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Personal Narrative and Experiential Meaning

This article develops parallels between how individuals make sense of both lived experience and narrative performance in order to suggest how the process of following a narrative can give rise to affectively engaging states of mind or flows of thought that I term experiential meanings. Although potentiated through the artistry of performance, these meanings result from listeners' own interpretational processes and therefore become experiential resources available for use in their lives.

THE PERSONAL EXPERIENCE NARRATIVE appears to be self explanatory. Human beings have experiences in the world, and living in relationship with other human beings, they sometimes find it useful or meaningful to communicate these experiences to other people through narratives. This ability of narrative to embody experience is central to its essence. The first part of Labov and Waletzky's classic definition of narrative centrally implicates this ability: "narrative will be considered as one technique for recapitulating experience, in particular, a technique of constructing narrative units which match the temporal sequence of that experience" (1967:13; cf. Labov 1972:359–360). Few people would disagree with these statements. Yet their simplicity belies an underlying complexity. Scholarly interest in this complexity has generated a wealth of interpretive strategies to discern the meaning and function of personal narratives for both the teller and listener. (For an overview of this research see Langellier 1989.)

In this article I focus attention on one facet of personal narrative—the listener's experience of "following" or making sense of the unfolding narrative performance. I suggest that the experience of following can give rise to affectively engaging states of mind or flows of thought that I term *experiential meanings*. I explore the parallels between comprehending lived experience and the process of following narrative performance in order to suggest some insights into how listeners constitute these meanings. I will also suggest how the formation of experiential meanings in following narrative performance can make narrative a particularly effective vehicle for communicating experience to others in a pragmatically useful form. By using the term *experience* I therefore intend to

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invoke both the sense of experience as a resource of accumulated wisdom and the sense of experience as an ongoing interpretive process—a making sense of "what is going on here," to use Goffman's orienting question (1974:8).[1]

For the purposes of this article I suggest that personal narratives, as narratives, are coherent, followable accounts of perceived past experience. When performed, they present the selected, interpreted, and narrativized experience of an individual as a coherent sequence of events that can be followed and, therefore, experienced by listeners. Following a narrative involves an ongoing process in which the listener repeatedly tries to integrate the unfolding narrative and the dynamics of performance into a coherent and meaningful interpretation of what happened. I suggest the experience of following gives rise to experiential meanings both from the emergent individual constructions of sense making that take place and from the sequence in which these constructions unfold in time. It must be recognized, however, that the coherence that informs a narrative is the combined product of the narrator's own understanding of "what happened," the creative artistry that manifests itself in the poetics of his or her performance, and the emergent dynamics of the performance event. The coherence that listeners perceive in the experience of following is therefore constructed not only from the dynamic relationships of the narrated event but also with respect to the narrator's interpretation and presentation of his or her experience, the dynamics of the performance event, and the experiential resources listeners bring with them into the performance event. Because of parallels between lived experience and the process of following a narrative, the listener's struggle to follow a narrative must be seen to be an experience in its own right. Part of this experience of following involves a recontextualization of the narrative imagery and events in terms of the listener's own life experience. In this sense personal narratives can generate experiential resources for the listener—resources that may be "thought with" and "thought through" in the struggle to make sense of the world.

The argument that I present here assumes a performance-centered approach to oral narrative in which text, narrative event, and narrated event form an indissoluble unity (Bauman 1986:7). In maintaining my focus on the listener's experience—one point of entry into the larger unity—I have not explicitly developed all the implications of my suggestions for such a performance approach. My limited focus on the listener's experience also results in a partial analysis of the texts that I use as examples. A much richer analysis could be achieved by exploring dimensions of context, social relationship, differential identity (Bauman 1972), the narrator's construction of self, and so forth. I have intentionally left the specifics of such an analysis open, with the hope that the focused insights I present here might be useful in a range of different approaches to personal narrative.

My focus on the listener has been influenced by Alan Dundes's call for "oral literary criticism" (1966) and by Sandra Dolby Stahl's recent work on interpreting personal narratives (1989). The argument that I present here can be read as an "aural-response criticism"—in reference to the reader-response criticism

developed by literary theorists. (For an overview of this theory see Beach 1993; Freund 1987; Tompkins 1980.) There are some parallels between my suggestions and the models of reader-response critics. My use of insights from phenomenology and Gestalt psychology calls to mind the work of Wolfgang Iser (1978, 1989). My focus on the temporal foundation of the listener's experience is similar to the early work of Stanley Fish (1980:21–67). The bulk of reader-response theory, however, is focused on written texts and therefore does not directly deal with the dynamic and emergent qualities of oral performance. With oral narrative the teller and listener are copresent, and their exchange plays out interactively in real time. Aspects of performance such as timing, intonation, gesture, and situational context may play crucial roles in the experience of following. Listeners' sensory perceptions and their interpretations of the social dynamics of performance events are therefore essential resources implicated in their experience and comprehension of oral narrative performances.

Most fundamentally, the ideas I present here arise from my interactions with two storytellers. The first is Beth Jacobsen, a gifted teller of personal narratives whom I had the pleasure to know in Seattle, Washington. My reflections on how Beth's stories managed to evoke meaning led me to explore the process of listening to a story. I therefore use two of Beth's stories to illustrate theoretical points of my argument. Beth died in 1987 at the age of 87. I dedicate this article to her memory. The second storyteller is Duncan Williamson, a Traveller from Scotland—and one focus of my ongoing dissertation research. Duncan's insights into the meaning and function of stories among the Travelling People have influenced me greatly. While I do not make any claims for the universality of the concept of experiential meaning beyond my focus on Beth's narratives, I do hope the ideas that I present here will give insight into other traditions and genres of narrative. Such claims, however, will need to be supported by more extensive fieldwork.

Following Narrative and the Generation of Meaning

Dell Hymes has suggested that narrative is a viable but often undervalued mode of thought (Cazden and Hymes 1978). Philosopher of history Louis Mink puts this idea in very explicit terms. He claims that "narrative is a primary cognitive instrument—an instrument rivaled, in fact, only by theory and metaphor as irreducible ways of making the flux of experience comprehensible" (1978:129). Mink is one of a group of philosophers of history that are primarily concerned with exploring how narrative works as a vehicle for historical understanding (see Gallie 1964; Mink 1978; White 1987). Despite the limited focus on historical knowing, some insights from the study of historical narrative can be adapted to my present concern with personal narrative. In particular I want to develop the process of "following" a narrative that was proposed by W. B. Gallie in his book *Philosophy and the Historical Understanding* (1964).

