THE LITTLE WEIRD: SELF AND CONSCIOUSNESS IN CONTEMPORARY, SMALL-PRESS, SPECULATIVE FICTION

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This dissertation explores how contemporary, small-press, speculative fiction deviates from other genres in depicting the processes of consciousness in narrative. I study how the confluence of contemporary cognitive theory and experimental, small-press, speculative fiction has produced a new narrative mode, one wherein literature portrays not the product of consciousness but its process instead. Unlike authors who worked previously in the stream-of-consciousness or interior monologue modes, writers in this new narrative mode (which this dissertation refers to as "the little weird") use the techniques of recursion, narratological anachrony, and Ulric Neisser's "ecological self" to avoid the constraints of textual linearity that have historically prevented other literary modes from accurately portraying the operations of "self." Extrapolating from Mieke Bal's seminal theory of narratology; Tzvetan Todorov's theory of the fantastic; Daniel C. Dennett's theories of consciousness; and the works of Darko Suvin, Robert Scholes, Jean Baudrillard, and others, I create a new mode not for classifying categories of speculative fiction, but for re-envisioning those already in use. This study, which concentrates on the work of progressive, small-press, speculative writers such as Kelly Link, Forrest Aguirre, George Saunders, Jeffrey Ford, China Miéville, and many others, explores new ideas about narrative "coherence" from the points of view of self as they are presented today by cognitive, narratological, psychological, sociological, and semiotic theories.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: THE LITTLE WEIRD

> [I]t is only with the new century that what one might call genre-morphing has become a central defining enterprise within fantastic literature.
>
> John Clute

Writers of New Weird, Interstitial, New Wave Fabulist, or Slipstream literature assert that today's progressive speculative fiction borrows elements from many genres.[1] However, many, if not most, writers of speculative fiction still work within genre boundaries (i.e. space opera, cyberpunk, high fantasy, hard science fiction, etc.), and they write progressively within those parameters. Increasingly though, the poetics promulgated in the small-press magazines that embrace experimentation are finding their way to broader audiences. Niche markets sustain themselves within a textual community of progressive and experimental speculation, and today this community's literature is beginning to appeal to larger markets. This literature, to begin with generalizations, is not as broadly attractive or approachable as the more clearly defined, more tried-and-true works that typify speculative fiction. Many of the progressive forms under discussion—with their often sustained and driving interests in characterization over plot—are either outright "literary" or close enough to invoke the term, a distinction that contributes to their general separation from more "mainstream" speculative fiction. Other subversive, non-mainstream forms such as magical realism, surrealism, the fantastic, the marvelous, and the uncanny are all ready modes within the world of progressive, small-press speculative fiction; however, any of these forms are subject to deconstruction, re-alignment, even contradiction. Nevertheless, a familiarity with them makes a critical shift into the progressive mode an easy transition.

The literature of the progressively experimental community I am addressing coexists in the pages of the small press with examples of "cleaner," non-hybridized works in the forms I mentioned above (and many more) and with more mainstream speculation. These other works have received critical attention in the past under the rubrics of the larger classifications they belong to (i.e. fantasy, science fiction, horror); however, the poetics that appear within the cross sample of the truly experimental and truly progressive have not undergone as much consideration. For this reason, and for the venues wherein this literature appears, I refer to this mode as the "little weird." This dissertation examines the new poetic directions that contemporary, experimental, and progressive small-press speculative fiction takes to distance itself from the more traditional, non-hybridized forms whence it takes its formative examples. Contemporary theories of consciousness, studies in narratology and semiotics, linguistic analysis, and postmodern literary criticism all offer lenses through which we may view the convolutions of the little weird.

The general, distinguishing poetics of the little weird are inverted. I mean this discursively: these elements are inverted relative to their uses in older forms such as magic realism and the fantastic. In Todorov's early definitions of the fantastic, critical interest centers on the fantastic hesitation, the pause during which a focal character (or reader) cannot determine if the events he or she is facing are "marvelous" (and therefore supernatural) or "uncanny" (and therefore natural, albeit unique). The fantastic lasts as long as the hesitation; once the character makes his or decision, the text enters one or the other mode.[2] All three of these modes, however, emphasize the *events*: grounded in the mundane, characters encounter these strange occurrences and must then reconcile the experience with what they knew about the world and themselves before. However, in the little weird, the reverse is true: when fantastic, marvelous, or uncanny

events occur, focal primacy is placed not upon these events but upon the characters or focalizors and their (often) broken relationships with themselves and others.[3] The invasion of the weird into the narrative framework is a given: it is offered as speculative staple out of which these stories are built. What is far more unapproachable is the self, destabilized as it has become by cognitive science and social upheaval. The worlds of technological and social innovation have largely caught up to speculative fiction, leaving its characters in the same quandaries of self suffered by its readers. John Clute, addressing this problem in *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction* asks "Can sf, as a set of cognitions which differ from the world, exist in a world which takes on the colouring of our thought? What now is figure, what now is ground? What now is difference, what now is mission statement?"[4] The little weird answers by dodging the question: the sublime is not in accepting a lack of understanding with some unknowable and indefinable *event* or *thing*; the sublime comes in accepting the impossibility of understanding a self that, in relation to the world that has caught up to its speculation, as Clute points out, is in a constant state of flux. Under these circumstances, "strange" events are metaphors for the socio-cognitive uncertainty of being.

The little weird also inverts the typical power-relations found in magical realism. Traditionally, magical realism has concerned itself with juxtaposing the magical (typified as non-Western, post-colonial, and anti-positivistic) against the real (Western, rational, and epistemologically intolerant).[5] This mode has opened narrative opportunities for cultural voices that have previously, under the oppression of what Maggie Ann Bowers calls "totalitarian regimes," struggled to be heard.[6] In this literature, the magic is presented just as matter-of-factly as the real, therefore theorizing either a new order entirely that breaks the logic separating the magic from the real or simply theorizing that the magic (whatever it represents) exists even in the

face of the oppressive real. The characters who typically appear as agents in magical realist texts are often disenfranchised and removed from the oppression's centers of power. In the little weird, juxtaposing the magic and the real is not simply a way of demonstrating how the "magic" (and who it represents) can negotiate with the "real"; it is also a model for demonstrating how the oppressive, rational "real" can approach and apprehend the "magic." The characters in works of little weird fiction need not be disenfranchised, under-represented, or oppressed: indeed, they can be painfully mired in the "totalitarian regime" as generic citizens with generic jobs. However, these "real" characters can still find, in the struggle to apprehend the "self," that the magic (or weird) defines their problems far more clearly than the rational real, for as I will argue, the nature of "self" is *weird*. Furthermore, if the dual narrative modes of magical realism both characterize the respective people each embodies, then both the magic and the real are representationally recursive narratives. The people *are* the manner of their stories—for example, a story presenting the "magic" as it is conceived within the cultural ideology of colonized people represents how they conceive of existence not only narratively but in the "real" world as well. Ill defining as this is, it demonstrates that there has been a narrative anxiety about the importance of understanding the self *before* understanding the landscape and whatever events occur there beyond the scope of a people's worldview (and therefore "magic"). The little weird simply brings this anxiety into narrative primacy, often unconcerned about what has been culturally suppressed in favor of examining the uncertain cultural roles characters are thrust into, even if their culture is the "totalitarian regime."

Furthermore, stories in the little weird typically occur in the "real" world and not in alternative worlds as pure science fiction and fantasy sometimes do. However, the mimetic nature of the little weird ends there. Time and reality can flow in any direction in this literature;

insofar as these stories are coherent within their own narrative frameworks, they exhibit no concern for anchoring their models to a knowable world—that is to say, the "weird" elements in stories do not have to "mean" anything. Frame stories can become main stories (as in Kelly Link's "Lull" and Jeffrey Ford's "The Yellow Chamber").[7] Landmasses and locomotion may re-invent themselves as necessary for the story (as in Ed Park's "Well-Moistened with Cheap Wine, the Sailor and the Wayfarer Sing of Their Absent Sweethearts" and Christopher Rowe's "The Force Acting on the Displaced Body").[8] Dreams or alternate states of consciousness can *make* the real world before they have even occurred (again "The Yellow Chamber," also Alex Irvine's "Gus Dreams of Biting the Mailman" and Jonathan Lethem's "The Dystopianist, Thinking of His Rival, Is Interrupted by a Knock on the Door").[9] All of these instabilities and textual experimentations point to a larger, overarching concern in the little weird: there are no worlds, no realities; there are only people and their self-world metaphors. This, of course, can be clearer in some works than in others, particularly in those that deal very directly with the anxiety of self as far more destabilizing than invasions of the strange (as in Elizabeth Hand's "The Least Trumps," Glen Hirshberg's "Shipwreck Beach," or Peter Straub's "Little Red's Tango").[10] In these last examples, there is certainly more of the "real world" than in, for example, "Lull" or "The Yellow Chamber"; however, the first three demonstrate the same anxiety, for, as Mieke Bal argues in *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, events must be "motivated" for inclusion in a narrative by who- or whatever is focalizing the elements of the story.[11] These focalizors are then "making" their worlds in accordance with what their personal anxieties dictate warrants inclusion in the narration of their experiences.

It bears mentioning that my discussion and categorizing of the little weird is not a manifesto. I am not proposing a call for literature that will voice the concerns of genre-blurring

and form-destabilizing poetics. Rather, I am attempting to map the confluence of the varied characteristics of progressive speculation occurring today. I am attempting a survey of a particular textual community; I am not trying to create one. Indeed, it is the preexistence of this textual community (loose and largely undefined as it is) that makes my study significant for this stage of the speculative tradition. There are a number of reasons why this community developed; however, it is sometimes difficult to distinguish which of its characteristics are symptomatic and which were generative. As comfortable as writers and editors of little weird fiction are with recursion, however, it seems only appropriate that the "real" world out of which they work should be as unstable and relative as the work itself. After all, verdicts such as "symptomatic" and "generative" are simply the conclusions produced by different perspectives. Others have asked whether art mirrors life or life mirrors art. My study is largely uninterested in answering this question.

The little weird and its textual community are also tied to the Information Age. As global economic factors exert their influence upon the operation of publishing houses, magazine presses, and even the disposable income of citizens in general, the downsizing and conglomeration of media producers shifts to keep pace. As certain smaller publishers, production companies, and other media outlets cease operation, others emerge to claim their territory. The larger firms, however, that produce the majority of today's creative commodities find themselves forced to hedge their bets in regard to what chances they can take with literature, film, or games. It is no secret (nor is it a conspiracy) that most of what these firms offer can be categorized as "safe"—it is based on models that have turned profits before, models that typify what is "mainstream." This safety, of course, is circular: commodified literature will present, more or

less, ideas, themes, and epistemologies that are sympathetic with those being presented by film and games.

The small press, however, counterbalances this by publicly experimenting with "safety" in literature. Brian Attebery argues that most innovation in the speculative fiction field today occurs in periodicals.[12] I extend his argument: the most innovative segment of this innovation occurs within small-press periodicals, for even well-funded and well-established periodicals have expenses to cover and profits to turn. To a large degree, the magazines, collections, anthologies, and even novels produced by the small press turn no profit—sometimes they are lucky to simply break even. As a result, the editors publishing this material, I conclude, are doing so for reasons other than straight monetary gain, and they are willing to take greater risks with their material. Perhaps they are trying to establish themselves as the voices of progress. Perhaps they are performing studies of their own, wrestling with the ideas of textual communities and narrative forms in the most direct way possible: circulation. Perhaps they publish simply because they love particular strains of literature; literature in general; or, simply, all things textual. There may be no good reason why some of them do what they do, but it is enough for the purpose at hand that they do it.

But there remains the little weird's ties to the Information Age. One of the most feasible methods for small-presses to operate is electronically. They offer their literature, articles, and interviews as digital magazines, often linking to each other and back to themselves in dizzying convolutions that can lead their readers through a labyrinthine publishing underworld. There are very few rules (or even expectations) for how these e-zines should operate, and since some offer the same pay rates to their contributors as larger, established presses, these smaller enterprises offer work by the same writers powering what I earlier described as "mainstream." This is, of

course, not universally true, and many, many magazines offer little to no pay. Just so, the material the small presses offer so readily makes of the entire small-press and e-movement one large, operating deconstruction of more mainstream speculative fiction. That the editors and writers involved in the "mainstream" are sometimes similarly involved in the underground only heightens the idea promulgated by progressive speculative fiction that the self is shapable, not only artistically, but methodologically as well.

Furthermore, the recent popularity of low-budget micro films and games available through the internet influences the little weird community. Entire artistic genres can appear, present their operating aesthetics, and then disappear at alarming rates, sometimes within a matter of days. Every aesthetic (not simply those beloved of speculative fiction) has, or soon will, come under experimentation through the internet. Feedback comes instantaneously, and these experiments remake themselves at dizzying rates. The very idea of artistic form itself has come under attack, and postmodern metafiction has become a staple for this ever-changing artistic dynamo. There are few remaining lines between art and self, and those that still exist are in danger of disappearing.

The writers, artists, programmers, and designers (among the myriad of others) who maintain online journals (web logs: blogs) are as recursive and interconnected as the aforementioned e-zines. Whereas during the Golden Age of speculative fiction, critical discussion had to occur largely in the form of letters written in to editors, these same discussions now take place across the network of blogs: the blogosphere.[13] The Information Age has facilitated instantaneous discussion between thinkers who, in previous decades, would only have been able to engage each other as easily by coming together face-to-face. To return to the textual community of the little weird, writers, artists, and editors have taken critical theory from the

sequestered discussions of Academe and re-invented it as they see fit. Discussions of form, narrative, identity, and poetics occur alongside personal anecdotes, confessions, political argumentation, and even the perpetuation of "memes"—the form of Richard Dawkins's discovery as it has come to be known in its electronic incarnation.[14] There is no longer a clean line between high art and low, between a theoretical discussion and simple amusement. Derrida and Saussure must now share digital page-space with the faces on *American Idol* and *Survivor*, and textual communities like the little weird express how this fast-paced and ever-changing environment destabilizes ideas of the self, the real, the virtual, and the simulacrum. As I said before, there are no longer selves and landscapes, there are simply selves expressing—voices espousing and abandoning artistic methodology as rapidly as possible to keep not only their listeners, but also themselves, guessing. In an age of widespread political dissatisfaction, economic uncertainty, and artistic exhaustion, it has become less important to hold fast to clear, mimetic aesthetics and more important to demonstrate that change cannot occur and then settle down to a good, several-decades run as a solidified form. As writers, artists, and editors seek answers for why things are how they are and who can be blamed for what, their creative output suggests that no one gets the responsibility. No one, in this sense, owes anyone anything, though as the world-bending literature of the little weird demonstrates, we still have not, as a world-community, admitted to ourselves that we have realized this.

Notes to Chapter 1

[1] See China Miéville "Long Live the New Weird," editorial, *The Third Alternative* 35 (2003). See also Peter Straub, Guest Editor's Note, *Conjunctions: 39: The New Wave Fabulists*, ed. Bradford Morrow. Guest ed., Peter Straub. (New York: Bard College, 2002) 6-7. See also James Patrick Kelly, "On the Net: Slipstream," column, *Asimov's Science Fiction* December

2003 <http://www.asimovs.com/_issue_0312/ onthenet.shtml>

[2] Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1973) 24-25.

[3] Bal defines focalization as "the relations between the elements [of a story] presented and the vision through which they are presented. . . . Focalization is, then, the relation between the vision and that which is 'seen,' perceived." *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1985), 100.

[4] John Clute, "Science Fiction from 1980 to the Present," *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction*, eds., Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003), 68.

[5] See Maggie Ann Bowers, *Magic(al) Realism.* The New Critical Idiom, series ed., John Drakakis. (London: Routledge, 2004).

[6] Bowers, *Magic(al) Realism*, 4.

[7] Kelly Link, "Lull" *Conjunctions: 39: The New Wave Fabulists* (see note 2). Jeffrey Ford, "The Yellow Chamber" *Trampoline: An Anthology*, ed., Kelly Link. (Northamptom, MA: Small Beer Press, 2003).

[8] Ed Park, "Well-Moistened with Cheap Wine, the Sailor and the Wayfarer Sing of Their Absent Sweethearts" *Trampoline: An Anthology* (see note 8). Christopher Rowe, "The Force Acting on the Displaced Body" ibid.

[9] Alex Irvine "Gus Dreams of Biting the Mailman," *Trampoline: An Anthology* (see note 6). Jonathan Lethem, "The Dystopianist, Thinking of his Rival, Is Interrupted by a Knock on the Door" *Conjunctions: 39: The New Wave Fabulists* (see note 1).

[10] Elizabeth Hand, "The Least Trumps" *Conjunctions: 39: The New Wave Fabulists* (see

note 1). Peter Straub, “Little Red’s Tango” ibid. Glen Hirshberg, “Shipwreck Beach” *Trampoline: An Anthology* (see note 7).

[11] Bal’s motivation is “. . . a function of focalization. A character sees an object. The description is the reproduction of what it sees. Looking at something requires time, and, in this fashion, the description is incorporated into the time lapse. But an act of looking must also have its motivation. There must be enough light so that the character is able to observe the object. There is a window, an open door, an angle of vision which also have to be described and therefore motivated. Further, the character must have both the time to look and the reason to look at an object.” Bal, *Narratology*, 130-31.

[12] Brian Attebery, “The Magazine Era: 1920-1960,” *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction*, eds., Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003), 47.

[13] Ibid, 37.

[14] See Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1976), 201-15. See also Susan Blackmore, *The Meme Machine* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999).

