Temporality, Technology and the Aporia of Narrative Identity

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Abstract

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Identity is an ambiguous concept, yet it is central to virtually every sphere of human interaction. "Who" one is, claims to be, or is designated as delineating a horizon of possibility.

The question "who?" is a riddle. On the one hand, the answer is defined by where one fits into the world. On the other hand, there is an almost inalienable presence of one's self/soul to oneself that seems to resist classification with respect to world structures. The point of intersection between the world and the soul is a ground of ambiguity upon which the story of a life is told, performed, observed, produced and sold. This work riddles with Ricoeur, Merleau-Ponty, and Hannah Arendt in order to articulate and delineate identity in such a way as to be faithful to both worldly conditions and the fears and aspirations of the soul.

Insofar as one's identity is knowable, it is knowable as a narrative. Ricoeur's contribution to narrative identity is his assertion that human existence is fundamentally temporal. Consequently, the circle of action and narrative is central to the question of identity. Novel narrative forms are emerging from technological advances. For example, computer games have developed into a multi-billion dollar endeavor. Just as fiction and history imitate action and in turn inspire action, so too do digital narratives. This thesis explores the ways in which identity is articulated and ascribed by emerging digital narrative forms.

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Prologue

"Who are you, Master?" he asked.

"Eh, What?" said Tom sitting up, and his eyes glinting in the gloom.
"Don't you know my name yet? That's the only answer. Tell me who are you,
alone, yourself and nameless?" J.R.R. Tolkien

The problem of identity is broad in both the range of its consequences and the variety of strategies for its resolution.

Bureaucratically, identity is a matter of classification for the purposes of distributing rights, resources and sanctions. Authors like Seyla Benhabib and Will Kymlicka seek to resolve the problem of identity within the constraints of bureaucratic structures. (Benhabib 1992 and Kymlicka 1995)

Militarily, identity is a matter of classification for the purposes of pacification, protection and extermination. George W. Bush's infamous ultimatum ("either you're with us or you're with the terrorists") and the campaigns that followed are examples of presidential military resolutions to the problem of identity.

Politically, identity is a matter of legitimating claims to state citizenship. The Quebec referenda were two attempts to politically resolve the problem of identity.

Economically, identity is a matter of conspicuous "branding". By "branding" I mean the expression of social, economic and aesthetic positioning through the medium of consumer goods and services.

Personally, identity is a matter of mental, physical and spiritual wellbeing. The work of Michael Chandler links the loss of personal and cultural identity in Canadian aboriginal youths with increased incidents of teen suicide. (Chandler 2003)

Philosophically, identity is a riddle whose resolution deepens its mystery. The problem of identity can be stated as a reformulation of Augustine's temporal puzzle. *Who am I? I know well enough who I am provided that nobody asks me; but if I am asked who I am and try to explain, I am baffled.* I will attempt to construct an intellectual apparatus designed to articulate and clarify the simultaneous certainty and bafflement that accompanies the act of self-speculation.

What form should such an apparatus take? Mark Muldoon approaches narrative identity by situating the works of Ricoeur and Merleau-Ponty within the broader context of a discourse that is concerned with the categories of "modernity" and "post-modernity". (Muldoon 1997) Although I am not qualified to deploy such a strategy, I am grateful to Muldoon for his contribution to the subject.

What follows takes the form of an exercise in mobility, discursive or otherwise. When Merleau-Ponty asserts that "philosophy's center is everywhere and its circumference nowhere", he foreshadows one of the problems faced by a computer literate "web culture". (1964: 160) As Dreyfus points out, the Internet is structured in such a way as to make any site a potential conduit to any other site. He claims that the post-modern response to the loss of meaningful connections is the radical aestheticization of content. (Dreyfus Ch.1)

In light of the paralyzing freedom of movement that digital technology affords an individual who belongs to a generation that has access to digital worksites, almost every discursive problem is, at least in part, a problem of navigation. How does one orient oneself without recourse to an Archimedean point, a genesis, or a time before creation? The answer is to begin *in media res* – imbedded in the preoccupations of a time and place. Two such preoccupations that are commanding today's headlines are the "War on Terror" and emerging digital technologies. In what follows, I navigate the cultural space delineated by the abovementioned axes with the guidance of three master texts.

My starting point is Ricoeur's third volume of <u>Time and Narrative</u> in which he seeks a poetic resolution for the aporias of temporality and the union of history and fiction. From this work emerges the "fragile offshoot" which seeks to answer the question "who?". The answer, which can only be articulated poetically, is, following both Arendt and Ricoeur, what I will refer to as narrative identity.

In its narrative incarnation, the problem of identity appears as the tension between two opposing conditions. On the one hand, the world stands as a pre-existing structure that brackets the story of a life (or community). Against this structure (or more precisely this collection of structures) stands what I refer to as the soul. Although this term need not (and possibly ought not) be stripped of its religious implications, I am using it with no particular reference to either theological nor military thought.

Here, I am using the term *soul* to designate that which is referenced by its everyday secular usages, such as "this city has no soul", "I feel it in my soul", or "she has a good soul".

The soul's identity is antithetical to worldy identity insofar as it can only be inferred by observing what it is not. The apparent negativity of the soul has prompted some thinkers to go so far as to give it the status of non-being or nothingness.

I avoid an ontological debate by positing the following hypothesis. *Insofar as the visibility of worldly identity is in opposition to the soul, it relies on linguistic distinctions (I/you, us/them) that belong to the soul. And, the soul can only be articulated metaphorically with the language of the world.* By bridging worldly identity and the soul, the poetic function of language draws together a discordant web of narratives into a unified self.

The hypothesis that guides my work is an instantiation of Ricoeur's three aporias of temporality. The first aporia is the result of the "mutual occultation of the phenomenological and the cosmological perspectives" of time. (Ricoeur 1985: 242) Narrated time bridges the gap between the time of the soul and the time of the world. The second aporia arises from the question "is time singular"? The tentative answer to this question is indicated by the assertion that, insofar as the respective positions of the actor and the spectator cannot be occupied concurrently, time is not totalizable. The third aporia attests to the difficulty with which any theory of time must contend, namely, the unrepresentability of time. Again, Ricoeur looks to the function of poetic narrative to bring to light that which remains obscured by the temporality of experience and discourse.

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My examination of the aporia of identity takes for granted both the method and the uneasiness of the resolutions of Ricoeur's aporetics. Furthermore, the path of my argument paces Ricoeur's unraveling and reconfiguration of temporal puzzles. However, I do *not* return to the same texts that Ricoeur uses to explicate temporality. Instead, I look to two tangential works that buttress Ricoeur's work, namely, Merleau-Ponty's <u>Phenomenology of Perception</u>, and Arendt's <u>The Human Condition</u>. Rather than seek to reinsert these texts into <u>Time and Narrative</u>, my strategy is to read the work of Arendt and Merleau-Ponty through a lens provided by Ricoeur.

My first chapter is an exegesis of Ricoeur's aporetic method. I use "The Time of the Soul and the Time of the World: The Dispute between Augustine and Aristotle" as an exemplar. I comment on the structure of an aporetic argument, which differs from other argumentative structures in that there is no clear starting point. The impetus of the argument comes not from the compulsion of a logical mechanism, but rather from the mystery at its core. The argumentation orbits the aporia, held together by the progressive enigmas that emerge. Although the structure of the argument is circular, it appears as a productive spiral, where every revolution leads to new insights and further problems. In fact, it may be more appropriate to describe the argumentative structure as a spiral that simultaneously moves in multiple directions, since each inroad is purchased at the cost of deeper mystery.

In my second chapter, I address Merleau-Ponty's section entitled "Other Selves and the Human World" in <u>Phenomenology of Perception</u>. It is in this section that the aporetic tension between the world and the soul is explored as

the relation between anonymous and personal life modes. Merleau-Ponty begins his examination of *être-au* with the following observation.

> The transcendence of the instants of time is both the ground of, and the impediment to, the rationality of my personal history: the ground because it opens a totally new future to me in which I shall be able to reflect upon the element of opacity in my present through which I live with apodeicitc certainty, and since the lived is thus never entirely comprehensible, what I understand never quite tallies with my living experience, *in short, I am never quite at one with myself.* Merleau-Ponty 2000: 347 emphasis added

Here, the puzzle of time is transformed into a puzzle of identity. Anonymity situates the personal in such a way as to permeate the barrier between consciousness and the world of objects. This claim challenges both the objectivity of the body and the constituting power of consciousness. When the presumptions of objective thought are overcome, the body is revealed as a behavioral surface. When the implicit assumption of other consciousnesses is revealed at the heart of solipsistic thought, the problem of reciprocity moves towards resolution in the form of a superabundance of ambiguous existence that looms as an ever-present horizon of possibility. The price to be paid for this resolution is that it appears as though "the world is wholly inside and I am wholly outside myself". (Ibid. 407)

In my third chapter, I take up the puzzle of the interiority of the world and the exteriority of the soul with Arendt's phenomenology of public life. First

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I address Benhabib's charge that Arendt's phenomenology of public life excludes marginalized people. I argue that labour as a basic activity is inadequate to articulate an identity.

Next I discuss the modal dichotomy between the ambiguous and the personal, which is the cornerstone for Arendt's discourse on action. Insofar as plurality is a basic human condition, it is characterized by the simultaneous equality and distinction of humans with respect to humans. The mode of ambiguous life serves as a ground upon which the mode of personal life is figured. Ambiguous equality as such is not readily apparent, but rather lurks in the customs and habits of a group. It is in this sense that the topological structures of the common world are interior – *we carry our world(s) with us.* Personal life figures upon these structures as a uniqueness that appears in the world through the media of speech and deeds. It is in the mode of the personal that Ricoeur's aporia of the singularity of time is refigured as an epistemological barrier to self-revelation. Concerning this barrier Arendt writes,

> This disclosure of "who" in contradistinction to "what" somebody is – his qualities, gifts, talents, and shortcomings, which he may display or hide – is implicit in everything somebody says and does. It can be hidden only in complete silence and perfect passivity, but its disclosure can almost never be achieved as a willful purpose, as though one possessed and could dispose of this "who" in the same manner he can dispose of his qualities. On the contrary, it is more likely that the "who," which appears

so clearly and unmistakably to others, remains hidden from the person himself. Arendt 1998: 179

That is, insofar as the position of spectator and actor cannot be occupied concurrently and human experience is fundamentally temporal, a person may or may not have access to his or her own narrative identity.

