

CONVERGENCES: HYBRIDITY AND METAPHORS OF CONSCIOUSNESS

by Janice Lee

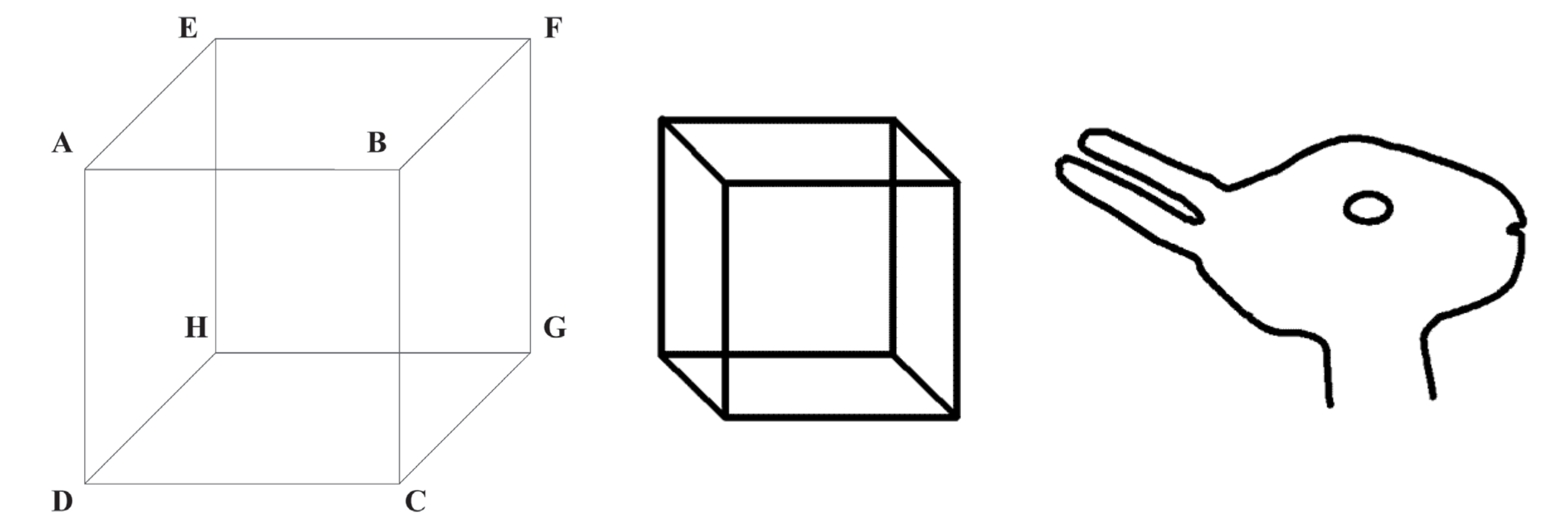
PROJECT:

-A reconsideration of the importance of **metaphor** and **narrative** in human cognitive processes and its relationship to hybrid and experimental texts.

-An attempt at mediation between **consciousness studies** and **creative writing**.

On May 24, 1832, the Swiss naturalist Louis Albert Necker wrote a letter to Sir David Brewster in which he described the “sudden and involuntary change in the apparent position of a crystal” during his observation.¹ Necker stated that repeated observations of the same figure resulted in a change in its configuration, though the figure remained dormant. At one moment face A was foremost with face X behind it, and at another moment X came forward while A receded.

His perception was spontaneously changing while the observed object stayed unchanged.



Robert Romanyshyn proposes that the original presentation of reality itself is metaphorical, that what is seen is always inextricably bound up with how one sees.²

Necker’s cube, as a metaphor for consciousness, also offers itself as a metaphor for reading, for narrative, and for hybridity. It recalls the consequences of facing the creation of an impossible perceptual world occurring in a physical one. Consciousness as a metaphor for reading a hybrid work, consciousness here is consciousness of something else, always having an object which is not consciousness itself, as that process in which meaning is revealed, or, consciousness as intentionality as meaning. All models of consciousness are metaphorical, metaphors form the basic ground of human consciousness, metaphors succeed precisely because they fail, and perceived reality is itself metaphorical, narrative/ reading/ hybridity/ textuality all becoming intertwined with models of consciousness.

With Necker, the figure was not only setting his eye in motion, but also his understanding. The experience of seeing could lead him to the appearance of a particular face, and yet the experience of seeing could also be led to a face which appears. The Necker cube, I propose, might be analogous to a literary text, specifically a hybrid one. Romanyshyn argues,

“The Necker cube and phenomena like it endure because, through their ambiguity and movement of breakdown, we are returned to the metaphorical character of the world.”²

Consciousness itself is grounded in metaphor an imaginative rationalization of the world around us. We create narratives as part of perceiving and understanding the world around us.

How is **subjectivity** manifested in a hybrid or experimental text?
How can one write a narrative that lives up to the expectation of the world?

