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Narrating Lives in the Balance

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When we narrate, we place lives in the balance in that our renderings of experience shape actions, beliefs, and emotions. Narrators grapple with the tension between endorsing one coherent account or cultivating a dialogue among alternative versions. In all communities, master and subjugated storylines contentiously co-exist. We examine the repercussions of narrative asymmetry for communities, families, and individuals. Unmined, official stories yield a stasis that is often debilitating. We illustrate this dynamic through analysis of how the narrative structuring of experience can perpetuate mental suffering.

0. Introduction

Language is among the greatest gifts to humankind. Genres of language transport authors and audiences across time and place into worlds experienced and imagined. Many share Toni Morrison's perspective that discourse in general and narrative discourse in particular shapes lives: "Narrative is radical, creating us at the very moment it is being created" (1994:4).

Perhaps it is idealism; perhaps a manifestation of ethnocentric biases, or the advantaged viewpoint of a privileged social class. Yet many hold the conviction that every narrative provides an opportunity to step back, reflect upon, and structure human existence. Narrative composition and interpretation entail an introspective pulling together of past, present, future and imagined events. We draw from a set of possibilities and potentialities to paint one or more visions of the world. We knit events together emotionally and causally and use words, grammar, and the rhetoric of discourse to craft a version of collective and individual experiences.

The narrative visions we construe are very much guided by history, culture, and personal circumstance. One of the most important functions of narrative is precisely to situate particular events against a larger horizon of what we consider to be human passions, virtues, philosophies, actions, and relationships. As the late poet James Merrill commented in an interview, "Don't you think there comes a time when everyone, not just a poet, wants to get beyond the self?" (McClatchy 1995:59). As narrators, we evaluate specific events in terms of communal norms, expectations, and potentialities; communal ideas of what is rational and moral; communal senses of the appropriate and the esthetic. In this way, we affiliate with other members of society both living and dead. We come to understand, reaffirm, and revise a philosophy of life. Indeed the poet Merrill once responded to a

protégé's account of his troubled love affair, "I read your last letter . . . with pangs of recognition . . . You won't be ready yet to *like* the fact of belonging to a very large group who've all had—allowing for particular differences—the same general experience. Later on, when your sense of humor and proportion returns, that fact ought rather to please you: to have so shared in the—or at least *a*—human condition." (McClatchy 1995:60). The power to interface self and society renders narrative a medium of socialization *par excellence*. Through narrative we come to know what it means to be a human being.

Given these properties and more, narrative is the most effective genre on earth for making sense out of reportable events: events that break expectations, breach a norm, upset the balance of life's affairs, or in some other way deviate from the ordinary. Whether in the courtroom, workplace, scientific laboratory, school, sports field, or simply in the course of conversing with family and friends; all over the globe narrative activity confronts participants with enigmatic and frustrating situations. Faced with such dilemmas, narrators alternate between two fundamental tendencies—either to lay down one coherent, correct solution to the problem, or to cultivate a dialogue between diverse understandings of and responses to the problem.

1. Living with the Question

Narrative activity does not always yield soothing solutions to life's dilemmas but rather may draw narrators to collectively articulate abiding questions. Humans are "questioning Beings" Vaclav Havel tells us in his *Letters to Olga*. (1983). And furthermore, human beings question themselves. Unique among the species, humans can transform themselves into both questioners and the question. For Havel, the vibrant human being remains persistently and productively open, willingly challenges pat solutions to complex problems, and assumes that ultimate answers to life's dilemmas are elusive: "The notion of some complete and finite knowledge that explains everything and raises no further questions is clearly related to the notion of an end—an end to the spirit, to life, to time and to Being." Meaningful discourse "never . . . attempts to answer, unambiguously the unanswerable question of meaning (. . . in the sense of 'settling the matter' or 'sweeping it off the table'). It always tends rather to suggest a certain way of living with the question" (1983:225).

The best theater accomplishes this work, taking the audience on an insightful, sometimes astonishing, journey to the frontiers of the human condition. "Instead of seeing and immediately recognizing life as they know and understand it and delighting in that, the audience becomes party to an unexpected and surprising 'probe' beneath the surface of phenomena . . . This kind of theater neither instructs us, nor attempts to acquaint us with theories or interpretations of the world, but by probing beneath the surface, it somehow inspires us to participate in an adventurous journey toward a deeper understanding, or rather to a new and deeper question, of ourselves and the world" (1983:252).