The process of following a narrative is dependent on definitions of how narrative is constructed. It is not my intent here to generate a "new and

improved" definition of narrative but rather to suggest an interpretational framework that may be usefully applied to a number of different kinds of narratives. I will therefore limit my discussion to two generally accepted qualities of narrative that are relevant to the present study. The first quality is that narrative embodies a temporally ordered sequence of events. Michael Toolan, for example, tentatively defines narrative as "a perceived sequence of non-randomly connected events" (Toolan 1988:7). Labov and Waletzky's definition of narrative, quoted above, centrally implicates temporal sequence. Definitions of narrative that focus on "events" (e.g., see Prince 1989:58) necessarily involve time and temporal sequence in the transition from one state to another. The relationship between sequence in the world and sequence in narrative representation has often been termed one of iconicity (Bauman 1986:5). Yet the relationship need not be as simple as the term *iconicity* suggests. Varying degrees of artistry may transform the narrative sequence, creating a recoverable but complex relationship between the events and their portrayal in narrative (e.g., McDowell 1982:124).

The second essential quality of narrative derives from the realization that narrative is more than simple sequence or chronology (see White 1987:1–25). The sequence of events in narrative is selected, interpreted, or organized in a way that transforms the sequence into a coherent and meaningful whole. In Toolan's definition of narrative quoted above, for example, he suggests the sequence is "non-random." Labov and Waletzky suggest that sequence is motivated and organized by an "evaluative function" (Labov and Waletzky 1967:13). Paul Ricoeur states this idea very succinctly when he suggests:

> every narrative combines two dimensions in various proportions, one chronological and the other nonchronological. The first may be called the episodic dimension, which constitutes the story as made out of events. The second is the configurational dimension, according to which the plot construes significant wholes out of scattered events. [Ricoeur 1980:174]

This characteristic is also implicitly at the heart of Aristotle's definition of narrative—that a narrative has a beginning, a middle, and an end. Understanding the source of this coherence is crucial to understanding personal narratives as vehicles of experiential knowledge—a point that I directly address in the next section. For the moment I will assume that I am dealing with an already coherent narrative.

In order to understand how narrative as coherent sequence makes history or experience comprehensible, a shift is needed to an experiential perspective on what is meant by a listener's being able to "follow" a narrative (see Gallie 1964:22–50). In following a narrative performance, the listener follows the narrative sequence as it unfolds, at any given moment trying to integrate the emerging narrative information into a coherent sense of "what is happening." Following a narrative is not a linear process. Narratives are not structured like arguments, where a sequence of statements logically leads to a clearly visible conclusion. With narrative the listener follows a plot as it unfolds, accepting

wild and unpredictable contingencies as long as the narrative shows them to be "acceptable after all" as it moves toward an unpredictable conclusion. Gallie points out, "[A story] is as much a journey as [a story is] an arrival" (1964:67). This journey of following requires active participation:

> In following a story we must always keep our minds open and receptive to new possibilities of development, new hints, clues and leads, up to the very last line: besides exercising our intelligence in making routine predictions or seeing complicated but definite lines of continuity, we must be ready constantly to reassemble and reassess different possible relevances, links, dependencies, still unexplained juxtapositions. [Gallie 1964:43–44]

Following a narrative therefore involves a repeated reframing of the perceived events in an attempt to predict the narrative course and grasp the coherence that informs the narrative and gives it meaning. While the organizing principle may be seen as atemporal, the process of following or comprehending is experiential; it is an active process that takes place within time. The listeners' struggle to make sense of the narrative is crucial. Through this struggle they are led to tentatively accept or experience the coherence of the narrative, a pattern that I suggest below embodies the ideology of the narrator.

Louis Mink suggests that the validity of narrative as a mode of knowledge comes from "having followed" a narrative. Having followed a narrative means that the "ensemble of interrelationships of many different kinds" (Mink 1978:144) that narrative embodies has been grasped in an acceptable way, a way that integrates all historical knowledge about these past events into an acceptable, or coherent, understanding. At this point the temporal sequence is transcended and "actions and events . . . can be surveyed as it were in a single glance as bound together in an order of significance, a representation of the *totum simul* which we can never more than partially achieve" (Mink 1970:11). Narrative becomes important as a device that functions to transform temporal relationships into bounded, timeless wholes—into webs of interrelationship that can be examined and comprehended.

Mink is not alone in suggesting that meaning in narrative is somehow achieved in transcendence of the temporal unfolding of narrative sequence. Narratives can function and mean as wholes that are abstracted from performance (cf. Bauman and Briggs 1990:72–78). There is, for example, value in talking about the "point" of a narrative (cf. Labov and Waletzky 1967; Polanyi 1985). The point refers to features of the whole of a narrative and its relation to the surrounding discourse. In a similar way it is perfectly valid to discuss what a narrative is about, as I will do in reference to the examples I give below. But these synchronic distillations from narrative do not carry the full meaning of narrative as performance. None of these distillations give a complete understanding of what a narrative means, or how a narrative means, to a listener.

I suggest that significant meaning is generated in the active process of following a narrative—in the struggle to follow narrative threads and contingencies, grasp the narrative coherence, and make sense of what is going on at a

given point in the narrative unfolding. Following narrative is not just a process that serves to generate a complex referential field, as Mink seems to suggest for historical narrative, but following a narrative is an experiential process that can generate states of mind—or more dynamically, flows of thought—that effectively or affectively engage the listener. These states of mind and flows of thought may arise from both emergent individual constructions of sense-making and from the sequence in which these constructions unfold in time. These states of mind and flows of thought are constitutive of what I term experiential meanings.[2] In this sense I want to invoke a parallel between the meanings generated through narrative-following and the full range of meanings available through human experience. The full complexity of narrative performance plays a central role in evoking these experiential meanings as part of the listener's experience of following—a topic I develop more fully below. For the moment it is enough to suggest that features of performance, such as prosody, intonation, metanarrative, genre, and framing, may provide "data" that are integrated into the listener's interpretation and experience as they follow the narrative.