And yet, quantum superposition, the fundamental law of quantum mechanics, would seem to forbid us from writing such multilayered narratives. If the world can be in any one configuration, it could as easily be in another, and so the world is in both and, for that matter, all the others, and history equal to the sum of all possible histories.

Vanessa Place writes, “Ergo no single story can be told because there is never just one...” Yet there is an ontological paradox of quantum physics, “for it is only the single observer who can create wholecloth reality from piecemeal particles – the singular consciousness in all its individual multiplicity transforms the multiplicity of the quantum flux.”³

SUBJECTIVITY: The quantum intrusions of consciousness which you have to constantly sort through. The hierarchy of senses. The process of narrativization. The strangeness of being singular – plural.

A hybrid text: poetry/prose, text/image, etc. Interdisciplinarity and experimentation. ie, **“experimental writing.”**

Why is the **anti-narrative impulse** being valorized in avant-garde / experimental writing?
Why does such a strong **opposition** exist between the anti-narrative of experimental writing and the narrative realism of mainstream writing?

The opposition exists as a convenient metaphorical model, categorizing individual subjectivities onto a larger dichotomy that becomes a **metaphorical model to project subjectivity onto**.

The world at large seems to be one in which progressive aesthetics and politics seem to be ever-increasingly opposed to narrative as a medium. In the particular political climate of post-capitalism, individual narratives feel shopworn, too-readily accepted but utterly **inadequate guarantors of truth**.

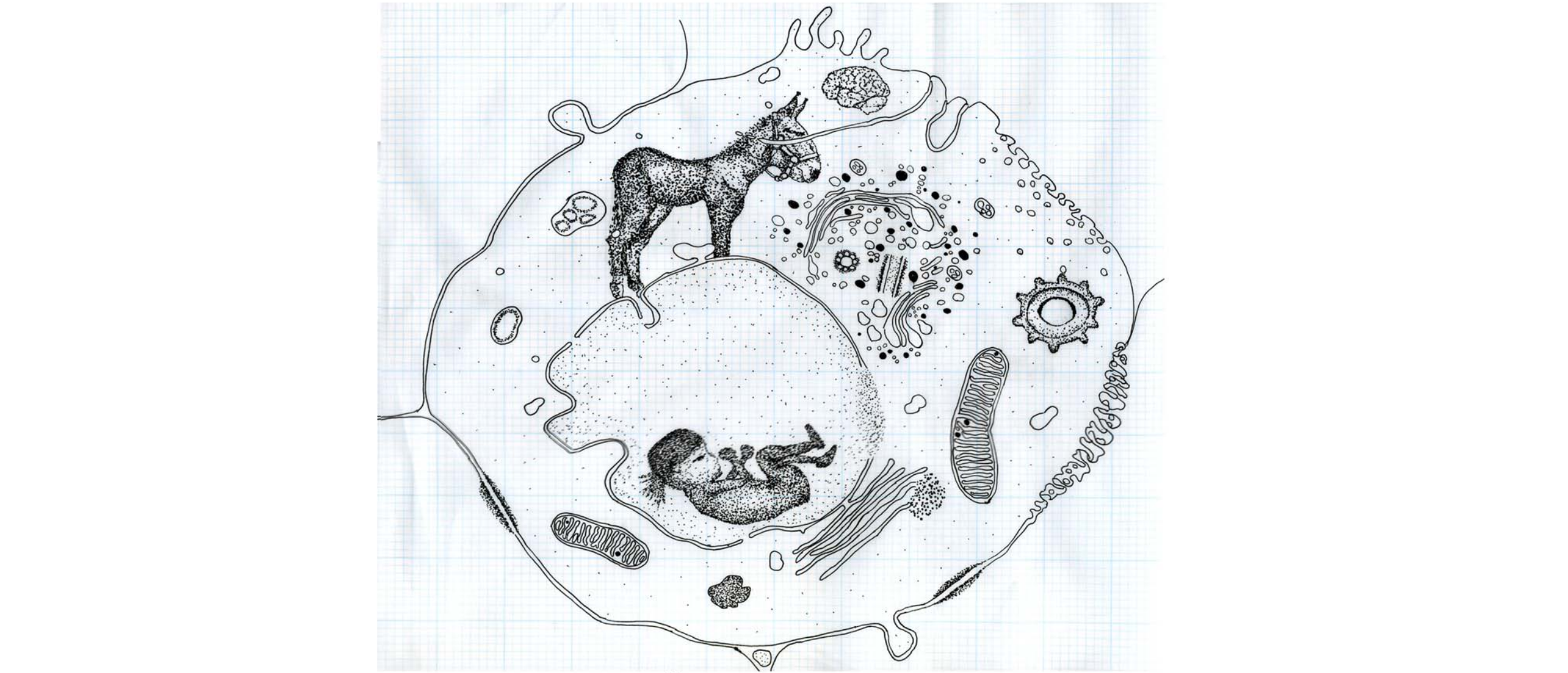
Yet **narrative** is the ground upon which the figure of the human subject can be distinguished. David Antin proclaims, “narrative [is] the mimetic representation of a desiring subject confronting a transformation that he or she attempts to bring about or prevent or both... the narrator’s subjectivization of the subject creates, by a kind of domino effect, the subjectivization of the narrator, who acts as the medium of exchange with someone to whom this is being narrated.”⁴

