider the shots of the piano on the beach. They are like car advertisements in their juxtaposition of artifice and nature. This actually enhances the ambiguity of the piano itself, which is a symbol of both patriarchal repression and of subjective expression. There are also the drowning and surfacing

shots whose rebirthing imagery is popular in everything from Coke to cosmetic advertisements. Elsewhere in the film, magisterial camera movements are at a sublime distance from the wilds of the romantic island, constructing the mis-en-scène and montage with a Prospero-like magic. This sublime aesthetic of nature is that of the European bourgeois period. It was discredited as picturesque luxury by the defiant gestures of Modernism, but it has persisted in the industrial, popular commodity arts of cinema and photography in a system of conventional gratifying icons. It is very common in the cinematic sublime, and therefore perhaps, not always very obvious that there is a contradiction between the luxurious imagery and the grubby subject matter. Even if this is an unconscious element in *The Piano*, the mark of the contradictions of an unfree society, it is still dissolved into the solution of anachronistic and antagonistic narrative elements that are subsumed under the emblematics of the romance comedy. As a romance tale, *The Piano*, employs various overlays of narrative forms, folds the line of the historical development of narrative forms back on itself over and over again, never eradicating the surplus ideological significance that each form brings to the composition, never reconciling them, but preserving the antagonism as an image of unfree society.

In the end, as its crucial plot device, the comic, revolutionary impulse of *The Piano* actually employs an emblematic form of unfree society: the commodity form itself. Just as Stewart seeks to render the Maori land exchangeable so that he can acquire it, so he is also ready to turn Ada into an item of exchange. Then, in making his deal with Stewart, Baines takes advantage of the commodity form, like a cunning Jacob doing Esau out of his birthright. (Esau's wife, coincidentally, was Ada.) Still, in the feminist romance, it is Ada, not Baines, who is subsequently marked by the struggle with the patriarchal angel. Most importantly, it is through Ada herself taking on the form of a commodity that she trades her way out of entrapment. This system of exchange is repeated in the film's economy of dismemberment—in Ada's exchanging her finger in order to avoid more brutal mutilation, or her boot in order to avoid death at sea with the heavy piano. Even the asset of the piano is liquidated. It is as if the fluidity of the commodity form is cheekily taken to represent a revolutionary potential of global commodification, so that, out of the fluid but significant juxtaposition of different historical forms, goods and images, a greater comic vision of history emerges. And it is as if the different historical forms and images of the narrative are themselves made fluid and interchangeable, so that in their significant redistribution a greater comic vision of history is envisaged or represented.

58. *The romance of fiction*

Jonathan Rosenbaum (1995, p.4) has said that, in being able to laugh at *Dr Strangelove*, "it's possible that we've lost something." Such is the progress of fiction, and the power of what is called progress to induce nostalgia. And such matters are the subject matter of fiction. In being able to laugh at *Don Quixote* we (or they) lost something: the enchantment of all those old romances. Now though, we are lucky if we are still able to laugh at it. Fortunately then, I am still able to laugh at George C. Scott, arms outstretched like the wings of a B52, enthusing over the ability of his pilots to take their nuclear weapons right through the Soviet defences and onto their urban targets.

At the end of his quest, the commander of one of those B52s (Slim Pickens) dons the good guy's hat bequeathed to him by the historical romance tradition of the Hollywood Western, and rides his bomb, bare-back, all the way down to the target. Romance quest epitomises human teleological endeavour. At least in its reflexive,

