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ELEMENTARY, MY DEAR WATSON: THE KLEENEX SHROUD IN BARTHELME'S «VIEWS OF MY FATHER WEEPING»

1. *Introduction*

My analysis of Barthelme's narrative «Views of My Father Weeping» applies loosely a Faircloughian (1992) multidimensional concept of discourse: (i) *text-dimension* (= the Hallidayan systemic-functional description of the formal properties of the present narrative[1]); (ii) the analysis of text production and interpretation, that is, of *discursive practice* (which here consists of the reader and her socially constructed genre expectations) and thirdly, (iii) the more general, ideological context of *social practice* of the reading community are complemented by *intertextual analysis*. Foucault's «orders of discourse», the conventional practices, (or speech genres in Bakhtin's terminology) are taken here as the foundation of any discourse formation. Following Fredric Jameson's theory on postmodernism and the logic of late capitalism (1984), I set out to show how «Views of My Father Weeping» represents a historically embedded shift to the postmodernist paradigm. At the end I return to and explain my working title.

2. *Defining narrative*

The first step in my top-down methodology is to see what the concept narrative stands for. Etymologically the word *narrative* derives from the Latin *narrare*, to tell a story, which in turn comes from the word *gnaros*, meaning knowing[2]. Drawing upon this etymologically defined reciprocal relationship between telling and knowing, which, in fact, is the foundation of a narrative and indispensable for the narrative's «reality-effect», it becomes a commonplace to take the narrative form as *a mode of cognition*. It is even a greater commonplace that storytelling – let us say, the presence of narrative structure and technique in science, film, history or literary fiction – helps us to make sense of the world. When adding to these commonplaces the claims of classical empiricist epistemology and the Kantian notion of the centrality of spatio-temporal and causal

concepts embodied in storytelling as organizers of all our perception of an «objective world», it is possible to infer that we have no access to the world beyond the narratives we construct.

Fiction to a much higher degree than the more «factual» narrative genres, enjoys an *equivocal status*: *all verbal art* has simultaneously a strongly *pragmatic and an aesthetic function*. Following Halliday's (1985) systemic-functional grammar, to know a language is to know the relations between meaning (in technical vocabulary, semantics), wording (lexico-grammar) and writing (or sounds, in a spoken speech, the sphere of phonology). Ruqaiya Hasan (1989:96) presents an analogous relationship in verbal art:

> VERBALIZATION
> SYMBOLIC ARTICULATION
> THEME

Verbalization, the primary contact with the fictional narrative, is the basic level of the scheme. It is on the level of verbalization that the description of linguistic patterns takes place, on the level of semantics, lexico-grammar and phonology. The reader at this point of reading captures the meaning of the individual clauses and the underlying logic uniting them as a narrative. For instance, we could say about Barthelme's «Views of My Father Weeping» that it is about an aristocrat who ran over the father of the story's «I» and killed him, and the son then started to search for this aristocrat by looking for witnesses, and so on[3].

Then «what is this story about?» comes next. Is it about a son's search to know how his father had died? Or is it about the way we get to know things in general? Both questions, without excluding one or the other, could be answered affirmatively and agreed with. *The difference of description* between the two resides in the fact that the first question-answer pair functions *only* by reference to the level of verbalization. Without invalidating the first question-response type (usually more frequent among the younger readers), the latter one belonging to the highest level of abstraction, a common feature of adult reading, seems the more accurate one for the present purposes.

This highest level of abstraction is the *stratum* of *theme*, the subject matter of the narrative and the most profound mode of meaning in verbal art. The theme is very close to a generalisation, which can be viewed as a hypothesis about some aspect of the life of social man (Hasan, 1989: 97).

If theme is taken as «a general hypothesis about some aspect of social man», it then could be seen as *the layer of pragmatic function* in the system of verbal art. This conclusion obviously cuts down some of the most extreme claims about the non-utilitarian character of literature. Jakobson himself (1960) considered verbal art purely aesthetic, not pragmatic. It is exactly because of the pragmatic function that questions about truth values in literature belong to the secondary plane of problematization[4]. On the other hand, *theme* in the system of *verbal art* (= consisting of verbalization, theme and thirdly, of symbolic articulation, which will be discussed in the following paragraph) is nearest to the *ideology of the community it was created in*, a factor which in

practice often leads to an emphasizing of the social context of the construction of verbal art.

The lowest (= verbalization) and the highest (= theme) levels of the system of verbal art are mediated by the sphere of *symbolic articulation*. According to the present author, the metaphorical nature of verbal art resides precisely in a twofold semiosis:

> In all verbal art there exist two levels of semiosis: one that is the product of the use of natural language, itself a semiotic system; and the other which is the product of the artistic system through foregrounding and repatterings of the first order meanings.... The art of verbal art consists of the use of language in such a way that this second order semiosis becomes possible (Hasan, 1989: 98).