George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, in *Metaphors We Live By*, propose that:
Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of how we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature.⁵

Our conventional ways of talking about arguments presuppose a metaphor we are hardly ever conscious of. The metaphor is not merely in the words we use – it is in our very concept of an argument. The language of an argument is not poetic, fanciful, or rhetorical; it is literal. We talk about arguments that way because we conceive of them that way – and we act according to the way we conceive of things.

Metaphor is not just a matter of language.
Human thought processes are largely metaphorical.

Metaphor, then, like it is used in narrative, in poetry, in other imaginative pursuits, is an integral part of human consciousness, how we perceive and understand the world, and, since truth is based in understanding, how we decide what to believe and how to act.



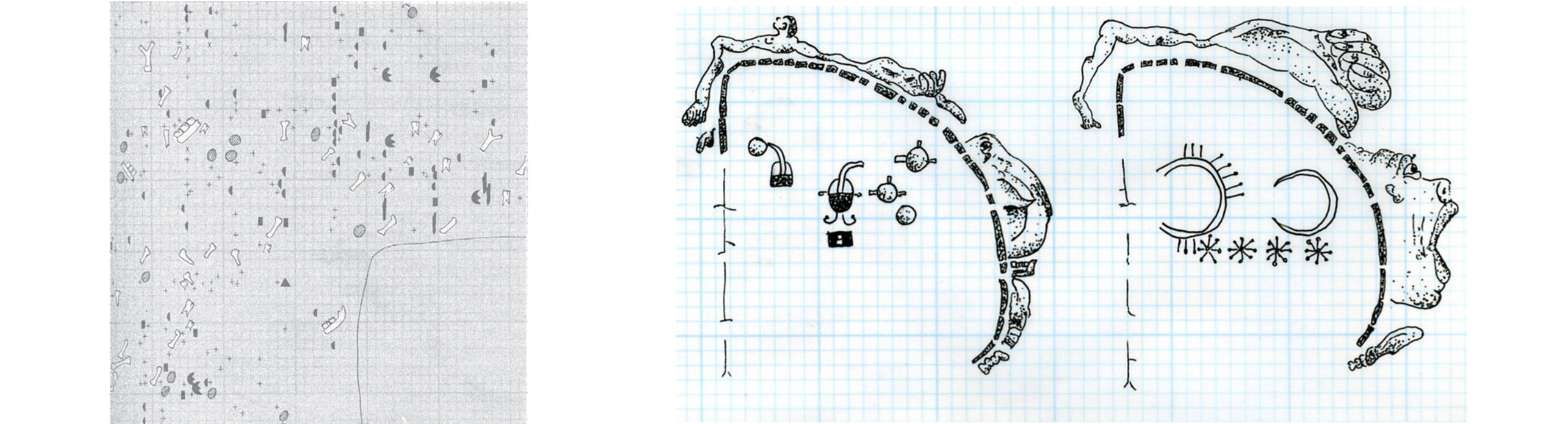
Lakoff and Johnson do a thorough analysis of different kinds of metaphors, looking at how for instance many primary metaphors are spatial or orientational. One example is how we conceptualize our visual field as being a container and conceptualize what we see as being inside it. Even the term “visual field” suggests this. This metaphor is a natural one that emerges from the fact that, when you look at some territory (land, floor, space, etc), your field of vision defines a boundary of the territory, namely, the part that you can see. The metaphorical concept **“Visual fields are containers”** emerges naturally. Thus we can say:

The ship is *coming into view*.
I have him *in sight*.
I can’t see him – the tree is *in* the way.
He’s *out of sight* now.
There’s nothing *in sight*.
I can’t get all of the ships *in sight* at once.

Similarly, states, actions, and events also follow his pattern.

He’s *in* love.
We’re *out* of trouble now.
He’s *coming out* of the coma.
I’m slowly *getting into* shape.
He *entered* a state of euphoria.
He *fell into* a state of depression.

Here, the argument is that metaphors are not only language based, figurative, or imaginative. In fact, the kind of metaphor “I have him in sight” is much more literal and natural than “Love is a work of art.” But they operate similarly.⁶



Lakoff and Johnson also look at direct causation, usually seen as made up of primitive concepts or ultimate building blocks. They instead suggest that causation is best understood as an **experiential gestalt**. Causation can be viewed as a cluster of other components.

But the cluster forms a gestalt – a whole that we human beings find more basic than the parts.