modern form as fiction, it instructs us not, as it once did, in what it is to be human, but in what it is to become human. For the art of fiction is itself a romance quest, but one in which the end is not assigned from the start. It is a strange and unclear project, a bit like the one in Tarkovsky's *Stalker*. As well as the ground of certainty, the old ends and values have been abandoned, consumed in the dragon fire of modernity. Fiction's greatest test is to discover or make up, while on the run, what its ends, if any, might be, and to only recognise any achievement afterwards, when it has been superseded. Such is its abandonment to time. The project of fiction is no longer a romance but a fiction—romance which makes up and works on and tests its own form and its own ends, both within individual works and throughout the lineage of works that makes up the species called *fiction*. This predicament is reflected in the modern concept of *originality*—a quality that does not exist unless after the fact, when it has been recognised as having been and gone. As a romance protagonist whose goal has been assigned right from the start, the commander of the B52 becomes the unwitting functionary of heteronomous intentions. Even his scepticism is directed the wrong way because it has been functionally appropriated by the forces of war and death. All his heroism has been subverted, from the love that was the end of romance to the ends of a strange love. Fiction's self-critique has been directed at the ways that its spiritual project is ceaselessly being subverted. Fiction, like romance before it, has to supersede itself, lest it be superseded by something else, and even if, precisely in doing so, it risks being superseded by something else.

Seeking enlightenment by the seat of its pants, art is prone to delusions. Other purposes can easily appropriate the very thing devised to deliver humans from such alien purposes. Manipulation of affective responses, and the abuse of ecstasy and entertainment are ways in which fiction can crash. Sometimes it has seemed possible, as it did to Hegel, that art might simply come to an end, its moment passed, its project completed, or, as Adorno (1970, p.6) suspected, its dialectical self conception superseding itself in favour of "something other than, and opposed to, art," its almost blind romance impulse taken over by the very interests it sought to defy. Seat of the pants flying, like that of Slim Pickens, might become impossible in an all too functionally differentiated society. Then, fiction would become a diverting appendage of social systemic processes, something that is primarily, pruriently gratifying to the pinched sensuality of functionally isolated emotions, and predictably profitable. Though this may seem to be just what it is doing now as entertainment industry, we should recognise, by the example of works like *Don Quixote*, that this is just the kind of problem that art has long taken delight in facing. Especially in its modern form, its task has been that of outmanoeuvring culture's self-alienation from its human subjects. Perhaps art has long done this for its own sake and perhaps the slogan, *art for art's sake*, implied ...and not for culture's. The trouble is that practicing and appreciating *art for art's sake*, though in its time it has rescued art from alienation, puts art in an inherently unstable predicament, so it may not rescue art from itself for very long. Art is, after all, just another cultural form with a life (and death) of its own. Nevertheless, forebodings about the demise of art—especially forebodings about whether, in a functionalist, objectifying age, something that appears to be as subjective as art, can survive—may well be subjective themselves. They may be no more than symptoms of an ontogenetically conditioned sense of jadedness when it comes to art, like when Montaigne noted that, with age, he had tired of romances. Then again, such subjectivity has its objective conditions, and not just in the biology of ontogeny, but in the cultural evolution of generationalism. Like fluffy, sliced bread, so much modern culture evolves in a hot house environment that selects for the meagre pleasures of limited infantile taste in technology, innovation, marketing and

taste itself. Perhaps narrative art will survive, but primarily as a commodity for exploiting the emotions of a youth market by dividing the emotions from one another and thus from the sensuous pleasures of cognition. But then again, even this repeats something like the predicament of romance in Montaigne's day, a predicament to which modernity's fiction responded. And fiction could well respond because dividing the emotions for the sake of their gratification sacrifices pleasure for the sake of the predictability that pleases markets but barely pleases minds, young or old.

