

Symptoms, Artworks and the Limits of Narrative

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Summary

In the light of Michel Foucault's description of the modern as the age of history, this paper argues that narrative operations occupy a privileged place in our episteme. On the basis of Arthur Danto's *Narration and Knowledge* (1985), which characterizes narrative as an explanatory account of changing, coherent past events, this paper concludes that difficulties with definition, temporal organization and the causal can be expected to emerge as problematic for narrative operations. The detailed account of the psychoanalytic symptom, and the modernist artwork combined with an analysis of the uses to which narrative operations are put by Freud and Foucault, which follows, confirms that taxonomic and temporal stability are indeed essential to the age of history. This paper finally suggests that if the psychoanalytic symptom and modernist artwork's capacity to silence narrative stems from their failure to meet a set of specific distinctions – such as those between past and present, action and event, percept and concept – then what this narrative failure reveals is no less than the modern form of the distinction between culture and nature.

Opsomming

In die lig van Michel Foucault se beskrywing van die moderne as die tydvak van die geskiedenis word in hierdie referaat geredeneer dat narratiewe ondernemings 'n bevoorregte plek in ons episteme beklee. Op grond van Arthur Danto se *Narration and Knowledge* (1985) wat die verhaal karakteriseer as 'n verduidelikende verslag van veranderende, samehangende, gebeurtenisse van die verlede, word in hierdie referaat tot die slotsom gekom dat daar verwag kan word dat struikelblokke rakende definisie, temporele organisasie en die oorsaaklike as problematies vir die vertelhandeling te voorskyn sal tree. Die uitvoerige verslag van die psigoanalitiese simptome, die modernistiese kunswerk tesame met 'n daaropvolgende analise van die aanwending van narratiewe prosedures soos deur Freud en Foucault benut, sal bevestig dat taksonomie en temporele stabiliteit beslis noodsaaklik is vir die era van die geskiedenis. In hierdie referaat word ten slotte voorgestel dat indien die psigoanalitiese simptome en die modernistiese kunswerk se vermoë om die verhaalkuns die swye op te lê, voortspruit uit hulle onvermoë om 'n stel spesifieke onderskeidings die hoof te bied – soos dié tussen die verlede en die hede, handeling en gebeurtenis, persep en konsep – dan is dit wat deur die mislukking van die verhaalkuns blootgelê word, niks anders as die moderne vorm van die onderskeid tussen kultuur en natuur nie.

If, as Michel Foucault argues in *The Order of Things* (1973) the modern is indeed the age of history, then the narrative operations which found historical knowledge must occupy a privileged place in our episteme. And certainly the direction taken by narratology in recent years provides much to support Foucault's point. For despite its original and still productive association with fiction, one of the most important aspects of narrative enquiry is that concerned with true narratives, most notably with history. In fact, it will be argued here that the study of narrative is more than merely a branch of the general field of what could be called "generic epistemology" but must be considered instead as its founding form – that configuration which spontaneously outlines the limits of modern intelligibility itself.

1 The Essentials of Narrative

Arthur C. Danto's increasingly well-known formal study of the epistemology of history, *Narration and Knowledge* (1985), concerns the nature, validity and limits of narrative as a form of knowledge and thus makes it possible to establish the background material necessary for this enquiry.

Much that is central to the understanding of narrative which Danto's account provides, stems from his defence of history's supposedly dubious epistemology and his extension of narrative enquiry beyond its conventional boundaries.

By pointing to a number of uncontroversial, apparently present tense statements, which include terms such as "father" or "scar", Danto draws attention to the implications of the widespread presence of these narrative predicates and to the fact that all narrative procedures are also implicitly causal (1985: 70). Both narratives and narrative predicates, Danto reveals, presuppose not just past events but a serial organization of them accompanied by their causes. It is not possible to describe a sequence of past actions or events accurately without establishing the causal connections between them and all narratives depend upon the possibility of describing events in the order of their occurrence which these connections alone can establish. In order to make sense of the bits and pieces of information which experience presents, a narrative must be found to support them. And the power of narrative is, therefore, based upon its capacity to describe events and explain their causal connections simultaneously.

However, as Danto's account goes on to reveal, there are a number of preconditions for producing a narrative with these powers intact. For example, in order to establish the casually connected series which constitutes their basic structure, narratives also require continuity on the level of content or subject matter – that is, they require some level of constant which also changes. Narratives are, therefore, not only dependant upon being able to set up a causal series of events but also upon establishing some constant identity across the ingredients or components which they describe.