Artist-philosophers like Toni Morrison and Vaclav Havel are vocal guardians of discourse, reminding us with searing eloquence that acts of language are ultimately moral and consequential. We are measured, Morrison tells us, by how "we do language." A story is not just a story; it is a struggle to formulate a life, a history, an ethics, especially a justification for actions realized and to come. Morrison's conviction that we are responsible for language and Havel's call to probe beneath the surface of language reflect their experience of linguistic oppression. Morrison's words erupt from a lifetime exposure to language that estranges and muffles the voices of minorities. Such language is morally bereft. Morrison compares language that "sanction(s) ignorance and preserve(s) privilege" to "a suit of armor, polished to shocking glitter, a husk from which the knight departed long ago . . . exciting reverence in schoolchildren, providing shelter for despots, summoning false memories of stability, harmony among the public" (1994:14).

Havel's missive originates from a small Czech prison cell. Once a week he is given a few pieces of blank paper and a few hours to write a letter to his wife Olga. At first his letters are massively censored but gradually Havel develops a sublime style of narrating that allows him to transcend the immediate horizons of his prison walls and reach out to a responsible fellowship of questioners willing to pierce veils of logic and legitimation. We measure Havel's greatness by the revolutionary way he "does language" to benefit humanity.

Morrison and Havel join artists across time who have used their craft to expose and reject repressive ideology. But what distinguishes Morrison and Havel is their consciousness that language itself is a form of subjugation. Morrison notes, "Oppressive language does more than represent violence; it is violence; does more than represent the limits of knowledge; it limits knowledge" (1994:16). This heightened awareness of language as political action participates in a generational consciousness about discourses of power rooted in Paris 1968 and the war in Vietnam. In the 1970's song-poets like Bob Dylan, Phil Ochs, and Jackson Browne mocked the official rhetoric of war. Dylan ridiculed the claim of war supporters that we have "God on Our Side." Phil Ochs sighed, "Ah but in such an ugly time the true protest is beauty." And Jackson Browne cautioned that war stories put "Lives in the Balance." These official stories define who is an enemy, who is a friend, what is worth fighting for, and who is to fight. Browne and other protesters challenge us to question the dominant narrative of Vietnam and our silent complicity: As complicit supporters of the dominant narrative, *all* of our lives hang in the balance. We face peril not on the battlefield, but rather internally, on a moral plane of conscience.

2. Discourses of Madness

These themes are echoed during the same period in Michel Foucault's studies of socially and historically situated discourses of power. Foucault's persistent message is that language is only apparently an arbitrary system of signs; more profoundly for the history of humankind, language is a refined technology,

exploited by institutions, for strategically codifying and controlling how people feel and think. Foucault (1965, 1979, 1990) lays bare the dominant discourses that define and authorize for subjects what is sex, what is crime, what is madness, what is the self. More than any other social philosopher Foucault demonstrates how dominant narratives harness the force of authenticity and moral correctness to legitimize and put in motion categories, attitudes, and acts. Like Morrison, Havel and the song-poets of the 1960s and 1970s; Foucault urges audiences to probe beneath these dominant narratives to expose subjugated knowledges, that is, disqualified, insufficiently elaborated views of human existence. Such subjugated knowledges include the world views of the criminal, the psychiatric patient, and other marginalized members of society.

In *Madness and Civilization*, Foucault emphasizes that "language is the first and last structure of madness" (1965:100). Discourse practices such as definitions, laws, diagnoses, philosophical treatises, and literary pieces construe what is madness, who is mad, and the moral and communicative relation of madness to society. Foucault traces a historical shift in communicative rights of those deemed mentally ill, from the silence of exile in seventeenth century institutions of confinement to surveillance through daily psychoanalysis in the twentieth century.

Foucault delineates madness across populations and across epochs. We have delineated the emergence of madness across a life. Foucault mined historical records for how madness is represented in written discourse. Join us as we penetrate one woman's madness through the stories she tells. Listen to her words for the official version of her madness, but probe beneath this official version to apprehend a subjugated version, one that contains an alternative, conflicting world view. This subjugated world view is not recognized in the official discourse of *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (1994), a manual endorsed by the American Psychiatric Association. Nor is it fully recognized by the storyteller herself. Rather the subjugated world view lies buried in background details of the stories.