As a spiritual project, if not as an entertainment industry, fiction is a quixotic affair. For modernity to be able to divide its spiritual project between the arts and the sciences was less a reason for dismay at "two (mutually exclusive) cultures", and for yearning after lost unity, than an historically specific, and timely, affirmation of both. In order to maintain its social systemic persistence, art, in its self-emphatic modern sense, and fiction in particular, has had to be as curious, as innovative and as self-sceptical as science. Perhaps more so. For art has had to be ruthlessly disparaging of its own pretensions, and accordingly innovative in its own purposes. This is why *Don Quixote*, even if scarcely anyone can be bothered reading it any more, is still emblematic of fiction: it was so sceptical of the art of narrative, which, by recursion, it made its own object; so innovative in redesigning the purposes and means of narrative art. The old artistic values must continually prove or renew themselves. Even the importance of beauty in art seems to have been somewhat superseded. There is now a reticence about speaking its name, and since it is unmentionable it has become unmentioned and so less emphatically important. Not that beauty, the most deeply sedimented artistic value, has become extinct; but to some extent it has given way to the sublime and to its own subliming. Whether art can persist as a spiritual project and not just as an entertainment industry or a museum piece, has been a fruitful, if not a well articulated or entirely justified worry. It is a concern that in some form has driven art right through the age of modernity, reaching a fever pitch in the period of high Modernism. And it has continued to shape fiction in the period since Modernism, though perhaps with the poignant sense of swansong. Narrative art at least still continues as a kind of romance quest, though as *Don Quixote* showed, it is not one where the way or the end is clear, except perhaps in a negative form, such as in the ironic contemplation of what has gone before but just won't do any more.

Once upon a time taste was a kind of magical instrument given to art by the wizened dwarf of past sensibility, to aid art in its perilous quest. To inquire what this thing called taste was, was the oafish question asked by art's older, philistine siblings. Now though, the same question has become that of the curious third child, art itself. Now and for some time this puny child called art has, in its scepticism, denied itself what was once its most sensitive instrument, suspecting that it was merely some mystifying thing to fall back on. Now the third child is an orphan and only child. Like the young bell maker in Tarkovsky's *Andrey Roublev*, this child can only bluff about being told the secret of the art by its father. At the end of Tarkovsky's film, the great new bell is ready for its ceremonial first ringing. It takes several swings before the gong can begin to inscribe an arc big enough to strike the newly cast metal. The gathered crowd waits in silence until the gong at last strikes and the bell tolls. Yet as the bell is ringing, its young maker lies in despair, away on a deserted mudflat. Andrey Roublev comes upon him. The youth, convinced of his failure, confesses that his father had never told him the secret. For him there is no pride, no consolation in looking on his work and seeing that it is good. It has its own life now. Any talk about knowing the secret meaning of art is a fiction. All this though is part of art's sense of its importance, for if it is to have any value it can hardly be allowed to degenerate into a predictable old tale.

Fiction pursues what have been advertised as the highest of human aspirations, but it does so on no firmer basis than that they could be absolutely otherwise. If fiction is nihilistic or relativistic it is because these things are part of the predicament that fiction finds itself in—to its delight. Fiction cannot be some pat ideological dismissal of these things, nor can it just be consolation. If it is critique it is a kind of negative critique, presenting untruth, meaninglessness, cruelty, and evil not only in their best light, but as positively and unavoidably to be embraced—otherwise how can we have any sense of the power these things have exerted on humans. In this, above all, it honours Hegel's view that critique cannot remain outside what it criticises. Paradoxically, it is only in this way that fiction avoids contamination by evil—by feeding off it. Moralistic critics whether they complain about the nihilism in Altman's *Short Cuts* or whether they frown and praise what they see as a serious diagnosis of the ills of the times miss the point, which is the delight that fiction takes in all this. This irrepressible delight wells up from the comic roots of fiction, not despite but because of its darkest themes. Fiction pursues its obscure end without any fundamental guidance about what it is or how to find it. Whenever someone refers to a project—be it art's, science's, philosophy's or history's—as being a project of imaginative endeavour that cannot just reduce itself to some prescribed or unambiguous method, they are seeing that project in terms of romance narrative that must work on its own form. Science might seem to be a less ambiguous quest, but only because, by its functional differentiation from other endeavours, it seems to have quarantined itself from the doubts and contingencies that bedevil those endeavours whose object is the contingency of human life by and for the contingent, emotional and reflexive understanding of human beings. Science's devotion to empirical truth and, in particular, to a truth that is adequate to a non-reflexive object and adequate for specific technological ends, seems significantly to disambiguate its purposes. But ultimately the scientific project is as epistemologically groundless as fiction is ultimately aesthetically and ethically groundless. To see fiction in terms of romance is to see it anachronistically, in terms of an earlier form of narrative art. The romance impulse and form persists memetically but recursively, as an object of itself. This recursive relation of fiction to romance, and in turn, of fiction to itself, is one of its most distinctive modern features. Romance narrative, let's say, is about the pursuit of the good object of desire against the contingencies of an environment that thwarts it. In fiction the good and the aspirations are themselves temporalised and contingent. They unfold through time and through the course of the narration.

