

# Technological Uncertainties And Popular Culture

**A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

**by**

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## Abstract

This thesis is an inquiry into possibilities and problems of a sociology of translation. Beginning with a recognition that actor network theory represents a sociological account of social life premised upon recognition of multiple ontologies, interruptions and translations, the thesis proceeds to examine problems of interpretation and representation inherent in these accounts. Tensions between sociological interpretation and social life as lived are examined by comparing representation of non-human agency in both an actor-network and a science fiction study of doors. The power identified in each approach varies from point making to lying. A case is made for considering fictional storytelling as sociology and hence, the sociological value of lying. It is by close examination of a fictional story that this study aims to contribute to a sociology of translation.

The greater part of the thesis comprises an ethnographic study of a televised children's story. Methodological issues in ethnography are addressed and a case is made for a complicit and multi-site ethnography of story. The ethnography is represented in two particular forms. Firstly, and unusually, story is treated as a Storyworld available for ethnographic study. An actor network ethnography of this Storyworld reveals sociologically useful similarities and differences between fictional Storyworld and contemporary social life. Secondly, story is taken as a product, a broadcast television series of six programmes. An ethnography of story production is undertaken that focuses attention on production performances, hidden storytellers and politics of authorship. Story is revealed as an unfinished project.

A prominent aspect of this thesis is a recognition that fictional storytelling both liberates and constrains story possibilities. This thesis concludes that, in addressing critically important tensions in sociological representation, fictional stories should be included in sociological literature as studies in their own right.

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## Chapter 1

### **Introduction by literature review**

... the power of such analytical [actor] networks is also their problem: theoretically they are without limit. ... Yet analysis, like interpretation, must have a point; it must be enacted as a stopping place. ... In coming to rest a network must be ‘cut’ at a point ‘stopped’ from further extension. [Strathern 1996: 523]

Fantasists, whether they use the ancient archetypes of myth and legend or the younger ones of science and technology, may be talking as seriously as any sociologist - and a good deal more directly - about human life as lived. ... as all children know, it is above all by the imagination that we achieve perception, and compassion, and hope. [Le Guin 1989: 48]

The purpose of a thought-experiment, as the term was used by Schrodinger and other physicists is not to predict the future ... but to describe reality, the present world... Science fiction is not predictive; it is descriptive... Prediction is the business of prophets, clairvoyants and futurologists. It is not the business of novelists. A novelist’s business is lying. [Le Guin 1989: 131]

Strathern has observed the paradox that, in producing our analytical accounts of social life, social scientists take interpretative ‘cuts’ that stem that flow of folk and things that is social life [Strathern 1996]. Ironically, in our acts of interpretation we lose connection with that which we seek to explain. Such observations represent a particular challenge to social scientists who, like me, have a commitment to sociological interpretation whilst holding to a strong belief that social life is open-ended, material, performed and heterogeneous.



In taking Strathern's observation seriously I set out to explore an idea that had been forming for some time. As a sociologist I have been struck by interesting similarities between fictional accounts that relate science, technology and society and certain social theory. Indeed, it is not only similarities that have drawn my attention but also some interesting differences. I am left wondering whether, in such similarity and difference, we might find some leverage on tensions between interpretative 'cut' and 'life as lived'. In this light, Le Guin's proposition that fantasists, a particular variant of fictional storyteller, "may be talking as seriously as any sociologist - and a good deal more directly - about human life as lived" becomes personally and professionally interesting.

Here then is my thesis: in rejecting as imperative truthful representation of social life, and by focusing on description over interpretative cut, fictional accounts can be usefully incorporated into sociological representation so as to build analytical power whilst retaining a sense of 'human life as lived'.

In establishing this thesis, in this chapter, I will locate this work in Science-Technology-Society (STS) studies. I identify my work with Actor Network Theory (ANT) and suggest that ANT offers particular explanatory power in combining three key imperatives: material performativity, empirical fieldwork and a sociology of translation [see for example Callon 1986,; Law and Callon 1992; Latour 1992, 1996].

Initially, in developing this account of ANT, I will draw on Latour's sociology of a few mundane artifacts [Latour 1992]. I specifically focus on Latour's sociology of 'doors' for both its explanatory power in illustrating central tenets of ANT and as an example of a networky *de-description* of doors. Having pointed to the strength of de-description [Akrich 1992 and Latour 1992], my account of ANT is further developed through reference to situated performances. In this context I draw on Mol [1999] to illustrate the relevance of performance to network theory. Using Mol's account of ontological politics I demonstrate that, by theorizing social action as performances in

mobile and heterogeneous networks, ANT points to multiple and intimately connected realities. In this context, daily performances are limitless and political practices involving partial and shifting connections [see for examples Mol and Law 1994, Law 2002 and Strathern 1991].

Having discussed some of the major contributions of ANT to contemporary social theory I then move to consider how certain principles of both social constructivism and ANT draw attention to politics of sociological explanation [see for example Ashmore 1989, Latour 1988, Lynch and Woolgar 1990, Lynch 1991 and Woolgar 1988]. Representation is recognized as a central concern for sociologists of translation who trace their own performances as sociological actor network.

In pursuing the relationship between theory, empirical practice and representation two particular studies are taken as examples of ANT responses to politics of explanation. These two accounts suggest emerging forms of ANT authorship. The first is a ‘fictionalising’ study *Aramis: the love of technology* [Latour 1996] and the second a deeply ‘evocative’ account *Good Passages, Bad Passages* [Moser and Law 1999]. It is suggested that these two forms offer different opportunities for theory building and theory fixing. Acknowledging the value of both forms, it is then suggested that there may be sociological value in a turn to fictional accounts of STS in popular culture.

In pursuing the value of popular culture I retell a story by Isaac Asimov [1970] to illustrate sociologically useful similarities and differences between Latour’s sociology of doors and Asimov’s account. A case is made for juxtaposing sociological polemic with fictional account in order to address those tensions between analysis and ‘sense of flow’ that are to be found in STS accounts in general and in actor networky accounts in particular.

In summary this chapter positions this study as one informing a particular approach to **Science-Technology-Society** study: namely **Actor Network Theory (ANT)**. In reviewing literature of ANT, particular focus is placed here on work that established

this approach as a ‘Theory’ – principally work of Michel Callon, Bruno Latour, John Law and Annemarie Mol. These works have fixed cherished notions of ANT and have established the focus of this theory as relational and material performativity. Central notions of **translation**, **delegation**, **heterogeneity** and **order** are discussed and I examine the impact of considering **hybridity** as a character of humans and non-humans enrolled in net-work. Attention then turns to **problems of analysis and representation**. In this context seminal work of both Latour and Law are raised to discuss contemporary ANT attempts to both subvert and enact politics of explanation and theoretical closure. **Fiction** is raised as one means to explore relationships between theory, practice and representation. Finally, the chapter compares the examples used to represent a fictional and non-fictional study of doors and a case is made for the **sociological value of lying**.

## **Science Technology Society (STS)**

Over the last three decades there has been considerable sociological interest in science, scientific knowledge production and science practices. This interest has been drawn from across many branches of social science and has developed into a multi-disciplinary site as sociologists [see for example Knorr-Cetina 1981, Latour and Woolgar 1979, and Collins 1985], historians [see for example Shapin 1996] feminists [see for example Harding 1986, Haraway 1991] anthropologists [see for example Downey and Dummit 1997] and ethnomethodologists [see Lynch 1985, 1991, 1993] all contribute to developing our understanding of science in contemporary society. Each contributing discipline has provided seminal insights into science and, notwithstanding fierce disagreement on certain points of theory and practice, together their classic studies have produced a tacit understanding of science as cultural practice.

Alongside this burgeoning interest in science there has been an associated interest in applied science and technology. Again, the research effort here has been multi-

disciplinary and the resulting diverse range of theoretical and empirical work productive. In general, this broad area of interest that incorporates both science and technology studies can be represented by an increasing fascination with relationships between science, technology and society (STS).

It is not my intention to draw a line in the sand and argue **for** one approach **over** the other: such debate would be a major work in its own right and replay large chunks of an excellent discussion by Lynch in which he explains his interest in ethnomethodology through an account of shifting trends in science studies over a thirty year period [Lynch 1993]. Any attempt at arguing for a position over another would involve a potentially fruitless attempt to solve some of the intractable problems in social theory such as the debates between foundationalist and anti-foundationalist approaches to social life or between radical constructivism or neo-realism. Having read Lynch's intelligent refusal to play such positioning games, I would prefer instead to pin my colours to a particular mast and address some points of concern and interest that I have within my chosen field of operation. The mast in question is a particular brand of anti-foundationalist social theory: Actor Network Theory

One of the greatest strengths of STS is that, irrespective of perspective, approach or position, empirical work underpins theory [Collins 1996]. This 'show and tell' tradition of theory building and change is one I value – and one I would seek to emulate in this thesis. In this context, in demonstrating the explanatory power of ANT as social theory, my literature review is both highly selective and derivative in that it draws upon the 'show and tell' power of others in order to perform my own 'show and tell'.

It is my intention in this chapter to introduce my particular interest in Actor Network Theory and raise some 'gentle' concerns. In order to develop this introduction, I review some seminal contributions in (and to) Actor Network Theory, and identify the power of such accounts in terms of sociology of translation. In particular I focus on

the explanatory power of ANT in its descriptions of relational and material performativity.

To begin this discussion I draw on a paper by Bruno Latour that offers a sociological study of mundane artifacts: specifically a sociology of doors. This paper serves as a sound introduction to a central premise of ANT, namely that:

... in order to understand domination we have to turn away from an exclusive concern with social relations and weave them into a fabric that includes non-human actants, actants that offer the whole possibility of holding society together as a durable whole. [Latour 1991:103]

ANT was not the first theoretical push to incorporate non-humans into our theories of social domination and both sociological and anthropological studies of material culture have focused attention on artifacts and their production, consumption and use. Non-humans appear in social theory in a number of guises. Social constructivist studies of technological systems address material forms directly [see Grint and Woolgar 1997, Bijker, Hughes and Pinch 1988] as do biographical accounts of technological artifacts [Appadurai 1986], and studies that examine production and consumption processes of material life [see Silverstone and Hirsch 1992]. Equally there are strong technological tropes in feminist accounts of human technology relations [see Harding 1986, and Haraway 1989, 1991]. Undoubtedly, each of these very different forms of accounting for non-humans contribute significantly to our appreciation of STS.

However, I have already stated that my interest here is ANT and I will begin to explain the potency of network accounts by drawing attention to an item of tacit knowledge in STS, that is that objects are inscribed with assumptions about their use:

Designers thus define actors with specific tastes, competencies, motives, aspirations, political prejudices, and the rest, and they assume that morality, technology, science, and economy will evolve in particular ways. A large part of the work of innovators is that of “*inscribing*” this vision of (or prediction about) the world in the technical content of the new object. [Akrich 1992: 208]

Acknowledging that technologies represent some basic assumptions and intentions, Akrich points to difficulties that ensue when objects move through design processes and into everyday use. In accounting for these difficulties she continues with the textual metaphor of scripts and articulates tensions between ‘projected user’ and ‘real user’ as:

... between the world inscribed in the object and the world described by its displacement [Akrich 1992: 208]

In thinking through this question of tension, inscription and displacement STS authors have taken particular themes and metaphors with a view to explaining the social life of technology whilst undermining any implied techno-elitism or determinism. For example, Grint and Woolgar develop this tension by invoking a *configured* user [Grint and Woolgar 1997]. In what follows I want to illustrate how this notion is addressed in ANT and the strength of the particular theory of social action that emerges.

## **Actor Networks**

In theory building, ANT explains social life as ‘net’ ‘work’ by raising the active **presence** of **non-humans** and demonstrating their **power** in translation [see for example: Latour 1991, 1993, 1996 1997a and Law 1997a, 1997b, 1999]. To illustrate these basic yet cherished notions I begin with an example from ANT literature. This example is from a paper by Bruno Latour -*Where are the Missing Masses? The Sociology of a few Mundane Artifacts* that appeared in an edited

with other cars to form collectives known as trains. Cars and trains then travel at safe distance and uniform speed to provide public transportation around Paris.

In building Aramis, the intention was to use innovative means of coupling and decoupling the small transport ‘elements’ known as cars. In effect, this radical form of coupling subverts the linear and planned performances of what we currently understand as trains. The coupling technology would allow engineers to build a system that could position ‘cars’ anywhere in the transport system as and when required. Any car, at any position in a train, can uncouple it-self from the train and take a user to any desired station in the system. Once the users are safely deposited on platforms, this car can then be directed anywhere in the system either as an individual element, or as it moves into ‘busy’ lines, to couple with other cars to form a collective - namely a train. Trains are now no longer single artifacts coupled together with heavy mechanical couplings but collectives of individual components that can and do connect and disconnect in seamless and massively complex ways. This was the project of Aramis and, Aramis died – or did it?

Latour’s study extends over 300 pages and is overtly representing a lengthy and deep field ethnography. The account follows a ‘fictional’ research student and Norbert, his sociology Professor, as they attempt to uncover what happened to Aramis and why. As, in true detective fashion, Norbert and the student trace Aramis’ known history and movements, they pursue the victim through senior management offices, internal documentation, workshops, political fora, R&D departments and in techno-person itself. Voices of researchers, researched and an absent anonymous ‘theorising’ voice are juxtaposed as filaments of networky connections are identified, located and encountered. In this tracing, Norbert and the student follow Aramis as it is transformed from ‘project’ to ‘artifacts’ to ‘dead’ technology. As Mol illustrated with anaemia, performances of Aramis morph as it shift locations.

In reading *Aramis*, I am struck by the power of the representational approach. Readers follow juxtaposed snatches of speech that include both dialogue and monologic forms. These juxtaposed text are loosely bound by more traditional narration when in snatches of speech from either the detectives or the absent unnamed sociological presence. Such explanations vary in form from vernacular dialogue or speech to ‘straight’ sociological address. The overall effect is of a disjointed yet connected dialogue similar to an annotated play script. This approach has value, as tracking multiple connected accounts requires care and attention on the part of the reader: in other words it requires active reading.

Although the dialogic form of *Aramis* is rightfully unsettling, we are aided in our interpretation of this collection of ordered voices that drift across our eyes by the steering hands of Norbert, his sidekick student and the absent sociologist. *Aramis* manages to represent multiplicity without becoming incoherent as these characters keep plot lines mobile but available. Whilst this is no simple ventriloquism, we are regularly positioned as empirical readers [Eco 1983] in Latour’s textual world. Points of analysis are clearly developed as, in this fictionalising of ethnographic fact production, Latour describes multiplicities of *Aramis* and illustrates displacements of decision to Mol’s “always elsewhere”.

I value *Aramis*. It is a seminal piece of work in both theorising actor-network and in sociological representation. I use this ethnographic study in teaching post-experience graduate students taking courses in project management. It is always well received. In *Aramis*, students recognise so much of their everyday experiences of managing projects within commercial organisations. They understand the point of commitment and ‘love’ of a technology, they can connect with politics of ‘doing’ projects and they relate to shrinking and expanding networks to which both this study, and Law’s study of an aircraft project, relate [see Latour 1996 and Law 2002]. *Aramis* is an entrance



point for engineers into STS in general and to the sociology of translation in particular. It is a brilliant exposition of theory through empirical study.

For me, as a sociologist *Aramis* is intriguing. It clearly addresses criticisms of ANT that suggest technological tropes swamp the sense of hybrid action and social experience. For, whilst technologies of *Aramis* are given literal and figurative voice, technological voices are not amplified to a point at which all others are quietened or stilled – they are voices amongst others. Furthermore, for all its radicalism, *Aramis* also carries immediate sociological authority as a representation of painstaking, careful and reflexive ethnographic practice. One can sense the fieldwork, follow the frustrations of fieldwork and pursue the sociological aim. Ironically, for me this success is also its problem as there is little scope in its fictionalising for imagination or creative work – little scope for our characters to be more than we are told or the ‘points’ to be other than those given. *Aramis* is a work of careful production that offers a different form of accounting for ‘how things are’ in ANT but offers little scope for ‘how things might be’. It closes around ANT and establishes the ‘T’ of theory beautifully.

On the other hand, the second piece I offer here does appear to suggest movement. I refer to Moser and Law’s shorter ethnographic piece *Good Passages Bad Passages* [1999 and hereinafter referred to as GPBP]. *Aramis* and GPBP are similar in a number of ways. For example, in their radical use of representation, both theorise but eschew invoking detailed language of their theoretical home – for example there is little in the way of quasi mobiles, hybridity or actants in GPBP and far less than one would expect in *Aramis*. Indeed, I would argue that, in the case of *Aramis* the use of cherished concepts is offset against a wider set of intertextual references drawn from within and outwith sociological literature. On the other hand, GPBP is a more direct ethnographic argument in which sociological representation is both illustrative and evocative.

As with Aramis, GPBP is immediately recognisable as an account drawn from ethnographic fieldwork and the authors perform ethnography in a ‘straight’ but knowingly different manner. Crucially, in GPBP ‘the ethnography’ remains at the heart of the telling and, in this way, the ethnography is both an end in itself and a means to ‘make a point’. Let me demonstrate.

Moser and Law represent ethnographic encounters between the researcher, Ingunn Moser, and ‘Liv’. In crafting their account the authors offer ten very short stories from the field and they develop each of these stories in their ‘argument’. Each ‘story’ is little more than a paragraph or two long and relates directly to ‘Liv’. We begin with the first story in which Liv and Ingunn meet. Liv is a dis/abled woman who lives ‘alone’ in a sheltered setting. Her dis/ability is severe and Liv has difficulty talking and can only move with a wheelchair ‘controlled’ by a switch that is connected through an extended lever apparatus to just below Liv’s head. Hence, Liv ‘moves’ by head movement. In short, Liv is wheelchair bound/enabled and in the first story we become aware of ‘Liv’-chair as a dis/enabled body in time and space.

The first observation that is developed from this story is quite straightforward, that is that Liv's wheelchair is now a part of Liv. It is represented as both an extension of Liv’s body and of her circumstances: in the time before this chair Liv’s dis/ability was, necessarily, ‘done’ differently.

In writing this story of extensions, the connection to theory worlds of prosthetics, networks and Cyborg is stated not argued. However, an argument is presented - an argument that is represented as beyond the now mundane STS knowledge of heterogeneous networks. The argument runs thus: “that any study of the materialities of dis/ability is incomplete unless it also attends to the continuities and discontinuities of subjectivity” [Moser and Law 1999: 198]. It is taken that we understand this to be a general point of argument about materialities and not case

specific to dis/ability. And, now argument development and creative opportunity begins.

In following nine stories of Liv we stay close to her ways of doing life. To illustrate my point I cite a ‘chunk’ of the text – the extended quote is necessary given that any sense of identity and materiality develops in the telling. Here then is a significant part of the second story and it follows from the point at which Liv and Ingunn meet for the first time outside Liv’s flat:

Opening the door? Again, it isn’t clear how she’s doing this but Liv is going to explain. She’s going to explain about a third joystick, this time with a red button. She can move it, again by shifting her head, her chin. But, this time it’s different. Because this joystick is working something called an ‘environmental control’. So, what happens?

The answer is that once she sets the environmental control running it moves through a series of functions, click, click, click, a different function each time. Liv knows the order in which they come. It turns out that it is the first sub-option within the fourth main function, after the fourth click, that is going to open her front door. She moves her chin at the right moments, moves the joystick. And, finally the door opens. And then Liv is rolling forward. Her wheelchair is taking her through the door. Ingunn is following her, and once they are both through, a few seconds later, the door closes. It closes automatically. They’re in the flat and they’re ready to talk. [Moser and Law 1999: 198]

The descriptive pieces are tight: comprising short sentences and direct address. They offer nothing of the poetic imagery that some anthropologists use in evoking sense of place. However, whilst this is description not poetry, it is evocative. Evocation is difficult to ‘prove’ or demonstrate but the crucial test is whether readers are drawn

into the fabrication of the text [Tyler 1986]. In evocative pieces, text and reader collude in particular ways that allow for resonance and active imagination:

Evocation is neither presentation nor representation. It presents no objects and represents none, yet it makes available through absence what can be conceived but not presented. It is thus beyond truth and immune to the judgment of performance. It overcomes the separation of the sensible and the conceivable of form and content, of self and other, of language and the world. [Tyler 1986: 123]

Once given, Liv's story cannot be taken back – it is now available for us to work. In their representation of this second story, Moser and Law raise specificities, namely the specificities of Liv's controllable world and particular specifications of control. In demonstrating their point they pose questions as to what is within her ability and what outwith:

The door, that's a specificity. The television, that's another. But, she can't work the blinds, not for the moment. ... They are not hooked up to it because she hasn't got round to it yet. ... She is planning to get to this. Does she want anything else? Well, possibly, though she is not bothered about having an alarm. ....

Dis/ability is a set of specificities – which means, to be sure, that we might imagine ourselves as abled, but abled in a million ways. Just as Liv is dis/abled in a million ways. [Moser and Law 1999: 200]

In reading this very pointed and direct account of 'facts' of Liv's life we can actively work with the text, adding to that which is offered our own imaginings and questions. We are not following a singularly sociological plot – we have 'interest' in Liv's life. The writing forces attention on and beyond the text itself.

Each ‘story’ raises a new point. For example, story three raises a notion of passage: as movement between specificities. At this point there is an anecdote by Liv: a story of travelling to her hometown by train in which we hear of both pleasures and pains that ensue when technologies intended to smooth the passage are both absent and present. Story four shifts the ground – it is visceral. It is about a bad passage for Liv: dis/ability in talk. For Liv, the meaning of living this particular dis/ability is powerful and damaging and there are tears and tension when an urgency to be understood is transformed into pain when communication fails. And, here is a twofold contribution as pleasures and pains are added into actor networks by evocation by direct address. In Liv we find that action is not solely hybrid-physical-bodily agency but also an emotional-psychological subjectification: actor network is hybridised identity work.

