

Elvis has left the building but is making a comeback - the Death of God and His revival through the narratives of cyberspace¹

"We are living at a time when all the once regnant world systems that have sustained (also distorted) Western intellectual life, from theologies to ideologies, are taken to be in severe collapse. This leads to a mood of skepticism, an agnosticism of judgment, sometimes a world weary nihilism in which even the most conventional minds begin to question both distinctions of value & the value of distinctions".²

"There is a widespread belief in the world that all essential human needs would be fulfilled if the industrial mode of production were perfected... If man, so goes the assumption, has enough to eat, plenty of leisure time, & an ever-increasing opportunity for consumption, he will be happy & mentally sane... For the psychiatrist, certain consequences of this situation are important. Man, having been transformed into a thing, is anxious, without faith, without conviction, with little capacity for love. He escapes into empty busy-ness, alcoholism, extreme sexual promiscuity, and psychosomatic symptoms of all kinds, which can best be explained by the theory of stress".³

"Once Mother Church & her motherly Eros fall into abeyance, the individual is at the mercy of any passing collectivism & the attendant mass psyche. He succumbs to social & national inflation, & the tragedy is that he does so with the same psychic attitude which had once bound him to a church".⁴

The objectives of this paper are:

- to explore the notion that narrative is fundamental to the human condition and that new narratives are emerging which will reclaim sacredness and allow us to better understand our complex world and the powerful force that works towards wholeness.
- to suggest that the 20th Century lost its way and suffered a crisis of meaning following the decline of the Biblical meta-narrative. This crisis resulted in multiple narratives being constructed, experimented with and played out - some to the detriment of human kind (eg Hitler's Aryan narrative).
- to explore the importance of Jungian archetypes for narratives and how some of these archetypes have surfaced (or re-surfaced) during the 20th century's search for meaning; and finally
- to suggest that cyberspace is an emerging, new narrative or multiple narratives with religious connotations. The important shift for narratives within cyberspace is that linearity or sequencing of events is now in the control of the cyberspacer. The user, in exploring the vastness of the Internet, can choose their own path of enquiry (ie through hypertext) and construct their own story ending.

The fundamental premise of this paper is that without narrative, the spirit cannot breathe; the soul cannot soar. Narratives help us to construct a sense of the world and our life within it. It is not the world itself, but a partial reality of it. As semiotic representations, narratives meaningfully connect a series of events in a causal way. Video games, plays, comics, history, diaries, novels, hypertext,

1 I am choosing not to explain this metaphorical title resting on the hope that my essay will clearly explain the concepts embodied in the title.

2 Irving Howe. The New Republic February 18, 1991. p42.

3 Erich Fromm "The Psychological Problem of Man in Modern Society" May 2, 1964 lecture in Erich Fromm On Being Human. New York: Continuum Publishing, 1994. pp 31-32, 36.

4 C.G. Jung quoted in Antonio Moreno. Jung, Gods & Modern Man London: Sheldon Press, 1970, p 245.

music, films *inter alia* are all examples of narratives.⁵

Narratives give meaning to the past; help explain the present; and can provide assurance and guidance for the future. They can help to answer the three metaphysical questions that have always occupied the human mind:

- why am I here?
- where have I come from?
- where am I going?

The art of storytelling is an old one, yet our disenchanted secular society has largely lost this skill and has been cast adrift in search of a story.

This paper will attempt to show that emerging, new narratives are capable of restoring this lost art and will be able to do so through an understanding of social complexity. This new recognition of the power of narrative in understanding the extraordinary connectivity of our world and nature has not been without cost.

The first part of this paper will outline earlier meta-narratives and examine why they managed to sustain themselves despite their suppression of sacredness and blind ignorance of the complex dynamics of nature.

The paper will reach the conclusion that a comprehensive, inspirational narrative which vibrates with the vorticity of a person's soul and life experiences has at its core a belief in a transcendental, higher power which is responsible for the beauty of connectivity and that this inspirational narrative is now spontaneously emerging on the Internet.

Nietzsche's folly

Perhaps the greatest folly of Modernity⁶ was Nietzsche's pronouncement in 1882 of the Death of God. The German philosopher declared:

"If there were Gods.. .How could I endure it to be no God! Therefore there are no Gods".⁷

Prior to Nietzsche, the West's grand narratives rested on a religious foundation. Perhaps best expressed by Dante, the meta-narrative of Genesis was: *"All things, among themselves, possess an order; and this order is the form that makes the universe like God".⁸*

The Medieval worldview was a conflation of God, Greek classical thought and Aristotelian-Ptolemaic science with God at the apex. The extraordinary predictive power of the Genesis meta-narrative was exemplified by Dante's vision of the nested crystalline spheres of the heavens, the nine levels of purgatory and the inferno. The soul's quest for moral perfection spiraled through this hierarchy with sinners being punished at each level.⁹

5 Susana Onega & Jose Angel Garcia Landa. *Narratology: An Introduction*. London & New York: Longman, 1996. p 3.

6 Modernity: I take this to be from the Age of Enlightenment in the 18thC, when the idea of "the modern" was articulated in the discourse of the time. The 19th C further articulated the notion of modernity with the rise of industrialism, the nation state, the growth of the corporation, the ushering in of capitalism etc.