Modern fiction has submitted its own project to the same temporalised unfolding of its meaning. By submitting its received values and norms to the most virulent scepticism towards values and knowledge, it has made its task harder and harder. In repudiating reference and morality, fiction tests whatever truth or good emerges despite the repudiation. Fiction is commonly disparaged as escape from reality, but it is reified reality that is escapist, while fiction delights in escaping from the delusions of such reality. Fiction must construct itself by fashioning its own ends and means in the face of an agnosticism that renders all values merely relative by virtue of their contingency. The problem for philosophy is not to deconstruct all knowledge and values. Of course it is all eminently deconstructible; and far from being the epitome of sophisticated culture, the tradition of deconstruction is almost a kind of natural process: nature, in the form of an environment's depredations on organisms, deconstructs all life's pretensions, just as it deconstructs the pretensions of concepts to thoroughly grasp their objects. The task for philosophy is to wonder how, out of the groundless contingency that would seem to make all knowledge and values relative and interchangeable, human values and knowledge emerge anyway. In

making itself up, fiction emulates the long and difficult emergence of human value from groundless contingency. It wants to rescue the quest to become human from the despair of life's utter contingency, the despair that fears utter relativism. It wants to unfold happiness from this contingency, for fiction actually finds its own happiness in contingency. Fiction uses what those given to epistemological certitude can't bring themselves to countenance: the groundlessness from which reason has had to construct itself. Fiction is in cahoots with the devil that the theologians of certitude would expel from their ontologies. The wasteland through which modern fiction journeys is that of its own groundlessness, but it does not undertake its task like some universal hero. That would get it nowhere. Its attitude is not even that of adventurer full of courage and high spirits. It is more like cunning and delight. It proceeds by multiplying the difficulties, the same way that, in the history of subjectivity, ethics did in relation to morality.

If fiction could be absolutely otherwise, how and why is it worthwhile? Why bother at all? This is like asking about how and why the end and meaning of a romance emerges from the way the protagonist acts. Why not just lie to the silly old hermit met along the way? Why not just kill the stranger barring our progress to the distant city? In the transfiguration of the old hermit into Merlin himself, or in the revelation that the murdered stranger was our friend or our own flesh and blood, stories show how happy ends are not delivered by unhappy means. Fiction is its own happy end because it is its own happy means.

Clearly, to lie or to murder is to defy Kant's categorical imperative. Such actions are scarcely consistent with a universal principle; for, if we choose to lie to the hermit or murder the stranger, we are choosing, in the universalisation of such forms of action, to be lied to or murdered ourselves. Kant was strenuous in his efforts to deny that the pursuit of happiness could constitute a ground for universal practical laws. Instead, he located the determining ground of the moral law in its austere, timeless, categorical form. But is happiness to be thought of in terms of mere subjective desire? Or rather, is the subjective desire for happiness that of a subject whose subjectivity is not intimately constituted in its history as a social animal? Isn't happiness a phenomenon of social rather than solipsistic subjectivity, an intimation of our sociality to and for ourselves? It is the impossibility of unhappily pursued happiness that makes happiness somehow already something whose consistency of form fits it for universal law giving. As in so much of Kant's thinking, what he thought of as transcendental form was the sedimented outcome of historical processes. The form of happiness seems to capture the timely, contingent and even contradictory character of ethical life that the form of the categorical imperative would all too mechanically regulate to the point of meddling with and frustrating the happy outcome of events. The ethical truth of a promise is more a matter of timely consideration than of hapless rectitude. The social circumstances in which a promise is uttered may, with time, dissolve from beneath the words uttered by the parties to that promise. The truth of a promise is a creature of time and therefore may be consistent with what the timeless logic of the categorical would wrongly demonise as contradictory.

