

THE PRIMORDIAL ROLE OF STORIES IN HUMAN SELF-CREATION

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Abstract: We now have a paradoxical situation where the place and status of stories is in decline within the humanities, while scientists are increasingly recognizing their importance. Here the attitude towards narratives of these scientists is defended. It is argued that stories play a primordial role in human self-creation, underpinning more abstract discourses such as mathematics, logic and science. To uphold the consistency of this claim, this thesis is defended by telling a story of the evolution of European culture from Ancient Greece to the present, including an account of the rise of the notion of culture and its relation to the development of history, thereby showing how stories function to justify beliefs, situate people as agents within history and orient them to create the future.

Keywords: Narrative; History; Science; Culture; Complexity Theory; Hegel; Ricoeur; Carr; Kauffman

There is a peculiar inversion taking place between the sciences and the humanities. The humanities traditionally have given a central place to stories or narratives, either historical or fictional, and sought to defend them as offering at least an equivalent status in knowing the world to the mathematical thought and reductive analysis of the natural sciences. This defence runs from Giambattista Vico through Johann Herder and Wilhelm Dilthey to Paul Ricoeur and David Carr. This has been in opposition to the proponents of mathematical physics from René Descartes through to the logical positivists who have dismissed stories as at best a form of entertainment, at worst, as delusional. The human sciences traditionally have been divided between those who wished to reduce them to a branch of the natural sciences and exclude narrative as 'unscientific', and humanistic approaches celebrating human creativity, which have aligned themselves with the humanities and given a central place to narrative. But narratives are now under attack within literature, history and the humanities. There is a crisis of narrative in novels, while in film, narrative is being subordinated to the image.¹ Perhaps more significantly, history has been in a crisis for some time, and a number of historians have

¹ On this, see Scott Lash, 'Discourse or Figure? Postmodernism as a "Regime of Signification"', *Theory, Culture & Society*, 5 (June 1988): 311-336; reprinted in *Sociology of Postmodernism*, (London: Routledge, 1990), pp.172-198, esp. p.191.

denigrated the cognitive claims of historical narratives.² Postmodernists have embraced this decline in narratives, particularly metanarratives, as in some way liberating. It would seem that narratives, and the humanities, have finally been defeated by the cognitive claims of the scientists.

Within the natural sciences, however, there is increasing disquiet about the ultimate goal of science to develop a mathematical ‘theory of everything’, and along with this, increasing skepticism about the role of mathematics within science.³ This skepticism has found eloquent expression in a short essay by Stuart Kauffman, ‘Emergence and Story: Beyond Newton, Einstein and Bohr?’ Kauffman points out that Newton, Einstein and Bohr shared the assumption that to explain anything we must first pre-state its configuration space; that is, the set of all possible solutions. In Newtonian mechanics we pre-state the initial and boundary conditions, the particles and force laws and with them, the configuration space. In the general theory of relativity the configuration space is the set of possible solutions given the initial and boundary conditions along with Einstein’s equations. In quantum mechanics we also pre-state the configuration space of all conceivable observables. But if the universe is really creative, and it seems that the biosphere in particular is creative, then it is impossible to pre-state its configuration space. In fact, Kauffman noted, biologists seldom do science as Newton taught, although they do so occasionally in limited domains. In the biological world, which includes biologists, things are more complex. As autonomous agents, people muck through, making a living, and to describe this, they tell stories. As Kauffman put it:

If we cannot have all the categories that may be of relevance finitely pre-stated ahead of time, how else should we talk about the emergence of the biosphere or in our history – a piece of the biosphere – of new relevant categories, new functionalities, new ways of making a living? These are the doings of autonomous agents. Stories not only are relevant, they are how we tell ourselves what happened and its significance – its semantic import.⁴

Kauffman began his paper by stating that ‘If story is not the stuff of science yet is about how we get on with making our ever-changing livings, then science, not story, must change.’⁵ He concluded this paper by offering a proof that it is impossible to pre-state the configuration space of the biosphere.

² See for example the essays in William H. Dray ed., *Philosophical Analysis and History*, (New York: New York University Press, 1966), the introduction to Hayden White, *Metahistory*, (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1973), and papers in *The History and Narrative Reader*, ed. Geoffrey Roberts. (London and New York: Routledge, 2001).

³ For a critique of the quest for a theory of everything, see John D. Barrow, *Theories of Everything*, (London: Vintage, 1990), esp. p.210. For an expression of skepticism about the role of mathematics in science, see Jesper Hoffmeyer, *Signs of Meaning in the Universe*, trans. Barbara J. Haveland, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996, p.38. On the limitations of mathematics as such, see Gregory J. Chaitin, *The Limits of Mathematics*. Singapore: Springer-Verlag, 1998.

⁴ Stuart Kauffman, ‘Emergence and Story: Beyond Newton, Einstein and Bohr?’, *Investigations*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), chap.6, p.134f.

⁵ Kauffman, ‘Emergence and Story’, p.119.

Does this mean that despite the surrender by humanist intellectuals, the proponents of the humanities had been right all along? This is the claim of the psychologist Jerome Bruner who argued that narrative stands alongside the domains of logic and science as a complementary mode of cognitive functioning; that is, a mode of organizing experience, of knowing the world and of reality construction.⁶ If this is the case, what is the relationship between these two modes of cognitive functioning? This is a more problematic question than it seems. How could it be answered? Given prevailing assumptions, an answer and its defence should be formulated through logic and science. But this is to prejudge the issue. It presupposes that logic and science are the ultimate reference points for judging the relevance of different discourses, precisely the position that is being questioned. If this assumption is wrong, then it will be self-contradictory and virtually impossible to answer the question in this way, since if stories are more primordial than logic and science it will be impossible to fully comprehend stories through logic and science. In fact, this is what I will argue in this paper. I will argue that stories are both ontologically and epistemologically more primordial than science. How could this be argued? The only logically consistent way is through a story. That is, through a story I will attempt to show that stories are more primordial than logic and science and provide the conditions for understanding not only what logic and science are, but also what stories are.

In defending and characterizing stories in this way I will also defend something else: the notion of culture. That is, I will try to show through a story about the concept of culture and how it has developed, what both logic and science and stories are. In conclusion, I will argue that stories are primordial not only as means to organize our experience and understand the world, but to the process by which humans create themselves. The development of logic and science will be shown part of human self-creation dependent upon humans' capacity to construct stories. To characterize the importance of stories and reveal their role in culture, I will construct a narrative of the development of the notion of culture, and then show the significance of stories within culture. At the same time this will provide an example of a story that will be used to illustrate the argument being presented.

In constructing this narrative I will not trace the history of the *term* 'culture', something which has already been done,⁷ but rather the *notion* of culture, which pre-existed the term and which is associated with only one of a number of its meanings. This means constructing a narrative going back to Ancient Greece. Because of its scope, all I will offer is an extremely schematic narrative; but then this highlights another characteristic of narratives - that they can be schematised or filled out indefinitely.⁸ In a world where people are being intellectually crippled by masses of detailed knowledge jealously guarded by specialists, and all efforts to put

⁶ Jerome Bruner, *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), esp. chap.2. Also 'The Narrative Construction of Reality', *Critical Inquiry*, 18 (Autumn, 1991): 1-21.

⁷ See for instance Raymond Williams, "Culture" in *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, (London: Fontana, 1988), pp.87-93.

