

***Words:
A Short Guide
To Making Your Own***

1st EDITION

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Words: Music or Meaning?

Writing is like painting with words.

A long time ago, words were comprised of a succession of letters in the form of tiny images (pictograms), or visual ideas (ideograms).

People vocalized these images: they uttered them aloud. Words were spoken long before they were written. Some words – known as onomatopoeias - even captured natural sounds: bottle, gurgle, jingle, bubble, or flip-flop.

Good writing reflects these rhythms of speech.

Good writing is akin to music.

In poetry, we come closest to these musical roots of writing. No wonder all songs have poems as their lyrics.

Other writing techniques which draw on sound include alliteration, anadiplosis, assonance, consonance, parachesis, tautogram, and tongue twisters. Look them up in the glossary at the end of this booklet.

So, the first thing to do when you had written something is to read it aloud to yourself: does the music of the words sound right?

One way to judge is by counting your pulse or, if the text is long, your breathing (inhalations).

Let us try this technique while we peruse a poem about getting old:

**The sageing flesh,
a wrinkled vicedom.
The veined reverberation
of a life consumed.
On corneas imprinted
with a thousand dreams,
now stage penumbral plays
directed by a sight receding
and a brain enraged.
To fall, as curtains call,
to bow the last,
rendered a sepia image
in a camera obscured,
a line of credits,
fully exhausted,
fully endured.**

Syllables are like atoms. When they are joined together, they form the molecules that we call “words”. The word “camera” has three syllables: “ca”, “me” and “ra”.

Let us convert the words in the first few lines of poem above into ta-ta ta-ta (each “ta” stands for a syllable):

Ta-ta ta-ta (4)

Ta-ta ta-ta ta. (5)

Ta-ta ta-ta ta-ta ta (7)

Ta-ta-ta ta-ta. (5)

The tension escalates from 4 to 5 and then to 7 and subsides, but not fully – to 5.

Continue the exercise with the remaining lines and see how the author (humble me) modulates the emotional resonance of the poem merely by varying the number of syllables in each line.

Now, let us turn to other techniques in this modest piece of authorship.

Notice the neologism (newly coined word) “**sageing**”. It is a somewhat cumbersome combination of “**sagging**” and “**ageing**” – both words traditionally and profoundly associated with senescence.

By combining them, we create a greater and somewhat shocking juxtaposition.

Try to combine words to a greater effect! See what you can come up with!

But combining words is only one way of eliciting imagery in our mind.

Consider the word “**vicedom**”.

Vice means sin, bad habit, misbehaviour.

Vice also means “deputy”, number 2 in a hierarchy, like vice-governor of vice-premier.

The suffix –dom is usually associated with polities like states or monarchies: kingdom, Tsardom, fiefdom.

The echoes of meaning that words generate in our mind, are called “associations”.

We can combine several associations in a single word, drawing on its etymology (look it up in the glossary!), history, prior usage (especially in literature), and current use.

“**Vicedom**” is such a combination: a hierarchical kingdom of vices. It follows the word “wrinkled” which implies old age and decrepitude.

Newly minted words (neologisms) like “vicedom” and “sageing” adhere to an important principle of good writing: parsimony.

Parsimony teaches us to apply as few words as possible to convey an idea or an image. If we can gainfully combine words or use an idiom to capture a concept or a lesson of life – we most definitely and always should.

Next, let us study the phrase “**veined reverberation**”.

Veins are blood vessels. As blood courses through them, they inflate, deflate, and flutter. In other words: they reverberate. But here, we have converted the noun into a verb (vein to veined) and the verb into a noun (reverberate into reverberation).

When we derive verbs from nouns, adverbs from verbs, nouns from verbs, or adjectives from nouns – we enrich our language and startle our readers.

These may well be the two main roles and functions of a good author: to develop and evolve his tool of trade

(language) and to drag his passive interlocutors (his readers) from their slumberous comfort zone and into a new territory, a terra incognita, a mysterious continent of unexpected sights and sounds, thus provoking their sense of wonder and curiosity.

Now you have the tools to analyze the next word combination: “a life consumed”.

The verb “to consume” conjures images of something burning (a fire consumes) and of consumption: the act of purchasing and then making use of a good (especially comestibles).

But consumption as a word has deep historical roots and is, therefore, multilayered, a lot like an archaeological dig. “Consumption” was the old name for tuberculosis, a fatal disease before the advent of antibiotics.

So, to consume also meant to waste, or to be wasted, to decay, to go to ruin.

“A life consumed”, therefore, simultaneously raises the spectre of a life wasted and at its end.

Writing is like a giant theme park firmly planted in the author’s inner landscape, including his erudition. If you are well versed in physics or biology or football or agriculture, never hesitate to bring this knowledge to bear on your writing. Infuse, impregnate, and fertilize your writing with metaphors and similes borrowed from all the dimensions and aspects of your personality.

Consider the opening words in the next sentence: “On corneas imprinted”.

Corneas survive death and are often harvested to be implanted to restore vision to the partly blind.

But the corneas of this old man, the subject of this poem, are imprinted with dreams. The word “imprint” has a second meaning, borrowed from psychology. To be imprinted is to learn rapidly, especially at an early stage of life.

So, the corneas of this old man’s eyes, which usually face the world, were actually inverted in the man’s childhood: they looked inside and witnessed the man’s dreams.

But no longer. They **“now stage penumbral plays, directed by a sight receding and a brain enraged.”**

With these few words we get a glimpse of what it is like to be old: penumbral, receding, enraged (and helpless). The parts of the body most affected – the eyes (“**sight**”) and the brain – are enumerated in conjunction with verbs that describe gradual decline and dysfunction (“**receding**”, “**enraged**”)

Penumbral is an old word. It made its first appearance almost 400 years ago. Enraged and receding are even older words, positively ancient.

Language is like a menu in a restaurant and you are the chef. Never hesitate to prepare your favorite dishes just because the recipe were dreamt up centuries ago. Words are like ingredients in cooking: they must be the right taste, alone and together.

You should also never dumb down. If you catch yourself avoiding certain words or turns of phrase because you are

afraid that your readers will not understand you or will judge you harshly, then you are a bad writer for two reasons: (1) You are doing your audience a disservice. Your roles as an author are to educate, to teach, to enrich, and to enlighten whoever is exposed to your writing. Never betray this sacred mission; and (2) You owe it to yourself to maintain the highest professional standards.

It helps if your work has a central, pivotal image around which everything else and from which everything branches.

In this poem, life is compared to a theatre play and a film (movie):

**To fall, as curtains call,
to bow the last,
rendered a sepia image
in a camera obscured,
a line of credits,
fully exhausted,
fully endured.**

The technique used here is known as metaphor.

Metaphor is when we borrow a word or phrase from one realm and apply it seamlessly to another. “Gene mapping” is a metaphor because the act of mapping is lifted from cartography, not from genetics. Yet, it is coupled with a genetic entity (gene) to give a name to a new type of technology, gene mapping.

Metaphors illuminate the essence because of the element of surprise and semantic dislocation. No one expects to find maps in genes or in genetics labs. Yet, gene mapping

makes perfect sense and encapsulates and conveys all the information we need to have precisely due to the element of surprise.

Metaphors are not similes. Similes are explicit comparisons: “John is as big as a house” is a simile. Placing John side by side with a house in the same sentence vividly evokes John’s size.

Metaphors are more subtle and stealthy, even underhanded. They sneak under the radar to attack us unexpectedly (yes, this is a metaphor). The images they conjure capture the quiddity and quintessence of the topic they refer or allude to.

Back to our poem:

**To fall, as curtains call,
to bow the last,
rendered a sepia image
in a camera obscured,
a line of credits,
fully exhausted,
fully endured.**

The passage (strophe) starts with “To fall”. “Fall” is a word powerfully associated with decline, decay, mishap, accident, and immorality. It strongly resonates with old age in which dysfunction and contrition for past misdeeds and wrong choices abound.

Immediately, the poem introduces us to the core metaphor: life is a theatre play and old age is a prelude to our curtain call (death). Curtains also elicit in us other associations: darkness, mustiness, dust, stillness – all

properties of demise, extinction, and expiration. Indeed, in English, the word “curtains” means death.

But in the poem the word curtain is coupled with another word: call. “Curtain call” – when the curtains are lifted time and again at the end of a play to allow the actors to bow to the audience and acknowledge the applause.

To call is to beckon, to summon. Old age brings us to death’s door, where we are “called” to cross over into the great unknown.

So, the combined effect of the phrase “curtain call” is to remind us of the end: “to bow the last”.

What happens to us next is that we become memories, like sepia photographs. We fade with time as though the photos were taken with a camera obscura (read about this [ancient device in Wikipedia](#)).

But the word “obscura” is twisted into “obscured” which means being made hidden, concealed, unknown, or unclear. So, someone “took our photos” with a timeless gadget that remains mysterious. This camera is, of course, Time itself.

When you use a metaphor try to exhaust all its aspects, dimensions, and potentials.

Theatre plays and movies are first cousins. Indeed, films are projected onto screens in movie theatres. So, the metaphor evolves to include this newer incarnation of theatre: the cinema.

But rather than start at the beginning, the poem surprises us with “a line of credits”. In banking, a line of credit is a contract with the bank that allows a customer to withdraw up to a certain amount of funds subject to specified terms and conditions.

Of course, we use words to convey our inner world: our ideas, beliefs, values, hopes, dreams, visions, and fears. We also deploy words in order to move people or motivate them to do something or prevent them from acting in certain ways or even manipulate them.

Words are far more powerful than actual weapons. Dictators know that and so they dedicate inordinate amounts of scarce resources to silencing dissent and censoring free speech.

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Nothing is As It Seems

I am a voracious reader of the most convoluted and lexiphanic texts - yet, there is one author I prefer the most. She gives me the greatest pleasure and leaves me tranquil and craving for more when I am through devouring one of her countless tomes. A philosopher of the mundane, a scholar of death, an exquisite chronicler of decay and decadence - she is Dame Agatha Christie. I spend as much time wondering what so mesmerizes me in her pulp fiction as I do trying to decipher her deliciously contorted stratagems.

First, there is the claustrophobia. Modernity revolves around the rapid depletion of our personal spaces - from pastures and manors to cubicles and studio apartments. Christie - like Edgar Ellen Poe before her - imbues even the most confined rooms with endless opportunities for vice and malice, where countless potential scenarios can and do unfold kaleidoscopically. A Universe of plots and countervailing subplots which permeate even the most cramped of her locations. It is nothing short of consummate magic.

Then there is the realization of the ubiquity of our pathologies. In Christie's masterpieces, even the champions of good are paragons of mental illness. Hercule Poirot, the quintessential narcissist, self-grooming, haughty, and delusional. Miss Marple, a schizoid busybody, who savors neither human company, nor her inevitable encounters with an intruding world. Indeed, it is deformity that gifts these two with their eerily penetrating insights into the infirmities of others.

Then, there is the death of innocence. Dame Agatha's detective novels are quaint, set in a Ruritanian Britain that is no more and likely had never existed. Technologies make their debut: the car, the telephone, the radio, electric light. The very nature of evil is transformed from the puerile directness of the highway robber and the passion killer - to the scheming, cunning, and disguised automatism of her villains. Crime in her books is calculated, the outcome of plotting and conspiring, a confluence of unbridled and corrupted appetites and a malignant mutation of individualism. Her opus is a portrait of our age as it emerged, all bloodied and repellent, from the womb the dying Victorian era.

Christie's weapons of choice are simple - the surreptitious poison, a stealthy dagger, the cocked revolver, a hideous drowning. Some acquaintance with the sciences of Chemistry and Physics is indispensable, of course. Archeology comes third. But Christie's main concerns are human nature and morality. The riddles that she so fiendishly posits cannot be solved without taking both into account.

As Miss Marple keeps insisting throughout her numerous adventures, people are the same everywhere, regardless of their social standing, wealth, or upbringing. The foibles, motives, and likely actions of protagonists - criminals as well as victims - are inferred by Marple from character studies of her village folks back home. Human nature is immutable and universal is Christie's message.

Not so morality. Formal justice is a slippery concept, often opposed to the natural sort. Life is in shades of gray. Murders sometimes are justified, especially when they serve to rectify past wrongs or prevent a greater evil.

Some victims had it coming. Crime is part of a cycle of karmic retribution. The detective's role is to restore order to a chaotic situation, to interpret reality for us (in an inevitable final chapter), and to administer true and impartial justice, not shackled by social or legalistic norms.

Thus, nothing is as it seems.

It is perhaps Christie's greatest allure. Beneath the polished, petite-bourgeois, rule-driven, surface, lurks another world, replete with demons and with angels, volcanic passions and stochastic drives, the mirrors and the mirrored, where no ratio rules and no laws obtain. Catapulted into this nightmarish, surrealistic landscape, like the survivors of a shipwreck, we wander, bedazzled, readers and detectives, heroes and villains, damsels and their lovers, doomed to await the denouement. When that moment comes, redeemed by reason, we emerge, reassured, into our reinstated, ordered, Before Christ(ie) existence.

Her novels are the substance of our dreams, woven from the fabric of our fears, an open invitation to plunge into our psyches and courageously confront the abyss. Hence Christie's irresistibility - her utter acquaintance with our deepest quiddity. Who can forgo such narcissistic pleasure? Not your columnist, for sure!

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Abusing Speech

"A sharp tongue is the only edged tool that grows keener with constant use."

(Rip van Winkle by Washington Irving)

"He spoke with deliberation, occasionally emphasizing, somewhat dramatically, with his voice or by gesture, a remark which he deemed of transcendent importance, or chuckling at the mention of some incident which he considered amusing ... He objected strenuously to the 'continuity of his thought' being disturbed by interruption and frequently stated so in a most imperious way, intimating that the interruption had placed in immediate jeopardy of destruction some thought of vital interest and importance to the community."

(Contemporary news reports describing Charles Guiteau, President Garfield's assassin)

To preserve a language as a LIVING LANGUAGE, the following conditions must be met:

1. An academy of language to set standards and preserve linguistic knowledge
2. A corpus of words codified in works of reference such as dictionaries and thesauri
3. A population which speaks the language and shares the same cultural and historical space

4. Literature and media which make use of the language as a primary resource

5. Constant innovation and neologization (creation of new words) in slang and in various disciplines like technology.

In the narcissist's surrealistic world, even language is pathologized. It mutates into a weapon of self-defence, a verbal fortification, a medium without a message, replacing words with duplicitous and ambiguous vocables. "Conversational narcissism", Charles Derber calls it, replete with "shift responses" (replicas that shift the attention back to the narcissist).

Narcissists (and, often, by contagion, their unfortunate victims) don't talk, or communicate. They fend off. They hide and evade and avoid and disguise. They lecture and hector and preach. In their planet of capricious and arbitrary unpredictability, of shifting semiotic and semantic dunes they perfect the ability to say nothing in lengthy, Castro-like speeches. Their speech is impregnated with first-person pronoun density: it is saturated with first person pronouns ("I", "me", "my", "mine").

The ensuing convoluted sentences are arabesques of meaninglessness, acrobatics of evasion, a lack of commitment elevated to an ideology. The narcissist prefers to wait and see what waiting brings. It is the postponement of the inevitable that leads to the inevitability of postponement as a strategy of survival.

It is often impossible to really understand a narcissist. The evasive syntax fast deteriorates into ever more labyrinthine structures. The grammar tortured to produce

the verbal Doppler shifts essential to disguise the source of the information, its distance from reality, the speed of its degeneration into rigid "official" versions.

Buried under the lush flora and fauna of idioms without an end, the language erupts, like some exotic rash, an autoimmune reaction to its infection and contamination. Like vile weeds it spread throughout, strangling with absent minded persistence the ability to understand, to feel, to agree, to disagree and to debate, to present arguments, to compare notes, to learn and to teach.

Narcissists, therefore, never talk to others - rather, they talk at others. They exchange subtexts, camouflage-wrapped by elaborate, florid, texts. They read between the lines, spawning a multitude of private languages, prejudices, superstitions, conspiracy theories, rumours, phobias and hysterias. Theirs is a solipsistic world - where communication is permitted only with oneself and the aim of language is to throw others off the scent or to obtain Narcissistic Supply.

The narcissist's inability to listen and pay genuine attention stems from his overriding need to sustain his grandiosity and to rehearse his next lines, retort, or clever response while his interlocutor - really merely his audience - is talking. After all: why should the narcissist waste his precious time on listening when he is omniscient?

This has profound implications. Communication through unequivocal, unambiguous, information-rich symbol systems is such an integral and crucial part of our world - that its absence is not postulated even in the remotest galaxies which grace the skies of science fiction. In this

sense, narcissists are nothing short of aliens. It is not that they employ a different language, a code to be deciphered by a new Freud. It is also not the outcome of upbringing or socio-cultural background.

It is the fact that language is put by narcissists to a different use: not to communicate but to obscure, not to share but to abstain, not to learn but to defend and resist, not to teach but to preserve ever less tenable monopolies, to disagree without incurring wrath, to criticize without commitment, to agree without appearing to do so. Thus, an "agreement" with a narcissist is a vague expression of intent at a given moment - rather than the clear listing of long term, iron-cast and mutual commitments.

When the narcissist speaks, there is an undercurrent, a stream of occult and dual messages that permeate the overt text. A narcissistic mother may say "I love you" and mean: "I am dependent on you, don't leave.", or "Look how much I have sacrificed for you. You are mine now, guilt-ridden and blameworthy!" She may exclaim: "All I want is for you to be happy" and actually mean: "I hope you remain a miserable failure. That way I get to maintain my superiority over you and have you running errands for the rest of your life."

The rules that govern the narcissist's universe are loopholed incomprehensibles, open to an exegesis so wide and so self-contradictory that it renders them meaningless. The narcissist often hangs himself by his own verbose Gordic knots, having stumbled through a minefield of logical fallacies and endured self inflicted inconsistencies. Unfinished sentences hover in the air, like vapour above a semantic swamp.

In the case of the inverted narcissist, who was suppressed and abused by overbearing caregivers, there is the strong urge not to offend. Intimacy and inter-dependence are great. Parental or peer pressures are irresistible and result in conformity and self-deprecation. Aggressive tendencies, strongly repressed in the social pressure cooker, teem under the veneer of forced civility and violent politeness. Constructive ambiguity, a non-committal "everyone is good and right", an atavistic variant of moral relativism and tolerance bred of fear and of contempt - are all at the service of this eternal vigilance against aggressive drives, at the disposal of a never ending peacekeeping mission.

With the classic narcissist, language is used cruelly and ruthlessly to ensnare one's enemies, to sow confusion and panic, to move others to emulate the narcissist ("projective identification"), to leave the listeners in doubt, in hesitation, in paralysis, to gain control, or to punish. Language is enslaved and forced to lie. The language is appropriated and expropriated. It is considered to be a weapon, an asset, a piece of lethal property, a traitorous mistress to be gang raped into submission.

With cerebral narcissists, language is a lover. The infatuation with its very sound leads to a pyrotechnic type of speech which sacrifices its meaning to its music. Its speakers pay more attention to the composition than to the content. They are swept by it, intoxicated by its perfection, inebriated by the spiralling complexity of its forms. Here, language is an inflammatory process. It attacks the very tissues of the narcissist's relationships with artistic fierceness. It invades the healthy cells of reason and logic, of cool headed argumentation and level headed debate.

Language is a leading indicator of the psychological and institutional health of social units, such as the family, or the workplace. Social capital can often be measured in cognitive (hence, verbal-lingual) terms. To monitor the level of comprehensibility and lucidity of texts is to study the degree of sanity of family members, co-workers, friends, spouses, mates, and colleagues. There can exist no hale society without unambiguous speech, without clear communications, without the traffic of idioms and content that is an inseparable part of every social contract. Our language determines how we perceive our world. It IS our mind and our consciousness. The narcissist, in this respect, is a great social menace.

The Narcissist's Verbose and Florid Prose

The narcissist's writing is too embellished and ornamental. It is so cumbersome that it bothers on incomprehensible at times.

There are several reasons for such style of authorship:

1. Trying to impress and inspire awe rather than communicate and attempting to place oneself above the rest of humanity who are too inferior and stupid to truly understand one's depth, insights, and erudition;
2. An inability to separate the wheat from the chafe, giving every bit an equal weight (in extreme cases because of vanity and grandiosity: "every idea and shred of thought of mine ought and deserves to be recorded for posterity");
3. Perfectionism and fear of the imperfect and the imprecise;

4. Underestimating the readership and feeling the need to spoon-feed them rather than leave some space for free thought and own conclusions

5. "Stream of consciousness" recording (documentation) of every passing thought process in real-time and as it unfolds.

6. Feeling uncertain about the subject matter and disguising this deficiency (or cognitive deficit) with verbiage.

Palindromic Speech

The [communication of narcissists](#) is either inward-facing (they verbalize their inner dialogs, conversing aloud with themselves with the audience as a mere foil to their stream of consciousness) - or outward-facing (they talk in order to impress their interlocutors, or to evade and obfuscate)

Pay attention to several warning signs:

1. The use of indefinite pronouns and modifiers (like "this" or "someone") without specifying or clarifying any of the other parts of speech, leaving the listener guessing as to what occurred to whom, when, where, and why.