CHAPTER 2

THINKING METAPHORS:
NEW IDEAS IN CONSCIOUSNESS AND FOCALIZATION

> [I]f something like this could happen, and granted it's speculative and not particularly likely for any given person, still you have to acknowledge that probabilities aren't predictive, then anything you read could really be true. True like the-sky-is-blue true or two-plus-two-is-four-true. And the other thing is that you . . . could be a fiction, which . . . in this case would not make you any less real.
>
> Alex Irvine

Introduction

Mapping the processes of consciousness that appear in the little weird must begin with a new definition of what it is "to be" cognitively. Many contemporary theories of consciousness portray the "self" that each of us knows so well as an operational metaphor, a collision of ideas, impulses, and reflexes that, when taken as a whole, presents the illusion of a controlling unit in the brain. Descartes's classic ideas about the division between mind and body bequeathed to modern conceptions of self the prevailing fiction of the ghost in the machine of the human brain. Modern science and contemporary philosophy, however, both struggle to undo the Cartesian legacy.[1] These disciplines recast consciousness as a second-order fiction produced by the first-order myth of objective perception.[2] Many literary theories, however, fail to incorporate these scientific deconstructions into their studies of literary selves—or, importantly, what produces them—but as David Lodge points out in *Consciousness and the Novel*, "Literature constitutes a kind of knowledge about consciousness which is *complementary* to scientific knowledge."[3] By exploring how contemporary theories of self do away with a number of previously held ideas about personal agency, governance of the body, and perceptual objectivity, we reveal the memes and other cognitive motivations actually at work within a text—or, for that matter, within any work of art. Our expressions of self are the "voices" of our awareness, of the varying crises that

result from everyday existence in a reality built on myths.

Positing a thorough model of consciousness is not a brief exercise. An understanding of *self* is arguably a thinker's most primary understanding, so asking him or her to embrace a new one is both conceptually and methodologically difficult.[4] After all, even thinkers willing to examine a new theory of consciousness must think *through* their already-established senses of self. It would seem that asking a reader to consider a new concept of consciousness is simply undoable. Doing so wants a meta-consciousness through which to study *first-consciousness*; however, since such meta-consciousness is still beyond our reach, we are left with forming a new theory from the old.

In contrast to the thoroughness required to disprove the *un-do-ableness* of such an undertaking, what I present here is simply a sketch, a collation of the most salient aspects of contemporary theories of consciousness. For that matter, it would be beyond the scope of this study to paraphrase *every* theory of self that coheres with the little weird. As such, I situate here only the most fundamental for a new poetics of self.

"Focalization" and "motivation" are essential components of the examination. Although there have been many adaptations to and extrapolations of narratologist Mieke Bal's definitions, her theories still hold largely true in narratological discussion. As such, I will not re-invent the wheel. Focalization, under Bal's definition, "is . . . the relation between the vision and that which is 'seen,' perceived."[5] Narrators must perceive before they can narrate. "Focalization" systematizes this perception by pointing, in turn, to "motivation":

> Motivation is, then, a function of focalization. A character sees an object. The description is the reproduction of what it sees. Looking at something requires time, and, in this fashion, the description is incorporated into the time lapse. But an act of looking must also have its motivation. There must be enough light so that the character is able to observe the object. There is a window, an open door, an angle of vision which also have

> to be described and therefore motivated. Further, the character must have both the time to look and the reason to look at an object.[6]

In other words, literary events are motivated for focalization, a process that can reveal a narrator's relation to both its textual world and to the real one that informs it. Uncovering the significance of what does and what does not appear in a narrative environment like this tracks the environment's relation to a focalizor's experiential situation—to its self. This question of relation, I posit, clarifies how memetic impulse directs consciousness—in this case, its creations: characters, narrators, and focalizors. Instabilities of narrative reality, in this regard, become not necessarily problems with reality; rather, they become problems with focalization. As Robert Scholes theorizes,

> Fiction has always been characterized by its ability to perform two functions. Some fictions accomplish both equally, some emphasize one. . . . We may call these two functions *sublimation* and *cognition*. As sublimation, fiction is a way of turning our concerns into satisfying shape, a way of relieving anxiety, of making life bearable. . . . As sublimation, fiction takes our worst fears and tames them by organizing them in a form charged with meaning and value. . . . In its cognitive function, fiction helps us to know ourselves and our existential situation.[7]

I argue that *all* narratives "accomplish both"; however, the "shapes" of characters' concerns are not "satisfying," and the terms of their "organization" should be examined at the level of consciousness, not of narrative. Characters internalize the weird when it occurs around them—as they internalize all things. Characters can no more isolate the weird's relevance to the real than the critics who study them.

In addition to my limitations on how many cognitive theories I include here, the cross-section of little weird fiction I address is also unavoidably narrow. The number of small-press venues (both print and electronic) publishing progressive speculation seems to rise every day. As a result, I cannot, in this study, represent them all—for that matter, I cannot represent even a small portion of them. Rather, I intend my selections—and the examinations they bear—as

examples of how others can adapt my premises to larger cross-sections. Indeed, it is my sincere hope to encourage a critical discussion, not to conclude one.

Theoretical Background

Changes in an understanding of self are also changes in an understanding of literature, for texts are nothing if not the record of our abstractions. As such, any study of consciousness is also a study in why and how we tell our stories the way we do.

We tell our stories, in large part, because of the ideas that first comprise our cultures. Dennett, concluding his chapter "The Philosophical Problems of Consciousness," in *Consciousness Explained* points out an analogue of his idea of the Self as a "Center of Narrative Gravity" in David Lodge's *Nice Work*:

> [T]here is no such thing as the "Self" on which capitalism and the classic novel are founded—that is to say, a finite, unique soul or essence that constitutes a person's identity; there is only a subject position in an infinite web of discourses—the discourses of power, sex, family, science, religion, poetry, etc. And by the same token, there is no such thing as an author, that is to say, one who originates a work of fiction ab nihilo. . . . in the famous words of Jacques Derrida . . . "*il n'y pas de hors-texte*", there is nothing outside the text. There are no origins, there is only production, and we produce our "selves" in language. Not "*you are what you eat*" but "*you are what you speak*," or, rather, "*you are what speaks you*."[8]

The idea of being "what speaks you" is as important for works of literature as it is for works of self. Literature is what speaks it: its language and the meanings that cohere across time with a work's semantic framework. A metaphor may illustrate my point: a set of blueprints (my "semantic framework"—its very, unchanging words) yields *roughly* the same building even when followed by different builders (readers); however, if each of these builders uses different materials (i.e. stone, bronze, steel—what "coheres across time"), then the building (the meaning) changes each time. If any definition of self simultaneously projects itself into and is delimited by

culture, then any definition of self simultaneously projects itself into and is delimited by the art (in this case, literature) that comprises part of that culture.[9] As such, speakers (being what speaks *them*) feed back into the self-culture discourse partly through expression and art.[10]

Consciousness, self, sentience: these are different names for the same ongoing, interior dialog—a communication between states of intention, analysis, disposition, and discrimination. Dennett points out that consciousness is the product of the constantly changing and disappearing reports offered by excited regions in the brain:

> Visual stimuli evoke trains of events in the cortex that gradually yield discriminations of greater and greater specificity. At different times and different places, various "decisions" or "judgements" are made; more literally, parts of the brain are caused to go into states that discriminate different features. . . . These localized discriminative states transmit effects to other places, contributing to further discriminations, and so forth. . . .[11]

These localized discriminative states react not only to each other but also to themselves as they await (and take part in) re-stimulation and alteration by the process of negotiating meaning from trends in cognitive disposition. There exists no ghost in the machine—consciousness makes itself as it goes, and it writes away its obsolete forms by the instant.

The process of excited neural regions negotiating meaning from their own and each other's reports is a capstone in Dennett's concept of consciousness, which he calls the "Multiple Drafts" model:

> These editorial processes occur over large fractions of a second, during which time various additions, incorporations, emendations, and overwritings can occur, in various orders. We don't directly experience what happens on our retinas, in our ears, on the surface of our skin. What we actually experience is a product of many processes of interpretation—editorial processes, in effect. They take in relatively raw and one-sided representation, and yield collated, revised, enhanced representations, and they take place in the streams of activity occurring in various parts of the brain.[12]

The multiple drafts model argues against a number of pervasive myths about consciousness,

namely the Cartesian theater and the central meaner. There is no region in the brain where all of these data, all of these negotiations, come together for the benefit of us, the selves in control of our bodies (Dennett's "Cartesian Theater"). Furthermore, there is no central voice directing our utterances—nor is it capable of conversational strategy (the "Central Meaner"). It does not exist; as Ernest Keen points out, "[Consciousness] has structure, or structures, within which it is what it is and does what it does. Many candidates can be listed for structures of consciousness, for example: Space, time, self, body, gender, reflection, language."[13] The leaderless activity of discriminatory regions of the mind generates the illusion of a central mindspace where mental images are viewed by us (as differentiated from both our thoughts and bodies, both of which we tend to think we own). These discriminatory regions announce that the perceptual content it is their job (at least, one of their jobs) to care about has appeared in the meaning-negotiation. When the discriminatory regions make these announcements, they offer unto the negotiation any surviving records (if any yet exist: Dennett's aforementioned "overwriting") of past announcements as well as any memory-fragments—which we generally consider more complete than they genuinely are. This process yields what Dennett considers the narrative of self-hood:

> These strings or streams of narrative issue forth *as if* from a single source —not just in the obvious physical sense of flowing from just one mouth, or one pencil or pen, but in a more subtle sense: their effect on any audience is to encourage them to (try to) posit a unified agent whose words they are, about whom they are: in short, to posit a *center of narrative gravity*.[14]

We, the selves, the consciousnesses, are the combined whole of these many and varied processes; we are operational metaphors that arise out of our interaction with ourselves, others around us, and the larger cultures beyond. That is not to say that we are slaves to unseen impulses (not entirely, in any event); we *are* those impulses.[15]

In addition to their roles in the multiple drafts model, the regions of the brain that excite

themselves when the content they care about becomes present (either in the meaning-negotiation or as raw perceptual data from out-there-in-the-world) also play roles in the enacting or perpetuation of ideas. We call these ideas memes, and they are capable arranging themselves into the most pervasive complexes of our worlds.[16] The anthropologist Catherine Lutz has isolated "motivation" in one of these complexes, and although her use of the term works quite well narratologically, she focuses primarily on the larger "culture" complex:

> To say that culture provides the self with *motivation* is to say that the child, in the course of growing up, learns what is desirable, what should be sought, and what should be avoided. If we consider emotions to be the most fundamental form of motivation, then the process of enculturation includes the acquisition of culturally appropriate emotional responses to particular events and other persons. Motivation on the individual level, moreover, provides the basis for the maintenance of culture and its institutions.[17]

In this case, many of the dispositions (we might also call them filters) consciousness uses to organize its data are the results of Lutz's enculturated motivations. We use aspects of culture as aspects of ourselves, and this assists each of us in knowing *what to do* with what we perceive.[18]

Under this model, our regions-of-the-brain do not simply negotiate the meaning of perceptual data; they also determine what is worth consciously perceiving in the first place.[19] The memes, which we might simply call "codes" for what we should do with certain negotiated meaning—not only from "out there" in the world, but also in abstract, predictive thought—dictate what we should do or what we should feel when a negotiated meaning fits a specific memetic bill.[20] So, when I said that we are not slaves to unseen impulses, I meant it. However, the idea that we are ghosts controlling our machines, reacting as we see fit, strategizing as free agents, and doing what we want to do falls apart under this synthesis of Dennett's and Lutz's theories. Again, we are operational illusions, abstractions that our bio-cognitive selves draw for easy self-reference and feedback as well as coherence within the discursive environments of self-

other, self-community, and self-world relationships. Our memes very often determine what we do in these relationships—they are not ideas we form after the fact.

In the world of literary narration, the motivation behind focalization is, similarly, not a product of the ghost in the narrator's (or author's) machine but of memetics and culture instead. This assumes that authors model narrators and characters after our ideas about consciousness, or, at least, that we decode what we read about these narrators or characters according to what we know about ourselves, how we think, and what consequences this knowledge has for us. Dennett asks, "What foundation, then, can we stand on as we struggle to keep our feet in the memestorm in which we are engulfed?" To borrow his own answer, there is no we (as Cartesian dualism has, for so long, taught us to understand that term) to either stand or struggle in the first place.[21] Memes are not biology, they are behavior. As Keen points out,

> [C]onsciousness expresses its intentionality, simultaneously attuned to multiple layers of meaning, through behavior visible to others who, like itself, are embodied and through their bodies are sensitive to the same world. We can add that these sensibilities are codified into cultural categories of meaning, so that it is not only the same world. It is a shared world. Consciousness without a world, consciousness without a body, consciousness without behavior that bodily engages the world is a mere abstraction, an imaginary unicorn of psychology, nowhere presented as data.[22]

Though far more experimental and far more free in form than *real* consciousness, narrators and focalizors offer points of departure into the dialog between culture and consciousness by being not only a model of that dialog, but one of its artifacts as well.[23]

So far, my examination of memetics in perception and focalization has simply been a discussion of what we do with what we learn. The important difference is that we do not simply gather memes as our brains see fit. However, memetics differs from other behavioral analyses in that it propones that we do not acquire our behaviors; rather, our behaviors acquire us. Memes

communicate themselves through the verbal, visual, or cultural instructions of others. We, in turn—motivated by those memes already at work within us—may mimic these ideas, even if they are not *good*.[24] Furthermore, if my study simply catalogued how we use what we learn, it would be yet another unnecessary model of categorization.[25] The memes that acquire us do not simply reside in our brains until we expire; they replicate themselves *through us* and feed back into the cultural discourses that delimit not only how we build our own worlds, but how we build those in literature as well.[26]

Analysis

Transferring memetics from cognitive theory to literary analysis is problematic. Any reader knows that a story is not a consciousness; furthermore, many argue that literature need not even be *modeled* on consciousness. After all, there are no regions of a story processing the meaning of its utterances, and of course, the story perceives nothing, so there is no negotiation of meaning *within* it. Time can do as it pleases in literature; association can mean causation; and typically (and most dangerously for a study of consciousness) events can be motivated at the narrative level, meaning that a story's unknown end results (or sustained overall purpose) can determine both the existence and the path of any narrative event. However, Scholes reminds us that ". . . if we must acknowledge that reality inevitably eludes our human languages, we must admit as well that these languages can never conduct the human imagination to a point beyond this reality."[27] Literature is language, and it seems it has nowhere to go but back to us, back to Scholes's "reality." No matter the scope of experimentation in a literary work; no matter the fragmented, surreal juxtaposition of its images; no matter its non- or a-human characters—as C. S. Lewis said, "What is new usually wins its way by disguising itself as the old."[28] We

understand what is new by comparing it against *what we already know*. As Scholes points out, "We leap to familiar meanings as we leap to recognize the person of someone we know from a glimpse of a face or the shadow of a gesture. All our interpretive processes proceed in quantum jumps from apprehended parts to imagined wholes or gestalts."[29] As such, how we understand consciousness informs how we understand our "cultural artifacts"—in this case, literature. Indeed, our understandings inform the creation of these artifacts, so even if a character is not an accurate model of human consciousness, it ultimately results from the negotiations of *our* consciousnesses. Looking for these creative processes in a character, narrator, or focalizor can show us how to find them in ourselves and in our cultures (even how to find our *struggles against* these processes).

In addition to its other accomplishments, Kelly Link's short story, "Lull," measures a number of gaps between concepts of self.[30] One of her narrators regularly presents explicit logical formulae and then, immediately, either confirms or violates them. For example, when the narrative turns to the strange house off of the highway, we read that the hermit "had an arrangement with a grocer. The grocer sent a boy up to the house once every two weeks, and the boy brought the mail, too" (57). Here, the narrator establishes a logical formula: the hermit requires groceries, so a local grocer, via his boy, fulfills the need. However, the next line in the paragraph reads, "but there wasn't ever any mail." The logical formula has been violated: 1) hermit requires both his food and mail delivered 2) grocer sends an employee to that end 3) there never was any mail. Had the narrator said "and the boy was *supposed to bring* the mail" or "had there ever been any mail, the boy would have brought that, too," there would be no violation of the formula; rather, there would only be validations of it—i.e. 1) hermit requires food and mail 2) grocer sends a boy to deliver food and, *if there is any*, mail 3) there never is any mail. Under

the existing circumstances, the boy brings the mail there never is. Shortly after, the narrator tells us, still discussing the hermit, that "People said they saw him. Or they didn't see him. That was the point" (57). Here, the narrator reports a logical formula that stands to reason: onlookers can report that 1) they saw the hermit 2) they did not see him. The text presents no violation of this formula; however, its inclusion, like the one above, mimics the recognition, analysis, and action that occurs when a *real* consciousness negotiates meaning with itself.[31]

That most texts do not sketch the logical formulae they manifest or violate so explicitly calls attention to the *calling-attention-to* of the logical formulae in "Lull." Link's narrator reveals—in ways other stories (indeed, most real events) do not—what Dennett calls "perceptual sets" or "semantic readiness" and what the cognitive psychologist Ulric Neisser calls "schemata" or "priming" (discussion to follow). The oscillation between confirmations and violations of the these explicit logical formulae in "Lull" destabilizes how readers progress through the text—it is never certain which will happen. Creating such "semantic *un*readiness" is part of what makes the borders between narrators and narrated, conscious and inanimate so unclear in the story. Essentially, it is a cognitive exposure of David Bohm's problems with categorization.

There are reasons why we come to our conclusions, both in *real* life and in the literature we read. Similarly, there are reasons that inform, if they do not necessarily explain, how characters, narrators, and focalizors come to *their* conclusions. Neisser, in his essay "The Development of Consciousness and the Acquisition of Skill," explains that

> . . . after a while, the characteristics of the self and the environment become familiar, so familiar that they are no longer discovered but merely confirmed. . . . If something is confirmed, it must first have been anticipated; if it was anticipated, some mental structure corresponding to it must have existed in advance. In almost all modern cognitive theories, such structures are called schemata.[32]

"Lull," then, makes clear as it goes the assumptions it makes about itself—that is, what it knows

about how it operates that readers (also characters, narrators, and focalizors), guided by their own memospheres, do not. This creates a cognitive map of the processes of consciousness that inform the motivations (and, in turn, the focalizations) in the story. By revealing its "schemata" as it goes, "Lull" aligns itself with both its readers and its narrators, in that their assumptions and confirmations (or those they represent) become similar to its. When the borders between narrator and narrated become unclear in the story, "Lull" violates this alignment, throwing its readers into a worsened state of semantic readiness and inviting them to recognize, as it does, the gaps between what tells a story (or consciousness) and who it is told to. As Lutz points out, culture and individual each serve the other in the process of replicating memes and delineating appropriate responses to perceived data.