3. *The basic story level*

Quoting the affirmation of one of Barthelme's fictional characters, «fragments are the only form I trust», several literary critics have argued that fragmentation is the guiding principle of Donald Barthelme's aesthetics. Indeed, when visualizing the 35, often disconnected parts presented under the title «Views of My Father Weeping», the reader is easily tempted to share the prevailing, fragmentary perspective regarding the narrative.

I agree with those critics who, instead of fragmentation, find structure the author's main concern (Klinkowitz, 1975: 64). The word *structure* on the story level is used in the sense of referring to the degree to which «Views of My Father Weeping» has a *recognizable purpose, organization and development*. That is, we expect texts, first of all, to be *cohesive*, and secondly, to be arranged to make *a progressive sequence of ideas*. Now I propose to examine some of the cohesive devices of the narrative «Views of My Father Weeping» and see how they contribute to the chosen modifiers of the topic: postmodernism and the generic convention of detective story.

The term *genre* refers here to *systems of classification of types of texts that have been historically perceived as such*. Mikhaïl Bakhtin (1986) makes a distinction between «primary» and «secondary» speech genres. Secondary, complex speech genres derive from the primary ones and «literature», in his theory, belongs to the secondary genres. – Indeed, Bakhtin reminds us how little the novelistic genre has historically been preoccupied with the «real world experience», and how much it has concentrated on describing the *human and social reality*, a reality that is in the first place of discursive character, *experienced in and through language*.

We could say that ultimately genre's task is to limit meaning by making the decoding process easier for the participating subjects. In the case of a narrative genre, the knowledge the reader has of the socially determined generic conventions shapes her reading and her narrative expectations[5].

In the traditional Poe-type detective story *the heuristic activity* was the main concern and thus emphasized the reader's role. Just as in contemporary literary studies in

general, where the reader has become *the actor* and the author and his work have moved backstage, similarly in a detective story the reader is supposed to fill in the missing gaps or ellipses and make the story logical. And the reader inevitably *draws upon her socially constructed genre repertoire.*

The definition of genre is constructed upon the notion of *convention*. A genre is constituted by an established use or practice, by an implicit social agreement, and whose central concern is *to naturalize* – in Foucault's or Halliday's sense – the unnatural and arbitrary. In other words, although some texts are «unconventional», none are actually conventionless. Different literary paradigms, or *epistemes* problematize the conventional in various manners. Romanticism, for instance, associated convention with the traditional, predictable forms and gave the concept a pejorative connotation. The Realists, on the other hand, tried to devalue and diminish the conventional aspect of their writing by claiming their own authority of the lifelike, sincere quality of representation of the outside world. Each paradigm shift, then, generates new conventions of their own, either by concealing (such as Realism) or laying the convention bare (Modernism or Postmodernism, as we shall see).

In order to define the basic story structure of «Views of My Father Weeping», the genre convention (or «register» in Halliday's vocabulary) needs to be supplemented by the concept of «cohesion». In the analysis of the level of «fabula» I shall concentrate on *cohesive devices*, which seem to be fundamental to the grammaticization of the plot structure. Cohesion is founded on a very simple principle: each utterance after the first is linked to the content of one or more preceding utterances by at least one tie. The nature of this tie is *semantic*: the two members of any tie are linked together through some meaning relation[6].

«Views of My Father Weeping» opens with the introduction of the event: «An aristocrat was riding down the street. He ran over my father». When the narrator-son states that he has decided to trace the aristocrat, the reader gets a clear generic signal of a detective story. A detective story is distinguished from other forms of fiction by the fact that it is primarily a puzzle around a committed crime. The reader's attention is directed to *intriguing circumstances surrounding the crime rather than the event itself.* A detective story's climax is the solution of the puzzle, a closure achieved through the investigator's logical process from clue to clue. The focus is upon the heuristic activity, whereas characterization is in the secondary plane.

In Barthelme's text, the reader is encouraged to look forward to the final reconstruction of the father's death and the discovery of his murderer. In other words, the reader is persuaded *to naturalize the text according to detective story genre convention*. And indeed, when the narrator of «Views of My Father Weeping» moves from witness to witness, until he meets the «murderer» who personally tells him about the accident, the narrative seems to be answering the generic expectations aroused in the beginning of the story.

However, the reading and deciphering process is complicated by the narrative's apparent fragmentation: the plot structure of «Views of My Father Weeping» is not of

the linear type. It is divided into two different story lines. This *bifurcation into two stories* is easily visible: any reader will notice sooner or later that in some parts of the story all the events take place in the past, while in other parts they are manifested through the present tense. The detective line of the narrative opens the story, and just as in any traditional narrative, the events are told in the past tense. By the time the reader gets to the fourth paragraph, the narrative sequence is broken by a «view» of the father, a sort of memory of the past told in the present tense. This fragmentation into two plots, one detective and the other non-detective, is also visualized by «oversized full stops» that separate the paragraphs.

The two plots, both the detective story and the non-detective story line have two main characters or «identities»: the first-person narrator «I» and the narrator's father, «my father». When examining the *identity chains*[7] of the two separate lines, the first impression of the bifurcated plot proves to be correct.