In the light of these points it is possible, with Danto, to lay out some criteria for narrative unity, that is, for the operation of a valid narrative.

Firstly, a narrative requires continuity on the level of its subject matter and, as it is not events as such but rather events under a certain description which are explained, it is important to choose that description which establishes the constant identity required. Having once chosen the descriptive apparatus, however, the changing events which the narrative describes must be explained relative to that description.

Secondly, in order to count as a narrative at all, the events described must be ordered in time. And finally, although not separable from the other two criteria, a valid narrative is one which also provides a rationally defensible series which, because any event's status as causal can only be determined when its effect is determined, alone establishes the very possibility of explanation.

It is thus as an explanatory account of changing, coherent past events that narrative must be characterized and evaluated and, likewise, it is difficulties with definition, temporal organization and the causal which can be expected to emerge as problematic for narrative operations.

What this suggests, even at the outset, is that narrative implicates concepts of no lesser epistemological significance than those of taxonomy, time and causality, and that for this reason phenomena which stand in an uneasy relation to narrative are of considerable epistemological interest. The psychoanalytic symptom and works of aesthetic modernism which are problematic on each of these counts are phenomena of just this kind.

2 The Problem of the Symptom

The idea of mental illness, the field of psychological symptoms, is now so familiar that it is easy to forget that psychopathology is a knowledge of recent and uneasy origin. Looking at the early history of psychoanalysis, and the difficulties which surrounded Freud's first attempts to provide psychoanalysis with indigenous subject matter, it becomes clear that the conceptual and practical opacity of the psychoanalytic symptom stems from those very factors which also make it resistant to narrative.

The first of these is the symptoms, unstable status – that is, the difficulty psychological symptoms present for categorization.

Donald Davidson in *The Paradoxes of Irrationality* (1982) makes an important contribution to this problem when he shows that the initial difficulty which the Freudian symptom presents for interpretation (and thus for explanation) derives from the fact that it resists classification as belonging to either the body or the mind. As something compelled the psychoanalytic symptom seems to originate in the body, yet unlike the physical symptom it also implicates the field of the mental. What is more, because neither bodily, nor any other, causes can be established for symptoms of this kind, they cannot take their place in an identifiable series of events and are, therefore, resistant to narrative explanation.

The specific contribution which Davidson makes to an understanding of the psychoanalytic symptom and its resistance to narrative, stems from his characterization of symptoms of this kind as belonging to a third uneasy class of phenomena different from either (rational) actions or physical events. As the background to his discussion of the question of irrational action, Davidson points out that human actions can be distinguished from phenomena in nature or of the body, because they belong to a class of events which have reasons for causes. What is more, those phenomena which have reasons as causes can be explained – that is, be seen to have the particular form or features that they do – by way of these reasons.

Actions, or at least those actions we call rational, have according to Davidson, two additional features. Firstly, they stem from what he calls "pro-attitudes" – values, goals, or wishes and, secondly, they accord with the beliefs concerning the form of action appropriate to achieve the particular goal. Rational actions thus belong to a class of events which not only have

reasons as their causes, but which also have another characteristic – that of a logical relation between the wish and a belief as to how it can be fulfilled. It is this feature which forms the basis of Davidson's contribution to the understanding of irrational actions and the problems they present for knowledge.

Irrational actions, Davidson points out, present a particular epistemological paradox. An irrational action (to be an action at all) must have a reason for a cause, but in the case of irrational or symptomatic actions the reason is not known to the actor, nor would it if it were known, function as the cause of *that* particular action. In other words, irrational actions are actions which are not logically related to the reasons which cause them.

This explains why, in the absence of reasons and/or of a logical relation between cause and outcome or form, symptoms belong to the class of phenomena which cannot become part of a narrative. For, to give a history of actions, it is necessary to provide the reasons which are their (particular) causes.

By way of an example Davidson himself refers to the famous incident in a footnote to Freud's *Ratman* case ([1909]1979). The Ratman removes a stick from the path where his beloved may travel in her carriage because he thinks it may cause her to have an accident and places it safely in the hedge. On getting home, however, he wonders whether it may not injure some other passer-by by projecting from the hedge. So he returns to the park and puts it back in the path where he found it – in other words, back in the way of the carriage.