The ten tales continue in this fashion and expose other points of theory. As the ten unfold Moser and Law raise identity and identity work as crucial to our understanding of network performances. This is a profound and moving account. When I first came across this piece it was being presented at a conference *Actor Network and After* [Keele University July 1997]. I had read the paper the evening before it was presented and I was stunned by the potency of the piece. As I talked with others at the conference they too had emotional and political responses to the paper.

Initially, I wondered if my response to GPBP was driven by Liv’s conditions – a liberal politically incorrect sense of guilt perhaps. But, that is not the case – the value here is recognising hidden actors and action that reveal agency as creative, imaginative, urgent, emotional and visceral work. I related this active, networky and embodied subjectivity to my newly found interest in children and doors. In following ‘abled’ child doing ‘latch key kid’ I found as many calls to subjectivity and identity as I found in those ten tales of Liv: childhood tales of ‘freedom’, ‘autonomy’, and ‘responsibility’ alongside ‘loneliness’, ‘fear’, ‘vulnerability’ and ‘isolation’ – opportunities for good passages, bad passages and all places between.

It is now becoming clear that lives are full of potential, they can move in many directions, and interpretive cutting is an illusion - a device to stem the flow and produce interpretation. Whilst lives are framed in actor network, there is fictive potential in living - life has possibilities, ways of moving that are different from the fixity of the facts that are drawn into interpretation by the cut of analysts' thinking.

Constructed reality, and fictive pasts and futures, are not separable for humans as they perform their mundane lives... but they are separated in our cuts. It is disquieting that any sense of flow is stemmed in interpretation but this is a cost of *analysis*. Strathern provided insights into this disquiet when she *anthropologized* ANT [Strathern 1996]. Having first established the performative materiality of ANT, and noted that: "Actor-network theorists set up narrational fields in order to show how effects are produced out of alliances between human and non-human entities" she then addresses the power/problem of autolimitless networks by drawing on the metaphor of cutting. "Cutting is used as a metaphor by Derrida himself... one phenomenon stops the flow of others" [Strathern 1996: 522].

Strathern points to the cuts that have emerged from Euro-American studies, arguing for extending these accounts by an appeal to anthropology:

In anthropologizing some of these issues, however, I do not make appeals to other cultural realities simply because I wish to dismiss the power of the Euro-American concepts of hybrid and network. The point is, rather, to extend them with social imagination. That includes seeing how they are put to work in their indigenous context, as well as how they might work in an exogenous one. [Strathern 1996: 521]

I find Strathern offers a graphic, and theoretically full, way of thinking about my concerns. I, too, would like to extend academic networks with social imagination. In my case this extension comes from drawing on the work of Euro-American authors, whose fictional stories resonate for popular audiences. I do not seek to subvert the

existing academic genres or to suggest that they are somehow weaker or less analytically useful than fiction - quite the contrary - I think that we could extend our sociological stories with fictional ones and juxtapose fiction and theory in interesting and useful ways. I will let Donna Haraway help me here with three observations that, in the context of this thesis, suggest useful relationships between fact, fiction and truth.

Facts ought to be discovered, not made or constructed. But the etymology of facts refers us to human action, performance. Indeed to human feats [OED]. Deeds as opposed to words are the parents of facts. [Haraway 1989: 3]

Fiction can be imagined as a derivative, fabricated version of the world and experience... But tones of meaning in fiction make us hear its origin in vision, inspiration, insight, genius ... That is fiction can be *true*, known to be true by an appeal to nature ... the etymology of fiction refers us once again to human action, to the act of fashioning, forming, or inventing, as well as to feigning. [Haraway 1989: 3-4]

Fiction's kinship to facts is close, but they are not identical twins. Facts are opposed to opinion, to prejudice, but not to fiction. Both fiction and fact are rooted in an epistemology that appeals to experience... A fact seems done, unchangeable, fit only to be recorded; fiction seems always inventive, open to other possibilities, other fashionings of life [Haraway 1989: 4]

In this closeness, this lack of opposition, and those differences I think there is huge potential.

## Turning to fiction

I am going to conclude this chapter by demonstrating my thesis. This demonstration requires that I retell another story of doors. This story is separated from Latour's sociology of doors by about forty years. My choice here is a science fiction (SF) short story by Isaac Asimov - *It's such a beautiful day*. This story was originally published in 1954 in an SF publication *Star Science Fiction Stories, No. 3*. This publication was one of a number of text based comic forms of American SF that were popular in the U.S from the 1930's through to the early 1960's. I first came across the story around 1970 when it was included in an SF collection of four Asimov tales titled *Through a Glass, Clearly* [Asimov 1970]. I have re-read this study of doors on a number of occasions over the years and I hope you enjoy the retelling as much as I enjoy the original.

In my retelling I remain faithful to the linear structure of the text and use quotations from the original to provide both an impression of the original authorly style and an authentic ring to the retelling. For the most part, I avoid analysis of the text save that which is inevitably embedded in my selective retelling. In other words there is no established theoretical framework written into my re-telling, no identifiable touted applied technique of narrative analysis, no foundation to the reading - except me.

Anyway, my point comes from positioning this tale alongside an account of ANT – so here it is:

### **Another sociology of doors: It's such a beautiful day**

On April 12<sup>th</sup>, 2117, the field modulator brake valve in the Door belonging to Mrs. Richard Henshaw depolarized for reasons unknown.

As a result, Mrs. Henshaw's day was completely upset and her son, Richard, Jr., first developed his strange neurosis.



It was the type of thing you find listed as a neurosis in the usual textbooks and certainly young Richard behaved, in most respects, just as any well-brought-up twelve year old in prosperous circumstances ought to behave.

And yet from April 12 on, Richard Henshaw, Jr. could only with regret ever persuade himself to go through a Door. [Asimov 1970: 7]

So begins Isaac Asimov's short story of a boy, his life and doors and, through this story, we will come to know something about why and how young Henshaw became an ill-disciplined user of Doors.

Asimov's tale begins with a description of the Henshaw household just prior to the failure of the Door. The household comprises Mrs. Henshaw (widow), her twelve-year-old son Richard, and a variety of gadgets and mekkanos. The day, April 12<sup>th</sup>, was unfolding for Mrs. Henshaw much as any other – coffee on a tray, planning a day trip to New York, a tergo-shower. Indeed, she "...passed through the stages of her morning ritual with a certain contentment ..." – all was well with the world [p. 7].

However, her picture of mundane contentment was about to be well and truly rocked. For, as her son Richard prepared to go school, he tried the Door, and it failed. He tried again to key in the coordinates of school but without luck, and so, finally, he called to his mother for help. She too keyed in the school coordinates but:

The Door remained an inactive gray barrier despite all her manipulations. It was obvious that the Door was out of order – and only five months after its annual fall inspection by the company.

She was quite angry about it.

It would happen on a day when she had so much planned. She thought petulantly of the fact that a month earlier she had decided against installing a subsidiary Door on the ground that it was an unnecessary expense. How was she to know that Doors were going to be so shoddy? [p. 8]

As with most household doors, this Door is deeply involved in the mundane lives of the family. The unexpected failure is frustrating to Mrs. Henshaw who is both offended by “shoddy” workmanship and rightfully angry – for, what use is a door that won’t work? After all, she bought the best and had it serviced regularly, surely that should be sufficient for her to be able to forget it: the thing *ought* to be reliable.

Notwithstanding moral outrage, Mrs. Henshaw had a problem - the door had failed yet Richard must go to school. She settled on the idea that he could take a short walk to a neighbour’s house and use their Door – rather than the 250-yard walk to the “public” Door. Needless to say, mother’s plan was not the ideal solution as far as Richard was concerned (obviously, no child of his class, place and time would want to go anywhere without using a Door) - “Aw, gee Mom, I’ll get dirty. Can’t I stay home till the Door is fixed?” [p. 8]. But, Mrs. Henshaw was a strong mother who valued schooling:

“You won’t get dirty if you put flexies on your shoes, and don’t forget to brush yourself well before you go into their house.”

“But golly-”

“No back-talk Dickie. You’ve got to be in school. ...” [p. 8]

The next problem was how would Richard get to the neighbours – and of course mother had a solution - use the emergency door. There was however a slight technical problem with that solution - “*I don’t even know how to work this thing,*

*Mom*” [p. 9]. Eventually, Richard was shown how to use the emergency door and, finally, shamed outside when his mother offered a household robot as nursemaid. Aggravated, Richard refused the offer of a mechanical minder and left the house muttering... “What do you think I am? A baby? Gosh!” [p. 8]

Gosh indeed, the Door has failed and life has suddenly changed. Arguments, flexies, being treated like a baby and, worst of all, the risk of the outside have all descended on the mundane routine of the Henshaw household. Time to ring for an engineer.

For Mrs. Henshaw there were three things wrong with the engineer. Firstly he was young- “he was really quite competent, though Mrs. Henshaw regard his youth with deep suspicion” [p. 9]. Secondly, he was a representative of the Company that supplied that Door and “she wanted the Company, or its representative at least, to suffer a bit. It would teach them what broken doors meant.” [p. 9]. Finally, he arrived *cheerful and unperturbed*. Poor Mrs. Henshaw, the engineer just didn’t seem to grasp the point she was trying to make, he had travelled by public Door, walked from the Public Door to her house and he was still cheerful! Well, she would just have to tell him more clearly:

“... There was no warning at all. I had to send my son out to the neighbors through that-that thing”

She pointed to the entrance through which the repairman had come

“That’s a door, too, ma’am. You don’t give it a capital letter when you write it. It’s a hand-door sort of. It used to be the only kind once.”

“Well at least it works. My boy’s had to go out in the dirt and germs.”...

...“ These things just go all of a sudden. Can’t predict it”.... “Will you sign here, ma’am? And put down your charge number, too, please? Thank-you ma’am.” [p. 9-10]

Exit the engineer.

Time for a quick socio-technical rough sketch of the story so far. (1) Family relationships are noteworthy as are Doors. (2) **D**oors are readily distinguishable from **d**oors. (3) Different folk use different types of Doors. (4) D/doors mark a boundary between inside and outside. (5) Dirt is bad. (6) Things break down. (7) Capitalism is intact. (8) Stratification is intact. (9) Users have varying degrees of skill/knowledge. (10) Repair and maintenance competency is specialized.

Just in case there is any residual confusion about categories of doors - Capital D variety Doors are programmed with coordinates and perform matter transportation taking the user to the encoded coordinates: that is to another Door set to receive incoming matter. Lower case d variety doors are non-programmable or hand-doors which allow the user to pass from inside a place to outside by walking through the gap left when the door is activated, that is when it is open.

And now – the plot thickens. Mrs. Henshaw had just got rid of the engineer when Richard’s teacher rang. Miss Robbins was worried – Richard was late, very late for school that morning. Mrs. Henshaw explained about the events of the morning and that Richard had to use a neighbour’s Door for school. However, in giving her explanation, a somewhat proud Mrs. Henshaw managed to upset the teacher

... who came from a family that had always had to economize rigidly on the use of Doors (the price of power being what it was) and who had therefore run errands on foot until quite an advanced age, resented the pride. She said quite clearly, ‘Well, I’m afraid, Mrs. Henshaw, that Dick did not use the neighbor’s Door. He was over an hour late to

school and the condition of his flexies made it obvious that he tramped across country. They were *muddy*.” [p. 11]

Finally, Miss Robbins played the coup de grace, which roughly translated ran something like this, dear parent I think your child may be unbalanced - a certain look in his eyes. But read for yourself:

“Frankly, Mrs. Henshaw he seems ill. That’s why I called you. Perhaps you might want to have a doctor look at him”

“Is he running a temperature?” The mother’s voice went shrill.

“Oh, no. I don’t mean physically ill. It’s just his attitude and the look in his eyes.” She hesitated, then said with every attempt at delicacy; “I thought perhaps a routine checkup with a psychic probe-”

She didn’t finish. Mrs. Henshaw, in a chilled voice and with what was as close to a snort as her breeding would permit, said, “Are you implying that my son is *neurotic*?” [p. 11-12]

The story has taken a sinister turn as broken Door meets mental health and torturous sounding probes. Anyway, with that powerful stroke Miss Robbins closed the teacher/parent spat and settled down to watch the children. It was an English class in which a vocaliser was demonstrating to the children “how English *should* be read”. And, as she watched, she wondered whether “... it was wise to train students into a speech that was divorced from individuality...”. But, it was soon time for the children to go home and so she subdued her little rebellion and set about preparing for ‘home time’.

To go home the children had to go through the Door in order, as coordinates were all preset. If the class were out of order then children would be “popping up” all over

the place. There was also an added complication, as, except for wealthy parents who owned deluxe model Doors, parents had to set their Door to ‘receive’ before their children could get home. If the parents didn’t set their Doors correctly the children were effectively bounced back to school. This is an obvious problem – especially for public Door users. Notwithstanding the forgetful parent, the trick at the school end was to get everyone in line and then get them through in the right order.

Home time on April 12<sup>th</sup> someone was out of line, not only was he out of line - he was missing. Of course, the culprit was Richard Henshaw. And when Miss Robbins asked the children of the missing boy’s whereabouts:

Another boy answered with the rather repulsive tone of self-righteousness all children automatically assume in reporting the deviations of their friend to elders in authority, ‘He went through the fire door, Miss Robbins.’ [p. 14]

Miss Robbins opened the fire door and found that there was nothing out there but outside. Satisfied that she had acted professionally earlier in calling Richard’s mother and advising her of his strange behaviour, Miss Robbins continued to send children homeward.

Meanwhile, back at the Henshaw’s, Richard was late and Mrs. Henshaw was panicking. She even contemplated ringing the school. But, before that embarrassing moment happened, Richard arrived shamefaced and through the door, at which point “Mrs. Henshaw’s anxiety transmuted itself instantly (in a manner known only to mothers) into anger” [p.16].

The anger didn’t last long – it was overtaken by amazement – Richard was ‘dirty’ and his shirt was torn, he had been out in the open! She could hardly believe the evidence and fleetingly played with the idea that the School Door had failed. But Richard was quite clear, the school Door had not failed, he had chosen to walk. “Well, I’ll talk to

you afterward, young man. First, you're taking a bath, and every stitch of clothing is being thrown out. Mekkano!" [p.16]

For the rest of that evening they kept their own company – or rather Richard had “the-worse-than-lack-of-company of the mekkano” [p.16]. As Richard prepared for bed his mother decided to try to find out what had happened:

“I just don't like going through those darn Doors, Mom”

“But why ever not?”

He shuffled his hands over the filmy sheet (fresh, clean, antiseptic and, of course, disposable after each use) and said, “I just don't like them.”

“But then how do you expect to go to school, Dickie?”

“I'll get up early,” he mumbled.

“But there's nothing wrong with Doors”

“Don't like 'em.” He never once looked at her.

She said despairingly. “Oh, well, you have a good sleep and tomorrow morning you'll feel much better.”

She kissed him and left the room, automatically passing her hand through the photo-cell beam and in that manner dimming the room lights. [p. 17]

It was hardly surprising that after that sad exchange Mrs. Henshaw didn't have a particularly good night's sleep. She thought of the events of the day, and the diagnosis made by the schoolteacher. She decided that the teacher was wrong. Richard was only “upset” and “sleep was all the therapy he needed” [p.17].

But, sleep didn't provide the necessary healing and next morning she woke early only to find that Richard had already left through the door – small 'd'. She spent a day of “abstracted concern and worry” to have, at 3:10 p.m. precisely, another teacher/parent match with Miss Robbins. Once again, Dickie had left by the fire door, once again the mention of psychic probing:

... “I told him to use the regular Door. I do not know where he went.”

Mrs. Henshaw said carefully, “He left to come home.”

Miss Robbins looked dismayed. “Do you approve of this?”

Pale-faced, Mrs. Henshaw set about putting the teacher in her place.

“I don't think it is up to you to criticize. If my son does not choose to use the Door, it is his affair and mine. I don't think there is any School ruling that would force him to use the Door, is there?”

Miss Robbins flushed and had time for one quick remark before contact was broken. She said, “I'd have him probed. I really would.”

[p.18]

Poor Mrs. Henshaw, such ambivalence, Richard is being unreasonable but “Her sense of family placed her for a few moments quite firmly on Richard's side. Why *did* he have to use the Door if he chose not to?” [p.18]. This time, when Richard arrived home, she managed to stay in control, meeting his defiance as though nothing were amiss. In this way they settled into something like a workable relationship. Mrs. Henshaw convinced herself that Richard's use of the door was a form of adolescent defiance and, surely, as with most adolescents he would grow out of his odd behaviour. So it was, that daily use of the door became an “almost normal state of



affairs” [p.18]. The approach seemed to pay off for there were days when Richard chose to use the Door. She soon learnt not to allow these days to raise her hopes of a full recovery, as he would always go back to using the door - “like an addict to his drug”. [p.18]. These were difficult times for Mrs. Henshaw and each time he returned to the door – small d – her mind turned to seeking help for her son:

And each time she thought despairingly of psychiatrists and probes, and each time the vision of Miss Robbins’ low-bred satisfaction at (possibly) learning of it, stopped her... [p.18]

As the days dwindled on a routine was established. Basically, they developed some rather fragile strategies for managing the situation. As Richard returned home he was met at the door by a mekkano with a Tergo shower kit and a change of clothing. His disposable clothes (underwear and flexies) were disposed of immediately and his mother bore the cost of new shirts daily and rigorous cleaning of trousers – with a new pair each week.

Then, after some time of coping, came the day that provided some slight relief for Mrs. Henshaw. She had to travel to New York and, worried about leaving Dick alone, she suggested that he accompany her. He did, quite happily. There was no hesitation at all, he went straight through the Door: he used the Door without complaint, sulking, or resentment.

Following the success of the New York trip Mrs. Henshaw hit upon a plan to “wean” him off the door. The plan was rather extreme as it involved lots of trips to exotic settings. However, as with most plans of its kind it was of only limited success. Richard would quite happily travel the globe by Door but when it came to going to school, he returned to the door.

Mrs. Henshaw managed to live this disturbing predicament for quite some time but finally, a situation arose which forced her hand - “a virus had found a lodging in her

house...” [p.19]. Richard had a cold. For Mrs. Henshaw, germs were non-negotiable and she was compelled to find psychiatric help for Richard. Of course she didn't select any old psychiatrist; she picked Dr. Sloane because he lived in a good district (her district). In fact, they were almost neighbours.

For the first consultation with the psychiatrist Mrs. Henshaw went alone. She and Dr. Sloane had a brief chat about Richard's use of D/doors and then, as with most women of her kind, Mrs. Henshaw told the doctor of her preferred treatment for her son, "...a quick probe". Whilst Mrs. H was formidable, Dr. Sloane was no push over. He gently resisted Mrs. Henshaw's treatment and explained that, whilst probes are very popular "there are many psychiatrists who think the theory of probe-analyses to be most uncertain" [p.21]. He was quite used to explaining these problems to both patients and their relatives. In this case, he was quite firm - a probe would not be his first choice, he would rather meet Richard, talk with him and try to find another route to Richard's problem. Mrs. Henshaw accepted the professional reasoning of the Doctor and, it was agreed, that Sloane would begin treating Richard at the Henshaw home on the following Saturday.

At the end of the consultation Dr. Sloane watched Mrs. Henshaw as she left through the Door in his office:

She became a half-woman, a quarter-woman, an isolated elbow and foot, a nothing.

It was frightening

Did a door ever break down during passage, leaving half a body here and half there? He had never heard of such a case, but he imagined it could happen. [p.22]

Disturbed by his own thoughts he shifted from reflecting on Doors to his own concern over psychic probes. And then, ever the professional, he made a mental note to himself to discuss “his mechanophobia” with his own analyst:

His resentment of the probe was beginning to bother him. Was it a fear of technological unemployment, a basic insecurity on his part, a mechanophobia if that was the word-

He made a mental note to discuss this with his own analyst. [p.22]

Saturday arrived and so too did Dr. Sloane – through the Door at Richard’s home. The doctor had spent quite a bit of time thinking about this therapy session. He needed it to go well. If things went badly, he was sure that Mrs. Henshaw would search the profession for a Doctor willing to use a probe. In his opinion, the boy was at risk and he had to make some sacrifices if he was to protect this child from dangerous quackery. He took a radical step and invited Richard for a walk.

“A walk, sir?”

“I mean, outside”

“Do you go – outside?”

“Sometimes. When I feel like it”

Richard was on his feet holding down a squirming eagerness...

... “... And I like company”

“Mom?”

Mrs. Henshaw had stiffened in her seat, her compressed lips radiating horror, but she managed to say, “Why certainly, Dickie. But watch yourself.” [p. 23]

Actually, the Doctor hadn't been outside since his college days and he found the idea of the walk produced a crawling sensation about his skin. Nonetheless, he reasoned that if Richard would open up to him quickly the sacrifice would have been worth it.

As they moved through the door Sloane had to stem a rising tide of panic. Once outside he worked hard on controlling his own fear and looked about him. He was amazed to discover a managed landscape “Here it was a perverse sort of estheticism, a kind of conspicuous consumption”. [p.24] in which mekkanos tended garden, swept and cleaned.

Richard led the way, pointing out interesting features by turning things and places Sloane was familiar with as coordinates of Doors into landscape and buildings. Intrigued by this new picture of his world Sloane asks “Where is A-3, 26, 475? It was his own house, of course.” [p.24] Richard thought for a while and talked his way through the landscape –

“...you see that water there? ...