The two plots have the same number of paragraphs (17), but many of the paragraphs belonging to the non-detective line are significantly shorter; some contain only one sentence. The detective story line, in its turn, consist of much longer paragraphs. This story plot has also got *secondary characters*, such as the aristocrat, Lars Bang, and so on. Unlike in the detective story line, the first-person narrator and the father are *the sole characters* in the non-detective line.

The relationship between these two characters, «I» and «my father» is that of *co-reference in a subordinated way*: «I» precedes «my father» because «my father» is ultimately a co-reference to «I». When observing the identity chains of the two narrative lines, it soon becomes clear that the *detective story line of the narrative is the leading plot* of «Views of My Father Weeping»: of the 17 parts of this narrative line, only the first and the 32nd paragraph do not contain any «I» co-reference. The reason for the two missing cohesive links is simple: the first paragraph (besides the title!) contains the co-referential «my father» which cataphorically refers to the «I» of the second paragraph. By starting the detective story through the artefact of a cataphoric reference, the author «stimulates» the reader's curiosity to start her heuristic deciphering activity which, as has been stated, is fundamental to the functioning of a detective story genre. «Whose father?» the reader asks herself. – The non-detective story line is completely dominated by the co-reference «my father»: 16 out of 17 paragraphs contain «my father». To sum up: the identity chain of the detective narrative line is that of narrator «I», while the non-detective story line is about the narrator's father's identity and therefore co-referentially in a secondary position.

As far as *similarity chains*[8] of the two plots are concerned, they also visualize the fragmentation of the secondary non-detective story line. Even if both plots contain the same number of paragraphs, 17 each, the non-detective line has strikingly fewer similarity chains. A natural explanation would be the shorter length of the non-detective line paragraphs. There are only seven «real» similarity chains, such as *weeping – tears – plaint – dejection*.

Indeed, the non-detective story plot proves not to be a narrative, in the sense of a sequential and logical connection of events, but rather *pictures* or *views* or *images* of

the father weeping. Besides «sitting», which is a common static pose of a model to be portrayed or photographed, «weeping» and words belonging to the same general field of meaning form the most lasting similarity chains here. These non-detective fragments present the father in various ways: there are views of the father weeping, shooting various targets, such as animals, beer cans and so on. There are views of the father throwing a knitting ball, jamming his thumb in cupcakes, enacting a Western, riding a dog, writing on the wall with crayons, playing with the salt and pepper shakers, thrusting his hand into a doll's house, and so on.

A father doing things that are usually associated with women or children! The question of identity is brought up immediately in the first fragment: «Yet it is possible that it is not my father who sits there in the center of the bed weeping». Through this artefact, Barthelme is calling the reader's attention to the *linguistic nature of the story*: natural and grammatical gender, or real flesh-and-blood people and «paper people» are two distinguished categories and no construct of the illusion of reality – like in a realistic narrative – is permitted.

To conclude: following Toolan's (1988) definition of a narrative genre as an understood continuum of logically organised events, it is quite tempting to call the present story line an *antinarrative*: first of all, the reader's role as a sense-maker is dubious. Secondly, there is no obvious teleology, no progression or development, or «transformation» as Todorov (1990) writes, in these non-detective sections.

Moreover, the non-detective line brings to mind a diversity of *modernist styles*. The «clever reader» might recognize stylistic allusions to some modernist writers such as Hemingway or Virginia Woolf. Then the non-detective narrative line would enter the category of the modernist mode of writing and the reader would find cohesion through the psychoanalysis, *the epistemology of the hidden*, such as the epiphany in James Joyce or the *moment of vision* in Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, for instance. The *modernist idea of depth*, that the world of phenomena conceals secret and universal principles of truth is one possible (and trapping!) guideline in the reader's process of making sense of the story.

On the contrary, the detective story plot is cohesive and obeys a perceived sequence of non-randomly connected events: each paragraph contains cohesive ties in relation to the following one. This detective line of the narrative presents a style typical of *realist nineteenth century fiction*. The realist fiction relies on the assumption that *reality exists prior to the writer's attempt to portray it*: the objects of perception exist independently of the observer; events take place in spatio-temporal continuum and they can be arranged according to the cause-and-effect principle. A realist writer looks for correspondence and referentiality between the fictional and the outside world. Consequently, like realist fiction in general, the detective line of the narrative is written in the past tense.

Besides the realistic mode of writing, the setting of the story also supports the image of nineteenth century realistic fiction: coachmen and aristocrats make the reader think of nineteenth century Russia or England. But as soon as the reader adapts her

expectations according to a realistic mode of reading, her *illusion of a unified place of setting* is broken by references to Scandinavia (ore, crowns, the name Lars Bang) or to France (Rue de Bac). Borrowing Michel Foucault's terminology, Brian McHale (1987) calls this phenomenon *a heterotopian type of discourse*, widely used in postmodernist fiction. Several fragmentary, *possible worlds coexist in a space* associated with nineteenth century England, Sweden, Russia and France, but which is actually *located in the written text itself*.