7 Moreno op.cit. Chapter VIII: Nietzsche & Jung, p 220.

8 Dante Alighieri *Divine Comedy Paradiso I*, 103, trans. Allen Mandelbaum. Berkely: University of California Press, 1982.

9 Mercury Magazine Vol 30, no I Jan/Feb 2001. "The Infinite Universe".
http://www.aspsky.org/mercury/mercury/30_01/universe.html

God was the centre of everything; He was the one God; the only true way. His music reverberated throughout the celestial spheres. Absolute values and eternal truths relied on the existence of God and the custodian of these was the Medieval Church. Order and predictability was maintained as long as the scientific picture of the universe was in perfect harmony with the Biblical narrative.

The strength of the Genesis meta-narrative was the notion that the social order and all living things mirrored the static arrangement of the celestial spheres, a space of light and grace, populated with planets, stars, cherubs and angels.

In a world at the mercy of bubonic plague, inadequate hygiene, religious wars and persecutions, Dante's ethereal journey towards the Supreme Being must have been particularly comforting. The Church and its priests could explain to the masses the meaning of life and death.¹⁰ The war over chaos was won.

In the Medieval world, no sub-plots were permitted; no other narratives of experience could exist; no other gods could enter the pantheon. The celebration or supremacy of the individual was an unheard of, indeed heretical, notion.

To understand how Nietzsche's announcement of the Death of God shattered the celestial spheres, we must first explore how a meta-narrative can so captivate its audience. Are humans so gullible that they can be lulled into a state of stupidity and silence by a dominant narrative?

Jean-Francois Lyotard suggests that meta-narratives are the source of legitimacy. The dominant narrative weaves its own tapestry of facts, institutions, truths, explanations and justifications. It produces its own knowledge and legitimates itself with reference to its own discourse. When a meta-narrative declines, Lyotard asks: "*Where, after the metanarratives, can legitimacy reside?*"¹¹

I would suggest that two essential conditions existed for the flourishing of the medieval dominant narrative. Firstly, modern science with its microscopes and telescopes, which reduced the universe to independently provable and testable *facts*, had not yet made its appearance. Aristotle would still have felt at home had he been transported to the medieval world with its insistence on the belief that any movement or scientific progress was ultimately traceable to God. The story would be essentially the same.

The architecture of the cosmos had God as its chief architect. Things moved according to His Will. He planned and designed the Cosmos. The medieval God was a harsh God, one who tormented souls in purgatory or assigned them to the inferno of Hell.

The meta-narrative was static and unquestionable. Although only a snapshot of the complex reality of the universe as it unfolds and enfolds, its explanatory power evoked strong emotions of fear, fantasies of religious persecution and reduced life to mere survival. This allowed the Genesis meta-narrative to sustain its position of authority and dominance because it was limited by humans' knowledge of the times.

The great mass of the population in the medieval era was peasants, serfs and labourers - an uneducated stratum of society. Scientific and religious knowledge was in the hands of the clergy and this is the second reason for the supremacy of the Genesis narrative.

10 Margaret Wertheim. *The Pearly Gates of Cyberspace: A History of Space from Dante to the Internet*. Sydney: Doubleday, 1999. Chapter One 'Soul Space', pp.44-75.

11 Jean-Francois Lyotard. *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999. pp. xiii-xxv.

These were pre-Gutenberg times. The control of the Bible lay with the religious elite who had the power of interpretation. The uneducated focused on survival and avoiding purgatory; the knowledge elite was the focaliser or reflector ie the character through whose eyes the action is presented. This elite group manipulated the information presented to the populace so that the Genesis narrative was the vision and story of the medieval church and no other.¹² The equation was simple: God=faitth=meaning.

Galileo shuffles the deck

Preparing the way for Nietzsche to declare the death of God was Galileo and his pendulum. Cultural critic, Neil Postman, uses a wonderful analogy to explain the medieval worldview. He asks you to imagine a brand new pack of cards. On opening them and turning them over one by one, you quickly note the order - the three of hearts is followed by the four of hearts, which is followed by the five of hearts and so on. If you suddenly see the six of diamonds appear, you are surprised. The role of the medieval church was to keep the deck in order.¹³

Extending this analogy further, if the deck is well-used and well-shuffled, the cards will be dealt to you in random order - the irregular and erratic side of nature becomes apparent.

The medieval knowledge elite kept the card deck in good order but along came Galileo who attempted a reshuffle.