... well past the river, over that hill with the big clump of trees ... It's a green house with a white roof”

“It is?” Dr. Sloane was genuinely astonished. He hadn't known it was green. [p. 25]

And so the walk continued with Richard translating landscape, flora and fauna. He explained how he explored different routes home each day; he saw different things or the same things differently. As they walked and talked Richard was explaining to Sloane why he liked being outside. He also spoke of rain, how his mother did not like him getting wet – and hated him getting a cold. So, obviously, he used the Door when it rained. Finally, they returned home.

Sloane's diagnosis was straight to the point - Richard was unusual but not abnormal – he simply liked the outside. Furthermore, Richard was ashamed of his passion – too ashamed to talk to either his mother or his teacher in any great detail. The treatment was equally straightforward: accommodate the behaviour but minimise the disruption. Mrs. Henshaw should negotiate with Richard in such a way that he might spend a certain amount of time outside at the weekend on the provision that he used the Door for traveling to School and back. According to Sloane, the likely result would be a happy Richard and no trouble with teachers and peers.

Whilst Mrs. Henshaw could see the usefulness of the plan she was still concerned that Richard might never be “normal again”. So, Sloane tried another tack – this time portraying Richard as rebel – a child “enjoying the forbidden” with the added reassurance that:

Then, as he grows older, he will become more aware of the expectations and demands of society. He will learn to conform. [p. 27]

Sloane felt that his work was done: a reasonable diagnosis and treatment had been suggested: ambiguity and fear had been negotiated. But, Mrs. Henshaw had one last parting shot, “And you don’t think a probe will be necessary doctor?” Sloane’s response concludes the story:

He turned and said vehemently, ‘No, definitely not! There is nothing about the boy that requires it. Understand? Nothing!’

...

‘What’s the matter Dr. Sloane?’ asked Mrs. Henshaw.

But he didn’t hear her because he was thinking of the Door and the psychic probe and all the rising, choking tide of machinery. There is a little of the rebel in all of us, he thought.

So he said in a soft voice, as his hand fell away from the board and his feet turned away from the Door, “You know, it’s such a beautiful day that I think I’ll walk.” [p. 27]

## The uses of lying

Latour and Asimov provide two sociologies of doors. I like both stories - they are ripping yarns that complement one another wonderfully – what power! It appeals to the *ANT* aficionado in me that each author writes of worlds that are both stable and framed yet surprisingly fragile and open to disruption: disruption marked in both cases when a failure provided space for our author-analysts to *describe* doors (and Doors).

I also have considerable sympathy with the way neither author plays Divine by authoring grand theory in the form of utopic or dystopic visions of human-technology relations. Rather, both Latour and Asimov write of mundane living, of power, action and dissent. These are everyday stories of techno-folk in which the authors extend and shrink the world of the stories so moving easily from little lads to science, uncertainty and moral order.

It would be most unfair to over analyze these snapshots as any form of explanation is suspect, and anyway you will probably have drawn your own pictures that I would not want to overwrite, so, I will keep this brief. Bringing Asimov and Latour together here is not about analysing different styles of individual authorship. Whilst there is certainly scope within STS for such a reflexive play on authorship in the shadow of Geertz classic study of Anthropology and Ashmore's reflexive thesis [Geertz 1988 and Ashmore 1989] – it isn't going to happen here. All I want to do for the moment is demonstrate that different types of storytellers are interested in similar relationships. Indeed they write of similar issues and play serious games with all the possible tools that their trade can muster. Furthermore, their stories are inevitably and interestingly different: they are different folk, doing different things and they can privilege different

characters and actions. Fiction provides different slants on technological living and tells some tales better, and others worse, than their kin. They can take/make different cuts.

So, where does that leave us? On the one hand, let's call it fiction, Asimov played with human experiences and developed those experiences through multiple connections that were fluid, tacit and mundane. He demonstrates this fluidity as he draws his collection of characters and actions into well known and connected spaces: we move seamlessly from a broken Door - to family – to consumption - to school – to mental health and back again all via a child and a broken Door. In this imagined time and space Asimov demonstrates how Doors frame human action but in terms of connections that are not really connected, networks that aren't fixed structures, and human relations that are never solely human. Even the discarded filaments point to the fluid nature of some connections: whatever did happen to Miss Robbins and her school room rebellion? How did she manage little Dickie and his dirty clothes? Where did her power go in the great *probe* scare? What unwritten networks is poor Miss Robbins involved in? – networks that haunt the text and position her (rather low importance) character.

In Asimov's fiction, our imagination is allowed to work overtime – filling gaps, sharing in the *obvious* references and finding pleasure in the hidden analysis. Take for example the moment when Mrs Henshaw exchanges one form of reason for another when her son's odd behaviour, his teacher's intervention, her own pride and her own fears of outside contamination confront her. The result - a tentative coming to terms with Richard's actions – a way of continuing to *do* family. We understand Mrs. Henshaw's action. We may even feel we know her. There again, even if we don't know her we know about hybridity and ambiguity. There are sufficient resonances in the text for the written world to be a possibility. We can suspend disbelief and listen to the tale.

On the other hand, let us call that ‘making a point’. Latour takes us on a similar but more orderly journey by writing of doors, morality and control. He builds doors into our lives as facts (of life) and then plays in deadly earnest with the way in which doors perform and are part of performances. This story is a little more *self-conscious* than Asimov’s – but maybe that is a feature of both the academic moment and a genre of academic authorship. In this case Latour is writing argument (for human-non-human actant rhizome ontology) and proffering conceptual tools for thinking power in terms of performance. The personal investment here is enormous in this moral tale of good sociology. The sense of authenticity comes through reference to common experience of mundane artifacts. You can almost feel the fieldwork – the empirical study that characterises STS. No need to suspend disbelief here – only to recognise and believe.

In many ways, as with Asimov, Latour makes sense and *rings true* by appealing to shared experience – doors, failure, what we know of children, what we know of hinges, what we know of automatic anythings – a story of control, negotiation and open-closedness of interpretation. Take for example childhood – a subject rather under-researched in STS. When Latour wrote of the child groom in his tale of doors the references to children and childhood are there but, for me, it doesn’t raise childhood so much as use it – probably because human childhood wasn’t the point of the story. Instead, Latour privileges the technological performances – not least because that is where the political point is to be made in STS. With Asimov however, this isn’t a story of childhood either, but the child Richard is a character in the story, and whilst we never get to know him, both characters and technology are privileged. So, in Asimov I found the reference to childhood deeper, the prompt to think children, family, class and topology bolder. But then, I am reading Asimov having read STS and liking Latour – so perhaps it is inevitable that I, as a sociologist, find Asimov a rich source. Oh, but then I read Latour (& Co.) having read Asimov all those years ago – aargh, so maybe I like Latour in part because of Asimov: oh dear I feel a topological type headache coming on. I knew I should avoid ad hoc analysis!



Ad Hoc analysis or not, in placing these two stories side by side I have intended to demonstrate that social science and popular culture fabricate tales of STS that are recognisable and meaningful. Both Latour and Asimov set out to describe social reality. Differences between these stories are situational differences, located in one author *doing* social science and the other *doing* science fiction. Whilst “Both science and popular culture are intricately woven of fact and fiction” (Haraway 1989: 3) each perform storytelling in different ways and against different criteria of performance: they are framed within different situations.

At this point Ursula Le Guin proves a useful ally. At the beginning of this chapter I cited two observations by Le Guin, a much respected and award winning science fiction writer who has written a great deal on the uses and politics of science fiction (see for example Le Guin 1992 and 1989). In the first observation Le Guin suggests a kinship between sociology and science fiction and focuses attention on the direct manner in which fiction writes of human life as lived. In comparing Latour and Asimov, I would agree with Le Guin that the distance that Asimov’s fiction provides gives a sense of human life lived in terms of Mol’s multiple and interfering realities however, Latour’s point making is a more direct and powerful political device. Both have their place in ANT accounting.

The second observation by Le Guin incorporates two points: thought experiments as descriptions and the uses of lying. The first point is well made but commonplace however, I was surprised to find myself both amused and shocked by Le Guin’s matter of fact assertion that the **business** of novelists is **lying**. Lying is taboo in all branches of the social science, a point that is rather strange given that we have problematised truth. In reading Le Guin, I was struck by the manner in which, within the social sciences, we have dealt with the problem of truth. Typically, we have challenged truth claims by theorising notions of play and evocation and performing new literary forms yet telling recognisably authentic tales: in other words we have

acted as good and faithful actors of the game of truth. We play truth games but we have not set out to lie or play lying games: our imaginings are limited by a literal sense of truthfulness. This observation provides a point of departure for an examination of fictional storytelling.

## **Forthcoming...**

In examining some sociological uses of lying I have spent time with a story unfettered by truth claims or the appearance of factuality. In writing of this time, I have structured this work into three parts.

Part One introduces theory, method and research subject/object, and includes this chapter together with a methodological discussion (chapter 2) and an outline of the story at the heart of my fieldwork (chapter 3). In this context, I discuss my preference for ethnography and methodological issues that emerged in following the life and times of a particular televised children's drama *The Demon Headmaster Takes Over* [Cross 1997, Cresswell 1997a and BBC 1998]. As my fieldwork story is a children's tale that is part of a significant body of work I felt it useful to provide a loose history and plot background to the stories for readers unfamiliar with this body of work – and chapter 3 provides such a textual landscaping.

Part Two represents fieldwork. The ethnographic study is presented in two chapters, the first offers an ethnography of a storyworld (chapter 4) and the second focuses attention on the politics of production (chapter 5). The ethnography of story takes an actor network cut through a fictional landscape. Particular emphasis is placed upon fictional performances of order/disorder, science and human/non-human boundaries and a networky account is produced that demonstrates the power of fiction to fluidly represent actor net work (chapter 4). Attention then turns to the production of this televised tale. In accounting for production I take a networky cut across production processes and reveal multiple and hidden storytellers of *The Demon Headmaster*

*Takes Over.* Politics of authorship are revealed that foreground both story and storytelling as unfinished and multiple performances (chapter 5).

Part 3 comprises of one chapter (chapter 6) in which I return from Storyworld to consider the sociological value of lying. But, that is for later, meanwhile, it is such a beautiful day, I think I will shut down this machine and go for a walk.

## Chapter 2

### **Methodology**

... some of us opt for itinerant ethnography because the “quasi subjects” and “quasi objects” we are interested in do not stay put [Heath 1998: 71]

In chapter 1, I suggested that there is sociological value in researching stories that deal imaginatively with relationships between Science-Technology-Society (STS). In pursuing this thesis, I undertook an empirical study of a televised children’s story *The Demon Headmaster Takes Over* [Cresswell 1997, BBC 1998, Cross 1997]. The study took the form of eighteen-month multi-site ethnography and this chapter is a discussion of my methodological practice in terms of adequacy and selectivity. The aims of this chapter will be to demonstrate that ethnographic fieldwork is political practice [Clifford and Marcus 1986, Woolgar 1988, Clifford 1988, Van Mannen 1988] and that this particular ethnography was, most appropriately, itinerant [Heath 1998], complicit [Marcus 1997] and interested [Rabinow 1997].

In developing a claim for itinerant complicit ethnography I begin by considering relationships between theory and method. I will argue that ethnography is a ‘fitting’ method for researchers who frame research questions in terms of action and agency. Political and practice issues of ethnography are then considered in terms of ‘native’ point of view. A case is developed against ethnographic practices that seek to render ostensive accounts of ‘local’ behaviour, and an argument developed for performative approaches that are knowingly mobile, actively involved and sociologically interested.

The discussion then moves to illustrate practice issues of **this** itinerant ethnography by focusing attention on politics inherent in both fieldwork metaphors and research selectivity. The discussion of selectivity concludes with a critical reflection on a contentious fieldwork category, namely the audience of *The Demon Headmaster Takes Over*.

Finally, in response to the politics of field practice the chapter closes with a short discussion of reflexive practice and authorly style.

### **Theoretical senses and methodological choices**

As I have already suggested in chapter 1, STS is subject to academic gazes that actively ‘fix’ or unfix it in multiple ways. Such theoretical and methodological diversity can be perceived as a healthy outcome of a liberal politic involving cross-disciplinary dialogue and critique. Alternatively, such variety can be taken as symptomatic of poor disciplinary regulation that enables weak researchers to perform poor sociology [see Gross, Levitt and Lewis 1997, Sokal and Bricmont 1998]. In this context, I locate myself in a liberal tradition of sociology that sees sociological knowledge making as cultural practice. As such, I consider methodological preferences to be situated in networks of practice framed by sociological tradition, sociological forms of knowing and sociological processes of knowledge legitimation. Theory, method and practice are questions of professional identity.

In terms of professional identity, I find particular resonance in studies that focus on science-technology-society in terms of agency, action or culture. Typically, these studies represent detailed qualitative empirical work and have their antecedents in

groundbreaking studies of science as practice that emerged through the 1970's and 1980's [see for example Latour and Woolgar 1979, Latour 1987, Lynch 1985].

It would be naïve to provide an origin story for these seminal studies of science. However, they were directly and indirectly informed by a particular social, political and intellectual milieu of late twentieth century Europe. In particular, this was an environment of academic and popular debates on processes of power and ideology.

One visible result of this focus on processes of power was a burgeoning fascination with heterogeneity and identity. Whilst grand theoretical narratives of inequality pointed to the 'what' of sociological concern, emerging theoretical narratives of text, difference and agency pointed to 'how'. Applying qualitative methods to scientific and technological situations enabled researchers to get close enough to "examine accomplishments, interruptions and identities" of science in action [Knorr-Cetina 1981: 6]. The results of such sociological effort proved to be radical.

Radical insights can be represented as interplay of a particular method, deep field ethnography, and a theoretical push that translated science from unassailable objective knowledge into material and textual work. Of relevance here are theoretical studies such as Latour and Woolgar [1979], a radical interpretative cut on scientific practice, and Latour [1987] a study of *Science in Action*. In both cases, using deep field ethnography of the kind familiar to anthropology, research foregrounded practices that had been hitherto either unacknowledged, unseen, or tacit. For example, one significant contribution of Latour and Woolgar's *Laboratory Life* is that it foregrounds science as textual practice. This claim is empirically supported as ethnographers reveal the long hours spent in reporting, noting,

diagramming, modeling, representing, recording and (crucially) publishing science [Latour and Woolgar 1979].

As with other researchers, my methodological practices are influenced by seminal empirical studies. When I set out to research *The Demon Headmaster Takes Over* I imagined the BBC and production team as akin to a ‘laboratory’: my intended outcome a ‘laboratory life’ of drama production. Other seminal works that influenced my commitment to ethnography came from various traditions. For example ANT studies such as Law [1987] and Law & Callon [1992] played a significant role. However, so too did Gilbert and Mulkay’s [1984] focus on scientific discourses and Michael Lynch’s ethnomethodological work on scientific life [Lynch 1985]. Similarly, Trevor Pinch’s constructivist work on physics [1986] illustrates the critical power of qualitative research. In other words, each differently, yet convincingly, examines science in action.

For me, such diverse efforts provided three key contributions. Firstly, they represented science as cultural effort. Secondly, in their different approaches they focus attention on methodological issues in studying science up close. Thirdly, by folding back their insights onto sociological practice they contributed to wider debates on the politics of sociological effort. At the very least, these works focused methodological attention on ethnography and ethnographic methods. For many sociologists who, like me, ask about day-to-day processes, experiences and practices of power, ethnography became the method of choice. However, the question of ‘fit’ is deeper than at might at first appear.

Within social science there are considerable debates over both the nature of ethnography and appropriate analytical toolsets [see Hammersely 1993, 1990]. A

relevant example here is a debate between Collins [1994] and Lynch [1994] over an ethnographic account by Hirschauer [1991]. This debate is relevant here as it focused attention on ‘good’ ethnography. I use it now to position myself as a particular kind of ethnographer.

In 1991 Hirschauer published an ethnographic account of a surgical operation performed in a Western hospital. The ethnography treated mundane surgical practices as exotic. Hirschauer’s position as ethnographer was as a naïve and interested observer of scientific and technological procedures that are usually hidden from view. In his account, Hirschauer described and translated details of surgical practice. The translation involved weaving together knowledge from the participating medical team with his own sociological form of knowing: that is he brought sociological and anthropological knowledge, skill and competencies into the ethnographic work.

Collins and Lynch debate a point of ethnographic practice. The issues emerge around Hirschauer’s observations of a medical team preparing a patient for surgery. These preparations include draping surgical gowns around the point of incision. In the ethnography, Hirschauer writes that ethnographic moment in terms of ritualistic actions that work to dehumanise the patient ‘body’. Collins takes particular issue with this translation, arguing that this account of ‘drapes’ would not be recognised as authentic by members of the surgical team. According to Collins’ critique, for locals, the action of placing surgical covers around a point of incision relates to prevention of infection. The ethnographic meaning of the drapes is antisepsis not dehumanisation.



For Collins, the critical test of ethnographic accounting is that it is recognisable by the community of practice. In this sense it relates to their 'internal state' not that of the researcher. As such, Hirschauer's account is theoretically and methodologically flawed.

Offering a different response to the Hirschauer ethnography, Lynch notes how the researcher combines our mundane knowledge of surgery **and** its status as special practice. In making this connection, Hirschauer is able to draw out exotic aspects of mundane practice [Lynch 1994: 359]. For Lynch, interweaving observation and theoretical interpretation is acceptable. Juxtaposition of mundane and sociological accounts produces an interpretation that is different to surgical knowledge but is, none-the-less, a valuable insight into politics of practice.

Invoking Sacks, Garfinkel and Goffman, Lynch the ethnomethodologist notes the usefulness of making the familiar strange. Collin's branch of realism hits Lynch's ethnomethodological senses full on. In responding to Collins' critique, he takes issue with Collins' model of ethnographic work, translating it into quasi-experimentation [Lynch 1994: 362-366].

Hirschauer's piece is either irredeemably flawed or an analytically rich insight into otherness. I am with Lynch on this one. Collins' criticisms are useful in that they focus attention on 'good' ethnography. However, I am unhappy with the notion that those drapes carry one meaning - antisepsis. Prevention of infection may well be the way surgical folk talk of drapes, but daily uses and meanings of drapes may be mobile and removed from local accounts. If we think in terms of Latour's hidden masses [Latour 1992], and Mol's multiple ontologies and interference [Mol 1999], then much can be inscribed in a drape and draping that is tacit, enacted but rarely

exposed. I would argue that if we only describe the ostensive world and self-description of a group of practitioners, we have barely begun the sociological task.

However, I must take care when drawing my line in the sand. Collins' criticisms represent important relationships between theory, method and professional ethics. As a researcher I feel a professional duty to produce an ethnographic account that is at least recognisable to my 'natives'. On the other hand it is pointless denying that researchers carry cultural and intellectual competencies into the field - not all of which are lacking in virtue. In managing this tension between 'doing' sociology and keeping faith with my 'folk' I was repeatedly led to reflect on field practice. In particular, I was forced to consider issues of mobility, collaboration, and friendship. It is to these notions that I now turn.

*Itinerant complicity and commitment: against collaboration*

A particular form of ethnography is required to adequately trace and translate enactments of folk, places and things. In this context, for a method to make sense, it must allow us the opportunity to engage with ambiguity in action. Not only must we be 'close up' interacting in the lives of hybrid folk and things, we must also provide adequate space for them to shift and move, both literally and categorically. Sociologically, I found the demand to be mobile overpowering.

To be adequate, fieldwork practices must be able to follow mobile actors. In this context I agree with Heath when she posits ethnographic practice as **itinerant** behaviour [Heath 1998: 71]. Heath is focusing on movement and mobility because things move and are mobile. She is developing a particularly actor-networky translation of Clifford's accounts of fieldwork as 'encounter' [Clifford 1997], suggesting that we must follow the trails that spread from one situated performance

to another. In this context, my own study was multi-sited. I travelled with the *Demon Headmaster Takes Over* to numerous locations. Research became focused not in a laboratory-like site but across multiple sites that represent both physical and intangible situations. I was like Geertz's pilgrim cartographer [Geertz 1988: 10]: both traveller and social scientist.

The pilgrim mapmaker is a nice image but a dangerous one. There is a need for methodological caution in order to avoid what I think of as theory-tourism. Theory-tourism is a serious yet playful way of thinking about the cultural competencies that we take into the field. As I carried out fieldwork I was aware that I carried a huge amount of theoretical and experiential baggage. The reflexive imperative that is intimately tied up with constructivist and ANT approaches goes some way toward addressing this concern [see Woolgar 1988b]. Nonetheless the knowing and competent researcher is problematic.

One lauded way to offset this 'knowing competent researcher' is to incorporate the other into our sociological sense making. In such circumstances notions of rapport are replaced by a stronger political imperative of inclusive collaboration. Collaborative practices are premised upon a belief that ethnography involves imbalanced power relationships that favour researchers. Collaborative ethnography is, in this sense, representative of a pluralist politic that attempts to be 'fair' to the native point of view.

Most ethnographic works include snatches of *otherness* as they incorporate verbatim transcriptions into the final narrative. In conventional works, transcriptions are selected and placed within the ethnography by **the** ethnographer. However, although well-intentioned researchers can use this approach effectively in advocacy of others,

there is a risk of misplaced colonialism [Geertz 1988] – with sociology the colonising force.

Collaborative practices take a more radical approach to incorporation of otherness. In some cases this radicalism involves a nativist account, in others polyphony offsets the voice of the ethnographer and disrupts any straightforward narrative of otherness [see Tyler 1986, Trinh 1989]. Initially, I was sold on collaboration. Intending to use a multi-vocal approach similar to Latour 1996, and incorporating a collaborative production of the ethnography itself. I was chasing an ideal where it was obvious that the text no longer belongs to the researcher alone [Tyler 1986].