In order to exemplify how the process of following can generate meaning in narrative performance, I will examine a narrative Beth Jacobsen told during an interview on 2 August 1987. At the time of the recordings Beth was 86 and living in a retirement home in Seattle. She was mentally agile in spite of the growing frailties of old age. I do not believe that my interviews with Beth were a new and unfamiliar experience for her since a number of people came regularly to visit Beth and delight in her conversation and thought-provoking stories. This narrative, that relates an interaction between Beth and her older brother Clare, was told in the context of a discussion about her early childhood. This was an intellectually stimulating time of her life:

> When I look at the house we lived in . . . up until about the age of six, I realize that it was the seed bed of everything I became later . . . mostly due to Clare but probably also to the general conversation in the family. . . . My father was a very interesting man and he liked ideas, he talked ideas too. But Clare would answer the questions. [Tape JB001, 1987]

This excerpt might best be described as a narrative fragment since I have extracted it from a longer flow of narrative discourse. It does, however, fit the minimal description of narrative that I have given above.[3]

1 And if he used a word like
eternity
I said,
"What's eternity Clare?"
5 And he

said, "Well **I'll** show you."
And he said, "You see
in that storeroom underneath the sp spiral stairway
where Momma keeps the can the cans of milk?
On **each** can of milk"—
it was
let's see Mount Vernon canned milk—
"**there's** a
lady and **she's** holding a can of milk
and if you look closely
the lady on **that** can is **also** holding a can of milk
and so they go on and on there wouldn't be any way for them
ever to **start**.
Well that's **eternity**," he said.
[laughter]

While there are a number of interesting aspects of Beth's narrative, in this analysis I will focus on one aspect of the narrative's experiential meaning. Beth's point, in the context in which I collected the narrative, was to exemplify her brother's influence on her childhood and how she developed her interest in thinking for herself about things metaphysical. Through the use of reported speech the narrative shifts reference to a narrated event that took place in Beth's childhood—some 80 years in the past. In this original context Clare's point was presumably to convey to Beth an understanding of the term "eternity." Presumably, Clare could have given Beth a semantic definition of eternity. Instead he chose to give her an *experience* of eternity. Beth's recontextualization of Clare's narrative brings with it the "experience" that Clare wove into the temporal unfolding of the narrative. Lines 10–14, "On each can of milk . . . there's a lady and she's holding a can of milk," effectively generate an image in my mind of a can of milk that pictures a woman holding an identical can of milk. Lines 15 and 16, "and if you look closely / the lady on that can is also holding a can of milk," transform this static image into a dynamic one that moves from this first image to smaller images that common sense claims must exist on the ever shrinking cans of milk. Line 16 ends without intonational resolution implying that there is no resolution to the imagined flow of smaller images. Lines 17 and

18, "and so they go on and on and there wouldn't be any way for them / ever to start," continue the motion from image to image by launching my imagination onto an experience of the infinite regression of ever smaller images by metanarratively commenting that this regression of images will continue forever. In following the narrative, encouraged by the poetics of performance, I spin out this progression of ever smaller images and am led to an experience of eternity. Fortunately this experience is an imagined projection that has been evoked by following the narrative and I can choose to stop the experience when I wish. Clare's decision to answer Beth's question in narrative allows the experience of the temporal foreverness of eternity to be captured in a very understandable way. A referential definition could not have produced this experiential element that adds to understanding. (I should note that this definition in narrative was very effective given the clarity with which Beth remembers it after 80 years!)

Coherence, Lived Experience, and Narrative Performance

Since coherence is centrally implicated in the process of following a narrative, it is essential to understand the origin of this coherence in order to fully understand how experiential meanings are constituted and communicated in narrative performance. In this section I argue that our perception of coherence in the events of the world does not derive from an objective reading of these events, but that it is a product of the experiential process. By merging insights gleaned from phenomenological studies of experience and studies of perception from Gestalt psychology, I suggest that the experiential process involves a coherence making in which lived experience is understood with respect to culturally based interpretational frameworks, past experiences, and projections of what is expected to happen. I further suggest the transformation of experience to narrative as intended communication builds on this experiential coherence-making, but additionally involves the narrator's strategic selection and presentation of experience. In this presentation of experience, the formal features of performance become resources the narrator can use to suggest experiential meanings.

At the outset it is important to suggest that coherence is not an objective quality that is inherent in the events of the world. This point is persuasively developed in the work of Hayden White and Louis Mink. Hayden White, for example, suggests that historians have adopted narrative form "out of a desire to have real events display the coherence, integrity, fullness, and closure of an image of life that is and can only be imaginary" (1987:24). He asks, "Does the world really present itself to perception in the form of well-made stories, with central subjects, proper beginnings, middles, and ends, and a coherence that permits us to see 'the end' in every beginning?" (1987:24). Louis Mink similarly suggests that "our experience of life does not itself necessarily have the form of narrative, except as we give it that form by making it the subject of stories" (1978:133). He goes on to imply a reversal of the apparent logical priority of narrated event and narrative event by suggesting " 'Events' are not the raw

material out of which narratives are constructed; rather an event is an abstraction from a narrative" (1978:147).

Despite the value of these arguments, I do not want to suggest that narrative form is purely an artifice that structures the events of some real world by imposing coherence on them. Instead, I begin my exploration of narrative coherence from a phenomenological view of experience and suggest coherent narratives may be accurate representations of the "real world" because they reflect the lived, and therefore interpreted, experience of the world for the narrator. David Carr, for example, argues there is a fundamental similarity between narrative form and the temporality of lived experience (1986:64). He criticizes Mink and White for suggesting that there is a discontinuity between narrative representation and the real world. Instead he suggests that narrative "arises out of and is prefigured in certain features of life, action, and communication. Historical and fictional narratives will reveal themselves to be not distortions of, denials of, or escapes from reality, but extensions and configurations of its primary features" (1986:16).

There are several insights from phenomenological explorations of lived experience that profitably add to my understanding of narrative coherence.[4] These insights, in turn, illuminate the dynamics of how individuals narrativize experience and how they experience narrative performances in the process of following. Fundamental to these insights is the phenomenological characterization of how an individual experiences the present moment. Henri Bergson, for example, argues that the "present" of lived experience is not some sequence of disconnected "present instants" that separate the past from the future, but that it is duration, "a continuation of what no longer exists into what does exist" (Bergson 1965[1922]:49). William James similarly identifies duration as the basis of what he terms the "specious present" (1981[1890]:574). James goes on to suggest that "the original experience of both space and time is always of something already given as a unit, inside of which attention afterwards discriminates parts in relation to each other" (1981[1890]:574–575). In this sense, all comprehension of experience, even the awareness of sequence, requires an abstraction from the experience of duration (see Bergson 1965:49–51; James 1981[1890]:591–592). The temporal "thickness" of the present as duration is essential to the discriminatory process of attention or interpretation. It is through the experience of duration that the experiencer is able to apprehend continuity and change in the flux of experience (Bergson 1965:48–49).

I suggest that the process of understanding "what is going on" in lived experience additionally requires a complex process wherein the "parts" abstracted from the experience of duration are reassembled into meaningful wholes—a process wherein the flux of experience is informed with coherence.[5] In contemplating this process, I am helped by an analogy to how Gestalt psychologists suggest the flux of sensory perceptions is converted into distinct, meaningful objects (for an overview of Gestalt psychology see Rock and Palmer 1990).