The twofold consequence of this "offshoot" from Ricoeur's second temporal aporia is the irreversibility and unpredictability of action. Action is irreversible because actors are fundamentally temporal. Action is unpredictable because actors are ignorant of their own narrative identity.

Arendt's remedies for action's predicaments rotate the omni-directional spiral of the aporia of narrative identity another revolution. It is through forgiveness that the retributive logic of action can be transcended if at all. Forgiveness is poetic in the sense that it closes the logical distance between discordant terms. The poetry of forgiveness refers us to the nascent character of action and its unpredictability. There is nothing in the structuring of a situation that can account for an unexpected outcome other than the power of an agent or cohort to bring something new into the world. It is in the form of a promise or a covenant that the power of nativity is kept in check.

Although the predicaments of action correspond to the untotalizability of time, Arendt often treats narrative identity as a totality – a "rectilinear line" that cuts across the cycles of nature. At other times, she refers to the public realm as a "web of relationships". It is the metaphor of the web that aptly expresses an aspect of the aporia of narrative identity. That is, *insofar as time is not totalizable*

and human existence is fundamentally temporal, identity is not totalizable. The "who" refers to a web of narratives – not to a single story of a life. These narratives are constantly being retold from innumerable perspectives. It is in these senses that the epistemic problem of narrative identity places one's "self" in the eyes of one's peers.

My fourth and final chapter directs the insights revealed in the preceding sections toward the problematic intersection of identity, technology and warfare. I argue that, insofar as narrative identity is a function of the weaving of the soul and the world, technological, economic, and cultural changes elicit questions concerning the possibility, viability and relevance of life stories. Novel narrative modes (like computer games and CNN) lead to novel expressions of identity. These modes go beyond the traditions of oral and literary storytelling. The implications of emerging technologies on narrative identity are unclear, but they are both significant and unavoidable.

1 The Aporetics of Identity

The aim of this chapter is to introduce the problem of identity to the aporetic method employed by Ricoeur in *Time and Narrative*. Ricoeur's movement through aporetic puzzles is unique in that he does not trace a direct path from premise to conclusion, but rather, he engages in the unravelling of a

Gordian knot[1] whose intersecting strands yield surprising insights. Ricoeur readily admits that there is no clear entry point, and so his choice of texts is as much a matter of dramatic device (the dynamic between tension and resolution) as it is conceptually justified. My own approach to the knot is more conventional. I begin at a critical distance with a structural analysis.

The second section of this chapter traces Ricoeur's discursive movement in "The Time of the Soul and the Time of the World: The Dispute between Augustine and Aristotle." What is noteworthy about this movement is that it appears as though Ricoeur ends the chapter back where he started – at an impasse. However, accompanying this impasse is an inroad – a tentative bridge over the antithetical temporalities of the soul and the world. It is this unique mode of discursive mobility that both condemns aporias to perpetual dispute and ensures their perpetuity in the domain of thought.

My third section serves as my entry point into the problematic of identity. Taking my cue from Arendt, I begin with the idea that a human life is a rectilinear line that cuts across the cycles of nature and the cosmos. The story of a life, inscribed in memory and its products, is integral to Ricoeur's claim that his hermeneutic circle is productive.

My fourth section is my second point of entry. In opposition to the recollection of a life lived, I pose nascent flesh inserted into a world. Merleau-Ponty's carnal phenomenology sets the stage for an inquiry into the relationship between the soul and the world. Insofar as narrative identity bridges the identity

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[1] King Gordius of Phrygia tied a knot of such complexity that it was said that only the future ruler of Asia could untie the strands. Alexander the Great cut the knot.

of the soul and the world, it is flesh that constitutes the ground of the figured self.

1.1 *The Circular Hypothesis*

An aporetic argument begins with a circular hypothesis, that is, with a claim or, more often than not, a pair of claims that circumscribe the disputed territory of a problem. The logical movement of the hypothesis is reversible. Within the context of the argumentative structure, the hypothesis is the reckoning point that anchors the argument to the mystery at its core. This means that, not only is the circular hypothesis the starting point of the aporetic argument, but it also makes an inveterate appearance at every resolution.

Part I of <u>Time and Narrative</u> volume 1, aptly named "The Circle of Narrative and Temporality," is paradigmatic of an aporetic argument. It begins with the following hypothesis.

> Time becomes human time to the extent that it is organized after the
> manner of a narrative; narrative, in turn, is meaningful to the extent that
> it portrays the features of temporal experience. 1984: 3

With this hypothesis, Ricoeur conjoins the domains of human experience and the movement of the cosmos. The opposition of these domains functions as a tension that threatens to tear apart the hypothesis. For what is more characteristic of human existence than its mortal opposition to the sempiternal movements of the stars? By bringing together these opposing terms, Ricoeur opens a worksite that

is charged by their antithesis. It is the tension of the antithesis that compels the argument toward each resolution.

The compulsion toward resolution leads to a reiteration and reconfiguration of the impelling hypothesis. When Ricoeur orbits the aporia of temporality via Augustine's <u>Confessions</u>, he returns to his initial hypothesis in an altered form.

> The struggle against the linear representation of time does not necessarily have its sole outcome the turning of narrative into "logic," but rather may deepen its temporality. Chronology – or chronography – does not have just one contrary, the a-chronology of laws or models. Its true contrary is temporality itself. Ibid. 30

This incarnation of Ricoeur's hypothesis allows us to evaluate the progress that has been made during his visit with Augustine. The time of the cosmos has been fleshed out to include the concepts of measurement, movement and poesis. The radically ephemeral time of the soul has been anchored by the concepts of *distension* and *intention*. What's more, the conceptual expansion of each pole of the antithesis facilitates the interdependence of each term that manifests in the act of emplotment. Insofar as measurement and fabrication belong to the human realm and *distension* and *intention* are figured upon the cosmic ground of eternity, the juxtaposition of these discursive realms simultaneously illuminates and deepens the problematic of time.

The intertwining of human and cosmic time in the mode of fabrication

remolds the aporia of temporality in a different form. The power of figuration

that is fundamental to human experience bridges the cosmos and the soul in the

mode of emplotment. By introducing the products of temporal figuration,

Ricoeur sets the stage to move toward the mimetic relationship between action

and poetry. This relationship is further refined into two narrative modes,

namely fiction and history.[2] Although both require a pre-understanding of

action, they differ in their referential function. History is presented in the mode

of *this has happened*, whereas fiction deploys a world of its own that lays no claim

to a past. The circular hypothesis as it is conceived as a matter of reference is

restated as follows.

> Fiction would borrow as much from history as history borrows from
>
> fiction. It is this reciprocal borrowing that authorizes my posing the
>
> problem of the *interweaving* reference between history and narrative
>
> fiction. Ibid. 82

It is this interweaving which constitutes what Ricoeur refers to as "narrated

time". With the introduction of this third time, the aporia's prospect for

resolution has become increasingly tenuous. At the same time, progress has

been made toward a better understanding of the relationship between the time of

the cosmos and that of the soul.

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[2] For an excellent exegesis of the structure of this relationship see Muldoon's
"Ricoeur and Merleau-Ponty on Narrative Identity."

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1.2 *The Dispute Between Augustine and Aristotle Revisited*

The movement of an aporetic argument can be described as the deepening and unfolding of a series of puzzles. Bracketed by circular hypotheses, the revelation of each new insight is tempered so far by recurrent atavisms. In this section, I present an exegesis of Ricoeur's discussion of Augustine and Aristotle to serve as an exemplar for the discursive mobility of an aporetic argument.

The discussion in volume 3 begins where it left off in section I of volume 1, namely, with the confrontation between cosmological and phenomenological time. Cosmological and phenomenological time are instantiated by the respective theories of Aristotle and Augustine. Ricoeur is explicit when he asserts that Augustine does not successfully explain time solely in terms of the soul.

Though Augustine recognizes that time is not movement, he fails to exorcise movement from time. Faced with the everyday usage of language that

effectively measures time, Augustine places that which is measured within the realm of the soul. That is, the measurement of time is a function of the threefold present. "Expectation is shortened when what we are awaiting approaches and memory is extended when what we remember recedes." (Ricoeur 1990: 13) The inadequacy of this solution stems from the inability to compare duration without a fixed measure.

Augustine's argument against cosmological time is based on a simplification of Aristotle's position, namely, that time is movement. Ricoeur responds to Augustine with a robust outline of Aristotle's three-part argument.

1) Time is related to movement without being identical with it. (Ibid. 14)

2) The relation between before and after is in time only because it is in movement and it is movement only because it is in magnitude. (Ibid. 15)

3) What is important for the definition of time is not counted but countable numbers, and this is said about movement before it is said about time. (Ibid. 16)

Numerical differentiation takes ontological primacy over movement, which takes primacy over temporality. Since succession is a feature of the world, time is not of the soul.

Ricoeur clarifies how and why this might appear as an aporia that arises from the confrontation of Aristotle and Augustine. The problem hinges on the distinction between the instant and the present. The instant is the arbitrary "break in the continuity of movement insofar as the latter is countable." (Ibid. 19)

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In contrast, the present is "any instant designated by a speaker as the 'now' of his utterance." (Ibid. 19) The irreconcilability of the instant with the present is complicated by the ability of everyday language to bring the two together. That is, insofar as the instant is a matter of succession, it finds its everyday expression with *before* and *after*; the present, in turn, is indicated by its very utterance and resides in the everyday language of *now, past,* and *future*. The instant lacks the feature of immediacy that is characteristic of the position of the actor and the present lacks the distance that is characteristic of the position of the spectator. So the problem of time is responded to as another problem if at all.

1.3 *Narrative Identity*

The interweaving of historical and fictional reference finds some measure of applicability when it is applied to the problem of identity. The simultaneous bafflement and certainty that follows from the question "who?" is revealed in the unfolding of a story.

As we saw earlier, historical reference is present in the mode of *this has happened* and fictional reference creates novel and meaningful relations. History draws on fiction to refigure experience into an intelligible form and fiction draws on history as a model for action. The unity of the narrative cloth woven from fiction and history is confirmed when we attempt to answer the question "who?". This "fragile offshoot" from Ricoeur's work is judged by Muldoon to be the "fruit" born from Time and Narrative. One will notice that the same problems that arose from temporality will reemerge when we examine identity.