2. If the narcissist is addressing an audience or you demand the truth and accountability from the him, you can safely assume exaggeration, confabulation, reframing, and outright lying on his part. This is done partly also to cover up the narcissist's pervasive dissociation.

3. When the narcissist expostulates on his motivation for

doing things, or when he recounts what had happened, he is either wrong, reframing to justify his misbehavior or to restore ego-syntony, or just lying out of self-interest. He tries to sell you on "what makes sense" rather than on the truth. If you keep reiterating the question, he often contradicts himself and comes up with conflicting versions of the same events.

Never trust what the narcissist says. Do not let his gaslighting undermine your trust in your senses, judgment, and common sense. Make sure that only what you see is what you get.

Observe the behaviors and reactions of the narcissist and everyone around him for clues as to what had really transpired. Don't let the narcissist club you on the head and don't wake up in his Platonic cave of shadows of an alternative reality.

[Palindromic speech](#) is any kind of statement about facts or inner mental state that intentionally (often) or inadvertently (rare) creates confusion and disorientation in the listener. Gaslighting and lying are examples of crass and malicious palindromic speech acts. Confabulation and "word salad" (illogical, incoherent discourse) are benign variants intended to bridge dissociative gaps in memory or to buttress grandiosity.

Palindromic speech makes use of various semantic devices:

Referential shift (when the words refer to one thing while appearing to be referencing another);

Double entendre (word or phrase open to two, sometimes mutually exclusive interpretations or meanings);

Contextual drift (subtly altering the context of the conversation and thereby the message or the reality testing);

Manipulative speech (goal oriented utterances intended to impress or to accomplish aims, not to communicate);

Misattribution (proffering the wrong connections or links between alleged or ostensible motivations and intentions and actual actions, thus deflecting blame, for example or casting one's actions in the best possible light);

Circumstantial mitigation (an external locus of control and victim stance: events conspire to yield the misconduct, abrogating personal responsibility, a passive voice); and

Logical fallacies (such as post hoc ergo propter hoc - if B followed A it means that A caused B, correlation is causation, reference to authority, ad hominem attacks, and so on)

Palindromic speech is efficacious because of the base rate cognitive bias (people automatically fully believe 95% of what they are told, sight unseen) and because it mitigates the ineluctable hurt associated with truth-telling. It colludes with psychological defense mechanisms such as denial and with behaviors such as reframing and avoidance. It has powerful psychodynamic allies, in other words.

Two other [obstructive speech patterns](#) are: the hypothetical and counterfactual.

The narcissist, borderline, and psychopath use hypothetical speech to "test the waters", to see how their interlocutors would react to information. Sentences which start with "maybe" or "possibly" or "it could be that" or "I think that" or "I thought so, but wasn't sure" - are all forms of such exploratory excursions.

Maybe X typically means: X had actually happened or is the truth. How do you feel about it?

Counterfactual speech is a lie or misinformation disguised as either a rhetorical question or as a statement of settled and universally accepted fact. "Maybe she flirted with me at the restaurant, but she didn't come to my room later that evening, now, did she?" When, of course, she did visit his room that night.

There are three types of [manipulative speech](#):

Victim

Entitled, demanding, dependent, transparent, whining (grievances and grudges)

Child

Entitled, demanding, dependent, transparent, manipulative, naive-immature (fantastic)

Psychopathic

Entitled, envious, competitive, malicious, opaque (coded: dense and multilayered)

Lying and Confabulating

If their mouths are moving, they are [lying: histrionics, psychopaths, and narcissists](#) lie all the time. Their lies may be goal-oriented (to secure sex or money), intended to regulate grandiosity or a labile sense of self-worth, to buttress a stance of victimhood, or simply because the forbidden and illicit are risky and thrilling (in the cases of lying serial cheaters, promiscuous cockteasers, and attention whores, for example). So, when communicating with these types, WHAT they say is largely irrelevant. The only relevant information is WHY they choose to say what they are saying. The SELECTION of lies is revealing, telling, and informative.

The same applies in psychotherapy. In the anamnestic (intake) phase, most patients confabulate and offer narratives that are ego-syntonic (self-justifying). WHAT they say is not nearly as crucial or edifying as the CHOICES they make in telling their stories.

Narcissists lecture, never talk; seek to impress, never to communicate; ignore other people's input or actively suppress it rather than listen.

The narcissist is so invested and immersed in extracting narcissistic supply from his interlocutors preferably by dazzling them with his brilliance, that he is oblivious to their body language, verbal cues, interjections, events around him, or the environment at large.

The narcissist expostulates and pontificates, opines and

defines, edifies and rectifies, rants and raves and rambles for hours on end, ceaselessly and breathlessly - and always from a position of pompous self-importance and verbose superiority and faux authority.

People - his mum and numbed audience - find his exhibitionistic, delusional, and coercive grandiosity so repellent and off-putting that they shun his unilateral company altogether.

Abusing Speech Acts: Three Examples

Big Picture Evasiveness

[Narcissists hate details.](#) They are too self-important and their lives too cosmically significant to be wasted on frivolous trifles and trivia. They are above the fray of the quotidian and concern themselves with strategy, not tactics. They lay out in sweeping, synoptic terms the big picture and leave it to lesser mortals to fill out the yawning gaps and iron out the glaring inconsistencies.

Any attempt to involve the narcissist in the minutia of decision-making and the give and take of human endeavor is perceived by him as a humiliating, ill-intentioned, and deliberate challenge to his grandiose self-perception (his False Self). The narcissist's unwillingness to dirty his hands with the routine, the pedestrian, and the mundane virtually guarantee that his harebrained schemes, hastily laid plans, and convoluted stratagems will go awry and end in failure.

His coercive delegation of tasks, the cascade of often contradictory instructions, the grandiosity and aggressive superiority that characterize his expectations and fantasies

- all these alienate and infuriate his bosses, collaborators, partners, suppliers, customers, and employees as well as his intimate partners.

Some of them end up acting passive-aggressively and spitefully undermining the joint enterprise. Others, worn by the narcissist's aloofness and godlike detachment from reality, simply give up: they go through the motions robotically, awaiting the inevitable meltdown.

Alloplastic Defenses and Shifting Blame

Narcissists are hypervigilant and, consequently, misperceive rejection everywhere. Not being sexually desired; not occupying the center of attention; not garnering narcissistic supply; not being the alpha male in the room or the most intelligent person in the group - all constitute grave narcissistic injuries to his or her False Self.

The psychopath is goal-oriented, so he regards the very same "rejections" as mere challenges to be overcome: I am not desired? Will render myself irresistible and make her jealous by triangulating - or just move on to the next target; I am not the center of attention? If I want to, I will make sure that I am; and so on.

So, both narcissists and psychopaths are competitive and hellbent on winning and prevailing - but for different ends.

The narcissist seeks to secure an uninterrupted flow of narcissistic supply and the psychopaths aims to achieve his goals (money, sex, power, or, less commonly, fame and status).

Another facet shared by narcissists and psychopaths is their alloplastic defenses: they are never fully responsible, accountable, to blame, or guilty for their misconduct.

Narcissists who cheat, for example, are likely to say: "I was drunk and taken advantage of", or "You made me do it", or "I had no choice under the circumstances but to act the way I did." The psychopath will use the theory of just deserts: "They provoked or mistreated me or acted stupidly, so they had it coming", or "I deserved it, so I took it", or "This is the way of the world and I had to do what I did just in order to survive."

Passive-aggressive Gaslighting

Nothing is more infuriating than the [passive-aggressive evasiveness or gaslighting of the narcissist and psychopath](#).

He denies that anything at all had happened, then he parades a kaleidoscopic array of protean contradictory versions of what may actually have occurred, then he minimizes the meaning of what finally he grudgingly acknowledges had transpired. Throughout this teeth extracting process, he implies that to dispute his claims or doubt him is a sure sign of derangement and proof positive of an impaired reality test.

Having admitted wrongdoing, he axiologically reframes the transgression: he did nothing wrong in his book, the values of the injured party are old-fashioned or plain irrational, his misconduct is common or accepted where he comes from, he could not have acted differently under the circumstances and constraints of the moment, he had no premeditated intention to act the way he did, it just

happened, he was drunk or high or stressed or angry or sad or disappointed, lonely and miserable.

Finally he shifts blame (alloplastic defense with an external locus of control): the narcissist or psychopath was drunk or high, he was forced or coopted, got taken by surprise or gullibly taken advantage of and abused.

Or the perennial: it is all the victim's or hurt party's fault, she made him do it, she misbehaved, abused, pushed him to misdeeds, to the brink of insanity, to the point of no return where he could no longer recognize himself. Usurping the victim role is a surefire sign that the narcissist or psychopath has done something truly rotten or dangerous.

[Gaslighting by narcissists and psychopaths](#) is surreal and disorienting. They lie reflexively, with a straight face, and without missing a beat.

The psychopath's prevarication frequently involves very convincing mimicry of other people's behaviors and affect. This engenders an alternative, almost hallucinatory or nightmarish reality.

Here are two simple rules:

1. The psychopath is never sad - and always mad (at you); and
2. When the psychopath says "I am bad" (is ostensibly repentant), he means to say "I am afraid" (of the consequences of his actions)

As Cleckley wrote in his masterpiece, "The Mask of

Sanity", actions and behaviors are the psychopath's only true forms of communication, his language. We should, therefore, pay attention exclusively to what the psychopath does and utterly ignore absolutely everything he says.

Why do we often [believe and trust narcissists and borderlines](#) when they tell us what had happened? Why do we fall for their lies?

Because they are not lies. Psychopaths prevaricate to secure goals. Narcissists and borderlines rarely do: more commonly they confabulate.

Confabulation is a desperate attempt to bridge dissociative memory gaps ("lost time" or "blackouts") by extrapolating from past experience and creatively generating a fiction, a narrative as to what probably and plausibly might have happened in the missing hours or days.

Confabulating is intended to both restore identity continuity and cohesion and to hide the missing segments in the narcissist's or borderline's personal histories.

Confabulations - effectively false recall - are irresistibly convincing and alluringly reassuring because: 1. The narcissist or borderline honestly and firmly believe them to be true; 2. They have the power of memories and therefore appear to be objective and authentic; 3. They are always very likely, plausible, and even highly probable - so easy to accept by all parties.

In many cases, there is a fourth reason: the confabulation allows everyone involved to negate and efficaciously ignore a painful reality or an uncomfortable alternative scenario or set of facts. We all - including the

confabulator - want to believe the confabulation because it affords us comfort, succor, and a peace of mind.

Narcissists and borderlines dissociate and confabulate ceaselessly. It is easy to be drawn into their counterfactual alt reality, the twilight zone of their inventive probabilities, the psychotic realm of their discontinuous existence. Confirmation bias does the rest: having committed ourselves to the narcissist's or borderline's version of events, we filter out and suppress all countervailing information and contradictory or challenging facts and possibilities.

No Reasoning with the Mentally Ill

[Mentally ill people cannot be reasoned with or analyzed with any rationality.](#) This is because they are capable of harboring opposing, dissonant, and contradictory cognitions and emotions at the same time (paradoxical thinking and hyperflexibility). Bateson called it the "double bind" and Laing dubbed it the "incompatible knot". Their speech acts and decisions need to be deconstructed, not merely observed.

From the outside, persons with psychiatric or psychological problems appear to be impulsive, erratic, labile, unpredictable, antisocial, dysempathic, dangerous, heartless, mendacious, and egotistical. But the truth is that they are simply meandering along the conflicting paths of their psyche.

This fragmentation of the alienated self and cathecting of (emotionally investing in) internal rather than external objects may have to do with what Giddens called ontological insecurity.

Even in patients with milder syndromes, such as personality disorders, there is a glaring absence of order, continuity, cohesive identity, meaning, emotional stability, reduced anxiety, and consistent positivity (or negativity - the consistency matters, not the valence). Such epic fracturing impedes the evolution of a theory of mind, a worldlife and worldview, and of logic itself.

We base our perceptions and understanding of others on intersubjectivity and empathy – [mentalization, a theory of mind](#), placing ourselves in other people's shoes. But it is a speculative system founded almost entirely on trust: it is based on honest reporting by others of their inner (mental) states and on the correlations of these self-reports to observable actions and behaviors. Dishonest self-reporting leads to discrepancies with observables which engender disorientation and induce our dysfunctional responses.

People with Cluster B (dramatic or erratic) personality disorders consistently mislead and misrepresent their psychological self-states, emotions, and cognitions. This prevarication has to do with identity diffusion or disturbance; dissociative amnesia; confabulation; and manipulative lying and gaslighting.

Consequently, there is no point in trying to grasp, analyze, comprehend, retrodict, or predict these personalities. They do not possess a stable core. They are either subjected to and at the mercy of the labile and dysregulated whims of their moods or emotions - or no longer with us, steeped in delusions of grandeur within fantastic landscapes (pseudopsychotic impaired reality testing) - or lying through their teeth.

Language as a Weapon

The Macedonians have a word for it - "Magla", fog. It signifies the twin arts of duplicity and ambiguity. In the mental asylum that the swathe of socialist countries was, even language was pathologized. It mutated into a weapon of self defence, a verbal fortification, a medium without a message, replacing words with vocables. Easterners (in this text, the unfortunate residents of the Kafkaesque landscape which stretches between Russia and Albania) don't talk or communicate. They fend off. They hide and evade and avoid and disguise. In the planet of capricious and arbitrary unpredictability, of shifting semiotic and semantic dunes, that they inhabited for so many decades (or centuries) - they perfected the ability to say nothing in lengthy, Castro-like speeches. The ensuing convoluted sentences are Arabesques of meaninglessness, acrobatics of evasion, lack of commitment elevated to an ideology. The Easterner prefers to wait and see and see what waiting brings. It is the postponement of the inevitable that leads to the inevitability of postponement as a strategy of survival.

It is impossible to really understand an Easterner. The syntax fast deteriorates into ever more labyrinthine structures. The grammar tortured to produce the verbal Doppler shifts essential to disguise the source of the information, its distance from reality, the speed of its degeneration into rigid official versions. Buried under the lush flora and fauna of idioms without an end, the language erupts, like some exotic rash, an autoimmune reaction to its infection and contamination. And this newspeak, this malignant form of political correctness is not the exclusive domain of politicians or "intellectuals". Like vile weeds it spread throughout, strangling with

absent minded persistence the ability to understand, to agree, to disagree and to debate, to present arguments, to compare notes, to learn and to teach. Easterners, therefore, never talk to each other - rather, they talk at each other. They exchange subtexts, camouflage-wrapped by elaborate, florid, texts. They read between the lines, spawning a multitude of private languages, prejudices, superstitions, conspiracy theories, rumours, phobias and mass hysterias. Theirs is a solipsistic world - where communication is permitted only with oneself and the aim of language is to throw others off the scent.

This has profound implications. Communication through unequivocal, unambiguous, information-rich symbol systems is such an integral and crucial part of our world - that its absence is not postulated even in the remotest galaxies which grace the skies of science fiction. In this sense, Easterners are nothing short of aliens. It is not that they employ a different language, a code to be deciphered by a new Champollion. The Cyrillic alphabet is not the obstacle. It is also not the outcome of cultural differences. It is the fact that language is put by Easterners to a different use - not to communicate but to obscure, not to share but to abstain, not to learn but to defend and resist, not to teach but to preserve ever less tenable monopolies, to disagree without incurring wrath, to criticize without commitment, to agree without appearing to do so. Thus, Eastern contracts are vague expressions of intentions at a given moment - rather than the clear listing of long term, iron-cast and mutual commitments. Eastern laws are loopholed incomprehensibles, open to an exegesis so wide and so self-contradictory that it renders them meaningless. Eastern politicians and Eastern intellectuals often hang themselves by their own verbose Gordic knots, having stumbled through a minefield of logical fallacies and

endured self inflicted inconsistencies. Unfinished sentences hover in the air, like vapour above a semantic swamp.

In some countries (the poorer ones, which were suppressed for centuries by foreign occupiers), there is the strong urge not to offend. Still at the tribal-village stage of social development, intimacy and inter-dependence are great. Peer pressure is irresistible and it results in conformity and mental homogeneity. Aggressive tendencies, strongly repressed in this social pressure cooker, are close under the veneer of forced civility and violent politeness. Constructive ambiguity, a non-committal "everyone is good and right", an atavistic variant of moral relativism and tolerance bred of fear and of contempt - are all at the service of this eternal vigilance against aggressive drives, at the disposal of a never ending peacekeeping mission.

In other countries, language is used cruelly and ruthlessly to ensnare one's enemies, to sow confusion and panic, to move the masses, to leave the listeners in doubt, in hesitation, in paralysis, to gain control, or to punish. There, symbols are death sentences in both the literal and the figurative senses. Poets, authors and journalists still vanish regularly and newspapers and books are compiled into black lists with dreadful consequences. In these countries, language is enslaved and forced to lie. There are no news - only views, no interest - only interests, no facts - only propaganda, no communication - only ex-communication. The language is appropriated and expropriated. It is considered to be a weapon, an asset, a piece of lethal property, a traitorous mistress to be gang raped into submission.

And yet in other places in the East, the language is a lover. The infatuation with its very sound leads to a pyrotechnic type of speech which sacrifices its meaning to its music. Its speakers pay more attention to the composition than to the content. They are swept by it, intoxicated by its perfection, inebriated by the spiralling complexity of its forms. Here, language is an inflammatory process. It attacks the social tissues with artistic fierceness. It invades the healthy cells of reason and logic, of cool headed argumentation and level headed debate. It raises the temperature of the body politic. It often kills. It moves masses. Submerged in and lured by the notes issued forth by the pied piper of the moment - nations go to war, or to civil war, resonating with the echoes of their language.

Language is a leading indicator of the psychological and institutional health of social units. Social capital can often be measured in cognitive (hence, verbal-lingual) terms. To monitor the level of comprehensibility and lucidity of texts is to study the degree of sanity of nations (think about the rambling "Mein Kampf"). There can exist no hale society without unambiguous speech, without clear communications, without the traffic of idioms and content that is an inseparable part of every social contract. Our language determines how we perceive our world. It IS our mind and our consciousness. The much touted transition starts in the mind and consciousness determines reality. Marx would have approved.

Annex: The Shifting Sands of Finance Lingo

In 1976, the word "subprime" used to mean: a loan offered to desirable, creditworthy clients with its interest rate set below the prime rate. Within less than 15 years it

came to be defined by this arbiter of proper usage, the Oxford English Dictionary, as: *“Of or designating a loan, typically having relatively unfavorable terms, made to a borrower who does not qualify for other loans because of a poor credit history.”*

But, this is far from being the most startling transformation in the field of finance. The word "bank" is derived from the old Italian word "banca": a bench or a counter. Italian "bankers" (money dealers) used to conduct their business on such implements. Hence the word "bankrupt" ("banca rotta", or "broken bench", which is what irate clients did to the furniture of bankers who did not honor their commitments).

Fittingly, the word "broker" comes from the hedonistic French bon mot "brokiere", someone who opens bottles of wine (and then consumes their content - usually, at their clients' expense, needless to add).

The origins of the ponderous word "budget" are no more venerable: French tradesmen during the Middle Ages carried their money in a bouge (diminutive: bougette), a leather bag or knapsack. Later, the word came to signify the contents of the bougette. In the 18th century, Britain's Chancellor of the Exchequer (minister of finance) would present his annual statement and, thus, "open his bougette (budget)".

Finance is a field of human endeavor replete with conflict and murky dealings. Consider the origins of the ubiquitous word "negotiate". It literally means "not to be at ease" or "not be done at leisure". The Romans also gave us "bills". Official documents were sealed with a wax bubble called "bulla". Later, the very documents thus

stamped acquired the name "bulla" or "billa". Hence "bill".

Poets in Somalia hold an inordinate sway over the indigenous population. They sing the praises of war with the same alacrity and vehemence that they invest in glorifying peace. And the population listens and follows these dark skinned pied pipers. Lately, they have been extolling peace and peace prevails in Somaliland and the other state-like enclaves in this tortured shadow of a country.

In the evening we celebrate a birthday party under deciduous trees, in floodlit darkness, somewhere in the Balkans. The voices of industrious crickets, of late chirping birds, of the cesma - the fabled Balkan water fountain - all intermingle to produce an auditory magic. A famous satirist and poet catapults slurred, vitriolic diatribes at a guest from the West that I brought with me. His words ring inebriatedly authentic. He need not learn the language, he exclaims, of people without a spirit and without a mind. He is referring to English. His country - he triumphantly shrills - is the best, an island of civilization among the barbarians at the gates. He enumerates his neighbours and proceeds to describe in vivid, gut wrenching detail what he would do to them all, given the opportunity. "The rotten core of our national apple" - a melancholy contribution from a professor of psychiatry.

Another day. As the moon bit into the otherwise scorching sun - the streets emptied. Shops closed, the traffic halted, workers remained cooped up in steamy offices. Why all this - I asked my friend. He is a leading journalist, an author, an editor and a media personality. He looked at me

warily and proceeded to expound upon the health risks entailed in being exposed to the eclipse. He was serious as was evidenced by his subsequent descent into his basement and by the resounding bolting of the anti-nuclear double plated armoured door. He offered me to join him and was appalled to hear that I had every intention of watching the eclipse - and from the street.