For example, making sense of a fixed visual image requires a significant processing of the visual "data":

> The retinal image is nothing but an array of varying intensities and frequencies of light, the rays coming from different parts of the same object have no more affinity for one another than those coming from two different objects. It follows that the ability to perceive objects—such as stones, trees and houses—must be an organization achieved by the nervous system. [Rock and Palmer 1990:85]

Gestaltists suggest individuals break the undifferentiated visual field into meaningful parts ("discriminated parts," to use James's term) that are then associated with one another through "rules of organization" until a coherent gestalt of recognizable objects can be perceived. The basic rules of organization involved in forming a gestalt include groupings by proximity, similarity, closure, good continuation, common region, and connectedness (Rock and Palmer 1990:89). The individual's process of sense-making has been termed a "hierarchical processing of categories" since it involves a sequential categorization and synthesis process that takes place on more and more inclusive levels as "sense" is made out of the visual data (Terhardt 1987:158–160). Through this process an individual separates figure from ground by rules which select for the most "coherent" figure or "as good a figure as possible" (Handel 1989:186). This process takes place in time. The acceptance of groupings is contingent until it is seen if these choices lead to a coherent and meaningful interpretation of the whole.

A similar process takes place with temporally unfolding experience such as the perception of sound. Here the individual's interpretational process is referred to as a "streaming" of the acoustic flow into separate strands and the "fusion" of these strands back into coherent and meaningful associations (Handel 1989:189–191). With a temporally unfolding experience it is necessary to consider an emergent gestalt—or perhaps a sequence of gestalts—as part of making sense of "what is going on." The rules of organization involved in streaming and fusion will necessarily include aspects of ongoing relationship if these gestalts are to be coherent over time (see Handel 1989:190–205).

Lived experience requires a similar separation of figure from ground, a similar streaming and fusion of the flux of experience in order to make sense (form a coherent gestalt) out of "what is going on." As with perception, this is a temporal process that takes place within the thickness of the experiencer's present awareness. It involves interpretational choices that are contingent on their ongoing usefulness in making sense of the unfolding experience.[6] While I hesitate to enumerate a list of the "rules of organization" involved in forming a coherent gestalt of experience, there are a number of identifiable resources that can be drawn upon in making interpretational choices. These resources tend to be culturally based. For example, the viability of concepts such as worldview and ideology (in the sense of ideational system) suggests the existence of patterned, shared interpretational frameworks that are implicated in extracting

coherent meaning from experience. The patterning of these interpretational frameworks may have its origin in a number of different sources such as cultural teachings, traditional expectations (see Abrahams 1985), traditionalizations of community experience, or the structure of human neurology.[7] But I think it would be a mistake to suggest that experience is fully determined by these interpretational frameworks. While some aspects of these frameworks may remain unquestioned (or based in neurology), and the experiencer therefore remains blind to other possible interpretations, these frameworks are only one resource in the present of lived duration. They suggest to us "what normally goes on."

Past experience—"what has gone on before"—is also an essential resource in making sense of present experience. An individual's past experience is necessarily interpreted through the experiential process I am now describing, but here I emphasize the unique, situated nature of each experience in contrast to generalized interpretational frameworks. Phenomenological descriptions of lived experience recognize that the experiencer has access to the past within the duration of the present moment. The present necessarily includes awareness of the "just past" as a part of duration. But the experiencer also has access to past memories. William James, for example, suggests that the content of the "specious present" may include "direct experiences" or "acts of thinking" that are "representative of other experiences indefinitely remote" (1981[1890]:600). Edmund Husserl distinguishes between "primary retentions," retentions that maintain a direct connection to the now, and "secondary remembrances," memories that have lost this immediate connection (1964:57–58). An individual can bring these past experiences into the present as resources that allow "what is going on now" to be understood with respect to "what went on in the past."

Interpretations of what is going on now are also influenced by the experiencer's projections of the future—what he or she expects will go on, or wants to go on. Edmund Husserl argues that intentionality toward the future is a necessary feature of the lived present (1964:76). In a parallel to how "retentions" of the past endure in the present, Husserl suggests "protentions" connect the present to the future that is not yet present (1964:76). This makes sense most easily from a pragmatic point of view since one goal of understanding the present is focused toward predicting what will happen so that we can think and act appropriately. The processes I suggested above for perception and experience are explicitly protentive in the sense that the groupings, fusions, or interpretational choices are contingent on their ongoing usefulness in making sense of experience. It is only with respect to what has not yet happened that their validity or usefulness can be evaluated.

Making sense out of lived experience, therefore, involves a process whereby an individual breaks the flux of experience into significant units and reassembles them into a coherent and meaningful gestalt of "what is going on." Interpretational choices draw on the past resources provided by interpretational frameworks and past experience. They draw protentively on the future—interpretational choices build on expectations and are contingent on their ongoing usefulness in

making sense of the unfolding present. Sense making is a dynamic process that takes place within the temporal thickness of the individual's present awareness. While an individual's gestalt of what is going on must be seen as a whole at some given moment, this whole could be either a state of mind or a flow of thought. Sense-making is also emergent. Individuals are constantly updating, reinterpreting, reforming, or abandoning their "understandings" as needed and as required by subsequent experience. Previous experiences may even be reinterpreted in light of present experience. Note that meaning is not just carried through individual gestalts but also in the relationships and contradictions between these individual gestalts.[8] It is through an individual's interpretational process that his or her understanding of lived experience is informed with coherence.

This same coherence-making process is implicated when lived experience is transformed into narrative. There are a number of potential motivations to make such a transformation. As I noted earlier, Dell Hymes and Louis Mink suggest that narrative is a fundamental way of apprehending the flux of experience. In many ways we understand the present happenings of the world by telling ourselves stories about "what is going on." We actively abstract a coherent, followable sequence of events from lived experience. If these narratives "fit" the unfolding of lived experience—if they are pragmatically useful in living or if they are congruent with experiences or narratives we already know—we feel we have understood or accurately experienced "what is going on." The coherence that informs the narrative can then be argued to be the coherence of the world and used as a resource for future interpretations. This conception of understanding through narrative can be applied to diverse topics of personal experience (e.g., see Hufford 1982; Orr 1987).

It is also possible that some memories are constructed through the narrativization process. While this is a topic that requires more development than I can give it here, I suggest that experiences that unfold through time can be effectively "stored" by what I term *narrative memory*. By this term I mean that the sequence, coherence, and indexical references of the original experience are stored in memory in the sequence in which they are comprehended and abstracted into narrative form. Recalling these memories elicits a reexperiencing in the process of following—in a direct parallel to following the unfolding of a narrative performance. Where the remembered experience is itself a narrative performance, the reexperiencing will include not just the narrative text but also the listener's experiences of performance and context.

Dell Hymes suggests that for some cultures the formation of narratives can be understood as a future-orientated approach to the world. In addition to text and performance, Hymes suggests a third essential focus for narrative study is "the process in which performance and text live, the inner substance to which performance is the cambium, as it were, and crystallized text the bark. It is the grounding of text and performance in a narrative view of life. . . . That is, life is seen as a potential source of narrative" (1978:138). From this perspective experiences, interpretations of experience, and reinterpretations of experience

become resources that are used in the construction of narratives intended for future communication to others through performance (cf. Bauman 1987).