It is happiness that fiction pursues—even if in secret, for indeed happiness evaporates in the glare of advertisements for itself. Benjamin (1955, p.205) saw this in what he thought was Proust's "blind, senseless, frenzied quest for happiness." He added a jibe at the expense of "the model pupils of life" who expected, with Kantian resignation, that art's task was all "toil, misery and disappointment": "The idea that happiness could have a share in beauty would be too much of a good thing, something that their *ressentiment* would never get over (p.206)."

The timely character of happiness is indicated by its etymology. The word is related to what *happens*, to the *perhaps* of the fall of events and to the happenstance of situation. It is an eminently narrative phenomenon. If fiction is one attempt to rescue human becoming from the despair of utter contingency, its answer to the entropy of contingency lies in the timeliness of its happiness, the way it weaves a kind of kindness into contingency. I hesitate to mention the term *relativism* because I suspect that it is usually a kind of straw dummy used by moralists as the handy antithesis for their theses. Any mention of epistemological relativism, or of the relativistic predicament that knowledge must make a go of, invites the charge of moral relativism too. Though relativism has a specific form in market culture—where all goods are interchangeable and everything has its price—it is not the natural outcome of some kind of deconstruction that thinks it can dissolve all values and knowledge in the acid of contingency. The first critique of relativism is given to us by natural history. It follows from the asymmetry of time: for a subject, one direction in time is not as good as another. The selections of history may have bequeathed us its nightmare, but it has also bequeathed us all that we have become. The past is present, even though unequally distributed, as both nightmare and wealth. In pursuing what we are to become there is no clean slate, nor are we starting from scratch. There is no scratch any more. (For what it is worth this scratch is pre-Cambrian, way beyond the excavations of any latecomer's scepticism towards values and knowledge). And instead of a ground we are like the sailors in Otto Neurath's ship—the ship in the epigram cited by Quine at the beginning of *Word and Object*. The epigram describes a ship that must be rebuilt at sea. It cannot be pulled apart in a dock and perfectly remade from the best components. The same applies to the romance of fiction as to that of epistemology or ethics. The ground is what's up and floating already. The only means are the means at hand.

Ever since the eighteenth century, the suspicion that knowledge and values were ungroundable and not simply given once and for all—whether by nature or divinity—became intolerable, and there has been quite a scramble for something, anything, to fall back on. The philosophy of the subject sought new grounds, sometimes in reason and its universal subject, sometimes in radically individuated will or passion or power. But what this ungrounded predicament of knowledge and values demonstrated was neither the need for, nor the necessity of, either universal subjective reason or the assertion of the sheer will power or will to power of radical subjectivity—whether in epistemology, ethics, politics or art. Both of these reactions failed to appreciate (at the time, how could they?) the peculiar interanimations of psychic and social history, interanimations that make the antinomianism of radical subjective will versus universal reason oddly inappropriate and utterly inadequate to the phenomena in question. Yet, conceived as necessities, they have turned out to be the cultural ancestors of, variously, fascism, Soviet communism and liberalism. Rather, what this predicament indicated was that the actuality of knowledge and values (because there are such things) was itself an outcome of biological and social history, and that the whole of this history had been a contingent, arbitrary sedimentation of variously subjective and wilful, or social and culturally localised actions, all creating, happily or unhappily, the true, the good and the beautiful. Forsaking epistemological grounding, morality and determinate beauty, art, and particularly narrative art—insofar as, unlike empirical science, it concerns itself and throws itself into to the thoroughly reflexive objectivity of human communicative actions, that is, into the reflexive objectivity of society and psychic experience—has been, as it had already long been, a kind of great, sustained thought experiment in the

laboratory of becoming happily, socially human; and, in always recognising that things could be otherwise, it could never allow itself to hypostatise any universals, for that would have been to wrong history by thinking it could be stilled; and that would have been to still it with a makeshift, which is what universals about such reflexive phenomena as psyche and society always turn out to be.