⁸ For a fuller version of this narrative, see Arran Gare, *Nihilism Inc. Environmental Destruction and the Metaphysics of Sustainability*, (Sydney: Eco-Logical Press, 1996).

such knowledge in perspective is denigrated by conservative scholars and postmodernist theorists alike, the importance of this aspect of narratives cannot be overemphasized. Through this schematic narrative I will attempt to reveal the implications of the postmodern eclipse of narrative. I will suggest that this accounts at least in part for the passivity of the public and the withering of politics in the face of the rise of corporate power and the globalization of the economy.⁹ At the same time this essay will be a defense of those involved in the effort to rehabilitate narratives, including schematic narratives.

THE DENIGRATION OF "CULTURE"

History emerged in Ancient Greece along with philosophy. '*Istoria*', from which both the terms 'history' and 'story' derive, meant 'inquiry', associated with investigation into the causes of conflicts, of failures and achievements, and holding people responsible for their actions. However, history, along with other narrative forms, was eclipsed by the development of philosophy. The first clear antecedent to the modern notion of culture is the ancient Greek characterization of *nomos*. As Carl Schmitt has argued, *nomos* originally meant decision and order in earthbound locations associated with land appropriation, having a foundation in God and containing a concrete order and a community.¹⁰ With the development of the notion of rationally knowable *physis* (or nature), however, *nomos* was reconceived in opposition to it as the laws imposed by people or created by agreement, connoting 'custom, convention or arbitrary law'. An early articulation of this opposition, revealing how it led to an appreciation of the diversity of customs (and a tendency to denigrate such diversity) was Xenophanes' argument that some views vary from society to society while others transcend any particular society:

The Ethiopians say that their gods are snub-nosed and black, the Thracians that theirs have light blue eyes and red hair. But if cattle and horses or lions had hands, or were able to draw with their hands and do the works that men can do, horses would draw the forms of gods like horses, and cattle like cattle, and they would make their bodies such as they each had themselves.¹¹

Xenophanes used this argument to defend a monotheistic theology in which the one God, 'in no way similar to mortals either in body or thought' is discoverable through reason, and correspondingly, disparaged the epic poetry of Homer and the 'mythical' cosmogony of Hesiod.

Xenophanes was the teacher of Parmenides, who took Xenophanes' ideas much further in distinguishing the way of belief or illusion from the way of truth arrived at through reason. Parmenides argued that the way of truth deals with what is, with being, which alone is real. Change implies coming into being from not-being, and since not-being is not, there can be no

⁹ Carl Boggs, *The End of Politics: Corporate Power and the Decline of the Public Sphere*, (New York: Guilford, 2000).

¹⁰ Wolfgang Palaver, "Carl Schmitt on 'Nomos' and Space" *Telos* 106 (1996), pp. 105-127. See also G.L. Ulmen, "The Concept of 'Nomos': Introduction to Schmitt's 'Appropriation/Distribution/Production'" 95, (1993), pp.39-52.

¹¹ G.S. Kirk, J.E. Raven and M. Schofield, *The Presocratic Philosophers*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p.169.

becoming. The appearance of becoming therefore must be an illusion. This argument, although modified considerably, was incorporated into Plato's philosophy, with poetry, drama and mythology being dismissed for dealing in illusions, emotions and what is changing or becoming, in contrast to mathematics and philosophy which have as their objects what is eternal or 'omni-temporal' - mathematical objects and the forms - all deriving from one ultimate form, the form of the Good.¹² Plato's thought, reinterpreted by the Neoplatonists, was then synthesized with Hebraic thought by Christians, with the Good being identified with the Hebraic God. Arguably it was the primitive historical narratives of the Hebrews that gave Christianity its appeal, but such narratives were held to be subordinate to the eternal. As St Augustine put it:

The education of the human race, represented by the people of God, has advanced, like that of an individual, through certain epochs, or, as it were, ages, so that it might gradually rise from earthly to heavenly things, and from the visible to the invisible.¹³

Through history, people were to be educated to see the futility of the realm of change and becoming and to live for what is eternal. In the Christian culture which subsequently came to form the foundation of European civilization, the opposition between the realm of change or becoming dealt with by myths or stories, and the eternal revealed through reason or revelation, was upheld until the Renaissance, along with the denigration of the former and the exaltation of the latter.

The Renaissance was characterized first and foremost by the revival of history. However, this revival of history along with Renaissance culture generally were eclipsed by the scientific revolution. The seventeenth century revival of Pythagorean Neoplatonism by Kepler, Galileo, Descartes and Newton associated with the new mechanical philosophy, what has come to be regarded as the birth of modern science, can be regarded as a reaffirmation of eternal knowledge in the face of growing interest in diversity and change. Descartes claimed to have formulated and systematized a new method for acquiring knowledge in place of the authority of tradition, dogma, faith, superstition and prejudice. Modeled on mathematical thinking, and analytical geometry in particular, this new method was combined with a rejection of dialectical thought as a means of reasoning from reputable opinions to conclusions, of the use of metaphor and other rhetorical devices, and of the claims of history and historical narratives to knowledge.¹⁴ The rise of the new science was also associated with the quest for a perfect

¹² On this see Jaakko Hintikka, 'Knowledge and its Object in Plato', *Knowledge and the Known*, (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1974).

¹³ Saint Augustine *The City of God*, trans. Marcus Dodds, (New York: Random House: 1950), Bk 10, chap.14. For the identification of the heavenly, invisible things with the eternal, see Saint Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, Bk I, XXII, 20; trans. D.W. Robertson, (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1958), p.18.

¹⁴ See Descartes, *Rules for the Direction of the Mind*, especially Rule Ten. Stephen Toulmin in *Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), has revealed the social significance of this.

language, a language that would accurately represent the world.¹⁵ Retrospectively, this is equated with the move not only beyond myth, but also beyond philosophy, and the attainment of truly objective knowledge of reality, knowledge of the eternal laws of motion of immutable matter.

Hobbes took Descartes' mechanical view of the world to its logical conclusion, representing humans as complex machines in which all thinking is calculation, adding and subtracting in the service of control of the world to satisfy appetites and avoid aversions. Language is a means to extend the power of such thinking, to register what we find to be the causes of things, to convey this knowledge to others and to convey our purposes to others. Science is the extension of such knowledge and calculation. Societies are mechanical bodies formed by aggregations of egoistic individuals who have entered a contract to obey the covenants of society for their common benefit, and who, through their constrained egoism, keep the cogs of society turning. The only basis for ethics, for claiming rights and accepting duties, is enlightened egoism. Narratives, along with poetry and drama were given a place, "to please and delight our selves, and others, by playing with our words, for pleasure and ornament, innocently."¹⁶

In the eighteenth and nineteenth century this conception of the world was given added appeal through the addition of a simulated narrative of development - economic progress generated by self interest and, more broadly, progress in nature and in human history through the generation of diverse organizations of matter and their selection through the struggle for survival. Present day reductionist science which strives for a set of mathematical equations to account for everything in the universe, logical empiricism, neo-classical economics, socio-biology and cognitive psychology modeling human thinking on computers, are merely the late twentieth century developments of this world-view. In this scheme of things, customs, conventions and traditions are of little significance unless they can be used to promote tourism or sell things. Narratives are even less important. Historical narratives are nothing more than decorations surrounding factual statements about the past, and fictional narratives are playing with words, forms of amusement. Hobbes' philosophy has been embodied by society and reigns supreme.

