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Hide, Hiding, Hidden: Narrative as Concealment and Revelation

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What we hide and what is hidden from us is concealed, secreted from view. Like the hide of an animal, it both masks and protects our interior from the intrusion of all that is exterior to it. To hide oneself or an object or even to hide thoughts or feelings; to be hidden from apprehension (in both its meanings); and to be hiding or in hiding—all alternate between a state of affairs and a process. "Hidden stories" conjure all these senses, be they stories about the hidden or stories that are hidden or what is hidden in the act of story-telling. Before engaging in the "hidden stories" explored by the contributors to this Issue of Double Dialogues, we shall explore what is hidden in the act of story-telling, or, more formally expressed, the concealed and the revealed dimensions of narrative viewed in experiential terms.

I

Let us begin with a commonplace of experience. Both the act of writing and the act of reading, whether framed in experiential terms more broadly or in cognitive terms more narrowly, are deeply entwined in the process of revealing that which seems to have been concealed previously. The revelatory powers, if not the purpose, attributed to the arts have been variously connected to debates over the relationship between the arts and truth, the arts and morality, the arts and reality, even the arts and spirituality. In what follows, however, let us keep our focus upon those acts of writing and reading out of which our conscious encounters with narrative emerge.

When reflecting upon a series of his stories written between 1974 and 1978, John Berger found that, although writing for him had "no territory of its own," the very act of writing was "nothing except the act of approaching the experience written about" (1979: 6). Similarly, "the act of reading the written text" for him was "a comparable act of approach" (1979:6). But how do we approach experience? Berger responds as follows:

experience folds in upon itself, refers backwards and forwards to itself through the referents of hope and fear; and, by the use of metaphor...it is continually comparing like with unlike, what is small with what is large, what is near with what is distant. And so the act of approaching a given moment of experience involves both scrutiny (closeness) and the capacity to connect (distance). The movement of writing resembles that of a shuttle on a loom: repeatedly it approaches and withdraws, closes in and takes its distance. Unlike a shuttle, however, it is not fixed to a static frame (1979: 6).

Berger's foray stops short of exploring the nature of story-telling as distinct from that of the story-teller and village gossip. Perhaps instinctively he realises how far removed we remain from being able to articulate with any certainty the necessary and sufficient criteria of narrative, of what all narratives and only narratives have in common. Consider, for instance, the seven year-old Alyssa here. She may well have the capacity to recognise and talk about water without any knowledge whatsoever of its defining molecular structure. Conversely, Alyssa may well understand that people are considered bald even if they partly lack hair upon their scalps and yet not know, in the particular case of her wigless nonna, whether or not she is bald. So it is in the case of narrative. And even if we could define narrative, that still may tell us nothing about its significance for us, let alone about why we are so captive to what narratives reveal and conceal.

Of course, it may be counter-argued that the notion of narrative is an open-ended one for no other reason than new examples are continually being added to the store of narratives. Therefore, what act of writing qualifies as a narrative is more appropriately construed in terms of what Ludwig Wittgenstein (1945) dubbed "family resemblances" in which "we see a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing" (§66); indeed, we "extend our concept" (of narrative in this case)

as in spinning a thread we twist fibre on fibre. And the strength of the thread resides not in the fact that some one fibre runs through its whole length, but in the overlapping of many fibres (§67).

Yet, as the young Alyssa is introduced to new examples of foods, then the category of her meals keeps

expanding. However, we would be mistaken to think that the defining characteristics of what comprises a meal have changed as distinct from the instances falling within the category of meals. Nor, to return to the analogy of fibre, whilst it may be true that we cannot locate any one characteristic or property common to all narratives, need it follow that narrative cannot be defined?