Yet, memetics does more than simply inform literature—it is also active within in it and so, in turn, within readers. A story like "Lull" does not simply encourage its readers to remember that ideas theoretically determined the creation of the story's consciousnesses and consciousness-actions—the text also demonstrates memes in action. Isolating the motivations behind characters' or narrators' actions, when considered meta-memetically, reveal that the story does not *simply* dictate its events according to its end result, running conceits, or stylistic intentions. There are also cultural motivations behind the ideas authors group together, possibly, to effect end results, conceits, etc. This is to say that, while stories can be—indeed, often have been—studied at the narrative level, how and why we think *also* informs the juxtaposition of narrative elements.

To best examine active memes in a text, let us establish first that the memes we encounter when reading often situate themselves in our (the readers') memospheres. After we read a story, those memes (ideas) that successfully acquire us become part of our meaning-negotiations in the

real world—that is, of course, if a cultural discourse that rose around these memes has not already acquired us before we even read the story. For example, the meme of shape-changing as a metaphor for alienation has already acquired many readers who have not yet read Kafka's "Metamorphosis," where this particular meme "breeds" quite effectively. When, and if, they read the story, the meme would only be reinforcing itself, not acquiring them anew.

To return to active memes in "Lull," however: we broaden our understanding of the characters' actions and personalities when we uncover memes-in-action instead of reading the same simply as ghost-in-the-machine decision-making. One of the narrators in "Lull" states that "Ed liked to make up games. People paid him to make up games. Back when we had a regular poker night, he was always teaching us a new game and this game would be based on a TV show or some dream he'd had" (54). Here, Ed acts according to meme-clusters that reinforce not only his ideas but also his job—he is a game designer. The operative question becomes "Does 'Ed'—the central meaner, the ghost in the machine, the one who 'owns' the brain—like to make up games, or is this simply the convergence of the varied 'make-games' ideas in his memosphere?" In fact, since Ed *is* his memosphere, the question is really *why* he is acting on and perpetuating game-making memes, not *if*. He is dispositionally more concerned, in this instance, with reinforcing game memes than others. When Ed goes on to claim "We'll need to play fast—no stopping to think about it—just do what I tell you to do" (54), we see that the memes at work here have involved what we might metaphorically call a sub-routine that makes their enacting, their transmission, even more likely: a voluntary suppression of other conscious meaning-negotiation. The players in Ed's game are not to bother weighing and judging the results of his latest memospheric convergence; rather, they are to quiet the process and give all primary processing over entirely to the game. Whatever conclusions we might form about what roles

Ed's game-making plays in regards to character interaction or overall narrative effect, we must begin by examining how and why these roles exist (as extrapolated from our real world from which they draw their meaning) in the first place.[33] From this, any number of abstractions, fragmentations, deconstructions, or experiments may follow, but if they are to have any anchor at all in the meanings of the conscious arena, then they begin within it.

Of course, readers whose consciousnesses are the products of different cultural discourses can come to different conclusions about semiotic extrapolation from real world meaning, so while the New Critics argued that a text is itself in a vacuum, they were right. They only failed to realize that somebody has to remove it from this hermetic envelope before he or she can read it. That somebody, Lutz reminds us, is also a culture.

These sorts of memetic and focalizational analyses reveal how stories can, unlike real life, build realities that deconstruct the rules of our own. They can do this because authors extrapolate them from the elements of consciousness in controlled environments —they are written through to their ends and are collections of strategically included elements. Unlike real life, the excluded elements do not ever even enter into a reader's conscious periphery, meaning, for example, that the idea that "association means causation" can be functionally true. In real life this cannot be so certain—only causation can guarantee association, not the other way around. In *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, Tzvetan Todorov refers to this as the "fragility of the limit between matter and mind." He explains that "This principle engenders several fundamental themes: a special causality, pan-determinism; multiplication of the personality; collapse of the limit between subject and object; and lastly, the transformation of time and space."[34] Thus, in Alex Irvine's "Gus Dreams of Biting the Mailman," when the narrator states that "It should be interjected at this point that Mitch Packard had a problem with

coincidence, or perhaps with probability, or causality," this narrator is telling us that not only do memes about convergence and synchronicity affect Mitch's behavior, they also affect the very reality Mitch perceives around him—association (synchronicity) *can* mean causation.[35]

As I mentioned previously, we must internalize all aspects of exterior reality (its "affordances," its noteworthy aspects, its very shape) and negotiate their meanings through the various aspects of our consciousnesses. This means there can be no approach to reality (to intone an oft-heard refrain)—there can only be abstractions about it drawn from each thinker's experiences, dispositions, and negotiations of meaning. So, while Mitch's reality is no more certain than any of ours, a good number of us get along "normally" enough in the world according to what we have internalized (what reality we have *built*) about it—that means we must consider the possibility that Mitch (or a real internalization like him), within the story's deconstruction of our reality, can be just as likely to *get along* well enough: to be, as close as we can get, real. So though his reality, his internalization, might simply portray someone's from the real world who allows for extra-empirical influences on reality (i.e. someone in our world in whose reality association can guarantee causation), it might also portray any person whose world allows only for empirical, logical, or scientific influences on the convergence of reality. This marks an excellent struggle between memes—some strengthen the architecture of an empirical reality, yet some (like those perpetuated in "Gus Dreams") challenge to the idea. Neither is *good* or *bad*—they are only more or less successful on their own replicative, influencing terms, where more replication equates to greater "survival."[36] "Gus Dreams" furthers these differing memetic agendas simultaneously, privileging neither. Analyzing the story at the narrative, narrated, and focalizing levels, as we have done, reveals the architecture of "the fantastic" in its pure sense. It is a collision of memes not unlike those occurring within real-world consciousness as they

compete to acquire replicators: us. Furthermore, and perhaps most importantly, memetics argues that before we could read about this collision, before it could motivate focalization and determine its own inclusion in narration, it had to come from *someone*, it had to be replicated—in this case by Irvine. Memes exist as easily in consciousness as they do in the pages of a story.

So how does any of this change how we read stories? After all, one might argue that all I have done is map, in very complicated terms, how authors put stories together. The end result is the same—the text does not change. Really, what I have proposed here is a new awareness about internalizing worlds—real or fictional. A story is never *about* a world—it never even involves a world. Unless we make allowances for non-human yet capable-of-human-thought narrators, all stories are reports and assemblies of how the real we will never truly know can come together in ways that destabilize or question (via the story's inherently memetic nature) how *we* have internalized existence—how our ideas and memes have internalized it. In "Lull" the text moves, in large part, metonymically. That is, subordinate ideas or images in one paragraph link, like the processes of cognition themselves, to the content of the next paragraph. The same applies to the various sections of the story, wherein each time, the created in one becomes the creator in the next. We find the same idea in Jeffrey Ford's "The Yellow Chamber," in Jonathan Lethem's "The Dystopianist, Thinking of His Rival Is Interrupted by a Knock on the Door," in Forrest Aguirre's "The Reverie Styx."[37] Are these maps of authorial internalization? Perhaps. We cannot know. They are, however, maps of causality and creation. They are not Scholes's "nonsense"—they "mean" (like E. Sedia's "Munashe and the Spirits," like Jason Erik Lundberg's "One Less," or like Barth Anderson's "We Stand on the Verge of Getting it On") their own creation, and we realize, as we leave the stories, that they cannot point, even as hypothetical fiction, to how anything "actually happened."[38] If the agents in any of the above

stories signify, even remotely, the idea of people, whose consciousnesses revise and redact memory instant-by-instant, then which versions of what happens are we getting? What has happened to *our* memories of what we read earlier in the stories by the time we read the final lines? What happens as the memes in the stories acquire and change us? Did the elements that built the stories' climaxes actually converge as narrated? After all, are not narrators us? Are they not the *ability* to tell stories, which is *us*? Even if we concede that literature exists in stasis as inherently *not* us, reading it has effects on us—it affects how we understand; how, as the cognitive theorists I engaged earlier demonstrate, we exist; how we internalize stories. In this sense, ultimately, when read, stories work like we do.

At this point in our examination of consciousness and focalization, we should logically move into a discussion about mimesis versus poïesis, but that is getting away from the immediate study. I will address this in greater, and more appropriate, length elsewhere. For now, to frame a departure from this discussion and move into another, let me say simply that the arguments between literature as purely mimetic (representative of reality) or purely poïetic (creating its own entirely) do not divide as cleanly as many have asserted. In fact, it is always, as I hope I have revealed, a combination of both. As Scholes points out, "It is because reality cannot be recorded that realism is dead. . . . We do not imitate the world, we construct versions of it. There is no mimesis, only poïesis."[39] Yet, poïesis must begin with what is available, and therein lies, crippled as it is, Scholes's missing mimesis.

My analysis of new ideas in consciousness and their effects on the little weird, though it appears to favor literature as an exact translation of mind (of materialism), argue only that we *begin* negotiating personal meaning from art according how we negotiate *any* meaning. From this mimetic departure, all art creates—if, by no other means, than by how it makes realities by

what it excludes, what we can never recover since it never existed. In this sense, literature is para-mimetic.

Conclusion.

In the end, fiction is fiction; it is not an accurate and veridical report of memetic transmission and cultural discourse. To return to Scholes, literature *means* only itself: "Criticism has taken the very idea of 'aboutness' away from us. It has taught us that language is tautological, if it is not nonsense, and to the extent that it is about anything it is about itself."[40] However, much to the dismay of the New Critic, *people* write stories, people embedded in (or caught between) cultures and epistemologies. We might not understand the world any more by studying its art, but we will certainly understand art more by studying its world. It is important to remember, as artistic expression embraces more and more the un-intentional (simply self-meaning) utterance, that if utterances and stories do not have to *mean* anything other than themselves, then neither do people or the demographics they belong to. Existence without "meaning" may not be enough, but it provides a far more stable exploratory environment than the theoretical arenas that try to paint comprehensive portraits of existence by looking at things from only one viewpoint.

Notes to Chapter 2

[1] "Ever since Gilbert Ryle's classic attack (1949) on what he called Descartes's 'dogma of the ghost in the machine,' dualists have been on the defensive. The prevailing wisdom, variously expressed and argued for, is *materialism*: there is only one sort of stuff, namely matter—the physical stuff of physics, chemistry, and physiology—and the mind is somehow

nothing but a physical phenomenon. In short, the mind is the brain. According to the materialists, we can (in principle!) account for every mental phenomenon using the same physical principles, laws, and raw materials that suffice to explain radioactivity, continental drift, photosynthesis, reproduction, nutrition, and growth." Daniel C. Dennett, *Consciousness Explained* (Boston: Back Bay Books, 1991), 33.

[2] Dennett (admittedly developing themes from Wittgenstein's later work) warns against the possible deceptions in this process of "lower-order" states of awareness generating "higher" ones: "It is not that *first* one goes into a higher-order state of self-observation, creating a higher-order thought, so that one can then report the lower-order thought by expressing the higher-order thought. It is rather that the second-order state (the better informed state) comes to be *created* by the very process of framing the report." Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, 315 (italics in original).

[3] David Lodge, "Consciousness and the Novel," in *Consciousness and the Novel: Connected Essays* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2002), 16.

[4] This concept of the primacy of consciousness is not without opponents. The personality psychologist Ernest Keen suggests that "The body's expressiveness may even be more basic than its consciousnesses, in one sense, for we bodily express content about ourselves that we are not conscious of, or at least not conscious of expressing." Ernest Keen, "Being Conscious is Being-in-the-World," *Self and Consciousness: Multiple Perspectives*, eds., Kessel et al. (Hillsdale, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., 1992), 51. Keen's expressions are physical, but there is no reason why their reports cannot also generate Dennett's "better-informed" state. The problem lies with a myth of us as different from our impulses or expressions, a problem Keen

seems to recognize almost immediately: "[T]he body is conscious. It understands. It learns, remembers, decides, and most definitely it desires, is afraid, gets angry, sorrowful, and joyous. These activities are conscious and they are bodily. As individuals, we are our consciousness and our bodies, but not as separate things. We are conscious bodies and embodied consciousnesses." Keen, "Being Conscious," 51. This is a matter I address in my discussion of Dennett's "Multiple Drafts Model" of Consciousness.

[5] Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1985), 100.

[6] Bal, *Narratology*, 130-31.

[7] Robert Scholes, *Structural Fabulation* (Notre Dame: U of Notre Dame P, 1975), 4-5 (italics in original).

[8] Lodge, qtd. in Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, 410-411 (italics in original).

[9] See Lutz, "Culture and Consciousness: A Problem in the Anthropology of Knowledge," *Self and Consciousness: Multiple Perspectives* (see note 4).

[10] See Keen.

[11] Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, 134.

[12] Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, 112. In *A Cognitive Theory of Consciousness*, Bernard J. Baars offers further evidence of the trends away from centralized ideas of self in cognitive theory: "Distributed models require a change in our usual way of thinking about human beings. We normally think of ourselves as guided by an executive 'self'; intuitively we believe that 'we' have control over ourselves. But distributed systems are strongly decentralized—it is the specialized components that often decide by their own internal criteria what they will do.

This is comparable perhaps to a market economy, in which thousands of individual transactions take place without government intervention, although the marketplace as a whole interacts with global governmental influences. Distributed collections of specialized processors seem to have some distinct virtues. . . . A decentralized system does not *rule out* executive control, just as the existence of market forces in the economy does not rule out a role for government . . . But it limits the control of executives, and creates possibilities for a mutual flow of control between executives and subordinate elements. Details of processing are generally handled by specialized members of the processing society." Bernard J. Baars, *A Cognitive Theory of Consciousness* (Cambridge: U of Cambridge P, 1988), 42. Commenting on this in *Consciousness Explained*, Dennett points out that they two are not alone in this view: "As [Baars] notes, a variety of theorists, in spite of enormous differences in perspective, training, and aspiration, are gravitating toward this shared vision of how consciousness must sit in the brain." Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, 257.

[13] Keen, "Being Conscious," 57.

[14] Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, 418 (italics in original).

[15] "A self, according to my theory, is not any old mathematical point, but an abstraction defined by the myriads of attributions and interpretations (including self-attributions and self-interpretations) that have composed the biography of the living body whose Center of Narrative Gravity it is. As such, it plays a singularly important role in the ongoing cognitive economy of that living body, because, of all the things in the environment an active body must make mental models of, none is more crucial than the model an agent has of itself." Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, 426-27. As a further demonstration, in "The Self as a Center of Narrative Gravity,"

Dennett invokes a sympathetic idea expressed by Karl Popper: "[He] makes a similar claim about other social-scientific constructs: '. . . social entities such as institutions and associations are abstract models constructed to interpret certain selected abstract [sic] between individuals.'" Daniel C. Dennett, "The Self as a Center of Narrative Gravity," *Self and Consciousness: Multiple Perspectives* (see note 4), 105.

[16] In *The Meme Machine*, Susan Blackmore builds on Richard Dawkins's original coining of "meme": "When you imitate someone else, something is passed on. This 'something' can be passed on again, and again, and so take on a life of its own. We might call this thing an idea, an abstraction, a behaviour, a piece of information. . . ." Susan Blackmore, *The Meme Machine* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1988), 4.

[17] Lutz, "Culture and Consciousness," 70 (italics mine).

[18] "[C]ulture is experience itself. Here culture is not an ideological veneer (although ideological thought is present in all societies); it is not a set of clothing or customs that can be shed, still leaving behind a recognizable human being (although people quite regularly drop behavioral lines that become unworkable in changing socioeconomic circumstances); nor is it a 'map' that people hold out in front of themselves to consult, one that they may drop in favor of noncultural (and, most likely, 'natural') mappings when they find themselves headed for an uncatalogued destination. Rather, culture is the sum total of our experience in the world including those explicit and implicit interpretations that have been created by our cultural forbears. Culture then is inextricable from consciousness—in part, it *is* consciousness." Ibid., 67.

[19] It is important, Lutz asks us to remember, that "Consciousness, although modeled here as a process, is yet consciousness *of* something, and that something is the contents of the mind,

the information stored in the boxes of the brain" (ibid., 65, italics in original). Just because we are not aware of the process by which we become conscious of something, that does not mean that there are not activities, influences, and habits (indeed, memes) at play determining what we should be conscious of—in a sense, what we should perceive (in that we must be aware of our perceptions to notice them). In this sense, memes are directly involved in building our conscious worlds through their ability to influence our states of neuronal excitation. Keen demonstrates this with the following: "Perception is motivated no less than imagination or emotion. All conscious experiences synthesize a multiplicity of possible meanings into a coherent, unified focal experience. The intention or purpose of a particular experience may be to gather information; that certainly aids the goal of survival, one of the vectors expressed in the creations of our consciousness. But neither is survival the only vector of life nor is gathering information the only goal expressed in the particular way we experience. Sometimes experience is dazzling in its capability to overlook information. Consciousness here expresses a different goal, perhaps to avoid pain or maintain some other coherence that is threatened by the overlooked information. At yet other times, experience becomes totally caught up in an affective discharge, blanketing the perceptual world with a single theme (anger, fear, love), which in turn seems to goad behavior against, away from, or toward something or someone in the world. Experience, then, both is motivated and motivates." Keen, "Being Conscious," 56.

[20] Dennett builds a good case for this when he argues that the discriminators in our brains "have subsequently been coopted in a host of more complicated organizations, built from millions of associations, and shaped, in the human case, by thousands of memes." Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, 384.

[21] The rest of Dennett's rhetorical question posits a more thorough (and more eloquent) answer than my summary: "If replicative might does not make right, what is to be the eternal ideal relative to which 'we' will judge the value of memes? We should note that the memes for normative concepts—for *ought* and *good* and *truth* and *beauty*—are among the most entrenched denizens of our minds, and that among the memes that constitute us, they play a central role. Our existence as us, as what we thinkers are—not as what we as organisms are—is not independent of these memes." Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, 207-208.

[22] Keen, "Being Conscious," 58.

[23] Later, I will study this embedded, dual nature under the guises of both "recursion" and "simulacra."