THE NEW SCIENCE OF GIAMBATTISTA VICO

All this is not to say that narratives have not played an important part throughout the history of European civilization. And at various times they have been explicitly defended. Aristophanes ridiculed Socrates while extolling the teachings of drama. In contrast to Plato, Aristotle allowed that narratives have significance, but only as subordinate to philosophy. More importantly, narratives in various forms have been crucial to all social and intellectual life, and the history of European civilization is characterized by the continuous innovation in the genres

¹⁵ See M. Slaughter, *Universal Languages and Scientific Taxonomy in the Seventeenth Century*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

¹⁶ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, [1651], (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1968), Part I, chap.4, p.102.

of both historical and fictional narrative.¹⁷ The term "narrative" itself originated in rhetoric and originally had no connection with storytelling. Its development into a form of storytelling was itself a development in the form of narrative.¹⁸ But even through rhetoric, narratives did not gain the status of discourses aiming at knowledge of the eternal. It was only with the rise of the new mechanical philosophy in the seventeenth century with its thoroughgoing denigration of narrative knowledge that the first major intellectual defence of narratives was made. The defender was Giambattista Vico (1668-1744).

Vico was one of the first and one of the greatest ever opponents of mechanical philosophy. He not only opposed the dismissal of metaphor and rhetoric, of history, and imagination, but turned his attention to precisely those aspects of human reality which had been dismissed by the mainstream of European culture - customs, conventions, traditions and stories. Rejecting the view of society as an atomistic collection of mechanical egoists and defending in its place a conception of individual minds as the product of historically developing societies, Vico can be regarded as the founder of the science of culture.¹⁹ In opposition to Descartes' science of nature and his conception of the mind as a thinking substance, Vico claimed to have created a New Science of the socio-historical world, and argued for the superiority of the kind of knowledge, historical knowledge, attainable through this science over any knowledge that could be gained of nature. It is only what we have made that we can truly know, that is, know 'from the inside' rather than the outside.²⁰ Mathematics is transparent to us not because it belongs to a supersensible realm of being behind changing appearances, but because it is a human construction. It is possible for us to know works of art, political schemes, legal systems and history, to understand motives, purposes, ambitions, hopes, jealousies, outlooks and visions of reality for the same reason. We can grasp the thoughts, the attitudes, the beliefs, the worlds of thought and feeling of societies dead and gone through language, myths and rites. Totally rejecting the view of language as a means to accurately represent reality, Vico held language to be the key to the entire mental, social and cultural life of societies. We think in symbols, and ideas are inseparable from the symbols by which they are expressed. We can infer mental processes from words and the way they are used, for 'genius is the product of language, not

¹⁷ R.G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1948) is still one of the best general histories of history. The rise of the novel from earlier forms of narrative, its development and its significance have been described by Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. Willard R. Trask, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968). For a shorter history told from a different perspective, see Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M.M. Bakhtin*, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, Michael Holquist ed., (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981).

¹⁸ As noted by C. Jan Swearington in "Narration of Dialogue and Narration Within Dialogue: The Transition from Story to Logic", *Narrative Thought and Narrative Language*, (Hillsdale, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1990), pp.173-97.

¹⁹ This is not to say that Vico had no antecedents. His work can be understood as a development of the historical school of legal scholarship, and was also influenced by Bacon. On Vico's antecedents, see B.A. Haddock, *An Introduction to Historical Thought*, (London: Edward Arnold, 1980), chap.6.

²⁰ *The New Science of Giambattista Vico*, [3rd ed. 1744] trans. Thomas Goddard Bergin and Max Harold Fisch, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), par.331. p.96.

language of genius.²¹ We are able to enter the mentality of people very different from our own because we possess the faculty of fantasia - imagination - which allows us to appreciate more than one way of categorizing reality. By contrast, it is only possible to describe nature, to predict how it will behave in different situations. It is not possible to know why it behaves as it does.

At the same time Vico attacked Descartes' quest for perfect, incorrigible, timeless truths which could be expressed in universally intelligible symbols available to everyone, at any time, in any circumstance. In its place he proposed a 'genetic' approach to knowledge, arguing that the validity of all true knowledge, even that of mathematics and logic, can only be demonstrated by showing how it has been created, that is, by revealing through an historical narrative its genesis. Natural law theorists and social contract theorists have gone radically astray in striving to demonstrate the ethical basis of law through abstract reasoning based on some postulated eternal human nature, since human nature is a process continually transforming itself, and so is constantly generating new needs and new categories of thought and action. Modern law, together with such concepts as justice, rights and obligations, is the outcome of a long history of cultural evolution, and the validity, the value and prospects of law, these concepts and the ethical claims based upon them, can only be determined through the study of their historical background and genesis. For Vico, notions such as 'obedience to universal reason', the 'social contract', or the 'calculation of self-interest', are implausible myths, merely the refuge of ignorance.

More broadly, Vico began the schism between thinkers for whom the primary concern is with the specific and the unique, and those in the Cartesian tradition whose concern is with the repetitive and the universal. This opposition is correlated with concern for the concrete rather than the abstract, with change and perpetual movement rather than rest, with the inner rather than the outer aspect of reality, with quality rather than quantity, with what is culture-bound rather than with timeless principles, and with mental strife and self-transformation rather than with the possibility, or even desirability of eternal peace, order, harmony and the satisfaction of all rational human wishes. However, Vico did not totally reject the concerns of Cartesian thinkers. He allowed them a legitimate, though subordinate place; but a place which can only be justified historically.

CULTURE FROM HERDER TO HEGEL

Vico was virtually ignored until very similar ideas had been developed independently by Herder (1744 - 1803) in Germany.²² However, while Vico was only concerned with European

²¹ Giambattista Vico, *On the Study Methods of Our Time*, [1709] trans. Elio Gianturco, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), p.40.

²² See Johann Gottfried Herder, *On World History*, ed. Hans Adler and Ernest A. Menze, trans. Ernest A. Menze (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 1997). For a succinct statement of Herder's ideas on humanity see Isaiah Berlin, *Vico and Herder*, (London, Chatto & Windus, 1976). For a more in depth treatment, see F.M. Barnard, *Herder's Social and Political Thought*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965.

history, Herder wrote on the history of all humanity, and also offered an alternative view of nature consistent with his conception of humans. To defend human diversity, Herder appropriated the term 'culture', and used the plural to emphasize the differences between societies. In opposition to the Hobbesian conception of humans, he argued that we are both culturally formed by and participants in the creation of our particular cultures. To justify his rejection of the mechanistic view of humans, Herder rejected the mechanistic view of nature, conceiving it instead as a unity in which dynamic, purpose seeking forces - the interplay of which constitutes all movement and growth - flow into each other, clash, combine and coalesce.²³ Human life was then understood with reference to its physical and geographical environment conceived in such terms, but at the same time, all human activity was seen as the expression of individuals or groups striving to actualize their own unique potentialities. The challenge for each society and civilization is to discover its own centre of gravity and then to actualize its potential. All aspects of a particular people, the way they speak, move, eat, drink; their laws, architecture, theology and social outlook, their music and dance forms, and in particular their language, were seen to be pervaded by and to express patterns and qualities unique to their cultures so that each aspect of a culture reflects the whole culture. In opposition to the individualism of more conservative Enlightenment philosophers, Herder argued that individuality is only achieved by participation in and expressing the particular culture through which one's humanity has been attained. To speak and think requires language, it is to 'swim in an inherited stream of images and words; we must accept these media on trust: we cannot create them.'²⁴ All human activity was seen as expressing the total personality of individuals or groups, with self-realization being the richest and most harmonious form of self-expression, which is what all people, whether they are aware of it or not, live for. With this notion of humanity it was the creativity of people that was emphasised, and people were seen to be living in worlds which they themselves had largely created. The most important members of society are its artists. According to Herder, 'A poet is a creator of a people; he gives it a world to contemplate...'²⁵ The reason for studying societies is not to control them but to appreciate their uniqueness, and at the same time to inspire people to realize their own unique potentialities. The egoistic individualism taken to be the defining characteristic of humanity by Enlightenment philosophers was held to be, along with the mechanical world-view, merely the culture of one defective society. As he wrote in *Letters on the Advancement of Mankind* (1793-7) 'Our part of the earth should be called not the wisest, but the most arrogant, aggressive, money-minded: what it has given [the rest of humankind] is not civilization but the destruction of the rudiments of their own cultures wherever they could achieve this.'²⁶