His great contribution was to demonstrate that motion was not fixed or uniform, as Aristotle suggested, but subject to change. Nor was the Earth at the centre of the universe as depicted in Dante's vision, rather his observations led him to propose the heliocentric theory of the Earth moving around the Sun.

Galileo's pendulum began the swing to the scientific meta-narrative, which espoused that philosophical or religious reflections are not causal explanations. Only quantitative formulas, controlled experiments, repeatable measurements and rational theory can explain the world and nature. Mathematics became the language of the times and revealed the underlying laws of motion.

He declared: "*The great book of nature can be read only by those who know the language in which it is written.. [a]nd this language is mathematics*".¹⁴

A point of departure was reached with science and theology/philosophy bifurcating. Galileo's perception of the quaint medieval methods of deductive reasoning is best summed up by his caustic 1605 statement: "*What does philosophy have to do with measurement?*".¹⁵

The Scientific meta-narrative: introductory chapters

The Scientific and Genesis meta-narratives co-existed but each chapter added to the modern scientific story contributed to the rapid decline of God.

The 17th Century philosopher, Rene Descartes, wrote an introductory chapter entitled "Cartesian

12 Susana Onega & Jose Angel Garcia Landa. Narratology: An Introduction Chapter 6 Focalization pp 115-117.

13 Neil Postman. Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology. New York: Vintage Books, 1993. pp 58-59.

14 quoted in Keith Devlin. Goodbye Descartes: The End of Logic & the Search for a New Cosmology of the Mind. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1997. p.275.

15 quoted in Stillman Drake. Galileo: Pioneer Scientist. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990. p5.

Duality". He considered that existence could be divided into two distinct entities - a thinking self and a non-thinking body. Thoughts are separate from the body since the body is a non-thinking entity, devoid of thoughts. One's sense of self existed as separate from the body.

This philosophical dissociation allowed science to divide the universe into living and non-living things, animate and inanimate matter - separate existences and parts which could be individually examined and surgically excised from any notion of consciousness.

Isaac Newton penned the chapter "the mechanistic/clockwork view of the world", whilst Frederick Taylor's contribution was entitled "the time and motion study".

Reason, not religious authority, was now the basis for truth. The aloofness and coolness of the scientific narrative is seen in the following quote:

"It is science alone that can solve the problems of hunger and poverty, of insanitation and illiteracy, of superstition and deadening custom & tradition, of vast resources running to waste, of a rich country inhabited by starving people".¹⁶

The meta-narrative's equation was Science=faiht=meaning. Yet, God was still standing; it took Nietzsche's Death of God thesis to lay Him to rest.

What is ironic is that Nietzsche descended into insanity largely because he was unable to fill the void left by his forceful removal of God. Nietzsche appealed to the concept of a Superman who, without Christianity, could accept life as it is and overcome suffering and despair through self-mastery and lofty transcendence.¹⁷ That Nietzsche himself failed to live up to these ideals was of great interest to Jung who used Nietzsche as a case study of insanity.

In response to Nietzsche's thesis, Jung wrote:

"Why did the gods of antiquity lose their prestige and their effect on the human soul? Because the Olympians had served their time & a new mystery began. God became man".¹⁸

Man's Godly status

Our narrative now reaches the stage of the Industrial Revolution, Capitalism, the rise of psychology and the triumph of ego.

Man is now God. Man elevated to Godly status has become the dominant narrative, underpinned by the modern scientific story. God made man, but now man makes God. The new equation was: Science=Faith=Meaning.

The apparent ease with which Nietzsche killed off God may have been unintentionally assisted by Johann Gutenberg (a devout Catholic) and his invention of the modern printing press, which caused technological upheaval in the 1400s. The printing of a book for the sake of learning or exposing humanity to new concepts and ideas was not the rallying cry of this period of history. The rallying cry was Hell itself - the battle to save Christians from the inferno of hell was fought out in print by the offering of treatises and tracts devoted to salvation and forgiveness.

¹⁶ quoted in Mary Midgley. *Utopias, Dolphins & Computers: Problems of Philosophical Plumbing* London: Routledge, 1996. p141.

¹⁷ Antonio Moreno. *Jung, Gods & Modern Man* p225-226.

¹⁸ quoted in Roger Brooke. *Jung & Phenomenology*. London: Routledge, 1991. p56.

The irony of the Gutenberg era is that the religious order sought to manipulate the print media by widening its narrative through distribution of religious books and tracts to the populace. What occurred I would suggest is that the uneducated masses, who could now access the religious narrative for themselves and overlay their own interpretations, views and opinions, started to awaken to the fact of their captivity. The authenticity and legitimacy of the Genesis narrative was further damaged.¹⁹

It is interesting to explore the fractality of narrative. A meta-narrative, although only a subspace of the complex whole, can be extraordinarily powerful to the extent that humans can be seduced into accepting and following the story and the plot which is laid out for them.