One would think that subjugated world views would gain prominence in the course of psychotherapeutic dialogue. And sometimes this is the case. However, more often therapeutic interactions reinforce the official version. Why is this so? In part therapists are guided by the official narrative they have been apprenticed to detect and treat, the narrative codified in the diagnostic manual. Perhaps more importantly, the subjugated world view is hard to detect. Identifying this world view requires piecing together disconnected elements of the story. In particular it involves retrieving elements of the story setting and connecting them to subsequent emotions and actions. But especially when recounting distressing events, storytellers often rush through and minimize elements of the setting in an effort to communicate the dramatic climax of some harrowing experience. In the absence of a taped recording of the story, the setting, which is the key to illuminating subjugated knowledges, eludes therapist and client alike.

In this day and age, we have access to technologies which allow us to electronically chart autobiographies in the making. We can decipher how storytellers structure their experiences to foreground a master story perspective and

background an alternative point of view. Audio and video documentation enable us to track the intertwining of such perspectives across stories that comprise a life. Stories have an architecture that begs to be dismantled and mined for meaning. Because speakers the world over use narrative structure to make sense out of their experiences, it behooves us to look closely at how stories are built to penetrate the sense-making process. We believe that a look at how narrators routinely recruit linguistic forms to tell their stories—not only at words but at their grammatical and discursive shape—is an important step in illuminating how people, especially those suffering from psychological disorders, maintain and struggle to transform their lives.

Persons suffering from psychological disorders tell a dominant narrative again and again—the particulars may change, but the themes and moral positions are enduring. These dominant narratives shape and perpetuate how they think and feel about themselves. Co-authored and endorsed by others in their midst, such stories become the master narratives they live by. They impair individuals, families, friendships, and communities. They place lives in the balance by perpetuating destructive and debilitating images of selves and others.

We now delineate the architecture and impact of such destructive narratives in the life of Meg Logan, who is agoraphobic, her husband, and her two children. Meg lives by a master story that renders her irrational, abnormal, and helpless in a world spinning out of control. In painting this narrative portrait, she draws on a core repertoire of grammatical forms. In this sense, grammar structures madness, here a madness known as agoraphobia.

3. Panic Narrative Corpus

Our analysis draws upon a larger ethnographic study of sufferers of agoraphobia in their lived spaces (Capps & Ochs 1995). In particular, the study follows Meg as she interacts with family members over a three year period. At the onset of the audio and video recordings, Meg had not ventured outside a two mile radius of her home for six years. The narrative corpus examined here includes 14 panic narratives, drawn from conversations between Meg and Lisa Capps, Meg and her daughter, and family dinnertime interaction.

4. Narrating Agoraphobia

Agoraphobia is characterized by fear of being in a place or situation where escape may be difficult, or in which help may not be available should one experience a panic attack or otherwise develop potentially incapacitating or extremely embarrassing symptoms. A central feature of agoraphobia is avoidance in response to this fear. The term 'agoraphobia' means "fear of open spaces," but is more broadly described as a fear of being anyplace where one might feel alone and vulnerable to fear and panic. While it is possible for someone to be afraid of having a panic attack without having experienced one, the majority of agoraphobics report having had a panic attack. As delineated in the diagnostic

manual (1994), panic attacks typically begin with a sudden onset of intense apprehension, fear, or terror, often accompanied by a feeling of impending doom. They usually last minutes and involve the following symptoms: shortness of breath; dizziness; palpitations, accelerated heart rate, or chest pain; trembling or shaking; sweating; depersonalization or derealization; numbness or tingling sensations; flushes, chills or "hot flashes"; fear of dying; and fear of going crazy or of losing control.

Agoraphobic persons often describe feeling trapped by an ever-present threat of panic and their belief that they can not risk leaving a safe haven such as home. Paradoxically while at this safe haven, they spend much of their time ruminating over panic experiences. Agoraphobic persons' narrative ruminations transport them to distressing locations away from home where they have experienced panic in the past, and to equally threatening hypothetical locales, where they imagine enduring similar experiences. These repeated ruminations constitute a dominant narrative. They perpetuate a world view that has the unfortunate effect of keeping agoraphobia alive.