Perhaps defining features are not immediately observable within narratives themselves, something those such as Jerome Bruner (1991) and David Herman (2009), who have proposed a multiplicity of key textual characteristics, have nonetheless found. Perhaps they are hidden because the features in question have less to do with narrative objects and more to do with narrative activities. And those activities, in turn, can be equally related to those doing the narrating and those responding to it. From this perspective of activities, narratives can be defined by their relational properties, explicable in terms of either the functions or purposes they serve or the procedures or practices by which they gain communal recognition. Amongst the purposes narrative serves in the visual, performing, and literary arts is the ordering of experience both temporally and evaluatively. It may well be that narratives, when embedded within, say, educational, legal, or religious institutions, serve didactic, social, or ritual purposes independently of their artistic merit or intentions. Nevertheless, narratives so contextualised appear to replicate narratives in the artistic realm. They represent, express, or re-enact experience and they are experientially received by viewers, listeners, and readers. Even the most blatantly fictionalised of narrated experiences is experienced by its recipients albeit in a mediated, if not an hypothetical or second-order, manner. Seven year-old Alyssa may herself have never encountered an aardvark grieving for its young, let alone any other creature or person in that situation. Yet that need not preclude her, prompted through conversations with her nonna, from imaginatively re-experiencing the grief related. Moreover, to pursue this example, there is always the possibility that, at least initially, the narrative may have implicitly failed to fulfil its subsequently understood function for Alyssa in the role of reader. Historically speaking, that fate potentially awaits all narratives as readerships wax and wane.

Nothing we have said so far should suggest that narrative and experience should be equated; rather, we have been exploring something of the complex relationship between them in terms of activities that authors and audiences engage. But before explicating more fully our passing comment about the ordering of experience in temporal and evaluative ways—perhaps at the kernel of what might be ultimately understood to be hidden in and by stories—let us pursue the appeal to narrative activities, for these, too, can be unexpectedly concealed.

Consider our seven year-old Alyssa once more. What must she do for us to describe her as, say, reading a narrative? Whilst her personality, gender, ethnicity, class, and age might prove interesting sociologically, such factors do not illuminate her actual role here. Whilst gauging her psychological state—what is she thinking? what is she feeling?—before, during, and after the narrative act might satisfy our curiosity, it again does not analyse her actual role. So, would observing her flicking pages one after the other or dragging her cursor down an electronic screen be an act of reading a narrative? Or would we be more assured if she were sub-vocalising, mouthing various words or phrases as her eyes scanned across the page or screen? If she happened to be looking at a reproduction of stone fissures indistinguishable from utterances inscribed in a cursive script, is she reading? What makes such questions peculiar is that we have slipped into assuming that brute actions are one and the same as participating in an activity, in a practice, in which various actions comprise components of following a set of constitutive rules. In other words, these and other specifiable actions are, as John Rawls (1955: 25) and John Searle (1969: 51-52) amongst others have long argued, what "count as" reading in particular contexts because, as the former expresses it,

In the case of actions specified by practices it is logically impossible to perform them outside the stage setting provided by those practices, for unless there is the practice, and unless the requisite proprieties are fulfilled, whatever one does, whatever movements one makes, will fail to count as a form of action which the practice specifies (1955: 25).

If the activity of reading narratives can be legitimately cast in terms of a practice, then that clarifies why it is that Alyssa learnt to read, not by the inculcation of a set of rules, but by her continuing engagement with the practice. There were no rules for reading, to adopt the stance first promulgated by James Ross (1974), other than those that may have been relevant for developing subsets of linguistic skills—the morpho-phonological and the syntactic—

by which she could negotiate between oral and written media. Indeed, there were no rules for narrative other than those that may have been relevant for developing the meta-language—plot and characters, conflicts and situations, climax and resolution—by which she could begin to analyse individual narratives as objects.

Let us end this brief enquiry into the relationship between narrative and experience by returning to their temporal and evaluative facets. If William Labov has been instrumental in drawing our attention to the way temporality is manifested not only in the origin of verbal narratives but also in the very clausal sequences of their utterances, he has also identified the primacy of their evaluative nature that rationalises the telling of the tale in the first place. As Labov succinctly states, there is "a more basic consideration" than, for instance, arguing whether narrative utterances portray experiences truthfully or not or in causal sequence or not (2006: 37). The principal issue is that "a narrative is about something" which in practice entails "that it is judged to be reportable" (2006: 37-38). Narrative activities, in other words, must also have a point or significance that goes beyond merely reporting a state of affairs ("Nonna is nervous") or the location of an agent or entity ("Nonna is home"). When previously mentioning Alyssa's initial difficulty with the story of the grieving aardvark, we cast this in terms of her inability at first to anchor it to her experience. Its point or significance remained hidden until her nonna intervened. Perhaps, it is not accidental that Alyssa, on reaching the point at which we read narratives so often concealed in solitude and silence, has entered the practice of reading their significance revealed through solidarity and conversation.