The intellectuals of the Balkans - a curse, not in disguise. a nefarious presence, ominous, erratic and corrupt. Sometimes, at the nucleus of all conflict and mayhem - at other times (of ethnic cleansing or suppression of the media) conspicuously absent. Zeligs of umpteen disguises and ever-changing, shimmering loyalties.

They exert no moderating, countervailing influence - on the contrary, they radicalize, dramatize, poison and incite. Intellectuals are prominent among all the nationalist parties in the Balkans - and rare among the scant centre parties that have recently sprung out of the ashes of communism.

They do not disseminate the little, outdated knowledge that they do possess. Rather they keep it as a guild would, unto themselves, jealously. In the vanity typical of the insecure, they abnegate all foreign knowledge. They rarely know a second language sufficiently to read it. They promote their brand of degreed ignorance with religious zeal and punish all transgressors with fierceness and ruthlessness. They are the main barriers to technology transfers and knowledge enhancement in this wretched region. Their instincts of self preservation go against the best interests of their people. Unable to educate and teach - they prostitute their services, selling degrees or corrupting themselves in politics. They make up a big part

of the post communist nomenclature as they have a big part of the communist one. The result is economics students who never heard of Milton Friedman or Kenneth Arrow and students of medicine who offer sex or money or both to their professors in order to graduate.

Thus, instead of advocating and promoting freedom and liberalization - they concentrate on the mechanisms of control, on manipulating the worn levers of power. They are the dishonest brokers of corrupted politicians and their businessmen cronies. They are heavily involved - oft times the initiators - of suppression and repression, especially of the mind and of the spirit. The black crows of nationalism perched upon their beleaguered ivory towers.

They could have chosen differently. In 1989, the Balkans had a chance the likes of which it never had before. In Yugoslavia, the government of the reformist (though half hearted) Ante Markovic. Elsewhere, Communism was gasping for a last breath and the slaughter of the beast was at hand. The intellectuals of Central Europe, of the Baltic States - even of Russia - chose to interpret these events to their people, to encourage freedom and growth, to posit goals and to motivate. The intellectuals of the Balkans failed miserably. Terrified by the sights and sounds of their threatened territory - they succumbed to obscurantism, resorted to the nostalgic, the abstract and the fantastic, rather than to the pragmatic. This choice is evident even in their speech. Marred by centuries of cruel outside domination - it is all but meaningless. No one can understand what a Balkanian has to say. Both syntax and grammar are tortured into incomprehensibility. Evasion dominates, a profusion of obscuring verbal veils, twists and turns hiding a vacuous deposition.

The Balkan intellectuals chose narcissistic self absorption and navel gazing over "other-orientation". Instead of seeking integration (as distinct from assimilation) - they preach and practice isolation. They aim to differentiate themselves not in a pluralistic, benign manner - but in vicious, raging defiance of "mondialism" (a Serbian propaganda term). To define themselves AGAINST all others - rather than to compare and learn from the comparison. Their love affair with a (mostly concocted) past, their future-phobia, the ensuing culture shock - all follow naturally from the premises of their disconsolate uniqueness. Balkan intellectuals are all paranoids. Scratch the surface, the thin, bow tied, veneer of "kultur" - and you will find an atavistic poet, fighting against the very evil wrought by him and by his actions. This is the Greek tragedy of this breathtaking region. Nature here is cleverer than humans. It is exactly their conspiracies that bring about the very things they have to conspire against in the first place.

All over the world, intellectuals are the vanguard, the fifth column of new ideas, the resistance movement against the occupation of the old and the banal. Here intellectuals preach conformity, doing things the old, proven way, protectionism against the trade of liberal minds. All intellectuals here - fed by the long arm of the state - are collaborators. True, all hideous regimes had their figleaf intellectuals and with a few exceptions, the regimes in the Balkans are not hideous. But the principle is the same, only the price varies. Prostituting their unique position in semi-literate, village-tribal societies - intellectuals in the Balkans sold out en masse. They are the inertial power - rather than the counterfist of reform. They are involved in politics of the wrong and doomed kind. The Balkan would

have been better off had they decided to remain aloof, detached in their archipelago of universities.

There is no real fire in Balkan intellectuals. Oh, they get excited and they shout and blush and wave their hands ever so vigorously. But they are empty. It is full gas in neutral. They get nowhere because they are going nowhere. They are rational and conservative and some are emotional and "leftist". But it is all listless and lifeless, like the paces of a very old mechanism, set in motion 80 years ago and never unwound.

All that day of the eclipse of the last millennium, even the intellectuals stayed in their cellars and in their offices and did not dare venture out. They emerged when night fell, accustomed to the darkness, unable to confront their own eclipse, hiding from the evil influence of a re-emerging sun.

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Why Does a Narcissist Write Poetry?

They say, with a knowing smile: "If he is really a narcissist - how come he writes such [beautiful poetry](#)?"

"Words are the sounds of emotions" - they add - "and he claims to have none". They are smug and comfortable in their well classified world, my doubters.

But I use words as others use algebraic signs: with meticulousness, with caution, with the precision of the artisan. I sculpt in words. I stop. I tilt my head. I listen to the echoes. The tables of emotional resonance. The fine tuned reverberations of pain and love and fear. Air waves and photonic ricochets answered by chemicals secreted in my listeners and my readers.

I know beauty. I have always known it in the biblical sense, it was my passionate mistress. We made love. We procreated the cold children of my texts. I measured its aesthetics admiringly. But this is the mathematics of grammar. It was merely the undulating geometry of syntax.

Devoid of all emotions, I watch your reactions with the sated amusement of a Roman nobleman.

I wrote:

"My world is painted in shadows of fear and sadness. Perhaps they are related - I fear the sadness. To avoid the overweening, sepia melancholy that lurks in the dark corners of my being, I deny my own emotions. I do so

thoroughly, with the single-mindedness of a survivor. I persevere through dehumanization. I automate my processes. Gradually, parts of my flesh turn into metal and I stand there, exposed to sheering winds, as grandiose as my disorder.

I write poetry not because I need to. I write poetry to gain attention, to secure adulation, to fasten on to the reflection in the eyes of others that passes for my Ego. My words are fireworks, formulas of resonance, the periodic table of healing and abuse.

These are dark poems. A wasted landscape of pain ossified, of scarred remnants of emotions. There is no horror in abuse. The terror is in the endurance, in the dreamlike detachment from one's own existence that follows. People around me feel my surrealism. They back away, alienated, discomfited by the limpid placenta of my virtual reality.

Now I am left alone and I write umbilical poems as others would converse.

Before and after prison, I have written reference books and essays. My first book of short fiction was critically acclaimed and commercially successful.

I tried my hand at poetry before, in Hebrew, but failed. Tis strange. They say that poetry is the daughter of emotion. Not in my case.

I never felt except in prison - and yet there, I wrote in prose. The poetry I authored as one does math. It was the syllabic music that attracted me, the power to compose with words. I wasn't looking to express any profound truth

or to convey a thing about myself. I wanted to recreate the magic of the broken metric. I still recite aloud a poem until it SOUNDS right. I write upright - the legacy of prison. I stand and type on a laptop perched atop a cardboard box. It is ascetic and, to me, so is poetry. A purity. An abstraction. A string of symbols open to exegesis. It is the most sublime intellectual pursuit in a world that narrowed down and has become only my intellect."

Hannah Gabbay, author and journalist, read my poems and wrote to me:

"But for a few of your poems that betray an innocence you know was lost (mind you I say know, rather than simply, was) there is a dark and haunting quality that pervades your poetry. Beauty, in all its carnal and cerebral manifestations, and beautiful vulgarity, converge. The words are woven masterfully, as the tapestry at Bayeux.

Your poems speak to the ideals to which we of noble or ignoble intention, all aspire. They speak to the corporeal baseness and longings we all harbor deep in the cellars of our hearts -- because at the end of the day, we are, Animal.

We may strive for the celestial, the G-dlike in us, but the primitive gives way in us each and all. It is what we are -- whatever our unique pathologies or idiosyncrasies. Part Divine. Part Beast. Some of more the former. Some of us more the latter.

In this, many of your poems give the impression that you are exposing to the reader your inner sanctum; raw emotion -- down to your flesh and bone. But, therein lies

the rub: it is the impression you wish to convey. Not the true self. You harness this truth and distill its essence as vapor. The vapor is inhaled, consumed. You know it is there, but cannot see it. You transmit it as light. But light, refracted. It can be seen in all its prisms, but its origins and end-point cannot be discerned. It eludes any tangible grasp.

You judiciously select your words and delegate to each of them, a task: please, carefully selected word, tell the reader what I want him or her to believe of me. Speak from the me that I would be, if I could be. Speak as though I'm without inhibition to expose fallibility. Speak low, speak softly, speak angrily -- speak in the way I would do, if I could do so extemporaneously, messily, from the heart. Speak this way, you do, then stop just short of letting the floodgates open.

I read words that are born of emotion, and, emotional reluctance at one and the same time. It is why your poems are brilliant and artfully written. I don't believe they could be so masterful were there not a deliberateness to them. Your respect for words is noble, admirable, even. To me, however, it seems you love and respect these words more than the emotion to which they have been assigned the task of describing. Your astronomic intellect is your savior, I believe, in this regard. For even if you have not experienced each to its tormented end, or full-breadth, you *know* what it feels like: loss, longing, angst, isolation, desolation, awe, demoralization, hope renewed, hope deferred, obsession, denigration, indifference, and love. Isn't knowing the same as feeling? As doing? Your poems elicit this wonderment in me: where does the הנה end, and your mind, begin?"

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Manners of Speech

I. Introduction

Well into the 16th century, people in a quest for knowledge approached scholars who, in turn, consulted musty, hand-written tomes in search of answers. [Gutenberg's press](#) cut out these middlemen. The curious now obtained direct access to the accumulated wisdom of millennia in the form of printed, bound books. Still, gatekeepers (such as publishers and editors) persisted as privileged intermediaries between authors, scientists, and artists and their audiences.

The Internet is in the process of [rendering redundant](#) even these vestiges of the knowledge monopoly. But, the revolution it portends is far more fundamental. The Internet is about the death of the written word as a means of exchange and a store of value.

As a method of conveying information, written words are inefficient and ambiguous. Sounds and images are far superior, but, until recently, could not be communicated ubiquitously and instantaneously. True, letters on paper or on screen evoke entire mental vistas, but so do sounds and images, especially the sounds of spoken words.

Thus, textual minimalism is replacing books and periodicals. It consists of abbreviations (used in chats, instant messaging, e-mail, and mobile phone SMS) and brevity (snippets that cater to the abridged attention span of internet surfers). Increasingly, information is conveyed via images and audio, harking back to our beginnings as a species when ideograms and songs constituted the main mode of communication.

II. Speech

Scholars like J. L. Austin and H. P. Grice have suggested novel taxonomies of speech acts and linguistic constructs. The prevailing

trend is to classify speech according to its functions - indicative, interrogative, imperative, expressive, performative, etc.

A better approach may be to classify sentences according to their relations and subject matter.

We suggest four classes of sentences:

Objective

Sentences pertaining or relating to OBJECTS. By "objects" we mean - tangible objects, abstract objects, and linguistic (or language) objects (for a discussion of this expanded meaning of "object" - see ["Bestowed Existence"](#)).

The most intuitive objective speech is the descriptive, or informative, sentence. In this we also include ascriptions, examples, classifications, etc.

The expressive sentence is also objective since it pertains to (the inner state of) an object (usually, person or living thing) - "I feel sad".

Argumentative performatives (or expositives) are objective because they pertain to a change in the state of the object (person) making them. The very act of making the argumentative performative (a type of speech act) alters the state of the speaker. Examples of argumentative performatives: "I deny", "I claim that", "I conclude that".

Some exclamations are objective (when they describe the inner state of the exclaiming person) - "how wonderful (to me) this is!"

"Objective" sentences are not necessarily true or valid or sound sentences. If a sentence pertains to an object or relates to it, whether true or false, valid or invalid, sound or unsound - it is objective.

Relational

Sentences pertaining or relating to relations between objects (a meta level which incorporates the objective).

Certain performatives are relational (scroll below for more).

Software is relational - and so are mathematics, physics, and logics. They all encode relations between objects.

The imperative sentence is relational because it deals with a desired relation between at least two objects (one of them usually a person) - "(you) go (to) home!"

Exclamations are, at times, relational, especially when they are in the imperative or want to draw attention to something - "look at this flower!"

Extractive

Interrogative sentences (such as the ones which characterize science, courts of law, or the press). Not every sentence which ends with a question mark is interrogative, of course.

Performative (or Speech Acts)

Sentences that effect a change in the state of an object, or alter his relations to other objects. Examples: "I surrender", "I bid", "I agree", and "I apologize". Uttering the performative sentence amounts to doing something, to irreversibly changing the state of the speaker and his relations with other objects.

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The Basic Dilemma of the Artist

"I know of no 'new programme'. Only that art is forever manifesting itself in new forms, since there are forever new personalities-its essence can never alter, I believe. Perhaps I am wrong. But speaking for myself, I know that I have no programme, only the unaccountable longing to grasp what I see and feel, and to find the purest means of expression for it."

Karl Schmidt-Rottluff

The psychophysical problem is long standing and, probably, intractable.

We have a corporeal body. It is an entity subject to all the laws of physics. Yet, we experience ourselves, our internal lives, and external events in a manner which provokes us to postulate the existence of a corresponding, non-physical complement. This corresponding entity ostensibly incorporates a dimension of our being which, in principle, can never be tackled with the instruments and the formal logic of science.

A compromise was proposed long ago: the soul is nothing but our self awareness (introspection) or the way we experience ourselves. But this is a flawed solution because it assumes that the human experience is uniform, unequivocal and identical. It might well be so - but there is no methodologically rigorous way of proving it. We have no way to objectively ascertain that all of us experience pain in the same manner or that the pain that we experience is the same for all of us. This limitation on our knowledge prevails even when the causes of the sensation are carefully controlled and monitored.

A scientist might say that we can map and pinpoint the exact part of the brain which is responsible for pain. Moreover, science is even able to demonstrate a monovalent relationship between a pattern of brain activity in situ and pain. In other words, the scientific claim is that patterns of brain activity ARE the pain itself.

Such an argument is, *prima facie*, inadmissible. The fact that two events coincide (even if they do so without fail) does not make them one and the same. The serial occurrence of two events does not make one of them the cause and the other the effect, as is well known ("correlation is not causation").

Similarly, the contemporaneous occurrence of two events only means that they are correlated. A correlate is not an alter ego. It is not an aspect of the same event. Activity in the brain appears WHEN pain happens, but it by no means follows that it IS the pain itself.

A stronger argument would crystallize if it were convincingly and repeatedly demonstrated that playing back these patterns of brain activity induces pain. Even so, we would be talking about cause and effect rather than an identity of pain and its correlate in the brain.

The gap is even bigger when we try to capture emotions and sensations by applying natural languages. This seems close to impossible. How can one even half accurately communicate one's anguish, love, fear, or desire? We are prisoners in the universe of our emotions, never to emerge and the weapons of language are useless. Each one of us develops his or her own, idiosyncratic, unique emotional language. It is not a jargon, or a dialect because it cannot be translated or communicated. No dictionary can ever be constructed to bridge this lingual gap.

In principle, experience is incommunicable. People - in the very far future - may be able to harbour the same emotions, chemically or otherwise induced in them. One brain could directly take over another and make it feel the same. Yet, even then these experiences will not be communicable and we will have no way available to us to compare and decide whether there was an identity of sensations or of emotions.

Still, when we say "sadness", we all seem to understand what we are talking about. In the remotest and furthest reaches of the globe, people share the feeling of being sad. It might be evoked by disparate circumstances - yet, we all seem to share some basic element of "being sad". What is this immutable kernel?

We have already said that we are confined to using idiosyncratic emotional languages and that they cannot be translated to other idiosyncratic emotional languages or [otherwise communicated](#).

Let us postulate the existence of a meta language. This language is common to all humans. Indeed, it seems to be the language of [being human](#). Emotions are statements in this language. This language must exist to make even the most rudimentary [communication](#) between humans possible.

It would appear that there must be a correlation between this universal language and our myriad idiosyncratic, individualistic languages.

Pain is correlated to brain activity, on the one hand and to this universal language, on the other. We would, therefore, tend to [parsimoniously](#) assume that the two correlates are but one and the same. In other words, it may well be that the brain activity which "goes together" with pain is merely the physical manifestation of the meta-lingual element "PAIN". We feel pain and this is our experience, unique, incommunicable, expressed solely in our idiosyncratic language.

We know that we are feeling pain and we communicate it to others. As we do so, we use the meta, universal language. The very use (or even the thought of using) this language provokes the kind of brain activity which is so closely correlated with pain.

It is important to clarify that this universal language could well be a physical, even a genetic one. Nature might have endowed us with it to improve our chances of survival. The communication of emotions is of an unparalleled evolutionary importance and a species devoid of the ability to communicate the existence of pain, for instance, would surely perish. Pain is our guardian against the perils of our surroundings.

To summarize: we manage our inter-human emotional communication using a universal language which is either physical or, at least, has strong physical correlates.

The function of bridging the gap between our idiosyncratic, private languages and a more universal one was relegated to a group of special individuals called artists. Theirs is the job to experience (mostly emotions) and to mould their experience into the grammar, syntax and vocabulary of a universal language in order to communicate to us the echo of their idiosyncratic language. They are forever mediating between us and their experience. Rightly so, the quality of an artist is measured by his ability to loyally represent his unique language to us. The smaller the distance between the original experience (the emotion of the artist) and its external representation, the more prominent the artist.

We declare artistic success when the universally communicable representation succeeds at recreating and evoking in us the original emotion (felt by the artist). It is very much like teleportation which allows, in sci-fi yarns, for the decomposition of the astronaut's body in one spot and its recreation, atom for atom in another.

Even if the artist fails to faithfully recreate his inner world, but succeeds in calling forth any kind of emotional response in his viewers/readers/listeners, he is deemed successful.

Every artist has a reference group, his audience. They could be alive or dead (for instance, he could measure himself against past artists). They could be few or many, but they must be present for art, in its fullest sense, to exist. Modern theories of art speak about the audience as an integral and defining part of artistic creation and even of the artefact itself.

But this, precisely, is the source of the dilemma of the artist:

Who is to determine who is a good, qualitative artist and who is not?

Put differently, who is to measure the distance between the original experience and its representation?

After all, if the original experience is an element of an idiosyncratic, non-communicable, language, we have no access to any information regarding it and, therefore, we are in no position to judge it. Only the artist has access to it and only he can decide how far is his

representation from his original experience. Art criticism is impossible.

Granted, his reference group (his audience, however limited, whether among the living, or among the dead) has access to that meta language, that universal dictionary available to all humans. Still, no member of the audience has access to the artist's original experience and their capacity to pass judgement is, therefore, in great doubt.

On the other hand, only the reference group, only the audience can aptly judge the representation for what it is. The artist is too emotionally involved. True, the cold, objective facts concerning the work of art are available to both artist and reference group, but the audience is in a privileged status, its bias is less pronounced.

Normally, the reference group will use the meta language embedded in us as humans and a modicum of [empathy](#) to try to vaguely compare their emotions to his, to try to grasp the emotional foundation laid by the artist. But this is very much like substituting pornography for real sex. Talking about emotions - let alone making assumptions about what the artist may have felt that we also, perhaps, share - is a far cry from what really transpired in the artist's mind.

We are faced with a dichotomy:

The epistemological elements in the artistic process belong exclusively and incommunicably to the artist.

The ontological aspects of the artistic process are observable by the group of reference but they have no access to the epistemological domain.

And the work of art can be judged only by comparing the epistemological to the ontological.

Nor the artist, neither his group of reference can do it. This mission is nigh impossible.

Thus, an artist must make a decision early on in his career:

Should he remain loyal and close to his emotional experiences and studies and forgo the warmth and comfort of being reassured and directed from the outside, through the reactions of the reference group, or should he consider the views, criticism and advice of the reference group in his artistic creation and, most probably, have to compromise the quality and the intensity of his original emotion in order to be more communicative.

I wish to thank my brother, Sharon Vaknin, a gifted painter and illustrator, for raising these issues.

NOTE: Cognitive Disinhibition

As Jordan Peterson and Shelley Carson reported in 2003, artists may be challenged when it comes to cognitive filtering of information from the outside that is relevant to survival or to goal-orientation (latent inhibition leads to cognitive disinhibition).

In their attempts to categorize and organize the avalanche, artists come up with atypical, eccentric, schizotypal, and unconventional solutions, including hallucinations. They get immersed in their inner world at the expense of reality and personal needs (such as self-care or social functioning).