As a classic case of irrational or symptomatic action, Freud focuses on its peculiar position in the series of actions which he explains by way of its anomalous causal status. To remove a stick from a path and place it in a hedge is not in itself irrational. To remove the same stick from the hedge again is also not in itself irrational. It is merely indecisive. But first to remove it from the path, put it into the hedge and then return it to the same path, where it might once more be a danger to his beloved (which was the ostensible reason for removing it in the first place), is certainly so.

The final action in the series is symptomatic on two interrelated counts. The first has to do with its position in the narrative series, while the second stems from its logical, or rather illogical, form. The real reason or cause of the Ratman's action (the destructive wish towards the lady which he, at first, hides by means of an overly solicitous action) has been repressed, and is not therefore something of which he is aware. Its status as a rational action is called into question by virtue of its position in the series – that is, by the narrative – not, it is important to notice, by virtue of its external, visible form. There is nothing in the Ratman's action taken out of the context of the narrative which proclaims its symptomatic status.

It is only seen within the series, by way of a narrative account into which it will not fit, that the contradictions surrounding the episode become apparent and the symptom's irrationality is revealed. It is only, crucially, by way of the narrative that the problem of what Danto (1986) calls, in another context, the problem of "indiscernible counterparts" is resolved. And, equally important,

it is only as a result of Freud's interpretation which restores the real reason, which is its cause, to the Ratman's irrational action, that the full story can be told.

Only the interpretation which returns the action to rationality, and in so doing moves it from the anomalous class of irrational actions, closes the gap which the symptom had previously made in the narrative and, thereby, allows it to be completed.

If we recall some of the criteria for narrative unity outlined by Danto in *Narration and Knowledge* (1985), it is clear that the psychoanalytic symptom has already failed on two interrelated counts: Firstly, by virtue of its taxonomic instability which does not allow for the required descriptive continuity and, secondly, by virtue of the explanatory confusion which results from the inability to identify its cause. How does the symptom survive the third narrative requirement – the test of time?

Once more the symptom reveals that it is problematical for narrative on this occasion because of its temporally anomalous status. The temporal anomaly characteristic of the psychoanalytic symptom can be considered by way of four major themes or topics.

Firstly, the symptom stands out against the background of Freud's normative, developmental or genetic account as that which is repetitive, fixed, regressive or even precocious. The persistence of Oedipal wishes, fixation in the oral or anal stage, repetition in the transference – all defy or resist time in some respect. In fact, the symptoms most characteristic of psychoanalysis are all those thoughts, affects or actions which seem to come from some other time – or even not to be subject to temporal consideration at all.

Secondly, the temporally problematic form of the Freudian symptom can be understood in the light of two important metapsychological concepts, those of the "memory-motor" structure and of the agencies. Freud's account of the memory-motor structure allows the symptom to be explained as an unstable formation in which the normal relation of memory to motive is disturbed. In the symptom material which is (by definition) unavailable to memory cannot form a direct relation to motive, yet nevertheless persists in an odd vacillation between the forward and the backward direction, between the regressive position of memory and the progressive direction of action.

Thirdly, the so-called second typography, (Freud's later conception of the structure of the psychic apparatus) is perhaps most important of all in that it presents the psyche field as divided into both non-temporal and temporal organizations. The id or unconscious, as eternal, is necessarily outside history, while the part of the superego relevant to psychoanalysis, is also unconscious and, therefore, similarly outside time.

It is only the ego which both operates in the present and is capable of a rational relation to the past. The ego alone is able to set up an appropriately tensed recording operation – that of memory – on the basis of which to perform judgement, and it alone may both conceive of, and orientate itself towards, the future.

As a compromise-formation, the Freudian symptom involves a mixed relation between the agencies – between the tensed ego and the tenseless

fields of the unconscious or superego – and is, therefore, necessarily outside time in some sense.

Finally, in an analysis the transference is understood as a technique for exploiting the temporal anomaly of the symptom in the interests of the cure. The transference suppresses and condenses time, and in actualizing earlier Oedipal material, precipitates the past into the present, so that both people and events lose that identity which is based upon a particular position in history. Parental figures merge with that of the analyst and the psychological consequences of past traumas infuse contemporary experiences.