4.1 Dominant Architecture of a Panic Narrative

What do these dominant narratives of panic look like? Dominant narratives come to life when narrators draw upon discourse and grammar to build a recurrent story perspective. Meg's stories of panic, for example, draw upon specific discourse and grammatical structures that cast panic as an irrational response to being in a particular location and cast Meg as helpless and out of control. Understanding these structures is a means of penetrating and potentially altering the dominant world view that debilitates Meg.

Meg's stories of anxious experiences have a characteristic discursive shape that builds a dominant theory of panic. Each story contains a climactic panic episode, which projects this dominant theory. In this theory:

- 1) Meg is in a particular location, for example on a freeway or in an elevator;
- 2) Inexplicably, this circumstance triggers panic in Meg; she feels abnormal, helpless and out of control;
- 3) Panic in turn compels Meg to voice her need to escape the situation; Meg pleads "Get me out of here."

For example, Meg constructs this dominant theory in recounting the biggest panic attack of her life, which took place on the freeway:¹

¹The transcription notation uses the following symbols: Brackets denote the onset of simultaneous and/or overlapping utterances; equal signs indicate contiguous utterances, in which the second is latched onto the first; intervals within the stream of talk are timed in tenths of a second and inserted within parentheses; short untimed pauses within utterances are indicated by

Meg: But for one reason or another traffic came to a standstill and there we were.

(.8)

And all of a sudden I realized we weren't moving.

And I (.4) looked out

and saw there was no uh we weren't near an exit . . .

There was a big high chain link fence

bordering the freeway at that point where we were.

Being there triggers a sense of panic:

Meg: all of a sudden all of symptoms
the worst symptoms I've ever had of anxiety—

Lisa: [Ummm

Meg: [-just overtook me
and I felt like I was—

if I didn't get outta that (.4) ↑car ↓

and outta that ↑free↓way

(that/I bet) somethin terrible was going to happen to me.

In response to these panicky feelings, Meg implores her husband William, who is driving the car,

William, can we get out of here?

In reply, William states that this is not a realistic possibility:

What do you mean can we get out of here?

You know we're in traffic.

We just have to wait.

These story components cast panic as an inexplicable response to being in a particular location and cast Meg as a helpless woman with irrational, uncontrollable responses to mundane circumstances. Meg's account of her husband's responses to her pleas augment this dominant perspective, suggesting that her requests deviate from what would be expected of a normal person with a commonsense understanding of the situation at hand.

Meg structures her narratives in a way that gives panic a force of its own, sweeping her up into its grip. Panicky feelings and actions generate a spiraling, self-perpetuating vortex of events, inadequate responses and negative consequences. Realizing she is stuck in traffic on the freeway, Meg becomes

a dash: one or more colons represent an extension of the preceding sound or syllable; underlining indicates emphasis; capital letters indicate loudness; arrows indicate rising (↑) or falling (↓) intonation; when part of an utterance is delivered more rapidly than the surrounding talk, it is enclosed between 'less than' signs (><); audible aspirations (hhh) and inhalations (.hhh) are inserted where they occur; details of the conversational scene or various characterizations of the talk are italicized and inserted in double parentheses; and items enclosed within single parentheses indicate transcriptionist doubt.

anxious; realizing she is anxious, Meg panics; realizing she is panicking Meg tries unsuccessfully to convince her husband to exit the freeway; realizing this is impossible, Meg tries unsuccessfully to calm herself. Meg recalls,

- Meg: I'm I had this book
 that I had brought with me to re:ad
 And I was trying to preoccupy myself
 and distract myself by reading the book
 But I was so anxious it was just futile=
 Lisa: =Umhm
 Meg: I remember I took out writing paper and a pen
 and tried writing just writing anything
 Lisa: [Umhmm
 Meg: [just just to [distract myself

Meg's emotions and actions not only fail to alleviate her distress, but contribute to its escalation. In the core panic episode of her stories, Meg portrays herself as hopelessly trapped in a troublesome situation and entangled in an ever widening web of panic. Caught in this escalating vortex, Meg cannot visualize herself and her panicky feelings as anything but irrational.

Meg establishes herself as irrational and helpless by building a prevailing storyline which links panic back to situations that do not warrant such a response and forward to a series of failed attempts to alleviate her distress. In these ways, Meg uses story structure to create a dominant world view of panic and self which forms the dramatic core of Meg's narratives. It is the most vivid, elaborated, and captivating part of the story. And after the story ends, it alone remains salient, resonating in the minds of teller and listener alike.