After a long search, from witness to witness, the narrator-son gets together with the coachman Lars Bang, whose coach and horses had hit his father. The coachman explains that the drunk father, in a moment of madness, had attacked his coach and caused his own death. This coachman's presentation seems to provide the acquired closure for a detective story genre. But as soon as the coachman finishes his story, a previously silent girl reveals: «Bang is an absolute bloody liar». The final section simply says : «Etc.».

Which narrative line does the final paragraph belong to? Is it about the never-ending memories, views of the weeping father? Or is it about the never-ending search for the father's murderer? Or could it be a sort of Lyotardian «grand narrative», associated with the modernity? In fact, the ending of «Views of My Father Weeping» fits into Lyotard's (1984) definition of the postmodern condition, characterized by a collapse of those totalizing systems of meaning of modernity. Instead, our contemporary postmodern meanings derive from little narratives, from the pragmatics of infinite, locally determined language games.

After having observed the clear oppositional bifurcation into two separate narrative lines, the reader might come to explore the contrary and be amused by finding similarities or meeting points between the two narrative lines. First of all, *the father-son relationship* is at the center of both story lines. Secondly, both story plots deal with *epistemological questions*: how do we know things? How do I know that this person is my father? Thirdly, the lexicalization of the two story lines suggests a *hidden connection* between the two: the man in the carriage looks like an aristocrat and the man sitting in the bed looks like the narrator's father; or the father wears a straw hat and the coachman takes a straw-wrapped bottle.

Both the narrator-son-detective and the reader are first *invited to look for a closure* and yet immediately afterwards this desired *closure is exposed as irrelevant* – erased by the «etc». By first deceiving the reader into adjusting her reading process according to the conventions and expectations of the realist type detective story – or in the case of a «sophisticated» reader, activating her knowledge of modernist narrative conventions - and a moment later violating them, «Views of My Father Weeping» leaves the reader with nothing else but the *hermeneutic activity of reading*. As McHale rightly observes, postmodernism witnesses *a shift of dominant from epistemological concern to ontological*. The ontological character of postmodernist writing is revealed in its concern with the making of autonomous fictional worlds, *heterotopias*:

Heterotopias are disturbing, probably because they secretly undermine language, because they make it impossible to name this and that,... because they destroy... also that less apparent syntax which causes words and things... to «hold together» (Foucault, 1970: XVII-XVIII).

Barthelme's autonomous worlds are worlds on paper and in a self-conscious way. They happen as a text. Instead of asking questions about how a world, or a father (!) may be known, postmodernist fiction asks: what is the effect, the function of a father?

4. *The organization of the narrative text*

In order to move from actors to characters with distinct, individualized features, we need to examine the way these characters are part of their fictional reality. For this analysis, *the scope* of the following approach will be at the particular functional meaning of *clause as a representation,* as a realization of the fictional universe represented in «Views of My Father Weeping».

Transitivity in Halliday's grammar is the representation in language of processes, participants and the surrounding circumstantial features. A clause as a manifestation of a process is associated with *our cognition of what is happening in the world.* According to Halliday, this semantic parcelling of processes could be taken as the most basic characteristic of what we usually define as «*reality*».

The semantic categories of *process, participants* and *circumstances* «translate» the ways phenomena of the «reality» are expressed as linguistic structures. That is, the observer examines *what the relationship between the various components means:* to answer the question «who (or what) is doing what and to whom (or in relation to what)», could be taken as a foundation to a Hallidayan ideational functional study. This entire task of identifying types of process and participants aims at constructing a «*reality*», or as Halliday puts it, «*the goings-on*» which constitute «our most powerful conception of reality» (Halliday, 1985: 101).

Processes, then, need to be specified according to *the type* of process that is being represented. The participant roles are also specified in conformity with the particular process being applied. Processes realize different patterns of transitivity and can be ordered among themselves according to the effectuality or dynamism realized through the participant roles. Effectuality stands for the quality of being able to affect the world around us and of bringing change into the surrounding environment (Hasan, 1989: 45)[9].

Altogether I have found 79 material processes in the detective story line. The main character «I» occupies the participant role of the Actor (or agent) 22 times. However, out of these 22 agentive clauses, seven appear either in hypothetical (realized through if-clauses) contexts, in dialogues, or in hypothetical dialogues, or in «I»'s inner thoughts, usually remembering some past experience. Thus I consider that only 14

(plus twice «we») clauses represent what I choose to call «I»'s *«actual doings»*; *I made arrangements for the burial,* for instance[10].