Each person's experience within this meta-narrative is a fractal in the sense that there are similar actions, thoughts, feelings etc necessary for the individual to play out in living the narrative. Serfs or labourers in medieval times, for example, all feared the infernal pits of Hell and the torments of purgatory. Their experiences were similar as they lived out the daily story, chapter by chapter. They were caught by the attractor of the meta-narrative and did not drift into the gravitational pull of other attractors. The dominant narrative of medieval times was a simple one - obey God or be punished. The narrative was so simple that perhaps there were no other attractors.

The Genesis meta-narrative and its successor, the Scientific meta-narrative, could only ever be filters and veils. They were zones of stagnation and inertia existing far from the edge of chaos. The sustainability of their stories was made possible by the collusion of the knowledge elite and the automatism of those caught within closed systems inhibiting freedom and creativity.

The discoveries and theories of Galileo, Copernicus, Descartes, Newton and Nietzsche were butterfly effects - small inputs that caused dramatically large consequences, in this case, nothing less than the collapse of the Genesis narrative. The fact another meta-narrative rushed in to fill the void shows us that fresh narratives can still lead to delusion and ignorance when they fail to resonate with the complexities of life.

Western society's yearning for sacred stories

The West was founded on stories. Ancient myths and legends have accompanied our journey through time and space. Perhaps the grandest of all narratives is the archetype, the common source of all human archetypes being Jung's collective unconsciousness, the eternal mind.

The grand narratives of Genesis and Reason suppressed any notion of the possibility that a "grander", higher level of narrative existed which, if explored, could allow humans to become aware of interconnectivity and the simple fact that there is order out of chaos.

The 'dark, Satanic mills' of the Industrial Revolution and the accompanying economic order of Capitalism, sub-narratives within the meta-narrative of modern science and progress, ultimately led to the celebration of the individual and the supremacy of ego.

The 20th Century modern psychiatric narrative explained that individual conscience, not God, nor the priests or clergy, was responsible for spiritual and moral life. God and the churches had largely disappeared, and the landscape was now crowded with factories, railways, teetering office buildings, the telegraph, the wireless, electricity - all emblems of capitalism and the relentless march forward of the scientific meta-narrative. (The fact that terrorists destroyed The World Trade Center, the tallest buildings in the USA and a shining emblem of capitalism, should not go

¹⁹ Neil Postman. Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology pp.15-16.

unnoticed).

The bright flames of the sacred stories - Homer's The Iliad and The Odyssey, the creation myths, the heroic stories of Troy and Achilles, the notion of Gaia, Aboriginal Dreamtime legends - were extinguished as the conquistadorial consciousness of the scientific meta-narrative spawned the new sub-narrative of colonization and the further bifurcation of science and theology. The notion of God or spirit breathing essence through humanity and nature and the connectivity of all living and non-living things was lost and disenchantment set in.²⁰

Our morality and spiritual awareness now came not from God but from the Darwinian notion of evolution via apes and survival of the fittest.

The surgical-steel coldness of the scientific meta-narrative and its sub-narrative, industrialism, may have left us wondering whether God had deserted us and cast Earth adrift, destined only to be a lonely wanderer through the Cosmos.

John Milton may have cried out for "Paradise Lost", mapmakers may have erased "paradise" from cartography since God was no longer able to fulfill His promise of heaven on Earth, yet, our spiritual hunger did not die nor did our thirst for sacred stories full of passion, tragedy and soulfulness (the very essence of life).²¹

Jung despaired that once the gods die they are reborn as diseases (depression, suicide) and Robert Calasso asked:

"What conclusions can we draw? To invite the gods ruins our relationship with them but sets history in motion. A life in which the gods are not invited isn't worth living. It will be quieter, but there won't be any stories. And you could suppose that these dangerous invitations were in fact contrived by the gods themselves, because the gods get bored with men who have no stories".²²

Gods have always been the divine companions of sacred stories, throwing lightening bolts from Mt Olympus or marking Achilles' heel at birth, and leaving us with inspirational accounts that fuelled our creativity, curiosity and stirred our soul. But the scientific meta-narrative and its sub-narratives helped to break our magical attachment to sacred stories; and Nietzsche failed to invite the gods to participate in his bleak Superman story.

Jung's revenge

Australian sociologist, John Carroll, suggests that *"without the deep structure of archetypal story, a life has no meaning"*.²³ It is possible for narratives to help us reconnect with our sacred past and its archetypes and use them as vehicles for exploring and connecting with life's complexity. The narrative itself has a pattern - the author, the setting, the character/s, the action - and we follow the author's predictable path; there is no room within narrative for emergence, self-organisation, spontaneity or creativity.