Discourse structure is not the only tool that storytellers such as Meg use to construct dominant theories; grammar also is fundamental to this end. Like a painter's palette and brush, grammar gives shape, color, texture, and intensity to the narrator's vision. Certain grammatical forms recurrently flood the narratives of sufferers of mental illness. Complementing her use of story structure, Meg habitually draws upon a stock of grammatical structures to paint a dominating portrait of herself as abnormal, helpless, and out of control.

Meg consistently uses *adverbs of irrationality* to mark her transition from a normal to an abnormal state. In describing her sensations and emotions on the freeway, on an airplane trip, on her thirtieth birthday, and in a score of other scenes, Meg signals that she has entered an illogical state of affairs through adverbial phrases such as "all of a sudden," "out of the blue," and "unaccountably." For example:

- (1) Meg: Then we- we got on the air plane
 and I was oka:y you know ↓un↑til (.4) oddly
 we had a little bit of turbulence
 but (.4) you know nothin out of the ordinary
 but then when we got (.5) to the airport to LAX
 (.6)
all of a sudden I realized I wanted very much to be off the
plane

- (.5)
 But we had to wait for our turn to get up to the- (.3) the the-
 whatever
- (2) Meg: And **all of a sudden** I realized we weren't moving
 and I (.4) looked out
 and saw there was no:: uh we weren't near an exit
- (3) Meg: I mean I had all these atTA:CKS
 that just seemed to come **out of the blue**:
 And I began to feel
 that I really couldn't trust my body any more
 ((laughingly)) to behave

When Meg uses these forms, she portrays herself as deviant by distinguishing her experiences from the usual course of events in the lives of normal people.

Once in this state of abnormality, Meg furthers this dominating self-characterization through *mental verbs* such as "think," "realize," and "became aware of," to mark a transition to an internal, all-consuming dialogue with herself. Meg describes engaging in such mental dialogues while in the throes of panic on her thirtieth birthday:

- (1) Meg: I remember thinking
 I'll just go (.2) do something normal.
 D- you know ((lowers voice, delivers as list))
 I'll go upstairs
 and I'll brush my tee:th
 and (.) wash my face
 and get ready for be:d and

and en route to a ski vacation:

- (2) Meg: I **would think** okay.
 This sign says next (.) town you know 20 miles
 and I **would think** I can make it for 20 miles.

In addition to mental verbs, Meg's panic narratives are rife with the *locative pronoun "here."* This locative indicates her proximity to anxiety, that she is drowning in a vortex of panic. In Meg's panic narratives, "here" refers not to the room in which she is seated but rather to painful or situations that give rise to panic. For example, in relating her anxiety and frustration over her husband's culinary demands, Meg recalls:

- Meg: And- and then I realized
 ((desperate, pleading tone))
 well ↑what can ↑I-
 I felt real helpless
 I thought **here I a::m**
 (.2)
 I'm so damn mad
 I could just- storm outta here in the ↑car but-

(.2) (.HHH)
I can't le:ave

Karl Bühler (1934/1990) discusses how good storytellers transpose story events as if they are happening in the here-and-now. He describes this transposition as "The Mountain comes to Mohammed." Alternatively, storytellers may transpose listeners into the there-and-then of past events. In this case, "Mohammed comes to the Mountain." Meg, however, does not appear to use "here" as a rhetorical device, but rather as a sign that she is engulfed and overwhelmed by the experience of panic. Indeed, Meg's ongoing concern is that she cannot distance herself from this mountain. It dominates her thoughts and life.

Central to Meg's world view is that panic renders her helpless and out of control. The most obvious way that Meg grammatically constructs her helplessness is by casting herself in semantic roles other than agent or actor, such as *experiencer* or *affected object* roles which render her relatively impotent. When Meg refers to herself as an experience of emotion, she frames her emotions as unwanted and uncontrollable. She habitually represents her thoughts in much the same way. Look, for instance, at how Meg presents herself on her thirtieth birthday:

- Meg: And all of a sudden I (.4) u:h **became aware** of feeling (.4)
just ↑AN↓xious unaccountably
It was more a feeling of almost being outside myself
and looking
(.3)
looking on as it were.
Lisa: Umhm
Meg: And **realizing** that I **was aware of** every (.3) thought and
feeling that I ha:d.
And I couldn't seem to (.3) shake this=
Lisa: Um hm
Meg: = self preoccupation and that- was alarming in ↓it↑self.