How does one go about answering the question "who?"? This problem is a preoccupation in much of the writing of Hannah Arendt. Whether telling the stories of peoples or individuals, Arendt is confident in her assertion that *speech and action are revelatory*. That is,

> through [speech and action], men distinguish themselves instead of being merely distinct; they are modes in which human beings appear to each other, not indeed as physical objects, but *qua* men. 1996: 176

Arendt's fears the rise of the social and the loss of a space of appearance. In a society of labourers, one is often reduced to an occupation or a concentration of productive and consumptive potential. The inadequacy of such an identification is palpable, yet more often than not this suffices in the social sphere.

Ricoeur approaches identity from the everyday response to the question "who?" – a proper name – a "what". One might go beyond a name to assign attributes, geographical origins, lineage and occupations. These kinds of answers elicit the following question. "What justifies our taking the subject of an action, so designated by his, her, or its proper name, as the same throughout a life that stretches from birth to death?" (Ricoeur 1990: 246) Or, is it not the case that, in assigning a proper name or a collection of predicates, we are pushing aside the question "who?" and replacing it with "what?"? One might recall Ricoeur's criticism of Aristotle's cosmological time. What Coriscus' movement from the marketplace to the Lyceum illustrates is the inability of a purely substantial theory to account for either temporality or identity. Concerning this

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point, Ricoeur writes, "Coriscus is the same insofar as carried, but different when he is in the Lyceum and when he is in the marketplace." (Ibid. 20) Just as the substance of Coriscus is the same when motion changes his definition, so too, according to Aristotle, is the instant the same when time changes its definition.[3] However, the apprehension of time via the constancy of identity is implicated in Aristotle's theory and is made explicit by Ricoeur with the distinction between the instant and the present. So, to reverse Aristotle's analogy, just as time cannot be explained solely in terms of substance, neither can identity. Both the language of the soul and that of the world are employed by identity. One must bridge the identity of the world and that of the soul with a third identity – narrative identity.

Identity requires narrative, the interweaving of fictional and historical references, to be meaningful. Without narrative, one is faced with the following problem.

> Either we must posit a subject identical with itself through the diversity of its different states, or, following Hume and Nietzsche, we must hold that this identical subject is nothing more than a substantialist illusion, whose elimination merely brings to light a pure manifold of cognitions, emotions and volitions. Ricoeur 1990: 246

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[3] In his analysis of Book IV of the Physics, W. D. Ross writes, "As change is different from moment to moment, so is time... The now is in a sense the same and in a sense not... for change corresponds to magnitude, and time to change." (1960: 386) Coriscus is analogous to the "now". *In a sense, he is the same and in a sense he is not.*

The response to this problem at this staging site relies on the distinction between substantial and narrative identity. Where substantial identity changes in definition when Coriscus travels from the marketplace to the Lyceum, narrative identity is constituted by the dynamic and perpetual figuration of self via the interweaving of the soul with the world. That is, "self-constancy refers to a self instructed by the works of a culture that it has applied to itself." (Ibid. 247) The other side of this claim is the self's ability to make an appearance that might shape its world.

This dynamic between the self and the world is what Ricoeur refers to as a character. The expression of a character in the mode of narrative identity is "the poetic resolution of the hermeneutic circle." (Ibid. 248)

Although the problem of substantial identity has been addressed, the question of the constituting power of consciousness remains. A further distinction needs to be made between phenomenological and narrative identity. Merleau-Ponty's response to solipsism completes the bridge of narrative identity.

1.4 *The Body as the Bridge Between the Soul and the World*

Underpinning Ricoeur's phenomenology of identity is Merleau-Ponty's "I can". The deployment of a world as a horizon of possibilities is generated by the flesh in the form of the "I can". Ricoeur reaffirms that the flesh is "the most original mediator" between the soul and the world. (Ibid. 230)

Insofar as narrated time bridges cosmological and phenomenological time, Ricoeur relies on the carnal phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty to bridge "cosmic exteriority" and "reflective interiority".

To be the author or the reader of a narrative identity is to embody the logic of the "I can". Such a logic is structured by the deployment of a world bracketed by "nonpowers". So, to be a "who" is to "deploy a world" and to deal with its boundaries. The question of finding a dwelling place within these boundaries can be a question of prime importance. The fragility of narrative identity entails the ever-present possibility of homelessness, world-alienation and extermination.

"A world" is characterized by the acquisition and deployment of multiple operative topologies. Insofar as flesh is the bridge between the soul and the world, it is the medium through which operative topologies appear. That is, flesh is simultaneously a cultural object and the origin of a field of possibilities. It both articulates and performs the soul and the world and constitutes the ground upon which narrative identity is figured. From the primordial flesh, the body as a behavioral surface appears to both others and the self.

The irreconcilability of these perspectives is the position from which I reiterate the following hypothesis. *Insofar as the visibility of worldly identity is in opposition to the soul, it relies on linguistic distinctions (I/you, us/them) that belong to the soul. And, the soul can only be articulated metaphorically with the language of the world.* The remaining two chapters will be devoted to this hypothesis as I work with Merleau-Ponty and Arendt.

2 Pronouns, Anonymity and the World

i ka ʻōlelo ke ola — i ka ʻōlelo ke make
in language is life — in language is death.[4]

As a "system of carnal possibilities", the "I can" carries topological

structures that delineate a world. The ubiquity of operative topologies and the

uncritical deployment of social and cultural mores obscures the "I can" behind,

on the one hand, objective thinking, and on the other, solipsism.

Operative topologies appear as *where* one can act. The formation and

ascription of identity opens a space where definition and possibility become

nearly synonymous. The rules of the game are contingent on *who* the players are.

For example, the "War on Terror" has been directed at people (as opposed to a

state) who have been designated as the enemy.[5] The logic of military operation is

such that the designation of identity is a critical prerogative of the command

structure. In the case of the American (and Canadian supported) war, the

process of identification emanates from the White House and is situated in the

targeting computers of attack vehicles. The display of an American Apache

helicopter's targeting computer displays two colours – green and red. The

colours designate respectively *us* and *them*.

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[4] This Hawaiian proverb is quoted from Haunani-Kay Trask's article "Lovely
Hula Lands: Corporate Tourism and the Prostitution of Hawaiian Culture."
[5] In a recent survey conducted by the Muslim Community Council of Ottawa-
Gatineau, 82% of Muslims "felt they do not have the same freedoms, rights and
privileges as other Canadians." (Jaimet E1) 73% suspected that their phones
were tapped by Canadian intelligence authorities. (Ibid. E1)

If one wants to challenge the violent ascription of identity, one must challenge the assumptions and mechanisms of objective thought. Otherwise, the operative structures that are contingent on human action appear as compelled by necessity. (*This* is an enemy to be exterminated because the targeting computer is displaying a red shape.) When one fails to think about the social mechanisms that are designed to delineate identity, they become further entrenched in the cultural world. However, the price to be paid for such a challenge is the realization that the bracketing of operative topologies assumes the object it is intended to exclude. There is no "pure" identity of the soul that is waiting to be freed from the constraints of objectivity. The unsettling consequence of this realization is that institutions like the White House may be more relevant to the question "who" than one is comfortably admitting or acknowledging. The designations of George W. Bush (us/them, pure/defiled, sacred/profane, good/evil) provide assurance for some and disquiet others.[6]

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[6] George W. Bush has repeatedly stated "you can't distinguish between al-Qaeda and Saddam when you talk about the war on terror." (Gardner A11) This is a remarkable exercise of the presidential prerogative to ascribe identity.

2.1 Swarm Intelligence and Objective Thought

Ricoeur responds to the problem of substantial identity with narrated identity. The self is cohesive as a narrative mode of generative authority and receptive readership. Although this answer is satisfactory for Ricoeur's broader project of examining the relationship between temporality and narrativity, for this current project it is necessary to delve into the underlying structure of substantial identity – objective thought.

If Ricoeur's method can be described metaphorically as an omni-directional productive spiral, Merleau-Ponty's method is a power auger. He begins on the surface of appearance, the world of objects, and bores into that which seems "immediate" and "obvious" to uncover the phenomenon of perception. Like Ricoeur, Merleau-Ponty pays for his progress with a deepening problematic. He moves from the clarity of objective thought toward the ambiguity of the phenomenal self. In this section, I follow Merleau-Ponty's progress from the surface of objective thought to the stratum of *being-there*.

One of Merleau-Ponty's projects in <u>Phenomenology of Perception</u> is to deal with objective thinking. The problem with objective thinking is that it causes a disconnection with the phenomenal self and assumes the position of a "universal positing power".

> The whole life of consciousness is characterized by the tendency to posit objects, since it is consciousness, that is to say self-knowledge, only in so far as it takes hold of itself and draws itself together in an identifiable object. And yet the absolute positing of a single object is the death of consciousness, since it congeals the whole of existence, as a crystal placed in a solution suddenly crystallizes it. Merleau-Ponty 2000: 71

The crystallization of consciousness is at the heart of the problem of substantial identity. Consciousness positing itself as an object is its own nullification. The atemporality of objectification, the synthesis of perspectives into an all-encompassing totality is antithetical to experience. Yet this is precisely the position that is assumed when one is said to be in possession of one's self.

According to Merleau-Ponty, the world(s) of objective thought does not come pre-packaged – it is a collection of intellectual artifacts. Objective thought takes these artifacts for granted and assumes that they are atemporal things about which we are authorized to make judgments. What objective thought misses is the fact that objects are embedded in a social world – they are not the origin of the world but rather are the products of experiencing a world. For example, objective space is a concept that is loaded with historic, cultural,

religious and intellectual objects. The idea that a visual/motor field can be expressed as a collection of three-term co-ordinates does not spring from the earth into a geometric system. Amongst other things, geometry assumes a system of numbers and a formalization of a natural language. The forms and conventions of geometry are intellectual objects that have endured even beyond the popularization of quantum theories.