The temporal instability of the symptom is also made apparent on the level of psychoanalytic technique. The analyst's injunction that the analysand "free associate" – rather than narrate – is an attempt to elicit the kind of symptomatic material which is in need of interpretation. The patient in free-association is called upon to produce words criss-crossed by non-words, the picture or the possible pun, sensory materials in the form of repressed memories, and wishes which cannot enter into the series. The analyst, in other words, (and this is itself symptomatic as we shall see) looks for all that which would be "poetic" in the narrative.

In fact, part of the definition of the symptom is that it is something which, because it is not unambiguously present or past, cannot enter into the story of the analysand's life. The importance of interpretation, then, is that it acts to re-inscribe the non-temporal symptom in temporal terms, so as to restore it to a position in which it can become part of a narrative. While the pathological items themselves vacillate in time, the goal of a psychoanalysis as cure, and the case history as a form of explanatory writing about pathology, is to establish the conditions which make a fully narrative procedure possible.

The Freudian case histories themselves demonstrate this phenomenon to a unique and precise degree. Once more the *Ratman* case provides a particularly vivid example, on this occasion of the chronological instability of the symptomatic. Freud recounts, with great surprise, that it was not until some months into the Ratman's analysis, in which his father played a significant and regular part, that he discovered that the Ratman's father had died some time before the analysis began.

The Ratman's dead father (and death is necessarily outside time) continued to inhabit the Ratman's life as though he were alive, indicating the extent to which the past, in its most absolute position, returns to infiltrate and re-form the neurotic's experience. His dead father is literally eternal and, therefore, he is quite explicitly unable to exist within time ([1909]1979).

Every analysis, as Freud's work as a whole reveals, operates upon the tenseless economy of the symptom in order to produce a full history, one in which the identity of each event is established on the basis of the production of the complete narrative series.

To date it has been possible, with the help of Danto and Davidson, to make it clear that the symptom is problematic for narrative because it does not comply with the three figures fundamental to narrative epistemology, those of continuity of subject matter, cause and time. If these cover the conceptual or logical requirements of narrative, further examination of the Freudian

symptom also makes it possible to account for an additional feature – a significant aspect of its generic or representational requirements.

A somewhat more detailed account of the metapsychological foundations of the symptom, particularly those relevant to its form, is necessary in order to make this additional point clear.

Freud's psychopathology is based on the *necessity* of repression (not all wishes are acceptable to those who wish them) and its *actuality* (unacceptable wishes can be successfully assigned to the unconscious). However, it also emphasizes the regularity with which repression fails and the undesirable wish takes a disguised pathway to satisfaction. It is this process which forms the basis of Freud's understanding of the symptom.

The psychoanalytic account of the workings of the dream, as the prototype of all symptoms, provides a useful account of the basic ingredients that make up the Freudian symptom. Freud describes the dreamwork (that which determines the nature of the relationship between the latent and manifest content of the dream) as a process in which the linguistic or propositional form of the repressed wish is transcribed in visual or pictorial terms. The dream itself can thus be seen as a picture puzzle or, to use Freud's own term, a "rebus". The disguised satisfaction (which is part of what makes the dream a type of symptom) is possible because, although the original content of the wish is hidden (from the ego), enough of its ingredients remain operative in the translated form to allow the wish to be satisfied at least partially.

What is important for the point being made here, is that although the meaning of the original wish is disguised by means of this transcription process (that is, the dreamwork), its end-product must be of a specific form in order to make it possible to satisfy the particular repressed wish. Some *ingredient of the original wish* – as a proposition – usually including similarities across perceptual elements, must remain intact. In fact, one of the defining characteristics of symptoms is that for this very reason they admit no substitutes even where substitutes (of the original wish) either can and should be available.

If the Ratman had been aware of his wish to get rid of his rival, Dick, and had set about achieving this goal rationally, there would have been any number of things, including perhaps, but certainly not only confined to jogging, that he might have done. He might have wooed the lady he loved more intensely, dressed better, even challenged Dick to a duel. Most important of all, he would have considered and perhaps tried all three. As a disguised (and thus indirectly satisfied) wish, however, the desire to *get rid of Dick* could only be (partially) satisfied by jogging; because only by getting rid of *dik* (the German word for fat) could he get rid of *Dick* (his rival, Richard).

Likewise under normal circumstances, where the meaning or intention is paramount, some latitude in the surface form of the wish or action is possible. An ordinary, acceptable wish formulated in ordinary language does admit substitutes. The wish "to take a walk around the town", for example, could be expressed as wanting "to stroll about the city".