In this passage, Meg is the grammatical *subject*, but she is not in control. In other cases Meg puts panic in the prominent position of subject and relegates herself to the relatively minor position of *direct* or an *indirect object*. In panicking on the freeway Meg casts herself as acted upon by the force of anxiety.

- Meg: all of a sudden all of symptoms
the worst symptoms I've ever had of anxiety-
Lisa: [Ummm
Meg: [-just **overtook me**
and I felt like I was-
if I didn't get outta that (.4) ↑car↓ and outta that ↑free↓way
I bet somethin terrible was going to happen to me.

While she predominantly places herself in passive roles, Meg occasionally does portray herself as a volitional actor in the world. Yet in these cases she tends to use *negation* and other grammatical features to undermine her control, as when she says, "And I couldn't seem to (.3 pause) shake this . . . self preoccupation," "I

couldn't just carry on with my book and not stop obsessing." Or in the example here:

- Meg: I'm so damn mad I could just- storm outta here in the ↑car but-
(.2)
(.HHH) I can't le:ave I'm nine months preg- almost nine
months pregnant I can't-
(.4)
(*(intensifies desperate tone)*)
If I ↑wanted↓ to leave I ↑CO:ULD↓ n't.

Meg also undermines her agentive power by portraying her actions as compelled by external forces, namely panic, rather than her own volition. She constructs this state of affairs by habitually using *modal verbs of necessity* such as "got to" or "have to", as in,

- (1) Meg: I told William I **gotta** get out of here
I'm not- I'm not ↑feel↓ing good
(2) Meg: (*(desperate, pleading tone)*)
get me o::ut of here
I've **got to** get out now
I feel terrible
(3) Meg: I felt (.3) a great deal of my anxIEty
re:alizing that I **have to** wa:it

Here Meg casts herself not as wanting to go, but rather as having to, citing illness as a warrant for her action. Meg's use of these and other constructions augment a dominant portrait of herself as a helpless woman, unable to control the tides of panic rising within her.

4.2 The Subjugated Storyline

In such ways grammatical forms complement story structure to foreground a dominant narrative world view, wherein panic is an irrational response to being in a particular location, rendering Meg abnormal, helpless, and out of control. Grammar and discourse propel anxious thoughts and feelings over stretches of narrative and into Meg's here-and-now consciousness. Because she dwells on this dominant world view, Meg is blinded to parts of her stories that articulate an alternative world view of panic and self. Inside Meg's stories are subjugated story lines which may have the potential to liberate her from the oppression of panic and mental suffering.

Why do some storylines escape their tellers' grasp? Telling stories is not always easy. We often begin stories without knowing where they will take us. We become preoccupied with particular strands of the story and forget to mention a crucial detail. We need those around us to help thread bits and pieces of life experiences together, especially aspects of the setting that may explain what

happened. It is particularly hard to tell stories about emotions and events that unnerve us and those we love. We find ourselves tongue-tied, unable to create a story line that makes sense. When we initiate such stories, our interlocutors pull back, uncomprehending and apprehensive. In this atmosphere, alternative, fragmented storylines do not come to maturity.

Meg, like the rest of us, does not always trace disturbing events to background circumstances. While Meg's stories are lush with the details of the panic experience itself, their settings are skeletal, as in her account of panicking on her thirtieth birthday:

Meg: I was just reading a book.
We had gone out to dinner to celebrate my birthday
and um when we came home,
and I was sitting on the living room sofa reading a book.
And all of a sudden I (.4) uh became aware of feeling
(.4) just anxious unaccountably.

Where does this anxiety come from, and why at this moment in her life? This account does not tell us where the dinner took place, who was present, nor what occurred during the dinner. We don't know how she felt about the dinner or about turning thirty years of age. The details of this storyline never emerge but instead give way to a dominating story of panic in which Meg describes herself as feeling anxious "unaccountably" even as the story winds to a close. Expressions such as "unaccountably", "suddenly", or "out of the blue" place roadblocks in the sense-making process: Meg does not attempt to link panic to the settings of her stories once she begins to recount its distressing effects.