When narrative is viewed as intended communication, the process of transforming lived experience to narrative takes on additional dimensions of complexity. As I have suggested, experience and interpretation of the world is neither objective nor all inclusive but is dependent on differing perspectives and interpretational frameworks that individuals develop in the situated process of living. Each individual selects, interprets, and narrativizes lived experience in terms of their own understanding and cultural worldview and therefore, to them, the narrative may appear to accurately reference past events. But individuals may construct differing narratives out of the same "events" by virtue of their differing identities, points of view, interests, attentions, or understandings. The narratives generated by members of different cultures may diverge even more radically.

In addition to this coherence-making of lived experience, narrative as intended communication necessarily involves a selection and presentation of what is to be performed as narrative. Given the agency of the performer the construction of narrative need not be seen as a passive act. Richard Bauman points out that not only does narrative have the potential to make "the flux of experience" comprehensible, "it may also be an instrument for obscuring, hedging, confusing, exploring, or questioning what went on, that is, for keeping the coherence or comprehensibility of narrated events open to question" (1986:5–6, 33–53). The dynamics of the performance interaction, including the differential identity of the participants, may therefore influence the emergent performance. In this sense the creative construction of narrative coherence suggested by Louis Mink and Hayden White must be seen as a compliment to the experiential grounding of narrative coherence that is suggested by David Carr.

Regardless of whether the goal is presenting or exploring what happened, transforming experience to narrative involves a great deal of creative work on the part of the narrativizor. The narrator must make choices in terms of how to order, present and perform narratives. For example, words are chosen that can gloss visual, auditory, or tactile sensations that are relevant to communicating the experience. I suggest that a competent narrativizor brings into personal narrative construction a wide range of rhetorical, poetic, and performative skills that are used to structure the narrative in both formal and performance dimensions. A significant part of this competency is an understanding of how listeners extract meaning in following a narrative. While referential meaning might be explicitly embedded in the narrative, a competent narrativizor suggests experiential meanings through how he or she selects, performs, and unfolds the narrative sequence. The poetics of performance and rhetorical stances are resources for potentiating experiential meaning or meanings in narrative performance—for evoking states of mind or flows of thought. The narrator's performance artistry helps create the coherent narrative whole and therefore directly influences the listener's process of following and experiencing. In this sense, narrative performance evokes experiential meanings but does not deter-

mine them. These experiential meanings, like the performance itself, are emergent in the dynamics between performer, listener, and event.

Performance, Following, and Experiential Meaning

When following a narrative, the narrative performance, complete with all the nuances of the performance event, unfolds within the listeners present. Following is therefore an experience in its own right. Listeners must try to extract coherent meaning from this performance exactly as they would from any other lived experience. There is, however, one crucial difference between lived experience and narrative. With narrative, performers inform the emergent narrative with a coherence that derives from their own understanding and presentation of the events being narrated. In following this narrative—in constructing gestalts, states of mind, or flows of thought—listeners are led by this performed coherence as they grasp together the narrative threads in order to make sense out of the narrative. In this way the performer can suggest meanings that listeners are able to experience through their own following process. Back channel cues can serve to provide feedback to the performer as to the efficacy of their suggestions. Yet the coherence that listeners perceive in following a narrative is effectively a synthesis of the performed coherence and the coherence that is formed through the listeners' experiential process. The experiential meanings listeners construct are therefore very much their own.

For this communication of experience to work individuals must choose to invest their time in following a narrative. The degree to which they can accept the narrativized coherence is dependent on their involvement with the narrative. Gallie notes that if listeners' sympathies are evoked by the characters in the narrative, they are motivated to follow the narrative and are effectively "pulled along" by their desire to follow the narrative and find out what happens next (see Gallie 1964:44–47). With personal narratives the main character is the narrator. The listener's relationship to the narrator is thus an important factor in determining the intensity that a listener invests in following a given narrative. Narrators must be conscious of an established relationship, or the creation of a new one, if their narrative is to be followed by a listener. This can be seen as an aspect of the intimacy that Sandra Dolby Stahl finds as a key concept in dealing with personal experience narratives (1989:42).

In choosing to follow a narrative and in choosing to be led by the narrator's construction of coherence, the listeners still construct their own meaning through their experiential process. In *Literary Folkloristics and the Personal Narrative*, Sandra Dolby Stahl gives valuable insight into how a listener interprets personal narratives. Meaning is generated for a listener in an interpretive context that involves elements that "are not so much in the text as they are representative of the listener's active response; they are allusions the listener hears or fills in as the story is told" (1989:33). An individual's own associations, and shared associations with the teller, create a context of knowledge which informs the listener's understanding of what the narrative means. I take this insight one step further by suggesting on an experiential level a very similar process informs the

listener's interpretation of the teller's narrative. Part of the listener's active response of listening to, or following, a narrative involves the recontextualization of the narrative events in terms of the listener's own life experience.

With visual imagery, for example, this recontextualization is direct. Listeners will create their own images in interpreting a storyteller's words. When the storyteller talks about a "young girl running," listeners will use their imaginations to conjure up images of what they consider to be a young girl doing what they consider to be running, in a context of their own choice, assuming no context is specified by the storyteller. The image is as detailed as it needs to be for the listener to understand the story.[9] This idea has been expressed in a number of different ways. For example, Marie-Laure Ryan's "principle of minimal departure" suggests that "we reconstrue the world of a fiction and of a counterfactual as being the closest possible to the reality we know. This means that we will project upon the world of the statement everything we know about the real world, and that we will make only those adjustments that we cannot avoid" (Ryan 1980:406). Filling in ambiguity with the familiar is a process that can also be traced to the Gestalt principle of *Prägnanz*. Prägnanz suggests that individuals tend to interpret ambiguous stimuli by constructing the simplest image, or gestalt, that is consistent with the available information (Rock and Palmer 1990:86–88). With narrative then, familiar images from our own experience are used to fill in the gaps in our understanding—as long as the images "fit" the unfolding narrative.

A similar recontextualization process takes place for the experiential elements in personal experience narratives. The core of these narratives is, by definition, personal experience. In order to fully comprehend such a narrative, listeners must attempt to understand the experiences of the narrator as if the experiences were happening to them. Listeners actively follow the narrative, trying to experience the unfolding events by fitting themselves into the narrative situation. Their own allusions and experiences are invoked as resources for constructing tentative gestalts of what went on for the narrator. By this I do not mean to suggest that listeners substitute their experiences for those of the narrator but that, in trying to make sense of the narrator's experience, listeners draw on their own experiences and interpretational frameworks as they do in trying to comprehend their own lived experience.