²³ For Herder's views on nature and the influence of these see H.B. Nisbet, *Herder and the Philosophy and History of Science*, (Cambridge: Modern Humanities Research Association, 1970).

²⁴ Cited Berlin, *Vico and Herder*, p.168.

²⁵ Cited *ibid.* p.203.

²⁶ Cited *ibid.* p.160.

It was Herder who inspired the comparative study of language, literature, folktales and myths of both Europeans and non-Europeans, and the development of history and historical method, including hermeneutics, in nineteenth century Germany.²⁷ He also inspired the *Naturphilosophen*, who argued for a non-mechanistic view of nature. Such developments led to efforts to create the new syntheses of Fichte, Schelling and Hegel, the most important of which was Hegel. Hegel is important for (among other things), identifying three dimensions to culture. Rejecting Kant's notion of the preformed ego, the 'I' represented as a pure unity relating to itself, Hegel portrayed it as something which emerges in the development of the human organism from immediate sensitivity to self-consciousness through participation in the social and cultural life of society. In his early lectures he argued that the formative process of spirit or culture through which human organisms transcend their immediate engagement in the world to become egos, consists in three interdependent dialectical patterns: symbolic representation which operates through the medium of language; interaction on the basis of reciprocity of recognition which operates through moral relations; and the labour process which operates through the tool.²⁸ In his historical works Hegel attempted to show how the interweaving of these dialectical patterns, neither reducible to nor autonomous from each other, constitute the dynamics of societies.²⁹ At the same time these historical narratives were used by Hegel to legitimate the political institutions and cultural achievements of his own time by showing how they provided the vantage point and perspective from which past political institutions and cultural developments could be understood and evaluated.

With the characteristic penchant for reductionism of the Western intellectual tradition, each of these three dialectical patterns has been proposed by different thinkers as the basis of all cultural dynamics. As Jürgen Habermas pointed out:

Ernst Cassirer takes the dialectic of representation and makes it the guiding principle of a Hegelianized Kant interpretation, which at the same time is the foundation of a philosophy of symbolic forms. Georg Lukács interprets the movement of intellectual development from Kant to Hegel along the guide-line presented by the dialectic of labour, which at the same time guarantees the materialistic unity of subject and object in the world-historical formative process of the human species; finally, the neo-Hegelianism of a

²⁷ As Hans-Georg Gadamer argued in *Truth and Method* 2nd rev. ed., trans. revised by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, (New York: Continuum, 1993), chap.1.

²⁸ Jena Lectures of 1803-04 and 1805-06. The 1803-04 lectures have been translated in G.W.F. Hegel, *System of Ethical Life and First Philosophy of Spirit*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1979), pp.206-234 and the 1805-6 lectures in *Hegel and the Human Spirit*, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1983). The lectures have been critically examined by Jürgen Habermas in 'Labour and Interaction: Remarks on Hegel's Jena *Philosophy of Mind*, in *Theory and Practice* [1971] trans. John Viertel, (London: Heinemann, 1974), pp.142-169. The threefold division derives ultimately from the Pythagorean division between lovers of wisdom, lovers of honour and lovers of gain.

²⁹ In Hegel's mature work this division was subordinated to the division between Subjective, Objective and Absolute Spirit. However, contrary to Habermas' claim (ibid.) Hegel continued to give a central place to these struggles, particularly the struggle for recognition. On this see Robert R. Williams, *Hegel's Ethics of Recognition*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997). See also Axel Honneth *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*, trans. Joel Anderson, (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1996).

thinker such as Theodor Litt leads to a conception of the stepwise self-development of spirit which follows the pattern of the struggle for recognition.³⁰

More recently, the structuralists (and some post-structuralists) have attempted to reduce the dynamics of all culture to the 'dialectic or representation' - the operation of language and other systems of signs, most Western Marxists have followed Lukács and located the source of all cultural dynamics in the labour process, while symbolic interactionists and neo-Marxists, following George Herbert Mead, have located the dynamics of society in the struggle for recognition.³¹

EMERGENT FORMS IN CULTURE

What I am suggesting is not that all studies of culture have their roots in Hegel, or for that matter in Vico and Herder. The French tradition of cultural inquiry from Montesquieu through Durkheim to Lévi-Strauss, and the Anglophone tradition from the Scottish philosophical historians through Herbert Spencer, appear to have been developed largely independently of German thought. However, there have been no developments in the study of culture which cannot be seen as elaborating on one or another of the dialectical patterns identified by Hegel, or on some aspect of the relationship between these patterns.

This is not to claim that all aspects of human life can be understood in terms of the weaving of these three dialectical patterns of culture. Marx was important for revealing that the categories of economics, claimed by English economists to be part of the natural order of things, were part of a particular, and perhaps historically transient, culture. But Marx also argued that the market system, while based on culture, has developed dynamics of its own irreducible to the dynamics of culture.³² And Georg Simmel generalized this insight, arguing that it is not only socio-economic formations which had dynamics of their own. As he proclaimed:

Whenever life progresses beyond the animal level of culture, an internal contradiction appears... We speak of culture whenever life produces certain forms in which it expresses and realizes itself... But although these forms arise out of the life process, because of their unique constellation they do not share the restless rhythm of life, its ascent and descent, its constant renewal, its incessant divisions and reunifications... They acquire fixed identities, a logic and lawfulness of their own; this new rigidity inevitably places them at a distance

³⁰ Habermas, 'Labour and Interaction', in *Theory and Practice*, p.157f.

³¹ There has been a resurgence of interest in Mead's work in this regard within Germany. See for example, Hans Joas, *G.H. Mead: A Contemporary Re-Examination of his Thought*, trans. Raymond Meyer, (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1985).