"A brain-imaging study, done in 2010 by investigators at the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm, suggests the propensity for both creative insights and schizotypal experiences may result from a specific configuration of neurotransmitter receptors in the brain. Using positron-emission tomography, Örjan de Manzano, Fredrik Ullén and their colleagues examined the density of dopamine D2 receptors in the subcortical region of the thalamus in 14 subjects who were tested for divergent-thinking skills. The results indicate that thalamic D2 receptor densities are diminished in subjects with high divergent-thinking abilities, similar to patterns found in schizophrenic subjects in previous studies. The researchers believe that reduced dopamine binding in the thalamus, found in both creative and schizophrenic subjects, may decrease cognitive filtering and allow more information into conscious awareness.

"Clearly, however, not all eccentric individuals are creative. Work from our lab indicates that other cognitive factors, such as high IQ

and high working memory capacity, enable some people to process and mentally manipulate extra information without being overwhelmed by it. Through a series of studies, we have, in fact, shown that a combination of lower cognitive inhibition and higher IQ is associated with higher scores on a variety of creativity measures. The shared vulnerability model suggests that at least a subgroup of highly creative individuals may share some (but not all) biological vulnerability factors with individuals who suffer from psychotic illnesses, such as schizophrenia. This vulnerability may allow the highly creative person access to ideas and thoughts that are inaccessible to those of us with less porous mental filters."

("The Unleashed Mind: Why Creative People Are Eccentric" by Shelley Carson (Scientific American Mind, May/June 2011)

Note: Art as Self-Mutilation

The [internalized anger of Jesus](#) - leading to his suicidal pattern of behaviour - pertained to all of Mankind. His sacrifice "benefited" humanity as a whole.

A self-mutilator, in comparison, appears to be "selfish". His anger is autistic, self-contained, self-referential and, therefore, "meaningless" as far as we are concerned. His catharsis is a private language.

But what people fail to understand is that art itself is an act of self mutilation, the etching of ephemeral pain into a lasting medium, the ultimate private language.

They also ignore, at their peril, the fact that only a very thin line separates self-mutilation - whether altruistic (Jesus) or "egoistic" - and the mutilation of others (serial killers, Hitler).

About inverted saints: <https://samvak.tripod.com/hitler.html>

About serial killers: <https://samvak.tripod.com/serialkillers.html>

The Case of Sergej

Sergej Andreevski is one of Macedonia's foremost painters. I visited his studio in the outskirts of Skopje to avail myself of a rare opportunity: an open invitation by a practicing artist to enter his mind.

Sergej is an action painter in an age of for-hire artisanship, he is an expressionist, bucking the trends of modernism, abstract and otherwise. He splurges paint from his tubes all over the (usually largish) canvass and then dives into it, fingers and soul. He prefers green and blue.

Sergej is a very physical artist. He loves the texture of his colors (though not their smells). He is tall and imposing and likes his experiences raw and direct. But he rebels against the limitations of the physical and its intrusion on his spirit: he makes battle with his canvass, jabbing at it and piercing it, in a bid to extricate himself from its disciplining dimensions.

He paints with music in the background and tries to capture motion and magic by deploying naive but endearing techniques. His is a world of guts. He is a quasi-surrealist, though he rejects this label, any label. He is not a man of theory, but of daubed practice.

Sergej regards his art as an expression and a manifestation of what he calls his "instinct." He finds the need to verbalize the sources of his inspiration tedious, difficult, and superfluous. His sensa and his exposure to other countries and cultures should suffice to account for his work. He admits that mathematical precision and the balance of colors have a role in his art, but only as finishing touches, not as an integral part of the primary process of creation.

He is attuned to other people: their body language, their feelings, other intimate information he can glean. This is his raw material. His art is his reaction to the world, an emotive discharge. His paintings are, thus, emotional capsules, a visual internal biography, a landscape of interactions with himself.

Painting is Sergej's compulsion. The public is secondary. He doodles when he is not painting. When at work, he dissociates ("I cut them out"). Frequently, he has only vague memories of events outside his easel and of the intervening time. Sergej is cursed (or blessed) with

synaesthesia: musical notes assume colors and shapes and have a profound effect on his mood.

He thinks of his paintings as triggers, not as messages. As far as he is concerned, the viewer is at liberty to disagree with the artist on what a work of art means or says: "art is not a language". What matters is that there is a reaction. Sergej is a great believer in art's power to refine and uplift even the coarsest, most vulgar man.

He brings into his art the spell of his homeland, Macedonia, steeped for hundreds of years of solitude in folktales and traditions, the mists of times, the cradle of legends and of superstitions. "Too much knowledge obstructs the artist." Artists need to work on their associations, not to be too erudite, Sergej concludes.

Note: Immersive vs. Trigger Art

There are two types of art: immersive and trigger.

Immersive art invites you into the creator's mind, provides you with privileged access and keys to his or her inner landscape and private language and thus leverages empathy and intersubjectivity to new heights. It engenders a joint theory of mind.

Immersive art is explicit and detailed. It leaves little to the imagination. It fosters resonance via immersion in alternative worlds whose contours and content are provided and controlled exclusively by the artist. The art consumer is a tourist.

In contradistinction, trigger art is sketchy and skeletal. It evokes in the art consumer associations, imagery, and psychological insight by describing usually familiar situations in a journalistic or perfunctory or abstract style.

The art consumer is left to construct his or her own work of art from his or her reactions to the trigger art. The original work of art is therefore purposefully ambiguous and equivocal.

Most modern art and some strands of modern writing are trigger art.

Is Porn a Form of Art?

Is this classic painting by Courbet [pornography or erotic art](#)? Where does one draw the line?

The answer is that there is no line.

Scholars say that porn creates arousal and results in action. But I have frequently masturbated to erotic literature and paintings and even sculptures. And most porn leaves me utterly cold.

Porn is supposed to be goal-oriented. But lots of porn is not (example: homemade videos). Not all porn is objectifying and degrading - yet, this patently erotic painting is the former and many would say the latter.

Porn is harmful, they protest: it involves coercion, exploitation, wrongful depiction of lovemaking (no foreplay), and causes addiction. But in the previous centuries erotic art - in word and image - had the same effects (read the Marquis de Sade). And how do we account for feminist pornography?

But porn is primitive and one-dimensional, you evince. Yet in the past 200 years, philosophers used porn in the service of a variety of social, political, and cultural causes. And frankly, Courbet's vaginal masterpiece (pompously titled "The Origin of the World") has depth (pardon the pun), but little else.

Erotic art is porn designated by self-appointed elites as legitimate and high-brow. Porn is what fails to obtain the sanction and blessing of the cultural establishment. No one is this clearer than in film where the boundaries are so blurred that censors the world over fail to concur: the same movie is categorized as porn in one locale and high art in another. Ask Polanski.

Both [narcissism and art](#) are private languages translated into universally accessible representations intended for public consumption

But the intrinsic creative value of a work of art does not depend on its interaction with the audience. Narcissistic creations (like advertising)

do: they derive their meaning and value from the number of eyeballs they attract and the behaviors they elicit and engender.

Art and Disability

These 2 award-winning film directors have [Down Syndrome](#). Clearly, they are very far from the stereotype of retarded (intellectually disabled or intellectually challenged) "mongoloids". Other people with Down Syndrome hold advanced, even post-graduate degrees.

Something is wrong here: Down Syndrome is supposed to be a genetic clinical entity, as immutable and identical across all sufferers as tuberculosis. Yet, incredibly, the variance in intelligence, accomplishments, and self-efficacy among Down patients is great.

The situation in our understanding of trisomy 21, its ramifications and manifestations is reminiscent of how we misconstrued and misunderstood autism spectrum disorders until a few years ago. At first we thought that autists are retarded. Then we accused bad mothering as the etiological determinant. Then we considered it a disorder of communication (wrong processing of environmental cues). Inner noise. Being overwhelmed by stimuli. Any number of crackpot theories. Today we realize that autism is a neurological problem.

Down Syndrome may be a neurological disorder as well and may result in extreme emotional dysregulation, even lability (like in Borderline Personality Disorder or CPTSD or Highly Sensitive People and superempaths). People with Down syndrome are known for their heightened affect. It is a promising line of inquiry well worth pursuing because it may yield treatment modalities (therapies) and educational programs that may unlock the creative potential in these loving, childlike innocents.

Art as Cipher

[Modern works of art](#) contain copious amounts of coded information (provenance) about the artist, his life, his milieu, and his period; influences on his art; the tools of his art (colors, shapes, brushes, light, and so on); his techniques; and, above all, his philosophy of art and his message

Like paper money, cryptocurrencies, collectibles, or tulips during the era of tulipmania in Amsterdam, works of art are a store of value: conduits of wealth transfer and vehicles of speculation. They are worth millions because a sufficient number of people agree that they are worth millions and are willing to dole out these egregious dollops of dough in order to temporarily own them.

Form and Malignant Form The Metaphorically Correct Artist and other Romanticist Mutations

Every type of human activity has a malignant equivalent.

The pursuit of happiness, the accumulation of wealth, the exercise of power, or the [love of one's self](#) are all tools in the struggle to survive and, as such, are commendable. They do, however, have malignant counterparts: pursuing pleasures (hedonism), greed and avarice as manifested in criminal activities, murderous authoritarian regimes and [narcissism](#).

What separates the malignant versions from the benign ones?

Phenomenologically, they are difficult to tell apart. In which way is a criminal distinct from a [business tycoon](#)? Many will say that there is no distinction. Still, society treats the two differently and has set up [separate social institutions](#) to accommodate these two human types and their activities.

Is it merely a matter of ethical or philosophical judgment? I think not.

The difference seems to lie in the context. Granted, the criminal and the businessman both have the same motivation (at times, obsession):

to make money. Sometimes they both employ the same techniques and adopt the same venues of action. But in which social, moral, philosophical, ethical, historical and biographical contexts do they operate?

A closer examination of their exploits exposes the unbridgeable gap between them. The criminal acts only in the pursuit of money. He has no other considerations, thoughts, motives and emotions, no temporal horizon, no ulterior or external aims, and he does not incorporate other people or social institutions in his deliberations.

The reverse applies to the businessman. He is aware of the fact that he is part of a larger social fabric, that he has to obey the law, that some things are not permissible, that sometimes he has to lose sight of moneymaking for the sake of higher values, institutions, or the future. In short: the criminal is a solipsist - the businessman, socially integrated. The criminal is one track minded - the businessman is aware of the existence of others and of their needs and demands. The criminal has no context - the businessman does (he is a "political animal").

Whenever a human activity, a human institution, or a human thought is refined, purified, reduced to its bare minimum, malignancy ensues. Leukemia is characterized by the exclusive production of one category of blood cells (the white ones) by the bone marrow while abandoning the production of others. Malignancy is reductionist: do one thing, do it best, do it more and most, compulsively pursue one course of action, one idea, never mind the costs. Actually, no costs are admitted - because the very existence of a context is denied, or ignored.

Costs are brought on by conflict and conflict entails the existence of at least two parties. The criminal does not include in his Weltbild the Other. The dictator doesn't suffer because suffering is brought on by recognizing the Other ([empathy](#)). The malignant forms are sui generis, they are Dang an sich, they are categorical, they do not depend on the outside for their existence.

Put differently: the malignant forms are functional but meaningless.

Let us use an illustration to understand this dichotomy:

In France there is a man who has made it his life's mission to spit the furthest a human has ever spat. This way he has made it into the Guinness Book of Records (GBR). After decades of training, he succeeded to spit to the longest distance a man has ever spat and was included in the GBR under miscellany.

The following can be said about this man with a high degree of certainty:

- a. The Frenchman had a purposeful life in the sense that his life had a well-delineated, narrowly focused, and achievable target, which permeated his entire existence and served to define it.
- b. He was a successful man in that he fulfilled his main ambition in life to the fullest. We can rephrase this sentence by saying that he functioned well.
- c. He probably was a happy, content, and satisfied man as far as his main theme in life is concerned.
- d. He achieved significant outside recognition and affirmation of his achievements.
- e. This recognition and affirmation is not limited in time and place.

In other words, he became "part of history".

But how many of us would say that he led a meaningful life? How many would be willing to attribute *meaning* to his spitting efforts? Not many. His life would look to most of us insignificant, ridiculous and bereft of meaning.

This judgment is buttressed by comparing his actual history with his potential or possible history. In other words, we derive the sense of meaninglessness partly from comparing his spitting career with what he could have done and achieved had he invested the same time and efforts differently.

He could have raised children, for instance. This is widely considered to be a more meaningful activity. But why? What makes childrearing more meaningful than distance spitting?

The answer is: common agreement. No philosopher, scientist, or publicist can rigorously establish a hierarchy of the meaningfulness of human actions.

There are two reasons for this surprising inability:

1. There is no connection between function (functioning, functionality) and meaning (meaninglessness, meaningfulness).
2. There are different interpretations of the word "Meaning" and, yet, people use them interchangeably, obscuring the dialogue.

People often confuse Meaning and Function. When asked what is the meaning of their life they respond by using function-laden phrases. They say: "This activity or my work makes my life meaningful", or: "My role in this world is this and, once finished, I will be able to rest in peace, to die". They attach different magnitudes of meaningfulness to various human activities.

Two things are evident:

1. That people use the word "Meaning" not in its philosophically rigorous form. What they mean is really the satisfaction, even the happiness that comes with successful functioning. They want to continue to live when they are privy to these emotions. They confuse this euphoria and regard it as the meaning of life. Put differently, they mistake the "why" for the "what for". The philosophical assumption that life has a meaning is a [teleological](#) one. Life - regarded linearly in a kind of a "progress bar" - proceeds towards something, a final horizon, an aim. But people relate only to what "makes them tick", to the pleasure that they derive from being more or less successful in what they set out to do.

2. Either the philosophers are wrong in that they do not distinguish between human activities (from the point of view of their meaningfulness) or people are wrong in that they do. This apparent conflict can be resolved by observing that people and philosophers use different interpretations of the word "Meaning".

To reconcile these antithetical interpretations, it is best to consider three examples:

Imagine a religious man who has established a new church of which he is the sole member.

Would we say that his life and actions are meaningful?

Probably not.

This seems to imply that quantity somehow bestows meaning. In other words, that meaning is an emergent phenomenon (epiphenomenon). Another right conclusion would be that meaning depends on the [context](#). In the absence of worshippers, even the best run, well-organized, and worthy church might look meaningless. The worshippers - who are part of the church - also provide the context.

This is unfamiliar territory. We are used to thinking of context as something external. We do not feel that our organs provide us with context, for instance (unless we are afflicted with certain mental problems). The apparent contradiction is easily resolved: to provide context, the provider of the context must be either external - or with the inherent, independent capacity to be so.

The churchgoers do constitute the church - but they are not defined by it, they are external to it and they are not dependent on it. This externality - whether as a trait of the providers of context, or as a feature of an emergent phenomenon - is all-important. The very meaning of the system is derived from it.

A few more examples to support this approach:

Imagine a national hero without a nation, an actor without an audience, and an author without (present or future) readers. Do their works have any meaning? Not really. The external perspective again proves all-important.

There is an added caveat, an added dimension here: time. To deny a work of art any meaning, we must know with total assurance that it will never be seen by anyone. Since this is an impossibility (unless it is to be destroyed), a work of art has undeniable, intrinsic meaning, a result of the mere potential to be seen by someone, sometime, somewhere. This potential of a "single gaze" is sufficient to endow any work of art with meaning.

To a large extent, the heroes of history, its main protagonists, are actors with a stage and an audience larger than usual. The only difference between them and "real" thespians might be that future audiences often alter the magnitude of former's "art": it is either diminished or magnified in the eyes of history.

The third example of context-dependent meaningfulness - originally brought up by Douglas Hofstadter in his magnificent opus "Gödel, Escher, Bach - An Eternal Golden Braid" - is genetic material (DNA). Without the right "context" (amino acids) it has no "meaning" (it does not lead to the production of proteins, the building blocks of the organism encoded in the DNA). To illustrate his point, the author sends DNA on a trip to outer space, where, in the absence of the correct biochemical environment, aliens would find it impossible to decipher it (to understand its meaning).

By now it appears clear that for a human activity, institution or idea to be meaningful, a context is needed. Whether we can say the same about things natural remains to be seen. Being [human](#), we tend to assume a privileged status. As in certain metaphysical interpretations of classical quantum mechanics, the observer actively participates in the determination of the world. There would be no meaning if there were no intelligent observers - even in the presence of a context (an important pillar of the "anthropic principle").

In other words, not all contexts were created equal. A human observer is needed in order to determine the meaning, this is an unavoidable constraint. Meaning is the label we give to the interaction between an

entity (material or spiritual) and its context (material or spiritual). So, the human observer is forced to evaluate this interaction in order to extract the meaning. But humans are not identical copies, or clones. They are liable to judge the same phenomena differently, dependent upon their vantage point. They are the product of their nature and nurture, the highly specific circumstances of their lives and their idiosyncrasies.

In an age of moral and ethical relativism, a universal hierarchy of contexts is not likely to go down well with the gurus of philosophy. Yet, the existence of hierarchies as numerous as the number of observers is a notion so intuitive, so embedded in human thinking and behavior that to ignore it would amount to ignoring reality.

People (observers) have privileged systems of attribution of meaning. They constantly and consistently prefer certain contexts to others in the detection of meaning and the set of its possible interpretations. This set would have been infinite were it not for these preferences. The context preferred arbitrarily excludes and disallows certain interpretations (and, therefore, certain meanings).

The benign form is, therefore, the acceptance of a plurality of contexts and of the resulting meanings.

The malignant form is to adopt (and, then, impose) a universal hierarchy of contexts with a Master Context which bestows meaning upon everything. Such malignant systems of thought are easily recognizable because they claim to be comprehensive, invariant and universal. In plain language, these thought systems pretend to explain everything, everywhere and in a way not dependent on specific circumstances. Religion is like that and so are most modern ideologies. Science tries to be different and sometimes succeeds. But humans are frail and frightened and they much prefer malignant systems of thinking because they give them the illusion of gaining absolute power through immutable knowledge.

Two contexts seem to compete for the title of Master Context in human history, the contexts which endow all meanings, permeate all aspects of reality, are universal, invariant, define truth values and solve all moral dilemmas: the Rational and the Affective (emotional).

We live in an age that despite its self-perception as rational is defined and influenced by the emotional Master Context. This is called Romanticism - the malignant form of "being tuned" to one's emotions. It is a reaction to the "cult of idea" which characterized the Enlightenment (Belting, 1998).

Romanticism is the assertion that all human activities are founded on and directed by the individual and his emotions, experience, and mode of expression. Romanticism can, therefore, be construed as a subspecies of individualism. Its roots are ancient: Martin Luther noted disapprovingly that the Catholic Church espoused the view that absolution and redemption depend on the individual, his choices, and his actions (admittedly, mediated by the clergy.) Individualism (though not humanism) seems to predate the Renaissance by a good 15 centuries. As Belting (1998) noted, this gave rise to the concept of the "masterpiece" - an absolute, perfect, unique (idiosyncratic) work by an immediately recognizable and idealized artist.

This relatively novel approach (in historical terms) has permeated human activities as diverse as politics, the formation of families, and art.

[Families](#) were once constructed on purely totalitarian bases. Family formation was a transaction involving considerations both financial and genetic. This was substituted (during the 18th century) by romantic love as the main motivation for and foundation of marriage. Inevitably, this led to the disintegration and to the metamorphosis of the family. To establish a sturdy social institution on such a fickle basis was an experiment doomed to failure.

Romanticism infiltrated the body politic as well. All major political ideologies and movements of the 20th century had romanticist roots, [Nazism](#) more than most. [Communism](#) touted the ideals of equality and justice while Nazism was a quasi-mythological interpretation of history. Still, both were highly romantic movements.

Politicians were and to a lesser degree today are expected to be extraordinary in their personal lives or in their personality traits. Biographies are recast by image and public relations experts ("spin doctors") to fit this mould. [Hitler](#) was, arguably, the most romantic of

all world leaders, closely followed by other dictators and authoritarian figures.

It is a cliché to say that, through politicians, we re-enact our relationships with our parents. [Politicians](#) are often perceived to be father figures. But Romanticism infantilized this transference. In politicians we want to see not the wise, level headed, ideal father but our actual parents: capriciously unpredictable, overwhelming, powerful, unjust, protecting, and awe-inspiring. This is the romanticist view of leadership: anti-Webberian, anti bureaucratic, chaotic. And this set of predilections, later transformed to social dictates, has had a profound effect on the history of the 20th century.

Romanticism manifested in art through the concept of Inspiration. An artist had to have it in order to create. This led to a conceptual divorce between art and artisanship.

As late as the 18th century, there was no difference between these two classes of creative people, the artists and the artisans. Artists accepted commercial orders which included thematic instructions (the subject, choice of symbols, etc.), delivery dates, prices, etc. Art was a product, almost a commodity, and was treated as such by others (examples: Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, Mozart, Goya, Rembrandt and thousands of artists of similar or lesser stature). The attitude was completely businesslike, creativity was mobilized in the service of the marketplace.

Moreover, artists used conventions - more or less rigid, depending on the period - to express emotions. They traded in emotional expressions where others traded in spices, or engineering skills. But they were all traders and were proud of their artisanship. Their personal lives were subject to gossip, condemnation or admiration but were not considered to be a precondition, an absolutely essential backdrop, to their art.