However, and central to the point being made here, is that just as there are some actions or thoughts (symptomatic ones) which admit no substitutes, so

some expressions may not be paraphrased. While either of the two formulations of the wish mentioned above will suffice in the case of ordinary language, in a poem the word "town" but not the word "city" may be essential for the rhyme scheme.

What symptoms and poems have in common is that they, unlike ordinary language propositions, and the rational actions which can be explained in ordinary language, cannot be paraphrased.

This parallel between poetry and symptom is important, because both remind us that the limits of narrative are also those of paraphrase, and that it is not possible to produce a narrative wholly about, or in the position of, the symptom. In fact, as structuralist narratology in particular makes clear, part of the definition of narrative is that it can finally always be retold. Narratives, but not poems, sustain a distinction between *what is sometimes called that between discours and histoire* or what is commonly described as that between story and plot.

3 From Symptoms to Artworks

If, as we have seen, the psychoanalytic field as a whole is revealing for narrative enquiry, it is so on what might be called both the positive and the negative levels. As a practice which aims to cure, psychoanalysis advocates a return to the ego and with it to narrative. However, as a knowledge of the symptomatic, the privileged position in contemporary thought which psychoanalysis occupies, stems rather from its status as a critique of the common-sense view of rationality (of ego operations) and, therefore, of narrative as its natural ally.

What is generally regarded as Freud's major contribution, is the demonstration that the ego and its capacity to represent experience in narrative form is won only at the cost of alternative, non-narrative forms which, because they can never be completely superseded, regularly reappear to act as reminders of what has been repressed. In this, psychoanalysis has what appears, at first glance, to be an unexpected ally in literary and aesthetic modernism.

In fact, much that is central to the critique of contemporary culture and the accompanying critique of its traditional artistic practices, is based on an alliance between psychoanalysis and aesthetic modernism (including post-modernism) and their shared resistance to narrative.

Freud's may be a practice in the interests of the ego but it is a theory of the unconscious. The aesthetic *avant-garde* on the other hand, generate a theory of realism by means of a practice of the unconscious. At its most ambitious aesthetic modernism wishes to embody or mimic the symptom and only thereby explain, perhaps expose, the form and preconditions of the normal. Exactly how this happens can be clarified by demonstrating the many parallels between the artwork and symptom.

Firstly, like the symptom, the fictional status of the artwork modulates its taxonomic status as a tensed event so that its characteristic position is somehow outside history. In the same way, the symptom as the perpetually present (because never fully satisfied), embodiment of a wish or fantasy, always seems to be fictional.

Secondly, symptoms and aesthetic works have much in common on the level of form. Just as the symptom works spontaneously via procedures different from those with communicative intent, so fictional writing, especially that in the tradition of high modernism, gambles on achieving an intelligibility which is not that of ordinary language.

Perhaps the most obvious of these examples are rhyme, metre, and figures of speech such as onomatopoeia. The most famous are those, as is suggested by analysis of the symptom undertaken by Freud, of anagrams, pictograms or portmanteau words which collapse signifiers upon each other to produce another form of intelligibility, one only captured by the visible forms of writing.

The role of the anagram in poetic language is to compose words and sentences in accordance with effects wholly, or primarily at least, on the level of the signifier. The perceptual features which result produce a simultaneity, which threatens the ostensible linearity of narrative, and deliberately sustain readings in every direction.

Radical aesthetic writing of the kind which functions as a type of sustained anagram, must, therefore, eliminate direction as a key factor in the production of meaning. In a way, once more reminiscent of the unconscious, the modernist text resists serial operations. It cannot be confined to, or even really contain, the spoken ordinary effects of words, because it does not wish to be confined, to be limited, to the lateral forms characteristic of the sentence. It emphasizes the materials of the signifier (rather than the meanings of the signified) and at the same time significantly re-organizes the relation of style to content.

It is because the aesthetic use of language is characterized by an attempt to remotivate what Saussure calls the arbitrary relation between signifier and signified characteristic of the linguistic sign, it can only do so at the expense of something central to ordinary language – which accounts for the conflict between the language of the modernist and that of his more naturalist predecessors. Whereas a natural or ordinary language is defined as one which sustains a variable relation between form and content, (approximately the same thing may be said in different words), poetic language, as every student of literature knows, strenuously resists paraphrase.