In other words, certain kinds of actions that we go through in our daily lives, we experience as a gestalt; the complex of properties occurring together being more basic to our experience than their separate occurrence. Such domains are can be called an experiential gestalt, **structured wholes within recurrent human experiences**. They represent coherent organizations of our experiences in terms of natural dimensions (parts, stages, causes, etc) and seem to us to be natural kinds of experiences.

Narrative also often has this experiential gestalt effect.
*So how to create narratives that are unrecognized as such, yet still narrative?
Or, is this experiential gestalt inherent character of narrative itself?*

Words alone don’t change reality. But changes in our conceptual system do change what is real for us and affect how we perceive the world and act upon those perceptions.

Metaphor then is primarily a matter of thought and action and only derivatively a matter of language.

Metaphor unites reason and imagination.

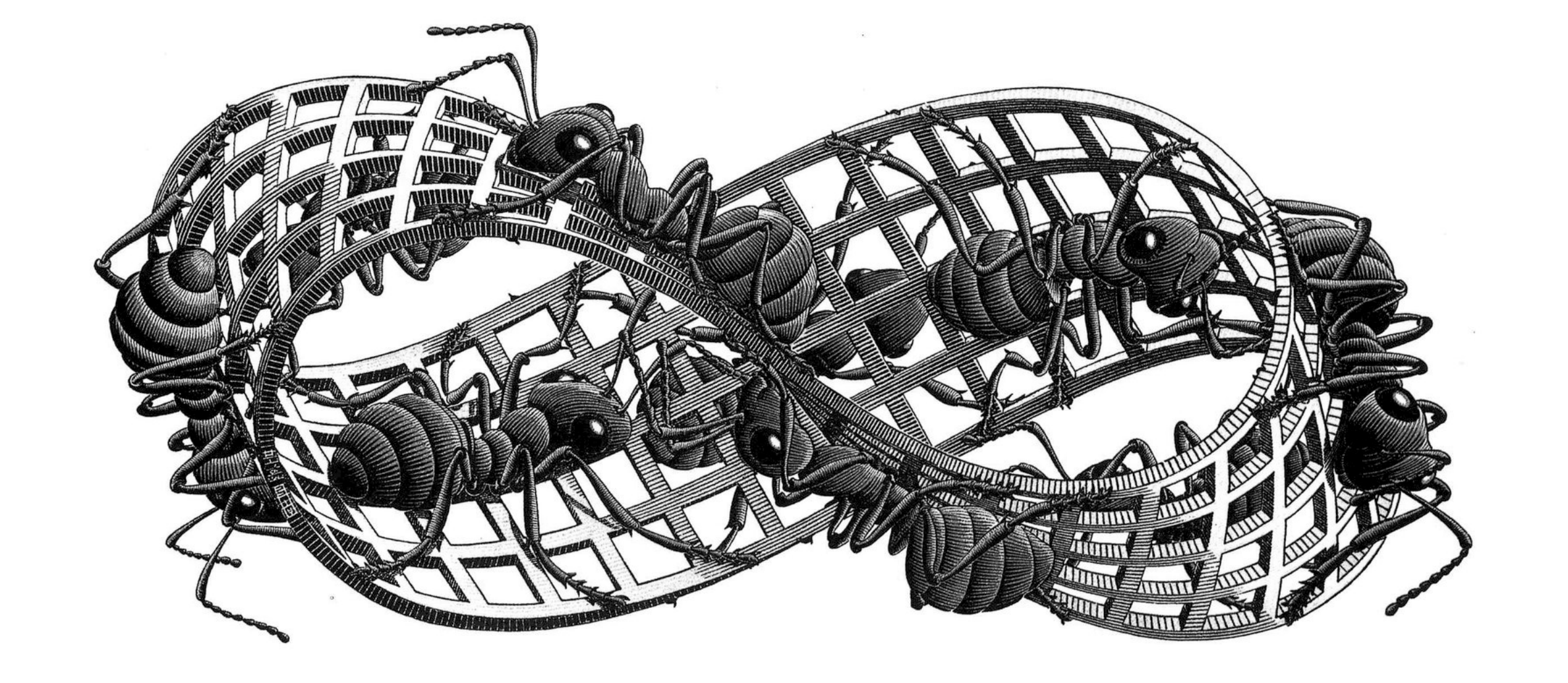
Reason, at the very least, involves categorization, entailment, inference. Imagination, in one of its many aspects, involves seeing one kind of thing in terms of another kind of thin – what we have called metaphorical thought. Metaphor is thus imaginative rationality. Since the categories of our everyday thought are largely metaphorical and our everyday reasoning involves metaphorical entailments and inferences,

ordinarily rationality is therefore imaginative by its very nature.

All perception and understanding metaphorical.

Meaning is never disembodied or objective and is always grounded in the acquisition and use of a conceptual system.

Language does not fit the world; instead it shapes our very understanding of the world.