Currently, digital geometers are endeavoring to "create" a formal space. Search space is a tool that is used to solve complex matrices graphically. The conventions of geometry are deployed to provide a "space" where digital "entities" can indicate solutions. The technique is called particle swarm optimization, and its premise is based on the swarming patterns of birds and insects.[7] By giving simple instructions to swarming entities (such as 1. seek out the optimum weights for a neural network 2. do not bump into any other entity) digital geometers are yielding solutions in ridiculously short periods of time. In his book <u>Digital Biology</u>, Peter Bentley describes the success of particle swarm optimization:

Swarms are very good at finding solutions to hard problems and finding them *fast*. [In an] experiment to find the weights for a neural network

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[7] What makes particle swarm optimization and evolutionary programming so interesting to authors like Bentley is the shift from algebra to geometry. It is not necessary for a programmer to understand the math that leads to a geometric solution yielded by a biologically inspired technique. In fact, often these solutions go beyond current mathematical theories of what is "possible" – yet they produce faster computer chips, more efficient circuits and so on. Both the complexity and the mystery of search space has led Bentley to conclude that a digital architecture is not a model of "real" space – it *is* "real" space. (Bentley 2001)

used to control a battery recharger, the swarm found the solution in 2.5 minutes, compared to the traditional backpropagation algorithm, which took 3.5 hours. 2001:129

From the effectiveness of biologically inspired programming techniques Bentley concludes that one ought to re-evaluate the boundaries of nature and artifice. Bentley is not alone in his endeavor. Currently, several governments are investing capital with the intention of projecting this claim.[8]

Particle swarm optimization does not provide evidence for the dissolution of the boundary between nature and artifice -- it forces the artifice of objective thought to the surface of attention. That is to say, the affinities that digital formalisms have to scientific formalisms attest to the hegemony of objective thought and the disciplined focus that has projected scientific thought. The formal space delineated by particle swarm optimization represents a limit of what is visible in that its dimensions can only be inferred. Particle swarm optimization assists one in adding to the already discredited question as to the assumption that reality *in its totality* can be reduced to a system of laws. The myth of the *universal positing power* is unmasked by the inability of common sense to perceive search space. [9]

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[8] To appreciate the scale of the endeavor, one need only browse NASA's page on swarm intelligence at *http://dsp.jpl.nasa.gov/members/payman/swarm/*.
[9] The myth of the universal positing power can be remarkably productive. For example, the radical bracketing that is required to acquire proficiency in a medical specialization delimits a space of fine resolution and focused complexity. In order for a surgeon to enucleate a tumor, she must bracket out all but the micro-systems that are drawn along with the intentional movement of her task. Questions of gender, age, culture and history are limited to those that pertain to

Formal space and natural space share the structural similarity of relating one thing to another. The "solution" as expressed as a point in formal space is a term that is related via formal processes to another term. In other words, space is a relational power. Concerning this point Merleau-Ponty writes,

> Space is not the setting (real or logical) in which things are arranged, but the means whereby the position of things becomes possible. This means that instead of imagining it as a sort of ether in which all things float, or conceiving it abstractly as a characteristic that they have in common, we must think of it as the universal power enabling them to be connected. 2000: 243

Geometry and particle swarm optimization are formal systems that employ rules in order to connect things. Likewise, natural space facilitates the connection of things – the difference being that the rules employed by informal spaces are contingent, ambiguous and impossible to enumerate.

As before, what has been said about time can be said about identity. Just as formal space connects definite terms, so too does substantial identity make

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the cellular structure that is to be removed. Ambiguity must be set aside. Normative evaluations are simplified into crystalline objectives. The space of the surgeon ought not be subverted, challenged or even expanded. It is an operative space that opens with the anticipation of an end. All connections are directed at this end. When the end is either achieved or all hope of its achievement is lost, the space dissipates. Although the clarity of formal space requires the belief in a myth, the results of such a system of beliefs can be quite dramatic.

definite connections. It is not necessarily the case that these connections are invalid or unjustified, but rather the crux of the problem is a matter of definition.

Ricoeur's charge that Aristotle's cosmic time admits phenomenological time through the back door of a discerning intelligence applies here. Recall the case of Coriscus – his substance was to have remained constant as motion changed his definition. What our examination of formal space shows, pacing Ricoeur, is that such a definition is either radically ambiguous or is a function of the universal positing power. Here the criticism of Aristotle applies to all objective thinking. Just as the generative principles of movement and magnitude demand the eradication of ambiguity so too does the positing of the self as an object. For these reasons, the ambiguous existence of consciousness cannot be admitted into the space of objective thought because it cannot be delineated and defined.

The eradication of ambiguity from substantial identity directs one to a remarkable consequence of objective thought, namely the ingenious mechanisms that are in place to bracket unwanted phenomena.[10] At times, these mechanisms are prudential, while at others they are tantamount to willful ignorance. The psychological conditioning that is required to direct a person to react to a red shape by pressing a button is an example of such a mechanism. As Merleau-Ponty quips, "the problem of the world, and, to begin with, that of one's own body, consists in the fact that *it is all there*." (Ibid. 198) Functioning in the world is sometimes a matter of turning away from what is *there*.

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[10] Imagine what it would be like to attend to every minutia of experience. This well-know thought experiment still resonates with a tone of certainty.

2.2 *Bidding Adieu to Descartes*

Without the mechanism of objective thought, it might appear as though one is left with a pure soul whose identity is beyond the mundane. Consciousness may not be an object for itself, but surely the body is an object amongst others in the world. The interaction of the self of the soul and the mundane body is merely a problem to be solved by cognitive science and neuroscience. The ghost is in the machine – mental causation is a question of interface.[11]

At the end of the chapter designated as "The Body as Expression, and Speech", Merleau-Ponty addresses those who are preoccupied with ghosts and machines.[12] In this section, I engage in an analysis of Merleau-Ponty's moves, conceptual and or otherwise, in order to move beyond the duality of the soul and the body.

Merleau-Ponty begins with a characterization of thinking that is inappropriately "influenced" by Descartes. He writes that,

> The reflective attitude simultaneously purifies the common notions of
> body and soul by defining the body as the sum of its parts with no interior
> and the soul as a being wholly present to itself without distance. Ibid. 198

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[11] I thank Fred Dretske for his generosity in assisting me in coming to the conclusion that the question of mental causation is intensely uninteresting.
[12] I am referring to the last paragraph of "The Body as Expression, and Speech" in the Colin Smith's English translation of <u>Phenomenology of Perception</u>, Routledge, 2000.

The purification of identity brackets any sense of being that deviates from the dichotomy of object and subject. The body is defined as an object and so is incidental to identity. The soul is identical with the perceptive self and is completely present to itself.

The Cartesian position manifests in the everyday notion that identity is hidden from view and is both generated and known by the self. There is neither ambiguity nor contradiction about what constitutes an object or a subject from the reflective attitude. The self is considered absolutely autonomous.

Merleau-Ponty simultaneously introduces the experience of the body and the pronoun "I" as a response to the Cartesian dichotomy. This conjunction of a conceptual and narrative shift is not an idle coincidence. The narrative moves from the disengaged position of the reflective attitude toward the inchoate embodied position via third person observation. This shift yields the claim that "the body is not an object" as a challenge to the purity of the subject/object schism. (Ibid. 198) The vague unity of identity casts the self as the hero in the unique drama that relates existential modes to the world.

From the position of third person observation, Merleau-Ponty moves toward his own carnality with the statement "I am my body." (Ibid. 198) The schism of self is transcended with the union of identity and carnality. The epistemic consequence of embodiment is entailed by the finitude of carnal experience. That is, knowledge of the body cannot be separated from knowledge of the self (and vice-versa).

After pointing toward the epistemic limitation of the flesh, Merleau-Ponty recapitulates the purified notions of body and soul. Rather than addressing the

inheritors of the Cartesian tradition, Merleau-Ponty addresses Descartes in a reverent tone. His assertion that "Descartes was well aware" of the epistemic limitations of embodied existence and his explanation of the role that the "rational author" plays in Descartes' thought distinguishes the innovator from the imitators. That is, Descartes' God justifies the purification of the soul from the corruption of ambiguous carnal existence. However, the inheritors of the Cartesian tradition, those who would look for ghosts in machines, have no recourse to a rational author. With the conclusion of the chapter, Merleau-Ponty bids *adieu* to both the dichotomy of subject and object and to one of the forefathers of modern thought.

2.3 *The Cultural World of Signification*

Having moved through the positions of scientific observation and neo-Cartesian dualism one is prepared to evaluate one's progress. By challenging the assumptions of objective thought the hypothesis that the language of substance is inadequate to articulate the self was reaffirmed. It is time now to broaden this hypothesis. That is, the language of substance is incapable of articulating the existence of others.

By closely observing Merleau-Ponty's farewell to Descartes, an ancient dichotomy was set aside. However, the problematic was not resolved. As Merleau-Ponty so explicitly states,

> How significance and intentionality could come to dwell in molecular edifices or masses of cells is a thing which can never be made

comprehensible, and here Cartesianism is right. But there is, in any case, no question of any such absurd undertaking. Ibid. 351

The preceding encounter with Descartes served to limit the scope of carnal epistemology and to clarify the consequences of a particular challenge to objective thought. Although identity cannot be articulated in terms of substance, every self is an embodied self.

From the position of the embodied self, one is prepared to acknowledge the presence of other selves. The starting point is the disjunction between self-understanding and experience. As was illustrated by the temporal aporia of cosmic and phenomenological time, the temporality of the soul both facilitates and resists self-speculation. The "I" who posits itself can never completely coincide with the "I" who is posited. Concerning this point, Merleau-Ponty writes, "since the lived is never entirely comprehensible, what I understand never quite tallies with my living experience." (Ibid. 347) There is an opacity to identity that emanates from the aporetics of time. As a temporal self, the "I" is untotalizable, unrepresentable, and fractured. Yet there is no greater phenomenological force than the presence of the self to itself.

The existence of others is implicit in the deployment of a cultural world insofar as the "sediment" of behavior patterns is cast upon nature. Sensorial objects are imbued with the significance of their potential use by anonymous others. A road is seen as such in virtue of it being traversable. This use does not radiate from me – it existed as a potentiality before I was born and will continue after my death. To be born is to be inserted into a world of cultural objects –

things imbued with significance. The apprehension of significance presents the other "beneath a veil of anonymity."(348)

What is it that justifies the claim that the anonymous other that utilizes and gives significance to a cultural world *is* an "I" amongst others? What justifies the pluralization of the singular "I" to "one"? Since the road was a road before I was born it would be absurd to say that *I* signify *this* as a potential traverse. It is in the mode of being *one's* potential traverse that the road is signified. The crux of the problem is articulated by the following passage.