II

Collectively, the many contributors to "Hidden Stories: Interior Worlds" range across visual, performing, and literary arts and artists. However, the second part of this paper wishes to avoid becoming a patchwork of précis. Instead, its purpose is to present the kinds of questions raised by contributors and, at the same time, depict something of the challenging conceptual terrain in which their notions of hidden stories nestle. Starting with the visual arts, whereas Deborah Walker asks what is it that Giorgio de Chirico wanted to hide about the sources of his early Turin streetscapes, Rob Haysom and Les Morgan question why the Antipodean and British modernist painters, Arnold Shore and David Bomberg respectively, remained hidden from critical acclaim. Here, we are confronted by a contrast between a psychological and a sociological approach respectively. It is a contrast that assigns agency to artist and audience respectively whilst simultaneously construing the process of hiding as an intentional act: both a deliberate act and an act directed at some goal or object. On the one hand, Walker queries why an artist would want to hide the actual perceptual sources and experience occasioning his or her work and what that might imply about the creative process. More specifically, she asks whether the fragmented, imaginative depiction of Turin—towers, statues, arcades—can be seen as de Chirico's attempt to render metaphysical themes from Nietzsche on canvas. On the other hand, Haysom pursues the notion of audience less as individuals and more as art institutions, especially in the form of public galleries. Readers are asked to consider if institutions are prey to the stipulations of benefactors and manipulations of the art market as much as they are to spatial constraints and curatorial prejudices, not to say to the promotion of the arts as part of the entertainment industry. Morgan similarly plots the ways in which the antipathetic attitudes of intellectuals, critics, and artists can be shaped by the socio-political institutions of the day to the point of hiding the substantial contribution of a working class Jew.

Principally focusing upon cinema are Stephen Goddard on what lies hidden behind the facades in *Cat People* [1942], Leon Marvell on what can be brought out of hiding by the application of an iconographical analysis of *Hellraiser* [1987], and George Raitt on how a pre-occupation with fidelity to the literary precursors of such screen adaptations as *Onegin* [1999], *The Monkey's Mask* [2002], and *Brokeback Mountain* [2005] actually hides the wealth of inter-textual connexions and interpretations brought to bear by the reader-viewer. To a greater or lesser extent and despite their superficial differences, have Goddard, Marvell, and Raitt, not unlike Walker, Haysom, and Morgan implicitly construed the act of interpreting ("reading") the visual arts from a particular communicative point of view? To elaborate briefly, have these contributors in practice assumed that the disclosures of any act of interpretation ultimately derive from one or more of the six interlocking factors Roman Jakobson (1960: 66-73) so influentially identified as necessary and sufficient conditions of any act of communication, artistic and ordinary? Readers of this Issue of *Double Dialogues* may find it instructive to track the degree to which, for instance, Haysom initially frames his hidden story by mainly focusing upon the context,

Walker upon the artist, Goddard upon the code, and Raitt upon the viewer-reader before accommodating other factors.