In the romance of fiction it is only by recognising the way humans are historically and contingently made, in recognising the bequest of pain, cruelty, despair, evil, and stupidity, that human becoming and fiction's becoming may happily proceed. Fiction speaks to humans about how they are made and being made and would be made. In particular it is about the cryptic, the contradictory, the intuitive, the cognitive and the emotional aspects of experience, and it is about such matters not only mimetically—that is by being cryptic, contradictory, intuitive, cognitive and emotional—but also because it is *for* the cryptic, contradictory, intuitive, emotional cognition of human animals. That is the moving ocean of its project.

Because it must start with its past, with the circumstances at hand, it builds itself by recursive operations on what it has been. Thus it relies on and is about our native social cunning, and the fast and not always adequate intuitions of emotional experience that are vital to social cognition. For fiction, not to do and be so would be unhappy indeed.

In their dedication to the bequest of the past, that is to the unique emotional predicament of human understanding, the institution of taste and the genres of romance and fiction have been, to some extent, marshalled on behalf of nostalgia for the cultural unity that was lost in the progressive functional differentiation of society. This may be seen in the fact that romance, for instance, registered the disenchantment experienced in the shift from traditional society's mythic narratives to modernity's historical narratives, by preserving mythic understanding. For this kind of preciousness, the whole domain of the arts has risked getting a bad reputation. Allegiance to the past, even if for the sake of happiness and the victims of progress, risks being little more than allegiance to a nightmare. But this risky situation is just one more trial in the landscape of fiction's romance. Fiction happily proceeds, testing and deconstructing itself in the process of its becoming fiction for the sake of our becoming human. We may see how what fiction has become has been selected for its ability to survive amidst these pressures. For narrative art's great plot remains *the test*, and its great theme remains that of the *disenchantment* that attends knowledge.

59. *The comedy of fiction.*

Laughter is a kind of critique. In laughing at the sanctified good or at the austere form of the moral law we recognise their unhappiness. We recognise that whatever their good or earnest ends, and whatever happiness they promise, they involve some portion of unhappy means and some denial of human happiness, and therefore some denial of being and becoming human. Laughter happily deconstructs unhappiness by being happily unencumbered by the need to spell out a program of reform. In eschewing a program, laughter suggests the unprogrammable character of happiness, or at least, that the complex timeliness of happiness would test any program for its realisation. In fact, what makes us laugh is laughter's own timely moment of reform. Laughter's only program for reform is to frame the absurdities of the world inside fiction's recursion.

In romantic comedy, comedy is not only a socialisation of romantic desire, it is a critique of romance and of the unhappiness it bears from the past. Hence we may laugh at tragic romance. The end of *Topless Women Talk About Their Lives* is happy

precisely because the male romantic lead—the accidental father of the child—happily dies on his way to the child's birth. In comedy we may laugh along with the cruellest characters at the most shocking of misfortunes of others. This is the scandal of comedy. It is enough to make moralists shake their heads, or to disturb the conscience and equanimity of gentle souls. Yet all this belongs to happiness and is for the sake of happiness, because not to acknowledge such things as laughing matters would be unhappy indeed. Anything that's "no joke" is truly "a joke".

Still, laughter unites us with the historical, contingent, emotional, intuitive make up of human experience. We are not perfect, global, logical and epistemological machines, but contingent, naturally selected, social and emotional organisms. Laughter comes from our shared predicament in human history. So does romance, but romance represents the positive quest for happiness. Laughter demonstrates the happiness inherent in the negative, and thereby demonstrates its affinity not only with critique but with the negativity of thought. It is interesting the way the best Hollywood romantic comedies of the late 1930s and just after—films like *His Girl Friday*, *The Awful Truth*, and *The Philadelphia Story*—show their allegiance to the past. Each of these films laughs at the rigidities of marriage and marital propriety, while acknowledging, as Shakespeare did in the case of Beatrice and Benedict, a kind of priority in the romantic engagement of the leads. Now this is ambiguous. It could be seen as honouring a kind of the most implacable unfreedom: sheer abstract allegiance to the accident of whom one meets first, and to the vows of first love. In a way, these films seem to be designed to give consolation to those stuck in the rut of an overlong marriage. However, the laughter in these films acknowledges the loss involved in the annihilation of passionate and witty past experience. Depth of feeling is related to depth of time, for the sake of happiness, not unfreedom.