³² Essentially, the market system of capitalism is an autonomous system emerging out of and then transforming the dialectic of labour. The dialectic of labour is itself a cultural process, as Aleksandr Bogdanov argued. See K.M. Jensen, *Beyond Marx and Mach: Aleksandr Bogdanov's Philosophy of Living Experience* (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1978).

from the spiritual dynamic which created them and which makes them independent... This characteristic of cultural processes was first noted in economic change.³³

Simmel set himself the task of examining the micro-forms which transcend dialectical processes, and social theorists since then have identified and examined the dynamics of a diversity of such formations (from Robert Michels's 'iron law of oligarchy' to Michel Foucault's 'discursive formations' and Pierre Bourdieu's 'cultural fields'). Other social theorists have attempted to analyse the relationships between diverse social formations.³⁴

Recognizing all three dialectical patterns together with the emergent cultural forms with their own dynamics in complex interaction with each other still does not do justice to the complexity of humanity. Individuals are more than products of biological, cultural and social dynamics. Clearly on the view that humans are cultural beings implies that they only become individuals through being encultured and socialized into these emergent forms. But individuals, like the dialectical patterns of culture and like social forms become, at least in some cases, more than the conditions of their emergence. They become, to some extent, self-determining. This is the aspect of humans on which existentialists, from Kierkegaard to Merleau-Ponty, focussed.

THE CONFLICT OF TRADITIONS AND THE NEW SCIENTIFIC REVOLUTION

The conception of humans as cultural beings presented here is clearly at odds with the tradition which originated with Xenophanes in which 'culture' is denigrated as the realm of belief and illusion in opposition to the way of truth - knowledge of God, of the forms, or of the laws of science. Until recently we have had an opposition between the humanities, concerned to understand, appropriate and critically reflect on our cultural heritage, in which humans have been seen as cultural beings, and the sciences, which have been concerned to acquire objective knowledge. Sociology, psychology and geography have been in the peculiar position of containing this dichotomy within their disciplines. What is the essence of this opposition? Partly it is the opposition between those committed to acknowledging the uniqueness of humans, and the uniqueness of different peoples and different individuals, and to showing how such uniqueness might be fully realized, and those committed to reductionist explanations enabling predictions to be made and control established over their objects of investigation. But there is a more fundamental opposition - and this should have become evident from my narrative - between those who have seen the world as a creative process of becoming and those who regard the experience of such time as an illusion, who are striving for timeless truths. In the past, efforts to defend a distinctive approach to the human sciences have not been taken very

³³ Georg Simmel, 'The Conflict in Modern Culture', in Donald N. Levine ed. *George Simmel on Individual and Social Forms*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), pp.375-393, p.375f.

³⁴ Fernand Braudel has provided the best theoretical analysis of such social complexity using the notion of multiple times and multiple spaces. See Braudel 'History and the Social Sciences', *On History*, (Chicago: Uni. of Chicago Press, 1980), pp.25-54.

seriously, at least in Anglophone nations, because if the 'scientific' view of reality were valid, then the humanities, assuming humans to be in process of becoming, are dealing in illusions.

However, in this century the natural sciences are undergoing a transformation. Herder's anti-mechanistic conception of nature is coming of age. As Ilya Prigogine has argued: 'we are in a period of scientific revolution - one in which the very position and meaning of the scientific approach are undergoing reappraisal - a period not unlike the birth of the scientific approach in ancient Greece or of its renaissance in the time of Galileo.³⁵ This revolution involves recognizing the priority of becoming over being, of the irreducibility of complexity, and that we, as conscious subjects, are part of reality being investigated. The original French title of Prigogine and Stenger's book *Order out of Chaos* was *The New Alliance*, implying that the natural sciences are now aligned with the humanities.³⁶ Such developments have been taking place mainly in the physical sciences, giving rise to the odd situation described by the quantum physicist David Bohm where:

... just when physics is moving away from mechanism, biology and psychology are moving closer to it. If this trend continues it may well be that scientists will be regarding living and intelligent beings as mechanical, while they suppose that inanimate matter is too complex and subtle to fit into the limited categories of mechanism.³⁷

Since then, there has developed an increasingly strong stream of anti-mechanistic, anti-reductionist thinking in biology and neuro-physiology fueled by developments in complexity theory partly inspired by the work of Prigogine.³⁸ Gerald Edelman, the Nobel Laureate at the forefront of neurophysiological research has argued for the reality of the consciousness, and conceived this as not only an emergent phenomenon of the brain (as did Roger Sperry) but also of culture.³⁹ Human life is seen as an emergent phenomenon, or rather, complex of phenomena, irreducible to and inexplicable in terms of the conditions of its emergence.⁴⁰ This involves the capacity of humans to orient themselves through stories, and we now have a science which justifies such a view of humans and justifies a central place to story-telling.⁴¹ And what we are now seeing is recognition that stories have a place in describing nature itself, since

³⁵ Ilya Prigogine, *From Being to Becoming: Time and Complexity in the Physical Sciences*, (San Francisco: Freeman, 1980), p.xiif.

³⁶ See Ilya Prigogine and Isabelle Stengers, 'The New Alliance', *Scientia*, 112, (1977): 319-332.

³⁷ David Bohm, 'Some Remarks on the Notion of Order' in *Towards a Theoretical Biology, 2 Sketches*, ed. C.H Waddington, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1969), p.34.

³⁸ An overview of the history of theories of evolution showing the recent advances in anti-reductionist thinking, see David J. Depew and Bruce H. Weber, *Darwinism Evolving*, (Cambridge Mass. M.I.T. Press, 1996).

³⁹ In particular see Gerald Edelman, *Bright Air, Brilliant Fire: On the Matter of the Mind*, (Harmondsworth: Allen Lane, 1992).

⁴⁰ For a survey of such ideas, see Brian Goodwin, *How the Leopard Changed its Spots: The Evolution of Complexity*, (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1994).

⁴¹ As Alicia Juarrero has argued in *Dynamics in Action: Intentional Behaviour as a Complex System*, (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002), esp. chap.14.

only stories can interpret a world that is really creative and gives a place to autonomous agents endowed with endogenous activity.⁴²

SCIENCE, TRUTH AND NARRATIVE

Where does this leave science's claim to be objective truth? Partly this was based on the commitment to prediction and to representing 'creative becoming'⁴³ as an illusion of the senses which could be overcome by reason and mathematics; in other words, to grasp the eternal reality behind changing appearances. What is the status of claims to knowledge which extol the limits to prediction and affirm the reality of creative becoming? To begin with, logical positivism which made prediction and the eternal realm of logical truths central to its celebration of science and denigration of the humanities failed in its attempt to ground mathematics in logic, or to find a form of logic which is beyond further questioning. Then its characterization of science was shown to be a total misrepresentation of how science actually operates by historically oriented philosophers of science. So not only did it become evident that logical positivists were not been able to ground claims to knowledge in some absolute, but it was shown that what scientists do is much more like what the humanist intellectuals do - they try to understand the world.⁴⁴ Critics of logical positivism thus confirmed the Vicovian insights of Benedetto Croce, that scientific activity is itself an historical process, with each experiment, each observation, each publication and each reading of a publication being historical events which must be appreciated as such for science to be possible.⁴⁵ And the ultimate goal of inquiry is to understand particular historical events and to bring them to life in the present. These insights generated a major problem, which once understood, could be resolved by appeal to the same Vicovian tradition. How can we choose between different ways of understanding the world? Here we find the traditional charge of those committed to discovering eternal truths against convention, customs and narratives, and against the humanities, the charge of relativism. It is at this point that it was realized that it is only through narrative that it is possible to escape relativism. Supporting Vico's claim for the priority of rhetoric over logic and mathematical abstraction, Alasdair MacIntyre showed how the acceptance of radically new theories is dependent upon the capacity of their defenders to construct narratives in terms of their theories. Since major advances in knowledge transcend old assumptions and create new ways of arguing, changing the standards of relevance and proof, they cannot be evaluated in terms of existing criteria. The superiority of the new theories is only revealed by the

⁴² See Anton Markoš, 'In the quest for novelty: Kauffman's biosphere and Lotman's semiosphere', *Sign Systems Studies*: 32.1/2, 2004.