Turning our attention to two contributors who themselves overtly move between the visual and the verbal media in tracing the work of two renegade women, Ivar Kvistad on the activist Valerie Solanas and Pavlina Radia on the writer and illustrator Djuna Barnes, Whilst Kvistad ultimately re-constructs something of the cultural revolution emanating from New York of the 'sixties in Solanas' disturbed, provocative, at times crass 1968 manifesto adopted by the feminist movement, he also forefronts the way in which attacking iconic artworks or artists—stealing or smashing the former; kidnapping or killing the latter—shapes the historical narratives of the arts long after actual knowledge of the perpetrators becomes a story of the hidden, the forgotten, or the dismissed. We need only recall when, in August 1911, *La Gioconda* was stolen from the Musée du Louvre in Paris, the poet Guillaume Apollinaire and the painter Pablo Picasso were immediately arraigned. Since then, it has arguably been acclaimed as "the world's most famous painting" (Riding, 2005), parodied by the avant-garde, including Marcel Duchamp, *L.H.O.O.Q.* [1919] and Solanas' intended victim, Andy Warhol, *Thirty are Better than One* [1963]. Yet who amongst us can recite the story of the thief, Vincenzo Peruggia, and his appeal to patriotism when apprehended in December 1913? Radia has a different target: namely, that the process of story-telling transforms the story-teller into what she calls "a renegade absence." Beneath her critical exploration of recent cultural theorists and the multi-media work of Barnes, readers may well ponder, is she ultimately teasing out themes traceable to Aristoteles' attempt to distinguish the ontological character of the arts in the *Ethika Nikomakheia*? The passage from Book Six, Chapter Four repays our special attention:

All Art deals with bringing something into existence; and to pursue an art means to study how to bring into existence a thing which may either exist or not, and the efficient cause of which lies in the maker and not in the thing made; for Art does not deal with things that exist or come into existence of necessity, or according to nature, since these have their efficient cause in themselves. But as doing and making are distinct, it follows that Art, being concerned with making, is not concerned with doing (1140a10ff., tr. Harris Rackham).

At not too distant a remove from the 'renegade' concerns of Kvistad and Radia is Michelle Aung Thin. As an Anglo-Burmese writer, she attempts to disclose the degree to which authenticity can only be captured within narratives of colonial, marginalised individuals licensed by the ethnicity of the writer. Were that the case, we are invited to consider the implications for the historical and ideological contexts in which such literature is read. And, as an accompanying question of "for whom are narratives of alterity written?" Aung Thin also asks us whether such literature can act as a "site of transgression" which, by recreating the hidden boundaries of alien subjectivities, undermines such contexts.

The next group of contributors—Patrick West, Neena Balwan Sachdev, and Ewen Jarvis—exemplify the ways in which quite specific theorists can be deployed as a means of disclosure. Jarvis, for instance, explores the experience of reading served by the structures of libraries as a place for acts of creative imagination largely by way of Gaston Bachelard; Sachdev, the ethical significance to be attached to the erotic depiction of the young male in two recent novels by Christos Tsiolkas, an ethical understanding informed by Emmanuel Lévinas; and West, how the late fiction of Janet Frame does not so much demonstrate as contribute towards the literary critical theory of Gilles Deleuze. Some readers, especially if unfamiliar with the theorist being brought to a text, may be inclined to dispute the lines of argument developed by these three contributors; they may feel that their respective explications of works by Murakami, Tsiolkas, and Frame are contestable; they may even demand more delving into the concepts and claims of the respective theories of Bachelard, Lévinas, and Deleuze. Yet even such unknowing readers would still recognise in these literary critical essays that they have been introduced to new inter-textual relationships. And by inter-textuality here we do not simply mean three creative writers sourced cognitively and thematically to three intellectual writers. Do we not also allow for how the struggle to depict a text's "intelligibility" or "meaning," as Jonathan Culler (1981: 103) once argued, delimits "its participation in the discursive spaces of a culture," in the "signifying practices of a culture"?

Perhaps we should remind ourselves of what characterises the logic of confronting new disclosures by critical analyses that appeal to the enlarged conception of inter-textuality deployed by the above-mentioned contributors,

Are they not opening debate, as Gregory Bateson (1979: 142-143) once suggestively claimed, by its abductive implications? So, for instance, one's belief that, by creating an imaginary narrative, a writer actually contributes to the development of another's theory might on the face of it seem absurd. However, if the conjecture or hypothesis that fictional stories engender artistic theories were true, then the previously mentioned belief would be unexceptional and therefore gives some grounds for regarding the hypothesis as veracious or at least the best explanation in the circumstances. (Of course, we should note, the hypothesis in question cannot be taken as confirmed in the way that the hypothesis proposed by Albert Einstein about general relativity in 1905 was confirmed during the solar eclipse of 1919.) Such abductive processes should not be dismissed as the sad lot of the arts because they are bereft of deductive (or necessary) and inductive (or probable) inferences. Abductive inferences are just as commonly used in the clinical and physical sciences when plausibly attempting to explain the actual world as they are by readers and viewers grappling to comprehend fictional worlds to which they have been exposed.