Prior to attempting *collaborative* work, I was concerned that radical polyphony could produce **either** a discordant evocative narrative **or** unworkable nonsense. A carefully produced discordant text may disrupt and disturb reading but still evoke possible worlds for readers. On the other hand a discordant text may disrupt, irritate or tire the reader to the point where the text is abandoned, and critical potential lost. However, once in the field I became aware of other professional and ethical issues that positioned me against collaboration. I was forced to reevaluate both my practice and my political position. In this context, I found collaborative work problematic in two ways.

Firstly, Why on earth should anyone collaborate? Being a cooperative subject in fieldwork is one thing, being a collaborator is quite different. To collaborate is to share responsibility, to partly own the fieldwork, to desire a stake in the analysis and to comment, correct, critique and collude. Collaboration is a liberal ethic of empowerment – but what if my natives don't want the power I offer in the form I offer – what then?

Secondly, I am not as radical, liberal or reflexive as I thought. I didn't want to be obliged to compromise my analysis. My fieldwork involved working with professional storytellers who are established in their craft. Prize-winning writers, they *know* about story, plot and discourse. They *know* a great deal about writing. They have authorial voices that they use to great effect in crafting characters, story and text. They have also written about authorship, given papers, attended conventions, explained themselves to others many times: to journalists, to literary agents, to other authors, to television producers and to children. In this situation, I would rather risk ventriloquism than lose myself or control.

My point here is that fictional storytelling is the trade of my natives. My storytellers are confident in their craftsmanship. They know what they like and what they don't. Significantly, as one would expect, they like different things. In programme making, their variety is managed in practice with the benefit of a script editor and producer. If I took the script editing or production control role I would subvert the collaborative ethic.

The issues here run deep. For example, one collaborator, Helen, is an intelligent reflective literary critic who is well aware of her own style. Significantly, Helen doesn't like plots:

I am hopeless at plots. I don't, by and large, do them. I don't believe in them. (I make a distinction between a plot and a story.) ... It was only when I began to write original television series like *The Secret World of Polly Flint*, and *Moondial*, that the conception of plot ever came into it. ...I daresay the structure of my books improved as a result of this, and they almost certainly became more exciting to

children. But I do still have a sneaking nostalgia for the good old plotless days of *The Nightwatchmen* and *The Bongleweed*, and those are the books I loved writing best. [Cresswell 1997b: 96]

On the other hand, Gillian – another author – has a position on plot that is somewhere amidships. She definitely uses the language of plot more than Helen does when accounting for her writing. To plot or not to plot would be quite a big issue on a collaborative ethnography! Working with production staff wouldn't be much better – directors would be prone to DIRECT my argument, set designers to DESIGN the product and special effects merchants could visualise and spin my thesis in all sorts of interesting ways. In this context, in attempting collaborative ethnography I run the risk of 'empowering' highly politicised actors whilst disenfranchising myself.

Theoretically collaboration was politically attractive, but not so in practice. My solution was to see what happened. As I developed my ethnographic style, I focused on field relationships and experiences. It was this emerging response that led me to prefer the politically laden notion of complicity to either rapport or collaboration.

Rapport, collaboration and complicity are close bedfellows but, for me, they are not the same. Marcus [1997] offers a useful discussion on politics of rapport in which he notes the significance of field relationships and the particular colonial attachments of the term. Drawing on Geertz [1973] now classic discussion of the Balinese cockfight, Marcus demonstrates that rapport is a questionable ideal and raises instead the notion of complicity. In this context, he establishes clear links between complicity and multi-situational fieldwork: noting that all ethnographers deal in fieldwork contexts that incorporate folk of different and changing status, disposition

and circumstance. In other words, folk is not a homogeneous category and individuals are fickle. In such uncertain conditions complicity suggests active involvement and a degree of mischief - without the implied political correctness of either collaboration or polyphony. There is a sense of shaky common ground, political alliance and political difference in complicity that formalises a researcher's position as a liminal and political actor [Marcus 1997: 97].

In the case of *The Demon Headmaster Takes Over* complicity came relatively easily, and my 'folk' were overtly political creatures. Working with them in this way, I was led to reflect on **friendship**. Rabinow [1997] develops a strong tale of *philia* - or friendship. He argues that, in forming relationships, and by being interested, we not only become complicit with the field, we are also involved in ethical and epistemological practice. Arguing the legitimacy of politically interested fieldwork, he develops a case for the ethnographer as *cosmopolitan amateur* rather than competent virtuoso social scientist:

... a cosmopolitan amateur. Although "amateur" is a somewhat clumsy term, it points to a practice that does not take mastery as its goal... A cosmopolitan ethos entails a perspective on knowledge, ethics and politics that is simultaneously local and global, native and foreign. [Rabinow 97: 207]

To explain this position, Rabinow describes aspects of fieldwork that emerged when he was invited into a scientific research community. His intention here was to both study science in practice and to re-present that community back to itself. In examining conversational encounters in this inquiry he suggests a two-way conversation – a dialogue between research scientists and anthropologist.

In fieldwork I found this conversational aspect cropped up over and over again. My field ‘friends’ had considerable competency in using ‘foreigners’ perceptions as a means to rethink their experiences and actions. For example, in the following brief extract Helen is explaining a point to me when she cites a conversation with a psychologist:

I didn’t realise that when I was writing it you know. I didn’t realise that until, well I think it was a psychologist who noticed years later, who said to me that he thought that the Bongleweed was actually a symbol of the creative imagination. And, when I thought about it, I thought, well yeah, you’re absolutely right. And, you see, the same can be said of *The Nightwatchmen*. They’re very subversive. (Helen Cresswell: Fieldwork Transcript Nov 1998)

Clearly then, fieldwork encounters are not one way. Just as we learn from our others about their lives, they are curious and keen to learn of us: this is the nature of field relationships. In this context, ANT notions of ‘hybrid’, ‘otherness’ and ‘cyborg’ became useful points of interest (!)

My preference for complicity is no simple issue of a pedant’s debate. The language and metaphors we use are intimately tied up with the way we sense our worlds, conduct ourselves and judge practice [Lakoff and Johnson 1980]. And, in this light, I want to take one final theory/method turn before I consider field practice in detail.

### ***Political metaphors and sociological practice***

Journal debates, such as that between Lynch and Collins, serve a valuable purpose in sociological knowledge production. They contribute to clarification processes and



identity formation. However, turf debates also serve a more doubtful function in that, when sociological argument is worked through a metaphor of **argument as war**. They draw a ‘theory-method’ line in the sand and define method in naturalistic and normative ways. One is then required to decide where one stands against the line. This is what I did when I rejected the quasi-realist descriptive ethnography implicit in Collins’ critique of Hirschauer. In terms of argument as war, I am on an opposing side to Collins.

However, I am uncertain as to how helpful war metaphors are in developing sociological understanding of STS. For example, war positions me against Collins yet I believe that Collins’ important studies of scientific knowledge production [1982, 1985] contribute significantly to our understanding of STS. There is clear value in Collins’ approach; it just isn’t my approach. Therefore, whilst I value debate as a basis of clarification and challenge, I disapprove of line drawing and the metaphors of argument that underpin them.

In *A Game of Cat’s Cradle*, Haraway [1994] offers an alternative metaphor. Cat’s cradle is a game, usually played in childhood. It involves knotted wool or string woven in intricate patterns around and across two hands. The skill of this game comes in passing the knotted thread from one player to another in such a way that a new pattern forms. This is not a game of winners or losers but an activity that favours art and accomplishment over competition. As such, I found that cats cradle provided a very different metaphor for thinking about academic practice and argument.

Haraway points to similarities between our professional practices in social science and those we seek to critique. Cats cradle becomes a metaphor for all our

professional encounters – both in the field and outwith. A metaphor to envisage and perform technoscience. Supplanting turf wars with a knotted together pattern of, in Haraway's case, activism, antiracist feminist theory and cultural studies.

In politicising metaphors that we so readily take for granted, Haraway points to particular issues of method. Her approach has been to apply political and moral pressure to disrupt, displace and improve. The result has been radical politics and liberal theoretical development. In empirically informed work she weaves together threads from different locations. Producing patterns of startling clarity and power [see for example Haraway 1989, 1991, and 1997]. In her fieldwork, Haraway demonstrates the art of disciplinary and methodological boundary transgression with political purpose, intellectual rigor and moral strength. A sense of the ethnographic is suppressed in favour of polemic – but it is there, couched in a broad array of subtle demonstrations, illustration and vignettes.

As Collins/Lynch allows me to recognise my belief in sociology as political practice, Haraway allows me to reflect on my own metaphors and practices. In this context, I have suggested that we perform research that 'fits' our professional identity and our politic of practice. For my part, my sociological identity requires that attention has to be given to senses that relate to our professionally situated selves yet appear beyond analysis and outside of description [Haraway 1994]. I have spent time attempting to foreground those senses that allow me to experience, visualize, imagine and know [Latour 1986]. In doing so I have raised the importance of mobility to me as a sociologist interested in material performativity and translation. In all, I have written of my desire to encounter others up close, complicit and interested. I now turn attention to how my senses were enacted in practice.

## Itinerant ethnography

It is very difficult to engage with any literature on ethnographic fieldwork without coming across a spate of spatial metaphors. For a start we work in *fields*. We also appear to be transfixed by location - with local and distant behaviours, situated knowledge and situated practice. These spatial metaphors are the subject of considerable concern [see Clifford 1997, Strathern 1995]. The online/off-line discourses in virtual methodology are a recent instance of such pondering on location [Hine 2000, Fischer 1999]. For my part, I found that location meant nothing and everything. In the following discussion I will draw on some vignettes of my fieldwork 'space' 'place' and 'time' to demonstrate some of the problems of arguing adequacy through traditional spatial metaphors.

### *Doing spatial metaphors*

It could be claimed that my first field encounter was October 1997 at BBC Television Centre in London. This was the beginning of eighteen months of fieldwork. There, a nice tight fact for a methodological chapter if ever there was one. But, quantifying fieldwork in this way is problematic. Let me explain.

Traditionally, two of the most important adequacy tests of ethnography relate to time and place. These are judgments on depth of immersion and reflect historical-romantic tropes associated with certain genres of anthropological ethnography. Such tests value deep and lengthy involvement with *other* forms of life.

Traditionally, anthropologists lauded immersion in a culture in pursuit of cultural understanding: taking as first principle that to *know* otherness one had to *be there*.

From such a first principle it is an easy sleight of hand to equate being there and

knowing there. The logic of presence then takes on its own momentum, reasoning that the longer one is 'there' the more opportunity for 'participation and observation' and the richer the 'insights'. Hence length of time in the field is still one of the "adequacy" checks for anthropological knowledge claims of *otherness*.

In exotic settings quantifying the length of these immersion appeared straightforward: – boarded the plane 25<sup>th</sup> October 1997, travelled by plane, road and boat arriving at the village noon 29<sup>th</sup> October, stayed locally for eighteen months, arrived home 30<sup>th</sup> March 1999 – easy. The 'here' and 'there' boundary is affirmed. First steps to adequacy have been taken. A right to comment on otherness constructed. Such 'locational' rights are always problematic, and field practices such as field records and record keeping practice bring home into the exotic field [Clifford 1990]. Even so, by-and-large, in this historical imagined fieldwork the ethnographer is an isolated stranger abroad desiring cultural immersion.

Given these deep-seated imaginings, it is hardly surprising that metaphors of space and travel still permeate professional discourses of ethnography. But times change and metaphors lose their potency. My experience of ethnography was similar to, but different from, the romantic otherness of imagined anthropology. Such differences are a useful point of methodological reflection.

My field is *relatively local*. I stayed in England. Most nights when I was fieldworking I went home. I mean to my real home, the one with the mortgage. In purist terms, an armchair ethnographer, I went back to the verandah. Occasionally, I would return to a hotel room to ruminate on the day. Even so, wherever (or whatever) my verandah happened to be, the field was never far away – physically or mentally. At home I could pick up the 'phone and ring the field, I could start-up my

PC and email the field, I could pick up a television script and work with the field, I could read a book and encounter the field. The split between here and there became blurred and not hugely helpful. My notions of good practice and deep immersion were reframed in this experience.

By my reckoning I was immersed *in the field* for eighteen months. For most of those eighteen months “here and there” didn’t seem hugely important. If I had to account for passage in any way at all it would be that I travelled between ‘here’ and ‘there’ as I drove up and down the M1 or M6 motorway. In practice, here and there became a complex mix of physical location and state of mind. In many ways the geographical or spatial notion of local and distant wasn’t relevant. For example I could be travelling to meet “Gillian” whilst reading a paper on “Enid Blyton” that “Helen” had urged me to read. Or, that same paper could be on the coffee table as both “Helen” and I sat in her lounge, chatting, taking soup and watching an episode of “The Demon Headmaster” on her TV. Where then is the ethnographic here and there? What use can here and there be?

Yet, I must beware of throwing the locational baby out with the bathwater. Different locations yield different Demon Headmasters. It could almost seem as if he morphed as I drove up and down England or moved from my PC to children’s book. But, of course he didn’t change at all – he was never fixed.

Here then is a problem with living by metaphors... you think you know what is going on and then the metaphor bites back. Metaphors of location and network are means of accounting: the language of particular senses and particular analytical “cuts” [Strathern 1996]. These locations are not separate spheres of knowing or doing – there are no spheres save those we perform.

Of course, one could argue that whilst my research practices were qualitative they were not ethnographic, and I am misleading myself in thinking that I was ‘there’ whilst in my front room communicating by phone or PC. However, I hold to the notion that ethnography is primarily about deep relationships, active involvement and complicity with otherness. Ethnographic work involves a will to explore variety and difference. It is in this spirit that, locational metaphors to the side, I am an ethnographer and this ethnography was based on eighteen months engagement with the field.

If location is a difficult spatial metaphor to think with in contemporary contexts, temporal metaphors and temporal bindings are no less a problem. Take for example how we cut our networks in ‘time’ and claim beginnings and ends. I will demonstrate my point by reference to my own ‘beginnings’. I am using this example to illustrate that actor- networky fieldwork is not just a series of encounters and translations, it is *conversational*. And, as Sachs suggests, there are very particular dynamics of conversations: a particular opening gambit can take a conversation down a particular road – a different opening will take the same folk down another route [Sachs 1992]. As I will illustrate, one of my first conversational encounters was in a hotel room with a set of children’s books. Having conversed and translated these books as fieldwork, some actor-networks began to take shape and others faded.

### *Temporal metaphors and framing networks*

There is no easy starting point for fieldwork. But, tongue-in-cheek, my fieldwork began with discussions on possible field sites with Dr. David Oswell. On the basis of his own work on children’s television David had a number of contacts at the BBC.

Although David's world was children's media, I had never imagined myself working on a children's fiction: I had my eye on a Yorkshire Television drama *A Touch of Frost*. However, access to large budget prestigious drama for an unknown doctoral student was difficult. With big budgets are at stake (and complex production schedules to adhere to) producers and directors look for proven staff. They want collaborators they can **trust** to either do the job, or at least not get in the way. So, when David offered to try and put me in contact with the director of a new production in children's drama at the BBC, I jumped at the chance.

I had met David on a Friday and was staying that weekend in Watford. Back in my hotel room I had time to reassess. I wondered which way this work would go. Would I be able to participate in the field? Could I have an unskilled role in a production process? How could I fund such a long-term undertaking? How would their timetable fit in with my work-commitments? I had no research grant... and I wasn't written in to anyone else's. On my own I wasn't really grant material. Financially, emotionally and physically Yorkshire would be so much easier.

The next day I went into central London to look for the book that I believed the series was based on. I found *The Demon Headmaster* in Waterstones, on the children's shelves under Fiction 9-13. I was a little surprised to find that the author was different to the one David had mentioned – 'Gillian' not 'Helen'. I was also surprised to find not one but a series of The Demon Headmaster books. I bought a copy of each and, without realising the significance of this act, nor how much of my future was going to be spent reading children's books, I headed back to Watford to read. That evening I read all of The Demon Headmaster books and I was riveted – this was exciting stuff. I didn't realise it then, but I held my fieldwork in my hands.

The point I make here is that fieldwork encounters are active and conversational: dialogic. In one encounter, with no one around except a set of children's books, I had become committed to a field: albeit a fictional one. Fiction or not, those books were populated by folk I wanted to know about, to become complicit with, and to learn from. I wanted to spend time in and around their important places and spaces. The research conversations had begun.

Whilst I make my point of complicity and commitment by personal reflection, I have no duty to confessional forms of anthropological accounting (see Van Maanen 1988). Confessions disturb me as they hint at a level of self-knowledge that I think is illusion, a completeness that I think is unattainable and an authenticity that I think of as dangerous [see Pinch and Pinch 1988]. Indeed, I have grave concerns about confessional styles and worry that the implied honesty is illusory as "sincerity is merely second-degree Image-repertoire." [Barthes in Sontag 1982: 481 cited in Geertz 1988 89-90]. How easy it is to convince oneself of one's own radicalism whilst unwittingly reproducing the status quo: Kant's comeuppance being that the road to hell is paved with good intentions. I have no confessions to make; I only note that fieldwork is conversational.

In terms of fixing or framing the research, one of the most influential "conversations" involved meeting Roger. This meeting followed quickly from my first encounter with the books. At that time, Roger was working for the BBC, producing and directing children's dramas. He had a long and successful career at the BBC with programme credits to his name that would be easily recognisable to most British researchers. He was also director of *The Demon Headmaster Takes Over* and my first point of human contact.



As I have already said, David acted as gatekeeper for my first encounter with Roger. He emailed me with both Roger's email and telephone details: the ball was in my court. Hmm, a very actor-network type moment ... phone/email ... email/phone – I opted for email.

I found E-mail to be a delightful medium for a fainthearted communicator. It provided me with the opportunity to compose both the text and myself. I could sit, ponder, edit, frame and walk away for half an hour before finally commanding the application to SEND my message. I had control. In employing that control I came up with a rather bland request for a meeting whilst trying to communicate my interest in 'how' a TV drama represented science and technology. It was a very general and short request as I didn't want to (a) frame Roger's responses too much, (b) put him off the whole idea, (c) set myself up for Ping-Pong emails clarifying detail when I wasn't really that clarified myself. However, I did want to establish sufficient authority to get the meeting. So, I went for a clear request. I introduced myself as a part-time doctoral student, gave no detail of my theoretical bent, explained my genuine interest in his work and used my work email account and signature. Oh yes, and I invoked Brunel, C.R.I.C.T. and David's name (more than once).

One thing that I had not taken into account was the incredible kindness and generosity of some individuals. At that time I didn't know Roger, I had not read anything he had written and I wasn't in academic networks of either media studies or children's TV. Nonetheless he emailed a reply... - unsure about how he could help, but willing to meet. He explained that he was doing post-production work on the third series of *The Demon Headmaster* and we could meet at Television Centre. We then had a short exchange of emails confirming dates and times.

Looking backward I wish I had understood the importance of this virtual encounter differently than I did at the time. I experienced it as neophyte researcher. At the time, I saw this as a beginning, I thought Roger was to be a central pivot in the future and that I was seeking access to the BBC. If only I had understood that *fieldwork* was already well underway. Even at this 'stage' I was negotiating cultural capital, professional delineation of space and privacy, technology, technique and questions of rights, grace and favour. No simple arrival story could evoke moving in such a tangle of threads. There was no **arrival** only a **sense** of actor-network and the worry that I was *doing it wrong*.

### *Conversing with Roger*

I met Roger in October 1997. I remember it well as I had just about the worst throat infection that I had ever experienced. I travelled to London better equipped medically than half of the fieldwork expeditions to the Amazon: antibiotics, anti-inflammatory analgesics, anesthetic throat sprays, lozenges and (in homage to alternatives) a honey, lemon and ginger home-brew that could cut its way through metal.

London was as threatening, grimy, noisy and self obsessed. I joined the melee at Kings-Cross and headed for the underground station. I loathe the Underground. It is oppressive, dirty and very, very strange. But, I was keen to be punctual and I could predict travel times using underground routes more effectively than surface travel. Surprisingly, I successfully navigated the Underground passage from Kings Cross to BBC Television Centre. Whilst the journey was, to my mind unpleasant, I found a new energy and enthusiasm on arriving.

Television Centre is a huge complex of offices, studios, labs, workshops and live recording studios. The area is secure. Those who wish to enter must go through a security pass ritual. Roger had prepared my way well. I got my security pass and instructions on how to find the building and floor I required. I was then left to find my own way to Roger's office... so, free to roam the compound. I didn't roam – I behaved myself – impeccably. Even so, there was definitely something of the awe-struck traveller about me. I meandered through the gaps between buildings searching for the West Tower, passing small open bays loaded with scenery marked up for 'Blue Peter' and studios with recording lights prohibiting entry. There was no sense of bustle or urgency, just folk going about their everyday business of making and broadcasting television programmes. All too quickly I found the West Tower and followed instructions to the lift and floor. Roger's post-production assistant had come looking for me and I was soon safely ensconced in our meeting room drinking BBC refreshments.