However, I suggest that when narrative reconnects with Jungian archetypes, the archetypes themselves can be inspirational to the point where the characters in the story (ie ourselves) may be released from narrative captivity and can start to reconstruct meaning which is in harmony with

20 David Tacey. ReEnchantment: The New Australian Spirituality. Sydney: Harper Collins, 2000. Chapter 1 Spirituality and the Return to Mystery. pp.17-38

21 Neil Postman. op.cit, p 62.

22 Robert Calasso. The Marriage of Cadmus & Harmony. Trans. Tim Parks. London: Vintage, 1994. p 387.

23 John Carroll The Western Dreaming: The Western World is Dying for Want of a Story. Sydney: Harper Collins, 2001. p9.

the complexity of life experience. This can be achieved by the powerful, ancient pull of the attractor of archetypes.

The 20th Century can be described with a number of keywords: nihilism, consumerism, individualism, egoism, isolation, alienation, disenchantment, reductionism, postmodernity. The list could go on.

The point to note is the two meta-narratives still co-existed, albeit the burning light of one of these narratives was almost extinguished. These meta-narratives were the continuing and dominant scientific narrative and the Genesis narrative in a different form.

God was still dead, but the first stirrings of a resurrection were heard when Jung uttered the word "archetypes". It may be a fantasy to suggest but it is possible that Jung was so intent on countering Nietzsche's death of god folly that he sought to identify God with the contents of the collective unconscious:

"Gods are personifications of the collective unconscious, for they reveal themselves to us through the unconscious activity of the psyche".²⁴

Jung's revenge was to articulate "archetypes". His patients consistently presented with dreams, fantasies and psychological fears that contained symbols often not explainable through their personal experiences. Jung believed that these symbols were rooted in mythology, stories and religion and he identified archetypes (prototypic phenomena eg wise old man, child, shadow) which form the content of the collective unconscious that is shared by all humans and which reflect universal human thought found in all cultures.

In a universe of interconnectedness, all consciousness is also interconnected. Archetypes reside in the collective unconsciousness or implicate order and unfold or spontaneously arise in the mind, particularly in times of crisis. Mythology bases its stories on archetypes and provides a rich pool of content that helps to reveal deep truths hidden from consciousness. Mythology helps in unfolding the enfolded and contemporary society has largely ignored the strong possibility that the unconscious or implicate constantly communicates with the conscious or explicate and together flow along the continuum of unbroken wholeness.

As potentialities, the archetype is inherited, but the image is not. The realisation of these universal potentialities is informed by the cultural and historical setting and the closer one's experience is to the archetypal core, the greater is the archetype's transformative and healing power.²⁵

I suggest that postmodernity, with its suspicion of singular, grand narratives and its belief in there being no one true objectivity, was a fertile intellectual bed from which Jungian archetypes and the re-emergence of the ancient, divine narrative could spring. Postmodernism, which has been gathering momentum since the 1950s and has been accelerated by the rapid rise of computer technology, allows for many narratives; concentrates on the tensions of difference and similarity; and has the potential to break the chains of modernity's rigidity and its metanarrative of logic, reason and science.²⁶

The tolerance for multi-narratives, multi-perspectives, multi-vocality fuelled the Jungian narrative. Although the archetype may be inherited; the way it is imagined and enacted was left to the individual.

24 C.G. Jung quoted in Antonio Moreno. Jung, Gods & Modern Man, p 74.

25 Roger Brooke Jung & Phenomenology pp 16-17.

26 Richard Appignanesi & Chris Garratt. Introducing Postmodernism. New York: Totem Books, 1995; Jean-Francois Lyotard. The Postmodern Explained. Sidney: Power Publications, 1992; Keith Tester. The Life & Times of Postmodernity. London: Routledge, 1993.

Tinseltown: Elvis, Marilyn, John Wayne and Diana

Although the 20th Century (and our own century) was locked into the consumerist narrative, there were inspirational flashes of archetypal narratives that burst onto the scene and caused disturbance in the collective unconscious, leading towards a reawakening. Ironically, the entertainment industry - the greatest emblem of the narrative of consumerism - gave us a taste for archetypal stories and breathed life back into the corpse of God.

The consumerist narrative, along with what I call the "Brady Bunch" narrative, side-lined us when it caused us to meet the three metaphysical questions of life with the following inept answers:

- work hard, work long hours and you will have the money necessary to buy the goods which the consumerist narrative says will make you happy;
- aspire to the house, the white picket fence, the 2.5 children and the family dog - happiness and fulfilment will be your reward;
- care not for your neighbour because the consumerist narrative promises individual rewards. You have the freedom to consume as you like; we have The Brand for you!