⁴³ The notion of 'creative becoming' derives from Bergson and Whitehead.

⁴⁴ On this see Michael Polanyi, *The Study of Man*, (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1958), and Maurice Finocciaro, 'Scientific Discoveries as Growth of Understanding', T. Nickles ed. *Scientific Discovery, Logic and Rationality*, (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1980), pp.235-255.

⁴⁵ For a brief but excellent characterization of Croce's ideas, see Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, *op.cit.* pp.190-204.

comprehension they facilitate of the achievements and limitations of the theories transcended. As Alasdair MacIntyre pointed out:

Wherein lies the superiority of Galileo to his predecessors? The answer is that he, for the first time, enables the work of all his predecessors to be evaluated by a common set of standards. The contributions of Plato, Aristotle, the scholars at Merton College, Oxford and Padua, the work of Copernicus himself at last all fall into place. Or to put matters in another and equivalent way: the history of late medieval science can finally be cast into a coherent narrative.... What the scientific genius, such as Galileo, achieves in his transitions, then, is not only a new way of understanding nature, but also and inseparably a new way of understanding the old sciences way of understanding... It is from the stand-point of the new science that the continuities of narrative history are reestablished.⁴⁶

Once this had been pointed out it became blindingly obvious that all those philosophers and scientists of the past who claimed to have discovered some absolute object of or foundation for knowledge, from Plato to Descartes and to Bertrand Russell, had only been able to explain and defend their claims through precisely the narrative forms they denigrated.⁴⁷ In fact what distinguishes a discipline as a genuine 'science', a body of knowledge and research programmes which can be said to advance, is that it has historians producing narratives through which various claims to knowledge are evaluated, problems defined and members of the discipline oriented for research. The new science being developed by Prigogine and others is defensible because it has provided the basis for a new narrative that reveals both the achievements and limitations of the natural science of the past, and through this, reveals how the new science is advancing beyond it.⁴⁸ But perhaps more importantly from the perspective of the humanities and cultural inquiry, this narrative can situate and explain why the humanities and humanistically oriented human sciences in which the reductionist methods of the natural sciences have been eschewed have achieved such penetrating insights, while those who have attempted to model their disciplines on their understanding of the natural sciences have gained such paltry results.

WHAT ARE NARRATIVES?

What then are narratives? While narratives have been studied sporadically since Aristotle, it has only been in recent decades that sustained efforts have been made to comprehend what narratives as such are (although these more recent studies of narrative were foreshadowed by

⁴⁶ Alasdair MacIntyre, 'Epistemological Crises, Dramatic Narrative and the Philosophy of Science.' *Monist*, 60, (1977): 459-60 & 467.

⁴⁷ J.M. Bernstein has shown how Descartes' defence of the suspension of narrative and historical legitimation is legitimated narratively. See *The Philosophy of the Novel: Lukacs, Marxism and the Dialectics of Form*, (Brighton, Harvester Press, 1984), pp.157-79.

⁴⁸ Ilya Prigogine and Isabelle Stengers *Order out of Chaos* (Toronto: Bantam Books) and Depew and Weber *Darwinism Evolving* each provide such narratives. For another example, see Gerry Webster and Brian Goodwin, *Form and Transformation*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

literary theorists in Russia in the 1920s). Structuralist semiotics has been partly responsible for this because examination of the way components of communication are organized from the phoneme and the morpheme upwards virtually demanded an examination of the way larger units are organized in discourses; and the most significant form of discourse is the narrative. In attending to narratives they also came to realize their ubiquity. As Roland Barthes noted:

The narratives of the world are numberless. Narrative is first and foremost a prodigious variety of genres, themselves distributed amongst different substances - as though any material were fit to receive man's stories. ... [N]arrative is present in myth, legend, fable, tale, novella, epic, history, tragedy, drama, comedy, mime, painting ... stained glass windows, cinema, comics, news item, conversation. ... [N]arrative is international, transhistorical, transcultural: it is simply there, like life itself.⁴⁹

However, the structuralists ultimately failed to characterize the nature of narratives in structuralist terms, and, more importantly, failed to explain their ubiquity or to reveal their importance to human life.⁵⁰ The service they performed was to provide a point of departure for others, most importantly for Paul Ricoeur and David Carr.⁵¹ For Ricoeur, narrative is the fundamental structure of the experience of time.⁵² Its ultimate referent is lived time. At the same time narrative is central to human creativity. Innovations are made by inventing plots by means of which 'goals, causes, and chance are brought together within the temporal unity of whole and complete action.'⁵³ A complete action can consist of a number of other actions. It can be the action of an individual - from some particular achievement to having lived a whole life, or of a group, such building a house or winning a war, founding a nation or establishing or destroying a civilization.⁵⁴

⁴⁹ Roland Barthes, 'Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives' in *Image, Music, Text*, (London: Fontana Press, 1977), pp.79-124.

⁵⁰ This is not to say that the work on narrative by Lévi-Strauss, Barthes, Greimas, Todorov and Genette has not been important, but most narratologists now accept that their work leaves out what is most important about narrative. On this see Art Berman, *From the New Criticism to Deconstruction*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), pp.122-132. However, the defects of the structuralists had already been identified in the Russian formalists by M.M. Bakhtin and P.N. Medvedev in *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship*, [1928], trans. Albert J. Wehrle, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985), chap.6.

⁵¹ Ricoeur is not the only important 'post-structuralist' narratologist, but his theory of narrative encompasses almost all the insights of other theorists (with the possible exceptions of Bakhtin and Carr).

⁵² Ricoeur defines his relationship to structuralism in 'What is a Text? Explanation and Understanding', *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, ed. and trans. by John B. Thompson, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981). This relationship closely parallels the relationship between Bakhtin/Medvedev and the formalists.

⁵³ Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, 3 volumes [1983-84], (Chicago: Uni. of Chicago Press, 1984-85), Vol. I, ix. There are significant differences between historical and fictional narratives, which are addressed by Ricoeur in Volumes II and III, but for our present purposes these can be disregarded.

⁵⁴ The way in which actions are integrated into broader actions, both of individuals and groups, and the connection between this and the structure of narratives, has been carefully analysed by David Carr in *Time, Narrative, and History*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991).

According to Ricoeur there are three moments of mimesis in narrative - prefiguration, configuration and refiguration.⁵⁵ Firstly, life itself is prefigured as an inchoate narrative. It is for this reason that we have a pre-understanding of what human action is, of its semantics, its symbolism, its temporality. The second moment of mimesis involves the representation of action according to specific rules of emplotment, that is, the making of a structure to configure this pre-understanding. Through the activity of emplotment a quasi-world of action and characters is generated. The third moment of mimesis is the reception and actualization of that structure. People are confronted with and drawn into the quasi-world, distancing them from their own life-worlds, revealing and challenging their taken for granted horizons of expectations to refigure their worlds.⁵⁶ They are provided with room to manoeuvre, to think about the way they construe their worlds and the way they live.⁵⁷ They are able to refigure their worlds and their lives by appropriating the new structure.⁵⁸ The clearest exemplification of the relationship between these three moments of mimesis in narrative occurred in Russia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as novelists based their characters and stories on real people, and individuals openly modelled their lives on fictional characters and their stories.⁵⁹

THE ROLE OF NARRATIVES IN CULTURE

With narrative thus briefly characterized, we can now consider what role narratives play in culture. To begin with, producing and telling stories are obviously a major component of the dialectic of representation. It could be argued to have a privileged place since human life is already organized by narratives and people are already living their lives as inchoate narratives. As Vico argued, we can understand the human world better because it is a human creation. Historical narratives are therefore a major component of the dialectic of representation. But more importantly, in the light of the failure of efforts to solve the problems of epistemology through logic, and the recognition of the role of narrative in rationality, narratives must be regarded as the matrix within which all other forms of representation must be legitimated.⁶⁰

⁵⁵ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, chap.3. 'Mimesis', usually taken to mean 'imitation', is accorded a more creative function in Ricoeur's philosophy.