At a basic level, asking readers to be aware of how and why they perceive the world around them is seemingly simple but also radical, asking readers to construct their own **phenomenological self-model** during the process of reading, a different kind of provocation that is like a new form of consciousness-raising.

“Language always fails. But how horrible would be if it were to succeed, how constraining that would be.” (Vanessa Place)

False memory as a normal phenomenon.
Recent studies indicate that reactivating a memory destabilizes it, putting it back into a flexible, vulnerable state. This process is called **reconsolidation**. The old memory is actually changed as it is recalled, demonstrating that memory can in fact be rewired.^{6, 6b}

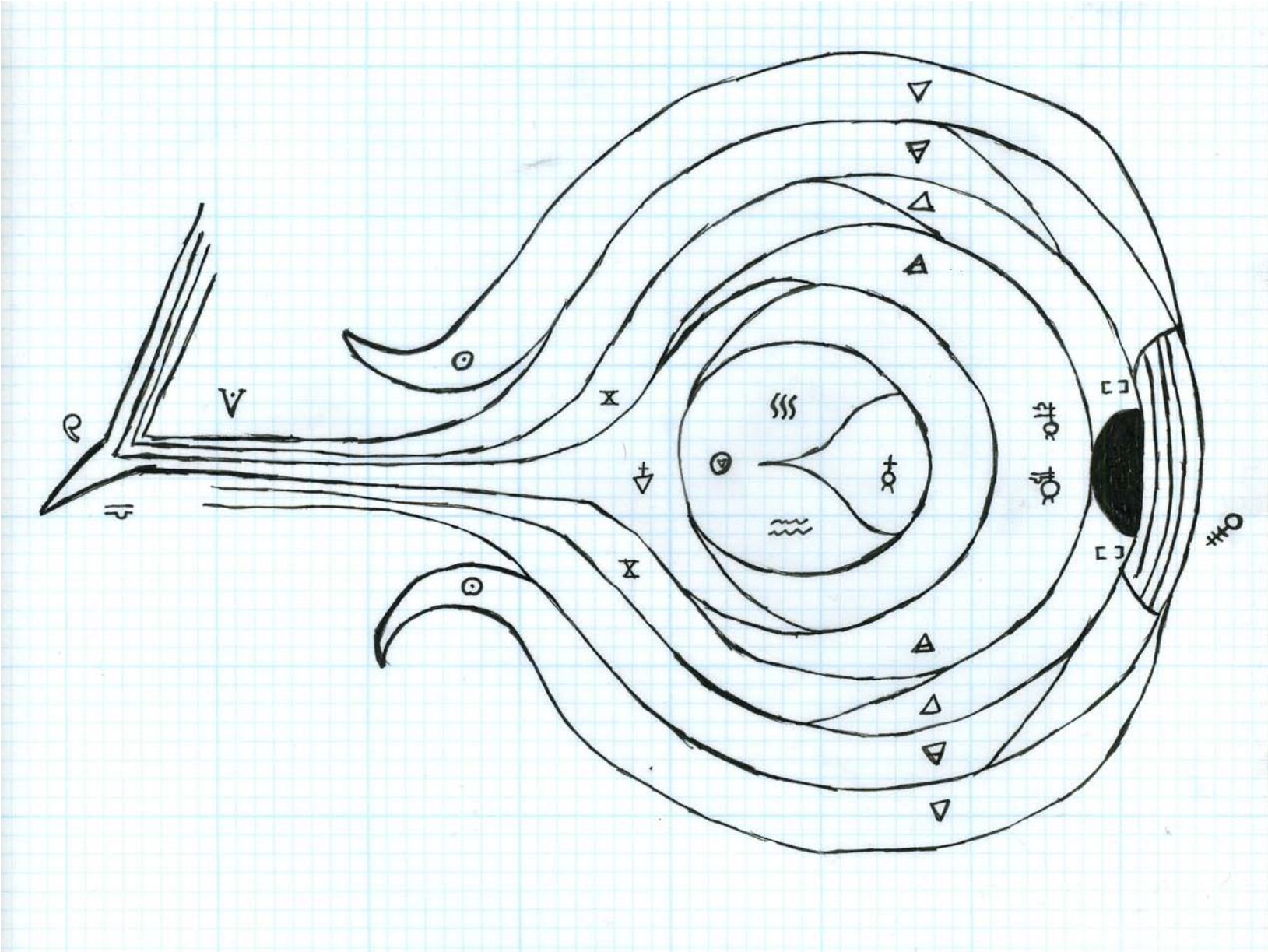
(How might narrative be reconstructed in a drastically new way to incorporate recent findings in neuroscience and psychology, to actually and physically alter our perception of the world, our process of narrativizing, our very consciousness. This, as ambitious as it sounds, is my goal, one I may never reach, but feel that I need to try. In other words, how can I write a narrative that will physical alter the brain chemistry of the reader, so that they will view the world in a radically different way.)