[24] "The important point is that there is no *necessary* connection between a meme's replicative power, its 'fitness' from *its* point of view, and its contribution to *our* fitness (by whatever standard we judge that)." Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, 203. Furthermore, "Some features of consciousness may just be selfish memes." Ibid., 221.

[25] For a study of the problems with categorization, see David Bohm's *Wholeness and the Implicate Order* (London: Routledge Classics, 2002) and George Lakoff's *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal About the Mind* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1990).

[26] "In contrast to Jaynes' (1976) view that language creates the distinction between self and other, most anthropologists have found it to be more parsimonious to view the relation between the development of culture, language, and consciousness a dialectical one. . . . Language also makes possible the transmission of large amounts of information from one generation to the next, including information about human nature, individual differences, and mind. This

transmission permits the development of distinct cultural traditions relating to the self and self-awareness." Lutz, "Culture and Consciousness," 68.

[27] Scholes, *Structural Fabulation*, 7.

[28] C. S. Lewis, *The allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1936), 11.

[29] Scholes, *Structural Fabulation*, 45-46.

[30] Kelly Link, "Lull," *Conjunctions* 39, ed. Bradford Morrow. Guest ed., Peter Straub. (New York: Bard College, 2002).

[31] Ulric Neisser refers to the necessary elements of this process as "affordances." He explains that "An affordance is a kind of meaning. To the extent that the meaning of an object or event consists in what we can do to it—or what it can do to us—many meanings are directly specified in the optic array. The environment we perceive is rich in immediate possibilities." "The Development of Consciousness and the Acquisition of Skill," *Self and Consciousness: Multiple Perspectives* (see note 4). Under Neisser's terms, this means that the logical formulae that the narrator in "Lull" makes explicit are reports about the affordances available to, in the first example, the delivery boy and, in the second, the people who say they have or have not seen the hermit. These characters, in turn, realize these affordances based on extrapolations of information that come from comparisons drawn between what an affordance-realizor has experienced in the past and what elements of the current situation present themselves now. Furthermore, how a given culture has memetically prepared an actor-to-be determines what actions the affordance-realizor (or, vicariously, the reader) should take. The explicit logical formulae in "Lull," then, become maps of most of the cognitive processes involved with being

either a consciousness in a story or a consciousness reading (and negotiating meaning from) a story.

[32] Ulric Neisser, "The Development of Consciousness," 6.

[33] This is "understanding" at the narrative level. In essence, what it asks is that we take what we find about memetic involvement in character and from it, back-form new ideas about why the narrator decided, of all things available, to include these things in its report in the first place. Peeling away even deeper layers of understanding, we should, following this back-formation, consider how memetics involved itself in the first place with the motivations behind the focalizing (the meaningful perception) of the affordances (the what-can-be-done-to-or-with-the-elements-of-the perceptible-environment). Why, since we are reading a report, a world-building, is what we see involved in the report in the first place? What is worth reporting and why? The answers (and they are, of course, relative to each examiner) lie in the array of cultural memetics involved in our consciousnesses.

[34] Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, trans., Richard Howard (Ithaca, New York: Cornell Paperbacks, 1975), 120.

[35] Alex Irvine, "Gus Dreams of Biting the Mailman," *Trampoline: An Anthology*. Kelly Link, ed. (Northampton, Massachusetts: Small Beer Press, 2003), 62.

[36] Richard Dawkins, upon introducing the concept of the meme in *The Selfish Gene* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999) warns against the dangerously misleading practice of considering memes *alive*. They replicate, and that is enough, but we commonly lack appropriate language to depict their process. They are survivors of an entirely different form than we have previously known.

[37] Jeffrey Ford, "The Yellow Chamber," *Trampoline* (see note 35). Jonathan Lethem, "The Dystopianist, Thinking of His Rival, Is Interrupted by a Knock on the Door," *Conjunctions* 39 (see note 30). Forrest Aguirre, "The Reverie Styx," Fugue XXIX (Hyattsville, MD: Raw Dog Screaming Press, 2005).

[38] E. Sedia, "Munashe and the Spirits," *GrendelSong* 1 (Erie, Pennsylvania: Jessup Publishing, 2006). Jason Erik Lundberg, "One Less," *Americana* (2005). Barth Anderson, "We Stand on the Verge of Getting it On," *Fortean Bureau* 24, July 2004. http://www.forteanbureau.com/july2004/Anderson/index.html.

[39] Scholes, *Structural Fabulation*, 7.

[40] Scholes, *Structural Fabulation*, 1-2.

CHAPTER 3

THE SELF-WEIRD WORLD: PROBLEMS OF BEING AS THE FANTASTIC INVASION

> None of this is as simple as it sounds, but one must start somewhere even though such placement inevitably entails the telling of a lie.
>
> Karen Joy Fowler

Introduction

There is a prevailing sentiment in the worlds of scientific, materialist study that the world is not *strange*—not in any of the more bizarre forms exhibited by the little weird. This sentiment has been, then, one of the prevailing criteria defining one artistic genre from another, mimetic versus non-mimetic, and relevant versus not. To explore how the little weird maps its own poetics and their relation to the world, we must do away with this mistaken sentiment, for the experimentation in the little weird is not, as is commonly thought, what estranges the work from realistic, naturalistic, or mimetic work—indeed, these techniques are what align the little weird more closely than most other categories with cognition.

In the little weird, the fantastic or the strange does not invade the normal to an "estranging" or "dissonant" effect; rather, the normal invades upon the strange, which is the form of self, of consciousness, and of cognition itself. As a result, mundane problems of being become the ungraspable fantastic, and not the timeslips, identity-blurs, recursions, and other common tropes of experimentation. In *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, Tzvetan Todorov points out that Sartre first identified this trend when studying Kafka and Blanchot. "According to Sartre," Todorov tells us, "Blanchot and Kafka no longer try to depict extraordinary beings; for them, 'there is now only one fantastic object: man. Not the man of religions and spiritualism, only half committed to the world of the body, but man-as-given, man-

as-nature, man-as-society . . .'"[1] Todorov concludes that "The 'normal' man is precisely the fantastic being; the fantastic becomes the rule, not the exception."[2] This, in many ways, directly opposes the formula for more realistic, naturalistic, or mimetic fiction. It is this opposition, I argue, that brings the little weird into closer step with how selves, consciousness, and narratives of being actually function.

Theoretical Background

The state of the world out there—*beyond* the self—arises from perception. Of course, there are infinitely many processes occurring in phenomenal space irrespective of any observing or participating self; however, their independence from our observation does not follow them into the worlds of our selves. In *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*, David Bohm begins his deconstruction of reality by elucidating the difference between what occurs *out there* and how consciousness reconciles itself with it: ". . . fragmentation is continually being brought about by the almost universal habit of taking the content of our thought for 'a description of the world as it is.'"[3] There is no such thing as a purely objective observer.[4] Further, the idea that external phenomena (as we process them) are un-strange, mundane, and logically progressive is simply a normalizing narrative that selves tell themselves and each other. As such, any literature that fails to take this into account in its attempts to "realistically" portray the condition self is neither mimetic, realistic, nor naturalistic. It is, as I have said previously, poïetic—it is creating, not representing; it is perpetuating a narrative of the mundane by adopting the material of the normal environment and para-mimetically arranging it into a decidedly anti-cognitive flow of events.[5]

According to Catherine Lutz's theory of self-culture discourse, the larger narratives of what a given culture is and what it is to be a part of that culture determine how a self should

respond to what it perceives.[6] This is how, for example, two different selves negotiated by two different self-culture discourses might look differently upon (and react differently to) something as extreme as, say, cannibalism. One of these selves, a Western one, for example, might *see* a horrific ritual—it is there, in the outside world, being perceived. However, the other self, one from a culture that practices cannibalism, would not see the same thing. No horrific ritual exists in its world. It sees, perhaps, religious transcendence, cultural solidity, or any number of other phenomena—it may not even see the eating of flesh at all but a metaphysical Eucharist instead. Which is correct? Both, of course. Each self has been built from a life-long immersion in cultural discourse, and each is guided by specific memes that delimit evaluation and response. What is more, one of these selves may have already begun "creating" cannibalism in its cognitive model of the world. If this self merely observes what it considers associated aspects of "possibly-cannibalism" (i.e. primitive huts, aggressive tribal dancing, drawings of heads on leathern windows), these aspects can create "cannibalism in the immediate world" before it has even been perceived. In his study of the processes of perception and how a mimetically driven narrative of self *creates* them, Daniel C. Dennett explains the "analysis-by-synthesis" model of perception, which states that

> perceptions are built up in a process that weaves back and forth between centrally generated expectations, on the one hand, and confirmations (and disconfirmations) arising from the periphery on the other hand (e.g., Neisser, 1967). The general idea of these theories is that after a certain amount of "preprocessing" has occurred in the early or peripheral layers of the perceptual system, the tasks of perception are completed—objects are identified, recognized, categorized—by generate-and-test cycles. In such a cycle, one's current expectations and interests shape hypotheses for one's perceptual systems to confirm or disconfirm, and a rapid sequence of such hypothesis generations and confirmations produces the ultimate product, the ongoing, updated 'model' of the world of the perceiver. Such accounts of perception are motivated by a variety of considerations, both biological and epistemological . . ."[7]

A self cannot remove itself from the motivated processing of what it perceives. The functions of

self and the functions of perception co-occur in the same materialist brain-operations. Furthermore, which data warrant sustaining in the ongoing narrative of self (that is, which warrant even being noticed and held in attention for any but the briefest of Dennett's revisionist instants) is determined by the disposition of those memes that have acquired the self in question. In some extreme self-worlds, the cannibalism scene *would not even exist* if the self in question were not motivated to sustain it in its ongoing report of self-and-situation.[8] A self's anxieties determine the construction of its world.

In George Saunders's "Sea Oak," the self narrating the story builds a world that includes a risen corpse as manifested narratorial anxiety. The narrator-self struggles with the threat of the mundane swallowing the story's characters (which, it must be recalled, the narrator-self has *created*: their appearances, utterances, even their very existence are all determined by what the narrator-self is motivated to focalize into its narrative). Further, though the story is narrated in first-person, we cannot know definitively if this is a self, an "I," that the narrator has created for itself or if the narrative is as simple as the main character creating a story—postmodern relativism dictates that it must interpretively be both. The narrator understands the main character as a middling stripper who caters primarily to women: "What a stressful workplace. The minute your Cute Rating drops, you're a goner. Guests rank us as Knockout, Honeypie, Adequate, or Stinker. . . . I'm a solid Honeypie/Adequate . . ." (88).[9] The main character and his sisters live paycheck-to-paycheck, nearly beyond their means and locked in a depressing and dangerous normality. Later, when their peaceful aunt Bernie dies, the narrator realizes she died "Scared to death in a crappy apartment" (93). When Aunt Bernie, who throughout her life experienced only the steady mundane, dies, she becomes a perfect (no longer changing) form—an expired self that, for certain now, will never escape the very-normal oppression that the main character also suffers from.

When Bernie resurrects and reappears in the apartment as a foul-mouthed, determined problem-solver, the narrator has her tell the main character "'You gotta get us out of here!'" (106). Bernie gives supernatural, perfected voice to the very anxieties that inform the main character's negotiation of self. The narrator builds a world for him that is fully informed by his concerns about never improving his lot. What he perceives is based on what the narrator (again, either another self or, in fact, himself) *needs* him to perceive, and the reader is left only with *this is how it is for him*. The realness of Bernie's resurrection is beyond discussion.

Analysis

Since a self must internalize everything *out there* in the world before it can negotiate relevance or meaning, what is out there and what it is doing become subordinate questions to what narrative of space a memeplex-self needs to tell itself, and why. One of the seemingly most primary of these narratives of space must be the story of physics. The processes scientists have charted (and we have accepted) regarding the behavior of real space (terrestrial or non) are wholly alien and impossible in the internalized versions of space a consciousness represents to itself. Ernest Keen isolates the disparity between what seems to be going on in real space (according to which physical laws) and what is going on in "experiential space" (according to no rules but those that serve the narrative of self) in "Being Conscious is Being-in-the-World":

> Experiential space, like experiential time, freely violates the conceptual framework of physics and functions. Physical objects occupy space, and the space they occupy is the geometric space of the Newtonian world. . . . But finally we have to say that conscious phenomena simply do not occupy the space of the Newtonian world. They have no Newtonian location.[10]

The physics of experiential space can involve *non*-physical tableaux such as, for example, the detailed daydream-envisioning of being able to fly; the sudden, atemporal appearance of a

deceased-relative phantasm for a conversation in mindspace; or even the rapid and often unconnected teleportation of a mapped self from one physical location to another. This means, that as phenomena from the external world are internalized and pieced together to build a para-mimetic world from a few real, physical building blocks *out there*, they are stripped of their inherent real world characteristics, processed through the anti-Newtonian self-world negotiation, and then only nominally re-given crude maps of those now-missing real world characteristics—most of which will default to the strictures of reality allowed by the self-culture discourse and not a self-science one. Few selves indeed keep accurate understandings of Brownian motion, the Phi effect, or the Oort Cloud in mind as they work through their everyday negotiations between themselves and the world beyond. The discriminatory, fragmentary, anti-Newtonian processes of sustaining a self and a world to move through, in this model, are hardly invulnerable to incorporating the weird into empirical reality. Indeed, these few examples paint a very weird portrait of consciousness.

In regards to experiential space, what applies, in regards to theory, to a literary narrative applies as well to narratives of self and space. When Todorov offered his defining summary of "fantastic" literature, he was mapping divisions between literary phenomena; however, his work concentrates decidedly on what is real as opposed to what is not as a measure of genre classification.[11]

> In a world which is indeed our world, the one we know, a world without devils, sylphides, or vampires, there occurs an event which cannot be explained by the laws of this same familiar world. The person who experiences the event must opt for one of two possible solutions: either he is the victim of an illusion of the sense, of a product of the imagination—and laws of the world then remain what they are; or else the event has indeed taken place, it is an integral part of reality—but then this reality is controlled by laws unknown to us. Either the devil is an illusion, an imaginary being; or else he really exists, precisely like other living beings—with this reservation, that we encounter him infrequently.[12]

But, again, Todorov means literary events attempting to signify real-world principles.[13] Mindspace events do not signify experience the same way—they *are* experience.[14] What exists in the materialist functioning of a consciousness is real, even if it is only a fragmentary, atemporal invasion into the more-or-less cohesive negotiation of consciousness. A person who sees a red-capped gnome frolicking for the briefest instant through the landscapes of his or her experiential space may actually believe in the creature, may take it as a manifested metaphor built from his or her cultural framework or personal anxieties, or may regard it merely as a flight of fancy taken from a lifetime of exposure to art and myth.[15] Regardless, the effects on the self-narrative are real. If it exists in a mind, it influences cognitive world-building, which is where real life takes place. Indeed, even many real world features that influence self-creation are merely the expressions of other selves. We live and build ourselves in an ongoing dialogue of expression, not only in a linguistic sense or in Lutz's cultural sense, but also in a *tangible* sense. Anything man-made is an expression of other selves—a type of expression we have long since reconciled with our many negotiations.[16]

Thus, in Doug Lain's "The '84 Regress," when the main character's world becomes phantasmagoric, we cannot simply call it a hallucination. The main character, at various points in the story, suffers withdrawal from a variety of pills, each of which cognitively normalize the taker so that he or she lives in (thinks in) a prescribed cultural situation—a *steady* cultural situation. As was the case with Saunders's "Sea Oak," readers cannot definitively conclude whether the main character is narrating his own story or if a different narrator has created the main character identity as an expression of its own self. This means that when the main character tells us that "The future is a hallucination," (9) we have to take the line both literally and figuratively.[17] The main character sees "it shimmering across the horizon, a city of cylinders and

squares, and [is] amazed at how it floats," but of course, what he is seeing has been taken piecemeal from the environment, internalized, loaded with semantic, cognitive, self-world meaning, and then sustained in the self's attention. The narrator (whatever its nature) has motivated certain aspects of what is *out there* beyond the main character for focalization, meaning the entire episode is both an invocation of motivated-perception world-building for the main character as well as an actual motivated world-building for the narratorial self—it is its own narrative, just as the main character's narrative of self is *within* it.

Further, the main character tells us that "The Yugo has a television screen where there was once a speedometer, and there is a jet stream where the exhaust pipe used to be" (9). While these may be hallucinations created by the main character's neuro-chemical imbalance, they are also very easily simply the metaphoric processes of consciousness at work. Thoughts of televisions and jet streams can very easily enter the self-world negotiation if there are memes or other cognitive dispositions at work that can, in some way, contribute to sustaining the main character's self or assist with orienting him in the world according to selfly need. That is to say "television" can interrupt one's thought at any time. Anything can, and does so regularly. The main character's experiential space is not Newtonian—it will be whatever it needs to and whenever it needs to as best suits the self's interests. That the self may think in metaphor (linguistic or imagistic) is only, as Dennett points out, part of its operation. Moreover, according to Bohm's thought-is-experience observation, what occurs in the main character's experiential space (as well as what is occurring in the narrator's) is real experience. Hallucination or not, the weird events in "The '84 Regress" are part of a modeled self's world, and each event is the culmination of varying crises of existence, identity, biology, and acculturation.

This principle is, of course, not limited to only one author. When the weird occurs in Ed

Park's "Well-Moistened with Cheap Wine, the Sailor and the Wayfarer Sing of Their Absent Sweethearts," it takes many forms: multiplicity of self (every woman on the island is named Tina), the collapse of distance and cartography (the location and motility of the research-island), and unstable history (the uncertain nature of the linguistic artifacts the Tinas' study).[18] Each of these events and all of them together, instead of being simply strange aspects of a non-mimetic story, are a model of consciousness. For Tina, the main character—and for the narrators, motivators, and focalizors involved in maneuvering her-as-narrative through the strange island—these events are the stuff of experiential space, anxiety, culture, and expression, to name a few. Tina thinking is Tina experiencing, and consciousness, as we have seen, is not a steady or "normal" operation. The story makes sense of itself by *making a place* of itself, where concerns of being can be modeled, extrapolated, tested, corrected, and then re-internalized both by itself (once the narration reaches its end, then the story knows its own teleology from the beginning) and by its readers, who are acquired by the many and varied memes of "Well-Moistened with Cheap Wine." We might say the same of China Miéville's "Familiar," which metaphorizes the accumulation of experiences and tracks the acquisition-by-memes that results in a consciousness.[19] Nevermind that sentient piles of gathering rubbish do not acquire consciousness in the real world—once the story's memes have acquired a reader, Miéville's story is now an entirely new, neat-and-tidy thought-metaphor at the ready when thinkers later envision the collecting of consciousness. Interstellar dust rarely ends in consciousness either, yet we have a name for that story: The History of Our Universe.