Although Lars Bang is a participant only in two sections of the story, the number of Bang's agentive positions is higher than the main character «I»'s acting positions in the whole story. Bang is 16 times the actor in as few as two paragraphs. It is also worth mentioning that Bang's story inside the story contains 32 material processes. Before meeting Lars Bang, «I» expresses a low rate of dynamism (only 10 actor positions!); after Bang's entrance into the story, even the little dynamism he so far had represented, vanishes completely and «I» turns into Bang's mere instrument. – I have detected five processes of *feeling* and eleven processes of *perception.* Cognitive processes are the most frequent ones: more than half, 24 in all, of the total number of 40 mental processes belong to the subgroup of *cognitive* verbs.

All the relational processes, except dialogues and Lars Bang's story, are «I»'s observations about his father (*his enjoyment was diminishing*), about Lars Bang (*he was very much of a surprise*). *Most* of his observations deal with his attitudes to aristocrats, or their carriages and their servants: «that might be the carriage itself, any man (...) tends to look like an aristocrat, the unknown aristocrat must be a powerful man».

To sum up, the detective story line presents us with a fictional world, in which the protagonist «I», in his search for knowledge (remember the predominance of cognitive, mental processes) and a consequent reward (= money purse!) on his father's death, is not acting upon his surrounding world but rather being acted upon. To conclude, the detective story line of «Views of My Father Weeping» is characterized by *the protagonist's simultaneous striving for knowlegde and incapacity to act.*

I have found 62 material processes in the non-detective line of «Views of My Father Weeping». «My father», linguistically realized through three different ways[11], is the agent 24 times. – Hypothetical agentive «I»'s, however, represent the «I»'s predominant mode of acting, such as in the example in «I could be reading a book».

In sum, the material processes of the non-detective line have five «unities» or distinguished entities of animate actors: «*my father»*, *«I»* (notice that the supposingly «humanlike» «I» lays his «doglike» *paw* and not his hand on his breast!), *an accompanying dog* (curiously enough, the dog is not being led by «my father», but on the contrary, «my father» is being accompanied and thus objectified by the dog instead!), the imperative elliptical *you,* and some *animals* who were expected to be the targets of their shooting but failed to arrive. Several questions concerning the identity of the above agents puzzle me: Is «I» a dog because of having paws instead of hands? Is «the dog» a human being for mastering «my father» and not the other way around? Do «I» and «the dog» refer to the same entity? - Again cognitive processes are the most frequent mental processes of the «I» of the story. Significantly, «my father's» sole cognitive process is about ignoring the «I», a linguistic realization which repeats and reinforces the lack of togetherness, or strange quality of the father-son relationship we have already seen through the material processes. By referring to «my father» as «this man» (twice!), the «disconnectedness», or let us say, the problematic link between the words

«my father» and the respect, expected identity that the designation «my father» is supposed to stand for, is further emphasized. In other words, «my father's» indefinite identity is questioned once again.

There are 22 relational processes that all have «my father» as a participant one way or another, either implicitly or explicitly. Significantly, the first two processes («yes it is possible...» and «it may be someone else...») are examples of the grammatical, interpersonal metaphor called «epistemic» modality, expressing objective, explicit, low value modality (Halliday, 1985: 336-37). In simple terms, the narrator is metaphorizing, transforming their propositional meaning[12]. Indeed, the relational processes reinforce what I have seen at the story level of the non-detective story and at the text level of the detective story: «my father» is a dubious object to identify, «it» is not definable through a direct, straightforward linguistic reference. What then remains to be concluded?

The same way, as I have already analysed in the basic story level these non-detective story line movements[13] do not form a narrative in the sense of containing a beginning, a middle and an ending. They simply present the reader with different 'angles' or 'views' for the identity of the referent «my father».

Now that I have 'sketched through' the text level of the narrative and tried to see, with the help of transitivity parcelling, «who is doing what to whom», *the epistemological concern*, in fact, *proves to be the theme* of «Views of My Father Weeping». It is my thesis that Barthelme's narrative is a comment upon the (un)importance of verbal communication in all cognitive activity, upon the (non-)validity of linguistic information exchange as a form of knowing things.

Human communication is language use, if we take language in the broad sense of the term as a means of constructing meanings, or semiosis-processes. «Views of My Father Weeping» challenges and problematizes our prevailing, semio-linguistic concept of reality. In Barthelme's narrative, language does not capture but rather fails in its material function of representing reality. In other words, «my father» has no existence, or identity outside the material realization of these two words. Or the other way around: father's identity does not match its linguistic referent, it is not 'knowable' through its linguistic representation.

This is the function, or the effect of «my father» in «Views of My Father Weeping»: to expose the reduced meaning potential of all language activity in the representation of reality. And since the author Barthelme is doing this, he is not finally only fooling or making fun of the reader's deciphering process – as I considered on the level of the story – but on the contrary, he is rather sharing a point, a moment of serious reflection with his reader.

My conclusion is simple: what I see as taking place at the story level, i.e. the manifest exposal of the linguistic and discursive artefact of «Views of My Father Weeping» is, on the level of text, thematized as an epistemological concern about the role of language in the construction of reality. Our apprehension of reality is discursive, but is there something more to it than that, something words cannot capture? If the answer is in the affirmative, then how to represent it?