The romanticist view of the artist painted him into a corner. His life and art became inextricable. Artists were expected to transmute and transubstantiate their lives as well as the physical materials that they dealt with. Living (the kind of life, which is the subject of legends or fables) became an art form, at times predominantly so.

It is interesting to note the prevalence of romanticist ideas in this context: Weltschmerz, passion, self destruction were considered fit for the artist. A "boring" artist would never sell as much as a "romantically-correct" one. Van Gogh, Kafka and James Dean epitomize this trend: they all died young, lived in misery, endured self-inflicted pains, and ultimate destruction or annihilation. To paraphrase Sontag, their lives became metaphors and they all contracted the metaphorically correct physical and mental illnesses of their day and age: Kafka developed tuberculosis, Van Gogh was mentally ill, James Dean died appropriately in an accident. In an age of social anomies, we tend to appreciate and rate highly the anomalous. Munch and Nietzsche will always be preferable to more ordinary (but perhaps equally creative) people.

Today there is an anti-romantic backlash (divorce, the disintegration of the romantic nation-state, the death of ideologies, the commercialization and popularization of art). But this counter-revolution tackles the external, less substantial facets of Romanticism. Romanticism continues to thrive in the flourishing of mysticism, of ethnic lore, and of celebrity worship. It seems that Romanticism has changed vessels but not its cargo.

We are afraid to face the fact that life is meaningless unless **WE** observe it, unless **WE** put it in context, unless **WE** interpret it. We feel burdened by this realization, terrified of making the wrong moves, of using the wrong contexts, of making the wrong interpretations.

We understand that there is no constant, unchanged, everlasting meaning to life, and that it all really depends on us. We denigrate this kind of meaning. A meaning that is derived by people from human contexts and experiences is bound to be a very poor approximation to the **ONE, TRUE** meaning. It is bound to be asymptotic to the Grand Design. It might well be - but this is all we have got and without it our lives will indeed prove meaningless.

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A Brief History and Future of the Book

"The free communication of thought and opinion is one of the most precious rights of man; every citizen may therefore speak, write and print freely."

(French National Assembly, 1789)

I. What is a Book?

UNESCO's uninspiring, arbitrary, and ungrounded definition of "book" is:

"Non-periodical printed publication of at least 49 pages excluding covers."

But a book, above all else, is a medium. It encapsulates information (of one kind or another) and conveys it across time and space. Moreover, as opposed to common opinion, it is - and has always been - a rigidly formal affair. Even the latest "innovations" are nothing but ancient wine in sparkling new bottles.

Consider the scrolling protocol. Our eyes and brains are limited readers-decoders. There is only that much that the eye can encompass and the brain interpret. Hence the need to segment data into cognitively digestible chunks. There are two forms of scrolling - lateral and vertical. The papyrus, the broadsheet newspaper, and the computer screen are three examples of the vertical scroll - from top to bottom or vice versa. The e-book, the microfilm, the vellum, and the print book are instances of the lateral scroll - from left to right (or from right to left, in the Semitic languages).

In many respects, audio books are much more revolutionary than e-books. They do not employ visual symbols (all other types of books do), or a straightforward scrolling method. E-books, on the other hand, are a throwback to the days of the papyrus. The text cannot be opened at any point in a series of connected pages and the content is carried only on one side of the (electronic) "leaf". Parchment, by comparison, was multi-paged, easily browseable, and printed on both

sides of the leaf. It led to a revolution in publishing and to the print book. All these advances are now being reversed by the e-book. Luckily, the e-book retains one innovation of the parchment - the hypertext. Early Jewish and Christian texts (as well as Roman legal scholarship) was written on parchment (and later printed) and included numerous inter-textual links. The Talmud, for example, is made of a main text (the Mishna) which hyperlinks on the same page to numerous interpretations (exegesis) offered by scholars throughout generations of Jewish learning.

Another distinguishing feature of books is portability (or mobility). Books on papyrus, vellum, paper, or PDA - are all transportable. In other words, the replication of the book's message is achieved by passing it along and no loss is incurred thereby (i.e., there is no physical metamorphosis of the message). The book is like a perpetuum mobile. It spreads its content virally by being circulated and is not diminished or altered by it. Physically, it is eroded, of course - but it can be copied faithfully. It is permanent.

Not so the e-book or the CD-ROM. Both are dependent on devices (readers or drives, respectively). Both are technology-specific and format-specific. Changes in technology - both in hardware and in software - are liable to render many e-books unreadable. And portability is hampered by battery life, lighting conditions, or the availability of appropriate infrastructure (e.g., of electricity).

II. The Constant Content Revolution

Every generation applies the same age-old principles to new "content-containers". Every such transmutation yields a great surge in the creation of content and its dissemination. The incunabula (the first printed books) made knowledge accessible (sometimes in the vernacular) to scholars and laymen alike and liberated books from the scriptoria and "libraries" of monasteries. The printing press technology shattered the content monopoly. In 50 years (1450-1500), the number of books in Europe surged from a few thousand to more than 9 million! And, as McLuhan has noted, it shifted the emphasis from the oral mode of content distribution (i.e., "communication") to the visual mode.

E-books are threatening to do the same. "Book ATMs" will provide Print on Demand (POD) services to faraway places. People in remote corners of the earth will be able to select from publishing backlists and front lists comprising millions of titles. Millions of authors are now able to realize their dream to have their work published cheaply and without editorial barriers to entry. The e-book is the Internet's prodigal son. The latter is the ideal distribution channel of the former. The monopoly of the big publishing houses on everything written - from romance to scholarly journals - is a thing of the past. In a way, it is ironic. Publishing, in its earliest forms, was a revolt against the writing (letters) monopoly of the priestly classes. It flourished in non-theocratic societies such as Rome, or China - and languished where religion reigned (such as in Sumeria, Egypt, the Islamic world, and Medieval Europe).

With e-books, content will once more become a collaborative effort, as it has been well into the Middle Ages. Authors and audience used to interact (remember Socrates) to generate knowledge, information, and narratives. Interactive e-books, multimedia, discussion lists, and collective authorship efforts restore this great tradition. Moreover, as in the not so distant past, authors are yet again the publishers and sellers of their work. The distinctions between these functions is very recent. E-books and POD partially help to restore the pre-modern state of affairs. Up until the 20th century, some books first appeared as a series of pamphlets (often published in daily papers or magazines) or were sold by subscription. Serialized e-books resort to these erstwhile marketing ploys. E-books may also help restore the balance between best-sellers and midlist authors and between fiction and textbooks. E-books are best suited to cater to niche markets, hitherto neglected by all major publishers.

III. Literature for the Millions

E-books are the quintessential "literature for the millions". They are cheaper than even paperbacks. John Bell (competing with Dr. Johnson) published "The Poets of Great Britain" in 1777-83. Each of the 109 volumes cost six shillings (compared to the usual guinea or more). The Railway Library of novels (1,300 volumes) costs 1 shilling apiece only eight decades later. The price continued to dive throughout the next century and a half. E-books and POD are likely to do unto paperbacks what these reprints did to originals. Some reprint

libraries specialized in public domain works, very much like the bulk of e-book offering nowadays.

The plunge in book prices, the lowering of barriers to entry due to new technologies and plentiful credit, the proliferation of publishers, and the cutthroat competition among booksellers was such that price regulation (cartel) had to be introduced. Net publisher prices, trade discounts, list prices were all anti-competitive inventions of the 19th century, mainly in Europe. They were accompanied by the rise of trade associations, publishers organizations, literary agents, author contracts, royalties agreements, mass marketing, and standardized copyrights.

The sale of print books over the Internet can be conceptualized as the continuation of mail order catalogues by virtual means. But e-books are different. They are detrimental to all these cosy arrangements. Legally, an e-book may not be considered to constitute a "book" at all. Existing contracts between authors and publishers may not cover e-books. The serious price competition they offer to more traditional forms of publishing may end up pushing the whole industry to re-define itself. Rights may have to be re-assigned, revenues re-distributed, contractual relationships re-thought. Moreover, e-books have hitherto been to print books what paperbacks are to hardcovers - re-formatted renditions. But more and more authors are publishing their books primarily or exclusively as e-books. E-books thus threaten hardcovers and paperbacks alike. They are not merely a new format. They are a new mode of publishing.

Every technological innovation was bitterly resisted by Luddite printers and publishers: stereotyping, the iron press, the application of steam power, mechanical typesetting and typesetting, new methods of reproducing illustrations, cloth bindings, machine-made paper, ready-bound books, paperbacks, book clubs, and book tokens. Without exception, they relented and adopted the new technologies to their considerable commercial advantage. It is no surprise, therefore, that publishers were hesitant to adopt the Internet, POD, and e-publishing technologies. The surprise lies in the relative haste with which they came to adopt it, egged on by authors and booksellers.

IV. Intellectual Pirates and Intellectual Property

The first-ever print runs were tiny by our standards and costly by any standard. Gutenberg produced fewer than 200 copies of his eponymous and awe-inspiring Bible and died a broken and insolvent man. Other printers followed suit when they failed to predict demand (by readers) and supply (by authors who acted as their own publishers, pirates, underground printers, and compilers of unauthorized, wild editions of works).

Confronted with the vagaries of this new technology, for many decades printer-publishers confined themselves to pornographic fiction, religious tracts, political pamphlets, dramaturgy, almanacs, indulgences, contracts, and prophecies – in other words, mostly disposable trash. As most books were read aloud – as a communal, not an individual experience – the number of copies required was limited.

Not surprisingly, despite the technological breakthroughs that coalesced to form the modern printing press, printed books in the 17th and 18th centuries were derided by their contemporaries as inferior to their laboriously hand-made antecedents and to the incunabula. One is reminded of the current complaints about the new media (Internet, e-books), its shoddy workmanship, shabby appearance, and the rampant piracy. The first decades following the invention of the printing press, were, as the Encyclopedia Britannica puts it ***"a restless, highly competitive free for all ... (with) enormous vitality and variety (often leading to) careless work"***.

There were egregious acts of piracy - for instance, the illicit copying of the Aldine Latin "pocket books", or the all-pervasive piracy in England in the 17th century (a direct result of over-regulation and coercive copyright monopolies). Shakespeare's work was published by notorious pirates and infringers of emerging intellectual property rights. Later, the American colonies became the world's centre of industrialized and systematic book piracy. Confronted with abundant and cheap pirated foreign books, local authors resorted to freelancing in magazines and lecture tours in a vain effort to make ends meet.

Pirates and unlicensed - and, therefore, subversive - publishers were prosecuted under a variety of monopoly and libel laws (and, later, under national security and obscenity laws). There was little or no difference between royal and "democratic" governments. They all

acted ruthlessly to preserve their control of publishing. John Milton wrote his passionate plea against censorship, *Areopagitica*, in response to the 1643 licencing ordinance passed by Parliament. The revolutionary Copyright Act of 1709 in England established the rights of authors and publishers to reap the commercial fruits of their endeavours exclusively, though only for a prescribed period of time.

Books – at times with their authors – were repeatedly burned as the ultimate form of purging: Luther's works were cast into the flames and, in retaliation, he did the same to Catholic opera; the oeuvres of Rousseau, Servetus, Hernandez, and, of course, of Jewish authors during the Nazi era all suffered an identical fate. Indeed, the Internet is the first text-based medium (at least at its inception) to have evaded censorship and regulation altogether.

V. As Readership Expanded

The battle between industrial-commercial publishers (fortified by ever more potent technologies) and the arts and craftsmanship crowd never ceased and it is raging now as fiercely as ever in numerous discussion lists, fora, tomes, and conferences. William Morris started the "private press" movement in England in the 19th century to counter what he regarded as the callous commercialization of book publishing and the inexorable decline of Renaissance-type libraries and collections.

When the printing press was invented, it was put to commercial use by private entrepreneurs (traders) of the day. Established "publishers" (monasteries), with a few exceptions (e.g., in Augsburg, Germany and in Subiaco, Italy) shunned it and regarded it as a major threat to culture and civilization. Their attacks on printing read like the litanies against self-publishing or corporate-controlled publishing today.

But, as readership expanded (women and the poor became increasingly literate), market forces reacted. The number of publishers multiplied relentlessly. At the beginning of the 19th century, innovative lithographic and offset processes allowed publishers in the West to add illustrations (at first, black and white and then in color), tables, detailed maps and anatomical charts, and other graphics to their books. Battles fought between publishers-librarians over formats (book sizes) and fonts (Gothic versus Roman) were ultimately decided by consumer preferences. Multimedia was born. The e-book

will, probably, undergo a similar transition from being the static digital rendition of a print edition - to being a lively, colorful, interactive and commercially enabled creature.

The commercial lending library and, later, the free library were two additional reactions to increasing demand. As early as the 18th century, publishers and booksellers expressed the fear that libraries will cannibalize their trade. Two centuries of accumulated experience demonstrate that the opposite has happened. Libraries have enhanced book sales and have become a major market in their own right.

VI. The State of Subversion

Publishing has always been a social pursuit and depended heavily on social developments, such as the spread of literacy and the liberation of minorities (especially, of women). As every new format matures, it is subjected to regulation from within and from without. E-books (and, by extension, digital content on the Web) will be no exception. Hence the recurrent and current attempts at regulation.

Every new variant of content packaging was labeled as "dangerous" at its inception. The Church (formerly the largest publisher of bibles and other religious and "earthly" texts and the upholder and protector of reading in the Dark Ages) castigated and censored the printing of "heretical" books (especially the vernacular bibles of the Reformation) and restored the Inquisition for the specific purpose of controlling book publishing. In 1559, it published the Index Librorum Prohibitorum ("Index of Prohibited Books"). A few (mainly Dutch) publishers even went to the stake (a habit worth reviving, some current authors would say...). European rulers issued proclamations against "naughty printed books" (of heresy and sedition). The printing of books was subject to licencing by the Privy Council in England. The very concept of copyright arose out of the forced registration of books in the register of the English Stationer's Company (a royal instrument of influence and intrigue). Such obligatory registration granted the publisher the right to exclusively copy the registered book (often, a class of books) for a number of years - but politically restricted printable content, often by force. Freedom of the press and free speech are still distant dreams in many corners of the earth. The Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA), the V-chip and other

privacy invading, dissemination inhibiting, and censorship imposing measures perpetuate a veteran if not so venerable tradition.

VII. The More it Changes

The more it changes, the more it stays the same. If the history of the book teaches us anything it is that there are no limits to the ingenuity with which publishers, authors, and booksellers, re-invent old practices. Technological and marketing innovations are invariably perceived as threats - only to be adopted later as articles of faith. Publishing faces the same issues and challenges it faced five hundred years ago and responds to them in much the same way. Yet, every generation believes its experiences to be unique and unprecedented. It is this denial of the past that casts a shadow over the future. Books have been with us since the dawn of civilization, millennia ago. In many ways, books constitute our civilization. Their traits are its traits: resilience, adaptation, flexibility, self re-invention, wealth, communication. We would do well to accept that our most familiar artifacts - books - will never cease to amaze us.

E(merging) Books

Dan Poynter and Danny Snow - the acknowledged gurus of the e-book revolution - did it again. The fourth edition of their U-Publish.com tome is a "living book". The public release is slated for December 2006-January 2007. But no two volumes will be alike. An appendix in the POD paperback edition will be updated monthly with breaking news from the couple's widely-circulated newsletters and, thus, differ in size and content. The standard trade edition will reference Web locations for monthly updates.

This is only the latest in a series of experiments that, put together, constitute a novel re-definition through experimentation of the classical format of the book.

Consider the now defunct BookTailor. It used to sell its book customization software mainly to travel agents - but this technology is likely to conquer other niches (such as the legal and medical professions). It allows users to select bits and pieces from a library of e-books, combine them into a totally new tome and print and bind the

latter on demand. The client can also choose to buy the end-product as an e-book.

Consider what this simple business model does to entrenched and age old notions such as "original" and "copies", copyright, and book identifiers. What is the "original" in this case? Is it the final, user-customized book - or its sources? And if no customized book is identical to any other - what happens to the intuitive notion of "copies"? Should BookTailor-generated books considered to be unique exemplars of one-copy print runs? If so, should each one receive a unique identifier (for instance, a unique ISBN)? Does the user possess any rights in the final product, composed and selected by him? What about the copyrights of the original authors?

Or take BookCrossing.com. On the face of it, it presents no profound challenge to established publishing practices and to the modern concept of intellectual property. Members register their books, obtain a BCID (BookCrossing ID Number) and then give the book to someone, or simply leave it lying around for a total stranger to find. Henceforth, fate determines the chain of events. Eventual successive owners of the volume are supposed to report to BookCrossing (by e-mail) about the book's and their whereabouts, thereby generating moving plots and mapping the territory of literacy and bibliomania.

This innocuous model subversively undermines the concept - legal and moral - of ownership. It also expropriates the book from the realm of passive, inert objects and transforms it into a catalyst of human interactions across time and space. In other words, it returns the book to its origins: a time capsule, a time machine and the embodiment of a historical narrative.

E-books, hitherto, have largely been nothing but an ephemeral rendition of their print predecessors. But e-books are another medium altogether. They can and will provide a different reading experience. Consider "hyperlinks within the e-book and without it - to web content, reference works, etc., embedded instant shopping and ordering links, divergent, user-interactive, decision driven plotlines, interaction with other e-books (using Bluetooth or another wireless standard), collaborative authoring, gaming and community activities, automatically or periodically updated content, multimedia capabilities, database, Favourites and History Maintenance (records

of reading habits, shopping habits, interaction with other readers, plot related decisions and much more), automatic and embedded audio conversion and translation capabilities, full wireless piconetworking and scatternetworking capabilities and more".

The Disintermediation of Content

The recent decision of the Supreme Court of the USA (in June 2005) was hailed as a victory for the music and motion picture industries. Peer-to-peer (P2P) networks, such as Grokster, were held responsible for encouraging and making possible the violation of copyright by allowing users to download illicit music tracks and films off other users' computers.

Prior to this seminal ruling, publishers, distributors and some creators pursued individual downloaders in court, closed down Napster, an earlier file-sharing network with a central directory, and introduced digital right management bits of copy-inhibiting software into their products. They even invested in or collaborated with legal media download online services, such as Apple's iTunes.

Still, are content brokers - publishers, distributors, and record companies - a thing of the past?

In one word: disintermediation.

The gradual removal of layers of content brokering and intermediation - mainly in manufacturing marketing - is the continuation of a long term trend. Consider music for instance. Streaming audio on the internet ("soft radio"), or downloadable MP3 files may render the CD obsolete - but they were preceded by radio music broadcasts. But the novelty is that the Internet provides a venue for the marketing of niche products and reduces the barriers to entry previously imposed by the need to invest in costly "branding" campaigns and manufacturing and distribution activities.

This trend is also likely to restore the balance between artists and the commercial exploiters of their products. The very definition of "artist" will expand to encompass all creative people. One will seek to distinguish oneself, to "brand" oneself and to auction one's services,

ideas, products, designs, experience, physique, or biography, etc. directly to end-users and consumers. This is a return to pre-industrial times when artisans ruled the economic scene. Work stability will suffer and work mobility will increase in a landscape of shifting allegiances, head hunting, remote collaboration, and similar labour market trends.

But distributors, publishers, and record companies are not going to vanish. They are going to metamorphose. This is because they fulfil a few functions and provide a few services whose importance is only enhanced by the "free for all" Internet culture.

Content intermediaries grade content and separate the qualitative from the ephemeral and the atrocious. The deluge of self-published and vanity published e-books, music tracks and art works has generated few masterpieces and a lot of trash. The absence of judicious filtering has unjustly given a bad name to whole segments of the industry (e.g., small, or web-based publishers). Consumers - inundated, disappointed and exhausted - will pay a premium for content rating services. Though driven by crass commercial considerations, most publishers and record companies do apply certain quality standards routinely and thus are positioned to provide these rating services reliably.

Content brokers are relationship managers. Consider distributors: they provide instant access to centralized, continuously updated, "addressbooks" of clients (stores, consumers, media, etc.). This reduces the time to market and increases efficiency. It alters revenue models very substantially. Content creators can thus concentrate on what they do best: content creation, and reduce their overhead by outsourcing the functions of distribution and relationships management. The existence of central "relationship ledgers" yields synergies which can be applied to all the clients of the distributor. The distributor provides a single address that content re-sellers converge on and feed off. Distributors, publishers and record companies also provide logistical support: warehousing, consolidated sales reporting and transaction auditing, and a single, periodic payment.

Yet, having said all that, content intermediaries still over-charge their clients (the content creators) for their services. This is especially true in an age of just-in-time inventory and digital distribution. Network effects mean that content brokers have to invest much less in

marketing, branding and advertising once a product's first mover advantage is established. Economic laws of increasing, rather than diminishing, returns mean that every additional unit sold yields a HIGHER profit - rather than a declining one. The pie is getting bigger.

Hence, the meteoric increase in royalties publishers pay authors from sales of the electronic versions of their work (anywhere from Random House's 35% to 50% paid by smaller publishers). As this tectonic shift reverberates through the whole distribution chain, retail outlets are beginning to transact directly with content creators. The borders between the types of intermediaries are blurred.