While listeners recognize that the experiences referenced in personal narrative belong to the narrator, the process of recontextualization that takes place in following a narrative allows the listeners to make the experiences their own. Listeners are constantly trying to piece together and understand the evolving whole of the narrative. They are constantly synthesizing and resynthesizing as much as the unfolding plot will allow. The listeners' emerging understanding of the narrated experience is therefore a product of the coherence making that is implicated in their own thought processes. This understanding is constructed from their own point of view and with respect to their own life experience. Listeners, therefore, are not told the meaning of a narrative but discover it for themselves through the cumulative process of following and experiencing. For

example, the narrator does not need to manipulate listeners into having emotional responses. The listeners' emotional reactions can be a genuine product of their experiencing in the process of following. Similarly, insights and intellectual understandings can also be a product of the listeners' experiential process. In this sense, narrative experience becomes an experiential resource that listeners can utilize in their future life. As an experiential resource this synthesis is not static. As with other experiences it can be taken apart, thought about, and resynthesized as future experiences add to the listeners' understanding. It can also serve as an experience to be "thought with" and "thought through" in the attempt to understand future experiences.

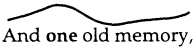
The construction of experiential meanings in narrative need not be single stranded. Multiple strands of meaning might emerge from the performance because of a listener's interests and interpretational strategy. But these multiple strands may be intentionally evoked by the performer's artistry. The narrator may suggest parallel interpretive frames that play off each other or that coexist as parts of a whole. States of mind or flows of thought may be intentionally evoked and contrasted with or contradicted by other experiential meanings. There may be a deliberate ambiguity in narrative performance that leads to competing strands of meaning within a single narrative—in a parallel to Gestalt illusions for the senses (see Rock and Palmer 1990). It must also be remembered that each gestalt is not seen as final but open to reinterpretation as the narrative progresses. My point is that the emergent dynamics of narrative performance can suggest a wide variety of experiential meanings. Narrative sequence, poetic devices, prosody, metanarration, generic assumptions, the listener's expectations, framing, situational factors, and so on, all play important roles in the construction of these experiential meanings. But in the end it is listeners who construct coherence and experiential meanings from narrative performance through a process that has significant parallels to how they abstract coherent meaning from their own lived experience.

The Baby Eggs

I recorded the following narrative from Beth Jacobsen in her room at the retirement home in Seattle on 2 August 1987. Present at the recording were Beth, Susan Grizzell, and myself. In this narrative Beth focuses on the mysteries of human birth and aging. Beth's narrative appears to be fairly simple and straightforward, but this simplicity belies the complexity revealed at deeper levels of analysis. It was not unusual for Beth's narratives to serve as a vehicle for expressing her accumulated wisdom and approach to the world. Her idiosyncratic perspective on life was the point of many of her stories.

Beth's family moved to Seattle shortly after her birth in 1901, and she lived there the rest of her life. She grew up with her brothers and sisters in a home which her father built in what was then a quite rural part of town. It was during an interview about her stories, and within the context of a conversation about a recent visit she made to her childhood home, that Beth told the following narrative.

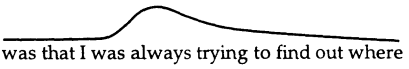
...The old memories came forth from the old house.



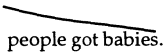
And **one** old memory,

focusing of attention on "one"

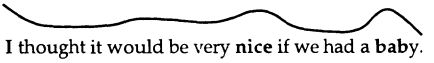
that I'd comp**lete**ly forgotten,



was that I was always trying to find out where



people got babies.

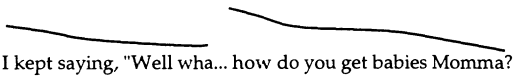


I thought it would be very **nice** if we had a **baby**.

childlike voice

[Mhmm]

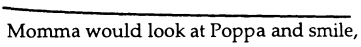
and eh



I kept saying, "Well wha... how do you get babies Momma?

childlike voice

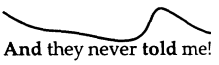
Where do they **come** from?"



Momma would look at Poppa and smile,

[laughter]

and Poppa would look at Momma and smile.



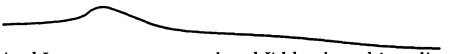
And they never **told** me!

frustrated

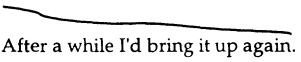
[Laughter]

I **never** heard!

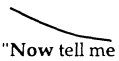
frustrated



And I was so **exas**perated and I'd let the subject die.



After a while I'd bring it up again.

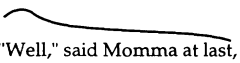


"**Now** tell me

Resolved

where do babies come from?"

deliberate, spaced words



"Well," said Momma at last,


"**You** know where little **birds** come from don't you?"


"Ohhh yes.....

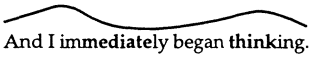

Do **you** mean we come out of **eggs?**"

amazed understanding

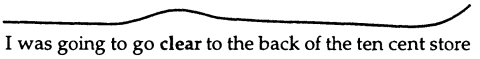
25 She said,

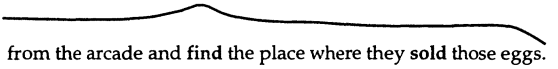
"yes."

very tentative and quiet


And I im**me**di**a**tely began **think**ing.

sense of determination


I was going to go **clear** to the back of the ten cent store


from the arcade and **find** the place where they **sold** those eggs.

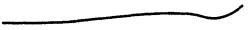
brisk and resolved

30 [laughter]


The **baby** eggs.

strong, final quality

[laughter]


And they'd be about that big

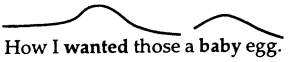
[indicates with hands—10"] return to naive child intonation

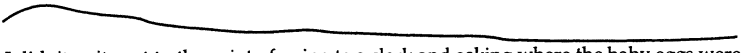
[laughter]

35


And I **just** re**mem**bered that

Adult delight


How I **wanted** those a **baby** egg.


I didn't quite get to the point of going to a clerk and asking where the baby eggs were.

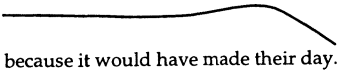
/ amused

[laughter]


I **wish** I had

strong wish

40


because it would have made their day.

[laughter]


The baby **eggs.**

sense of finality & conclusion

Well

hanging, generates anticipation

Beth's narrative results from her reflections on the experiences of her own life. In the moment of her visit to her childhood home, her emerging memories enabled an understanding that linked several facets of her own life into a coherent image of self. Her narrative is a way of communicating this experience to others in order to reflect and affirm this self image (see Myerhoff 1978:221–222). In this sense, Beth's narrative might be interpreted as a natural part of the life review process that takes place during aging (see Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1989; Mullen 1992). Her narrative is also a way of sharing with others the insights she has distilled from her own life experience.