"Familiar" is a thought (in that reading it is a cognitive process), and thought, of course, is experience. Experience, in turn, informs how we build our selves and our worlds, and we may just come to characterize something real down the line in terms of "Familiar" or of "The '84

Regress" or of "Well-Moistened with Cheap Wine" when we try to reconcile the real thing with our own narratives of self. There are no landscapes; there are only selves expressing experiential spaces, and the weird, not the normal, constitutes their true vocabulary.

Further Analysis

There are many consequences of the realization that a self is weird—one of the most disturbing is how it makes room for the fallacy that "association means causation" or how it allows what Todorov calls "pan-determinism,"[20] In short, the weirding of self and space can make gods and monsters responsible for the events that inform our anxieties of being. As Mieke Bal points out in *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, the world becomes agentive:

> Spaces function in a story in two ways. On the one hand, they are only a frame, a place of action. In this capacity a more or less detailed presentation will lead to a more or less concrete picture of that space. The space can also remain entirely in the background. In many cases, however, space is "thematized": it becomes an object of presentation itself, for its own sake. Space thus becomes an "acting place" rather than the place of action.[21]

So, if as Bal observes, places in literary narratives can be imbued with force, agency, or theme, so can they be similarly imbued in the narratives of self and world. A place, or many places, can either calm or exacerbate a character's (or self's) anxieties—his or her concerns about sustaining self, these concerns being some of the primary factors determining what one perceives, what world one makes. And as Bohm points out, thought is experience—under these circumstances, either actual world-building or that which appears in a textual narrative. The often-strangeness of world building in the little weird only aligns it even more closely to a human consciousness than "realistic" literature in that it both invokes the idea with its characters and activates the process in its readers.

A further consequence of "acting places" is that they can become targets of what Keen refers to as "affective discharge." Earlier, I aligned Keen's theory with how a self comes to notice perceptions; in that sense, however, emotion (or "affect") simply determined Dennett's "semantic readiness." Under the present focus, the projection of emotion onto the landscape of experiential space can become recursive. Keen's remarks bear re-iterating:

> At yet other times, experience becomes totally caught up in an affective discharge, blanketing the perceptual world with a single theme (anger, fear, love), which in turn seems to goad behavior against, away from, or toward something or someone in the world. Experience, then, both is motivated and motivates.[22]

A self in the grip of an intense emotion can come to experience all of his or her perceptions as temporarily more-than-simply-*associated* with the elements of phenomenal space. When environment moves from a place of action to an acting place, association all too often begins to mean causation. Perception and emotion occur in the same brain-space as consciousness itself (indeed, are part of consciousness), and the self in question creates his or her world through a filter of, for example, anger. Not only is the world, like the self, "angry," the world can become recursively causal in regards to the self's anger. That is to say an angry self creates its world by lifting into attention perceptions from the outside world that cohere with what the angry-self (its memes, dispositions, discriminations, and semantic readiness) needs, fears, distrusts, and so forth under the given emotional circumstances. Anything in the self's experiential space (which, as noted earlier, may both include objects that are not there in the real world as well as exclude those that most certainly are), when part of an acting place can become both target and cause of a self's emotion. For example, the self in question, angered, can become even more angry *at* a suddenly broken vase as well as becoming even more angry *because of* the suddenly broken vase. Here, association means causation: the simple matter of the vase *making it* into the self's notice associates it with the self's world-painting affective discharge. Its association becomes

causation in that it furthers the self's anger, and as the rest of the self's idio-occultism (the identifying of phenomena as "cause" when others are, in fact, causing *it*) attempts to assimilate the new anger-causing event (the vase breaking), it can become, even if only momentarily, an agent of the self's anger. One can almost hear the afflicted self wondering aloud why the vase broke *now*, lumping it into the rest of the acting-place, and the idio-occultishly decided-upon conspiracy at hand. When this process is coupled with the atemporal, fragmentary, revisionist, and metaphor-as-thought negotiation of consciousness, the borders between real and not, possible and not, and existent or not become dizzyingly blurred. The world can, in every real sense to this beleaguered self, become suddenly "out to get" the self, just as the world (or, for example, its gods) can also be out to help it in other situations. Sudden flights of imagination create scenarios that either alleviate or exacerbate the angered state, previous conversations can be recast to serve the needs of a new narrative self, and even bizarre thought-metaphors all exist as experience alongside the self-world negotiation. The self remakes itself (and its constituent memories, conclusions, and metaphors) in the instant, effectively revising away its previous incarnation, and all to the effect of how best to cope with the problem of the acting place, which is, of course, merely the self's projected anxieties. An acting place, like the self, is another metaphor of consciousness, different in only a few ways from the main metaphor of self. We might think of it as selfly bilocation. Ulric Neisser elucidates this multiplicity in "The Development of Consciousness and the Acquisition of Skill":

> In imagining what may happen and recalling what has happened, we leave the realm of objective awareness. Our consciousness *extends* to the possible as well as the actual; we can anticipate what we would see in entirely imaginary environments. Our conception of ourselves is altered, too. Who am *I*, in that imagined place? I still have a kind of ecological self, but it is not *this self* here. The extended awareness of imagination requires an analogously extended ecological self.[23]

Imagined events (and the anxieties, concerns, dispositions, or emotions that inform them) alter

consciousness by extending it into multiple forms. The dialogue between these varied forms and our main sense of self is the stuff of self-correction—more specific than a narrative of self, this dialogue is a drama of self.

A self, then, exists in a universe governed by idio-occult logic—in the sense of personal ideas about agency, environment, and causality, which, even in the instance of a skeptical, Empirical, positivist self, can never be fully objective, neutral, or real. This idio-occult system makes greater or lesser allowances for "possible explanations of things" based on the intensity of its affective discharge in any given moment. Indeed, idio-occultism can become nearly inactive as a self approaches homeostasis (as can the self itself); however, a self can never exorcise its tendencies toward occultation entirely—the self *is* occultation. Even the most vehement materialist does not have in his or her mind a comprehensive map of all of the complicated processes that govern *physical* phenomena—he or she often has only piecemeal sketches in mind at any given instant, and these sketches can easily create worlds for the vehement materialist wherein the sketch (defined, of course, as the memes of self best saw fit) in question becomes, inaccurately, the *cause* of what he or she perceives out there.[24] The problem with the idea that "association does not mean causation" is that the idea is infinite—one must never cease the exploration for deeper causation.[25] In this sense, a process of the world *out there* is fully causing something in the self-in-question's experiential space that it is not *actually* causing—not by itself, not as the ultimate cause. In moments of intense meditation or lucidity, this same self might suspend this process of causal explanation, of occultation, but in a moment of affective discharge, this is not as likely. The self then is less its self and more its emotion of the moment. This holds true for textual selves as well as biological ones.

One of the clearest examples of affective discharge at work in the little weird occurs in

Jason Erik Lundberg's "One Less."[26] The main character, a salesman locked in his job and at the mercy of his employer, is denied the opportunity to spend a birthday with the woman he loves because of work demands. From this one lack-of-control irruption into the main character's personal sphere, the character's world becomes an acting place, animated by the character's projected anxieties about self and control. By degrees, the main character is erased from the world of his own experiential space until he is ultimately relegated into the form of a lamp in the corner of the room he shared with his former lover, who is now involved with one of the main character's old coworkers. In "One Less," the world is literally out to get the main character in the sense that his inadequate assertions of self and his lack of control have empowered those aspects of the environment that his self is motivated to perceive. He bilocates into a world he creates that is the projected perfection (the logical conclusion) of the course of his present concerns of self. And of course, as Dennett points out, memes may not necessarily be good for a self—they are interested primarily in their own perpetuation, in keeping a hold on a self's attention, of being the self. In a story (textual or self), they situate themselves most advantageously for the very perpetuation that defines them.

As a textual self-model, "One Less" can extend itself through whatever length-of-story-time best suits the narrative, but when applied to actual self-narrative, the entirety of "One Less" serves as an example, perhaps, of a complex metaphor that might last only a few fragmentary seconds in a self's consciousness as it struggles suddenly to deal with a loss-of-control crisis, such as the main character's invaded birthday. Anxiety creates the metaphors, the weird, that will (for as long as it needs to be addressed by the self) model the self's concern with sustaining its own narrative. According to Neisser,

> . . . human beings are not concerned only with the present; they also remember the past, prepare for the future, and imagine possibilities that may never be realized. I suggest that

> this extension of consciousness is based on many of the processes that underlie perception itself, used in a different and constructive way.[27]

The main character in "One Less" prepares and imagines as best suits his self-world crisis. The extension of his consciousness is the metaphorized weird of his own life, a self-correcting projection, perhaps. And as Neisser mentions, the extension of this consciousness is powered by the processes underlying perception itself, meaning this extended self may motivate itself to notice vastly different aspects of phenomenal space than the main self does. It has, essentially, a life of its own, a parallel simulation operated by the same brain that sustains the main self. The extended self-world negotiation is the reality of weird taken to its extreme world-building conclusions, and, as evidenced by Lundberg's character's full immersion in it, it owes nothing to negotiating with reality, for it *is* a negotiation with reality.

In the end, the main character is even disconnected from the self-culture semiotics of language that, as Dennett and others have demonstrated, did much of the initial heavy lifting in constructing the self. The main-character-lamp-self can only express "Click," the language of inanimate function. Language fails often enough to categorize crises in a real self; in a story built entirely of language, this can be modeled only by metaphor. That very metaphor (when imagistic instead of linguistic) in a real self can enter, fragment, and inform the negotiation of self as atemporally, as strangely, and as intermittently as needed.

And Lundberg is not alone in taking affective discharge, experiential space, and bilocation as the mechanics of weird. The same devices work to different extrapolated ends in Jeffrey Ford's "Bright Morning," in M. John Harrison's "Entertaining Angels Unawares," and in Doug Lain's "The Word 'Mermaid' Written on an Index Card."[28] Einstein's narrative of self takes form, in part, according to atemporal concerns about Lieserl in Karen Joy Fowler's "Lieserl," and Ted Chiang's "Hell is the Absence of God" makes physical the concepts of both

heaven and hell as *imperfect* perfected forms that make the afterlife an expression of *socio*-occultation—a weird that is *too* graspable.[29] The dithering nature of the self-world negotiation appears everywhere in the little weird, and as cultural discourse embraces this more and more, narratives become even more dynamically unreal as they come nearer to the true nature of any self, which is, ultimately, expression.

Conclusion

Of course, one of the primary culprits in the creation of an idio-occult system (of a self) is language. When one metaphorizes cognitive occultation in both selves and texts, the result is the supernatural—the weird.[30] Todorov realizes this in his defining study of fantastic literature:

> If the fantastic constantly makes use of rhetorical figures, it is because it originates in them. The supernatural is born of language, it is both its consequence and its proof: not only do the devil and vampires exist only in words, but language alone enables us to conceive what is always absent: the supernatural. The supernatural thereby becomes a symbol of language, just as the figures of rhetoric do, and the figure is, as we have seen, the purest form of literality.[31]

In the same manner that deities might be considered people's perfected projections of their own concerns (perfect in the sense of ultimate, unchanging, and terminally causal), the supernatural and the weird can be linguistically perfected projections. They are often their own explanations, their own causes—creations based in cultural anxiety, emotion, or interest that share the same semiotic mindspace as everyday elements of the real world. And if so much of cognition is determined by language and its embedded cultural interests, then language, as Todorov mentions, is one of the primary media through which we create our selves (as well as "worlds" and other multiplicities of self). Robert Scholes recognized the self-language negotiation as essential to any study of speculative fiction in *Structural Fabulation: An Essay on Fiction of the Future*: "We learn that men's visual perceptions are governed by mental leaps to whole configurations or

‘gestalts’ rather than by patient accumulation of phenomenal details. We learn that we acquire language in similar quantum jumps of grammatical competence. And we know that our acquired languages in turn govern and shape our perceptions of this world.”[32] It is important to remember that while the supernatural or weird often represents what we think of as non-physical or impossible, nothing is non-physical or impossible: everything occurs in materialist space—in this case, in the bio-chemical dialogues of mind. Selves are, as many have said, stories, and it is more important to recognize that something strange might be informing this story in someone’s experiential mindspace (indeed, *does* inform when we consider the fragmentary, metaphoric, revisionist nature of consciousness) than it is to decide that strange or supernatural things “do not actually happen” and are therefore estranging features of a narrative.[33] Darko Suvin, though he regularly maneuvers his theories away from weird fiction in *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, realizes that “The aliens—utopians, monsters, or simply differing strangers—are a mirror to man just as the differing country is a mirror for his world. But the mirror is not only a reflecting one, it is also a transforming one, virgin womb and alchemical dynamo: the mirror is a crucible.”[34] The problem of simply being (with all its concomitant anxieties, projections, threats, and concerns) is what estranges characters, narrators, and selves. The strange or the bizarre is part of standard consciousness-operation. The culturally agreed-upon mundane is what selves must successfully incorporate into their senses of being.

Notes to Chapter 3

[1] Sartre, qtd. in Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, Trans., Richard Howard (Ithaca, New York: Cornell Paperbacks, 1975), 173.

[2] Ibid.

[3] David Bohm, *Wholeness and the Implicate Order* (London: Routledge Classics, 2002), 4. It should be noted that Bohm's thesis is specifically *not* about dividing the self from the world as I am using his work to illustrate. Indeed, he takes as his focus of study a doing-away-with ideas about division (fragmentation) between physical objects. However, in the sense that I have quoted him here, recognizing that what *seems* to be beyond the self must be processed by the mind and is therefore subject to Dennett's "semantic readiness," discriminatory states, and the other cohesive habits of the narrative of self does not contradict Bohm's argument. The outside world and the internal self may indeed be part of one order, as Bohm argues, but that does not mean that the mind has any pure, unaffected, objective access to what is occurring in its (the mind's) parcel of the whole and unbroken order.

[4] "Perception, however, is a psychological process, strongly dependent on the position of the perceiving body; a small child sees things in a totally different way from an adult, if only as far as measurements are concerned. The degree to which one is familiar with what one sees also influences perception. When the Central American Indians first saw horsemen, they did not see the same things we do when we see people riding. They *saw* gigantic monsters, with human heads and four legs. These had to be gods. Perception depends on so many factors that striving for objectivity is pointless." Todorov, *The Fantastic*, 100.

[5] Further, the phenomena that do occur within the range of a perceiver, the very phenomena that many hold as *first* neutrally and objectively perceived *then*, distorted by the processes of cognition, may be neither neutral nor objective even in a *physic*al sense. David Bohm points out in *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*, referring to Heisenberg's Indeterminacy Principle, that "even if one supposes that the *physically significant variables* actually existed

with *sharply defined values* (as is demanded by classical mechanics) then we could never measure all of them simultaneously, for *the interaction between the observing apparatus and what is observed always involves an exchange of one or more indivisible and uncontrollably fluctuating quanta*." Bohm, *Wholeness*, 89 (italics mine). A perceiving instrument (or perceiver itself) cannot *not* influence the state of what it isolates under its "gaze." To do so, the instrument would have to not exist.

[6] See Catherine Lutz, "Culture and Consciousness: A Problem in the Anthropology of Knowledge," *Self and Consciousness: Multiple Perspectives*, eds., Kessel et al. (Hillsdale, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc, 1992).

[7] Daniel C. Dennett, *Consciousness Explained* (Boston: Back Bay Books, 1991), 12. See also *Self and Consciousness: Multiple Perspectives* (see note 6).

[8] For example, if the self in question did not consider the cannibalism scene noteworthy, then it is likely that the ongoing narrative of itself would not sustain the perceptual data in its negotiation. We might draw a similar parallel to not-noticing a given patron dining in the same restaurant as our perceiving selves. In the reports we create and hold in attention, one or more of us (given the idea that we are all dining in the same restaurant) might not have a quiet, modestly clad couple in an innocuous central table). We are not motivated, based on Dennett's process of analysis-by-synthesis, to devote the energy to sustaining a useless aspect of our self-world situation. Certainly, the couple is there, but if we follow our dinner with stories to others about our dining experiences and fail (because they did not exist in our worlds) to include information about the couple in our presumably comprehensive report, are we still being "mimetic?" As with Mieke Bal's motivations for focalizations, our stories of self have created a world as best suits

our interests, concerns, anxieties, and other needs of self-world situation.

[9] George Saunders, "Sea Oak," *Feeling Very Strange: The Slipstream Anthology*, eds. James Patrick Kelly and John Kessel. Series ed., Jacob Weisman (San Francisco: Tachyon Publications, 2006).

[10] Ernest Keen, "Being Conscious is Being-in-the-World," *Self and Consciousness: Multiple Perspectives* (see note 6), 48.

[11] For example, bizarre, strange, or supernatural phenomena in literature may be real (i.e. mimicking phenomena from the real world), but only in the sense that they are the delusions of insanity.

[12] Todorov, *The Fantastic*, 25.

[13] Todorov takes as an unspoken, operative assumption here the idea of "our world," which is simply a sustained, self-culture, self-space, normalizing narrative.

[14] "Clarity of perception and thought evidently requires that we be generally aware of how our experience is shaped by the insight (clear or confused) provided by the theories that are implicit or explicit in our general ways of thinking. *To this end, it is useful to emphasize that experience and knowledge are one process* [italics mine], rather than to think that our knowledge is *about* some sort of separate experience [italics original]. We can refer to this one process as experience-knowledge (the hyphen indicating that these are two inseparable aspects of one whole movement)." Bohm, *Wholeness*, 7. It is important to note that experience generated by literature is the same as experience generated by real-world stimuli. They are handled by the same processes, occur in the same experiential space, and are filed into the same negotiation of self. Art *is* experience; it is not, as Bohm demonstrates, *about* it.