The consumerist narrative and its discourse is a subtle but powerful one. The narrative is playing on the levels of "you are an individual, you have the freedom to consume as you like - so have your freedom". What the 20th Century most wanted to believe in was democracy; we wanted to believe we were free and that individual choice was ours. The narrative duped us!²⁷

In our search for meaning, the following equations have been tested out and found wanting:

Consumerism as consolation = faith = meaning

Triumph of ego = faith (in self) = meaning

Communism = faith (in the Party) = meaning

Democracy = faith (in the glorious USA!) = meaning

Science + technology = faith (in the machine) = meaning

The Organisation = faith (in work, efficiency & productivity) = meaning

With the death of God, consumerism and popular culture became probably the worst Jungian diseases of the 20th Century. The appearance of large scale, self-contained shopping centres complete with cinemas, European style cafes, fashion outlets, themed foyers and plazas, "elevator" music etc seduced and lulled the consumer into believing that the search for meaning was over:

"Shoppers are drawn by and large to Shopping World by the promise of a consumption more metaphysical, more quixotic, than the purchase of soap and socks".

And that promise? You can escape the private, isolated monk's cell of the ego (so lauded by Freud but in reality so fragile and insecure when decoupled from the soul) and participate for one shining moment in a public space where your every fantasy can be fulfilled almost to the level of a religious experience.

What we miss seeing is that we are like automatons, rushing through Shopping World on our way to buying the latest Brand name; partake in the latest 50% off sale; console ourselves with junk food; sit in the cafe and watch others pass by without the slightest awareness that we are all connected; that Shopping World itself is a fractal - self-similarity between the microcosm of the

²⁷ John Carroll. *Ego & Soul: The Modern West in Search of Meaning* Sydney: Harper Collins, 1998. p 123.

human activity of Shopping World and the macrocosm of human society.

The Private Corporation narrative of the 20th Century has further contributed to our sense of "something is missing in life". The following quote by CS Lewis is enough to put a shudder through anyone working in a sterile office environments:

"I live in the Managerial Age, in a world of "Admin". The greatest evil is not now done in those sordid "dens of crime" that Dickens loved to paint. It is not done even in concentration camps & labour camps. In those we see its final result. But it is conceived & ordered (moved, seconded, carried & minuted) in clean, carpeted, warmed & well-lighted offices, by quiet men with white collars & cut fingernails & smooth-shaven cheeks who do not need to raise their voices. Hence, naturally enough, my symbol for Hell is something like the bureaucracy of a police state or the office of a thoroughly nasty business concern".²⁸

The sinful among us do not need the threats of medieval purgatory. We just need to work in a mega-organisation that worships at the altar of Frederick Taylor!

But enter Elvis, Marilyn, Diana, along with the laconic figure of John Wayne. Tinseltown unwittingly answered our yearning for a reinstatement of archetypes and the gods of our sacred stories.

In two fascinating books, *The Western Dreaming: The Western World is Dying for Want of a Story*; and *Ego & Soul*,²⁹ John Carroll examines the most prominent archetypes - the hero, the tragic "sex goddess", the fallen woman, the good hearted prostitute - and shows how the enigmatic traces of ancient archetypes have resurfaced in Hollywood movies, soap operas and in the most prominent public figures of the 20th Century. I venture to suggest that such an analysis would not have been possible without Jung reconnecting us with archetypes and exploring the deepest recesses of the human subconscious.

The tragic narrative is a great attractor for Western society yet, at the same time, it is a narrative we are fearful of. The life of Elvis Presley is an excellent example of the tragic thread that weaves through ancient narratives.

In the 1950s, Elvis was *eros*; he was passionate, gyrating energy with PreRaphaelite good looks - a startling prospect for the "American Apple Pie" era of the 1950s wishing to remain obscure and quiet following the turbulence of the destructive Hitler narrative.

Then Elvis went into decline. He became a sad, bloated figure, locked up in Graceland gorging on burgers (dare I suggest he was the main character in the McDonald's narrative). Crowds still flocked to his concerts during the 1970s, more out of morbid curiosity to see how drugs and alcohol can disfigure *eros*. When he died in 1977, the world went into overdrive, imagining sightings of Elvis and elevating Graceland to almost Lourdes proportions. Popular culture adopted the slogan "*Elvis has left the building*", originally announced at his concerts to encourage fans to go home, but now meaning "the show is over". (God is dead?)³⁰

The archetypes abound: Dionysius, the god of excess; Silenus, the drunken old lecher; Apollo, the beautiful, young God. Even Christ is part of the Elvis narrative. As saviour, he delivered the frenzied rock and roll era to a staid post-war world and literally gave his life to his fans.³¹

28 Quoted in L Payer. *Medicine & Culture: Varieties of Treatment in the United States, England, West Germany and France* New York: Penguin, 1988. p127.

29 Cited in footnotes 22 & 26.

30 The Phrase Finder <http://phrases.shu.ac.uk/meanings/128300.html>.

31 John Carroll. *Ego & Soul* op.cit. pp76-78.

Marilyn Monroe played out the "tragic heroine" narrative. A fragile, beautiful, full-figured blonde who so captivated the cinematic audience of the 1950s. Monroe personified the good natured 'whore' archetype which Carroll traces back to the Biblical figure of Mary Magdalene. Like Elvis, Marilyn succumbs to the attractor of drugs and ultimately takes her own life, thus becoming a failed Magdalene.³²

Both Elvis and Marilyn fascinated us and still continue to do so. Their personas appeal to the archetypes within us but we fear their narratives - one bright shining flame which is quickly burnt out and extinguished. Like Icarus, Elvis and Marilyn flew too near the Sun.