> Whether it be a question of vestiges or the body of another person, we
>
> need to know how an object in space can become the eloquent relic of
>
> existence, how, conversely, an intention, a thought or a project can detach
>
> themselves from the personal subject and become visible outside him in
>
> the shape of his body, and in the environment which he builds for himself.
>
> Ibid. 348-49

The problem of solipsism is introduced as a strategy to uncover the phenomenon of plurality that is a basic human condition.

2.4 *Anonymity and Identity*

The eradication of objective thought seems to reveal the pure phenomenon of experience. However, it is questionable whether such a purification is possible. Merleau-Ponty leaves us with this question at the close of "The Body as Expression, and Speech" and concludes with the tone of a

warning. "Obscurity spreads to the perceived world in its entirety." (Ibid. 199) The act of perception obfuscates the subject before itself and others. Yet, the very ambiguity that is at the heart of self-speculation is what ensures the appearance of the existence of the inaccessible consciousness of others. The doubt of the solipsist is a paper tiger because these doubts are addressed to the very existence that is in question – other consciousnesses. Merleau-Ponty's explication of solipsism is not an ingenuous rebuttal – it is a strategy to uncover the relationship between the self, the other and the social world.

When Merleau-Ponty states that "I am never quite at one with myself", he foreshadows the transcendental principle of freedom. (Ibid. 347) Insofar as "it is a fate for me to be free," the inexhaustible horizon of possibility can never tally with experience. This freedom looms as an anticipated future that can never be experienced, since every actualization becomes "a particular instance which does not exhaust the generality of my being." (Ibid. 360) The horizon of freedom answers the question of solipsism in that the possible always outruns the actual. This is true both in the case of self-speculation and in the presence of the other. To commit to a reciprocal position with respect to another is to "aim beyond [the other's] qualities, at an inexhaustible ground which may one day shatter the image that [has been] formed." (Ibid. 361) However, when objectification takes the place of the possibility of communication, the reciprocal presence of one before the other gives way to the denial of selfhood to the other. It is this bracketing of the presence of the other that affirms the other by the act of

exclusion. It should then come as no surprise that a significant portion of

military technology is designed to perform this operation of radical exclusion.[13]

The ambiguity of existence revealed as a transcendental horizon of

possibility entails that the self can never be in possession of itself or others. But

the inaccessibility of the self looms as a presence in the same way as the

consciousness of the other is present. Ambiguous existence throws the self

outward into the social where the anonymity of plurality permeates *the given*

with significance. Significance and cultural objects refer us back to the

ambiguous life upon which the personal is figured. It is at the level of ambiguity

that consciousnesses are compresent through such experiences as a living

condition, a shared fate, or a reciprocal gaze.[14]

The superabundance of ambiguous existence provides an answer to the

question of access to a pure experience. The position from pure experience

presupposes the objects that it attempts to exclude. One must have recourse to

the very systems and structures that are intended to be excluded in order to

perform the act of bracketing. So, the primacy of experience as the ground for

objective thought can only be inferred. The return to experience from the

structures of the social world as given is always grounded by topologies that

recede from the act of introspection. The superabundance of ambiguous

existence that opens the possibility of a social world is paid for with the

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[13] At the American Defense Advanced Research Project Agency (DARPA) website, the absence of terms that might invest an enemy with the status of a human being is apparent. Euphemisms like "target" and "agent" are deployed to indicate a person or group of persons who are marked for extermination.
[14] Hannah Arendt often attempts to capture the ambiguity of plurality with her narrations of the "revolutionary spirit", the nature of totalitarianism, and "mass society".

following puzzle; "the world is wholly inside and I am wholly outside myself."
(Ibid. 407) To operate in a plural space requires that I take up the collective
concrete terms of the social and carry them as my own.

At the heart of subjectivity is objective thought in the form of cultural
objects and at the heart of objectivity is the general and anonymous subject that
constitutes its significance. Identity is a function of the movement between
ambiguous and personal existence across the fields of natural and social worlds.
The world is revealed through the actions of the self and the self is revealed in its
flight toward the world. The "violent act" of perception entails that the act of
self-speculation is intensely mundane. It is this act filtered by operative social
mechanisms that allows the deployment and correlation of the pronouns "us"
and "them" when confronted by green and red shapes on a computer screen.

3 The Opacity of Action

At the close of the last chapter, one was left with the puzzle of the
exteriority of the soul and the interiority of the world. It was resolved by the
hypothesis that identity is a function of a certain kind of mobility. In this
chapter, I take up this notion of mobility and recast it as both the precondition
and consequence of action.

The first section of this chapter outlines Arendt's architecture of publicity.
I respond to the general and hackneyed claim that Arendt's distinction between
the public and the private is insensitive to historically marginalized groups.

The second section addresses the predicaments of action. I argue that

their resolution requires the dual referential function of narrative. That is,

inasmuch as poetry imitates action, action imitates poetry.

The final section is a recapitulation of the puzzle that initiated this work –

the Augustinian quest for self. Arendt's phenomenology of plurality constitutes

a reversal of Augustine's ontology of the soul. The soul is no longer calibrated

according to the eternal but instead to the fragile, finite, and temporal public

realm. Rather than revealing eternal being, introspection reveals the world.

3.1 Reclaiming the Public Realm

All sorrows can be borne if you put them into a story and tell a story about them.
Isak Dinesen[15]

Plurality is a basic condition for any public realm. For Arendt, plurality is

characterized by the fragile simultaneity of equality and distinctness. This

conjunction is fragile because these terms seem to be antithetical. *I* am distinct

insofar as I am different than *you,* yet *we* are equal insofar as it is possible for us

to communicate. The limits of equality and distinctness structure the political

sphere. As was illustrated in the preceding chapter, Merleau-Ponty articulates

the existential modality of the social world with his answer to solipsism. That is,

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[15] This phrase is quoted by Hannah Arendt in <u>The Human Condition</u>, 1998: 176.

the social world is characterized as the respective simultaneities of transcendental phenomena and lived experience and historical personal existence and general anonymous existence.

The mysterious simultaneities of object and subject, the personal and impersonal, constitute the social world. The question of identity, both singular and plural, can only be answered in a common space of "consummate reciprocity." Without this condition, a "who" will be reduced to a "what." In order to establish a common world, one must recognize that the body as a cultural object is a behavioral surface. The mass of mobile flesh and bones must be seen as being "inhabited" by intentionality.[16]

The transition from Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology of Perception to Arendt's The Human Condition requires a linguistic recalibration. For Arendt, the terms *nature* and *social* are imbued with idiosyncratic significance. Arendt justifies her enrichment of terms by distinguishing between communication and disclosure. When charged with using idiosyncratic language, Arendt's response was,

> In my opinion a word has a much stronger relation to what it denotes or what it is, than just the way it is being used between you and me. You only look to the communicative value of the word. I look to the disclosing quality. And this disclosing quality, has of course always an historic background. 1979: 323

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[16] In order to get a sense for the intentionality of flesh, spend some time watching the advertisements that appear on any North American television network.

I will respect Arendt's distinction between communication and disclosure and will engage in a transition toward her linguistic convention. For Arendt, nature is the ahistoric realm of life cycles that demands the perpetual productive activity of labour to keep the processes of consumption and decay at bay. Labour is the activity that sustains life. Insofar as labour's futility is the consequence of the sempiternality of natural processes, earthbound existence cannot rid itself of the products of labour.

Arendt characterizes the social as the homogenization of the public and private realms. It is "the rise of housekeeping, its activities, problems, and organizational devices – from the shadowy interior of the household into the light of the public sphere." (1998: 38)

In the face of criticism by such political theorists as Seyla Benhabib, I will uphold the legitimacy of Arendt's distinction between the public, private and social realms on phenomenological grounds. (Benhabib 1992: Ch. 3) Benhabib charges Arendt with the patriarchal exclusion of labour and the historical domain of marginalized people from the public realm. However, against this charge stands the phenomenological claim that the horizon of possibility that emanates from the pre-political world of life processes precludes the possibility of plurality. Otherness in society's household is expressed as a multiplicity of productive and consumptive potential. The presence of others is valued not for the reciprocity of *being-together*, but rather for the increased efficiency that is directed at the necessity of life processes. So, it is not that the life stories of labourers (and women) are unfit to be told – it is the inability of labour as an

activity to articulate these stories. The social world of the household is centered round the process of progress. Insofar as this process is driven by novelty, consumption and production, there are no durable objects that can both relate and separate people – actors cannot appear within the boundaries of the social world.

The question of appearance presupposes the question of identity. To answer this question, one must be capable of answering the question "who did this?". This directs one to Arendt's claim that "otherness" is not the same as "distinctness." This requires another linguistic recalibration. Otherness is found in the presence of the sheer multiplicity of objects, whereas distinctness is found in the variation of living things. Uniqueness is the distinctness of human plurality, which can only be revealed through speech and action. The social world of a consumer society makes possible the appearance of otherness and distinctness. However, to apprehend what is unique about a person requires that a person act, and it is by one's interpretation of this action that one comes to know who the actor is. In other words, rather than seeing a person as distinct, one sees the person distinguish him or herself. Speech and action are modes of appearance in which one does not see objects that reveal an otherness but rather one sees the uniqueness of the "who" that speaks and acts.

Arendt asserts that "the disclosure of the 'who' is implicit in everything somebody says and does." (1998: 179) Action produces stories as fabrication produces objects, but, unlike the object's implication of a maker, a life story does not implicate a particular author. Recall Ricoeur's productive hermeneutic circle. The actor is also an author in the sense that he or she claims or refuses the

significances of his or her actions and is a reader in the sense that he or she presupposes a system of signification that grounds his or her action. The character of an individual or a group is expressed as the dynamic between these two positions. Neither the system of signification nor the significance of a particular action is generated by the actor. The meaning of an action is a function of appearing before one's peers. This meaning cannot be fixed – insofar as it is a function of the condition of plurality, it remains in a state of contention and refiguration.

3.2 *The Poetry of Action*

Action in both its modes (speech and deeds) is the activity that generates and sustains the public realm. When people act in concert, a public space appears. With the dispersal of actors comes the dispersal of the public space. The coextension of concerted action and public space is both a guarantee that public space can never be completely or permanently eradicated and a stipulation that a public space can never endure beyond the mood of its public. In other words, the public realm is both agile and fragile. It can emerge from within a tyrannical régime, and it can disperse before the smug thoughtlessness of a privileged Western democracy.