Barnes and Noble (the American bookstores chain) has, in effect, become a publisher. Many publishers have virtual storefronts. Many authors sell directly to their readers, acting as publishers. The introduction of "book ATMs" - POD (Print On Demand) machines, which will print every conceivable title in minutes, on the spot, in "book kiosks" - will give rise to a host of new intermediaries. Intermediation is not gone. It is here to stay because it is sorely needed. But it is in a state of flux. Old maxims break down. New modes of operation emerge. Functions are amalgamated, outsourced, dispensed with, or created from scratch. It is an exciting scene, full with opportunities.

The Revolt of the Poor: The Demise of Intellectual Property?

In 1997, I published a book of short stories in Israel. The publishing house belongs to Israel's leading (and exceedingly wealthy) newspaper. I signed a contract which stated that I am entitled to receive 8% of the income from the sales of the book after commissions payable to distributors, shops, etc. A few months later, I won the coveted Prize of the Ministry of Education (for short prose). The prize money (a few thousand euros) was snatched by the publishing house on the legal grounds that all the money generated by the book belongs to them because they own the copyright.

In the mythology generated by capitalism to pacify the masses, the myth of intellectual property stands out. It goes like this: if the rights to intellectual property were not defined and enforced, commercial entrepreneurs would not have taken on the risks associated with

publishing books, recording records, and preparing multimedia products. As a result, creative people will have suffered because they will have found no way to make their works accessible to the public. Ultimately, it is the public which pays the price of piracy, goes the refrain.

But this is factually untrue. In the USA there is a very limited group of authors who actually live by their pen. Only select musicians eke out a living from their noisy vocation (most of them rock stars who own their labels - George Michael had to fight Sony to do just that) and very few actors come close to deriving subsistence level income from their profession. All these can no longer be thought of as mostly creative people. Forced to defend their intellectual property rights and the interests of Big Money, Madonna, Michael Jackson, Schwarzenegger and Grisham are businessmen at least as much as they are artists.

Economically and rationally, we should expect that the costlier a work of art is to produce and the narrower its market - the more emphasized its intellectual property rights.

Consider a publishing house.

A book which costs 20,000 euros to produce with a potential audience of 1000 purchasers (certain academic texts are like this) - would have to be priced at a minimum of 50 euros to recoup only the direct costs. If illegally copied (thereby shrinking the potential market as some people will prefer to buy the cheaper illegal copies) - its price would have to go up prohibitively to recoup costs, thus driving out potential buyers. The story is different if a book costs 5,000 euros to produce and is priced at 10 euros a copy with a potential readership of 1,000,000 readers. Piracy (illegal copying) should in this case be more readily tolerated as a marginal phenomenon.

This is the theory. But the facts are tellingly different. The less the cost of production (brought down by digital technologies) - the fiercer the battle against piracy. The bigger the market - the more pressure is applied to clamp down on samizdat entrepreneurs.

Governments, from China to Macedonia, are introducing intellectual property laws (under pressure from rich world countries) and

enforcing them belatedly. But where one factory is closed on shore (as has been the case in mainland China) - two sprout off shore (as is the case in Hong Kong and in Bulgaria).

But this defies logic: the market today is global, the costs of production are lower (with the exception of the music and film industries), the marketing channels more numerous (half of the income of movie studios emanates from video cassette sales), the speedy recouping of the investment virtually guaranteed. Moreover, piracy thrives in very poor markets in which the population would anyhow not have paid the legal price. The illegal product is inferior to the legal copy (it comes with no literature, warranties or support). So why should the big manufacturers, publishing houses, record companies, software companies and fashion houses worry?

The answer lurks in history. Intellectual property is a relatively new notion. In the near past, no one considered knowledge or the fruits of creativity (art, design) as "patentable", or as someone's "property". The artist was but a mere channel through which divine grace flowed. Texts, discoveries, inventions, works of art and music, designs - all belonged to the community and could be replicated freely. True, the chosen ones, the conduits, were honoured but were rarely financially rewarded. They were commissioned to produce their works of art and were salaried, in most cases. Only with the advent of the Industrial Revolution were the embryonic precursors of intellectual property introduced but they were still limited to industrial designs and processes, mainly as embedded in machinery. The patent was born. The more massive the market, the more sophisticated the sales and marketing techniques, the bigger the financial stakes - the larger loomed the issue of intellectual property. It spread from machinery to designs, processes, books, newspapers, any printed matter, works of art and music, films (which, at their beginning were not considered art), software, software embedded in hardware, processes, business methods, and even unto genetic material.

Intellectual property rights - despite their noble title - are less about the intellect and more about property. This is Big Money: the markets in intellectual property outweigh the total industrial production in the world. The aim is to secure a monopoly on a specific work. This is an especially grave matter in academic publishing where small-circulation magazines do not allow their content to be quoted or

published even for non-commercial purposes. The monopolists of knowledge and intellectual products cannot allow competition anywhere in the world - because theirs is a world market. A pirate in Skopje is in direct competition with Bill Gates. When he sells a pirated Microsoft product - he is depriving Microsoft not only of its income, but of a client (=future income), of its monopolistic status (cheap copies can be smuggled into other markets), and of its competition-detering image (a major monopoly preserving asset). This is a threat which Microsoft cannot tolerate. Hence its efforts to eradicate piracy - successful in China and an utter failure in legally-relaxed Russia.

But what Microsoft fails to understand is that the problem lies with its pricing policy - not with the pirates. When faced with a global marketplace, a company can adopt one of two policies: either to adjust the price of its products to a world average of purchasing power - or to use discretionary differential pricing (as pharmaceutical companies were forced to do in Brazil and South Africa). A Macedonian with an average monthly income of 160 USD clearly cannot afford to buy the Encyclopaedia Encarta Deluxe. In America, 50 USD is the income generated in 4 hours of an average job. In Macedonian terms, therefore, the Encarta is 20 times more expensive. Either the price should be lowered in the Macedonian market - or an average world price should be fixed which will reflect an average global purchasing power.

Something must be done about it not only from the economic point of view. Intellectual products are very price sensitive and highly elastic. Lower prices will be more than compensated for by a much higher sales volume. There is no other way to explain the pirate industries: evidently, at the right price a lot of people are willing to buy these products. High prices are an implicit trade-off favouring small, elite, select, rich world clientele. This raises a moral issue: are the children of Macedonia less worthy of education and access to the latest in human knowledge and creation?

Two developments threaten the future of intellectual property rights. One is the Internet. Academics, fed up with the monopolistic practices of professional publications - already publish on the web in big numbers. I published a few books on the Internet and they can be freely downloaded by anyone who has a computer or a modem. The

full text of electronic magazines, trade journals, billboards, professional publications, and thousands of books is available online. Hackers even made sites available from which it is possible to download whole software and multimedia products. It is very easy and cheap to publish on the Internet, the barriers to entry are virtually nil. Web pages are hosted free of charge, and authoring and publishing software tools are incorporated in most word processors and browser applications. As the Internet acquires more impressive sound and video capabilities it will proceed to threaten the monopoly of the record companies, the movie studios and so on.

The second development is also technological. The oft-vindicated Moore's law predicts the doubling of computer memory capacity every 18 months. But memory is only one aspect of computing power. Another is the rapid simultaneous advance on all technological fronts. Miniaturization and concurrent empowerment by software tools have made it possible for individuals to emulate much larger scale organizations successfully. A single person, sitting at home with 5000 USD worth of equipment can fully compete with the best products of the best printing houses anywhere. CD-ROMs can be written on, stamped and copied in house. A complete music studio with the latest in digital technology has been condensed to the dimensions of a single chip. This will lead to personal publishing, personal music recording, and the to the digitization of plastic art. But this is only one side of the story.

The relative advantage of the intellectual property corporation does not consist exclusively in its technological prowess. Rather it lies in its vast pool of capital, its marketing clout, market positioning, sales organization, and distribution network.

Nowadays, anyone can print a visually impressive book, using the above-mentioned cheap equipment. But in an age of information glut, it is the marketing, the media campaign, the distribution, and the sales that determine the economic outcome.

This advantage, however, is also being eroded.

First, there is a psychological shift, a reaction to the commercialization of intellect and spirit. Creative people are repelled by what they regard as an oligarchic establishment of

institutionalized, lowest common denominator art and they are fighting back.

Secondly, the Internet is a huge (200 million people), truly cosmopolitan market, with its own marketing channels freely available to all. Even by default, with a minimum investment, the likelihood of being seen by surprisingly large numbers of consumers is high.

I published [one book](#) the traditional way - and [another on the Internet](#). In 50 months, I have received 6500 written responses regarding [my electronic book](#). Well over 500,000 people read it (my Link Exchange meter registered c. 2,000,000 impressions since November 1998). It is a [textbook \(in psychopathology\)](#) - and 500,000 readers is a lot for this kind of publication. I am so satisfied that I am not sure that I will ever consider a traditional publisher again. Indeed, [my last book](#) was published in the very same way.

The demise of intellectual property has lately become abundantly clear. The old intellectual property industries are fighting tooth and nail to preserve their monopolies (patents, trademarks, copyright) and their cost advantages in manufacturing and marketing.

But they are faced with three inexorable processes which are likely to render their efforts vain:

The Newspaper Packaging

Print newspapers offer package deals of cheap content subsidized by advertising. In other words, the advertisers pay for content formation and generation and the reader has no choice but be exposed to commercial messages as he or she studies the content.

This model - adopted earlier by radio and television - rules the internet now and will rule the wireless internet in the future. Content will be made available free of all pecuniary charges. The consumer will pay by providing his personal data (demographic data, consumption patterns and preferences and so on) and by being exposed to advertising. Subscription based models are bound to fail.

Thus, content creators will benefit only by sharing in the advertising cake. They will find it increasingly difficult to implement the old models of royalties paid for access or of ownership of intellectual property.

Disintermediation

A lot of ink has been spilt regarding this important trend. The removal of layers of brokering and intermediation - mainly on the manufacturing and marketing levels - is a historic development (though the continuation of a long term trend).

Consider music for instance. Streaming audio on the internet or downloadable MP3 files will render the CD obsolete. The internet also provides a venue for the marketing of niche products and reduces the barriers to entry previously imposed by the need to engage in costly marketing ("branding") campaigns and manufacturing activities.

This trend is also likely to restore the balance between artist and the commercial exploiters of his product. The very definition of "artist" will expand to include all creative people. One will seek to distinguish oneself, to "brand" oneself and to auction off one's services, ideas, products, designs, experience, etc. This is a return to pre-industrial times when artisans ruled the economic scene. Work stability will vanish and work mobility will increase in a landscape of shifting allegiances, head hunting, remote collaboration and similar labour market trends.

Market Fragmentation

In a fragmented market with a myriad of mutually exclusive market niches, consumer preferences and marketing and sales channels - economies of scale in manufacturing and distribution are meaningless. Narrowcasting replaces broadcasting, mass customization replaces mass production, a network of shifting affiliations replaces the rigid owned-branch system. The decentralized, intrapreneurship-based corporation is a late response to these trends. The mega-corporation of the future is more likely to act as a collective of start-ups than as a homogeneous, uniform (and, to conspiracy theorists, sinister) juggernaut it once was.

Dorking the Paywall: Illegal Crackers and Other Bad Guys (Their Victims)

Q. In July 2014, the Department of Homeland Security in the USA and the FBI warned the various branches of the US government, police, and public safety and security organizations of a malicious online activity called “Google Dorking”. What is it?

A. "Google dorking" or “Google hacking” is the use of advanced search queries in Google, Bing, or Yahoo to locate sensitive information, such as usernames and passwords, account numbers, social security numbers, etc. The FBI explains it well in its confidential circular which, ironically, was leaked to the press:

“Malicious cyber actors are using advanced search techniques, referred to as ‘Google dorking,’ to locate information that organizations may not have intended to be discoverable by the public or to find website vulnerabilities for use in subsequent cyber attacks. By searching for specific file types and keywords, malicious cyber actors can locate information such as usernames and passwords, e-mail lists, sensitive documents, bank account details, and website vulnerabilities.”

Oddly and disconcertingly, these data are often available publicly. High schools post mostly valid passwords and usernames to expensive subscription databases and for-pay media on their internet-facing library portals; Public libraries publish the first 8 or 9 digits of their library card numbers or barcodes, making it relatively easy to guess the rest; a variety of service providers neglect to deny to search engines access to client lists, social security numbers, confidential and sensitive commercial information, and even state secrets (all it takes to deny Google’s spider access is a robot.txt file on the server); sites like Bugmenot encourage users to create fake email accounts and submit thousands of usernames and passwords to numerous restricted online services and products; and government agencies and other national bodies are as leaky as sieves. The syntax of the search strings needed to elicit these bits of sometimes crucial data is laughably simple.

Both malicious actors and more benign types avail themselves of this cornucopia. The less savory operators hide behind proxy servers and

applications or online anonymizers and harvest (dump) prodigious amounts of data from databases, sometimes using automated tools and scripts.

White hackers, grey hackers, and intrepid reporters openly conduct penetration testing or simply verify the validity of publicly posted access credentials. These types of actors end up sharing their findings in order to improve the overall safety of the Internet and they never disguise their identity. Then there are “collectors” who amass huge piles of information but never make use of it and students and, more rarely, faculty who illegally access specific databases for limited periods of time in order to conduct targeted studies.

Q. But is Google dorking legal?

A. The situation is not helped by the fact that laws in the USA and the EU are outdated or exceedingly vague allowing criminals to go unpunished or overzealous prosecutors to terrorize minor infringers for mere contractual violations of terms of service. In 2013, a prominent Net activist and the inventor of the web feed format RSS, Aaron Swartz, committed suicide in the wake of such a ruthless investigation of what many – including the victim, the online database JSTOR - perceived to have been a misdemeanour.

Q. Where do most of these hackers come from?

A. During a 2-months period, I came across dozens of forums in Iran and other developing countries where students and faculty posted usernames and passwords for online academic and research databases. Via YouTube, I found websites which provide simultaneous access to the ezproxies (access points) of several universities or force-download full text documents from paid subscription academic and research databases.

This surprised me. I knew that many of these databases were supposed to be made available at reduced rates or at no charge to poor and developing nations and to their intellectuals. Yet, nothing could be further from the truth. Individuals (even students or faculty members in countries which are not subject to sanctions like Iran) are actually unable to obtain legal access to databases in their dirt-poor locales. Even the cheapest, most heavily subsidized repositories (for

example: the UN's HINARI) are available solely to select to institutions and only for the exorbitant equivalent of 6-24 monthly salaries (\$1500).

The repugnant avarice of most database providers and academic publishers has already spawned phenomena like the open access movement: scholarly publishing at no cost to the reader. But the last few years witnessed a virtual onslaught of indignant hackers from developing and impoverished countries who feel that knowledge should be democratized and made available to all, subject to [differential pricing](#). While it may be reasonable to charge \$50 per published academic paper in the USA, UK, or Norway – it is usurious in countries like Mali and Macedonia.

Even legitimate sites, such as Scribd, are now inundated with pirated copies of textbooks, lists of passwords for research databases, and usernames for university ezproxies. It is nothing short of a rebellion, civil disobedience, a protest movement the magnitude and effects of which are kept under wraps by its victims.

The overwhelming majority of these hackers are mostly idealists - though they do charge a pittance for the information they harvest in order to defray the hosting and bandwidth costs. They still naively believe that the academic community is about furthering learning, not about turning a profit. Many cannot help but feel that while these crackers may be acting illegally, they are not the only Bad Guys in this outright war of attrition.

Q. What can commercial providers of research or academic databases do to protect themselves?

A. Three simple steps would reduce malicious cracking and unauthorized access and use to almost nil: (1) Authenticate users not only with a username and password, but also with their IP address (where the Internet connection is initiated and coming from), a practice known as geolocation; (2) Implement rigorous database audit and monitoring (DAM) tools to spot, alert, and block intrusions; and (3) Welcome white hat and grey hat hackers and investigative reporters to test the systems and offer their insights. Shockingly, the current practice is to sue and prosecute such helpful people as

malicious crackers even if they helpfully share their findings with the affected database providers and vendors!

Censorship, East and West (Brussels Morning)

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: What defines censorship, or, more properly, characterizes censorship?

Prof. Sam Vaknin:

Censorship is any suppression of speech that is motivated by an ideology or by the perception of risk avoidance. It is intended to prevent challenges to the interests of an existing establishment or system or to safeguard secrets and national security interests.

Jacobsen: What have been the methods—and as two common placeholder spheres of influence concepts—of censorship in Eastern cultures and in Western cultures?

Vaknin:

Censorship in authoritarian regimes, most of which are indeed in the east or global south, is overt and institutionalized. The red lines are promulgated publicly and punishments for transgressions are enshrined in criminal law.

In the West, censorship is far more pernicious: it is stealthy, self-imposed, and adheres to standards of political correctness that reflect the interests and concerns of the identity politics of vocal victimhood groups.

Worst of all: the very existence of censorship is denied in the West as public intellectuals, the mainstream media, and societal and legal institutions uphold the counterfactual myth of “free speech”.

Censorship reflects the breakdown of trust in society and the need to use violence, both verbal and physical, to prevent the utter disintegration of the social fabric and the institutions that preserve the privileges of the elites.

Jacobsen: How have those forms of censorship evolved into the present?

Vaknin:

The sociologists Bradley Keith Campbell and Jason Manning posited that have transitioned from the age of dignity and reputation to the age of victimhood. This is not just about identity politics: as multiple studies have demonstrated in the past 3 years, victimhood is a profitable proposition and a way to reallocate scarce economic resources coercively.

Additionally, we are in the throes of more than one century of unprecedented existential risks (from nuclear weapons and world wars to climate change and invasive surveillance).

The confluence of these two toxic trends has rendered speech a dangerous luxury. Speech acts are deemed subversive, offensive, or malicious, even life-threatening, both on the collective and on the individual level.

Jacobsen: What have been the forms of censorship most tragic to intellectual progress and scientific discovery?

Vaknin:

By far, political correctness. It has stifled legitimate scientific inquiry, stymied public discourse, and penalized free thinkers of all stripes. It is comparable only to the Inquisition or to McCarthyism.

Jacobsen: What have been the common forms of censorship against you?

Vaknin:

Ironically, my sister, Sima Gil-Vaknin, served as the Chief Censor of the Israeli Defense Force (IDF), so I know a thing or two about the inner workings and the psychological underpinning of censorship.

Over the decades of my intellectual efforts, I have been subjected to every form of censorship in more than 10 countries. My videos are shadowbanned (deranked) on YouTube. My articles have been deemed “hateful speech” and deleted from various platforms, including, most recently LinkedIn. I have been sued multiply and have received graphic death threats more times than I can count.

Jacobsen: Why are these tactics used against public personalities?

Vaknin:

Naming and shaming. Censoring. Mobbing. Violence (Salman Rushdie, Jamal Khashoggi, to mention but two). Verbal abuse. Smear campaigns. All tried and true methods originally perfected by narcissists and psychopaths.

Jacobsen: Is censorship targeted against misunderstood or ill-understood individuals on the extreme ends of intelligence and creativity, i.e., geniuses, more often than cognitively average people if taking a per capita rate into account?

Vaknin:

I wouldn't say that. On the contrary: censorship targets the masses, the media, your average student or teacher, small to medium size businesses. In short: censorship targets constituencies whose vested interests in the current power structure are not great and who, therefore, are more open to evolutionary and even revolutionary ideas.

Jacobsen: What are ways for geniuses to protect themselves from the onslaughts of idiots? Leonardo Da Vinci devised some apparent techniques to keep certain aspects of his productions hidden in plain sight from sufficiently unintelligent people, as an example.

Vaknin:

This is by far the most serious problem: the inexorable rise of the idiocracy.

Why would women prefer men with an IQ lower than 120 to men with an IQ higher than 145? These are the results of a study published last year.

The answer is simple:

Our contemporary world is ruled by the feeble-minded, dimwits are empowered by technology, and everything is dumbed down to foster mass consumption.

In such a world, lower intelligence is a positive adaptation which confers evolutionary advantages on its bearers - and on their spouses and offspring.

Women select for beta males because the current environment favors [beta traits over alpha traits](#).

It is a paradigm shift of mind-bending proportions (for those in possession of a mind).

A study of nine million young adults over 40 years (conducted by Jean Twenge and her colleagues and published in the March 2012 issue of *the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*) has starkly demonstrated the deterioration from one generation to another. Youngsters are now focused on money, image, and fame and disparage values such as community, volunteerism, the environment, and knowledge acquisition. Other surveys have documented a rising level of illiteracy. As if to illustrate the imminence of these new Dark Ages, the Encyclopedia Britannica announced that it will cease the publication of its print edition after 244 years. Its surviving digital editions are a far cry from the print equivalent in terms of depth, length, and erudition.

The Stupid, the Trivial, and the Frivolous are everywhere: among the working classes, of course, but increasingly you can find them displacing the erstwhile elites, spawning hordes of mindless politicians, idiot business tycoons, [narcissistic](#) media personalities, gullible clergy, vacuous [celebrities](#), illiterate bestselling authors, athletes with far more brawn than brain, repetitious pop singers, less

than mediocre bureaucrats, bovine gatekeepers, and even ignorant and semi-literate academics. Their cacophony drowns the few voices of wisdom, expertise, and experience and their sheer number overwhelms all systems of governance and all mechanisms of decision-making. Rather than futilely fight back this tsunami, the well-educated, the erudite, and the intelligent choose to withdraw and seclude themselves in self-constructed, schizoid ivory towers, all bridges drawn.