Each time you remember, you replace the original with a slightly modified version. Eventually you are not really remembering what happened; you are remembering your story about it. “Reconsolidation suggests that when you use a memory, the one you had originally is no longer valid or maybe no longer accessible,” LeDoux says. “If you take it to the extreme, your memory is only as good as your last memory. The fewer times you use it, the more pristine it is. The more you use it, the more you change it.”

Reconsolidation might be how we update our store of knowledge, by making old memories malleable in response to new information. “When you encounter a familiar experience, you are remembering the original memory at the same time, and the new experience somehow gets blended in,” says Jonathan Lee. “That is essentially what reconsolidation is.” The evident purpose of episodic memory, after all, is to store facts in the hope of anticipating what might happen next. From the perspective of survival, constructive memory is an asset. It allows you to pull together scraps of information to simulate the future on the fly.⁶ This of course, sounds like narrative. Then, it isn’t memory itself that is essential for narrative to take place, rather the act of forgetting.

“Having a memory that is too accurate is not always good.”⁶

METAPHOR, NARRATIVE, CONSCIOUSNESS...



Narrative as experiential gestalt, also form of qualia.
Narrative becomes a metaphor for consciousness.

The cartography of consciousness and the cartography of interdisciplinary literature start to resemble each other - the manifestations of curious combinations of concrete images, schematizations, symbolizations, and geographical maps. Is the text a map of consciousness, or is consciousness the map of the text? In both we «read» the world around us; in both the maps operate to organize and stabilize, aiding us in anticipating future situations and events. Kurt Lewin, a cognitive mapper, describes the environment itself as differentiated in terms of goals, regions, barriers or boundaries, and the possibilities of pathways and movements through space.⁷ The dimensions of past, present, and future become linked. **Narrative becomes a metaphor for consciousness.**

It is as the imperative:

I respond even though I will be changed by it.⁸

Is this not the imperative of all literature?

Or as Rilke writes,

“Earth, isn’t this what you want: an invisible re-arising in us?”

Consciousness, like a hybrid work, occupies an intermediate order of being, between ideas and mechanisms, partaking of the characteristics of both realms, yet fully fitting within neither. The text is only one, and as Place writes,

“the only One is the multiplicity, the only meaning the retrospected seeming.”³



Fig. Paraphrasing V.S. Ramachandran: Random jumble of splotches. If you gaze at this picture for a few seconds, you will eventually see a dalmatian dog sniffing the ground mottled with shadows of leaves. Once the dog has been seen, it is impossible to get rid of it. Using similar pictures, Ramachandran and others were able to demonstrate that neurons in the temporal lobes become altered permanently after the initial brief exposure. (Tovee, Rolls, Ramachandran 1996) (Dalmatian dog photographed by Ron James)

A narrative event.

What does it mean for narrative to be an event?

Are events essentially narrative?

Narrative as the form most suited to an exploration of “the event.”

What is an event?

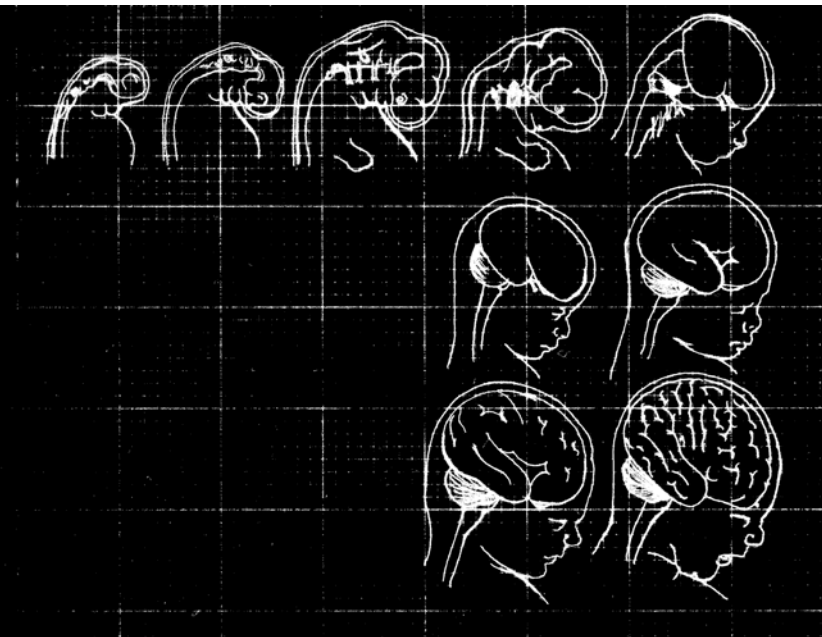
Alain Badiou describes the event as

“a rupture in ontology, in being-in-itself – through which the subject finds his or her realization and reconciliation with truth.”⁹

Badiou’s problem here is, unsurprisingly, the question of how to make use of “that which cannot be discerned.” (beyond some event horizon)

“Badiou’s ultimate ethical maxim is therefore one of: **decide upon the undecidable**. It is to name the indiscernible, the generic set, and thus name the event that re-casts ontology in a new light. He identifies four domains in which a subject (who, it is important to note, becomes a subject through this process) can potentially witness an event: love, science, politics and art. By enacting fidelity to the event within these four domains one performs a ‘generic procedure,’ which in its undecideability is necessarily experimental, and one potentially recasts the situation in which being takes place. Through this maintenance of fidelity, truth has the potentiality to emerge.”