John Wayne and Hollywood Westerns remind us of the 'hero' archetype and the sacred stories of Achilles and the battle of Troy. The Hollywood film industry has even been described as the "principal new Church" with John Wayne as the new god in the pantheon. The modern hero narrative asks the questions so important to the individual conscience left without guidance following the death of God: what is true? what meaning can I give to my life?

John Wayne was the lone hero, rambling over the prairie, seeking to right injustices and confront the wild frontier of morality in a secular age. One of Wayne's lines from the film *The Alamo* spells out for us the creed for a world without God (interestingly, this film was also financed and directed by Wayne):

*"There's right and there's wrong, you gotta do one or the other. You do the one and you're living, you do the other and you may be walking around but you're as dead as a beaver hat".*³³ (ie your soul is about as empty as it can get).

What I believe shocked the world into recognising that the seductive narratives of the modernist era, such as consumerism and McDonald-ism, where no longer good explanations for how the complex world works was the death of Princess Diana in 1997.

Like Marilyn Monroe, Diana is the tragic heroine archetype. A beautiful, young woman who appealed to so many millions around the world, was also by all accounts a tortured personality. She overcame her frailties by caring for the rejected and the poor - she became the People's Princess. Allegedly a victim of paparazzi (a disturbing aspect of the consumerist narrative with its thirst for film star and entertainment gossip), Diana died in a blaze of glory and became the modern Mary Magdalene.

Interestingly, Mother Theresa died in the same week as Diana but did not receive the tremendous world-wide outpouring of despair, grief and love which attended Diana's death. I cast my mind back to that day and, rather like asking "where were you when Kennedy died?", I recall I was at a family lunch when the news reached us.

Not having ever been a supporter of the monarchy, I was astounded at my reaction to Diana's death. I was quite angry with the paparazzi, but the greatest impact on me was seeing all the flowers at the gates of Buckingham Palace. Delivered by nameless and faceless individuals as a mark of their respect, it hit home that we are all connected to the unconscious and all tap into the archetypal narratives. That so many millions of people could be similarly affected demonstrated to me the connectivity between humanity, the collective unconscious and archetypes.

The restoration of the gods in the pantheon of the Internet

At the dawn of the 21st Century, the Western world was tired. Tired of the meta-narrative of

32 John Carroll. The Western Dreaming op.cit pp 44-46.

33 John Carroll, Ego & Soul, p58.

science, logic and reason; tired of being captive to stories which did not resonate with life's complexity and experiences.

James Gleick pinpoints the 1960s as the time when chaos theory started to reshape classical scientific thought. As Gleick says: "*Where chaos begins, classical science stops*".³⁴ The wildness and turbulence that is everywhere around us - in the weather, the human heart, insect populations - suddenly came into focus and scientists saw that complex systems, which appeared to behave erratically, possess orderly disorder in which patterns of behaviour unfold in irregular but similar forms.

The liet motif within the chaos theory narrative became the snowflake: because every snowflake has a regular irregularity, but each snowflake is unique.³⁵ The complexity narrative explained that it is a combination of chaos plus order. The Newtonian vision of an orderly, deterministic universe was shattered as it became clear that this fresh narrative was a more perfect description of the complexity of nature (and a perfect description of post-modernity per se).

I suggest that the technology that made the Internet a reality has also resulted in new, emerging narratives - narratives of cyberspace.

The Internet is hard-wiring the collective consciousness. As each new web site hangs up its shingle in the cyberhood; as each cybersurfer travels through cyberspace on their way to finding their voice and identity; as each computer blinks "come and play with me", the omni-distributed array of information/knowledge available on the Internet allows human minds to become instantly aware of collective knowledge, the interrelatedness of cultures, individuals and minds.

Jungian archetypes are rapidly emerging on the Internet - the Hacker as warrior of the new techno-territory and the Chatter, the playful communicator or fictitious personality. The Hacker particularly is emerging as a mythological figure able to bring down global companies by hacking through firewalls into computer systems. Collective mythologies abound and the interrelatedness of communication, culture and self is becoming apparent on the Internet.³⁶

Two things are of particular interest:

- the almost religious appeal and connotation of cyberspace; and
- the re-ordering of the narrative structure in cyberspace.

The Church of Jesus Christ, Elvis

Massive global immigration into cyberspace has seen ordinary people hang up their cyber-shingles and open the virtual door into their own experiences, histories, thoughts and ideas. And so the Internet, with an energy of its own, is an attractor. It is a vortex of communication which creates new meaning.