⁵⁶ The notion of 'horizon of expectations', deriving from Husserl and Gadamer, is more fully developed by Hans Jauss than Ricoeur in his 'Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory', *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, trans. Timothy Bahi, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982).

⁵⁷ As Ross Chambers argued in *Room for Maneuver*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

⁵⁸ Strangely, Ricoeur was concerned with the refiguring of people's worlds, and dealt with the refiguring of their lives only as an afterthought. David Carr is more forceful on the relation between narratives and action than Ricoeur. On the differences and similarities between Ricoeur and Carr, see the debate between them in David Wood ed., *On Paul Ricoeur: Narrative and Interpretation*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1991).

⁵⁹ See Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual*, (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1981), chap.2, and Gare, *Nihilism Inc.*, chap.10.

⁶⁰ An argument somewhat along these lines has been made by Walter R. Fisher in *Human Communication as Narration: Toward a Philosophy of Reason, Value, and Action*, (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1989).

That the dialectic of recognition and the medium of moral relations through which it operates are conditioned by the dialectic of representation was acknowledged by Hegel and by those who have followed him most closely, for instance Theodor Litt, George Herbert Mead and Axel Honneth. Jacques Lacan, following Emile Benveniste, argued the dialectic of representation is so basic to the formation of identity that it can be virtually reduced to it. For Lacan the subject is strung along by the unfolding of the signifying chain.⁶¹ It is through names, pronouns and labels that individuals are constituted as subjects and moral agents. However, the relation between the dialectics of representation and recognition is much more complex than Lacan allowed.⁶² One is not situated in social space as a moral agent simply through individual words, but through narratives. As Alasdair MacIntyre argued:

I can only answer the question 'What am I to do?' if I can answer the prior question 'Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?' We enter human society, that is, with one or more imputed characters - roles into which we have been drafted - and we have to learn what they are in order to be able to understand how others respond to us and how our responses to them are apt to be construed. It is through hearing stories ... that children learn or mislearn what a child and what a parent is, what the caste of characters may be in the drama into which they have been born and what the ways of the world are. Deprive children of stories and you leave them unscripted, anxious stutterers in their actions and in their words.⁶³

Social groups through which individuals are recognized and granted an identity, from friendships to political movements and from business organizations to nations, are constituted by narratives.

Finally, while the dialectic of labour operating through the medium of the tool is often taken to be not only independent of the other two dialectical patterns and sometimes as the sole basis of the dynamism of society, the kind of co-operation required for the use, let alone further development of all but the most elementary tools would be impossible without an orientation to the world and the structuring of social relationships through the dialectics of representation and recognition embodying and utilizing narratives. Complex projects of joint action, involving the integration of a number of subordinate actions, take the form of a narrative and must be narrated by the actors to coordinate their actions with each other. This precedes its recounting by the actors or by others to a broader public. The simplest forms of joint action are hierarchically organized with people being reduced to instruments of the leader's project or projects. Such narratives are 'monologic'. Democratically organized joint projects must encompass the arguments between people with diverse perspectives and interests to reach a consensus on what goals to pursue and how to pursue them. Such narratives are 'polyphonic'.

⁶¹ In *Écrits*, (London: Routledge, 1989), p.316, Lacan claims 'A signifier is that which represents the subject for another signifier.'

⁶² As is evident from the work of Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*.

⁶³ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, (Notre Dame, Notre Dame University Press, 2nd ed. 1984), p.216.

What is the relationship between narratives and emergent forms that have taken on a life of their own? These are in constant tension. In taking on a life of their own social forms transform the conditions of their emergence, that is, associations of humans as cultural beings, transforming them into instruments of their own functioning. People participating in such forms might still define their participation in terms of narratives, but these will not be integrated into a narrative defining the goal of the formation, and are likely to be in irreconcilable conflict with the narratives of other participants in the formation. For instance as organizations become bureaucratized the narratives on which they are based tend to disintegrate, their goals tend to lose definition, and careerists totally indifferent to these goals, conceiving their actions in terms of their own personal advancement and their power struggles, not only penetrate such institutions, but displace those who take the original goals of the organization seriously. Members of such institutions 'lose the plot'. Those people claiming to be social scientists who model their approach on what now must be regarded as the misrepresentation of an outmoded form of natural science - notably mainstream economists and reductionist psychologists - are effectively instruments of such forms - and usually careerists. They are in opposition to those who are struggling to reformulate narratives which will subordinate such forms to human ends - or at least enable people to free themselves from domination by these forms.

This drama is illustrated by responses of intellectuals, academics and artists to the autonomous dynamics of capitalism. In the nineteenth century economists, modelling their discipline on physics,⁶⁴ came to regard the economy as an end in itself, and people only as of significance if they were utilizable by the economy. Malthus exemplified this attitude. In opposition to this Marx produced a narrative which cast the economic system, functioning according to dynamics transcending people's intentions, as an aberration which people, or at least those most oppressed by this system, the proletariat, were called upon to overcome. In the twentieth century John Maynard Keynes offered an alternative narrative according to which the market need not be abolished, but could and should be reduced to an instrument for human ends. This does not mean that Marx and Keynes did not use abstract forms of reasoning and analysis (or for that matter, engage in empirical research). But for the most part, they did not commit what Whitehead called 'the fallacy of misplaced concreteness' and take these abstractions for reality, although Marxists and Keynesians certainly did, and both Marx and Keynes occasionally gave them some justification for doing so.⁶⁵ Their abstractions were ultimately subordinated to their narratives that offered people the possibility of taking responsibility for the future, for regaining control of the dynamics of society in the interests of

⁶⁴ This has been demonstrated by Andrew S. Skinner, *A System of Social Science: Papers Relating to Adam Smith*, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1979).

⁶⁵ See Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, [1925], (New York: Mentor, 1948), p.52. Whitehead himself criticised this tendency in economics (ibid. p.179). Marxists often interpret Marx as an economist who discovered the laws of development of humanity, ignoring the subtitle of *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*. Keynes has been criticized by Geoffrey Hodgson for forgetting history, but his failing was not comparable to the 'barren universality' of his successors. See Geoffrey M. Hodgson, *How Economics Forgot History: The Problem of Historical Specificity in the Social Sciences*, London and New York: Routledge, 2001, chaps. 15, 16 & 17.

human welfare. Neo-classical economists associated with the rise of neo-liberalism, embracing a positivistic philosophy of science and infatuated by mathematics and computer models are again construing humans as cogs of the economic machine, this time, of the global economic machine, debasing people to 'human resources'.⁶⁶ Those responding to neo-liberalism are fighting a rearguard action to revive the tradition of historical thinking in economics, both of economic theory and of the institutions of the economy.⁶⁷ More specifically, those attempting to expose how institutions are being corrupted and debased are retelling their histories. Bill Readings book *The University in Ruins* illustrates this.⁶⁸ Such histories are the first step in fighting such debasement.