In following the narrative, my awareness of Beth's life, my perception of her motivations for telling stories, my sense of how I have influenced our interactions, my interpretations of other stories she has told me, and my understanding of the current context of performance become resources that inform my interpretation and construction of meaning. A full analysis of Beth's narrative performance would require attention to all these factors. In the analysis that follows, I limit my comments to examining the poetics of the narrative in order to give insight into potential aspects of the listener's experiencing and thus one

possible reading of the narrative's experiential meaning. While I draw on my own experiential resources and my own experiencing of the narrative performance as a guide in my analysis—and recognize that each listener's experience will be unique—I suggest that many of the features of this analysis may be shared by other listeners.

I discern four "Beths" in following this story. First there is Beth as a young child trying to fathom the mysteries of life. This Beth is the "heroine" of the narrative; the action takes place when she was this child. Beth the child is conjured up through the use of narration, but she comes to life through the use of direct quotes marked by the use of "childlike" voice and intonation (see lines 9, 10, 19, 20, 23, 24). Not only do I hear the child's voice, but I also become privy to the child's thought processes and consequent conclusions which are foregrounded through the use of stress and intonational features (see especially lines 23 and 24, "Oh Yes. . . . Do you mean we come out of eggs?"). I am invited by the temporal unfolding and style of the performance to follow and experience the child's growing understanding of the origin of babies, to identify with this understanding, and to marvel in the perfectly logical line of reasoning which leads to the ten-cent store and its shelf of baby eggs. My experiencing is dependent on following and inserting myself into the role of a child and allowing the echoes of my own experience and the memory of my own questioning to inform my understanding.

A second Beth present in this same passage is the Beth of 86, who has raised children and grandchildren of her own. In this role she associates herself with her parents who are reluctant, or unsure of, how to reveal the mysteries of life to the young Beth. Her performance allows me, as listener, to understand both the child's and the adult's perspectives as the narrative progresses. Lines 11 and 13, for example—"Momma would look at Poppa and smile, / and Poppa would look at Momma and smile"—are delivered in a virtual monotone and therefore lack normal interpretational clues. This simultaneously implies the lack of comprehension that a child would experience on receiving this response and suggests the difficulty and humor of a situation that an adult could understand. Another example occurs in line 26 where the acoustic texture of the line reinforces the parallel interpretive frames. The child hears "YES!" in answer to her question about human origin in eggs, but it appears from the quiet, tentative flatness of the response that Momma has given in to the easy way out. On one level humans do come from eggs, but there is an obvious misunderstanding on the young Beth's part. This, of course, triggers the projected search for these baby eggs in the ten-cent store and one key element of humor that exists in the story. Beth's performance allows me to easily put myself into the story, experience the conflicts of the characters, and have compassion for the resultant chain of events.

The third Beth is the Beth who is narrating the story to Susan and me. This is in part a metanarrative role. Beth shares in the delight of the narrative situation and even projects the possible consequences that would have resulted if she had acted upon her line of reasoning as a child, "I didn't quite get to the point of

going to a clerk and asking where the baby eggs were. / I wish I had / because it would have made their day." These projections create additional dimensions of experiencing that Beth, Susan and I can interpret. This Beth is implicitly present throughout the whole narrative because of the relationship that we as listeners share with her outside the narrative. This Beth is in a sense the context for the narrative as well as the subject of the narrative. It is with this Beth that I associate the source and summation of narrative meaning. It is my relationship with her that motivates me to follow her story.

Coexisting with these three Beths is a fourth Beth of the very recent past who visits her childhood home as an old woman and remembers younger days. This Beth ties together the other levels in a simultaneity of past and present in a timelessness that is expressed in the imagery of lines 50–53, "and when I visited the old house / I went to the very room and stood at the threshold of the room / and remembered how . . ." Here a common location, the old house, ties together then and now, youth and age, innocence and wisdom. This juxtaposition is foregrounded by the sequence in which the narrative unfolds. The finality of the intonation drop on line 42 ("The baby eggs") implies that the narrative has ended. But the hanging "well" of line 43, marked by a lack of closure in the intonation, hints that there is more to come. Lines 44 and 45, "Nothing came of all this / until . . .," bring the return of the initial narrative thread—Beth's desire to understand human origin. These lines also build interest and curiosity as to where the narrative is going by the quickened pace and near chant of the delivery. Beth then briefly suspends the narrative motion, in lines 50–53, and creates the vivid parallel between Beth as child and her return visit as an old woman, just before she reveals the birth of her sister, Mary.

In my experience of the narrative performance all four Beths are present. In fact they are all referred to by the single pronoun "I." The four Beths in one sense collapse into the one person of the narrator and yet they are held distinct by the content and prosody of the narration. But this parallelism evokes a paradigm that equates the different "I's" of Beth over time and across social situations. The effect, for me, is the suggestion of another possible gestalt that involves the dissolution of time into a perception that is imaged in a woman, neither old nor young and yet both, standing on the bedroom threshold wondering at the mystery of birth—a phenomenon that plays itself out in time.

Beth's narrative is an expression of her understanding of how birth, aging, and time play out their mysteries in the context of her own life. Her performance is the sharing of this understanding and experience with friends. In creating the form of her narrative she unfolds her understanding in a way that her listeners can put the pieces together and share her insight. Beth suggests situations that can be imagined, experienced and filled out within the listener's own interpretational context. She moves the plot forward by the use of narration, reported speech, and poetic features which suggest additional layers of interpretive meaning to be explored and experienced by the listener.

In following the narrative I am led to experience events that I cannot possibly experience at this point in my life. I have never had children. I am not 86 and

cannot look back over the full range of life and understand these matters from that perspective. I have never wondered where I would go to find baby eggs. In following Beth's narrative I am given a context in which I can imaginatively experience what it is like to be and do these things—guided by the wisdom of Beth's point of view. I do not simply find out that Beth has come to a certain understanding, but experience this understanding and realization for myself. I have created my own synthesis in following the narrative by experiencing myself as a child, a parent and an old man reflecting back over the experiences of life. What Beth has given me is not a static image but a dynamic resource which can be integrated into my experience and used to understand other experiences, or modified as future experience dictates.

Conclusion

I have suggested that one important aspect of personal narrative meaning is what I term experiential meaning. This meaning derives from a direct experience of the unfolding of narrative performance in a process parallel to how individuals experience the flow of duration in lived experience. Experiential meanings may be suggested through the artistry of performance. But the process of experiencing in following narrative allows listeners to transform narrative, and therefore other people's experience, into a resource for living their own lives. In this sense people can literally learn from the experience of others. There are, of course, factors which limit the potential efficacy of this experience. For example, a differential identity between teller and listener may imply a difference in the cultural patterns that influence the narrativization process. If the listener cannot accept the teller's patterning the listener may fail to follow, or even a lack the desire to try and follow, the teller's narrative. Problems may also result from a difference in understanding of the characteristics of performance. If the narrative experience is sufficiently foreign, listeners may not be able to recontextualize it in terms of their own experiences and their following may result in a "vicarious" or "virtual" experiencing.