Thousands of jumbled conversations and narratives are taking place over the vastness of the Internet and this leads us to ask: where is the focaliser? whose voice is being heard? what is the plot? what exactly is the narrative?

The answer to these questions is simple yet beautiful: there is no plot; there is no dominant narrative; no cyberspace story has a predictable ending; the Internet is multi-vocal; no particular

³⁴ James Gleick. *Chaos: The Amazing Science of the Unpredictable*. London, Vintage, 1998. p3.

³⁵ Ibid. pp312-313.

³⁶ Victoria Ward & Kim Sbarcea, "Voice: storytelling is knowledge management" in Kim Sbarcea (ed) *Rethinking Knowledge* Sydney: Butterworths, 2002, pp 92-93.

voice is more dominant or important.

God has been restored and is finding a prominent place in cyberspace. Finding God on the web is almost like being involved in a Digital Crusade. Cyberspace is having a profound impact on cyber-pilgrims who surge through self-organising web sites on their way to re-examining their religious beliefs and understanding of spirituality. The Internet has the potential to be whatever it needs to be for the user - for the religious, it is akin to a spiritual bazaar where cyber-churches offer self-organising, interactive electronic communities of faith.

A quick surf for Christ or God on any search engine will result in thousands of hits from Scientology groups (alt.religion.scientology) to the Vatican's own web page, complete with "email The Pope" (as God's major representative on Earth, we might jokingly suggest that, given The Pope's email address, God is Online!).

Perhaps demonstrating that Elvis has "re-entered the building" and that our yearning for sacred stories with a creator at its core is still one of our greatest narrative longings, is the Church of Jesus Christ, Elvis web site³⁷. Devout Catholics or Christians would no doubt be aghast to see Elvis depicted as a Christ-like figure.

Our fundamental desire to believe that there is a higher, transcendental order which connects the living with the non-living is particularly evidenced by the extraordinary appeal of John Edward, star of Crossing Over (TV show and website)³⁸. A psychic medium who claims to connect the living with those who have 'crossed over', he attempts to construct an entirely new narrative between those in the living world and those in the hereafter.

With the gods restored, the equation is now:

Connectivity = faith = multiple meanings

The narrative recast

The Internet's backbone is hypertext, which allows information to be displayed or accessed in different sequences ie non-sequentially, non-linearity. How information itself is stored does not affect how it is accessed and displayed. Access and display are independent of storage.

Hypertext has redefined our notion of narrative³⁹. Since hypertext is the art of non-sequential writing, the fundamental aspects of narrative (the author, the setting, the character/s, the action) are displaced in time and cyberspace. Hypertext narrative dynamically unfolds and the order in which things come to the cyber-reader is changed. The programmer may be the original author of the hypertext code, but the cyber-reader chooses to construct the story. As fragments of information randomly appear on the screen, the computer user becomes a co-author; chooses which hypertext link to follow next; constructs any ending to any story.

37 http://jubal.westnet.com/hyperdiscordia/sacred_heart_elvis.html

38 John Edward. Crossing Over: The Story Behind the Stories New York: Princess Books, 2001. Website: www.johnedward.net

39 Michael Heim. Virtual Realism New York: Oxford University Press, 1998. p 215.

In cyber-chat rooms and cafes, a chatter can construct or deconstruct narratives at will. You select a 'handle' or cyber-name that will identify you to other chatters and you can weave whatever story you wish. A male can take on a female persona; and vice-versa. Chatters can experiment with multiple-voices and personalities⁴⁰.

Star Trek perhaps gives us a glimpse of what future narratives will be like. The Holodeck is a fiction of the popular science fiction series. Crew members ask a computer to create a three dimensional holographic space - a multi-sensory, interactive virtual environment. A digital narrative (ie a novel) is played out in real time with the crew member becoming a human character amongst a cast of virtual, unpredictable characters. The plot is not known, the ending is uncertain.

Technology will no doubt be able to generate a Holodeck in the near future and we will see the computer as theatre. Whether a digital narrative will allow a human character to easily re-enter reality will be a test. For a narrative can only be of assistance to us in reaching our potential when it creates a story vortex - a whirling formation from which inspiration and creativity spontaneously emerge when they resonate with the reader (or listener's) psyche and soul. What emerges is a soul narrative that is capable of moving us beyond the narrative itself and towards the edge of chaos.

The new spirituality

Why does man seem to require God, gods or the notion of a higher power in narratives? It is because ancient narratives and their characters have always been accompanied by a divine presence to help them through their journey. It is because we need to be reconnected with the wholeness of beauty and connectivity so that we understand:

"God was not terrible & thunder-blue: It was a gentle water bird I knew"⁴¹

40 I am writing from personal experience here. I have for some time been fascinated with the Internet and identify in cyberspace and so have become a member of many chat rooms.

41 John Shaw Neilson (1924) quoted in Cliff Hanna (ed) John Shaw Neilson Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 1991, p95.

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