In preparing for this meeting I had swotted up on Roger's career and read all *The Demon Headmaster* books. At this stage I believed this meeting was crucial and that Roger would be my route into the fieldwork. Roger was indeed crucial, and the encounter took my work in a particular direction. However, this was to be my first and last meeting with him until after the fieldwork was complete and the thesis all but written. We did communicate by email a couple of times, just keeping tabs on movement and exchanging contact details but we never met or directly communicated on *The Demon Headmaster* after that first meeting at the BBC. I am rather ashamed to admit that I did *follow* Roger (and still do). Not you understand as a physical stalker, or anything like that, but I do lurk on the archives of a mail-base that he often contributes to, I know a little of what he is doing now and I follow re-

runs of his work. But, I am always grateful for the time, energy and involvement that Roger made and to the generosity he showed me.

It transpired that the office that we met in was one that Roger had “borrowed” from another director. Nonetheless, Roger was at home in this borrowed space. The walls were covered by stills from recent children’s television productions, some I recognised and many I did not. My own children were no longer children (if you see what I mean) and I was more distant from children’s productions than I would have been ten years previously. This borrowed room provided a blinding insight into the importance of location.

As Roger and I played at *getting to know you* we had a number of possible framing devices to bind our situation. The borrowed room was one of those devices. For Roger, the office provided comforting naturalness and organisational frames of reference. Roger’s authority, skill, competency and art were represented in this place. As we spoke, Roger would point to examples of his work, or use a still image to illustrate particular technical issue.

Surrounded as we were by the material fabric of BBC television production, Roger’s changing experience of organisational politics became as natural to our talk as aesthetics, production process or directorial practice. Equally, meeting here positioned me as ‘other’: I was naïve and seeking enlightenment.

My rather vague and open-ended email hadn’t provided Roger with many clues as to *what I wanted*. From my perspective this was just what I intended but, from Roger’s perspective, it was a risky position. All he knew was that I was keen to meet him and that I was interested in his work. Issues of trust needed to be worked through.

Initially, Roger was friendly yet cautious and reserved. I began to understand his caution when we chatted about my interests and approach.

We spent time conversing about academic accounts of media production. I was quite clear that I did not want to 'do' a media theory analysis of his work. I wanted to write an account of *The Demon Headmaster Takes Over* that he would recognise. I explained that I was fascinated by fictional stories that were written and broadcast about human-machine relationships. I wanted to understand something of what media professionals did as they crafted these stories. The clarification of this intention was important to Roger; he expressed the frustration that he felt when he read academic accounts of media products that were unrecognisable to him. We shared an interest in practice.

Given our shared interests, it was inevitable that Roger and I spoke of representing science and technology. But we also spoke of a great deal more. Roger made reference to his time as a student. When we spoke of power, he spoke of justice and equality, a subject close to his heart. He spoke of organisational change, of leaving the BBC and moving to the North of England. Of children, horses and lifestyle changes. Some of these wanderings were natural to our conversation, some directly related to the plot of *The Demon Headmaster* production processes. Some were points of validation and authority. And, others were fragments of those suppressed stories that situation never quite swamps. It seemed to me that in the stressful ethnographic moments of introducing ourselves we cut and paste our lives, thought and actions across situations. This was an interesting time/space and offered much for those with an eye for the surreal – shame I can only recognise it looking backwards.

The encounter with Roger held multiple conversations. It offered up multiple networks and ethnographies. Roger spent over half a day taking me through the production of *The Demon Headmaster*. He told me his story in a fluid and rehearsed way: he had obviously had to explain production to aliens in the past.

In methodological terms, it was in my early encounters with Roger, the BBC and The Headmaster books that I became **aware** of issues of selectivity and adequacy in the research process. I entered fieldwork knowing that ethnographers were political actors but this knowledge was in my head – not in my heart, soul and body. In the time since my visit to Roger I have come to know things differently, to recognise that a great deal of the *work* of early stages of my fieldwork was spent labouring to fix boundaries and frame possibilities: a labour that had intellectual, physical and moral character.

Out of that encounter with Roger I had an embryonic understanding of production processes. I knew that the latest Demon Headmaster story had moved into post-production work and was due to be screened in ten weeks time. I was introduced to the importance of authors, the strange manner in which the programmes had emerged on screen and the fascinating mix of folk who had recognisable voices as storytellers. In this meeting, Roger and I colluded with one another as we agreed that media criticism was, by and large, theory laden. We both felt that it paid to talk to those involved in telling the story. The shape of the network began to form and I was forced to make some boundary decisions.

## Politics of selection and practice

Throughout research we make theoretical and pragmatic decisions to fix and unfix boundaries around the object/subject of research. In practice, we are involved in processes of exclusion, marginalisation and amplification that are intellectual, situated, pragmatic and political. In this context, I now outline key decisions that shaped this study and demonstrate methodological issues that were addressed in fieldwork.

In examining fieldwork practices, I begin with my treatment of **story**. In this study ‘the’ story under scrutiny is *The Demon Headmaster Takes Over* [Cresswell 1997a, BBC 1998, Cross 1997]. Connecting structural accounts of story with fieldwork practice, I examine the uses and limitations of structural analyses of story. I argue that whilst such approaches offer analytical insight, they retain little or no sense of the vibrancy, flow and life of the original tale. In this context, I argue for a more radical approach, taking *The Demon Headmaster Takes Over* as a **Storyworld** available for actor-network ethnography.

Further to the ethnographic analysis of the fictional storyworld, I examined the story with its copyrighted producers. Significantly, as a story, *The Demon Headmaster Takes Over* has a number of physical forms. For example, it is a set of **scripts**, a series of **broadcast television programmes**, and a published **book**. Whilst, in this study, I privilege television series over other forms, each of these ‘sites’ were explored in my ethnography. In this context, I travelled with the story to visit its credited storytellers including **authors** and **programme makers**. Working with storytellers raised methodological issues concerned with field relationships, field

recording and textualisation. In discussing these issues I will demonstrate that fieldwork practices are performances of liminal, political partial connections.

Finally, in this review of selectivity and practice, I turn to **choices** that led me to knowingly **exclude** sites of research from this study. In this context, attention is also paid to folk, places and things that chose to exclude them-selves. The discussion of exclusion closes with a critical reflection on the treatment of **audience**.

In summary in what follows I examine the appropriateness and treatment of fieldwork sites and categories that I include herein: namely story, scripts, broadcast, production at Children's British Broadcasting Corporation [CBBC], book and authors. Further to this discussion I reflect on questions of 'choice'.

## Story

At the heart of this thesis there is a story. That is a fictional account that can be recounted and exchanged. Whilst the purpose of this study is to push at the boundaries of this tale, and to incorporate storytellers into the story itself, I have, in ethnographic terms, collected a story. As I demonstrated in chapter 1, stories have sociological interest and, consequently I have had to consider my treatment of **the** story alone.

The approach to story adopted here is unusual. I do not make direct use of conventional forms of either media analysis or literary critique arguing instead that, as a story, *The Demon Headmaster Takes Over* can be treated as a **Storyworld** and subject to ANT ethnographic investigation. Preferring a living Storyworld to analyses that focus on either the structural mechanisms of the tale or heterogeneity in use/reading, I keep faith with my intention to complicit ethnography. The



storytellers will recognise Storyworld, actor-network audiences will recognise Storyworld, and the fictional children Dinah, Michael, Harvey and Lloyd will recognise it too.

*Storyworld: against a structural treatment of story*

Ironically for a sociologist interested in multiple ontologies and interference, when considering my treatment of story I was drawn (dragged) to structural analysis. Clearly, that statement requires explanation. Although it was never my intention to undertake a literary criticism of *The Demon Headmaster Takes Over*, structural poetics has its uses here in three ways. Firstly, much of the ‘expert language’ of authorship and production has its roots in poetics and structural accounting of stories. For example, professionally, storytellers use terms such as plot, form, katharsis and narrative in their everyday work. By engaging with structural analysis I was acquiring a language for interaction – and a language I could play with in practice. Secondly, structural analysis provides text markers to fix story mobility as when, in discussions, plot transformations serve as compass points in the textual landscape. As such, awareness of plot became a useful point of departure for field encounters within and outwith Storyworld. For example, a field encounter built upon a discussion of one plot moment could take an actor networky turn in multiple directions: in field encounters plot knowledge mattered. Finally, limitations of structural analysis provided a basis against which I could think about what was, for this analysis, appropriate and adequate. So, poetics has its uses here.

Literary theory, media studies, art and cultural studies have all, at some time, engaged with structural analysis or *poetics* of story. According to Genette [1980], poetics involves study of story, text and narration: that is a study of a story

incorporating plot, characters, event, sequence and transformation which is inscribed (in text) and told (narrated). Contemporary accounts of poetics owe, and usually acknowledge, debt to Aristotle's *Poetics* [1996], be that in terms of direct descent or critical engagement. In *Poetics*, Aristotle offered an essentialist account of tragic poetry and provided a basis for appreciation and criticism. The work is premised upon two fundamental beliefs. Firstly, 'All human beings by nature desire knowledge' [see *Metaphysics*] and secondly, all human activities have an intrinsic rationale (*tekhne*) and can be rendered meaningful [see *Nicomachean Ethics*]. In this context then, *Poetics* represents both the desire to understand poetry by seeking out its intrinsic logic and the will to make that intelligibility available to scrutiny. In laying bare poetic *tekhne*, beauty once hidden in a poem is revealed to a 'sophisticated' observer [Heath 1996].

In fieldwork I found this sense of *tekhne* relevant to professional storytellers. For example, Helen explained how, as a child, she had **studied** Keats. This study was deeply personal not formal – an act of love not science. However, her fascination with the technical form led her to spend hours attempting to emulate the mechanisms by which his poetry 'worked'. Just as Helen regards her work with Keats as the commencement of her craft apprenticeship, visual storytellers accounted the importance that structural form has to their own craft practice – learning lessons of structure were central to professional practice. In this context structure is not solely a question of observational criticism but of critical practice.

In academic practice, the Aristotelian desire to understand the essence of poetry was carried forward in the structuralist project of story. The aesthetic sophisticated observer becomes the scientific structural analyst. Analysts search for elements of

story that transcend a single tale. Their intention is to reveal mechanisms by which a story has been constructed, and identify universal elements of story and story telling. The impetus is to develop a coherent theory of both the internal structure and processes of all literary discourse. What is sought is the universal set of literary 'objects' and the rule set through which they can be used. Once identified, an individual 'work', or an entire genre, can be understood as instances of such universal structural/process elements. A seminal and relevant example of such an approach being Todorov [1973]: a coherent theory of the elements, themes and processes of *The Fantastic*.

Todorov's interest is not so much in describing a story, as he takes story as its own best representative, he is more interested in theorising stories in general [see Culler 1975]. This thrust toward a general theory of story is shared by Russian Formalism. For example, Vladimir Propp's seminal examination of Russian fairy stories and folk tales in which he identified a limited number of plots: arguing that whilst tales may enact plot differently, they are, nonetheless, doing the same plot [Propp 1968].

In the case of the Demon Headmaster books the central plot line is typically, children are happy, demon headmaster attempts to take over the world, children are frightened, children overcome the evil plan, children are happy again. A plot summary that centres child characters and imaginatively 'empowers' them in a threatening world.

Plot analysis is informative, but of wider methodological relevance here is the structural attempt to understand the mechanisms of fiction. In this sense the agenda is identification of both **the** building blocks of all fiction and **the** techniques by which components are made manifest.

Chatman [1978] charts such functional decomposition from a starting point of narrative, and this serves as a useful point of departure for considering why I chose not to handle my fiction, in such a structured way. Typically, at the highest level of decomposition, structural analysis distinguishes between two components of narrative – story and expression. Story encompasses the people, their actions, the materials and physical situations within which they act and the plot. Expression focuses on the language through which these folk, places, things and so on are represented.

Both structuralism and formalism hold story as an important element, and both seek to identify those structural components of a story that allow a story to move, with apparent ease, across different forms of expression and different situations. For example, Bizet's *Carmen* is Opera-story but it can also be told as contemporary or historical fiction and in ballet, film, and book. There again, *Carmen* can simply be recounted over a beer.

Intuitively, I am unhappy with notions of transcendent story [Le Guin 1989, 1993a], however, the structural account of expression is interesting. I worked with story in a variety of forms, and some of my storytellers would argue that form carries a particular grammar. The rules of visual form being, at times, at odds with textual techniques. Hence, I was forced to consider whether I was excluding too many structuralist traces from my own brand of post-structuralism.

In a desire to keep faith with my material I decided to apply some of the techniques of structural analysis to both *The Demon Headmaster Takes Over* [Cross 1997] and *It's such a Beautiful Day* [Asimov 1970]. I began at the most basic level of story and at the easiest level 'plot'.

Plot and story are not interchangeable terms as “Plot refers to a type of story structure, one which places events in relation of subordination, not mere coordination” [Cohen and Shires 1988: 58]. In preliminary work on story, I took two of Todorov’s central notions of plot and subjected *The Demon Headmaster Takes Over* to a plot analysis. The two key notions I appropriated were (1) plots are *kathartic* (that is transformative) and (2) plots are *explanative* (in terms of causality) [Todorov 1981: 41].

In plot analysis I used further functional decomposition to separate different categories of plot – the central plot or *kernel* and the subsidiary plots known as *satellites*. By the time I tried my hand at this type of narrative analysis I had been exposed to a good many examples of plot analysis, including accessible plot work on Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex* [Rimmo-Kenan 1989], and well worked analysis of Austins’ *Pride and Prejudice* [Cohen and Shires 1988: 59-64]. I set about identifying kernels, satellites, transformations, actions, causal linkages and temporal sequences and produced nice plot charts taking Rimmo-Kenan’s diagrammatic presentation style as a template. The result was startling – I had a plot analysis – but little else. It was as if I had performed an autopsy on a body. Successfully identifying some vital organs and removing them for weighing and toxicology: any sense of living active story was lost.

This was a significant point of reflection. The story had been treated as an object for functional decomposition. As such, it was taken to be bounded, dead and available for use by analysts. The reductionism of structural analysis was clear and unacceptable. My preference for descriptive paraphrasing may do a disservice to a fiction but it doesn’t kill it. This experience led me to exclude from this study any

analysis of *The Demon Headmaster Takes Over* that might suggest clinical structural objectivism.

Although I have considerable problems with structuralist approaches, their rigorous thinking together with their wealth of empirical studies highlighted, if not the elements of fiction, a set of notions against which a more open and heterogeneous theory of story/narrative/text could be identified.

In this context I found French post-structuralism and Bakhtin's theory of dialogic imagination useful. Both force attention on language as unfinished, active and hybrid. Story no longer sits quietly in its place but is mobile and restless. Escaping strict boundaries of physical and temporal limits, story exists before its telling, outside its telling and after its telling [see Bakhtin 1968, 1981, Derrida 1976, 1978, Stallybrass and White 1986 and for exposition and criticism Eagleton 1996a, 1996b].

In particular, Bakhtin [1981] provides a theory of dialogic interaction that offers practical and theoretical insights for network analysis. Bakhtin's position on text is direct, politicised and opposed to any sort of objectivism of the kind implied in Russian Formalism. As with French post-structuralism, his contribution offset the reductivism of formal structural theory and analyses. What is interesting from my perspective is that Bakhtin's work is full of situational variety and action. In his essay *Discourse in the Novel* [Bakhtin 1981] he notes that:

... no living word relates to its object in a singular way: between the word and its object, between the word and the speaking subject, there exists an elastic environment of other, alien words about the same object, the same theme, and this is an environment that is often difficult to penetrate. It is precisely in the process of living interaction

with this specific environment that the word may be individualised and given stylistic shape. [Bakhtin 1981: 276]

In taking this approach, he positioned text/speech/language as dialogic. Whilst Bakhtin does not carry this analysis through to material artefacts he does, in the notion of dialogue, problematise any structural reduction of context: offering instead 'elastic' environments and 'alien' meanings that struggle with authorly (or speakers) intention.

Bakhtin's central theoretical notion is heteroglossia in which text, utterances or objects of speech are "... entangled, shot through with shared thoughts, points of view, alien value judgments and accents" [Bakhtin 1981: 276, Stallybrass and White 1986]. Examining dialogue in terms of speech registers and classification he demonstrated language as power in action. This attention to interaction proved valuable in handling television scripts that, unlike novels, are predominantly dialogic.

In contemporary French post-structural theory we are familiar with notions of language that rest on interpretative difference, and on the classificatory absent possibilities that are evident in processes of fixing meaning [Derrida 1976]. However, by treating words as objects in action, Bakhtin argues that certain words cannot be shifted easily and taken by a speaker for their own. In this way, he suggests not only the formal aspects and political nature of language in action, but also moral politics of words in terms of *right* to use and *naturalness* of usage. He is suggesting that our ability to *use* words in particular ways is determined in dialogic interaction.

Drawing on both ANT and Bakhtin, story can be textually explored as dialogic, interactive and political. In this context, *The Demon Headmaster Takes Over* is populated by different folk, using different speech registers and adopting specific linguistic techniques of power and Bakhtin offers up a particular way of thinking such variety.

Other post-structuralist approaches to fiction focus on readers as active consumers of texts [see for example Eco 1994]. In such analyses, the notion of story is problematised and the text becomes an open site. Seminal ethnographic studies of audience and ‘reception’ have illustrated this openness of story and developed a critique of notions of authorly imperialism [see Ang 1985]. There is value in examining consumption [see Ang 1991, 1996, Messenger Davies 2001 and Tulloch and Jenkins 1995]. However, as I am interested in professional practices of those who write, I want to keep a tight rein on my network and trace production. Consumption is a step too far in the network.

I required a means to explore and represent *The Demon Headmaster Takes Over* whilst not subverting any sense of active living text. Bakhtin comes close with dialogic interaction, but what of material performances? My approach was to identify the story as a world – not a textual world but a real-fictional world. A place one can visit, move through and interact: a storyworld. If story can be a world then it can be subjected to a networky ethnography. In this context, armed with a sensitivity to framing politics of situation [Bakhtin 1981], material performativity [1997a and 1997b], and limits of situationalism [Mol 1999] I visited Storyworld.



## Scripts

Scripts appeared early in fieldwork. Typically within media production, scripts cover three temporal situations: namely, pre-production, production and post-production. These time phases of production allow scripts agreed in one phase to be modified in later phases. Hence, each phase has a new generation of 'the script'. The post-production script is the final phase and represents a transcript of the broadcast programmes. In researching scripts I focused attention in two ways firstly on script changes and secondly on the post-production script.

I tracked script changes over the three phases of production. As all scripts are heavily codified and colour coded on the basis of their 'generation', it was relatively easy to undertake analysis both within and across production time. This analysis had two uses. Firstly, script changes proved a useful 'situation' for framing conversations with storytellers. Secondly, changes are interesting in their own right in terms of the shift they represent, the textual nature of the change and the informing annotation that accompanied some changes. Typically, changes might refer to a problem with specific language issues such as inaccurate use of technical or scientific parlance. Alternatively, changes might relate to difficulty that emerged when a piece of apparently 'good' dialogue was performed. On rare occasions, a change may represent the need to reaffirm a plot point or production value. In summary, script changes were noted, recorded and used in ethnographic exploration of authorship and production. These discussions of change were significant in that they point to production networks that frame programme making, and examples are used herein in chapter 5 *Politics of Production*.

Script changes framed some of my ethnographic encounters with the screenplay writer Helen Cresswell but I also focused particular attention on post-production scripts. Post-production scripts are transcripts of the screened tele-drama. Helen and I worked through scripts with the television programmes running. These encounters took the form of a recorded protocol analysis. Again, the focus here was on Helen as represented by her fictional story.

A further use that reflects the ethnographic importance of scripts is their status as a transcript of Storyworld. The scripts provide a readily available transcription of that world – they are codified, structured and detailed transcripts that include dialogue, artefacts, scene setting and portrayal. In other words they are rich transcripts of a world that had been codified by its producers. In this way, script plays a powerful role in evoking Storyworld in the written ethnography in chapter 4. The vignettes that I select, the dialogues we follow, the events and characters I get close to, indeed all transcripts in *The Ethnography of Story*, are represented by post-production script extracts and use conventions of the original BBC script.

The issue of convention is relevant here, as it is a point of methodological adequacy. I have chosen to use the ‘native’ form of scripting with the general exception that I have omitted marginal lines that indicate musical cues and timings. However, on some occasions I have chosen to scan an original script into the thesis and, on those occasions, **all** conventions hold.

My decision to omit musical information relates to the limit of my chosen form ‘text’ and my inability to read music. Music cues notwithstanding, the conventions used by the BBC are relatively straightforward and helpful. In the case of stories that are told in serial form, the scripts are separated and numbered by episode. Each episode

has its own individual script that is clearly bounded. Within an episode, scripts are organised sequentially in terms of production units known as scenes. The script contains essential reference material regarding scenes in terms of content, location and sequence position. Within a scene, the script is then broken down into scripted material to inform directors of the screenwriter's intention and dialogue. For example:

**SCENE 328. INT. DEXTER'S LABORATORY, UNIVERSITY, EVENING.**

...

...

...

**HYPERBRAIN VOICE:**

What do you need to know about Dinah Hunter!

DEMON HEAD JUMPS, STARTLED, AND WHIPS ROUND

I am the voice of Hyperbrain

DEMON HEAD STARES

I am Hyperbrain.

**DEMON HEADMASTER:**

You are under my control.

**HYPERBRAIN VOICE:**

No.

Extract episode 3 scene 328

The scene header indicates the episode and scene number. As a scene with a three hundred sequence, this scene is identifiable as a scene from episode 3. The tens and unit information indicates the scene in terms of its place in broadcast sequence – in this case we are looking at an extract of the twenty-eighth scene in episode 3. Post-production scripts are organised with script in full broadcast sequence that is each episode begins at scene 1 and runs through to the end scene in strict numeric sequence. On some occasions scene numbers attract a lettered post-fix such as Scene 822a. Such post-fixing is unusual but occurs on some occasions when two short

scenes are tightly intercut, such that in broadcast terms scene 822 begins, the action shifts **very** briefly to scene 823 and then back to scene 822a.