“An event is the naming of something for which the << encyclopedia of knowledge >> had no language; it is the calling into existence what the situation (the encyclopedia) did not allow”



In other words, the event of narrative is that point when the reader’s very being is changed, to something that was not existent before. In a narrative, there are several layers of **narrativization**, yet the one most relevant here is the actual process of the reader narrativizing the narrative which they are encountering. What we look forward to then is not just a return to Joycean experience, or simply a theoretical description of the phenomenal properties of individual consciousness in narrative. Rather, narrative should resist Daniel Dennet’s famous claim that consciousness is simply a kind of illusion or epiphenomenon, and provoke the reader into a consideration of the wages of consciousness and the agency we so fervently believe comes along with, that is, consciousness is often taken for granted as innately tied to everyday perception but is something rather more artificial and flexible. Not only does experimental narrative have the potential to offer a literary enactment of the kind of consciousness that drives the dream of individual subjectivity, the reader must construct his or her own **phenomenological self-model** during the process of reading.

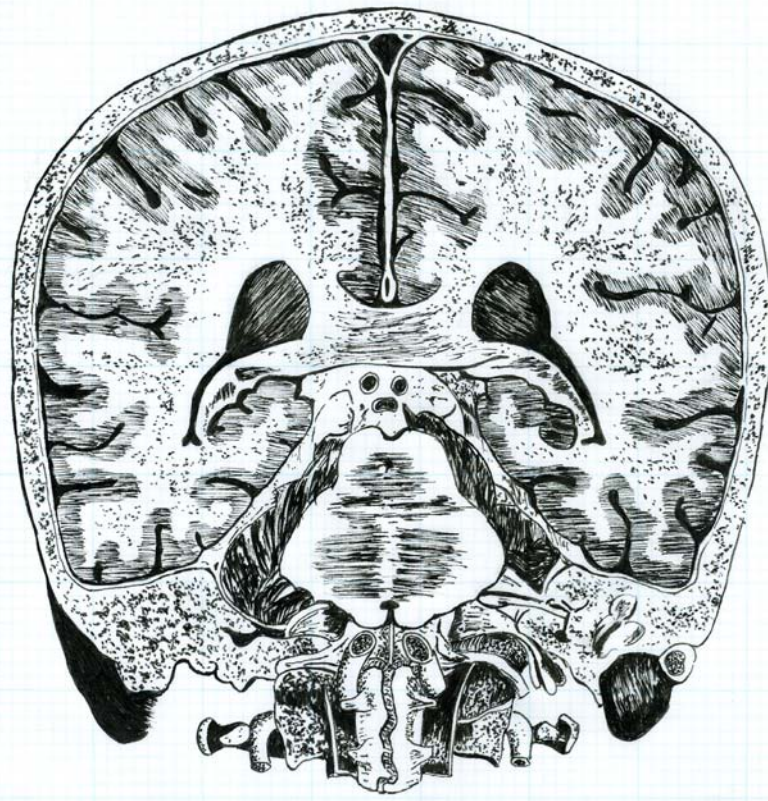
Yet as the reader delves in and out of the minds of characters, what they learn to see is not the world through another character’s eyes, but to see the world differently through their own again.

The reader’s own process of narratizing as reading as narratizing, becomes mapped onto the narrative architecture of the multimodal world of the page. The text is fragmented, bursts of language and emotion, for as Max Planck discovered, on the quantum level, energy works in bursts, not in a steady Joycean stream.

But do texts operate on the quantum level or on a greater one? How do we mend the broken bodies of texts, tattered from history and time, for as Romanyshyn points out, it is easier to repair a broken pump than it is to heal a broken metaphor, especially when we have forgotten the difference.¹⁰

And there is a definite questing for consciousness, whether the quest be a movement towards or a retreat from. Intrusions and disruptions in a narrative create their own constellations of lack. None of us in complete control of our own perceptions.

We are in the dream, but is the dream not in us?



In my own work, *KĒROTAKIS*, the main character G.I.L.L. is the convergence of many different lines, both visual and verbal. G.I.L.L. becomes a force generated from the coexistence of many gestures, some purely scientific, others more poetic.¹¹ Joe Milazzo writes, “Though as much as these images constitute some overall image of G.I.L.L., they also dissect her and scatter her disarticulated body throughout the text like the corpse of Osiris. **She can never represent herself**. The images enact the paradoxical power consciousness has both to create the object of its attention, and, in summoning that attention, to obliterate the object with observations, perspectives, conjectures, etc.”