Imbeciles are a menace to the continued existence not only of our civilization, but also of our species. We may end up being all Homo, no sapiens.

The percentage of stupid people in the general populace may not have changed. It may even have decreased. But in terms of absolute numbers, there are more Stupid heads now than the entire human population only a century ago. Modern medicine makes sure that the retarded and plain dim-witted live on to a ripe old age. That we are faced with the daunting prospect of idiocracy is the fault of the malignant transformation of the democratic ideal and the recent onslaught of the media, both old and new.

Start with democracy, the Stupid People's pernicious answer to meritocracy:

In the not-too-distant past dim-witted people had the right to vote once in a while and thus express their completely inconsequential opinion where it mattered least: in the ballot box. Alas, the inane idea of "one person (never mind how pinheaded, unqualified, or ignorant), one vote" has invaded and permeated hitherto hierarchical environments such as government, the workplace, and the military. With technology at their disposal, The Stupid repeatedly interfere with and disrupt the proper functioning of virtually every system.

Even the generation and transfer of knowledge have been "democratized" as crowdsourcing yielded enterprises such as [Wikipedia](#), the "encyclopedia" that anyone can edit, add to, and delete from. Internet search engines rank results not according to the merits and authority of the content, but by the number of votes cast by ... you guessed it: mostly dense people (who now congregate on social networks). This widespread and much-lauded vandalism reflects the

utter collapse and disintegration of the education system which turns out illiterate, nescient, and irrational graduates having annihilated its standards in order to lucratively embrace them as students in the first place.

The Stupid, dimly aware of their innate inferiority, are anti-elitist, anti-intellectual, and anti-excellence. But, while in the past these remained mere sentiments, today they have become an ethos, a code of conduct, a set of values and ideals. It is politically incorrect and impolite to claim any advantage and superiority. Egalitarianism is running amok. Everyone is equal: doctors and their patients; professors and their students; experts and laymen alike.

Continue with technology:

In an act of self-preservation, past civilizations had confined The Stupid to certain settlements, replete with their drinking establishments, entertainments, and sports arenas. There the “intellectually-challenged” could safely torment each other with their vulgarities and rampant, uninformed idiocy. The advent of radio, television, and, most egregiously, the Internet has changed all that: now stupid people have unmitigated access to the kind of technology that allows them to pollute the airwaves and the broadband with their inferior analytic capacity, low-brow output, trivial observations, monosyllabic exclamations, and harebrained queries.

Thus, the New Media have transformed stupidity from a mental endemic to a viral pandemic. The wise and knowledgeable may broadcast while the Stupid merely narrowcast – but the Stupid have the upper hand, what with Google, Facebook, Twitter, Blogger, Amazon, and YouTube decimating the traditional print and electronic media.

This technological empowerment is the crux of the problem: there are no barriers to entry, no institutional filters, and no erudite and experienced intermediaries to hold back the avalanche of doltish balderdash, the tsunami of nonsense, and the flood of misinformation, factoids, and conspiracies that corrupt our intellectual space. “Discovery”: separating the wheat from the chaff has become mission impossible.

Commercial interests inevitably and invariably side with the brainless masses because of their superior aggregate purchasing power. The privatization of education is one manifestation of this creeping decadence. The mindless nature of television programming is another. The empty one-liners that comprise most “conversations” on social networks are its culmination. We are surrounded with clods, harassed by the lame-brained, criticized, censored, and ordered by simpletons. Welcome to the New Dark Ages.

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The Definition of Definitions: Context, Background, Meaning

I. The Meaning-Egg and the Context-chicken

Did the Laws of [Nature](#) precede Nature or were they created with it, in the Big Bang? In other words, did they provide Nature with the context in which it unfolded? Some, like Max Tegmark, an MIT cosmologist, go as far as to say that mathematics is not merely the language which we use to describe the Universe - it is the Universe itself. The world is an amalgam of mathematical structures, according to him. The context is the meaning is the context ad infinitum.

By now, it is a trite observation that meaning is context-dependent and, therefore, not invariant or immutable. Contextualists in aesthetics study a work of art's historical and cultural background in order to appreciate it. Philosophers of science have convincingly demonstrated that theoretical constructs (such as the electron or dark matter) derive their meaning from their place in complex deductive systems of empirically-testable theorems. Ethicists repeat that values are rendered instrumental and moral problems solvable by their relationships with a-priori moral principles. In all these cases, context precedes meaning and gives interactive birth to it.

However, the reverse is also true: context emerges from meaning and is preceded by it. This is evident in a surprising array of fields: from language to social norms, from semiotics to computer programming, and from logic to animal behavior.

In 1700, the English empiricist philosopher, John Locke, was the first to describe how meaning is derived from context in a chapter titled "Of the Association of Ideas" in the second edition of his seminal "Essay Concerning Human Understanding". Almost a century later, the philosopher James Mill and his son, John Stuart Mill, came up with a calculus of contexts: mental elements that are habitually proximate, either spatially or temporally, become associated (contiguity law) as do ideas that co-occur frequently (frequency law), or that are similar (similarity law).

But the Mills failed to realize that their laws relied heavily on and derived from two organizing principles: time and space. These meta principles lend meaning to ideas by rendering their associations comprehensible. Thus, the contiguity and frequency laws leverage meaningful spatial and temporal relations to form the context within which ideas associate. Context-effects and Gestalt and other vision grouping laws, promulgated in the 20th century by the likes of Max Wertheimer, Irvin Rock, and Stephen Palmer, also rely on the pre-existence of space for their operation.

Contexts can have empirical or exegetic properties. In other words: they can act as webs or matrices and merely associate discrete elements; or they can provide an interpretation to these recurrent associations, they can render them meaningful. The principle of causation is an example of such interpretative faculties in action: A is invariably followed by B and a mechanism or process C can be demonstrated that links them both. Thereafter, it is safe to say that A causes B. Space-time provides the backdrop of meaning to the context (the recurrent association of A and B) which, in turn, gives rise to more meaning (causation).

But are space and time "real", objective entities - or are they instruments of the mind, mere conventions, tools it uses to order the world? Surely the latter. It is possible to construct theories to describe the world and yield falsifiable predictions without using space or time or by using counterintuitive and even "counterfactual" variants of space and time.

Another Scottish philosopher, Alexander Bains, observed, in the 19th century, that ideas form close associations also with behaviors and actions. This insight is at the basis for most modern learning and conditioning (behaviorist) theories and for connectionism (the design of neural networks where knowledge items are represented by patterns of activated ensembles of units).

Similarly, memory has been proven to be state-dependent: information learnt in specific mental, physical, or emotional states is most easily recalled in similar states. Conversely, in a process known as redintegration, mental and emotional states are completely invoked and restored when only a single element is encountered and experienced (a smell, a taste, a sight).

It seems that the occult organizing mega-principle is the mind (or "self"). Ideas, concepts, behaviors, actions, memories, and patterns presuppose the existence of minds that render them meaningful. Again, meaning (the mind or the self) breeds context, not the other way around. This does not negate the views expounded by externalist theories: that thoughts and utterances depend on factors external to the mind of the thinker or speaker (factors such as the way language is used by experts or by society). Even avowed externalists, such as Kripke, Burge, and Davidson admit that the perception of objects and events (by an observing mind) is a prerequisite for thinking about or discussing them. Again, the mind takes precedence.

But what is meaning and why is it thought to be determined by or dependent on context?

II. Meaning and Language: it's all in the Mind

Many theories of meaning are contextualist and proffer rules that connect sentence type and context of use to referents of singular terms (such as egocentric particulars), truth-values of sentences and the force of utterances and other linguistic acts. Meaning, in other words, is regarded by most theorists as inextricably intertwined with language. Language is always context-determined: words depend on other words and on the world to which they refer and relate. Inevitably, meaning came to be described as context-dependent, too. The study of meaning was reduced to an exercise in semantics. Few noticed that the context in which words operate depends on the individual meanings of these words.

Gottlob Frege coined the term *Bedeutung* (reference) to describe the mapping of words, predicates, and sentences onto real-world objects, concepts (or functions, in the mathematical sense) and truth-values, respectively. The truthfulness or falsehood of a sentence are determined by the interactions and relationships between the references of the various components of the sentence. Meaning relies on the overall values of the references involved and on something that Frege called *Sinn* (sense): the way or "mode" an object or concept is referred to by an expression. The senses of the parts of the sentence combine to form the "thoughts" (senses of whole sentences).

Yet, this is an incomplete and mechanical picture that fails to capture the essence of human communication. It is meaning (the mind of the person composing the sentence) that breeds context and not the other way around. Even J. S. Mill postulated that a term's connotation (its meaning and attributes) determines its denotation (the objects or concepts it applies to, the term's universe of applicability).

As the **Oxford Companion to Philosophy** puts it (p. 411):

"A context of a form of words is intensional if its truth is dependent on the meaning, and not just the reference, of its component words, or on the meanings, and not just the truth-value, of any of its sub-clauses."

It is the thinker, or the speaker (the user of the expression) that does the referring, not the expression itself!

Moreover, as Kaplan and Kripke have noted, in many cases, Frege's contraption of "sense" is, well, senseless and utterly unnecessary: demonstratives, proper names, and natural-kind terms, for example, refer directly, through the agency of the speaker. Frege intentionally avoided the vexing question of why and how words refer to objects and concepts because he was weary of the intuitive answer, later alluded to by H. P. Grice, that users (minds) determine these linkages and their corresponding truth-values. Speakers use language to manipulate their listeners into believing in the manifest intentions behind their utterances. Cognitive, emotive, and descriptive meanings all emanate from speakers and their minds.

Initially, W. V. Quine put context before meaning: he not only linked meaning to experience, but also to empirically-vetted (non-introspective) world-theories. It is the context of the observed behaviors of speakers and listeners that determines what words mean, he said. Thus, Quine and others attacked Carnap's meaning postulates (logical connections as postulates governing predicates) by demonstrating that they are not necessary unless one possesses a separate account of the status of logic (i.e., the context).

Yet, this context-driven approach led to so many problems that soon Quine abandoned it and relented: translation - he conceded in his seminal tome, "Word and Object" - is indeterminate and reference is

inscrutable. There are no facts when it comes to what words and sentences mean. What subjects say has no single meaning or determinately correct interpretation (when the various interpretations on offer are not equivalent and do not share the same truth value).

As the **Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy** summarily puts it (p. 194):

"Inscrutability (Quine later called it indeterminacy - SV) of reference (is) (t)he doctrine ... that no empirical evidence relevant to interpreting a speaker's utterances can decide among alternative and incompatible ways of assigning referents to the words used; hence there is no fact that the words have one reference or another" - even if all the interpretations are equivalent (have the same truth value).

Meaning comes before context and is not determined by it. Wittgenstein, in his later work, concurred.

Inevitably, such a solipsistic view of meaning led to an attempt to introduce a more rigorous calculus, based on concept of truth rather than on the more nebulous construct of "meaning". Both Donald Davidson and Alfred Tarski suggested that truth exists where sequences of objects satisfy parts of sentences. The meanings of sentences are their truth-conditions: the conditions under which they are true.

But, this reversion to a meaning (truth)-determined-by-context results in bizarre outcomes, bordering on tautologies: (1) every sentence has to be paired with another sentence (or even with itself!) which endows it with meaning and (2) every part of every sentence has to make a systematic semantic contribution to the sentences in which they occur.

Thus, to determine if a sentence is truthful (i.e., meaningful) one has to find another sentence that gives it meaning. Yet, how do we know that the sentence that gives it meaning is, in itself, truthful? This kind of ratiocination leads to infinite regression. And how to we measure the contribution of each part of the sentence to the sentence if we don't know the a-priori meaning of the sentence itself?! Finally, what is this "contribution" if not another name for meaning?!

Moreover, in generating a truth-theory based on the specific utterances of a particular speaker, one must assume that the speaker is telling the truth ("the principle of charity"). Thus, belief, language, and meaning appear to be the facets of a single phenomenon. One cannot have either of these three without the others. It, indeed, is all in the mind.

We are back to the minds of the interlocutors as the source of both context and meaning. The mind as a field of potential meanings gives rise to the various contexts in which sentences can and are proven true (i.e., meaningful). Again, meaning precedes context and, in turn, fosters it. Proponents of Epistemic or Attributor Contextualism link the propositions expressed even in knowledge sentences (X knows or doesn't know that Y) to the attributor's psychology (in this case, as the context that endows them with meaning and truth value).

III. The Meaning of Life: Mind or Environment?

On the one hand, to derive meaning in our lives, we frequently resort to social or cosmological contexts: to entities larger than ourselves and in which we can safely feel subsumed, such as God, the state, or our [Earth](#). Religious people believe that God has a plan into which they fit and in which they are destined to play a role; nationalists believe in the permanence that nations and states afford their own transient projects and ideas (they equate permanence with worth, truth, and meaning); [environmentalists](#) implicitly regard survival as the fount of meaning that is explicitly dependent on the preservation of a diversified and functioning ecosystem (the context).

Robert Nozick posited that finite beings ("conditions") derive meaning from "larger" meaningful beings (conditions) and so ad infinitum. The buck stops with an infinite and all-encompassing being who is the source of all meaning (God).

On the other hand, Sidgwick and other philosophers pointed out that only conscious beings can appreciate life and its rewards and that, therefore, the mind (consciousness) is the ultimate fount of all values and meaning: minds make value judgments and then proceed to regard certain situations and achievements as desirable, valuable, and meaningful. Of course, this presupposes that happiness is somehow intimately connected with rendering one's life meaningful.

So, which is the ultimate contextual fount of meaning: the subject's mind or his/her (mainly social) environment?

This apparent dichotomy is false. As Richard Rorty and David Annis noted, one can't safely divorce epistemic processes, such as justification, from the social contexts in which they take place. As Sosa, Harman, and, later, John Pollock and Michael Williams remarked, social expectations determine not only the standards of what constitutes knowledge but also what is it that we know (the contents). The mind is a social construct as much as a neurological or psychological one.

To derive meaning from utterances, we need to have asymptotically perfect information about *both* the subject discussed and the knowledge attributor's psychology and social milieu. This is because the attributor's choice of language and ensuing justification are rooted in and responsive to both his psychology and his environment (including his personal history).

Thomas Nagel suggested that we perceive the world from a series of concentric expanding perspectives (which he divides into internal and external). The ultimate point of view is that of the Universe itself (as Sidgwick put it). Some people find it intimidating - others, exhilarating. Here, too, context, mediated by the mind, determines meaning.

Note on the Concepts of Boundary and Trace

The concepts of boundary and trace are intimately intertwined and are both fuzzy. Physical boundaries are often the measurable manifestations of the operation of boundary conditions. They, therefore, have to do with discernible change which, in turn, is inextricably linked to memory: a changed state or entity are always compared to some things (states or entities) that preceded them or that are coterminous and co-spatial with them but different to them. We deduce change by remembering what went before.

We must distinguish memory from trace, though. In nature, memory is reversible (metals with memories change back to erstwhile forms; people forget; information disappears as entropy increases). Since memory is reversible, we have to rely on traces to reconstruct the past. Traces are (thermodynamically) irreversible. Black holes preserve - in their event horizons - all the information (traces) regarding the characteristics (momentum, spin) of the stars that constituted them or that they have assimilated. Indeed, the holographic principle in [string theory](#) postulates that the entire information regarding a volume of space can be fully captured by specifying the data regarding its (lightlike) boundary (e.g., its gravitational horizon).

Thus, boundaries can be defined as the area that delimits one set of traces and separates them from another. The very essence of physical (including biological) bodies is the composite outcome of multiple, cumulative, intricately interacting traces of past processes and events. These interactions are at the core of entropy on both the physical and the informational levels. As Jacob Bekenstein wrote in 2003:

"Thermodynamic entropy and Shannon entropy are conceptually equivalent: the number of arrangements that are counted by Boltzmann entropy reflects the amount of Shannon information one would need to implement any particular arrangement (of matter and energy)."

Yet, how does one apply these twin concepts - of trace and boundary - to less tangible and more complex situations? What is the meaning of psychological boundaries or political ones? These types of boundaries equally depend on boundary conditions, albeit man-made ones. Akin to their physical-biological brethren, boundaries that pertain to Humankind in its myriad manifestations are rule-based. Where the laws of Nature generate boundaries by retaining traces of physical and biological change, the laws of Man create boundaries by retaining traces (history) of personal, organizational, and political change. These traces are what we mistakenly and colloquially call "memory".

Appendix: Symbol and Essence

Aborigines in Australia believe that the entire universe is regenerated whenever they chant their songlines (Yiri). This is reminiscent of the [Copenhagen interpretation of Quantum Mechanics](#), which postulates that particles – and, really, the entire world – are the outcomes of choices made by observers (the “collapse of the wave function”). The ancient Hebrews – and many orthodox Jews to this very day – swear by the miraculous power of their alphabet and its numerical equivalent (gematria). The real name of God is so potent that it is never to be uttered lest it wreaks havoc and calamity on the world. Christian tradition equates Jesus Christ with the word (logos) that brought our universe into existence. This kind of magical thinking regards symbols not as representations but as handles attached firmly to real-life objects.

There are three types of symbols:

(1) Symbols that reflect intrinsic (mental) states. As Locke had observed, here the symbol *is* the essence, though awareness and enlightenment are required as the context in which these symbols can operate and evoke the inner landscape that they represent.

(2) Symbols that stand in for extrinsic (actual or objective) conditions or objects. Here the symbol is a representation and, as Wittgenstein famously commented, it requires interpretation or mapping before it can resolve appropriately. “Mapping”, therefore, is not merely reference: it relates both to the outside world and to the state of knowledge and experience of the subject (as in psychologism, or logical positivism). We combine representation and interpretation (strong subjective input of secondary qualities) to yield perception and description of the world. Still, the mental representation engendered by the symbol must share (primary) qualities with the

object it represents. This correspondence or sharing of qualities has survival value in that it fosters monovalent communication.

(3) The third class consists of symbols that stand in relation to cultural artefacts, or constructs, or memes. Here the symbol and the object it represents are one and the same. Any distinction between symbol and symbolized is spurious.

Combinations (strings) of symbols produce meaningful statements which really amount to compounded symbols. The same rules and taxonomy apply to them as to their more fundamental and simpler building blocks.

But, if symbols are intrinsically meaningful, how come we fail to immediately and directly comprehend foreign languages (or to the uninitiated, mathematics)? The answer is that we lack the context or the theory that will allow us to translate from one language to another. Symbols refer to reality or stand in for it only within semantic fields. Even then – and contrary to Quine’s dictum – we can always produce a set of workable (albeit inaccurate) translations (functional translation hypotheses).

Appendix: Why Waste?

I. Waste in Nature

Waste is considered to be the by-product of both natural and artificial processes: manufacturing, chemical reactions, and events in biochemical pathways. But how do we distinguish the main products of an activity from its by-products? In industry, we intend to manufacture the former and often get the latter as well. Thus, our intention seems to be the determining factor: main products we want and plan to obtain, by-products are the unfortunate, albeit inevitable outcomes of the process. We strive to maximize the former even as we minimize the latter.

This distinction is not iron-clad. Sometimes, we generate waste on purpose and its fostering becomes our goal. Consider, for instance, diuretics whose sole aim to enhance the output of urine, widely considered to be a waste product. Dogs use urine to mark and demarcate their territory. They secrete it deliberately on trees, shrubs, hedges, and lawns. Is the dog's urine waste? To us, it certainly is. And to the dog?

Additionally, natural processes involve no intention. There, to determine what constitute by-products, we need another differential criterion.

We know that [Nature](#) is [parsimonious](#). Yet, all natural systems yield waste. It seems that waste is an integral part of Nature's optimal solution and that, therefore, it is necessary, efficient, and useful.

It is common knowledge that one's waste is another's food or raw materials. This is the principle behind bioremediation and the fertilizers industry. Recycling is, therefore, a misleading and anthropocentric term because it implies that cycles of production and consumptions invariably end and have to somehow be restarted. But, in reality, substances are constantly used, secreted, re-used, expelled, absorbed, and so on, ad infinitum.

Moreover, what is unanimously considered to be waste at one time or in one location or under certain circumstances is frequently regarded to be a precious and much sought-after commodity in a different epoch, elsewhere, and with the advance and advantage of knowledge. It is safe to say that, subject to the right frame of reference, there is no such thing as waste. Perhaps the best examples are an inter-galactic spaceship, a space colony, or a space station, where nothing "goes to waste" and literally every refuse has its re-use.

It is helpful to consider the difference in how waste is perceived in open versus closed systems.

From the self-interested point of view of an open system, waste is wasteful: it requires resources to get rid of, exports energy and raw materials when it is discharged, and endangers the system if it accumulates.

From the point of view of a closed system (e.g., the Universe) all raw materials are inevitable, necessary, and useful. Closed systems produce no such thing as waste. All the subsystems of a closed system merely process and convey to each other the very same substances, over and over again, in an eternal, unbreakable cycle.