In Meg's stories of panic, we see a progression toward greater elaboration of settings. We analyzed the more elaborate settings for their connections to panic episodes and then returned to more abbreviated settings to see if they display similar features. The setting of Meg's stories consistently include a particular circumstance that anticipates her panic. Succinctly put:

- (1) A family member or friend asks Meg to participate in a proposed activity.
- (2) Meg has reservations but does not voice them.
- (3) Instead, Meg accommodates to the proposer.
- (4) Meg participates in the proposed activity.
- (5) Meg panics.

For example, Meg provides a setting to her panic attack on the freeway in which her husband proposes taking cousin Harriet out to lunch. However Meg has reservations:

Meg: And I remember ::h
(.6)
not really wanting to go:
(.3)
that morning.
Feeling ↑some like some foreboding
(.2)
some feeling that um
(.4)
For one thing I had a lot on my mind
It was Christmas-ti:me
I had presents to wra:p and cookies to ba:ke
It was an inconvenience t-

I knew- I knew that I had MORE than I could-
I had bit off more than I could possibly chew
I had something like twelve dozen cookies to make that night
And I knew I should have been (.2) staying home
(.3)
baking those for this Christmas cookie party
And I had (.2) presents to wra:p
and and get mailed off to Ohio for Christmas time
Lisa: Um hm
Meg: I had a LOT on my mind
and Ro:bert was staying with us
(.2)
This (.3) STRANger
Lisa: Umhm
Meg: And the stress of tryin to (.4) maneuver around him in a small
house with one bathroom was getting to ↑all of us.

She does not, however, voice these reservations to her husband, but rather drops everything and accommodates. On the way to lunch, Meg experiences some anxiety, which explodes into full blown panic when Meg's husband extends the outing by driving Cousin Harriet and Meg to visit his father. On the way there, Meg experiences the worst panic attack of her life. At this point Meg begins to identify herself as agoraphobic and confines her life to the vicinity of her home.

Up until the panic attack, Meg constructs a storyline in which anxiety arises out of her accommodation to an undesirable proposal. When she recounts the onset of panic, however, Meg's narrative switches to a storyline in which anxiety is an irrational response to being in a particular place. She feels utterly helpless and out of control. Only the agony of panic compels her to confront her husband and communicate her desperate need to exit the activity underway.

For Meg, other sufferers, clinicians, and researchers, the settings of narratives offer an alternative to the dominant story of agoraphobia. Returning to story settings illuminates what sufferers deem relevant but do not fully recognize. Meg's story settings, for example, reveal her extreme proclivity to accommodate to proposals that diminish her well-being. This submerged portion of her story suggests that this exaggerated proclivity fuels panic. Most people dislike delivering refusals, rejections, and regrets. However when warranted, they usually

do so after a brief delay. In contrast, Meg appears to delay expressing negative feelings far longer, until after panic sets in. Meg's stories suggest that she is suffering from a fundamental communicative handicap, namely a difficulty in communicating negative feelings in a timely, effective, and appropriate manner. While genetic predispositions play a role, for Meg, and perhaps others, agoraphobia may be a *communicative disorder*.

The dominant theory, which frames panic as an irrational response to particular locations, masks this alternative perspective. By subscribing to this theory, Meg fails to recognize the communicative roots of her suffering. By thinking of herself as someone who cannot leave home, she does not have to consider proposals that entail her doing so. Validating this version of her problem, those who know her do not initiate such proposals. As a result, Meg avoids the very communicative situation she cannot handle. This dynamic eliminates what may be critical opportunities for identifying and mastering the source of Meg's problems, contributing to ongoing mental distress.

5. Narrative Responsibility

Meg is not the only one in her family suffering from the effects of agoraphobia. When Meg tells stories of anxious moments to her family, for example at the dinner table, her anxiety permeates their lives. Meg draws her husband and children into her storytelling. Meg's husband shows visible discomfort hearing anxiety-ridden scenarios, often avoiding eye contact and withholding empathic responses. His minimal displays of involvement may be attempts to quell narrative emotionality before it gets out of hand, develops into full blown panic, and sweeps the family into submission. Unfortunately the husband's low affiliative responses have the opposite effect, leading to escalation not curtailment of anxiety not only for Meg but for everyone at the table. Crucially, when her husband fails to provide adequate feedback, Meg redirects her telling towards her two children. They in turn provide empathy, enact dramatic moments, and offer possible solutions to menacing events. While accepting their empathy, Meg often undermines the children's efforts to resolve the problem that kindles her anxiety. Further when Meg's daughter recounts how she voices her disagreement or otherwise confronts bullies, Meg reframes those actions in a negative light: Her daughter had no cause to be confrontative; she overreacted, she is impulsive; she is a loud mouth and so on. We believe that such involvement in recounting anxiety may be key to the intergenerational perpetuation of anxiety, an established phenomenon. Indeed Meg's daughter has been diagnosed with separation anxiety disorder, which is associated with agoraphobia in adulthood (e.g., Casat, 1988).