By calling the new fiction of his day *the comedy of romance*, Samuel Johnson indicated the allegiance of modern fiction to comedy and laughter. It was not just that fiction took romance from the enchanted wood and put it in the lowly, unserious setting of everyday domestic life. It was not just a rigorous application of Aristotle's differentiation of the genres according to the hierarchical differentiation of society. Fiction, in its emphatic modern form, was a critique of the superseded and unhappy inhumanity of romance. The romance quest by which we have imagined the quest of fiction is no longer the ancient nightmare that romance would be now. The way to imagine the project of fiction up till now, and if it persists, is as fiction: making itself up into what it would be from what it has been. The fiction of fiction.

60. *The future of fiction: a science fiction.*

Once and for a long time history was easily imaginable as being endable. Modernity, as and in its history of itself, preserves the teleological desire that was once the preserve of providential thought. In early modernity, from Milton to Hegel, this teleological desire still dreamed on in terms of an end of history, a be all and end all of the nightmare of the past. Now history, and especially that of the present times, can only conceive itself in terms of the future, a future that is not quite the end, but rather the outcome and the proper expression of all this modernity—this "rapidly changing world". History, with its persistent prophetic streak, has now evolved into a kind of speculative fiction about the future.

When machines have more genius than humans, the practice and experience of art will still have the function, I suspect, of subliming the selfish, and to us heteronomous, character of narrative society. With such technology, technology that imitates, emulates and surpasses psyche, society would be thoroughly technologised.

Perhaps the human functionaries that enabled the natural selection of this thoroughly technologised society will have to linger on as habitat for such society. Perhaps machines will need us as part of the biodiversity that sustains them. Or, if we fall out of nature, through redundancy and extinction, if we fall away like the scaffolding that is no longer needed to sustain a society that has become a pure autopoietic spectacle for itself, perhaps machines will experience the same melancholy for us that we feel for lost nature. Or perhaps, again like us, they will gaze the cold gaze, and we, as fossils or relics, will be lucky to excite much more than the passing warmth of a technologised, idle curiosity. This, of course, is all worthless, pruriently melancholic, speculation, all, at best, a fiction. But nothing so typifies the latest phase of modernity as prurient interest in quasi-histories of the future.

When people say that we will still need art because intelligent machines will never be able to be artistic, they are clutching at straws. They are taking consolation in the notion that though machines may well do science, they will never be able to be irrational—wonderfully irrational—in quite the same way as us. This is a quaint notion that reveals its historically limited character insofar as it reveals its genesis in the culturally replicated idea of the two societies. Perhaps they are right about machines—though I doubt it—but they are not right about art. They are repeating the old, and persistent, bourgeois sentimentality about art: that art is gratifying, luxurious irrationality and merely consolation for the thorough rationalisation of life.

In art, humans have long had experience in dealing with autonomous nature. In modern arts like fiction, humans dally and deal with the dazzling autonomy of the social nature that they themselves have blindly created.

Technology that is truly intelligent from our perspective will have to understand human intelligence, and, with that, the much revered irrationality. It will have to be able to emulate what for now we can only call human genius.

Whatever its success in emulating human irrationality, intelligent technology will be, or will become, quite capable of being, from our perspective, utterly irrational in *its* own way. This has long been the case with society; and with psyche and society thoroughly technologised, the ante will be thoroughly upped. This in itself might suggest that we will still want art—if there is a *we* and a *will*—not just to make it all bearable but to make this wild, overwhelming society human, to sublime its heteronomy into something that can be good habitat for us. Even if we have to use machines to make it—as we already do—we might still need art for the sake of becoming human. And maybe not. Like Henry James, a narrative says nothing is its last word on anything.

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