It is widely known, almost expected, that poetry should stand in the kind of relation to its materials that makes it difficult to paraphrase. But what of the non-realist novelist whose business is nevertheless to narrate? It is the novelist who elicits the most admiration, for he is the one which modernism confronts with the most strenuous task.

In fact, in attempting to explain why it is that the novel seems to emerge as the test case where modernism and post-modernism are concerned, the central question remains that of the apparently irreducible relation of narrative to paraphrase.

If a modernist narration is precisely one in which the distinction between the form of the telling and the tale is itself undercut, then its status as a narrative is also threatened – which is perhaps why the modern novel, at least since Joyce, always approximates the condition of poetry.

Writing about Writing: Modernism, History and the Limits of Narrative.

Modernist writing itself has clear and significant consequences for literary criticism, but those it has for literary history and narrative epistemology are less apparent but certainly no less significant. Because aesthetic modernism produces works which threaten the preconditions for narrative unity, the advent of modernism also raises questions as to the status of traditional writings about the aesthetic – particularly art history.

Once more the work of Arthur Danto is central. Confronting just this problem in *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art* (1986), Danto discusses the position of art history since modernism in a way that is of great importance to the study of narrative.

Briefly, Danto argues that modern art, because it represents a break from all previous aesthetic traditions, is no longer the kind of thing about which it is possible to write an “indigenous history”. It is not, he insists, that art is dead and that works comprising a unique category do not exist now (or will not exist in the future), but rather that they no longer belong to the class previously characterizable as aesthetic objects, but are instead better understood in philosophical terms, perhaps as examples of the practice of philosophy. Danto’s position is based on an assumption which programmatic modernism and its practitioners would probably be happy to endorse – that it is the changed nature and status of modernist artworks that account for the end of art history.

The complex argument presented in *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement Of Art* (1986) is best understood in the light of Danto’s philosophical definition of the nature of the aesthetic object as outlined in his earlier work, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace* (1981).

Here Danto indicates, in a way reminiscent of what is best in the semiotic accounts, that before modernism, art must be understood neither as a mere thing (that is, as a natural object or commodity for consumption, or exchange only), nor as a mere representation (that is, for example, a scientific drawing or passport photograph or an instance of a non-fictional language such as a newspaper report or a textbook).

Art was, until modernism, the operation of a practice or technique *across the relation between “mere things and mere representations”* (Danto 1981). Art is, or rather was, essentially representational, albeit in the widest sense. At first it was exemplary, then mimetic, and subsequently expressive. But, in each case, the artwork represented something which it itself – as material – was not. As realist, it operated as an attempt to *mimic*, but not *be*, an item in the field of perception (that is, of real things); and as expressionist it came to *refer to*, but not to *be*, an instance of representation. In other words, art was, phenomenologically as well as ontologically, a third term between things and representations.

In order to implement these representational effects, Danto argues, art employed a changing practice and had (or has) a history because of the fact that the eye (sight or perception) is not historical, while representation and

communication are. A history of art was possible as long as art implemented a practice across the difference between that which is within history and that which is outside of it – the history of that changing practice and the special class of objects which deployed it.

Danto illustrates his point by reminding us that art history has never been appropriately a history of the content of art, that is, of its changing subject matter, preoccupations or themes. An account of what art has chosen to represent is a part of the history of ideas, but not of art. Similarly, art history is not equivalent to a history of language, of calligraphy or even of printing. It has never been, in other words, a history of the means or technology of representation. It is concerned with these only insofar as they effect art's representational properties – be they exemplary, mimetic or expressive.

In the light of Danto's account, art history and psychoanalysis can again be seen to be alike. A psychoanalytic case history is not a history of the contents of the superego, because a history of the contents of what must be repressed would also amount to a history of ideas – in this case of those ideas subject to social disapproval. Nor, on the other hand, is a case history equivalent to the history of the rational or the ego, for this, too, would amount to a history of thought or, perhaps more precisely, to a history of language.

As in the case of art history, psychoanalysis is concerned neither with the content of repressed wishes themselves, nor with the means of representing them rationally, but with the possible relationships between the two. However, unlike psychoanalysis, where the case history is always a history of symptoms and thus of disguise, art history has always been about what is visible expressive representation itself. Because art history has always been concerned with techniques of representation, it is not surprising that art historians have, until very recently, seen perspective as the most characteristic art historical topic, and style (or expression) as its natural heir.