Here, denotation becomes corrupted by connotation.

“[The text] provokes the reader into a consideration of the wages of consciousness and the agency we so fervently believe comes along with it. Like G.I.L.L., are we really willing to allow ourselves to be spoken by language, to have our perceptions deformed by language, in exchange for some knowledge of ourselves? Is consciousness as we know it necessary for our survival, or might it be dispensed with? Can we even opt out of consciousness?”

Consider another metaphor of consciousness and consequently a metaphor for hybrid work: **HOLOGRAPHY** was initially seen as a metaphor to explain the distributed nature of memory traces in the brain. It has been observed that physical lesions of neural tissue do not remove specific memories in the brain. Many neurologists have despaired over the hope of comprehending the biological basis of memory organization because of the strange resilience of learned behavior and memory to physical brain damage. But a hologram has just these properties: a holographic store can be cut up into many small pieces, and an image can still be reconstructed from any of the pieces.¹² Think what might happen to a text if it were cut up, how fragments might operate in relation to a whole, a text already in fragments, G.I.L.L., a cyborg, as an amalgam of parts, constantly being “erased” and “recreated.” Holograms are blurred records of images and objects, blurred records of realities. Holograms carry with them a certain set of unique characteristics, one in particular, the facility for associating two “images” in the holographic store and retrieving them both in the absence of one, meaning, when only one of the previously associated images is present, illumination of it and the hologram will reconstruct the other. Perhaps Menander in the 4th century BC was thinking along similar lines when he said, “Those who can read see twice as well.”

Narratives allow us to categorize – events that allow us to alter the categories

Events can only happen across connections between disparate phenomena, as in metaphor itself.

What is needed then, is a reinvestigation of the writing event through the metaphor most suited to it: narrative.

Writing is thus neither inherently narrative or anti-narrative, but the cognitive processes that dictate it, the understanding of it (there since truth is understanding, the “truth” of the matter), is.

Semantic contents are meaningless without intentionality or the ability to refer to other states of objects. Intentionality is essential for narrative, especially for the creation of one. Intention as crucial to narrative.

Cognitive models are created by human beings, and in this sense they are idealized, abstractions. Grammatical constructions are also idealized cognitive models.

Neural maps learned via a process of neural recruitment produce a stable, conventional system of primary metaphors that tend to remain in place indefinitely within the conceptual system and are independent of language.

For example, the metaphor “Affection is warmth” arises from the common experience of a child being held affectionately by a parent, affection occurring together with warmth. Thus, they become conflated. Neuronal activation occurs simultaneously in two separate parts of the brain, those devoted to emotions and those devoted to temperature.

Appropriate neural connections between the brain regions are recruited, physically constituting the metaphor.

Metaphor is a neural phenomenon.

Metaphorical mappings seem to be realized physically as neural maps.

Primary metaphors arise spontaneously and automatically without our being aware of them. Many learn unconsciously and automatically in childhood simply by functioning in the everyday world with a human body and brain. There are primary metaphors for time, causation, events, morality, emotions, and other domains that are central to human thought. Such metaphors also provide a superstructure for our systems of complex metaphorical thought and language. In other words, you don’t have a choice as to whether to think metaphorically.⁵

All models are metaphorical (ie. -isms, not real things, imaginary constructs, metaphorical models) but exert a real influence on subjective conceptual framework and understanding of the world.

Truth based on understanding.

The anti-narrative impulse of experimental writing is both absurdity and impossibility. We are physically wired to narrativize the world, and so it is crucial to reconsider narrative in terms of mediating between the philosophical questions of truth and subjectivity in writing, and biological mechanisms of science.

The process of narrativization when reading a text is the same as the process of narrativization involved in perception and generally being in the world.

Andrei Tarkovsky’s film *Stalker*, depicts the journey of three men, the Stalker, the Writer, and the Professor, as they travel through a post-apocalyptic wilderness called the Zone in hopes of reaching a room that has the potential to fulfill your innermost desires. At one moment on this dangerous journey, the Stalker attempts to explain the complexities of the Zone:

“The Zone is a very complicated system of traps, and they’re all deadly.

I don’t know what’s going on here in the absence of people, but the moment someone

shows up, everything comes into motion. Old traps disappear and new ones emerge.

Safe spots become impassable. Now your path is easy, now it’s hopelessly involved.

That’s the Zone. It may even seem capricious. But it is what we’ve made it with

our condition. It happened that people had to stop halfway and go back.

Some of them even died on the very threshold of the room.

But everything that’s going on here depends not on the Zone, but on us!”¹³



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KEYWORDS: consciousness, narrative, truth, concept, text, event, literature, interdisciplinary, creative writing, hybridity, hybrid work, metaphor, language, memory, imagination, perception, reader/author, subjectivity, gestalt, qualia, failure.