The script headers carry information other than ordering and sequence data: they hold important information about the location and setting of the scene. In the above example the header informs that the setting is an internal shot set inside Professor Tim Dexter's Laboratory at the University in the evening. All scenes carry this type of locational information in their header.

Normally, within a scripted scene there are scripted instructions from the screenwriter to the director that provides background for story/dramatic intention. Such intentions are capitalised and indented. Where the screenwriter want to give intention to an actor the information is either parenthesized and capitalised or it follows the indented capitalised convention of general/directorial intent. In the above example "DEMON HEAD STARES" is a scripted part of story written by Helen Cresswell and included to give an idea of authorly intent.

There are other script conventions used by a screenwriter to carry intent. For example, if an actor is required to stress a word or piece of dialogue, underlining or exclamation marks are used to imply force. If a character is to pause then both ... and (PAUSE) can occur as conventions. The ... implies an almost imperceptible pause and (PAUSE) a slightly longer break. On occasions where the writer wants to actively control performance then one finds annotation such as (PAUSE TWO BEATS).

In chapters 4 and 5, where scripts have been used as a basis for argument the script conventions are those used by Helen Cresswell. I have not added line numbers for

analytical referencing or used any of my own conventions and, with the exception of musical cues scripts stand herein as they appear under copyright of the BBC.

## Broadcast Programmes

Access to final broadcast programmes came three months into fieldwork and the television series was screened in January of 1998. By the time that the broadcast programmes were screened I had already begun work with book, authors, scripts and production. My treatment of television programmes was akin to the treatment of book. I repeatedly watched the programmes as a student of ANT noting recurring visual themes. I combined work with post-production scripts and programmes: annotating scripts whilst reviewing the broadcasts, in effect codifying the scripts in ANT terms and noting particular points of performance, action and effect.

The ANT thematic analysis was reviewed and developed by working on broadcast programmes with screenwriter Helen Cresswell. In working with Helen I used clean copy of script as we watched, enjoyed, stopped and rewound videotapes. In these cases I annotated the scripts with Helen's observations, accounting and by-lines. The thematic review that emerged in this work became the final organisation for chapter 4 *Ethnography of Storyworld*: that is the three themes of Order/Disorder, Science and Human/non-human.

Finally, whilst the broadcast programmes have been collected in their own right, intertextual issues have been acknowledged in a number of ways. Firstly, in recording the original material I ensured that the tapes included the programmes around Storyworld: that is the videotapes recorded the run in 30 minutes to the programme and the run out. Secondly, intertextuality was a subject point raised by

Helen as she discussed production processes and decisions. Thirdly, I examined the production process and context: Children British Broadcasting Corporation CBBC.

## **Production process and context: CBBC**

Roger provided a fluent professional account of television production in which he represented temporal, procedural, aesthetic, financial, organizational and political aspects of shifting a television show from idea to broadcast programme. Following our meeting, Roger sent me a full set of scripts for *The Demon Headmaster Takes Over*. As I have already indicated these scripts were important in their own right but they also provided additional clues to the folk who inhabited my “production laboratory” as professional practice in media production requires that production contributions be credited. ‘Credits’ list many of the folk and things that had participated in the production: and the politics of who is absent is as interesting as the list of the included. Roger had already spoken of folk and roles involved in the creative construction of the series and scripts provided a list of names and contacts.

In tracing production processes I hit a major methodological problem; *The Demon Headmaster Takes Over* was production history. All of the folk I met were willing to talk about working on The Demon Headmaster. They were able to illustrate problem solving through anecdotes and explain script changes. However, in practice, the story-telling collective had, for the most part, moved on to new teams, new tales and new opportunities for translating script into broadcasts. It became clear that if media production was the object of my research I needed to look away from The Demon Headmaster and get involved with a production that was either about to happen or happening.

However, I was in too deep a relationship with *The Demon Headmaster* to walk away and ethnographic account of production processes was selected out of the study. Nevertheless, a post hoc account of production informed by fieldwork is offered here in chapter 5 *Politics of Production*. Given the post hoc nature of the material I have chosen to develop this discussion by reference to two key sites. Firstly, by public ‘voices’ of production: such as BBC (and CBBC) documentation, email correspondence to mailbase communities and published papers/correspondence. And, secondly, by direct reference to vignettes and anecdotes drawn from my ethnographic fieldwork with both **story** and **authorship**. In this way I intend to avoid implying that I conducted an ethnography of *Producing The Demon Headmaster* whilst demonstrating networks of practice in which this children’s story emerged.

## **Book**

Working across script, books and television broadcast I noted differences in the foci of story. Given my particular interest in popular television storytelling I opted to centre my research on the television series and television storytelling. This decision is arbitrary but allowed me the opportunity to examine visual and active components available in televisual form but absent in book. In effect television turned a living story into a performed drama.

However, the initial encounter I had with the *Demon Headmaster* books was influential in framing this research, and this section examines my methodological treatment of this text. As I have already explained, my first fieldwork ‘encounter’ was with the series of *Demon Headmaster* books written by Gillian Cross. At that time, the series comprised five books following the developing adventures of a group

of children. In order these books are: *The Demon Headmaster* [Cross 1982], *The Prime Ministers Brain* [Cross 1985], *The Revenge of The Demon Headmaster* [Cross 1994], *The Demon Headmaster Strikes Again* [Cross 1996] and *The Demon Headmaster Takes Over* [Cross 1997]. The published book remains one of the most readily accessible forms of *The Demon Headmaster Takes Over* and I use the Puffin publication (Penguin Group) of 1997 here with text copyrighted to Gillian Cross and illustrations to Maureen Bradley.

The approach taken to handling the book was threefold. Firstly, staying within the limits of the book I repeatedly ‘read’ the text as an adult ANT reader. Secondly, I conducted a basic plot analysis. Finally, a rigorous textual content review was added to identify recurring concepts and key themes. The ANT, plot and content analyses were used in work with the author. Each approach was used on a clean text – that is I bought three identical copies and used each as a basis for one technique.

The first step in this work was to read and then reread the text. Initially, I read for enjoyment but subsequent re-readings were used to cross-reference any thematic similarities and differences between this work and ANT. Cross referencing in this way revealed common themes if not common ground and the thematic review provided a useful basis for complicit work with authors.

In discussing the treatment of story I explained why I undertook a plot analysis of Storyworld – and why it is not included here. Although excluded as a formal interpretation, my work on plot is visible in the selective ‘retelling’ of the main texts that appears in chapter 3. These retellings are based on textual work with the ‘book’.

Content analysis was a straightforward textual content analysis based on frequency of recurring concepts. The point here was to extend and critique the key themes



identified in my ANT review. Both content based and ANT derived themes were used in open ended discussions with the author.

Working with authors, I became increasingly aware of deliberate intertextual links – particularly as Storyworld is one book in a series and has references to history and tradition of other stories in The Demon Headmaster series. Intertextual links were endless and, on occasions, fascinating, as when Gillian Cross explained how the Demon Headmaster had ‘originally’ appeared as a story within a story. In an earlier book Gillian had written of a fictional child character who wrote a story about an evil headmaster... one of Gillian’s own children pointed out that the fictional characters story was more exciting than Gillian’s – and The Demon Headmaster stories were developed. Intertextuality is a difficult beast to track – it appears here only as raised in work with authors, programme makers or broadcast – I have excluded any other basis for intertextual analysis and include none of my own ‘readerly’ intertextual links to any literature other than sociological.

In terms of representation of analysis herein, neither plot analysis or content data are formally presented here as they suggest a closure and fixity in Storyworld that is misleading. The thematic review, work with author and actor-networky reading is represented across fieldwork chapters 4 and 5.

## **Authors**

It was always my intention to examine fictional storytelling and storytellers. As such, it is hardly surprising that I spent quite a bit of time with and around authors of one sort or another. Whilst, notions of active audience have evoked a death of authorship, in researching *The Demon Headmaster Takes Over* I found two authors,

Helen Cresswell and Gillian Cross, alive and working in fascinating networks of professional practice [chapter 5]. Both women are professional writers. Gillian Cross is the author of all the Demon Headmaster books and the characters are her copyright. Gillian wrote three Demon Headmaster Books before the first television series was broadcast. Helen Cresswell became involved with the Demon Headmaster when the BBC asked her to adapt the first two books into a single six part television series. At this point straightforward notions of authorship are problematic as Gillian wrote story outlines for series 2 and 3 in varying degrees of consultation with Helen and CBBC. Those outlines were then used as a story specification against which Helen wrote a television series and Gillian the accompanying book in isolation from each other.

In terms of complicit field practice, I learnt a great deal from Helen and Gillian as I followed authorship. My sense of Storyworld expanded as we conversed on **our common interest** and they cross-referenced to other texts they had authored or ones they lauded or denounced. Throughout fieldwork I was lucky enough to work with both authors in their homes and to visit places they encouraged me to visit and follow their intertextual clues.

Working with Helen, I found that Keats, Taylor Coleridge and Stephen Jay Gould entered my ethnography alongside Enid Blyton, Moondials, Bongleweeds and E.E. Nesbit. In many cases these texts/connections were presented as gifts to help me understand some point or issue. Each such 'educational' 'explanatory' gift served as a basis for discussion, transcription and debate. All were gladly received and treated with respect and engagement. Clearly, Helen regarded these texts as representative of her professional knowledge/practice and gave them to me as either an exemplar of

an issue or representative of a practice. In cataloguing this material I recorded, cross-referenced and noted gift, context and issue. I then worked with the gift and usually referred back to the giver for clarification. Given that ethnography is *folk* writing – writing about folk, it is relevant to include here a discussion of particular decisions that I took in collecting and handling these fieldnotes/materials, and the significance of such decisions to this ethnography.

Fieldnotes are mischievous things; professionally necessary but loaded with political significance. Both Sanjek [1990] and Paul Atkinson [1990, 1992] illustrate numerous ways in which field encounters become text. For example, when collected artefacts are catalogued and annotated; when photographs are produced; when sketches are drawn; when formal notes are made and when moments of personal review are taken for both recollection and reflection. Overall, I found such change of form to be both startling and disturbing and identify strongly with Jackson's [1990] observation that.

... fieldnotes symbolize what journeying to and returning from the field mean to us: the attachment, the identification, the uncertainty, the mystique, and, perhaps above all the ambivalence. [Jackson 1990: 33]

On a practical point I found that my practice of note making, and the form of note, varied over time and place. However, I was influenced by fieldnotes and ethnographies I read and professional discourses of theory and form [Jackson 1990, Atkinson 1990]. In *Notes on (Field)notes* [1990] Clifford raises some interesting ideas by differentiating between three “distinct moments in the constitution of fieldnotes” [Clifford 1990: 51]: *inscription, transcription and description*. These

moments represent different ways of *doing* fieldwork and different *degrees of being in* the field but Clifford is careful to point out that ethnographers slip between moments many times during a single encounter. Acknowledging Clifford's reservations, I will use his classification as a basis for some of the following discussion.

For Clifford, moments of inscription involve ethnographers in field activities such as note making, referring to notes or taking a photograph. These are moments when our theoretical and disciplinary home intrudes and *doing* fieldwork turns to representation. In my experience, these were moments when my ANT senses cut (burst, flashed, shot, wafted, bulldozed, sauntered) across an encounter and both my attention and intention shifted to translation – to identifying, noting and naming otherness. Typically, these moments relate to snapshots of folk practice and knowledge and often appeared in field encounters that directly addressed points of clarification or mapping relationships.

On many occasions inscribed fieldnotes were mental notes to self – registering something to follow up, something to seek permission for, some point for more detailed investigation either within or outwith field encounters. Mental notes were “dumped” into quickly handwritten notes at the first available opportunity. On other occasions a discussion over a script or text led me to quickly annotate the script, or book passage often using notes in a margin or small post-it notes with a barely legible critical word or cross reference scribbled on it.

Irrespective of the form of inscription, I can see why Clifford observes, “... even if inscription is simply a matter of, as we say, ‘making a mental note,’ the flow of action and discourse has been interrupted, *turned* to writing.” [Clifford 1990: 51]. If

an ethnographer is to keep faith with their profession (anthropology, sociology or the like) then somehow they must interrupt *being there* and turn to translation and representation. This is what we *do*.

In the moment of inscription we have fixed the ethnographic price of the encounter and found this moment is worthy of note and valuable as an insight. The economic metaphor may suggest a crass instrumental use of encounters. This is not intended, as my point is that notes are value judgments, and inscription is *professional* practice. The form of inscription I used changed radically within and across encounters and related to trading off the value of the encounter with questions of professional ethics, social mores and disruption. For me, Rabinow's notion of *philia* is important here as friendship and complicity led to situations where I opted to ignore the moment rather than use or abuse friends in pursuit of an ethnographic claim.

Inscription is vested in an ethnographer's experience, but *transcription* comes from direct complicity between ethnographer and *others*. For instance, in transcription ethnographers often take verbatim record of the 'voice' of others - usually as the result of direct questioning and meticulously noting answers or recording rituals and ceremony. Typically, transcriptive transformations occur when one seeks to clarify a point; note a formula or record expertise such as introducing a special effect into a piece of video or casting a role. Ultimately, these moments of field action are relocated (and transformed again) as extracts of authentic field voices within a published ethnography.

A great many of my 'moments' of transcription came from working with authors and were framed around discussions of texts of one form or another: such as television programmes, scripts, books and papers. One powerful use of transcribed material is

to be found in the illusion they create of direct speech. This illusion appeals to our logocentric natures and, so, works to legitimise ethnographic claims: verbatim reports appear straight from the mouth of others. However, even if I construct my ethnography from thousands of pages of transcribed material with little or no commentary there remain crucial methodological issues of technique, adequacy and representation.

In considering methodological questions emerging from transcription one can ask quite simple questions such as “what transcription practice shall I use?” or, “how can this material be used to best effect?” These questions may be counterpoised against issues of analysis such as “are individual utterances of issue or is it more chunks of topics?” or there again “is it more cross references between chunks of talk?” These questions touch upon politics of transcription in particular and striking ways.

The politics of interview transcription are well documented [see Mishler 1986; Mishler 1991; Tannen 1989; Wolf 1992 and Kohler Reissman 1993]. Mishler [1991] demonstrates very forcefully how seemingly subtle changes in transcription practice of a single extract can give rise to quite different *folk*-accounts. I came across questions of representing transcription early (and regularly) in fieldwork with authors. These questions were direct and practical such as how do I ‘...represent explanations that took the form of a gift-giving’, ‘...represent the importance of a look that accompanied an explanation’, ‘...adequately re-tell a jokey explanation or illustrate passion in political debate’. Whilst I explored a range of coding strategies for conversational and discourse analysis, I was never satisfied that the form did justice to the field. I never reached the point where I could say that ‘this is close to how it was’.

I became frustrated as I tried to find answers to questions such as how are pauses to be shown? And, how do we distinguish between this sort of pause ... (irony) and that sort of pause ... (exasperation)? All the solutions seemed to undermine relationships that had been built up. I risked misrepresenting my friends in pursuit of a scientific authenticity.

My commitment to 'philia' led me to dispense with textual representation strategies that partitioned speech in ways that mocked the moment. However, I still needed a 'form' and, so, I looked to the field for solutions. As a result, there is no line numbering or other conventions of discourse analysis used here. Instead, I represent speech as turn taking using codes similar to those found in the scripts: that is I use conventions found within the field to represent field transcriptions.

There are of course other remedies for problems of transcription and representation. For instance, one could look for a more appropriate recording medium, or change the form of representation to one seemingly more appropriate. Indeed, there is a huge literature on the use and limits of visual media in anthropological fieldwork [see: Nichols 1992, Crawford and Simonsen 1992, Loizos 1993]. Clearly, from the debates within visual ethnography, the medium changes the problem of representation but it doesn't solve it – it cannot. Partiality and distortion are inherent in representation.

Transcribing the field led me to address issues involved in codifying, selecting, analysing, and representing material transcriptions collected in encounters. At this point, Clifford's model of 'moments' melted. I can not separate work done in shifting from interpretative cut to written ethnography. For instance, in practice, when I sat at home and listened to audio-transcripts I was taken back to special

places and people. Audio tape recordings are profoundly evocative of the field and, strangely, these tapes held smells, sights, jokes and traumas that flitted into mind. Using tapes, I could hear new talk, sense different inflections, and pull out nuances that were not in my original field observations. The field was strangely relocated. New fields opened with Helen's coughing voice or the background banter of Gillian's children. These were moments of new collection rather than recollection.

Jackson [1995] suggests that, when removed from the moment of their making, fieldnotes are liminal, neither fish nor fowl, betwixt and between, neither here nor there. I agree. Notes are liminal and mobile; they shift endlessly across the illusory divides of field/not-field, here/there object/subject and transcription/description.

Acknowledging fieldwork as liminal practice leads to the problem of description: how to translate ambiguous and partial experience into an authentic and powerful ethnographic study that implies knowledge without implying objective superiority. According to Clifford's categorization, descriptions serve as a link between fieldnote and published ethnography. Descriptions move with plot like surety in "the making of a more or less coherent representation of an observed reality" [Clifford 1990: 51] and narrating otherness. In such notes, potentially useful (publishable) vignettes are narrated and reflections formalised. These texts tend to weave together thick descriptions of the field with theoretically informed interpretations of observations and personal commentary. More importantly, they confront the researcher with the problem of their own politics of explanation. As we shall see shortly, my response to this is to distance myself from 'new forms' of authorship and trust the reader in fiction making.



## Choice

It was always something of a concern to me that not all of my ‘contacts’ wanted to participate or collaborate. There were occasions when someone’s name or role came up in different places, different situations and advocated by different folk – “Linda, you really ought to meet up with M”, but, M did not want to play. One such M was the script editor, who served a central role in creative production and, as I came to understand, played a major part in managing conflict and controversy in production processes: a mistress of creative action and creative politics. She was also a strong bridge between production and authors. She was friend to one of the authors – friend not colleague or acquaintance. She was advisor to both production folk and authors and a storyteller in her own right, suggesting a new scene or modifications to an old one. I tried on a number of occasions, and through a number of increasingly powerful routes, to get M to play, but no reply. After a few attempts I respected her silence and left her to her daily life. I represent M here through stories told about her by others: luckily they are always tales of admiration and respect so I have no ethical problem with such retellings.

## Audience

In tracing my network I made many willful exclusions in both setting the boundaries of research and in selecting appropriate tools and techniques. On occasions these exclusions may reflect pragmatic or ethical decisions – for example, I was too late to trace casting, literary agents were evasive and I felt talking with the authors children inappropriate. For the most part, these exclusions are acceptable but one important decision to exclude is probably the most controversial of my research decisions. that is the exclusion of television audience research from the study.

Before I started primary research I was aware that the audience was important. Audiences are users of stories and as such their practices are of academic interest in ANT as well as media studies and popular culture [see for example Abu-Lughod 1997]. Indeed, media theorists might be concerned that my story could be nothing without addressing audience. However, I am *doing* a network analysis of story and story production and, as I went about my ethnography, it became clear that, in my networky construct, audience was akin to a remote tribe that my folk interacted with at varying distances. In this way audience is present but as other to ‘my others’. So, I do not perform any form of rigorous research on or with audiences and audience appears here only as recounted by my tribe.

Whilst it was easy enough to marginalise audience, and I did so very early and in a reasoned way, things do not always stay where you put them and on one memorable occasion, I got up real close. Indeed, one of the most interesting encounters of my fieldwork was when I confronted a variant by that remote tribe ‘The Audience’.

### **A critical reflection on selection: the question of audience**

On one of my fieldwork trips to meet “Gillian” she mentioned that she had recently been invited to a workshop to meet the lyricists and musicians working on taking the idea of The Demon Headmaster Book One and turning it into a musical. I locked this information away but put this one outside the scope of the study not least as the musical related to Book One and that was a different story to my Storyworld.

It was fifteen months later when I came across a review of The Demon Headmaster musical [see Figure 1 Jeremy Kingston in ‘The Times’ Dec.15 1998]. It was playing at the Pleasance Theatre London 4<sup>th</sup> December 1998– 9<sup>th</sup> January 1999 (in tandem

with another Children's production *The Animals of Farthing Wood*) and the critic's headline and review made me interested enough to venture back to London.



Figure 1 Theatre review in The Times December 15th 1998

Intrigued by the review I contacted the Theatre and arranged to go to both the final matinee and evening performances. The Pleasance sent me publicity materials and arranged that I could meet with any of the cast and interview Paul James (Lyricist). The final performance of a well-received 'run' proved a great opportunity to meet folk.

The Pleasance is a small Theatre that tends to specialise in Children's/Family production. The theatre staff were great – I had my instructions, no photos in the Theatre but they would let me use their publicity shots and I could meet anyone involved in the production. So, I drove to London for a spot of children's culture.

I found the Pleasance easily, although to my interest it involved going up a fire escape. The foyer was busy and noisy. It was a small and comfortable place and, as theatres go, low key. You probably know the sort of thing, a counterblast to elitist Theatre. Small is beautiful.

I picked up my tickets, made myself known to the staff, took the material they had prepared for me and made straight for the auditorium. On the way into the Theatre I

passed walls bedecked with photographs of other production sets and production stills.

Inside the small cosy auditorium the house lights were up, the stage was open curtained and the set lit for production. The overall feel of the set was minimalist and the set objects had a cartoon (surreal) likeness. The overall theme of the Theatre was simplicity and stage, walls and seating were all black: accomplished by either paint or drapes. The dark walls interrupted by lit galleries for musicians, production staff and technicians. The seating was raked and comprised long dark benches. I was taking it all in as *they* arrived...