[15] Lest this point be dismissed as encompassing a stroke of mental image-metaphors that, if any, exert only minor influences on a self's sustenance, I point to Dennett's assertion that "metaphors are not 'just' metaphors; metaphors are the tools of thought. No one can think about consciousness without them, so it is important to equip yourself with the best set of tools available." Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, 455. Further, a "tool of thought" is thought, and thought, of course, is consciousness.

[16] Bohm tells us that many, many aspects of the physical environments we perceive are themselves simply thoughts: "Thus, as has already been pointed out, thought is a material process whose content is the total response of memory, including feelings, muscular reactions and even physical sensations that merge with and flow out of the whole response. Indeed, all man-made features of our general environment are, in this sense, extensions of the process of thought, for their shapes, forms, and general orders of movement originate basically in thought, and are incorporated within this environment, in the activity of human work, which is guided by such thought." Bohm, *Wholeness*, 74.

[17] Doug Lain, "The '84 Regress," *Last Week's Apocalypse* (San Francisco: Night Shade Books, 2006).

[18] Ed Park, "Well-Moistened with Cheap Wine, The Sailor and the Wayfarer Sing of Their Absent Sweethearts," *Trampoline: An Anthology*, ed. Kelly Link (Northampton, Massachusetts: Small Beer Press, 2003)

[19] China Miéville, "Familiar," *Conjunctions* 39, ed., Bradford Morrow. Guest ed., Peter Straub (New York: Bard College, 2002).

[20] Todorov, *The Fantastic*, 120.

[21] Bal, *Narratology*, 95.

[22] Keen, "Being Conscious," 56.

[23] Ulric Neisser, "The Development of Consciousness and the Acquisition of Skill," *Self and Consciousness: Multiple Perspectives* (see note 6), 8.

[24] Saussure's "semiology" works in application to cognitive narrative as well as textual. His "signs" describe a system of representation wherein language "signifies" real-world "signifieds." In a cognitive narrative, however, it is important to recall that any real-world item or process that may be signified has been internalized by the decoder (reader or listener)—the signified is wrapped up in the decoder's narratives of self, space, and causation. Therefore, this decoder's mental signifiers (my "sketches") are never semiotically pointing to anything but the constituent elements of his or her idio-occult system. Derrida pointed out that language could never point to the pure thing in itself, as there is a crippling arbitrariness between words and the *thingness* of what they represent. Further, signifiers (linguistic or cognitive) can never point to anything but a thinker's internalizations of things, which only situates these things in an even deeper "level" of removal. My sketches, then, become mental shorthand that condenses the gappy, removed nature of a thinker's understandings of *physic*al processes into solid, non-gapped, working modes. What has been removed, what has been left behind in the gaps, is excised (occluded) from the thinker's self-world negotiation. When or if it presents itself in perception, then, it must be at least temporarily metaphorized or modeled while it is being introduced into the sketch. These models can take infinitely many forms in the weird nature of consciousness I discussed previously.

[25] Bohm demonstrates the infinite nature of this problem when he states that "*lawlessness*

of individual behaviour in the context of a given statistical law is, in general, consistent with the notion of more detailed individual laws applying in a broader context." Bohm, *Wholeness*, 87 (italics original).

[26] Jason Erik Lundberg, "One Less," *Americana* (2005).

[27] Neisser, "Development of Consciousness," (6).

[28] Jeffrey Ford, "Bright Morning," *Feeling Very Strange: The Slipstream Anthology* (see note 9). M. John Harrison, "Entertaining Angels Unawares," *Conjunctions* 39 (see note 19). Doug Lain, "The Word 'Mermaid' Written on an Index Card," *Last Week's Apocalypse* (see note 17).

[29] Karen Joy Fowler, "Lieserl" *Feeling Very Strange: The Slipstream Anthology* (see note 9). Ted Chiang, "Hell is the Absence of God," ibid.

[30] How one casts these metaphors is determined culturally, as demonstrated in Lakoff and Johnson's *Metaphors We Live* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1980). Metaphorization, the recasting of one thing in terms of another, is primarily a linguistically determined enterprise, but in cognition, it can be also imagistic, auditory, or temporal—none of which must necessarily be expressed linguistically. In turn, within a text, linguistically determined metaphor will be informed by both the author's and the readers' understandings of their own non-linguistic metaphoric cognition, which turns back on itself as at least partially linguistically determined. The nature of linguistic metaphor is not simply semiotic: as Bohm illustrates, linguistic metaphor invokes cognitive metaphor in the same materialist brain-space as cognition itself—thought is not simply about experience, it is experience. When the anxieties, perceptual dispositions, and idio-occult systems making a self take the gaps in their negotiations as the processes of the

supernatural or the weird, they are making these processes ontologically recursive (in regards to linguistic metaphors informing cognitive metaphors and vice versa). Metaphor, then, in understanding selves and texts is a phenomenon that keeps narrating itself through ongoing self-culture discourses.

[31] Todorov, *The Fantastic*, 82.

[32] Scholes, *Structural Fabulation*, 37.

[33] Suvin defines estrangement in *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction* with ". . . SF takes off from a fictional ('literary') hypothesis and develops it with totalizing ('scientific') rigor. . . . The effect of such factual reporting of fictions is one of confronting a set normative system—a Ptolemaic-type closed world picture—with a point of view or look implying a new set of norms; in literary theory this is known as the attitude of *estrangement*. . . . most successfully underpinned by an anthropological and historical approach in the work of Bertolt Brecht, who wanted to write 'plays for a scientific age.' While working on a play about the prototypical scientist, Galileo, he defined this attitude ('Verfremdungseffekt') in his *Short Organon for the Theatre*: 'A representation which estranges is one which allows us to recognize its subject, but at the same time makes it seem unfamiliar.' And further: for somebody to see all normal happenings in a dubious light, 'he would need to develop that detached eye with which the great Galileo observed a swinging chandelier. He was amazed by that pendulum motion as if he had not expected it and could not understand its occurring, and this enabled him to come at the rules by which it was governed.' Thus, the look of estrangement is both cognitive and creative**;** and as Brecht goes on to say, 'one cannot simply exclaim that such an attitude pertains to science, but not to art. Why should not art, in its own way, try to serve the great social task of mastering

life?'" Darko Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction* (New Haven, Yale UP: 1979), 6 (italics original). Brecht's comments on Galileo re-seeing the swinging of the chandelier, indicate that invasions of the weird, for example, are devices that deconstruct normative ideas about what things (phenomena) are, how they work, and why they do so. For one to uncover new ideas about the laws that are governing existence, one must find cognitive ways (or cognition finds its own way) to destabilize currently accepted answers.

[34] Suvin, *Metamorphoses*, 5.

CHAPTER 4

ONE-HANDED CLOCKS: SIMULACRA, RECURSION, AND ANACHRONY

> There's an alarm clock on the floor beside his bed. The hands and numbers glow green in the dark, and he'll wait five minutes and then he'll call Susan. Five minutes. Then he'll call her back. The hands aren't moving, but he can wait.
>
> Kelly Link

Introduction

Consciousness is not a plotline. It shares many of the same features and operates in many of the same ways, but the crucial difference is linear progression: even if a story's plotline unfolds *out of time*, so to speak, it still does so *one word at a time*.[1] So, if as I have argued, narratives of self are nearly identical to textual narratives, does plot become the one difference between them? The answer lies in further marrying literary- to cognitive theory. In narratology, a fundamental step in understanding "stories" involves first understanding the "fabulas" they represent. So it is with consciousness: before we can understand stories of self, we must understand the fabulas they create.[2]

So, consciousness is indeed not a plotline, but it *shapes* itself with fragmentary, deep-structure concerns and anxieties that are rearranged, presented "out of time," and made synchronous with each other. The historical development of cognitive theory has mirrored the same in literary theory. So though the two disciplines have only recently begun commingling, they have been drawing many of the same conclusions during what has been their unavoidable collision course.

Ultimately, though, as contemporary culture and senses of self embrace more and more the idea of "simulacra," stories and selves lose more and more of their connection to deep-plots

or fabulas as their constructed natures become apparent.[3] Stories and selves are becoming, in a very real sense, *un*real. They are both becoming (have both become) *weird*. When what selves and stories represent is nonexistent in the sense that it could never exist according to its own fundamental laws, those selves and stories become simulacra, meaning we are left existing impossibly. The little weird models this.

Theoretical Background

The negotiation of character-, narrator-, or even reader-consciousness in the little weird is, in some ways, a return to earlier poetics. In *Consciousness and the Novel: Connected Essays*, David Lodge elucidates the presentation of narrative self in early English novelists, specifically Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding. Defoe, he argues, was the most direct, using a first-person "fictitious autobiography or confession."[4] This method, however, has its limits, as Lodge realizes: "This simple equation between first-person consciousness and first-person narration works—up to a point."[5] Defoe's model is largely linear: narrative self appears as the end result, the final say of a *being* process. These stories do not model a consciousness, not as we envision such today—they report one, resulting in a significant gap between the operations of narrative and the operations of self. They are focused, then, on how we understand (or, at least, understood) selves but not truly on what a self is and how that informs its relation to other narratives. Gilbert Ryle's ghost in the machine still dwells happily in the pages of Defoe's texts, in that the negotiated "plotline" or linearity of a self performs *as* the self, tacitly ignoring that this is, in fact, the *product* of a self.

Samuel Richardson, Lodge continues, evolved literary representation of consciousness with the use of the epistolary novel. "When a story is told through letters," Lodge argues, "the

first-person phenomenon of experience is reported in a first-person narrative while it is still fresh. The narrative unfolds with the events, and the outcome is unknown to the narrators."[6] Richardson's model does away with the presentation of selves as entirely linear, bestowing that property instead on the external phenomena to which selves react. By revealing narrative through a series of letters, the *produce* of selves is presented as exactly that—the business of a self as a non-linear narrative-producer and not as final narrative remains absent. As Lodge realizes, "This overcomes the problem raised by the pseudo-autobiographical novel about reconciling the time frame of its putative composition with the time frame of the action."[7] Essentially, the impossible match-up of story and fabula disappears. Admittedly, Richardson did not move consciousness-understanding closer to an appreciation of its true fragmentary, metaphoric, and weird nature, but neither did he move us further away from it. It is not until the discovery of "free indirect style" Lodge states, that third-person realism would combine with and stabilize the first-person narration of literary selves.[8]

Jane Austen freely employed free indirect discourse, which stamps character-thought directly into a text without any explanatory tags, narratorial intrusion, or other barriers between the character-self and its reader. In *Emma*, for example, "the story is told almost entirely from [Emma's] point of view."[9] While this, at first, does not seem entirely a deviation from earlier pseudo-autobiographical models, it differs in its use of free-indirect discourse, which more clearly presents the story as a negotiation between Emma's sense of self and the socio-cultural discourse occurring constantly around her. Lodge explains that "during most of the action, she is mistaken about the true state of affairs, so that, on the first reading, the reader shares at least some of her misapprehensions, and the shock of discovery."[10] These misapprehensions of Emma's self-world negotiation are the early epistemological gaps into which writers of the little

weird will later drive their *strange* devices.

Victorian novelists also expanded this new model by telling their stories through "several points of view, which are often mediated through free indirect style, but compared and assessed by an authorial narrator."[11] The "implied author" focalizing these collections of viewpoint characters and their narrators presents multiple negotiations of selves as the superstructures of its overarching stories. Further, "This was thoroughly consistent with the Victorian novelist's aim to present the individual in relation to society and social change."[12] As a result, this implied author then anticipates Neisser's ecological and extended selves in Lutz's self-culture discourse. In the little weird, this phenomenon would ultimately take the form of bilocation or multiplicity-of-self, demonstrating my previous conclusion that everything is a projection of self—*is* the self.

Following the turn of the twentieth century, modernist writers like Virginia Woolf and James Joyce collated these many stages of literary consciousness into narratives that attempted to portray the actual negotiations of self instead of simply reporting the general phenomena of conscious being. Their stream-of-consciousness mode introduced the fragmentary, metaphoric nature of thought and revealed explicitly the many discourses in process at any given time between a self and its environment. They focused less on behavior and more on an early literary psychology. In the mid- to late-twentieth century, the advent of postmodernism would reveal that the great hindrance in the stream-of-consciousness mode was its inescapable linearity of presentation. No matter how authors diverted the streams of their characters' consciousnesses, readers could only track them one at a time. In the hands of writers like Kurt Vonnegut, Jorge Luis Borges, and Philip K. Dick, narrative presentation returned to earlier models, using both first- and third-person narration and clearer delineations between character and narrator thought, speech, action, and description. These writers realized the impossible finality of stream-of-

consciousness to portray the negotiations of selves. Indeed, they elevated the impossibility of textually representing consciousness as the method by which to destabilize once and for all the idea of real linearity in both selves and stories. In "Postmodernism and Science Fiction," Andrew M. Butler's observations about Fredric Jameson's postmodern realizations close some of the final gaps between narrative and cognitive selves:

> For Jameson a postmodern text is not a critical representation of an authentic reality, but is a simulacrum, a copy without an original. . . . The work is ironically performing, rather than sincerely expressing, emotions or feelings of the artist—not that there is a stable identity which is the artist's self-identity any more, as she or he pastiches the styles of others. What results is schizophrenic *écriture*, where there is a breakdown in the meaningful connections between the words or images; at its most basic this may be an eclectic range of allusions, but it could be a bewildering collection of fragments of different voices. Finally, there is the sense of the sublime in the postmodern text, in part in its exhilarating, hysterical disorientation.[13]

It is around the time of Jameson's realizations that many theories of narratology took solid hold, meaning that the negotiation of selves (even if critical understanding of the process had yet more steps to take) had finally begun aligning with the impossible semiotic nature of postmodern literature. What Butler calls Jameson's "breakdown in the meaningful connections between the words or images" is, essentially, the first realization of what I referred to earlier as existing impossibly. Selves and stories had finally begun to mean only their own operations, and the idea of true mimesis became simply another cultural discourse—itself as impossible as the fabulas that both literary- and cognitive-narratives could no longer represent.[14] Indeed, postmodern writers realized that these representations had, in fact, never existed at all, and it would fall to writers of the little weird to demonstrate this explicitly.

Analysis

The finalizing division between narratives and selves indeed must come to linearity. The

postmodern authors I mentioned above (and the weird writers who followed them) realized this irreconcilable difference and metafictionally turned it on its head—if their stories could not overcome the division, they could see that its *readings* did. Writers of little weird fiction take the maneuver thoroughly one step further by first destabilizing story-fabula connections generally before weirding story-time specifically.

For one of the clearest demonstrations of the story-fabula disconnect, I must return to one of my earlier examples: Kelly Link's "Lull."[15] In the story, one finds what (at first glance) look like frame stories. To oversimplify, a group of friends have gathered to amuse themselves with card games. During the course of their evening, one proposes calling a phone-sex hotline—only this hotline also offers the clandestine services of a storyteller named Starlight. The friends present everything they would like to hear in their story, and Starlight complies, shifting the narrative seemingly into a frame story. However, by the end of Starlight's narrative (which Link presents not in told-story fashion but in the same narrative mode as the main story), one of the characters, the Cheerleader, begins telling her own story to another character, the Devil. Only, as she begins what would be a deeper-level frame story, she reveals that her tale is about Ed, one of the friends who gathered to play cards. The next segment of "Lull" shifts into the Cheerleader's story—again, not as a told-story, but in the same narrative mode as the other two frame stories. We learn right away that "The man's name is Ed. It isn't his real name. I made it up" (71). The Cheerleader's story has begun *telling* the story of the friends who gathered and called Starlight. The frame stories are no longer framed—each shares the same narrative priority as the others. Each ends by creating the next, which in turn creates those behind it. Eventually, even "Ed" tells a story of his own. As such, the various stories in "Lull" lack any fabula, for none of them can exist under their own fundamental laws.

If the fabula, then, is the collection of "real-world" events that a story invokes, "Lull" lacks one. In a simple tale about, say, a farmer going to market, readers can back-form the fabula out of the details in the story: which events happened in which order, what was sold to whom, how the stalls and street-vendors appeared. However, to try to do so to "Lull" (its atemporal complexity aside) is impossible. One might successfully back-form the fabula behind the initial story about the card-playing friends; however, as soon as one tries to tie the nested, subject-object confusion of the several stories in "Lull" to real-world phenomena, one must reconcile multiple realities with the literal construction of others.[16] While this is impossible in the phenomenal world, it is in the very nature of cognitive narrative. If Baudrillard's simulacra "feign to have what [they] don't have," then the recursive nature of the stories in "Lull" fit the bill: they do not have a fabula, they do not even have stable forms of *narrator* versus *narrated*.[17] Consciousness, however, has: it constantly narrates *itself* as part of Lutz's self-culture discourse. Further, its artifacts (for example, literature) *narrate* the self-culture discourse themselves. Meaningful recursion like this is the motive force behind all the ongoing negotiations that create selves, particularly Dennett's dispositional states and Dawkins's memes. These cognitive phenomena "voice" themselves into the ongoing revision of "self" (including Neisser's ecological and extended selves) and then adjust accordingly to best sustain the new, negotiated self. They narrate and are narrated, as Baudrillard explains:

> . . . we are in a logic of simulation, which no longer has anything to do with a logic of facts and an order of reason. Simulation is characterized by a *precession* of the model, of all the models based on the merest fact. . . . The facts no longer have a specific trajectory, they are born at the intersection of models, a single fact can be engendered by all the models at once. This anticipation, this precession, this short circuit, this confusion of the fact with its model (no more divergence of meaning, no more dialectical polarity, no more negative electricity, implosion of antagonistic poles) is what allows each time for all possible interpretations, even the most contradictory—all true, in the sense that their truth is to be exchanged, in the image of the models from which they derive, in a generalized cycle."[18]

Further, David Bohm points out that "it is important to note that facts are not to be considered as if they were independently existent objects that we might find or pick up in the laboratory."[19] When Baudrillard says that we are no longer involved in "a logic of facts," he is correct in more regards than, perhaps, he intended. Bohm goes on to explain that we make facts: ". . . beginning with immediate perception of an actual situation, we develop the fact by giving it further order, form and structure with the aid of our theoretical concepts."[20] The little weird, then, and "Lull" in particular, follows the example of early postmodern voices and lifts the impossibility of facts and fabulas into full, problematic view. *Being impossibly* wants impossible literature. When this paradox is metaphorized, it mimics the operation of consciousness (as best it can) and unavoidably creates the weird, resulting in Butler's "schizophrenic *écriture*" with its "breakdown in the meaningful connections" between words and images.[21] If there *is* no connection between the words and images (the story-fabula disconnect), then Butler's breakdown becomes the only artistic mode for expressing how strange the normal really is. Normal is the new weird, and it collapses upon itself (as in "Lull") when it invades the atemporal, metaphoric, and fragmentary negotiation of a self.