The plight of Meg's family's is not unique. Those troubled by unresolved experiences rely on their community to help them make sense of their lives. In Luigi Pirandello's play *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, the characters seek out a theater director who can help them realize the story within them. They say, "We really are six characters, sir, very interesting ones at that. But lost. Adrift."

They urge the director, "The drama is inside us. It is us. And we're impatient to perform it" (1952/1980:74). Not only people who are marginalized—deemed irrational, heretical, or subversive because of their world views—but all of us resemble Pirandello's characters. We have unrealized dramas within us that define us, yet we can only access these dramas in concert with willing others. Most people want to help those they care for—loved ones, friends, patients, students—to probe beneath the veneer of events that affect them. We share Havel's noble commitment to live a life of "persistent and productive openness, of persistent questioning . . . to search, demystify, and penetrate beneath the surface of phenomena" (1983:252). Yet we hesitate to mine storylines in part because we do not know how to begin, in part because we fear what may be exposed, and in part because we feel ill-equipped to handle the ramifications of our discoveries. Unmined, the official stories of lives and nations endure, yielding a stasis that may prove hurtful or even deadly. We become diminished, under-realizing our potential as questioning beings. The tension between these alternatives—between endorsing one coherent story or opting for a dialogic melee of alternative stories—epitomizes how narrative activity places lives in the balance. Each alternative has risks and benefits. The greatest challenge is to create a climate of courage and trust that allows stories to disentangle and lives and communities to reform.

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Exchanging Lies: Divining Intention in Marketplace Language

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Language is not a neutral medium that passes freely and easily into the private property of the speaker's intentions; it is populated—overpopulated—with the intentions of others. Expropriating it, forcing it to submit to one's own intentions and accents, is a difficult and complicated process (Bakhtin 1981:294).

0. Introduction

I embark on that process here. My subject is intentionality as it applies to genre—and particularly to genre construed as social action (Bauman 1986). My interest in intentionality stems from a concern with the way different cultures construct notions of fiction, lying and truth. Each of these categories maps on to different genres of speech, and is thus implicated in the genre hierarchy of any society. Given the post-enlightenment inheritance of much of the Western and Mediterranean world, genres which correspond to notions of truthfulness are usually more authoritative and powerful than those equated with fiction, imagination or lying, though one of the assertions that I will make in this paper is that this genre hierarchy is subject to shifts and debate.

Another motivation for my interest in intentionality grows directly out of my fieldwork in Morocco. For several years now I have been analyzing oratory performed in the Moroccan marketplace. These public texts are enigmatic in many senses. Playful and serious, traditional and commodified, sacred and profane, they challenge categorization and easy interpretation. My frustration at the difficulty of divining the intention of these texts and their speakers is compounded by the preponderance of intentionality as a discursive theme within the texts themselves. There will thus be two levels to the analysis of marketplace language that follows: the more abstract line of questioning that asks what notions of intentionality contribute towards understanding performance genres as social practice (Bauman 1986; cf. Hanks 1987, 1990), and the more culture-specific question concerning emic notions of intentionality.

In order to explore this terrain, I put two theoretical concepts into dialogue: that of intentionality and that of dialogism. In doing this, I seek a *rapprochement* between theories of the linguistic subject and theories of the linguistic context, between the narrow confines of semantics and the semantic excess that the theory of dialogism assumes. I do this by looking at a genre of speech that has been the subject of much theoretical speculation and almost no ethnographic inspection: marketplace language. As a hybrid speech genre, containing multiple simple genres, marketplace language expresses several different worldviews and relations to truth and fiction. I suggest that an analysis of this particular genre reveals partial truths relevant to discussions of language more generally. Indeed, I will end