Each of Arendt's primary activities, namely labour, work, and action, is conditioned by a predicament. Labour's predicament is the necessity of natural processes. Work's predicament is its inability to generate meaning. Action's predicament is twofold and is a consequence of the temporality of human

existence and the human origins of action. Insofar as action is "the only activity that goes on directly between men without the intermediary of things or matter," its predicament is a dimension of the aporias of temporality and identity. (Ibid. 7) Ricoeur's first temporal aporia, the dual perspectives of temporality, corresponds to the dual predicament of action. The predicament of irreversibility corresponds to the cosmological perspective of time in that the "whatness" of an action will always be situated as a sequence of events. The *before* and *after* cannot be refigured without destroying the connection between the historical reference of an action and its configuration into an intelligible story. The unpredictability of action corresponds to the phenomenological perspective of time insofar as the ambiguous presence of the future in the mode of anticipation cannot possibly correspond to its actualization in the mode of a present attention. That is, "the unexpected can be expected." In the face of these predicaments, the public realm becomes a dangerous place. Intentions can be misconstrued, products can be misused, and other actors will appear as obstacles before a desired end. This is why Arendt asserts that courage is the most political of all virtues.

Though each activity corresponds to a predicament, each predicament corresponds to a remedy. The perpetual necessity of labour's natural cycles is remedied by the durability of work's products. Work's "devaluation of all values" is remedied by the ability of action to generate meaning. Action's predicaments are remedied by the power of forgiveness and the power of a promise. Forgiveness transcends the mechanistic logic of retribution. Insofar as an action is situated by the temporal sequence of *before* and *after*, the sequence's impetus can be arrested by the nascent power of forgiveness. Forgiveness

initiates a new sequence of events that breaks from the previous transgression. It reorders the world in such a way as to halt the causal chain that was unleashed by the trespass. That is,

> Without being forgiven, released from the consequences of what we have done, our capacity to act would, as it were, be confined to one single deed from which we could never recover. Ibid. 237

If irreversibility corresponds to the cosmological perspective of time, then forgiveness is the insurgence of phenomenological time. The ability of temporal experience to refigure the time of the soul, to rethink, re-evaluate and reflect on the *past* and to cast this refiguration into the future, is the well from which forgiveness is drawn.

The unpredictability of action is remedied by the power to promise. The "process character" of action, the perpetual present that corresponds to phenomenological time, is crystallized into an *instant* by the power to promise. The instant of the covenant becomes an object *after* which actors are bound by their word. It is the objective character of a promise that requires its safeguarding (like any other object) against the forces of nature – the destruction of an instant by forgetfulness. The covenants of action are the anchors of identity – the "fixed measure" against which the soul is held. Concerning this point Arendt writes,

Without being bound to the fulfillment of promises, we would never be
able to keep our identities; we would be condemned to man's lonely heart,
caught in its contradictions and equivocalities – a darkness which only the
light shed over the public realm through the presence of others, who
confirm the identity between the one who promises and the one who
fulfils, can dispel. Ibid. 237

It is the power of the promise that justifies our taking the subject of an action as
the same throughout a life that stretches from birth to death. (Ricoeur 1990: 246)

The intersection of action's predicaments with its remedies instantiates the
dual reference of narrative. The soul and the world are bridged by the
interrelation of history and fiction. The *before* and *after* of action is ordered by the
generation of meaning in the act of emplotment. That is, the amorphous
experience of *being-there* is figured by the deployment of a system of cultural
significances. Whether in the form of a promise or forgiveness, the "miraculous"
ability to initiate shapes the intention of the soul into a visible form that takes on
its own worldly existence. The phenomenon of the unexpected, the
incongruence between what is designated as a cause and what can be hoped for
as an effect illustrates the poetic function of a metaphorical statement. That is,
"metaphor constitutes a work on language constituting in the attribution to
logical subjects of predicates that are incompossible with them." (Ricoeur 1991:
365) Creativity closes the logical distance between discordant terms and makes
possible the transcendence of the mechanism of reaction and retribution.

3.3 Self-Speculation and the Web of Narrativity

Having moved through Ricoeur's temporal aporetics, Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of the self and the other, and Arendt's phenomenology of plurality, it is time to return to my starting point – the reformulation of Augustine's temporal puzzle. This return via Arendt is fitting since she examines temporality as a quest for identity in Love and Saint Augustine. Arendt asserts that, when Augustine asks "Who am I?", he is situating the soul with respect to the eternal. The consequence of Augustine's ontological ordering is that,

> Existence itself loses its autonomous meaning, which can only be extension in time. Once we assume the perspective that we no longer view life as "before death" but "after death," death equalizes by devaluing life as such. [A:033313]

This assertion foreshadows the role of mortal uniqueness in The Human Condition.

> Men are "the mortals," the only mortal things in existence, because unlike animals they do not exist only as members of a species whose immortal life is guaranteed through procreation. The mortality of men lies in the fact that individual life, with a recognizable life-story from birth to death, rises out of biological life. Arendt 1998: 19

Mortality as construed as a "rectilinear line" that cuts across natural cycles refers to the temporal experience at the core of human existence. Arendt's reversal of the eternal and the temporal is not so much a dismissal of Augustine as a revolution around the aporia of identity.

Insofar as identity can be known, this knowledge is structured as a story. Here, the metaphor of a line that refers us to temporality is replaced by that of a web. The web of narrativity refers to the interweaving of perspectives and voices that constitute but do not exhaust narrative identities. The opacity of the identity that made Augustine "a question to himself" remains an epistemic barrier to self-knowledge. I can never know myself directly because *who* I am is a function of my speech and deeds. In this sense, contra-Augustine, I am of the world. *Self-discovery and discovery of the world coincide, because by moving toward the world I have ceased to belong to myself.* (Love B: 033150) I carry with me all that I have experienced and this is operative *as* me. It is in this sense that "all those [I] have loved, detested, known, or simply glimpsed speak through [my] voice." (Merleau-Ponty 1964: 19) When I gaze upon the world, I gaze upon myself. When I quest for my*self*, I am compelled toward the world. I will always be a question to myself, and I will always be baffled in my quest to find an appropriate answer. However, the story revealed by the positing of questions reveals the presence of an inquisitor.

4 Artificial Intelligence and Narrative Identity: Who is the Machine?

In 1950 a puzzle was posed by a mathematician. Although he was not the first to present the puzzle, he *was* the first to provide a method for its resolution. In October of that year, A. M. Turing published an article in <u>Mind</u> that would sound an imaginative note that continues to resonate in laboratories across the world.

Affectionately known as the "Turing Test", the puzzle is presented as a question of discerning an identity from the type-written responses to a series of questions. The challenge is to distinguish the answers of a machine from those of a human. Speculation about the implications of a machine capable of passing the test has inspired countless research projects from chess programs to 'combat simulators.'

The Turing Test has been subject to reformulation virtually from its first publication. However, one feature that has remained intact is the element of play. Intelligence, artificial or otherwise, is correlated to an agent's ability to engage in a game.

In this section, I explore the notion that a game can be a narrative form complete with its own syntax and system of signification. The dual reference of history and fiction is transposed into that of "reality" and "fantasy". The space of the game serves as a portal between the world and the player(s). It is the characteristic of being a middle ground between the real and the imagined that makes game play an appropriate medium for the narration of machine intelligence.

4.1 *Turing's Ghost in the Machine*

The world of cultural objects encompasses the world of artifacts. The significance of artifacts is a function of the use that an anonymous "one" can potentially make of them and the use that has been made of them. Through their availability to be used, artifacts contribute to and in many ways delineate the cultural world.

Insofar as narrative identity articulates the intersection of the soul and the world, it is connected in a very basic way to the world of artifacts. *Who* I am is very much a question of *what* is available for my use. Conversely, what is available to be used in many ways establishes my place in the world.[17]

In "Man's Conquest of Space", Arendt explores the status of human kind in a technophilic society. She concludes that, if technological advances continue

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[17] The following passage appeared in a recent newspaper article.
> Today teens have access to technological tools that make keeping in touch far easier – and more efficient – than ever. Computers and cell phones have created a whole new set of expectations for the people who use them. Teens expect their friends to be reachable at any time of day or night. They, in turn, are expected to reply quickly – if not immediately.
> *The Montreal Gazette*, May 29, 2004

along what she sees as a vector of perpetual progress, the status of humans will be diminished. This anthrometric concern is not unlike Augustine's quest for self. However, where Augustine finds his place with respect to the fixed measure of an eternal creator, Arendt finds herself swept away along with the anonymous plurality of humans as such, by the "perpetual process of progress."

Like all intellectual landmarks, Turing's work has been a perennial target of academics. However, the "Turing Test" endures because of its contribution to the imaginative world of a technologically dependent culture.

The test first appears in the form of a game, the object of which is for an interrogator to determine which participant is a human and which is a machine. The interrogator and the other participants communicate via teletype so as to bracket the "human dressing" of flesh.

Turing admits that the possibility of a thinking machine is "too meaningless to deserve discussion." (Turing 19)[18] He also recognizes the power that such a "meaningless" possibility would have to capture the imagination of a lay public. His anticipation of a state of affairs where "the use of words and general educated opinion will have altered so much that one will be able to speak of machines thinking without expecting to be contradicted" is shown to be fulfilled by statements recorded in the May 2004 issue of *Scientific American*. (Turing 19) In the course of an interview with Bill Gates, the following question is posed.

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[18] My page references correspond to an anthologized reprint of Turing's article.

Do you see continued relevance in the concept of artificial intelligence

[AI]? The term is not used very much anymore. Some people say that's

because its ubiquitous, that it's incorporated into lots of products. Stix

Gates responds to the question by introducing the current euphemism (machine

learning) in what seems like an attempt to simultaneously promote Microsoft's

AI projects and acknowledge the waning interest in thinking machines. It is

noteworthy that the ubiquity of AI is presented as being synonymous with the

availability of "intelligent" products.

It is unclear as to whether Turing has cellular phones and computer

games in mind when he makes conjectures about the development of AI.