5. *Perspectives*

My approach to «Views of My Father Weeping» has loosely followed Norman Fairclough's working programme presented in his book *Discourse and Social Change* (1992). I have examined the concept of *discourse* through three dimensions. First of all, the *text-dimension*, the description of the formal properties of the narrative; secondly, the dimension of *discursive practice*, the analysis of the interactional relationship between the text and the «specific» reader; and thirdly, the more general, ideological context of *social practice* of the reading community, which has been intermediated by *intertextual analysis*. Every text is itself the intertext of another text, and cannot be identified with an origin or source. Reading becomes an inter-textual activity forming ties to a vast corpus of past and present texts which breaks down the activity of linear, unidimensional type of cognitive processing. In effect, the detective story line reminds me of Nikolai Gogol's morbidly comic and simultaneously desolate depiction of absurd incidents in short stories such as *The Nose* or *The Overcoat*. The non-detective story line, on the other hand, reflects – let us say – the «poetic» quality of Benjy's idiotic discourse in William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*.

The mimetic concept of representation in narratives becomes problematic at this point: since all narratives – both «factual» and fictional – deal with events spatio-temporally remote from the addresser and addressee, and consequently only have discursive existence for the participants, the contradiction between the «representative reality» – the unidimensional order of language – and the «real reality» – the multidimensional order of the outside world – becomes acute. What kind of meanings are the participants then allowed to construct?[14].

Contextualization is the key concept in all meaning construction. Narratives can be decontextualized as far as the *immediate context of situation* is concerned, a technique of language manipulation I hold widely responsible for the change to a postmodernist paradigm: Barthelme's playful use of realist and modernist genre conventions is a clear example of this. But the *wider context of culture* remains there to provide a broader context for all narratives. It is a reciprocal relationship: narrative, on one hand, is never without a wider historico-cultural context which determines the story; on the other hand, narrative is shaped by the use the story is subjected to. My central conclusion concerning this reciprocal relationship is that narratives – both fictional and factual – have consequences in the outside world, they carry political meaning, either concealed or overt.

Barthelme's «order of discourse», therefore, is necessarily constructed through its genre-bound *historicity*, and which thus has been the underlying main concern in my presentation of the above multidimensional definition of postmodernist discourse formation. *Then how to characterize postmodernism in political or economic terms?* Are our politically and economically related nouns analogically modifiable by the temporalizing prefix to post-Marxism and post-industrialism (or «post-Fordism», following David Harvey's designation for «flexible accumulation» in his book *The Condition of Postmodernity*)?

Lyotard and those who share his argument that the «question of social bond is itself a language game», an «atomization of the social into flexible networks of language games» (Lyotard, 1984: 15-17), are taking the postmodernist preoccupation with language to the extremes of dispersal by suggesting that each of us may resort to a different set of conventions depending upon our personal life situation. The Lyotardian rejection of totalization and teleology that I have earlier outlined, involves a questioning of both liberal capitalism (i.e. the apparent beneficiary of postmodernist nihilism[15]) and Marxism as a historical explanation. Lyotard's statement about the emptiness of the present is also formulated by Bakhtin (i.e. Volosinov) but in another way: the «word» is unfinished, dialogical; Janus-like it looks forward and backwards simultaneously (Volosinov, 1973: 23), and any utterance is a moment in the continuous, process of a given social collective. (Volosinov, 1973: 95)

One of the great differences between «Bakhtinism» and postmodernism is at stake here: unlike Lyotard, Bakhtin puts the emphasis on a social collectiveness, or socially embedded and constructive verbal interaction rather than on game-playing. However, there is a possible meeting point between the two approaches. Postmodern verbal art as characterized by strategies of parody, irony, collage, in other words by the explicit intertextuality in ways that undercut the traditional aesthetic categories of originality, sincerity and organic unity, has affinities with the Bakhtinian notion of *carnival*: the juxtaposing of elements of «high culture» and pop culture in a free combination. In «Views of My Father Weeping», Lars Bang makes his entrance to the story by uttering «I understand that you are looking for me», echoing a canonical 19th century «high literature» character[16]. References to pop culture are frequent in the non-detective story line: beer cans, Mustangs, «my father» wearing a red bandana tied around his face like the bad guys in a cowboy film, or wanting his toenails painted with scenes representing God blessing America, just to mention a few.