In other words, according to Danto, art had an indigenous history for as long as aesthetic works shared identity conditions as members of the class of representational or expressive practices which are not real or *true*. And art history becomes problematic only when artworks no longer belong to this category.

The definitive change Danto outlines in *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art* (1986) is therefore that which is necessarily expressed in a change in the actual, or phenomenological nature of artworks, one which gambles on their retaining their ordinary, non-aesthetic properties (that is, presenting works which are real things or real representations), while representing aesthetic or fictional ones.

It is, Danto argues, when art (or literature, although the literary version is especially difficult to implement) comes to include "indiscernible counterparts" that the question of art history arises in a new light. When art ceases to be a representational or expressive practice, that is, when it ceases to implicate technique, it ceases to have an indigenous history. Art history becomes problematic from the point at which art objects are not actually distinct from real things by virtue of aspects of the artist's own (creative) actions but yet remain formally so.

Duchamp's famous urinal, the whole field of found objects and, for example, the operation of the collage made up of bus tickets, labels and cigarettes, are the instances Danto has in mind. When positioning in the gallery, labelling or collation alone becomes definitive of what art is, then, Danto argues, it operates in another way. No longer a representational practice, it becomes instead thought or philosophy.

Art now emerges as part of the traditional philosophical practice of drawing ontological distinctions across identical phenomena. While art may be a demonstration or practice of ontology, rather speculation upon it as in philosophy, Danto is undoubtedly correct to point to the essentially philosophical character of aesthetic modernism. Works which ask the question "When is a urinal not a urinal?", for example, rather than "How and in what way does this non-urinal come to stand for a urinal?", mark the move from art to philosophy which Danto describes.

His point, crucially, has nothing to do with the subject matter of art or the nature and quality of the technique. Artworks, in Danto's sense, may *represent* anything from kings and landscapes to bus tickets and soup cans, and still remain artworks about which it is possible to write *art* history. In the same way, any style or technique which implicates representation, be it *chiaroscuro* or abstract expressionism, may also be the subject matter of art history.

It is only when questions of style and technique no longer even arise that art history is logically and practically ruled out of court. Without the features of being "fictional" and representational which were, according to Danto, definitive of art prior to modernism, the aesthetic project changes so as to make its destiny and that of philosophy inextricable. In fact, it is possible to extrapolate on this basis that, if modernist works had a history, it would be closer to that of philosophy than that of art. In other words, art history has lost a consistent object, and thus cannot sustain its status as a specific form of history.

After all, as Danto himself has pointed out in *Narration and Knowledge* (1985), any history is predicated upon a minimal degree of continuity in its subject matter. It is both the precondition for, and the business of, history to trace and account for the changes which occur across something constant – which persist in some sense despite that change. It is this persistent ingredient which is no longer present in the case of art.

If aesthetic modernism and the psychoanalytic symptom both demonstrate narrative's dependence upon continuity, then doing so via the problem of indiscernible counterparts has very important consequences – consequences which include not just the nature of historical knowledge itself, but those insights into the nature of modernity which, this paper argues, narrative enquiry is in a privileged position to yield.

As Davidson (1982) explains and psychoanalysis demonstrates, irrational or symptomatic acts cannot be distinguished from normal or rational ones on phenomenological grounds alone. The Ratman's symptomatic jogging is, as we have seen, indistinguishable on the surface from non-symptomatic jogging, and cannot be identified as pathological without recourse to the

narrative of his actions. In the same way, what distinguishes Duchamp's urinal from that in the men's room, has nothing to do with its physical shape or texture, and only a history of its journey from men's room (or porcelain factory) to gallery, backed by histories of sculpture, of galleries and of aesthetic values, would make its new status as a work of art clear.

A great deal about culture and history and their relationship, may be learned from these apparently arcane examples. On reflection, their importance derives from the fact that while all cultures function to organize an apparently stable set of relations between ontology and phenomenology – between thought and meanings on the one hand, and perceptions on the other – not only do they not all do so in the same way but, even within a culture, they do not do so in the same way at the same time. This, an insight which surely underlies much that is central to the work of Foucault – the one for which he will be remembered as the historian's Kant – is why not all histories can be positive or continuous.

Foucault's narratives, which are finally concerned with discontinuity, reveal that not all that makes up a history remains in it, and not all that is definitive of objects remains to be seen. His archaeologies, those non-positive histories of thought which have themselves reorganized modern thought, are possible and necessary precisely because positive histories are not adequate to the task of explaining those points where the ontological to phenomenological relations (which maintain any culture's relation both to itself and to its archival "unconscious") are reorganized.