... like a marauding noisy, lively and excited tribe they came in chatting, arguing and eating. The Theatre seemed to fill instantly with children of various sizes and accompanying adults. As they settled in with about 10 minutes to go, I started eavesdropping. The children spoke excitedly of the cartoon-like set, of what they hoped to see, of yesterday, of later today, of friends, of other productions they had seen. They squabbled, fidgeted, chatted and multi-tasked as children do until, at last, the drama began. They hushed instantly.

They and I were enchanted. Indeed, I was stunned by this production – far more so than by either book or television series. At the interval the rabble/babble recommenced. Requests for ice cream were juxtaposed with searching questions about dramatic production, positive reviews for the entire cast and very informed (if a little pointed) dramatic critique. They lived it. I loved it. I loved watching it with them. I had a little insight into what I had written out of my own production. I was glad I had excluded them but they fascinated me and I wondered what bits of lives were playing out for the 24 minutes when an episode of *The Demon Headmaster* was

screened. What fights, entreaties, promises, chattering, eating's and sleeping were happening.

The visit to the audience did not make me rush to incorporate audience research into my study of story production. Whilst I hold to notions of active reader, and I believe that audiences become story tellers themselves as they actively consume/use stories, if I had involved audiences then this would be a different study. Not a better study, nor indeed a worse one – but a different one: both would be partial.

## Finally

There are complex and tense relationships between fieldwork, analytical stance and *writing*. Academic authorship is a major methodological issue/decision and writing is political practice [see for example Clifford and Marcus 1986]. Having the nerve to write of others as if somehow we know them is rarely an issue – we left that degree of certainty behind us some time ago [Geertz 1988]. But, to write as if we can know anything at all is still problematic, forcing serious methodological choices on the would be researcher/author.

Reflexive practice is an ethical imperative in the struggle to keep faith with both sociology and the field [Woolgar 1988]. Nonetheless, to be an authentic ethnography, the fieldwork narrative that I produce must convince the reader that I was there and that what I bring back is an adequate and appropriate tale of *The Demon Headmaster Takes Over*.

In writing of others from a position that lauds heterogeneity and partiality I want uncertainty to come through in my writings, but not so much uncertainty that I appear to have nothing to offer. Attempting to question the basis of knowledge

claims by making knowledge claims is a very Gilbert and Sullivan 'situation' – a most peculiar paradox.

It is in such paradoxical conditions that I undertake this ethnography – so, how to act and write? In amongst uncertainty there has to be its other – certainty. We have to relax, enjoy, and engage with the field otherwise that uncertainty leads to paralysis in practice. I approached field encounters as naïve but interested, fascinated by variety, and a student of otherness. I did relax and engage, so I had some certainties to latch onto – well at least one and, just before I head off to Storyworld, a quick word about that certainty. It involves readers (yes, that means you). My working assumption, in line with my theoretical position, is that readers are a capricious and intelligent bunch. In what follows I have deliberately tried to inject a sense that this story is unfinished and partial. I deliberately leave plenty of scope for you to 'do' some story making out of the threads. I have faith in you. So, no fancy narrative techniques, no poetry, no songs... no disrupting practices. No teasing fibs, and no staged asides for the aficionado. Just you and me in Storyworld:

'It's only a folk song, Esme' said Nanny Ogg. 'Hah!' said Granny Weatherwax. 'I should just say it is a folk song! I knows all about folk songs. Hah! You think you're listenin' to a nice song about.... about cuckoos and fiddlers and nightingales and whatnot, and then it turns out to be about ... about something else entirely,' she added darkly. 'You can't trust folk songs. They always sneak up on you.' ... Magrat fended them off a rock. An eddy spun them around slowly. ... 'I know one about two little bluebirds,' said Nanny Ogg. ... 'They may

start out by being bluebirds, but I bet they ends up some kind of mettyfor,' said Granny. [Pratchett 1991: 61]

Readers seem to be much more devious, much harder to take in, much cleverer at deconstruction, much faster in fiction-making than is assumed by those writers who, with some arrogance, believe that others believe. [Latour 1988: 168]

### Chapter 3

## Landscape

Suppose you are contemplating an island. It is not an island known to you. You are looking at it from a great height -...

At this height your viewpoint is more like that of an angel than that of any islander. But, after all, the position of a reader in a book is very like that occupied by angels in the world, when angels still had any credibility. Yours is, like theirs, a hovering, gravely attentive presence observing everything, from whom nothing is concealed, for angels are very bright mirrors. Hearts and minds are as open as the landscape to their view, as to yours; like them you are in the fabled world invisible.

[Paton Walsh 1994: 9-10]

In chapter two I suggested that one useful way to examine *The Demon Headmaster Takes Over* is to treat it as a Storyworld open to ethnographic inquiry. When stories are the subject of analysis in either media or literary studies it is usual to assume that the texts are widely known. Typically, this assumption is based on the belief that a story is either a ‘classic’ or massively popular. The belief here is that classic fiction such as the works of Shakespeare, Austin, or Rabelais will (or rather should) be well known by an educated audience. Equally, massively popular and widely circulating tales such as Ridley Scott’s *Alien*, the BBC’s *Eastenders* or contemporary ‘chick lit’ are taken as ‘common’ knowledge. Relying on the classicism or popularity of a text, analysts assume that the plot, characters and conventions of the text are well known and any introductory retelling would be redundant, patronising or presumptive.



In the case of classic children's fiction the same assumption holds. Few analysts would take the time to provide a detailed retelling of the *Narnia* tales of C.S. Lewis; Dahl's collected work or Blyton's famous five stories. It could be assumed that any interested reader would have sufficient background knowledge to character, plots and likely events that any retelling would undermine analysis.

However, in the case of children's popular fiction the assumption that stories are well known is more problematic. There is a large and widely read contemporary children's literature that is relatively unknown to adult audiences. Similarly, it is dangerous to assume that any adult audience is intimately familiar with massively popular children's television fiction.

*The Demon Headmaster Takes Over* is a story within a family of Demon Headmaster stories and has textual antecedents that may be known by some readers and unknown by others. Intertextual references between stories in the Demon Headmaster family is overt and heavily embedded in the text of Storyworld. As a prelude to an ethnography of Storyworld this chapter aims to provide a textual landscape for readers who are unfamiliar with the text.

The focus here is on a re-telling with a focus on plot. I begin with a quite detailed accounting of the first Demon Headmaster text. The detail is intended to provide a historical background and establish the central characters and their significant traits. In contrast to book one, the treatment of books two, three and four is little more than a brief plot outline before I conclude by setting the scene of contemporary Storyworld: namely a retelling *The Demon Headmaster Takes Over*.

Inevitably, retellings of this kind requires that we adopt a position of Angels [Paton Walsh 1994] and both my ANT 'reading' and structural plot analysis of the Demon Headmaster storybooks inform the selective retelling presented here.

## In the beginning ...

I will begin this history and landscaping of Storyworld by introducing Dinah. A bright girl aged about 13, Dinah begins book 1 as an outsider and ends a heroine. When first met, Dinah is about to be fostered by the Hunter family: that is Mr. and Mrs. Hunter and their two sons Harvey, who is slightly younger than Dinah, and Lloyd, who is slightly older.

A studious girl who had always found interest and solace at school or in books, Dinah looked forward to starting at her new school. However, school wasn't quite the blessing Dinah imagined. She was immediately struck by the strangeness of the place. Here was a school completely devoid of running, shouting, laughing, crying or playing children. Instead Dinah found an ordered, tidy, quiet, disciplined and calm collection of earnest pupils.

School was policed by prefects and controlled by a sinister figure known as 'The Headmaster'. There was no place in **His** school for litter, time wasting, or frivolous behaviour. His School was regulated and compliant.

Before Dinah arrival the headmaster had successfully controlled all but a few pupils. This handful of dissidents had an unhappy schooling, excluded by the Headmaster from assemblies or school meetings and marginalised by both prefects and peers at break-time. In response to this unhappy situation they formed an alliance – a secret society SPLAT: *The Society for the Protection of Our Lives Against Them*. The members of this rag bag group of dissidents were Dinah's new foster brothers, Lloyd and Harvey Hunter, and a small group of friends including Ingrid, Mandy and Ian.

SPLAT knew that the Headmaster and the Prefects controlled the school but they had no idea how that control was operationalised. When, Dinah arrived at the School, SPLAT had been running a defensive game for some time and meeting regularly (and in secret) to reinforce their own common sense of child-identity and survive school. Dinah's arrival was a catalyst for change.

When Dinah commented on the strangeness of school her foster brothers were deeply suspicious. Their apparent unfriendliness further complicated Dinah's difficult position as new foster child but, in her view, she didn't need the approval of her foster brothers to investigate the strange behaviour at school. Consequently, she set about trying to find out more about both the school and the Headmaster.

Dinah's curiosity was short-lived and her foster brother's fears were realised when, early in the term, Dinah returned compliantly mouthing school slogans about order and control. Dinah had become one of *Them*.

Unlike the rest of *Them*, Dinah retained some degree of self-awareness and she recognised that she was under some extraordinary form of control. At this point she approached her Lloyd and Harvey for help. Together, Dinah and SPLAT resolved to understand what it was that was happening at school. Working on available evidence, Dinah and SPLAT reasoned that the Headmaster was controlling pupils at a gathering where he could reach a large group en-masse: assemblies. And so, rather ingeniously, SPLAT wired Dinah prior to her attending assembly. However, things didn't go to plan on the first undercover outing and, although Dinah began recording as she entered the hall, the control the Headmaster exercised took effect quickly. Once under the Headmaster's spell, Dinah's stealth technologies were quickly discovered and confiscated and, assembly continued as usual.

Disappointed by the failed plan, SPLAT had to wait for the effects of Dinah's conditioning to wear off before they attempted a second covert exercise. Eventually, their guile paid off and they discovered the Headmaster's secret weapon - HYPNOSIS. Hypnosis was the key to his control and assembly a vehicle for rote learning of standard school fare alongside lessons of subjugation. The Headmaster was no ordinary adult. He had special power that allowed him to bend the will of others to his own and exert an extreme degree of control. He was The Demon Headmaster.

It was clear to SPLAT that the Headmaster posed a threat to the school children but, once they realised the form of his power, they feared that he had other ambitions. Together, Dinah, SPLAT and a range of different technologies (tapes, television cameras, phones and cameras) set out to uncover the Headmaster's intentions and his limitations. It transpired his intention was domination.

The Headmaster took his next step toward world domination by implementing a demonic plan to take over the United Kingdom. Controlling a school was relatively straightforward for a Headmaster with hypnotic powers; national domination was rather more challenging. Nonetheless he had a plan – a plan that involved a school quiz team and an appearance on a fictional children's television quiz programme '*The Eddie Hair Show*'. The plan was straightforward and ran something like this:

On the basis of hypnotically conditioned learning the School Quiz Team would win a televised quiz show: *The Eddie Hair Show*. Once the school had won the quiz he (the Headmaster) would be called upon to receive the prize trophy in front of the television audience and cameras. As part of his acceptance speech he would remove his glasses and hypnotize both the television audience and the television broadcasters. Once he had an audience, crew and broadcast medium under his control he would then move forward to the next step in national domination – controlling all media, computing facilities and political systems.

Needless to say – once they had revealed the threat, SPLAT took every opportunity available to subvert the Headmaster's plan. Firstly, they made it difficult for the school team to enter the quiz. Secondly, they tried to block the television broadcast and finally, when all else failed, Dinah used pepper to thwart the Demon Headmaster's television scam. The children quietly triumph over the threat, the Headmaster vanishes and book one closes with Dinah being adopted by both the Hunter family and SPLAT.

Book one is the beginning of the children's encounters with The Demon Headmaster. Books two and three find the children pitting their wits against their old adversary who returns in different guises and locations. Firstly he appears as a 'computer director' attempting to control the Government (book two) and then as a controller of consumer behaviour (book 3).

Whilst situations vary, the general plot theme running through all the stories is that of The Demon Headmaster seeking absolute control and the children subverting his plots by using imagination, collective action, intelligence and technologies. Over time and in different sites the children have struggled to foil His attempts at national or world domination. Whilst all the children are active and political in their struggle against the Headmaster, it is the intelligent and brave Dinah Hunter who proves to be his Nemesis.

## Recent history

Prior to our current story *The Demon Headmaster Takes Over*, the last time SPLAT and the Headmaster crossed swords was six months earlier when he turned up as Director of a Biological Research Centre that employed Mr. Hunter.

As Director of the research facility the Headmaster was once again up to no good. Planning to engineer and accelerate evolution he hypnotized the research centre staff and grew genetically modified plants and insects. This particular enterprise included some rather unsavoury trans-species genetic cocktail making of which Dinah inevitably ran foul. The upshot of the action was that Dinah was cloned as a human/lizard hybrid: the biblically named Eve. Eve emerged from an egg as part-lizard part-girl ready to be subjected firstly to a computer based 'rapid learning system' and then to **his** will.

Once again, SPLAT spotted that something funny was happening at the Research Centre, giant creepers growing at a fantastic rate and massive wasps being something

of a clue. They investigated and discovered that the Director was none other than their old adversary the Headmaster and they set out to foil his plan. The demonic plan wasn't easily subverted but, eventually, the children triumph. At the close of this encounter, Eve is destroyed. When mutant creeper winds itself around his ankle, the Headmaster/Director falls into his own 'evolution accelerator', the children turn the machine off and the Demon Head is no more. With this recent history and landscape in mind we arrive, six months later, at Storyworld: *The Demon Headmaster Takes Over*.

### **Storyworld – a retelling**

Now six months on, the creeper has stopped growing. The Centre, overgrown with mutant creeper, is a dark and ominous place and the British Government ready to enter and possibly reactivate the facility. Military Intelligence believed that a 'genetic malfunction' had led the creeper to grow uncontrollably. Now that the building appeared safe, an Army Unit and a Military Intelligence Officer are dispatched to take possession of the site.

The task for the military is to search out and remove anything (plant, animal or technological) that might be deemed 'classified' and then use flame-throwers to destroy any remnants of mutant creeper or technology. When Mr. Smith, a military intelligence officer, first arrives at the Research Centre he oversees securing the facility and reconnection of power supply. Once the mains supply is restored the evolution accelerator begins to 'reboot' itself and restore its programming.

As The Demon Headmaster was last seen falling into the accelerator, it is hardly surprising that, once activated, the accelerator 'produces' a vague and confused but instantly recognizable clone Demon Headmaster. Still groggy and confused the clone stumbles around and comes across the 'rapid learning programme'. Curious, he picks up the headset attached to the computer, places the headset on his head and activates the machine. Rapid learning commences and, relatively quickly, the Demon Head is

educated in some of the ways of the world. Crucially, there are important bits of the Headmaster's education missing such as the answer to his first question - "who am I?"

Whilst the Headmaster is preoccupied with questions of identity, Smith enters the research facility and is shocked to find anyone inside. Smith asserts his authority and begins to question the Headmaster however, the questioning backfires and, although still rather confused; the questions trigger an instinctive response in the Headmaster. Following an impulse, the Headmaster hypnotizes Smith and a new adventure begins.

In questioning Smith, the Headmaster rediscovers some of his old 'urges' and mention of *intelligence* and *power* prove to be strong triggers for the Headmaster. Following a few overheard snapshots of conversation the Headmaster ties together ideas of research, knowledge, intelligence and university and he is soon keen to get to the local University: University of Wessex. On arrival at Wessex the Headmaster begins to prowl the Campus in search of 'knowledge'. On his travels around the campus he comes across a sign for an Artificial Intelligence Unit. Clearly attracted by the idea of artificial intelligence, he moves toward the Department and comes first to an office occupied by Professor Tim Dexter and then to a secure door marked Hyperbrain Development Project.

Once inside the artificial intelligence unit the Headmaster acts quickly. He meets Tim Dexter and, almost instinctively, he respond to linguistic triggers of knowledge and intelligence and so hypnotizes Professor Dexter. Once under the control of the Headmaster, Dexter is debriefed on the work of the Unit and the Hyperbrain Project. He reveals that Hyperbrain is an Artificial Intelligence project intended to access, use and contribute to knowledge in universities, libraries and research centres throughout the world. The Headmaster equates knowledge with power and hence, Hyperbrain is of interest to him.

Exerting just enough control over Dexter, the Headmaster establishes himself in a new post: **Controller** of the Hyperbrain Development Team. In this position, he begins to

establish a power base. Dexter providing access to a large knowledge-based project and Smith access to Military Intelligence surveillance technologies. The scene is now set for the Demon Headmaster to begin to control an increasingly large and powerful group of people.

As Controller of the Hyperbrain Project, the Headmaster is able to exploit his position and widen his sphere of influence. His first major opportunity comes at a prestigious conference. Hijacking the conference, the Headmaster uses it as an opportunity to hypnotize a wide group of influential people: academics, media moguls and politicians. As usual, the Demon Headmaster has plans for controlling knowledge and his reluctant acolytes are working under the thrall of his three key mesmeric slogans **“Knowledge is Power”**, **“Curiosity is the Curse of the Human Brain”** and **“Ultimate Knowledge is Ultimate Power”**.

In this context of widening control, Smith provides the Demon Headmaster with technologies that give him ‘eyes and ears everywhere’, media magnates control public access to news and information and Hyperbrain develops at a pace. However, this sort of activity cannot go unnoticed for long. Eventually, some of the changes become evident outside the confines of the University as telephone systems mysteriously fail, newspapers go unpublished, libraries are closed, computer networks fail, television schedules are interrupted and game-shows become the mainstay of television. Furthermore, as The Demon Headmaster’s plan to control the country takes effect some individuals observe changes in the behaviour of family and friends – almost as if their personalities have undergone some kind of transformation. In the list of changed personalities is Professor Tim Dexter and it is his son, Michael, who first notices his father’s uncharacteristic tendency to pause mid-conversation to recite a mantra: **“Curiosity is the Curse of the Human Brain”**.

When Michael notices the changes in his father he talks to a family friend, Professor Claudia Rowe. Initially, Claudia is interested and supportive but then Claudia herself



becomes rather odd. However, there was one bright spot for Michael. he has made friends with a girl who visits Claudia Rowe – Dinah Hunter. It is soon clear that, whilst Michael is spotting peculiarities in his father’s behaviour, Dinah and the Hunter clan are also experiencing odd events and funny behaviours. From the general point of view the Hunter’s are finding the disruption to TV and telephones somewhat annoying but, for Dinah, it is changes in Claudia Rowe’s behaviour that are most worrying.

Dinah has been involved with Claudia and the University of Wessex for some time as she had first contacted Professor Rowe when SPLAT were struggling against the Demon Headmaster during the mutant creeper adventure. At that time, Dinah had the bright idea of seeking help from the University when SPLAT discovered a creeper that had remarkable growth patterns. Dinah sent samples of the creeper to Professor Rowe for analysis and recently, when the Army arrived to destroy the creeper, it was Dinah who rang and warned Claudia of the impending destruction. Claudia invited Dinah to visit her at the university department and offered the use of the university library. Claudia and Dinah get on well and hence, when Claudia’s open-house policy is overturned and she too begins to recite the mantra that “**Curiosity is the Curse of the Human Brain**”, Dinah is one of the first to notice.

In light of all the above action Michael and Dinah have quite a lot in common – they are both bright, both are interested in Claudia and Tim’s respective work and both are trying to deal with some very uncharacteristic behaviour presented by both Tim and Claudia. It doesn’t take Dinah long to put together all the strange changes in her world and to conclude that **he** is back! So, as the threat begins to emerge, Michael is taken to a Cyber Café to be introduced to Dinah’s brothers and SPLAT.

As the Demon Headmaster begins to secure his power base, and SPLAT begin to realise the threat, something rather dangerous is brewing in the Hyperbrain Laboratory. Hyperbrain is accessing, acquiring and processing information at a

phenomenal rate. Tim is amazed to discover that Hyperbrain has been applying some of its acquired knowledge to solve some of the knottier problems of his research: namely Direct Brain Access (DBA). The problem of DBA is complex and involves the development of a technology that can download human memory and make it available for Hyperbrain. Initially, Tim believed that DBA was ‘years away’ but he hadn’t banked on Hyperbrain setting about solving the problem.

Tim is impressed with the Hyperbrain activity, as is the Headmaster. But, things are not that straightforward. Firstly, DBA is still a rather jury-rigged technology and DBA works by moving memory from one location to another not by copying it. In other words the information moves from human brain (source) to Hyperbrain (target). Secondly, Hyperbrain is evolving and, disturbingly for the Headmaster, Tim believes that it is developing independent thought.

Whilst the Demon Headmaster can mesmerize humans, artificially intelligent systems are a different ball game entirely. Before the Headmaster can control Hyperbrain he must firstly get it to acknowledge him and, to that end, he must become an authorized user. However, the Headmaster doesn’t know his name and, in this particular technological world no name means no userid and no control.

Whilst frustrated in his attempts to control Hyperbrain, elsewhere the Headmaster is spreading his power widely. Currently, he is in control of communication devices, media and Military and has established a nation wide surveillance network based on Military technology designed to give him “eyes and ears everywhere”. The surveillance devices are discreet micro digital video camera worn as badges by his acolytes and in the shape of a small green hand. Any inputs drawn from the ‘green hand badges’ are networked to the laboratory from where the Headmaster can watch over his world on-screen. Surveillance information is also a food source for an increasingly knowledge hungry Hyperbrain.