My argument for an experiential component of meaning in personal narratives is a first step toward developing a more general understanding of the temporal poetics of narrative form and performance. It is my hope that the concept of experiential meaning may suggest useful insights in a variety of areas of narrative research. For example, the potency of experiential meaning for communication that transcends the referential may be useful in exploring the domain of "commemorative discourse" suggested by John McDowell (1992).

While I have been focusing on personal experience narratives in this paper, I suggest that many of my comments apply equally well to fictional genres of oral narrative. In fact the dividing line between fictional and "true" genres is a very hazy one. Personal narratives are subject to various degrees of interpretation and fictionalization in the narrativization process. Whether or not there is a contribution from conscious manipulation, the very process of creating a narrative is an interpretation of what happened and not the original experience. With

fictional genres there is no generic framing that "this story actually happened." But the "willing suspension of disbelief" suggested for interpreting fictional genres is balanced by a realization that much of the fictional narrative "could have happened" since we still draw on our own experience in following fictional events.

Some features of my analysis of personal experience narratives may not hold or may need to be modified in understanding how experiential meanings are constructed in following fictional narratives. Yet I believe fictional narratives do give rise to experiential meanings that are effectively integrated into an individual's experience as resources the listener can use to "think with" and "think through" in attempts to understand future experiences. I once told a folktale to a fifth grade class that a friend was teaching. The story involves two frogs that get trapped in a bowl of cream and cannot escape. One frog gives up and drowns, the other continues trying everything it can think of to jump out of the bowl. The frog eventually manages to churn the cream to butter and can then escape. My friend told me that the next day in math class, one student was ready to give up on a problem he felt that he could not do. Another student said, "No, don't give up! Remember the frogs!" While this example does not conclusively show the students experienced the frog's struggle and success, it does suggest the experience of following a fictional narrative can generate experiential resources that are pragmatically useful in dealing with future experiences in the "real world."

Notes

I would like to acknowledge the help of Inta Gale Carpenter, Sandra Dolby, Cornelia Fales, Jean R. Freedman, Susan Grizzell, Lynne Hamer, John H. McDowell, Robert Sander, and Gregory Schrempp for their support, bibliographic references, or comments on earlier drafts of this paper. The fieldwork with Beth Jacobsen was motivated and guided by Margaret Bennett and Yens Lund.

[1]In this sense I do not suggest that lived experience is meaningful in and of itself, but that meaning is a function of attention—of the reflective process involved in comprehending lived experience (see Schutz 1967:69–74).

[2]Reader-response critic Stanley Fish makes a similar point in suggesting that a focus on the temporal unfolding of the reader's experience is essential to understanding the meaning of a literary work. In his analysis he asks "what does a sentence do?" A sentence is suggested to be "an event" and what "happens" to readers—their temporally situated experience—is suggested to be the meaning of the utterance (Fish 1980:25).

[3]I have developed the notational system used in the transcriptions to reveal some of the features of performance style. Narratives have been broken into lines based on pauses in the delivery. Pitch contours are given above the phrases: an upward movement of this line indicates an increasing pitch; a downward movement a falling pitch. Note that the contours reflect the tonal pattern within a tone group but that the amplitude of pitch change is only roughly comparable with other groups. Stress is crudely indicated by use of bold type for stressed words. Utterances of Susan Grizzell or myself (the audience) are placed in square brackets. General interpretive comments on delivery of the narrative are given in the right column in the "Baby Eggs" transcription.

[4]I do not intend to develop a complete phenomenology of time consciousness nor a rigorous phenomenology of narrative in this paper. For an excellent survey of the concept of time in Western philosophy see Sherover 1975. In her book *Taleworlds and Storyrealms* (1987) Katharine Galloway Young suggests a phenomenological approach to narrative performance that explores the relation-

ships between the realm of narrative discourse and the taleworld it references. For another approach to the phenomenology of narrative see Carr 1986. Neither of these works, however, explicitly deals with the issues I raise in this paper.

[5]Compare this suggestion with Alfred Schutz's formulation of "configurations of lived experience":

> As long as consciousness remains a pure stream of duration, there are no discrete lived experiences. The latter appear only when the reflective glance of attention begins to operate. Within the stream, then, instead of discrete experiences, we have everywhere continuity, with horizons opening equally into the past and the future. However diverse the lived experiences may be, they are bound together by the fact that they are *mine*. To this primal unity there is added another unity at the next-higher level. This is the unity conferred by the reflective glance, the unity of *meaning*. [Schutz 1967:75; emphasis in original]

[6]My suggestion of the temporal basis of the ongoing interpretive process has many parallels to Wolfgang Iser's concept of the "wandering viewpoint" in his formulation of reader-response criticism (1978:108–118). Iser also talks about how a reader comes to comprehend an unfolding text through "consistency building"—a process he develops in terms of gestalt metaphors (1978:122–123).

[7]I do not mean to suggest that these frameworks are either innate or static. I suggest they are emergent individual constructs that are developed from individual experience in relation to community interaction in the situated process of living. These individual constructs are only shared in the sense that they have become negotiated and attuned through a continuity of interaction between individuals. On the social grounding of communicative and interpretive competency see Hymes 1975:349–354. Even neurologically based patterning may be learned in the sense that neurology is not fixed at birth but continues to develop as the child ages (Shatz 1992). Recent developments in understanding neural networks also suggest that experience becomes coded in terms of persistent neural interconnections (Hinton 1992).

[8]This point is also made by Stanley Fish in his formulation of the unfolding sense-making process:

> For me, reading (and comprehension in general) is an event, no part of which is to be discarded. In that event, which is the actualization of meaning, the deep structure plays an important role, but it is not everything; for we comprehend not in terms of the deep structure alone, but in terms of a *relationship* between the unfolding, in time, of the surface structure and a continual checking of it against our projection (always in terms of surface structure) of what the deep structure will reveal itself to be; and when the final discovery has been made and *the* deep structure is perceived, all the "mistakes"—the positing, on the basis of incomplete evidence, of the deep structures that failed to materialize—will not be canceled out. They have been experienced; they have existed in the mental life of the reader; they *mean*. [1980:48; emphasis in original]

[9]A teacher wrote me after one of my elementary school storytelling performances and told me one student commented that my storytelling was "better than any TV show he had ever seen, that he could make pictures in his mind and if he wanted to change them he could" (Jan Hoem, personal communication, 18 October 1984). Whether all listeners visually image the story events is open to speculation and research.

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