What Danto has identified as "the end of art history" occurs precisely at that point which Foucault would call a threshold or rupture, and the presence of those ruptures is often indicative of wider epistemic shifts which are nowhere more vividly revealed than in those cases of phenomena where ontological differences emerge from constant substance. Archaeologies are histories of those previously indiscernible counterparts which are able to reveal when and how counterparts cease to be, or become, counterparts at all.

What is distinctive of psychoanalytic symptoms and modernist artworks, as well as the anomalous qualities they display which have proved to be of such importance for narrative study, is that, while positive histories may explain those events which have a stable place in the historical continuum, only archaeologies explain *how and why* events enter or leave history – the experiential series itself – and thus become objects for knowledge.

Foucault's own *The Birth of the Clinic* (1973) is a classic and revealing example. Unlike a conventional history of ideas, Foucault's is not primarily a positive account of the early stages of modern medicine. It is an explanation of how modern medicine entered into that place where it could have a history at all. In other words, as an archaeology *The Birth of the Clinic* reveals how certain classes of acts, not necessarily different in form, cross the threshold of what Foucault himself calls positivity, and become, thereby, clinical acts. As the title suggests, this is not in fact an account of a continuation or development in medicine, so much as an explanation of the birth of a new knowledge.

Here Foucault reveals that it was not until an action identical on the phenomenological level, that of cutting up a corpse, could become a second on the ontological – one in anatomy and one in morbid pathology – that clinical medicine was born.

Similarly it would need an archaeology to explain aesthetic modernism's "disenfranchisement" of art, which for Danto means the end of art history. The so-called critique of representation in accordance with which modernism has implemented an alternative practice, reveals that only expressive representation could keep art and philosophy apart. An archaeology of modernism would, I suspect, reveal the influence of what could be called technology's own philosophy, that is of patent law – which, like aesthetic modernism, is finally concerned with the question of indiscernible counterparts.

Danto's narratology and the uses to which narrative operations are put by Freud and Foucault, together make important contributions to an understanding of the modern episteme. But these contributions are not only of the general kind. In the light of their work the central part played by taxonomic and temporal stability in the age of history, emerges with startling clarity. Yet, it is perhaps the specific insights their work simultaneously yields for which it will, in the end, be remembered.

An account of the psychoanalytic symptom, and the problem it presents for narrative, makes it clear that it fails to achieve the consistent classification which narrative unities require. However, this account also makes it clear exactly what crucial distinction the symptom blurs. As Davidson points out, the symptom as an irrational action, rests uneasily between the class of rational actions and that of events – a distinction which I suggest makes it possible to maintain those between body and mind, culture and nature and even perhaps, as its status as compelled suggests, that between what is chosen and what determined.

Read in conjunction with Danto's work on the disenfranchisement of art, an understanding of what is at stake in the distinction between actions and events is deepened. If we recall that rational actions must display a logical relation between reasons and the actions they cause, it becomes apparent that in experiencing the very different reasons that act as the cause of Duchamp's urinal having the form and position it does (those of the maker of sanitary ware and Duchamp himself) the urinal emerges as "irrational".

In divorcing the artist from the artwork, the urinal, like the psychoanalytic symptom, seems to originate elsewhere – in another time and an alien space. Like the repressed material which interrupts time present with an unstable version of time past, another's wishes infuse those of Duchamp bringing with them the reasons of the factory and another man's quite unartistic intentions. It is as if the psychic apparatus were redoubled in time and suspended between agents much as it was once, at its origins, divided in time and space. It is no longer merely a question of action versus events, but of whose action this action is.

What is more, those between action and event, actor and other are not, it turns out, the only distinctions the full narrative enshrines. As the problem-

atic of that which cannot be paraphrased suggests, narrative, like natural language itself, relies upon a form of sign – upon the arbitrary nature of the relationship between signifier and signified, the presence of the barline. Where the logic of the signifier competes with, even overrides that of the signified, meaning is threatened and words become indistinguishable from pictures and from things. The sign, and with it representation itself, rests (today at least) upon the capacity to distinguish concept from percept, the symbolic from the natural.

Finally then, the capacity to silence narrative as psychoanalytic symptoms, and modernists' artworks do with such regularity, reveals no less than the modern form of the distinction between culture and nature.

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