However, it *is* clear that Turing recognizes the relationship between imagination

and research. Regardless of whether "thinking machines" are possible, the idea

of such a possibility has captured the attention of enough institutions as to make

AI a project of research.[19]

AI is also characterized, in one form or another, in hundreds of science

fiction narratives. From Stanley Kubrick's 2001: A Space Odyssey to William

Gibson's Neuromancer, science fiction depictions of AI have contributed to

today's vernacular.[20]

The juxtaposition of the concepts of intelligence and *techné* is shaping the

horizon of powers and nonpowers that brackets the appearance of the possible

and in doing so acts as a metric for the status of humans as such. Whether it is

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[19] See Appendix A.

[20] William Gibson coined the term "Cyberspace" in his novel Neuromancer.

cast as a demon or a savior, AI is the mode in which technology is narrated as a character. I.e., the story of AI seeks to answer the following question: *who is the machine?* The hope is that, in answering this question, one will find a window to the soul of humanity as such.

The notion of AI is poetic in that it is intensely metaphoric. From its origins as a tool for mercantilism, the language of digital technology has evolved to draw upon the vocabulary of psychology and biology. What Turing refers to as a computer's "store" is now referred to as its "memory". An unauthorized program is referred to as a "virus". Auto-morphing code is said to "evolve" and "adapt". With the marketing shift from the characterization of digital technology as an "analytic engine"[21] to that of a "personal computer" and a "personal digital assistant" [PDA], it should come as no surprise that the idea of machine intelligence is ubiquitous. However, at the same time, there remains a sense of ambivalence with respect to the process of progress and digital technology. The fear of HAL[22] looms behind every convenience.

As much as technology has been influenced by biological and psychological language, so is neuroscience influenced by the language of digital technology. In his reflections on Deep Blue[23], William Calvin, a theoretical neurophysiologist, refers to brain systems as "mental machinery" and "cerebral circuitry". The result of these linguistic and conceptual shifts is the anthropomorphization of machinery and mechanization of human experience.

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[21] Charles Babbage referred to his incomplete invention as an "analytic engine".
[22] HAL is paradigmatic of an artificial intelligence that spontaneously turns against its creators. See paragraph 3 of page 57 of this document.
[23] Deep Blue is a chess program that has been and continues to be developed by IBM. It has beaten Gary Kasparov, a chess grandmaster.

All of this is done at the level of metaphor – a drawing together of disparate terms to articulate novel semantic structures. Computer science inspires research into life science and vice versa. It is unclear where digital science ends and life science begins. Unlike the well structured boundaries established by the "Turing Test", the theory building and speculation that is drawn upon to articulate both digital and neurological processes is open to novelty.

As an experimental space, the boundaries established by Turing are still deployed to bracket ambiguity from digital structures. These boundaries appear as a perpetually expanding system of rules. One point of contact between human "intelligence" and digital operations has been, and remains to be articulated in the form of a game.

Chess in all of its forms is one of the most popular abstract games today. Although there are many abstract games derived from "seed sowing" models[24], military strategy has dominated much of the history of abstract games. One theory about the roots of modern chess and its cultural variants suggests that they originate from what is now India as the game of *Chaturanga,* which is first referenced by the 7th century poet Subandhu in the work *Vasavadatta.* Tony Hosking describes the relation between the Sanksrit word "Chaturanga" and ancient Indian warfare.

> *Chaturanga* literally means 'four-membered', and represented the then
> four land divisions of Indian warfare; elephants, chariots, cavalry, and

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[24] Seed sowing games like Mancala are agrarian in origin as opposed to the military origin of chess.

infantry. *Chataranga* can therefore be taken to mean 'the war game'.

Hosking 1

The commonly held theory is that Chataranga was developed as an educational tool for military leaders and became a popular pastime for soldiers and laypersons alike.

Chataranga is thought to have been exported to the West via the 7th century Islamic conquest of Persia and the 8th century conquest of what is now Spain and southern France. This theory is supported by the etymological development of the modern word "chess" from the Latin *ludas scaccorum* (the game of shahs). (Ibid. 2) The Eastern development of Chinese chess (hsiang ch'i) and Japanese chess (shogi) is unclear, but it is thought to have followed the northward progress of Buddhism. Meaning "the general's game", shogi was played by the military elite of Japan from somewhere around the 7th century onward. By the 17th century, the shogunate sponsored an Office of shogi and began what is now a system of professional gaming leagues in Japan. (Ibid.4)

Both shogi and chess are important to the development of AI. In a 40 year old article[25] entitled "Chess-Playing Programs and the Problem of Complexity", the authors attempt to explain why chess held (and some would say continues to hold) a special place in the heart of programmers.

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[25] I mention the age of the article because in terms of computer science, this should be considered an ancient text.

The game is sufficiently deep and subtle in its implications to have supported the rise of professional players, and to have allowed a deepening analysis through 200 years of intensive study and play without becoming exhausted or barren. Such characteristics mark chess as a natural arena for attempts at mechanization. If one could devise a successful chess machine, one would seem to have penetrated to the core of human intellectual endeavor. Newell, Shaw, and Simon 1963: 39

In the above statement, there is no mention of the intelligibility of chess as a cultural object invested with significance. Even the "200 years of intensive study" is explained not in terms of chess's popularity, but in terms of qualities that are intrinsic to the structure of the game and its players.

David Stork's more recent reflections on the chess rivalry between Deep Blue and grandmaster Garry Kasparov show how the community of computer science has moved beyond the hope of discovering intelligence within the structure of chess. "We should take the eventual triumph of machines in chess as a milestone – the end of the easy era." (Stork) The "era" is a stage in the history of computer science during which it was believed that behavioral and functional models of intelligence were sufficient to create a machine intelligence. Today, the task of creating such an intelligence is viewed as more daunting than ever. It seems as though, at least for the computer scientist, the enthusiasm for thinking machines has waned – and chess is not as popular as it used to be.

Partially because of the complexity of its rules and hence an exponentially greater number of possible moves, shogi has taken a different course than chess.

Alongside the professional ranks of human players, there exists a league of shogi computer programs that compete for dominance in professional tournaments. It is interesting to note that in the 2003 world championships, no program remained undefeated through 8 rounds of eliminations. (Grimbergen 2) However, like Deep Blue, the goal of shogi chess programmers is to defeat a top human player.

Opinions about the implications of a program that can outperform a human at a game like chess are varied. The idea that chess is an adequate measure for human intelligence has long been abandoned by researchers, who have moved on to modeling language acquisition and various modes of "learning". If this is the case, then why is there an International Computer Shogi Championship Tournament? Why does IBM continue to work on the Deep Blue project?

Garry Kasparov's answer echoes Arendt's sentiment concerning the status of humans as such. When asked about the stakes of his rematch with Deep Blue, Kasparov responds, "it's about the supremacy of human beings over machines in purely intellectual fields... it tells us where we stand in a world of intelligent machines." (IBM Research , "An Interview with Garry Kasparov") For Kasparov, the question of chess programs and intelligence is very much alive, not because of the technical achievement of Deep Blue, but rather because of his personal confrontation with an "other" presence. When reflecting on the presence of Deep Blue, Kasparov says,

Often you get the feeling that the computer is trying to trick you, that it is "enjoying" the position, or even that it is laughing at you. Of course it is not, it is just processing billions of numbers. But its prodigious calculations translate into a behavior that is very hard to distinguish from the activities of a human chess master. Ibid.

Even though he approaches Deep Blue as a massive calculator, Kasparov still can't help but feel the presence of an "other" displayed before him on the behavioral surface of the chessboard.

For Kasparov, the superiority of Deep Blue over chess masters is inevitable. He points out that Deep Blue is already better than 99.9999999% of the world's population.[26] Yet he still seems to feel a kind of assault (or possibly insult) upon humanity. The reason for this response might be revealed by Kasparov's narration of how he plays chess.

Chess is initially a logical, calculating, mathematical game that makes use of the left side of the brain. But as a player becomes stronger he is using more and more faculties that are located in the right side hemisphere. There is a vast amount of pattern recognition involved. A strong grandmaster knows literally ten thousands of chess "words," little chunks of chess knowledge that tie up with other chunks much like words of a

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[26] Kasparov is virtually the only human being who has any chance of beating Deep Blue.

natural language. The strongest players understand the patterns and motifs most deeply and are able to use them most effectively. Ibid.

What Kasparov is describing is the acquisition of a game language and the emergence of a game as a narrative form. Although this language is intensely esoteric, for those that can deploy the language of chess, it is meaningful.[27] Furthermore, the language of chess is not completely bracketed from other narrative forms. One of Kasparov's fascinations is the way that "life and society have influenced the style of great masters." (Ibid.) Might it be possible that the rivalry that Kasparov felt and continues to feel toward Deep Blue transcends the question of intellectual supremacy toward an assault on a way of life?

If this hypothesis is correct and game playing machines threaten (or possibly enhance) the place of humans as such, then the field upon which the contest is decided is not so much a product of scientific progress as it is a testament to the popularity and longevity of an ancient military pedagogics. That is, it is the power of chess in all of its forms to capture cultural imaginations that span nearly two millennia that make it a powerful system of significations capable of articulating the confrontation between human beings and machines.

David Stork refers to HAL (Heuristically programmed ALgorithmic computer), the villain in Kubrick and Clarke's <u>2001: A Space Odyssey</u>, to situate

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[27] <u>Habu's Words</u> is and interesting example of shogi literature that construes the game as a narrative. Yoshiharu Habu, one of the world's top shogi players provides a window into his thoughts during a particular game by engaging in a hypothetical dialogue with the reader. His words are contextualized by a series of game boards around which the dialogue is inscribed. For example, when Habu invites the reader to look at the advancing pawn, the trace of Habu's gaze meets with the reader's with remarkable immediacy.