Further Analysis

Literary simulacra pair themselves often with recursion, for it is the nature of a copy without an original to create loops of Saussure's "signification." This pairing in the little weird, as part of its "being impossibly," metaphorizes, in its unavoidably linear way, the atemporality of consciousness. Recursive simulacra create sinkholes of meaning, in that they signify what cannot fundamentally exist.

In one of the story worlds that appears in "Lull," before the card-playing friends even call

Starlight, the matter of the strange orchard house appears in the narrative. This house will later play a significant, self-world role in the story of "Ed," but at first, it appears simply as an inexplicable anomaly, a metaphor, perhaps, of the irreconcilable nature of normal that each of the friends struggles with. Ed tells us in the first story that "'Off the highway, down by that Texaco, in the orchards. This guy built a road and built a house right on top of the road. Just, plop, right in the middle of the road. Kind of like he came walking up the road with the house on his back, got tired, and just dropped it'" (55). No one involved in the story-locale's cultural discourse knows the explanation behind the strange house.[22] Even if "Lull" did point to a fabula, any person who *could* explain the mystery of the orchard house would be beyond it, for he or she is not included in the "story": "Ed says, "Where the house is, is the first weird thing. The second thing is the house. It's like this team of architects went crazy and sawed two different houses in half and then stitched them back together. Casa Del Guggenstein. *The front half is really old—a hundred years old*—the other half is aluminum siding'" (55, italics mine). As such, the characters are left only with constantly anchorless theories perpetuated by their own and by the locale's cultural discourse to explain the anomaly—the house becomes a meaning vacuum, for it will always be, as the story explains, beyond understanding: "Which was the plan because this guy who built it was a real hermit, a recluse. People in town said all kinds of stuff about him. Nobody knew. He didn't want anybody to know" (57). The house undergoes the same extended-self revision that generates "real" selves, which, of course, inform how we negotiate meaning from Link's characters. The house's unstable nature invites any number of constant and variable projections of self-anxiety onto the house—it can become one of Neisser's extended selves, an acting place powered by what the characters put upon it. Without a fabula, with only realities of nullity to point to, semiotic sinkholes like the house metaphorize the real-world disconnect

between *narratives* of self and any explanatory *fabula* of self.

A similar sinkhole appears in Jeffrey Ford's "The Yellow Chamber." In the story's "Center for the Reification of Actual Probability," the mechanico-organic Melusina is the reified collaboration of three people: two brilliant researchers in probability, mathematics, and philosophy, and a charlatan scholar. The Melusina resulted from the trio whispering orders to unseen technicians for the construction of their collaborative reification—except, none of the trio speaks to the other about the Melusina during her/its multi-year construction. The Melusina draws its power from biological chemical reactions, yet it is given form by a metal case (including a female head). It thinks with a genuine human brain. The Melusina's raison d'être

> . . . what with its quantum ability to traffic in probabilities, was to describe the existence of, and goings on in, a particular alternate reality. The location commented upon by the device was a wandering island it called Threbansch. This errant landmass drifted upon the yellow sea of another world that did not necessarily exist but very well could have. (235)[23]

While, at first glance, this seems merely a farce of the researchers' unspoken whims slowly building on and informing each other, the Melusina's ties to Threbansch become problematic later—they become world-buildingly recursive. Pelasio DeGris, the ruler of Threbansch, has spent many "years" haunted by a phantom.[24] Mercy Bond (one of the researchers) "comments" upon the haunting while the Melusina recursively both receives and sends Bond's flights of imagination:

> [Bond] watched as the insubstantial phantom strode the ramparts [in Threbansch] in his powder blue pajamas like some prodigious exhalation of pipe smoke, mourning its execution many years earlier. His crime had been to suggest that the island be anchored. He had roused the populace to believe that they could never be actual without a definite location, and that their incessant wandering trapped them in a state of unreality. . . . (238)

Threbansch, then, is seeking its own fabula, for it cannot in any phenomenal world (its own missing one or the alternate reality of the Center that, at this point in the story, creates

Threbansch) *be* without one. Like the narrator-narrated nature of the stories in "Lull," Threbansch is *being impossibly*. Later, when the narrative exposes the infinitely recursive creator-created relationship between the Center and Threbansch (especially when the roles are first reversed), this exposure works backward through the story, altering Threbansch from a flight of collective fancy to a place of its own that creates the Center in its struggle to be actual. The only recoverable fabula in the story, that of the Center, evaporates. The self-world negotiation, Neisser's extended selves, and Bal's "acting place" find their metaphorization, their narrative expression in the recursion between Threbansch and Center. "The Yellow Chamber," as with many other stories of the little weird, celebrates the impossible nature of expressing self and consciousness through the inescapably linear nature of text. The weird here works just fine—as I have demonstrated previously, it is a characterization of consciousness itself; however, the normal cannot reconcile itself with the disconnect between itself (the real world as our narratives commonly tell us) and the "experiential space" of consciousness. It is *this* inescapable disconnect that the *story-fabula* disconnect expresses.[25]

Final Analysis

Recursion or atemporality in the Little Weird is yet another similarity between textual narratives and narratives of self. "Anachrony" as Mieke Bal calls the phenomenon is not anything new. She explains that "Differences between the arrangement in the story and the chronology of the fabula we call *chronological deviations or anachronies*."[26] These are the movements forward or backward in "time" that a story makes in its process of prioritizing or focalizing elements of its fabula. It allows a narrator, essentially, to revise its narrative as it goes, suddenly re-informing everything that has already occurred in the narrative with an insight from

the past or, similarly, readying a reader semantically so that he or she focalizes the remainder of the unavoidably linear story appropriately.

Selves do the same thing in their processes of negotiation. Ernest Keen's observations in "Being Conscious is Being-in-the-World" demonstrate that

> A duration of present experience is a structured now, containing within its structure pasts as remembered and futures as anticipated, and enacting through its structure those acts of appropriation. Nothing could be more complex. Temporality, as it presents itself to us in consciousness, when that consciousness is taken as a phenomenon, an appearance and a presence rather than a function, freely violates the rules of Newtonian temporality. I change the past in remembering it. Its role in my life, its causal efficacy, if you will, is utterly unchangeable by my reinterpreting it—again, a backwards influence in which the later present acts backward on an earlier past, changing the past's acting forward on the later present and future. Consciousness *times itself* in its own way, a way unlike that conceived in physics and extended to the analysis of functional relations between organisms and their environment.[27]

Consciousness, of course, makes ready use of our pasts and futures in aligning its narrative with its determining dispositions, anxieties, and concerns at any given time. Further, literature often does the same itself: modernist writers like Woolf and Joyce working with stream-of-consciousness demonstrated this keenly. Though they may be linear, narratives are not temporal, for they are both created and received in the anti-Newtonian realms of experiential space. As Bohm points out, "Protagoras said: 'Man is the measure of all things', thus emphasizing that measure is not a reality external to man, existing independently of him."[28] Bohm uses this idea in support of his overarching thesis about the problems of fragmentation or categorization, but the truism serves just as well in the study of narrative. Events must be timed so that they we might properly focalize them as best suits narrative need, cognitive or textual. After all, as Baudrillard says, "Our entire linear and accumulative culture collapses if we cannot stockpile the past in plain view."[29]

My point is not to argue that real-world events have not happened in the past, nor that

nothing will ever occur in the future. But any real nature of past and future is beyond both cognitive and narrative reach. As soon as a self focalizes the perceived phenomena of the outside world into the worlds it builds in its experiential space, the data undergoes immediate and unending revision.[30] There are no real fabula for the narratives of consciousness to point to, for selves create fabula simultaneously with their stories as they go about perceiving. As Bal points out, there are inevitable disconnects in relations between story and fabula: "When a certain part of the time covered by the fabula is given absolutely no attention at all, the amount of TF (time of the fabula) is infinitely much larger than the TS (story-time). On the other hand, we can distinguish the *pause*, when an element that takes no fabula-time (so an object, not a process) is presented in detail."[31] Bal's observations delineate the impossibility of "isochrony" between stories and fabulas. The phenomenal world is its own fabula in that there is no overarching narrative attempting to represent *all* of it. However, selves and stories, with their limited perceptual capability, their constantly interrupting anachronies, and their focalizations cannot possibly reconcile themselves with all of phenomenal space-time. Hence the necessity for causal occultation; hence the need for sustaining a self model for those few aspects of phenomenal space that interact with the self. Those aspects, in many ways, inform the anxieties and dispositions that determine how the self will model its interaction with the outside world.

What selves are left with in this morass of created time, is an enduring present. Keen points out that

> The future, then, is present; it is not merely a point yet to be traversed. Even more vividly, the present is not a specious point forever caught between a constantly receding past and a constantly approaching future. Rather the present is a duration. Experience endures, and its relation to both future and the past is one of appropriation. I appropriate the future and the past, in anticipations and in memories, and through these appropriations I weave together a *now* that has a complexity and density vastly unlike that empty point on a Newtonian time line.[32]

Selves endure through revision: the five-year-old self does not exist within a twenty-year-old self except as it has been revised along the way. These processes, of course, inform how we understand literary selves. Narration is dynamic: it relates the interaction of constantly revising selves, of enduring presents, of memetic transmission. Story is, then, a collision of anachronistic negotiations, revisions, and anticipations, irreversibly separated from fabula, for where is the real, the fabula, to be found? And even when one finds one, once a self introduces the fabula-information to its negotiation, it becomes only story. As Baudrillard demonstrates, the real is "no longer anything but operational. In fact, it is no longer really the real, because no imaginary envelops it anymore. It is a hyperreal produced from a radiating synthesis of combinatory models in a hyperspace without atmosphere."[33] The "operational real" is the *storied* negotiation of phenomena from out there within the anti-Newtonian, atemporal, fragmentary, and metaphoric realm of experiential space.

Of course, there remains the problem of literary linearity-of-presentation. Things do not occur one-at-a-time in consciousness as they do in literature. But, just as an anachrony in a story can revise what one has read prior (or inform what one will read), so can the story, in its entirety, can be an anachrony. As with recursion and simulacra, the Little Weird fascinates itself with the impossibility of temporality and therefore metaphorizes the entire problem. In "Lull," this occurs within the orchard house. At the story's conclusion, in the midst of the house's many semiotic sinkholes, Ed experiences a suspense in time: "There's an alarm clock on the floor beside his bed. The hands and numbers glow green in the dark, and he'll wait five minutes and then he'll call Susan. Five minutes. Then he'll call her back. The hands aren't moving, but he can wait" (83). The text offers no mention of time stopping, meaning the question of when it did is as semiotically open as the house. The story's recursive narrator-narrated format, the anachronies

that appear, the creation of acting places—all of these elements have been revised as suspended in time. They all occur, under these contexts, *at the same time*. Though we experience the story's many elements linearly, the suspension of time at the end works backward through the entire text. Everything that has appeared previously becomes *co-equal* and *co-eval* in Keen's "enduring present," thereby modeling more closely than even modernist stream-of-consciousness did the process of cognitive narrative. Keen demonstrates the parallel between cognitive and narrative revision:

> But this time frame, this notion of temporality, is already inadequate as soon as we move from (1) the mechanical *relations* of past cause to future effect to (2) the human *knowing* of these relations. Our knowing of these relations is a prediction, an anticipation of the future. The future, as anticipation, as experience, rather than as merely some later point on a simple time line, is a presence in my life. The future is present. I anticipate now. My now is aimed at a present future, which affects my decisions in a way wholly unlike the mechanical relations in Newtonian time. My future shapes my present, a backwards influence to which we commonly give the name teleology.[34]

By casting the entire story (because of the recursive, inter-linked nature of each frame story's reality informing the others) in a suspended instant, Link has effectively dodged the problem of linearity. Though one might take the time-suspense simply as another metaphor of, perhaps, alienation or isolation, if Ed's moment never ends, then neither can any of the other moments in the story.

A similar occurrence takes place in "The Yellow Chamber." In the story's conclusion, it becomes clear that the Melusina is also Ocinda the witch from Threbansch. Ocinda's non-actual reality, through various means, created the reality of the Center, our reality, one might argue. In turn, the Center's reality also had already created Threbansch. Further, the two recursive realities are, in true form, the black serpent that swims Threbansch's seas. In the end, "It swam relentlessly for a day, a century, forever, and in that brief span all things were probable" (241). The two realities, in the form of the serpent, become co-equal, and they "swim relentlessly" in a

non-space between them both, that non-space now occupying the position of the real. They exist physically in a space beyond our physics, a space that we cannot for certain say involves our time. Though it *may* involve time, it also interpretively must not (as Dennett shows with his demonstration of what cannot exist in the world of Sherlock Holmes). The events in "The Yellow Chamber," through the story's conclusion, become *un-timed*. Ford, then, dodges linearity differently than Link, but no less effectively. Doug Lain accomplishes a similar feat in "The '84 Regress" when the narrator explains "The year 1984 never ended" (3).[35] Alex Irvine does no less in "Gus Dream of Biting the Mailman": the final, brief segment in the story begins with "What it all boils down to is this, this one end that is eternally present" (70).[36] And these are but a few examples of the maneuver. The little weird offers many more within its bounds, and true to its liminal-genre nature, even a few beyond.

Conclusion

Literature, of course, has no inherent responsibility to represent consciousness. However, it is in its nature to *tend* to do so, as David Lodge's brief historical sketch demonstrates. As I said previously, art is nothing if not a record of our abstractions. Over time, how we conceive ourselves and the literature that explores this cannot help but collide. The boom in electronic publication, correspondence, and internet blogging leads every day to exponentially more and more discourse about the nature of expression and how best to fit it into cultural negotiation. Literary criticism and literary theory, as I stated in the introduction, no longer belong solely to Academe; further, the blurring of the lines between high art and low and a growing distaste for genre classification has only increased the merge between theoretical debate and everyday conversation. In the dynamically involute, blogosphere-informed textual communities of today,

theory that cannot hold its own weight disappears rapidly. But a general trend in form and execution like the little weird, with its roots in a centuries-old tradition of weird, of speculation, and of romance will inevitably find ways to converse with science. In Yevgeny Zamytin's *We*, characters walk unaided on the wings of a spacecraft; in Alfred Bester's *The Demolished Man*, trends in cognitive evolution lead to postmodern psi-conflicts; and in works like "Lull," "The Yellow Chamber," and the others I have mentioned, time takes its proper role as a cognitive metaphor, as what Protagorus referred to as the internal measure. The *telling* of stories becomes the unified field, not who tells them, and certainly not to whom they are told. We *are* our stories; we are our metaphors and anachronies and creator-created recursions—and nothing gets to us except through them. Even though cognitive science has not yet unlocked all of the black boxes of the brain, the intersection of cognition and narrative that appears in the little weird has at least begun modeling these remaining mysteries with, perhaps, a brief, backward glance at the surrealist tradition. After all, as Dennett points out "of all the things in the environment an active body must make mental models of, none is more crucial than the model an agent has of itself."[37]

Notes to Chapter 4

[1] Roland Barthes demonstrates in *S/Z* that readers do not necessarily unpack meaning one *word* at a time, per se; rather, "Although every unit we mention here will be a signifier, this one is of a very special type: it is the signifier par excellence because of its connotation. . . . We shall call this element a signifier . . . or a *seme* (semantically, the seme is the unit of the signifier." Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans., Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974), 17 (italics original). Barthes here refers to Saussure's seminal theory of semiology involving linguistic *signifiers* and the *signifieds* they point to. Meaning may unfold for story-receivers several words

at a time, a paragraph at a time, or even a morpheme at a time. The point here is that they do each of these processes *one at a time*.

[2] Mieke Bal defines the fabula as "a series of logically and chronologically related events that are caused or experienced by actors." Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1985), 5. A "fabula" then is the collection of events, actors, and experiences that a "story" represents. Whereas stories may involve such devices as gaps in the timeline, flashbacks, and even the excision of unimportant details, fabulas contain all of these things. They are, essentially, the phenomena that are *storied*. In the frontmatter to *Narratology*, Bal clarifies this differentiation with a "distinction between the text (the linguistic structure and the different speakers involved), the story (the arrangement of the content in a specific manner), and the fabula (the structure of the fictitious or 'real' content)."

[3] In *Simulacra and Simulation*, Baudrillard says "Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being, or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal." Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans., Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1994), 1. Andrew M. Butler clarifies the idea in "Postmodernism and Science Fiction": "Baudrillard's theory of the simulacrum is that the history of images means that the copy is becoming more desirable. Images are tied in with notions of exchange—one image is exchanged for an idea—and in, say, the history of economics it has become better to exchange goods for money rather than objects. In the postworld war the image has become everything, especially the copy that has no original; the model has replaced the actual, the opinion poll has become more important than the election. Everyday life has become more and more inauthentic—monetary value has come down to noughts and ones in a computer.

For Baudrillard such lack of reality has infected the very landscape of America itself, although this infection has been obscured from its inhabitants." Andrew M. Butler, "Postmodernism and Science Fiction," *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction*, eds., Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003), 144.

[4] David Lodge, "Consciousness and the Novel," in *Consciousness and the Novel: Connected Essays* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2002), 43.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid., 45.

[9] Ibid., 48.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Ibid., 49.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Andrew M. Butler, "Postmodernism and Science Fiction," *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction* (see note 3), 141.