But why the need for such transport and the expenditure of energy it entails? Why do systems perpetually trade raw materials among themselves?

In an entropic Universe, all activity will cease and the distinction between waste and "useful" substances and products will no longer exist even for open systems. Luckily, we are far from there. Order and complexity still thrive in isolated pockets ([on Earth](#), for example). As they increase, so does waste.

Indeed, waste can be construed to be the secretion and expulsion from orderly and [complex](#) systems of disorder and low-level order. As waste inside an open system decreases, order is enhanced and the system becomes more organized, less chaotic, more functional, and more complex.

II. Waste in Human Society

It behooves us to distinguish between waste and garbage. Waste is the inadvertent and coincidental (though not necessarily random or unpredictable) outcome of processes while garbage is integrated into manufacturing and marketing ab initio. Thus, packing materials end up as garbage as do disposable items.

It would seem that the usability of a substance determines if it is thought of as waste or not. Even then, quantities and qualities matter. Many stuffs are useful in measured amounts but poisonous beyond a certain quantitative threshold. The same substance in one state is raw material and in another it is waste. As long as an object or a substance function, they are not waste, but the minute they stop serving us they are labeled as such (consider defunct e-waste and corpses).

In an alien environment, how would we be able to tell waste from the useful? The short and the long of it is: we wouldn't. To determine is

something is waste, we would need to observe it, its interactions with its environment, and the world in which it operates (in order to determine its usefulness and actual uses). Our ability to identify waste is, therefore, the result of accumulated knowledge. The concept of waste is so anthropocentric and dependent on human prejudices that it is very likely spurious, a mere construct, devoid of any objective, ontological content.

This view is further enhanced by the fact that the words "waste" and "wasteful" carry negative moral and social connotations. It is wrong and "bad" to waste money, or time, or food. Waste is, thus, rendered a mere value judgment, specific to its time, place, and purveyors.

Appendix: Original vs. Copy and the Question of Context

Consider these conundrums:

1. A brilliant geek invents a 3D printer which replicates flawlessly the Mona Lisa. Leonardo's masterpiece and the copy spewed out by the machine are indistinguishable even under an electron microscope: they cannot be told apart. In which sense, therefore, is the artist's Mona Lisa superior to or different from its identical clone?
2. An ancient letter unearthed in the archives of the Church in France proves beyond any doubt that the Mona Lisa was not painted by Leonardo da Vinci, but by an obscure apprentice of his. The painting's value drops overnight even though it has undergone no physical or chemical transformation.
3. A world-renowned photographer uses the latest in digital photography equipment to shoot the Mona Lisa in a thought-provoking, fresh manner. The resulting oeuvre becomes a sensation overnight. He then proceeds to attach the photo to 15,000 e-mail messages and sends them to his entire voluminous addressbook. In which sense is the photo that he had shot more worthwhile than its numerous digital replicas?

Intuitively, we feel that Leonardo's Mona Lisa is not the same as its clones and that its monetary value and intrinsic worth depend crucially on its provenance: its authorship, the historical background,

and its proven “biography.” The concepts of originality and authenticity, therefore, have little to do with the work of art itself and everything to do with its context. This realization is thrown into even sharper relief in the third conundrum where the only thing separating one digital copy (the “original”) from another is chronology: the original preceded all others temporally as it was shot first.

The sentence "all cats are black" is evidently untrue even if only one cat in the whole universe were to be white. Thus, the property "being black" cannot form a part of the definition of a cat. The lesson to be learnt is that definitions must be universal. They must apply to all the members of a defined set (the set of "all cats" in our example).

Let us try to define a chair. In doing so we are trying to capture the essence of being a chair, its "chairness". It is chairness that is defined – not this or that specific chair. We want to be able to identify chairness whenever and wherever we come across it. But chairness cannot be captured without somehow tackling and including the uses of a chair – what is it made for, what does it do or help to do. In other words, a definition must include an operative part, a function. In many cases the function of the Definiendum (the term defined) constitutes its meaning. The function of a vinyl record is its meaning. It has no meaning outside its function. The Definiens (the expression supplying the definition) of a vinyl record both encompasses and consists of its function or use.

Yet, can a vinyl record be defined in vacuum, without incorporating the record player in the definiens? After all, a vinyl record is an object containing audio information decoded by a record player. Without the "record player" bit, the definiens becomes ambiguous. It can fit an audio cassette, or a compact disc. So, the context is essential. A good definition includes a context, which serves to alleviate ambiguity.

Ostensibly, the more details provided in the definition – the less ambiguous it becomes. But this is not true. Actually, the more details provided the more prone is the definition to be ambiguous. A definition must strive to be both minimal and aesthetic. In this sense it is much like a scientific theory. It talks about the match or the correlation between language and reality. Reality is parsimonious and to reflect it, definitions must be as parsimonious as it is.

Let us summarize the characteristics of a good definition and then apply them and try to define a few very mundane terms.

First, a definition must reveal the meaning of the term or concept defined. By "meaning" I mean the independent and invariant meaning – not the culturally dependent, narrative derived, type. The invariant meaning has to do with a function, or a use. A term or a concept can have several uses or functions, even conflicting ones. But all of the uses and functions must be universally recognized. Think about Marijuana or tobacco. They have medical uses and recreational uses. These uses are expressly contradictory. But both are universally acknowledged, so both define the meaning of marijuana or tobacco and form a part of their definitions.

Let us try to construct the first, indisputable, functional, part of the definitions of a few terms.

"Chair" – Intended for sitting.

"Game" – Deals with the accomplishment of goals.

"Window" – Allows to look through it, or for the penetration of light or air (when open or not covered).

"Table" – Intended for laying things on its surface.

It is only when we know the function or use of the definiendum that we can begin to look for it. The function/use FILTERS the world and narrows the set of candidates to the definiendum. A definition is a series of superimposed language filters. Only the definendum can penetrate this lineup of filters. It is like a high-specificity membrane: only one term can slip in.

The next parameter to look for is the characteristics of the definiendum. In the case of physical objects, we will be looking for physical characteristics, of course. Otherwise, we will be looking for more ephemeral traits.

"Chair" – Solid structure Intended for sitting.

"Game" – Mental or physical activity of one or more people (the players), which deals with the accomplishment of goals.

"Window" – Planar discontinuity in a solid surface, which allows to look through it, or for the penetration of light or air (when open or not covered).

"Table" – Structure with at least one leg and one flat surface, intended for laying things on its surface.

A contrast begins to emerge between a rigorous "dictionary-language-lexical definition" and a "stipulative definition" (explaining how the term is to be used). The first might not be immediately recognizable, the second may be inaccurate, non-universal or otherwise lacking.

Every definition contrasts the general with the particular. The first part of the definiens is almost always the genus (the wider class to which the term belongs). It is only as we refine the definition that we introduce the differentia (the distinguishing features). A good definition allows for the substitution of the defined by its definition (a bit awkward if we are trying to define God, for instance, or love). This would be impossible without a union of the general and the particular. A case could be made that the genus is more "lexical" while the differentia are more stipulative. But whatever the case, a definition must include a genus and a differentia because, as we said, it is bound to reflect reality and reality is hierarchical and inclusive ("The Matriushka Doll Principle").

"Chair" – Solid structure Intended for sitting (genus). Makes use of at least one bodily axis of the sitter (differentia). Without the differentia – with the genus alone – the definition can well fit a bed or a divan.

"Game" – Mental or physical activity of one or more people (the players), which deals with the accomplishment of goals (genus), in which both the activities and the goals accomplished are reversible (differentia). Without the differentia – with the genus alone – the definition can well fit most other human activities.

"Window" – Planar discontinuity in a solid surface (genus), which allows to look through it, or for the penetration of light or air (when

open or not covered) (differentia). Without the differentia – with the genus alone – the definition can well fit a door.

"Table" – Structure with at least one leg and one flat surface (genus), intended for laying things on its surface(s) (differentia). Without the differentia – with the genus alone – the definition can well fit the statue of a one-legged soldier holding a tray.

It was Locke who realized that there are words whose meaning can be precisely explained but which cannot be DEFINED in this sense. This is either because the explanatory equivalent may require more than genus and differentia – or because some words cannot be defined by means of others (because those other words also have to be defined and this leads to infinite regression). If we adopt the broad view that a definition is the explanation of meaning by other words, how can we define "blue"? Only by pointing out examples of blue. Thus, names of elementary ideas (colors, for instance) cannot be defined by words. They require an "ostensive definition" (definition by pointing out examples). This is because elementary concepts apply to our experiences (emotions, sensations, or impressions) and to *sensa* (sense data). These are usually words in a private language, our private language. How does one communicate (let alone define) the emotions one experiences during an epiphany? On the contrary: dictionary definitions suffer from gross inaccuracies precisely because they are confined to established meanings. They usually include in the definition things that they should have excluded, exclude things that they should have included or get it altogether wrong. Stipulative or ostensive definitions cannot be wrong (by definition). They may conflict with the lexical (dictionary) definition and diverge from established meanings. This may prove to be both confusing and costly (for instance, in legal matters). But this has nothing to do with their accuracy or truthfulness. Additionally, both types of definition may be insufficiently explanatory. They may be circular, or obscure, leaving more than one possibility open (ambiguous or equivocal).

Many of these problems are solved when we introduce context to the definition. Context has four conceptual pillars: time, place, cultural context and mental context (or mental characteristics). A definition, which is able to incorporate all four elements is monovalent, unequivocal, unambiguous, precise, universal, appropriately exclusive and inclusive, aesthetic and parsimonious.

"Chair" – Artificial (context) solid structure Intended for sitting (genus). Makes use of at least one bodily axis of the sitter (differentia). Without the context, the definition can well fit an appropriately shaped rock.

"Game" – Mental or physical activity of one or more people (the players), subject to agreed rules of confrontation, collaboration and scoring (context), which deals with the accomplishment of goals (genus), in which both the activities and the goals accomplished are reversible (differentia). Without the context, the definition can well fit most other non-playing human activities.

"Window" – Planar discontinuity in a solid artificial (context) surface (genus), which allows to look through it, or for the penetration of light or air (when not covered or open) (differentia). Without the context, the definition can well fit a hole in a rock.

It is easy to notice that the distinction between the differentia and the context is rather blurred. Many of the differentia are the result of cultural and historical context. A lot of the context emerges from the critical mass of differentia.

We have confined our discussion hitherto to the structural elements of a definition. But a definition is a dynamic process. It involves the sentence doing the defining, the process of defining and the resulting defining expression (definiens). This interaction between different definitions of definition gives rise to numerous forms of equivalence, all called "definitions". Real definitions, nominal definitions, prescriptive, contextual, recursive, inductive, persuasive, impredicative, extensional and intensional definitions, are stars in a galaxy of alternative modes of explanation.

But it all boils down to the same truth: it is the type of definition chosen and the rigorousness with which we understand the meaning of "definition" that determine which words can and cannot be defined. In my view, there is still a mistaken belief that there are terms which can be defined without going outside a specified realm(=set of terms). People are trying to define life or love by resorting to chemical reactions. This reductionism inevitably and invariably leads to the Locke paradoxes. It is true that a definition must include all the necessary conditions to the definiendum. Chemical reactions are a

necessary condition to life. But they are not sufficient conditions. A definition must include all the sufficient conditions as well.

Now we can try to define "definition" itself:

"Definition" – A statement which captures the meaning, the use, the function and the essence of a term or a concept.

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Shmuel (Sam) Vaknin

Curriculum Vitae

Born in 1961 in Qiryat-Yam, Israel.

Served in the Israeli Defence Force (1979-1982) in training and education units.

Education

1970-1978: Completed nine years of study in the Technion – Israel Institute of Technology, Haifa (psychology, ecology, medicine) ([correspondence](#))

1982-3: [Ph.D. in Physics](#) (dissertation: "[Time Asymmetry Revisited](#)") [Pacific Western University \(PWU\)](#), **California**, USA ([California Miramar University](#) purchased the California State Approval of [Pacific Western University](#) in 2007) ([Testimony](#))

1982-5: Graduate of numerous courses in Finance Theory and International Trading in the UK and USA.

Certified [E-Commerce Concepts Analyst](#) by [Brainbench](#) ([more](#)).

Certified in [Psychological Counselling Techniques](#) by [Brainbench](#) ([more](#)).

[Certified Financial Analyst](#) by [Brainbench](#) ([more](#)).

Full proficiency in Hebrew and in English.

Business Experience

1979 to 1983

Commentator in Yedioth Aharonot, Ma'ariv, and Bamakhane. Published sci-fi short fiction in Fantasy 2000.

Founder and co-owner of a chain of computerised information kiosks in Tel-Aviv, Israel.

1982 to 1985

[Senior positions](#) with the Nessim D. Gaon Group of Companies in Geneva, Paris and New-York (NOGA and APROFIM SA):

- Chief Analyst of Edible Commodities in the Group's Headquarters in Switzerland
- Manager of the Research and Analysis Division
- Manager of the Data Processing Division
- Project Manager of the Nigerian Computerised Census
- Vice President in charge of RND and Advanced Technologies
- Vice President in charge of Sovereign Debt Financing

1985 to 1986

Represented Canadian Venture Capital Funds in Israel.

1986 to 1987

General Manager of IPE Ltd. in London. The firm financed international multi-lateral countertrade and leasing transactions.

1988 to 1990

Co-founder and Director of "Mikbats-Tesuah", a portfolio management firm based in Tel-Aviv.

Activities included large-scale portfolio management, underwriting, forex trading and general financial advisory services.

1990 to Present

Freelance consultant to many of Israel's Blue-Chip firms, mainly on issues related to the capital markets in Israel, Canada, the UK and the USA.

Consultant to foreign RND ventures and to Governments on macro-economic matters.

Freelance journalist in various media in the United States.

1990 to 1995

President of the Israel chapter of the Professors World Peace Academy (PWPA) and (briefly) Israel representative of the "Washington Times".

1993 to 1994

Co-owner and Director of many business enterprises:

- The Omega and Energy Air-Conditioning Concern
- AVP Financial Consultants
- Handiman Legal Services

Total annual turnover of the group: 10 million USD.

Co-owner, Director and Finance Manager of COSTI Ltd. – Israel's largest computerised information vendor and developer. Raised funds through a series of private placements locally in the USA, Canada and London.

1993 to 1996

Publisher and Editor of a Capital Markets Newsletter distributed by subscription only to dozens of subscribers countrywide.

Tried and incarcerated for 11 months for his role in an attempted takeover of Israel's Agriculture Bank involving securities fraud.

Managed the Internet and International News Department of an Israeli mass media group, "Ha-Tikshoret and Namer".

Assistant in the Law Faculty in Tel-Aviv University (to Prof. S.G. Shoham).

1996 to 1999

Financial consultant to leading businesses in Macedonia, Russia and the Czech Republic.

Economic commentator in "[Nova Makedonija](#)", "Dnevnik", "Makedonija Denes", "Izvestia", "Argumenti i Fakti", "[The Middle East Times](#)", "The New Presence", "[Central Europe Review](#)", and other periodicals, and in the economic programs on various channels of Macedonian Television.

Chief Lecturer in courses in Macedonia organised by the Agency of Privatization, by the Stock Exchange, and by the Ministry of Trade.

1999 to 2002

Economic Advisor to the Government of the Republic of Macedonia and to the Ministry of Finance.

2001 to 2003

[Senior Business Correspondent](#) for [United Press International \(UPI\)](#).

2005 –

Associate Editor and columnist, [Global Politician](#)

Founding Analyst, The [Analyst Network](#)

Contributing Writer, [American Chronicle](#)

Expert, [Self-growth](#) and [Bizymoms](#) and contributor to [Mental Health Matters](#)

2007-2008

Columnist and analyst in "[Nova Makedonija](#)", "[Fokus](#)", and "Kapital" (Macedonian papers and newsweeklies).

2008-2011

Member of the [Steering Committee for the Advancement of Healthcare in the Republic of Macedonia](#)

Advisor to the Minister of Health of Macedonia

Seminars and lectures on economic issues in various forums in Macedonia.

2011-

[Editor in Chief of Global Politician](#) and Investment Politics

Columnist in [Dnevnik and Publika](#), [Fokus](#), and [Nova Makedonija](#) (North Macedonia)

Columnist in [InfoPlus](#) and [Libertas](#)

Member [CFACT Board of Advisors](#)

Contributor to [Recovering the Self](#)

Columnist in New York Daily Sun

Professor of Clinical Psychology and Professor of Business Management at [CIAPS](#) (Commonwealth Institute of Advanced Professional Studies in [Cambridge and Birmingham UK](#); [Ontario, Canada](#); and [Lagos, Nigeria](#)) ([Detailed Bio](#)) ([Letter of Appointment](#))

Visting Professor of Psychology and Economics in South East European University (SEEU) (Letters of Appointment 2024-6 [1](#), [2](#))

Columnist in [Brussels Morning](#) ([sample](#), [sample](#))

2017-2022

[Visiting Professor of Psychology in Southern Federal University](#), Rostov-on-Don, Russia

Web and Journalistic Activities

Author of extensive Web sites in:

- Psychology ("[Malignant Self-love: Narcissism Revisited](#)") – an Open Directory Cool Site for 8 years;
- Philosophy ("[Philosophical Musings](#)");
- Economics and Geopolitics ("[World in Conflict and Transition](#)").

Owner of the Narcissistic Abuse Study List, the Toxic Relationships List, and the [Abusive Relationships Newsletter](#) (more than 8,000 members).

Owner of the Economics in Conflict and Transition Study List and the Links and Factoid Study List.

Editor of mental health disorders and Central and Eastern Europe categories in various Web directories (Open Directory, Search Europe, [Mentalhelp.net](#)).

Editor of the Personality Disorders, Narcissistic Personality Disorder, the Verbal and Emotional Abuse, and the Spousal (Domestic) Abuse and Violence topics on Suite 101 and contributing author on [Bellaonline](#).

Columnist and commentator in [Brussels Morning](#), "The New Presence", [United Press International \(UPI\)](#), InternetContent, eBookWeb, [PopMatters](#), Global Politician, Analyst Network, Conservative Voice, American Chronicle Media Group, eBookNet.org, and "Central Europe Review".

Publications and Awards

"[Proposal to Augment Israel's Foreign Exchange Reserves](#)", Fabius International, Tel-Aviv, 1985

"[Managing Investment Portfolios in States of Uncertainty](#)", Limon Publishers, Tel-Aviv, 1988

"[Games of Luck](#): Everything You Wanted To Know about Gambling", Limon Publishers, Tel-Aviv, 1990

"[Requesting My Loved One: Short Stories](#)", Miskal-Yedioth Aharonot, Tel-Aviv, 1997

"[The Suffering of Being Kafka](#)" (electronic book of Hebrew and English Short Fiction), Prague, 1998-2004

"[The Macedonian Economy at a Crossroads – On the Way to a Healthier Economy](#)" (dialogues with [Nikola Gruevski](#)), Skopje, 1998

"[The Exporter's Pocketbook](#)" Ministry of Trade, Republic of Macedonia, Skopje, 1999

"[Malignant Self-love: Narcissism Revisited](#)", Narcissus Publications, Prague, 1999-2007 (Read excerpts - click [here](#))

[The Narcissism, Psychopathy, and Abuse in Relationships Series](#)

(E-books regarding relationships with abusive narcissists and psychopaths), Prague, 1999-2010

[Personality Disorders Revisited](#) (e-book about personality disorders), Prague, 2007

"[After the Rain – How the West Lost the East](#)", Narcissus Publications in association with [Central Europe Review/CEENMI](#), Prague and Skopje, 2000
More than [50 e-books](#) about psychology, international affairs, business and economics, philosophy, short fiction, and reference (free download [here](#))

Winner of numerous awards, among them [Israel's Council of Culture and Art Prize for Maiden Prose](#) (1997), The Rotary Club Award for Social Studies (1976), and the Bilateral Relations Studies Award of the American Embassy in Israel (1978).

Hundreds of professional articles in all fields of finance and economics, and numerous articles dealing with geopolitical and political economic issues published in both print and Web periodicals in many countries.

[Many appearances in the electronic and print media](#) on subjects in psychology, philosophy, and the sciences, and concerning economic matters.

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Sam Vaknin (<http://samvak.tripod.com/mediakit.html>) is the author of Malignant Self-love: Narcissism Revisited as well as many other books and ebooks about topics in psychology, relationships, philosophy, economics, international affairs, and award-winning short fiction.

He is a Professor of Clinical Psychology and Management Studies in CIAPS (Commonwealth of International Advanced Professional Studies), Cambridge and Birmingham, UK; Ontario, Canada; Lagos, Nigeria; a Visiting Professor of Psychology and Economics in South East European University (SEEU); and a former Visiting Professor of Psychology, Southern Federal University, Rostov-on-Don, Russia.

He was the Editor-in-Chief of Global Politician and served as a columnist for Central Europe Review, PopMatters, eBookWeb , and Bellaonline, and as a United Press International (UPI) Senior Business Correspondent. He was the editor of mental health and Central East Europe categories in The Open Directory and Suite101. His YouTube channels garnered 100,000,000 views and 500,000 subscribers.

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