By contrast to West, Sachdev, and Jarvis, Hadeel Abdel-Hameed and Raya Al-Naqshabandy explicitly shun a theoretical framing of their investigation into the one-act play, *Finding the Sun* [1983] by Edward Albee. Resolutely returning to a recounting of the plot, the authors argue that what is revealed by so doing is a "double mirroring" of existential themes and situations and metaphor. Plot, characters, setting—the staple diet of everyday discourse about drama—are said to be the very means by which the human predicament is enacted upon the stage by portraying stages of life and love in a piece given more to mood than to movement. Katherine Lyall-Watson finds that playwrights have a licence to uncover the hidden lives of individuals not granted to those narrating biographies or memoirs. Whilst finding that both kinds of writers are given to concealing and revealing details, both are bound to truthfulness of a different kind. Is it the kind of difference John Hospers (1946: 162ff.) once articulated as the respective difference between "truth to" our felt experience of events, entities, and persons and "truth about" the actual facts of events, entities, and persons?

When delving into source material for a novel, Melisa Ashley encountered a dual act of concealment by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm. The Grimms not only revised the ancient folktale, "The Girl Without Hands," with its taboo antagonist of an incestuous father, in their seventh 1857 edition of *Kinder-und-Hausmärchen* pitched at a more explicitly bourgeois, Christian readership, but both then and in the first 1811 edition excised the role of and variant relayed by their informant, Marie Hassenpflug. Svend Erik Larsen also brings out of hiding not merely hidden aspects, to an Anglophone audience, of stories by Hans Christian Anderson, Edward Dekker, and Amitav Ghosh. However, in so doing, Larsen also returns that audience to one of the more dominant intellectuals of the XXth century *entre guerre*, Karl Bühler (1934: 42ff.), and his principle of abstractive relevance constitutive of both ordinary and imaginative perception and recalled perception (or memory) by which actions and objects assume the status of signs be they verbal or non-verbal. In other words, the principle of abstractive relevance acts as a governing explanation for the process of perceiving—and ultimately conceiving—all experience in terms of "selection" and "combination" of "distinctive features" (to echo the influential application of the principle applied to auditory signs of speech by Roman Jakobson (1956: 97-99)). We are, to return to John Berger initially quoted at the beginning of this paper, "continually comparing like with unlike, what is small with what is large, what is near with what is distant" (1979: 6). That said, how does Larson apply Bühler's principle? Is he justified in interpreting the principle to extend to a dialectical relationship between the different but related processes of remembering and forgetting, showing and hiding in stories of experience? Does the principle, in turn, rationalise why and how writer and reader, painter and viewer, both participate in the process of unravelling the hidden?

Finally, we arrive at the beginning of this memorial Issue of *Double Dialogues*: an essay by Teresa Cannon who saw photojournalist Peter Davis' novel, *Abraham's Pictures*, to publication. One of the tasks she sets herself is to argue that the text and photographs comprising the narrative and the author's pre-occupation with what lies "outside the frame" of "the decisive moment" propelling the act of story-telling is not a hidden autobiography. The other task, in light of meditations on photography by Roland Barthes (1980), is to return us to the transformation of the act of experiencing a narrative where actual and narrated images enter the text. Or, to close with the words of the protagonist in Davis (2009: 4):

'Taking pictures is easy,' Abraham had once said... 'It's looking at them that's difficult. Whatever it is that returns our gaze, that's what we have to deal with.'

We can no more follow a televised narrative by taking our television set apart than by taking a television camera apart. Narratives are simply not reducible to the activity that produces them or to the instruments by which they are made. As all contributors to this Issue have revealed, the content of narrative is not reducible to the raw material by which it is conveyed. De Chirico's oil painting, *La Torre Rossa* [1913], is made on canvas, but it is not an oil painting of canvas: that which is certainly not hidden is not what "returns our gaze."

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