[14] Maggie Ann Bowers points out that the esteemed Italo Calvino "himself states, his stories, like those of Borges, do not rely on a recognizable version of reality to support their magical aspects, but are structured around their own 'internal logic.'" Maggie Ann Bowers, *Magic(al) Realism*, The New Critical Idiom. Series ed., John Drakakis (London: Routledge, 2004), 64. Any system of occultation that metaphorizes the inexplicable as magic (or even, simply, weird) is part of an operation to map the negotiation between the system (or narrative, or

self) and the outside world. Calvino's "reality" need only function in the occultation system insofar as it participates in sustaining that system, self, or narrative—it needs only its "internal logic." Of course, memetics complicates this equation, for each meme attempts to sustain *itself* as part of the larger system. This may account for the occasional gaps in an occultation system's "internal logic."

[15] Kelly Link, "Lull," *Conjunctions* 39, ed. Bradford Morrow. Guest ed., Peter Straub (New York: Bard College, 2002),

[16] "Story" then fulfills a similar role in regards to fabula that Saussure's "signifiers" fulfill in regard to "signifieds."

[17] Baudrillard, *Simulacra*, 3.

[18] Ibid., 16-17 (italics original).

[19] David Bohm, *Wholeness and the Implicate Order* (London: Routledge Classics, 2002), 179.

[20] Ibid., 179-180. Bohm goes on to demonstrate his argument with "For example, by using the notions of order prevailing in ancient times, men were led to 'make' the fact about planetary motion by describing and measuring in terms of epicycles. In classical physics, the fact was 'made' in terms of the order of planetary orbits, measured through positions and times. In general relativity, the fact was 'made' in terms of the order of Riemannian geometry, and of the measure implied by concepts such as 'curvature of space'. In the quantum theory, the fact was made in terms of the order of energy levels, quantum numbers, symmetry groups, etc., along with appropriate measures (e.g. scattering cross-sections, charges, and masses of particles, etc.)." Ibid., 180. Selves make and acquire facts (or, according to memetics, facts make and acquire

selves) as part of their self-world, self-culture, idio-occult negotiations. Once "semantically ready" (Dennett) this way, perception is motivated to confirm facts, meaning, as Baudrillard points out, that the model replaces the actual.

[21] Butler, "Postmodernism," 141.

[22] Though one might argue that some fictional *somebody* in the story-locale of "Lull" might or must have the explanation behind the strange orchard house, since no one *in the story* knows, the possibility has a null value. Dennett demonstrates this significant textual nullity with a similar, tongue-in-cheek question for Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes: "Our tendency to suppose that there *has* to be a fact of the matter to settle such questions is like the naïve reader's supposition that that there *has* to be an answer to such questions as: Did Sherlock Holmes have eggs for breakfast on the day that Dr. Watson met him. Conan Doyle *might have* put that detail into the text, but he didn't, and since he didn't, there is simply no fact of the matter about whether those eggs belong in *the fictional world* of Sherlock Holmes." Daniel C. Dennett, *Consciousness Explained* (Boston: Back Bay Books, 1991), 408.

[23] Jeffrey Ford, "The Yellow Chamber," *Trampoline: An Anthology*. Kelly Link, ed. (Northampton, Massachusetts: Small Beer Press, 2003).

[24] These years would be impossible, as Ernest Keen pointed out, for conscious phenomena (in this case, the collaborative mental fancy of the researches that, at this point in "The Yellow Chamber," creates Threbansch) do not adhere to Newtonian laws. Neither would they adhere to time, as this chapter will later argue.

[25] Doug Lain's "The Suburbs of the Citadel of Thought," *Last Week's Apocalypse* (San Francisco: Night Shade Books, 2006) and Jeffrey Ford's "Bright Morning," *Feeling Very*

Strange: The Slipstream Anthology, eds., James Patrick Kelly and John Kessel. Series ed., Jacob Weisman (San Francisco: Tachyon Publications, 2006) are two other prime examples of simulacral paradox, here elided in the interest of brevity.

[26] Bal, *Narratology*, 53 (italics original).

[27] Ernest Keen, "Being Conscious is Being-in-the-World," *Self and Consciousness: Multiple Perspectives*, eds., Kessel et al. (Hillsdale, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc, 1992), 47 (italics original).

[28] Bohm, *Wholeness*, 28.

[29] Baudrillard, *Simulacra*, 10.

[30] It is important to recall the variously voiced observations regarding the motivated nature of perception. We perceive what we *need* to perceive in the process of sustaining the self. And even those phenomena that might *make the cut* into perception, so to speak, stand very high chances of being revised away and discarded in the processes that immediately follow their entrance into the negotiations of self. In "The Self as a Center of Narrative Gravity," Dennett aligns the process explicitly with the nature of literary creation: "[I]t does seem that we are virtuoso novelists, who find ourselves engaged in all sorts of behavior, more or less unified, but sometimes disunified, and we always put the best 'faces' on it we can. We try to make all of our material cohere into a single good story. And that story is our autobiography." Daniel C. Dennett, "The Self as a Center of Narrative Gravity," *Self and Consciousness: Multiple Perspectives* (see note 27), 114.

[31] Bal, *Narratology*, 70 (italics original).

[32] Keen, "Being Conscious," 47 (italics original).

[33] Baudrillard, *Simulacra*, 2.

[34] Keen, "Being Conscious," 46 (italics original).

[35] Doug Lain, "The '84 Regress" (see note 25).

[36] Alex Irvine, "Gus Dreams of Biting the Mailman," *Trampoline: An Anthology* (see note 23).

[37] Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, 427.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

> Every mention of the identity of the character contains information that limits other possibilities.
>
> Mieke Bal

Introduction

It is, perhaps, counter-intuitive to offer an explanation of a literary phenomenon at the conclusion of its study. However, by their nature, the stories I have placed under the lens of the little weird (as well as those I have suggested only by implication) are interstitial. They blur common genre and common type and become instead part of an anti-genre—a catchall for windfall oddities. As such, the little weird bears an examination of function, not classification. By presenting the cognitive performance of these stories before addressing *what they are*, I hope to have emphasized what many cross-genre writers themselves take as a priority: narrative movement and creative flux. Under which categories they might be grouped is only of incidental significance. Indeed, since many speculative fiction sub-genres earn their lineaments in publishers' marketing efforts, the little weird's foundation in the small press exempts this literature from many of these same efforts. Small press publications sell themselves often in a kind of opposition to the produce of larger publishing houses. The small press is itself an entire, interstitial movement, surviving in the gaps between larger, often more commercial publishing endeavors. As I mentioned in my introduction, Brian Attebery was correct when he said that most innovation in speculative fiction today occurs in periodicals.[1] But to reiterate my extension of his idea, it is within the small press that the most dynamic of this innovation occurs.

But innovation is in many ways similar to Baudrillard's "simulacral precession." It

models *ab nihilo* what is to be the new real, the new Speculative Fiction. As such, exposing the cognitive narrativity in the little weird is not enough, for nothing exists in a vacuum. To depart with a full understanding of the impact of the phenomenon, it must be placed (as best, by its unstable nature, it can) in the growth cycle of the speculative tradition.

Analysis

The little weird is decidedly not a divergence into one, specific speculative tradition. For example, it is not a wholesale shift into magical realism. Though there are a number of similarities between the two literary phenomena, magical realism favors the impossible simultaneity of a positivist reality as well as a magical one.[2] Neither is technically privileged over the other; however, equating the two is a de facto privileging of the magic, for it is often irreconcilable with positivism. To make it reconcilable is inherently *not* positivism. The little weird, as I have attempted to show, demonstrates the weird (or magic) as a *product* of positivism (it is the result of materialist cognition, specifically metaphorization, idio-occultation, and atemporality). Magic and real, then, are co-equal, for they are both the results of self-world negotiation; however, neither occur out there in the world, as is often the conceit in purist magical realism. In other words, in the little weird, the magic is not real, nor is the real magic. The two do not compete; the magic does not deconstruct the real, for they are both narratives generated by motivated perception, focalization, and affective discharge. In this sense, the non-genre little weird is a way of *seeing* literature, but it does not follow in the wake of any manifesto or teleology—it is a point of discourse between a self and a work of literature informed by the collision of cognitive- and literary theories. Further, as I have demonstrated, in the little weird, it is the normal, the mundane, and the real that is ungraspable, not the magic. That magical realism

reconciles the magic with the real is, as I have said, inherently calling attention to the *need-to-reconcile*. This implies the generally ungraspable nature of the magic. Rather, in the little weird, the real must reconcile with the weird (i.e. magic), therefore operating from the assumption that the real is already-weird. Under these circumstances, magical realist reconciliation becomes tautological.

Further, magical realism has often been a mode of protest against hegemony. Maggie Ann Bowers explains that "Magical realism has become a popular narrative mode because it offers to the writer wishing to write against totalitarian regimes a means to attack the definitions and assumptions which support such systems (e.g. colonialism) by attacking the stability of the definitions upon which these systems rely."[3] Work in the little weird, while certainly sometimes following this example, often expresses what becomes the unknowable or *irreconcilable-with-self* aspects of being mired *within* totalitarian regimes (e.g. Western commercialism) instead of being decidedly othered by them. While "Magic(al) realist writing . . . has become associated with the modernist techniques of the disruption of linear narrative time and the questioning of the notion of history,"[4] meaning that magical realism shares with the little weird a number of the techniques I examined in "One-handed Clocks," it "is often criticized for relying on a European viewpoint that assumes that magic and the irrational belong to indigenous and non-European cultures, whereas rationality and a true sense of reality belong to a European perspective."[5] Taking "European" in this sense to mean technologically, financially, and legally sophisticated society in general, this magical realist view is a reverse-totality, a damaging generalization of what is abstracted to represent what is *not-indigenous* and European. The little weird, departing often, as I said, from *within* totalitarian regimes, deconstructs or destabilizes *this* reversed totality. A totalitarian regime is not a unified front, and like any cultural discourse, its

occultations leave epistemological gaps that the citizens "perpetuating" it must reconcile with themselves and with larger, global discourses.[6]

The little weird is also not necessarily the next incarnation of either science fiction or fantasy, although some of its works certainly share enough tropes with both of these categories to, by themselves, qualify. Bowers points out that magical realism is *not* science fiction because "The science fiction narrative's distinct difference from magical realism is that it is set in a world different from any known reality and its realism resides in the fact that we can recognize it as a possibility for our future. Unlike magical realism, it does not have a realistic setting that is recognizable in relation to any past or present reality."[7] The little weird shares this same difference from science fiction; however, Bowers's observation is only a first step in noting categories of speculative divergence from the oft-blanketedly applied "science fiction."[8] Further, her classification of what is science fiction has become unsteady. Science fiction need no longer occupy worlds different from any known reality; indeed, many of its works have turned away from the frontiers of space or alien worlds to look instead at Earth. Even the "distance" between the present and the future once associated with science fiction has narrowed. Science fiction may take place only a short time from the present, it may occupy the present itself, or it may write itself into the past. And if science fiction is, as Bowers suggests, simply "recognition of future possibility" painted onto alien worlds, then it neglects its role in Ernest Keen's idea of the future as a structured now here in the familiar and the domestic.[9] Robert Scholes espouses that "[O]ur need for future feedback to guide present action makes writers of fiction responsible for the production of imaginative models of the future, alternative projections that can give us some sense of the consequences of present actions," but he does not restrict his models to the alien.[10] Further, the seminal science fiction theorist Darko Suvin points out that ". . . the cognitive value

of all SF, including anticipation-tales, is to be found in its analogical reference to the author's present rather than in predictions, discrete or global. Science-fictional cognition is based on an aesthetic hypothesis akin to the proceedings of satire or pastoral rather than those of futurology or political programs."[11] However, even Suvin's definitions of science fiction have become problematic.

The little weird then is part of a general collision of categories, labels, and genres—it is not the next evolutionary step of any of them. For example, Suvin's seminal *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction* makes little room for the "weird." His adaptation of Ernst Bloch's "novum" and his use of the Russian Formalists' "estrangement" pushed understandings of science fiction in quantifiable directions.[12] However, clean Suvinian science fiction no longer necessarily dominates the genre. In delineating his science fiction, Suvin claims that "A further step down into pseudo-sophistication—correlative, no doubt, to a marked decadence of cultural taste in bourgeois society and its literary markets—is the parasitism of Gothic, horror, and weird *fantasy* upon SF. Such fantasy is characterized, as I have said, by the irruption of an anti-cognitive world into the world of empirical cognition."[13] Csicsery-Ronay points out that "Suvin argued that an sf text presents aspects of a reader's empirical reality 'made strange' through a new perspective 'implying a new set of norms'. This recasting of the familiar has a 'cognitive' purpose, that is, the recognition of reality it evokes from the reader is a gain in rational understanding the social conditions of existence."[14] For Suvin, cognitive meant normalizing in terms of Catherine Lutz's self-culture discourse. As a result, Suvin's ideas of weird not fulfilling the same cognitive role as science fiction mirrors magical realism's failure to account for cognition and weird both as products, as narratives produced by brains. Suvin's cognitive normality must be (as the collision of cognitive- and literary-theory in the little weird demonstrates) a process generated by what I

have argued is the inherently weird nature of selves *being*. Suvin's cognitive normalization only perpetuates a number of the myths of self that I have attempted to deconstruct. Weird is not anti-cognitive; nor is it parasitic. Indeed, under Suvin's use of the term, weird is *pre-cognitive*: it is part of the processes responsible for *generating* his normative cognition. A parasite, we might say, requires a host, and such is not the case here. That science fiction as Suvin defined it gave voice to *future-as-present* models that explicitly expressed only extrapolated positivism only means that it was awaiting (or anticipating) advances in positivist discovery and how we will reconcile them as part of our culturally normative cognition. Dennett, Baars, Bohm, and the many others I have here relied upon for their theories of self have provided exactly those discoveries, and the little weird has taken up Suvin's science-fictional task of extrapolating a future for the present in regards to how we understand ourselves and our stories. Csicsery-Ronay realizes this when he points out that Carl Freedman in *Critical Theory and Science Fiction* ". . . suggests that Suvin's category can be made valid by thinking of sf not in terms of real cognition, but as a 'cognition effect'—a rhetorical construction that evokes the sense of true cognition."[15] My essential argument is that the little weird performs exactly this evocation. It is, then, part of the contemporary genre-collision that now defines the majority of what once may have been clean genres, but it is not any phoenix rising from the ashen ejecta of this collision; it is merely one of the still-burning fragments.

Conclusion

Todorov realized in his influential study of "fantastic" literature that "When we examine works of literature from the perspective of genre, we engage in a very particular enterprise: we discover a principle operative in a number of texts, rather than what is specific about each of

them."[16] I have attempted to do the same here. Indeed, I do not postulate the little weird to add yet one more genre-category to the already over-named movements of contemporary speculation. What I have attempted to present, as briefly as possible, is a new way of looking at already-existent genres, names, and categories. Speculative fiction has long made of itself the narrative metaphor of Theory: social, scientific, philosophic—even literary. That it continues to do so now, particularly in the sociological and cognitive aspects I have here presented, only demonstrates its ongoing dynamism. Further, that its readership has for so long been such an actively discursive element of its construction means that it will continue to be read, to be conceptualized in the same manners in which it is written. The little weird is only one phenomenon of narrative-selves negotiating self-narratives, but, as the speculative tradition informing it has always done, it has begun a new conversation with itself that will ever inform the work that follows.

Notes to Chapter 5

[1] Brian Attebery, "The Magazine Era: 1920-1960," *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction*, eds., Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003), 47.

[2] Maggie Ann Bowers explains in *Magic(al) Realism* that "The distinguishing feature of 'marvellous realism', for instance, is that its fiction brings together the seemingly opposed perspectives of a pragmatic, practical and tangible approach to reality and an acceptance of magic and superstition into the context of the same novel." *Magic(al) Realism*, The New Critical Idiom. Series ed., John Drakakis (London: Routledge, 2004), 3. Further the term *realismo mágico* applied to 1950s Latin American fiction refers to "to all narrative fiction that includes

magical happenings in a realist matter-of-fact narrative, whereby, 'the supernatural is not a simple or obvious matter, but it *is* an ordinary matter, and everyday occurrence—admitted, accepted, and integrated into the rationality and materiality or literary realism' (Zamora and Faris 1995: 3)." Ibid., 2 (italics original).

[3] Ibid., 4.

[4] Ibid., 9.

[5] Ibid., 84

[6] My comments here, are of course, generalized. Magical realism has a tendency to blur categorizing lines just as the little weird does. Bowers points out that "Zamora and Faris have noted both these aspects in their introduction to a collection of essays on magical realism, claiming that such critical analysis reveals that 'Magical realist texts are subversive: their in-betweenness, their all at onceness encourages resistance to monological political and cultural structures." Ibid., 67. Further, in attempting to differentiate the little weird, I am not attempting an invective against magical realism; rather, I wish to map (as much as possible) their differing points of expressive departure.

[7] Ibid., 30.

[8] The common application of the category "science fiction" to speculative work does not occur without a reason, as the many historical essays in *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction* demonstrate. Science fiction itself grew some time ago from much older traditions (as did "fantasy"); however, the many sub-genres that now associate with speculative fiction are not as old. That they have yet to shed the categories of their forebears does not mean that they never will. Indeed, this practice of blanketing-terminology has already largely fallen into disuse among writers, readers, and editors of speculative fiction.

[9] Ernest Keen, "Being Conscious is Being-in-the-World," *Self and Consciousness: Multiple Perspectives*, eds., Kessel et al. (Hillsdale, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc, 1992), 47.

[10] Robert Scholes, *Structural Fabulation* (Notre Dame: U of Notre Dame P, 1975), 17.

[11] Darko Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction* (New Haven, Yale UP: 1979), 78.

[12] See Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, Jr.'s "Marxist Theory and Science Fiction," in *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction* (see note 1), pp 119 and 118, respectively.

[13] Suvin, *Metamorphoses*, 24 (italics original).

[14] Csicsery-Ronay, "Marxist Theory," 118

[15] Ibid., 119-120.

[16] Todorov, *The Fantastic*, 3.

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