Politics and more specifically, *the ideological consequences* deriving from both continuity and difference form the underlying material of parodic representation in postmodern art. Parody, according to Linda Hutcheon (1989: 93-94), besides contesting the common humanist views about artistic uniqueness and originality, also questions the capitalist notion of ownership. Thus the ideological position is the basis of all discourse formation. As I have written earlier, paraphrasing Bakhtin's discursive concept of the representation of social rather than real-world experience in literature, it is precisely in postmodernist writing that the linguistic, or discursive character of all reality-construction is laid bare, or made «actual». Linguistic realities, or «worlds» of discourses are all we have access to. And behind each utterance there is a politics which nurtures it and from which it derives. Fredric Jameson's (1984) designation *aesthetic populism*[17] is another name for this overlapping and mingling of the previously separate speech genres of high and mass culture. Aesthetic populism derives from the breakdown of 19th century Realism into Naturalism and Modernism. Then High Modernism dialectically gives rise to commercial mass culture. Postmodernist *pastiche* synthetizes the two manifestations of Modernism by breaking down the modernist fron-

tier between high and low culture. Pastiche comes to substitute the modernist parody. Modernist styles, therefore, turn into «postmodernist codes».

Postmodernism for Jameson is a reaction against the canonization of Modernism which took place in the academic institutions in the late 50's. Curiously enough, this reaction became almost immediately part of the established culture. According to Jameson, the reason for this fast canonization of postmodernism is that the aesthetic production has now been transformed into a production of commodities: thus postmodernism is part of the cultural logic of late capitalism. Postmodernism is directly connected to the technological revolution of the electronical and nuclear era, and which, in its turn, is linked to multinational capitalism producing this technology:

> If the ideas of a ruling class were once the dominant (or hegemonic) ideology of bourgeois society, the advanced capitalist countries today are now a field of stylistic and discursive heterogeneity without a norm. Faceless masters continue to inflect the economic strategies which constrain our existences, but no longer need to impose their speech... (Jameson, 1984: 65).

In front of these faceless masters or mistresses, parody as a form of repetition with intentional difference has no functionality and is replaced by the affectless imitation of pastiche.

At the core of the postmodernist culture is *simulacrum*, the culture of repeated images divorced from any referential function. Jameson's description of postmodernist «schizophrenic disjunction» has got to do with the notion of simulacrum and the loss of critical distance. When the ties between meanings fail, the subject is drawn into a space disconnected from the past and the future, and denied any possibility of *identity construction*[18]. When a solid identity building and a personal (Modernist) style vanish, both the modernist notion of interior time (*durée*) and the exterior, historical time of Realism are also gone. Or: they can *only* return through the logic of simulacrum.

Perhaps the most fundamental and distinctive characteristic of postmodern culture in Jameson's writing is «the waning of affect»: euphoria provides superficial intensities, displaces the modernist existential angst and, more importantly, *empties the political unconscious, the older feeling of alienation*. In fact, what was earlier considered to take place due to the lack of critical distance is completed: *all interpretation* – both negative and positive – *has come to an end*.

Is it really so, I ask bluntly. Isn't Jameson totalizing something that is only one of the several contemporary intellectual impulses? «Views of My Father Weeping», however, seems to offer us an illustration of

(i) *aesthetic populism* – in terms of the popular detective genre, a register characteristic of the «paraliterature of airport lobbies». In my title, the utterance «elementary, my dear Watson» stands for a postmodernist pastiche signalling probably the best-known English literary character, the reader being a contemporary Sherlock Holmes devoid of any solution for the puzzle of the crime, for *the shroud* – notice the double meaning of the word: 1) a cloth wrapped around the corpse, and 2) something which covers and hides – in «Views of My Father Weeping»;

(ii) an example of *simulacrum* if we think of the realistic and modernist writing conventions of the two story lines. My title's banalized *kleenex* as a serialized and cheap paper tissue copy of a Madeira-made, hand-embroidered linen handkerchief comments upon the act of hiding the hollowness of the present;

(iii) the impossibility to construct a solid, definable identity, since «my father's» *intriguing identity* is at the heart of the thematization of the narrative as a whole. *The social sphere produced by the transition from the imaginary order to the symbolic one* annihilates a one-to-one correspondence between things and what they are called and evokes an open-ended semiosis-process instead;

(iv) «*the waning of affect*»: «Views of My Father Weeping» is told in such an affectless way that a reader is almost sure to find the narration strange. Therefore, the reader no longer needs a handkerchief for wiping away tears while reacting to Barthelme's story, the postmodern kleenex will do perfectly.

Furthermore, there is a substantial but a misleading hint to expect feelings to play a role in the story: the title «Views of My Father Weeping» indicates that the emotional act of weeping is going to be central in Barthelme's narrative. «My father's weeping» *means something but what it means is an open question*. «Weeping», like any kind of feeling, is beyond the symbolic order of language, beyond our discursive reality. That there is reality beyond our discourses and which we can never know, is an ideological stand I assume as *the foundation for any construction of utopia*. For the time being, the thing I intend to do is to hold on to our linguistic representation of affect, let us say, to the act of «weeping», as a unit that produces an effect.

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1 Discourse in Halliday's multifunctional perspective is simultaneously *a mode of action* – the sphere of interpersonal choices to be made – *and of representation* – the ideational metafunction –, in the process of signifying and constituting the world.

2 See Ernout, Meillet, 1967: 278b, Hoad, 1993: 309, Lehmann, 1986: 222-23. The most important conclusion for my purposes seems to be the association of the three related Latin notions: *(g)nascor* = to be born, *(g)noscor* = to know, and *(g)narrare* = to tell.