What is the relationship between narratives and individuals? It is essentially through narratives that individuals become more than the conditions of their existence. It is individuals who utilize the inherent reflexivity of the narrative form to question the narratives they have been encultured by and socialized into, who consider alternative versions of these narratives, who begin to construct their lives as unfinished stories in relation to chosen versions of the stories of the communities and organizations within which they are participating, who thereby take responsibility for their own lives and the culture of their society, who are the creative agents of culture, of society and of history.⁶⁹ Such people are 'authentic' - authors of their own becoming.⁷⁰ The kinds of narrative that can be developed will of course be dependent upon social conditions. As Lucien Goldmann noted, the first phase of capitalism had a place for a stratum of individuals who could play 'an active and responsible role in economic, social and political life, and therefore in cultural life'.⁷¹ It was in this environment that the *Bildungsroman* developed, a narrative of self-education and self-development.⁷² As social reality became increasingly irrational, the works of Franz Kafka and the existentialist and absurdist writers who followed him revealed the *angst* of striving to give narrative coherence to one's life in a

⁶⁶ On this, see Philip Mirowski, 'Shall I Compare Thee to a Minkowski-Ricardo-Leontief-Metzler Matrix of the Hicks-Mosak Kind?', *Economics and Philosophy*, 3, (1987): 67-96. Mirowski is one of the most trenchant critic of the mathematization of economics. See also his *Against Mechanism: Protecting Economics from Science*, Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1988; *More Heat Than Light: Economics as Social Physics*, N.Y.: Cambridge University Press, 1989 and Philip Mirowski, *Machine Dreams: Economics Becomes a Cyborg Science*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

⁶⁷ See Geoffrey M. Hodgson, *How Economics Forgot History: The Problem of Historical Specificity in Social Science*, (London: Routledge, 2001). See also Alex Callinicos, *Theories and Narratives: Reflections on the Philosophy of History*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995).

⁶⁸ Bill Readings, *The University in Ruins*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996).

⁶⁹ The relationship between narratives and personal identity has been explored by Ricoeur in the essays in *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey, (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1992). However, perhaps the best and most interesting study of this derives from the study of a very young child in Katherine Nelson ed., *Narratives from the Crib*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989). On the other hand, Jürgen Habermas has represented the capacity to organize one's own life as a biography as the highest stage of moral development. See 'Moral Development and Ego Identity', *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, [1976], (London: Heinemann, 1975), p.87.

⁷⁰ Carr has defended the notion of authenticity in such terms in *Time, Narrative, and History*, pp.86-94.

⁷¹ Lucien Goldmann, *Sociology of the Novel*, trans. Alan Sheridan, (N.Y.: Tavistock, 1975), p.169.

⁷² On this, see Franco Moeretti, *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture*, (London: Verso, 1987).

world dominated by incomprehensible social forms and mindless functionaries. In a world that has rendered people totally powerless within a global market, 'postmodern' narratives such as Brett Easton Ellis' *American Psycho*, have attempted to portray life where there is not only no coherence in the social order, but all attempts by individuals to achieve narrative coherence in their own lives have been abandoned. But to construct narratives about this, historical or fictional, is to rebel against such incoherence. Postmodernists who debunk narratives as such are effectively capitulating to the triumph of the global market and corporate power. It is people struggling for both coherence and adequacy to the world through narratives who are the opponents of decadence, the decay of the narratives being lived out and the dominance of emergent social forms with dynamics inimical to creative freedom and human dignity. It is they who regenerate democratic institutions and societies by reformulating and reviving old, or creating new narrative forms.

CONCLUSION

As I proposed to do at the beginning of this essay, I have presented a very schematic narrative. However, it does provide an example of what a narrative is, and now, very briefly I will review what I have presented. To begin with, I have offered an emplotment, a unification of a diversity of events, ideas and developments into one action. This 'action' consists of a number of constituent 'actions'. Firstly, Greek philosophy, defining negatively 'culture' as the changing ephemeral aspects of human society, thought and beliefs in opposition to knowledge of what is eternal, and the consolidation of this with the development of modern science; secondly, the inversion argued for by Vico which made 'culture' the privileged object of inquiry and conceived of science as part of culture; thirdly, the 'naming' of culture by Herder and the development of the notion of diverse 'cultures', together with the suggestion that it is our understanding of nature which needs to be brought into line with this notion of humans as cultured, creative beings; fourthly, the elaboration by Fichte, Schelling and Hegel and his followers of Herder's ideas, postulating three dimensions of culture, and the subsequent development of the humanities, further elaborating the concept of culture - although without succeeding in displacing the mechanistic view of humans promulgated by the 'hard' sciences; fifthly, the breakdown within science of the project of gaining knowledge of the eternal reality behind appearances and the development of a conception of nature as a process of creative becoming justifying the view of humans developed in the humanities, together with the resolution of epistemological problems in the natural sciences by recourse to narrative; sixthly the crisis of narrative associated with postmodernism, neo-liberalism and the globalization of the economy inspiring the development of narratology which is now further enriching our understanding of all dimensions of culture, of individuality, and of what it is to be human.

The presentation of this narrative has been at the same time an evaluation of the events recounted, suggesting that a culture which celebrates the eternal, since it will assume there is only one truth, will tend to be aggressive, intolerant and oppressive towards other cultures; but more significantly, suggesting that this celebration is wrong. Although in the schematic form in

which I have presented it only those sympathetic to my position will be convinced by this narrative, narratives, to the extent they are successful, compel agreement with the value judgements being made. And narratives do not merely compel intellectual agreement. They address people's way of engaging in the world, their orientations for action, the way they live, and orient them to live differently.

What is being suggested is that at this stage of history, with all that is associated with the humanities, and even the sciences now that they are breaking out of the Platonist mould, under threat from the autonomous dynamics of the economic system and those who serve it: corrupt governments, careerist administrators and academics, and most importantly, the high priests of global market forces, neo-classical economists, one of the most important intellectual tasks is the defence of narrative. This task is being undertaken not only by literary and film theorists, but also by psychologists (Donald Polkinghorne,⁷³ Jerome Bruner, and many others), philosophers (pre-eminently, Ricoeur, MacIntyre and Carr), economists (Mirowski and Hodgson) and radical social theorists (Callinicos).⁷⁴ Rather than reducing humans to objects to be controlled, narratologists are attacking social problems by critically investigating the narratives dominating people's lives, and showing how they can be empowered, how they can become authentic agents, by reflecting on the narratives they are living out, gaining access to new narrative forms and by participating in the creation of new narratives. The narrative I have offered here is a defence of their work and a call for further work in this direction.

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⁷³ Donald E. Polkinghorne, *Narrative Knowing and the Human Sciences*, (N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1988).

⁷⁴ Other philosophers are now also paying attention to narrative. See the anthology edited by Thomas R. Flynn and Dalia Judovitz, *Dialectic and Narrative*, (N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1993); also Bill Martin, 'Analytic Philosophy's Narrative Turn: Quine, Rorty, Davidson', *Literary Theory After Davidson*, ed. Reed Way Dasenbrook, (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993).