Deep Blue in a popular context. Stork concludes that although Deep Blue is very good at chess, it fails to live up to the promise of artificial intelligence that HAL represents. Although this conclusion seems neither surprising nor particularly interesting to a 21st century reader, one of Stork's anecdotal digressions proves to be revelatory. He writes,

> Kubrick originally filmed the scene with Dave playing a new game, "Pentominoes," then being promoted by the Milton-Bradley Game Corporation. Kubrick rejected this because although Pentominoes might have gone on to popularity, film goers wouldn't quite know what the astronaut was doing (programming or controlling some aspect of the ship perhaps?) Even if they did recognize it as a game, viewers wouldn't quite know just how difficult it was and thus how impressive HAL's inevitable win would be. Kubrick chose chess in large part to show how "intelligent" HAL was; chess has long been held as a paradigm of the heights of human logic and reasoning. (It should be pointed out that Kubrick is an avid chess player and as a teenager hustled chess in the parks of Brooklyn during the 1950s.) (Stork 2004)

Here, Stork makes reference to the popularity and intelligibility of chess both as a game and as a symbol of human intelligence. This supports the claim that computer scientists from the 1950s onward chose chess as the form through which to articulate the story of AI because it was and is (to some degree)

symbolic of the unique place accorded to humans. It also suggests that the entertainment that some people derive from playing chess might be influential.

Turing addresses the concerns of the solipsist by claiming that one has as much access to the consciousness of a machine as to that of another human. He concludes that the mystery of consciousness need not be solved before the question of artificial intelligence is resolved. (Turing 23) The fact of the matter is that artificial intelligence became a reality the moment a human being endeavored to enter a game space with a machine. By postulating the machine as an "other" against whom to compete, the machine is accorded an identity beyond that of an object. There is the anticipation of a limited and structured reciprocity that is characteristics of rule-bound game space. Displayed upon the dimensions of a chessboard, the "words" intersect to build a conversation.

Conversely, the refusal to engage in conversation and the denial of any reciprocal space strips an "other" of his or her robust identity. Whether it is the household servant who disappears in the eyes of the employing family or the human shields that surround a "person of interest", when common ground is dissolved, there is no space in which narrative identity can appear. There is a certain irony in the fact that more has been written about the story of artificial intelligence than the individual lives of most of the world's population.

4.2 War, Gaming and Entertainment

Real Life Adventures   By Wise and Aldric

ED! I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU'RE LETTING OUR SON WATCH SOMETHING THAT VIOLENT, SADISTIC AND BLOOD-THIRSTY.

BUT IT'S THE NEWS.

THAT'S WHAT I MEAN!

Even more horrifying film at 11.

The historical progress of chess, from a military tool to a cultural pastime to a technological challenge, has returned the game back to the "generals" in the form of "smart" weaponry and advanced training techniques derived from early computerized game programs. However, rather than pursuing a Deep Blue-like intelligence, military powers (lead by the US) have for the most part directed their research at swarm intelligence and combat simulation. Although it is an interesting and powerful strategy, swarm intelligence is not so much indicative of a confrontation between humans and machines as it is of a broadening of the term "intelligence". Insofar as collectives like insects and birds are deemed to be intelligent, swarm agents apply collective behavioral patterns to designated tasks.

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Although chess as a research tool has become less influential with its general loss of popularity, the rise of other computerized game forms continues to impel research into AI.[28] For a computer game to be profitable today, it must exhibit "behavioral patterns" that are sufficiently challenging and thus entertaining to consumers. Most game reviews include AI in the calculus of a game's rating.[29] Another criterion of judgment is a game's visual aesthetic. Advances in graphic and animation technologies have made it possible to re-introduce the "human dressing" of flesh into a modified Turing test. Now, the goal is to make the gamer feel the presence of an "other" behind the surface of a digital agent – an avatar that may or may not be directed to behave by another player.

A quick perusal of gaming literature from the past decade will reveal that, at every stage of development, the "realism" of the top games is prominent. What was judged to be industry leading in 1997 is unacceptable by 2004 standards. A game that once provided an immersive environment becomes conspicuous by its technological archaism. The degree to which the popularized Turing test is passed correlates to an awareness of an industry standard that serves as a metric. Any success that a program might achieve is almost immediately consumed by the perpetual process of progress.

The insatiable appetite that the gaming public has for novel artificial intelligences has made the computer gaming industry into a multi-billion dollar endeavor. Not surprisingly, chess games are rarely if ever "top 10" best sellers.

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[28] In order to experience the palpable loss in the popularity of chess, I invite you to walk into your local computer game shop.
[29] Generally such reviews take the form of a multiple category scale.

Abstract games have long been overtaken by an evolving world of representation. The language of representational games is calibrated by an ever-present reference to the ground of the state of the industry. Intelligence, as it is felt as an "other" presence, looms in brief moments of the unexpected when the behavior of the digital agent exceeds the industry standard. This kind of AI, the experience of an adversary, exists in the mode of anticipation that crystallizes into moments of clarity before it dissipates into memory as a consumed product. The artificial "other" resides just beyond the limit of expectations. Sometimes it is impossible to play the same game twice.

The U.S. military has picked up on the popular variation of AI with its own computer game. Modeled on best-selling game architectures, the Army computer game America's Army is a recent recruiting tool directed at a key demographic – teenaged boys. Available at goarmy.com, the game is popular because of its high quality game play and its cost (the game is free to download). The Army website provides the following description.

> The U.S. Army has developed a highly realistic and innovative PC video game called America's Army. You'll face your first tour of duty along with fellow Soldiers. Gain experience as a Soldier in the U.S. Army, without leaving home. U.S. Army

This passage, which might be enticing to some and chilling to others, represents a reclamation of "war-gaming" by military structures. However, rather than using games as a training tool, America's Army is being deployed as a marketing

device. The "Army" is being deployed as a brand, a certificate of quality and a "life style" marker. The hope is that the life of a soldier will appear to be sufficiently appealing as to encourage young men to enlist.[30]

The brand recognition of the U.S. Army reflects a broader change in the way Western consumer cultures communicate and operate. The ancient language of chess and the ephemeral language of computer gaming intersect in such a way as to shape the anticipated presence of an artificial intelligence into a form of entertainment. Beyond behavioral simulation, language acquisition, or swarm computation, it is the weaponization of entertainment that might possibly prove to be the greatest achievement of AI.

The American Army's recruitment team's concern for realism illustrates an odd correlation between reality and entertainment. In order be entertaining, a combat game must be realistic. However, in order to be consumed as entertainment (in the form of a game, CNN, or otherwise), reality must be dispensed as digestible morsels. The relation between entertainment and reality is an incarnation of the relation between history and fiction. Reality as such must be refigured by the laws of poetry in order to be intelligible – in turn, the laws of poetry imitate action. However, in its current form, the dual reference of history and fiction is not deployed to narrate ambiguous existence – it is intended to bracket ambiguity, silence questions, and to reassure an apathetic population that "we" are OK as long as "they" stay safely behind the glass in our living rooms.

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[30] My use of gendered language here reflects those who play combat inspired computer games.

The relation between entertainment and reality illustrates a delineation of temporal experience. A game ends when a victor emerges.[31] The board (or theatre of operations) acts as "an ephemeral opening of a common ground". Likewise, the initiation of a conversation is an opening of a space that dissipates when the words finish. When reality is refigured into entertainment, it becomes surreal – the continuity of experience is partitioned by commercial breaks. Unlike Turing's game, the purpose of entertainment is not to make contact with an "other". The surrealism experienced by the player of <u>America's Army</u> may be indicative of a method of engagement whereby the medium of communication consists of a sequence of high-velocity projectiles.

Conclusion

What relevance does a hermeneutic of narrative identity have to a consumer society in search of entertainment? It is fine to say that identity is the story of a life, but to whom does one tell such a story? Who is interested in listening? The story of artificial intelligence is displayed alongside that of the Apache Attack Helicopter and the life of Elvis Presley in an expanding body of television programming that has become a centerpiece of the Western world. How is it possible to reach across the dividing line of the television screen to the

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[31] There are some online games like <u>Everquest</u> that have no discernable end. However, a player must at least leave game space to attend to one's carnal exigencies.

"reality" entertainers -- those whose experience of what is *really real* often includes the experience of shockwaves, firestorms, and lethal artificial intelligences -- with the intention of reciprocal appearance? It is unclear as to whether these questions can be answered. However, the positing of such questions is a necessary step towards acknowledging the presence of an "other" as more than a potential source of entertainment.

The statement "I am a question for myself" is an affirmation of my temporality and the ongoing quest that is my narrative identity. The articulation of identity in the form of a riddle captures the ambiguity of human experience and the ongoing struggle of "one" *vis-à-vis* the "other". The assertion of the impossibility of closure with respect to questions of identity keeps the possibility of plurality and equality open in the face of violent topological structures and unauthorized ascription of identity. If I try to explain who I am, I am baffled – and perhaps this is as is should be.

Appendix A

In 2003, the following proposals were approved by an American agency, the
Defense Advanced Research Project Agency [DARPA].

Submitted by Dr. Azad M. Mahid of Intelligent Systems Technology, Inc.
Computational architectures for intelligent agents and human behavior
models have advanced to the point where one can benefit from the other
in creating more realistic intelligent Synthetic Force behaviors. This Phase
I effort is directed to analyzing the respective strengths and weaknesses of
agent architectures and cognitive/human behavior models with a view to
incorporating high payoff cognitive/behavioral constructs into agent
architectures. To this end, a comparative framework will be constructed
to explore the strengths and limitations of candidate agent architectures
and human behavioral models with a view to identifying and exploiting
common features, combining unique strengths, and circumventing the
limitations of each within a next generation agent architecture. The
resultant architecture will improve both the fidelity and validity of
distributed training and wargaming simulations while facilitating the
design, development, and deployment of agents.

Submitted by Dr. Mathew Antone of ALPHATECH, Inc.

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We propose a new automatic target recognition (ATR) system that operates on video data, exploiting the inherent redundancy and spatio-temporal coherence of motion imagery to create three-dimensional target signatures. Unlike previous approaches that use shape alone, our method will additionally model and predict object surface appearance properties, in the form of bi-directional reflectance distributions (BRDFs), to compensate for environmental effects such as varying illumination. We will employ parameterized reflectance models and pre-defined shape and material characteristics to create and refine object models on-the-fly, both for the formation of target templates and for recognition of these templates in subsequently observed motion video. Tight integration between tracking, prediction, modeling, and registration reflects the tight coupling of the underlying recognition problem and facilitates optimal signature estimation by incorporating all available information. We will implement a prediction engine that guides refinement of geometry and appearance by accounting for environmental lighting, shadows, and material properties as well as object shape and reflectance. We will also apply robust correlation techniques to estimate target match probabilities across multiple video frames. Finally, we will evaluate the performance of our model generation and ATR techniques, and compare with existing approaches.

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