3 This is the sphere of paraphrase which, according to Hasan is most probably an important stage in socialisation into the study of verbal art; but it is far from everything... Up to a certain stage in the school system, the 'teaching' of literature consists simply of getting the pupils to do precisely this kind of paraphrase». (Hasan, 1989: 97)

4 As Hasan observes: «To ask this question... (= whether literary texts are true or fictional) is to miss the point. Nothing much depends upon their truthfulness, so from the point of view as their status of art... the more important question is whether in the specific events... one is able to perceive some general meaning... and to share it communally» (Hasan, 1989: 100).

5 *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* is not very far from the previous argument when it defines a literary genre as «a recognizable and established category of written work employing such common conventions that will prevent readers from mistaking it for another kind» (Baldick, 1990: 90). The result of confusing and diverse use of the term «genre» is that a literary text can be considered simultaneously belonging to several genres.

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6 Halliday and Hasan (1976, 1985) distinguish five kinds of cohesive relationship linking utterances: reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction and lexical cohesion. Hasan's technical term for this simultaneous working of cohesive threads is cohesive chains. A chain consists of a set of items related to each other by the semantic relation of co-reference, co-classification or co-extension.

7 In an identity chain every item of the chain refers to the same thing (= co-referential relation, realized through reference and lexical cohesion), see Halliday, Hasan, 1985.

8 The members of a similarity chain are related to each other by co-classification and co-extension and realized through substitution, ellipsis, conjunction and lexical cohesion: «... the items of a similarity chain belong to the same general field of meaning, referring to related/similar actions, events, and objects and their attributes...» (Halliday, Hasan, 1985: 85)

9 The 'doer-roles, or as Hasan coins them, the -er-roles, (opposing the-ed-roles, such as goal, range, phenomenon, identity), from the most dynamic on to the one expressing the highest degree of passivity, are: !. actor (realized through a material process); 2. sayer (realized through a verbal process); senser (realized through a mental process); 4. behaver (behavioural process); 5. carrier, a participant in relational processes.

10 Besides the above agentive roles, the «I» of the story appears 14 times in other participant roles, such as He would offer *me* (= recipient) a purse full of money. -Father, on the other hand, is 10 times an element, like in I bent over *my father* (= goal).

11 The realizations are: 1. as «my father»: my father shot; 2. as «he»: he may stop; 3. as a part of «my father's body»: his yammer darts in and out of all the house.

12 Or the way Halliday puts it into words in one of his most controversial and interesting affirmations: «The importance of modal features in the grammar of interpersonal exchanges lies in an apparent paradox on which the entire system rests - the fact that we only say we are certain when we are not. If unconsciously I consider it certain that Mary has left, I say, simply, Mary's left. If I add a high value probability... such as Mary's certainly left, ... this means that I am admitting an element of doubt – which I may then try to conceal by objectifying the expression of certainty» (Halliday, 1985 :340).

13 The movements of the non-detective line all dealing with, and problematizing «my father's» identity, can be classified into four groups: 1. «my father» and the activity of shooting; 2. «my father» acting as a child or a madman; 3. the narrator's monologues about «my father»; 4. «my father's» weepings.

14 What is there to hold on to in the semiosis-process if utterances «which would be readily interpretable in a canonical situation-of-utterance are subject to various kinds of ambiguity or indeterminacy if they are produced in a non-canonical situation: if they are written rather than spoken and dissociated from the prosodic or paralinguistic features... if the participants in the language event... are widely separated in space and time; if the participants cannot see what the other can see; and so on. (Lyons, 1977: 638)

15 Postmodernist nihilism in Jurgen Habermas's *Philosophical Discourse into Modernity* (1987) refers to a useless attempt – originated by Nietzsche – to get out of the philosophy of subject.

16 As Lois Gordon in his book *Donald Barthelme* observes: «The son parrots literary styles – i.e., the popular detective story and the grand, nineteenth-century novel. «I understand that you are looking for me», says Lars Bang, like Dashiell Hammett's Philip Marlowe. Because his words (the «signs» of his feelings) ring false, the most we can say is that he is filling a role expected of him, one created by pop culture and tradition, a grim parody of the Hamlet figure» (Gordon, 1981: 107).

[17] Jameson writes: «Postmodernism... will then logically enough stage itself as a kind of aesthetic populism... The postmodernisms have in fact been fascinated precisely by this whole 'degraded' landscape of... the so-called paraliterature with its airport paperback categories of... the murder mystery: materials they no longer simply 'quote', as a Joyce or a Mahler might have done, but incorporate into their very substance» (Jameson, 1984: 54-55).

[18] «... when it (= the schizophrenic disjunction) becomes generalised as a cultural style, it... becomes available for more joyous intensities, for precisely that euphoria which we saw displacing the older affects of anxiety and alienation» (Jameson, 1984: 72, 74).

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