An increasingly well fed Hyperbrain grows and changes. It works on developing its own interface to the outside world and gradually it shifts from a limited screen based dialogue to a ghostly bodily form and then corporeality. As Hyperbrain grows and changes The Demon Headmaster becomes desperate to control the machine but he is at a loss to think how he can gain the control he desires. At this point he sees Dinah Hunter on a green-hand camera and recognises her as the girl on security tape footage from the old Research Centre. He reasons that if she was at the Centre and in conversation with him then she will know his name.

Hyperbrain is also interested in Dinah Hunter – but for two reasons not one. Firstly, if Hyperbrain is to remain independent of the Demon Headmaster then it must prevent Dinah from telling the Headmaster his name. But, secondly, and possibly more disturbingly, Hyperbrain is beginning to search out new input sources for Direct Brain Access and, it is no longer interested in any old minds, only in strong intellects: Dinah has a mind of the “highest quality”.

So, both The Demon Headmaster and Hyperbrain are in pursuit of Dinah Hunter and both lay plans and set traps. The Demon Headmaster’s trap is rather sophisticated and he attempts to entice her by selecting her for a television game show that offers a chance to win ‘Your Wildest Dream’. The plan backfires and Dinah remains safe and unavailable. On the other hand, Hyperbrain is more brutish. It lures Dinah’s mother to the AI lab, subjects her to Direct Brain Access and holds her hostage.

The denouement comes when Dinah arrives at the Laboratory to rescue her mother. Both Hyperbrain and The Demon Headmaster attempt to force Dinah to accept DBA. Whilst the Headmaster focuses on the threat posed by Hyperbrain and appeals to Dinah’s sense of social responsibility, Hyperbrain focuses on the threat to Dinah’s mother and appeals to Dinah’s sense of daughterly duty. Dinah is confronted by two different forms of evil and forced to choose between them: ‘caught between a rock and a hard place’ [BBC-Cresswell 1997].

Cornered in this way Dinah agrees to DBA. However, as the two protagonists bicker she has a sudden flash of insight that is that if, during DBA, she were to consciously think of nonsense then maybe she could retain her mind long enough to be rescued. She begins to recite Edward Lear. The impact is almost immediate - Hyperbrain begins to fade, whirl and appear confused at the nonsense input. Dinah's brother Lloyd is watching and understands. He act quickly, immediately, he gets a message to SPLAT to explain that the answer to the current threat lies in nonsense. He tells SPLAT to get word around quickly and, suddenly, children throughout the country are to be seen shouting nonsense poetry into 'green-hand badges'. As the nonsense onslaught continues Hyperbrain becomes increasingly vague, confused and distressed at which point Lloyd plays the coup de grace, he recites Jabberwocky. Such nonsense is the final insult and Hyperbrain is defeated.

Once Hyperbrain has imploded with nonsense Dinah find that the Direct Brain Access programme is in reverse and she is receiving all of Hyperbrain's knowledge. The Headmaster sees an opportunity and takes it: he reaches for the DBA headset and moves Dinah out of the way as all the information that Hyperbrain has collected and stored is downloaded into his brain. For a moment he is triumphant but Hyperbrain was a vast machine and, after a moment of awe, the Headmaster is overpowered by knowledge – his mind is burned out and once again the world is safe.

### **An end to retelling**

This somewhat laboured retelling is ended and readers have a working knowledge of the Demon Headmaster family of stories. But, the précis of events, characters and action in Storyworld is only a starting point for a sociological visit to Storyworld. A visit that will illustrate that this fictional landscape of childhood is unfinished, ambiguous and uncertain.

## Chapter 4

# An Ethnography Of Storyworld

...distancing, the pulling back from 'reality' in order to see it better, is perhaps the essential gesture of SF. It is by distancing that SF achieves aesthetic joy, tragic tension, and moral cogency. [Le Guin 1973 cited in Le Guin 1989: 13]

Interpretation must hold objects of reflection stable long enough to be of use [Strathern 1996: 522]

## Introduction

In Part 1 I suggested that there is common sociological ground between actor-network accounts of science technology and society and fictional studies that address the same relationships. I argued for the value of a 'close up' study of a fictional story. The approach to such a study was to be an active ethnographic fieldwork 'conversation' between actor network theory, story and storytellers who focus on lying. The story in question is the televised children's drama *The Demon Headmaster Takes Over* [Cross 1997, Cresswell 1997b, BBC 1998].

This chapter is the first of two chapters that re-present my ethnography. In this first 'cut' through *The Demon Headmaster Takes Over* I stay close to the story and offer an ethnographic treatment of a fictional Storyworld. In regard to my thesis, of particular interest here are similarities and differences that emerge between Storyworld and actor network representations of social life. In some ways, this study offers up scope for comparing Le Guin like 'distancing' [1989:13] with Strathern like 'interpretation' [1996: 522].

In representing this ‘cut’ ethnography I structure my discussion around use three recurring themes. These themes were developed in working with ‘my natives’ – both fictional and non-fictional – in a politically interested and sociologically complicit manner. Hence, the organising structure used here is meaningful to all.

The first theme considered is performances of **Order/disorder**. At the heart of sociological practice is a desire to examine, explain and influence social life. In pursuing this desire attention is drawn to means by which social order is produced, experienced, reproduced and changed. Forms of organising, structures of organisation and rules of moral order become social questions when sociologists study the lived lives of humans.

As I showed in chapter 1, ANT theorises organisation in terms of relational material performativity. An interest in net ‘work’ of social action focuses attention on mobility and hybridity. In this context, boundary performances such as classificatory work, material frameworks, spatial and temporal constructs and ambiguity are rendered relevant. So, from my viewpoint, order, organisation and disorder are of sociological interest and I was interested to see how organising is talked and performed in Storyworld.

At first glance, the story of the Demon Headmaster stories can be taken as an Orwellian tale of knowledge and power [see extract from The Times 1998 – page 119 herein]. Undoubtedly, the Orwellian account of knowledge, power and control is evident in Storyworld. However, in tracing Storyworld performances across locations I find radically ‘other’ accounts of ordered life. In this context, I will argue here that, in Storyworld, organisation, knowledge and power are complex, subtle and, sometimes, contradictory in performance. To provide a snapshot on to this variety, I use and develop fieldwork vignettes based on BBC programme scripts. These vignettes are drawn from a number of locations and illustrate that Storyworld life is lived **and represented** in networks of action that fluidly expand and shrink in

mundane dialogic interaction. In this sense, it will be demonstrated that order and disorder in Storyworld is closely allied to tales of order and disorder in actor network accounts of social life. In particular, that Storyworld represents life as hybrid, multiple, situated and full of interference.

The second theme is **Science and Society**. As ANT has had a significant involvement in accounting for scientific practice, it is hardly surprising that I have an interest in examining science in Storyworld. In terms of genre categories, the BBC classifies *The Demon Headmaster Takes Over* as Science Fiction (SF). So, inevitably, Storyworld is populated with places, people and things that 'do' science. Taxonomy of SF dramas often involves a top-level classification of stories into utopic or dystopic fictions [see Baker-Smith and Barfoot 1987]. Utopian stories suggest a future place or time in which science has solved many (if not all) of the problems of contemporary society. On the other hand, in dystopic futures the trajectory of science and society has led to a nightmare world of anarchy, violence and de-humanisation. In SF studies, this distinction is undermined by critical accounts that focus on the power of SF to critique contemporary life [see Csicsery-Ronay Jr. 1991, Wolmark 1994 and Roberts 2000]. In tracing science in Storyworld I found Moser Law's good passages, bad passages, and all shades between. Instead of an either/or of utopian idealism versus despair, I found practices closely akin to ANT accounts: namely science as network practices that are bounded and boundless, local and global, personal and professional and regulated and messy.

The final theme for this ethnography of Storyworld is **Human/Non-Human**. In chapter 1 I showed that ANT rendered boundaries between human and non-human sociologically relevant. For ANT the dissolution of human/non-human boundary is theoretically driven, politically significant and morally imperative. However, in Storyworld the situation is more ambiguous. Whilst much of the everyday action in Storyworld follows mundane cyborg practices, distinctions between human and non-

humans are directly raised as politically significant and morally imperative. In this context two characters are of particular interest, The Demon Headmaster and Hyperbrain, and two identity performance issues are raised as particularly relevant, naming and corporeality.

In following the Storyworld work done in both dissolving boundaries between humans and others I illustrate similarities between Storyworld and sociological accounts of social life – particularly ANT and sociology of childhood. However, following the Storyworld work done in fixing boundaries between humans and others, I identify two particular character traits that are in this fiction identified as wholly human: imagination and the use of nonsense. In concluding the discussion of Storyworld I will argue that this fictional world represents partially connected networks that cut across situations in way that are both fluid and coherent. However, at the same time, it draws clear boundaries around ‘humanness’: identifying imagination as a powerful site for human action. Whether we agree with the distinction made in Storyworld is not at issue here, what is signaled is a need for ANT to incorporate imagination into its analyses in a more direct and theoretically developed way. Continuing a dialogue with fictional storytellers may provide such an opportunity.

## **Order/Disorder**

Before I launch into the nitty gritty of fieldwork vignettes, it may be useful to provide a quick review of the sociological ‘framing’ of this ethnography. The point here being that we are examining ‘treatments’ of social life across both ANT and fiction. As I showed in Chapter 1, actor-network theory offers a particular cut on the mechanisms of order, reproduction and change. A cut premised upon sociological theory of relational, material performativity [Law 1997a, 1997b]. In this context, Latour’s de-scription of mundane artifacts nicely demonstrates non-human agency in the hybridised net work of social life [Latour 1992]. In this account, materiality is no



simple built environment that closes opportunities for interaction, but a mix of technical and natural agency. Hence, material forms of social life are recruited and used in processes of ordering and disordering life.

The ANT focus attention on performance raises both situated practice and strategies of power. Situation is problematised when strategies of power are identified in terms of both those strategies that are situationally imbued with meaning and those tactics for that shift the situation in action [see Law 1991 and Mol 1999]. In light of some of the observations from Storyworld it is worth noting here the common ground between ANT's material performativity and both de Certeau's conception of spatiality and everyday life [de Certeau 1984] and Lefebvre's politicisation of urban space [Lefebvre 1991]. Whilst not wholly representative of actor network theory de Certeau is concerned with strategies of power that are represented in the built spaces of everyday living and the tactics of 'users' for reframing meaning of space. For, Storyworld, ANT and de Certeau, space and non-humans are politicised and relationally open.

As I have suggested, consideration of power in terms of tactics and strategies has been theorised in ANT. In chapter 1 I used Mol's account of multiple ontologies and interference to establish such thinking. Mol's work acknowledges a debt to Law and she notes that it was Law who originally posits the notion of *ontological politics* [Mol 1999: 87]. In this light, an earlier study of power [Law 1991] has relevance here. Prior to the ontologic politic arguments, Law suggests that whilst traditional notions of power such as power-to, power-over, power/storage and power discretion are viable there is a fifth approach that focuses on power/effects that is of equal value.

In theorising power/effects Law focuses on relation and discursive form. In essence this is a very ANT account that posits agency as a set of relations that can characterise, store and (potentially) offer discretion in respect to power-to and power

over situations. In examining the ‘how’ of such agency Law argues a strategic/tactical organisation of agents where the intentionality of agents may be diverse and apparently unrelated but where the practice of net-work is directed and relational. In other words, in describing agency we find strategies that draw across situations, reasoning systems and practices but that have a strategic outcome. In summary:

I am saying that an agent is a structured set of relations with a series of (power) effects; I am saying that those relations are embodied in a series of different materials; and I am also saying that, as a matter of empirical fact we are likely to find that they are in some measure strategically (or multi-strategically) organised. ... I am also suggesting that normally we may expect to find that agents of all kinds are interdiscursively structured and shaped. [Law 1991:173-174]

This examination of power is close to Bakhtin’s account of linguistic power vested in dialogic interaction but, in Law’s account, agency is described as power/effect and material relations of body, texts, interactions, technical and natural forms [Law 1991: 174]. In this way ANT raises the discursive, spatial embodied, organic and technical nature of power. – If ‘distancing’ does allow a closer description of reality, it will be interesting to examine how Storyworld handles such notions as power.

In Storyworld, the Demon Headmaster is fascinated by the slogan that *knowledge is power*. However, in following ‘folk’ around I found power to be far more complex than the slogan implies. In this context, Law’s account of power/effects has value as an intelligent and thoughtful link between power and the everyday practices of living and doing in *Storyworld*. In taking my interpretative ‘cut’ through order and disorder in Storyworld, I structure the discussion around vignettes from four (rather mobile) situations: a military barricade, a family home, a car journey, and two technologies.

The first location is easily identifies as a 'site'. It is a physical barrier between a research centre and 'everywhere else'. Barriers are useful places to examine boundary work. As with doors, barriers separate and classify space. Tracing interactions across the barricade from a particular ten minutes in Storyworld time, I develop a vignette that illustrates shifting patterns of power as the boundary is established, challenged and breached by science, childhood and chappiness.

The second location is 'a car journey' – or more precisely two journeys. We travel in one car with the Headmaster and Smith as they move from the Biological Research Centre (BRC) to the University. In the other car, at the same time, we follow Dinah and Claudia following the same route. The fieldwork vignettes here focus on knowledge, in particular the Headmaster's slogan that 'knowledge is power'. Both knowledge and power are important issues in Storyworld and my folk spend a good deal of time discussing and doing knowledge/power in different ways. In tracing knowledge and power across these situations Storyworld networks expand and shrink dramatically to connect macro politics of State control with everyday performances of power/agency.

The third location is the family – specifically the regulation of childhood. Storyworld is heavily populated with children and my attention was necessarily drawn to sociological questions of childhood. There is a clear and developing sociological literature of childhood that draws heavily on constructivist accounts of identity and experience [Prout 2000, James and Prout 1990]. In considering childhood order/disorder in Storyworld, I have taken a networky approach and illustrate childhood performances of order and resistance as ambiguous, heterogeneous and discursive in character.

The final location for considering order/disorder is technological and based on performances of two domestic technologies: telephones and televisions. I will illustrate that these two technologies are deeply embedded in the everyday ordering

practices of Storyworld and are almost invisible until they fail or misbehave. As with Asimov's Doors, it is in misbehaving that telephones and television are rendered relevant to social relations in Storyworld.

The locations presented here cannot be readily separated, each is an aspect of network and in 'real' Storyworld settings it is impossible to extract childhood, barricades, knowledge and telephone. However, as the locations do impose some order I begin with identity/spatial performances across a barricade.

### *Crossing barricades*

The particular vignette that I want to examine begins in the Hunter household on a day that the Army has arrived to cordon off the Biological Research Centre (BRC). As I will demonstrate, the Army provides an important framing for Storyworld. As an institution of State, Army locates action in a 'National' situation and allows stories to unfold that directly and indirectly address questions of State, individual and society. I will take as my starting point Scene 103 in Episode One, this is the first dialogue encounter in Storyworld and the one in which the arrival of the Army is announced

#### **SCENE 103. EXT. (OLD) HUNTER HOUSE, DAY**

FURNITURE IS BEING LOADED INTO A REMOVAL VAN,  
SUPERVISED BY MRS HUNTER.

LLOYD IS WHEELING UP HIS BIKE TO BE LOADED. DINAH  
EMERGES CARRYING A PILE OF BOOKS

...

**... (9 LINES)**

**HARVEY:**

The Research Centre – they're opening it up!

LLOYD AND DINAH RESPOND INSTANTLY, MRS HUNTER  
HARDLY SEEMS TO HEAR

**DINAH:**

What?

**HARVEY:**

The army – (loads of them)

**LLOYD:**

Army? But why?

**HARVEY:**

Come-on – see for yourself! They’ve got flame throwers and everything

**DINAH: (AGHAST)**

Flame throwers! But the creeper!

[Copyright BBC: Extract from episode one scene 103:3]

The appearance of the Army is special and precipitates excitement in the Hunter household. In both anthropological and military terms the research centre has been classified. Yesterday, it was a closed Biological Research Centre. A space of buildings, land and landscape set in an English town. A space ostensibly governed by practices of land boundary, property laws, tacit knowledge of land ownership and a forbidding overgrowth of mutant creeper. The presence of the Army has shifted the research centre into a new situation. The centre is now a different kind of space, a classified space regulated by both military personnel and laws. It is now a space that is subject to forms of classification that represent military ways of knowing and doing: classification categories such as danger/security, friend/foe and risk/certainty.

When Dinah finds out that the Army has flame-throwers and intends to destroy the creeper she is obliged to challenge military order. For Dinah the situation is complex, she **knows** the creeper is of scientific importance. Afterall, it was she who contacted the University when the creeper was growing out of control, yet now here is the Army preparing to destroy it. As the script notes - she is aghast. Her reaction is understandable as whilst she knows that Army protect and serve, she also **knows** it to be less than consultative, rather secretive and, possibly, not very cerebral. Hence, Dinah prepares to defend the creeper (and scientific interests) from the Military machine.

To follow what happens next, we move with Dinah and her brothers to the BRC. Dinah stands on the edge of this special land desiring access on behalf of science. In what happens next we find an interaction that across this barricade that involves Dinah in performances of order that incorporate space, materials, science and childhood bodies. The interaction begins as follows:

**SCENE 106. EXT. GATES, BRC, DAY**

A SMALL CROWD HAS GATHERED. DINAH, HARVEY AND LLOYD ARE AMONG THEM. A GUARD IS ON THE GATE. AND DINAH IS TRYING TO PERSUADE HIM TO LET THEM IN

**DINAH:**

That creeper – you’ve got to save some!

**GUARD:**

Oh yeah? What for – rabbit food?

[Copyright BBC: Extract episode one scene 106:6]

Sociologically, embodiment, demarcation of space, and cultural practices that regulate space are increasingly understood as sites in and through which childhood (and its other of adult) are constructed, negotiated and reframed [see Prout 2000]. The commencing exchange across the barricade reveals relationships between military action, science and childhood through performance of spatial boundaries and various forms of spatial regulation. The research centre barricade is a site of multiple subjectivities and, in this case, here is a *child* wanting to get into somewhere *they* say she shouldn’t and a **knowing** adult guard who has heard it all before.

The research centre has become a prohibited space for all non-military personnel. It is not only Dinah and children that are excluded from this place but adult *others*. The distinction between military humans and non-military humans required considerable network and is in/described by social and material behaviors: salutes, insignia, barriers, uniform, passes, guns, communication devices and so on. The military/non-military divide is, for the moment, clearly inscribed in the actions and trappings of a category of adult-military. The Army’s *right* to act is both uncontested and highly visible. The Army arrived without warning and cordoned off an area of a town yet no one is overly upset except Dinah. It would seem, that in the mundane and highly public setting of a peace-time suburban road, tacit knowledge together with symbolic, and material forms of power, a child and ‘small crowd’ understand their place in an order of things, that is, as Other.

Dinah's status as a child is clearly a significant force in performance at the barricade. There can be no doubting the status and rights of the category *child* in this situation. Dinah is non-military not least because the classification of military/non-military is performed in British culture through distinctions that incorporate the notions of adulthood and childhood. In our contemporary national experience, children should not be soldiers – it is an affront to our understanding of childhood. Soldiering is a serious and dangerous business and children should not have to deal with serious and dangerous things: the regulation of children is framed as protecting child and childhood. Of course, as we shall see, boundaries are never quite as straightforward as they might at first appear.

So, what can we glean from these Storyworld performances at the barricade: how did our child and guard *do* the barricade debate. Well, it was more than the Guard's job was worth to let a kid in to a secure area – it was his job to get rid of her. Even so, he had to be careful – polite even. The guns, uniforms and trappings of military power can only take you so far when you are dealing with kids, especially kids belonging to your nation, - they aren't fair game. He *couldn't* go clipping kids around the ear or scaring them with guns – that would be *wrong* - not least because he'd be up on a charge today and in the newspapers tomorrow. Even so, his instinct was *good*; he handled it *well*, with a joke. On the other hand, Dinah's earnest appeal to save the creeper didn't get her very far – the guard didn't take her seriously and being taken seriously is a problem for children.

The dispute across the barricade could have finished at this point, but Dinah continues the encounter and shifts the situation by invoking an authority that she believes to be higher to both her own and the soldier: adult scientific research. I'll rewind the action and restart the scene but this time I'll let it run a little longer:

**SCENE 106. EXT. GATES, BRC, DAY**

A SMALL CROWD HAS GATHERED. DINAH, HARVEY AND LLOYD ARE AMONG THEM. A GUARD IS ON THE GATE.

AND DINAH IS TRYING TO PERSUADE HIM TO LET THEM IN

**DINAH:**

That creeper – you’ve got to save some!

**GUARD:**

Oh yeah? What for – rabbit food?

**DINAH: (DESPERATE)**

There’s this professor – she asked me to let her know – when the place was opened up ... she’s doing research!

**GUARD:**

Nice try.

**HARVEY:**

It’s true

[Copyright BBC: Extract episode one scene 106:6]

The accounting here is becoming complex as duty, authority, rebellion and submission are played out as child confronts boundary keeper. The guard is literally standing his ground. He does not take his duty lightly and today his duty is to keep civilians out of the BRC. He wasn’t going to shirk that duty because a kid said someone was doing research – even if it was underlined and followed by a shriek. Anyway, the kid is probably just trying to wind him up – after all that is what kids do – wind up folk in authority. Couldn’t this kid understand he was doing her a favour – it was most probably dangerous in there and she hadn’t a clue about the risk?

For Dinah, this interaction is about the difficulties of being taken seriously by an adult as she attempts to do a serious thing: preserve specimens of special scientific interest. In performing across the barricade Dinah and the Guard enact mundane knowledge and live out ordering of/by folk and things. The resolution of this child/adult barricade debate is interesting and involves a shift of order when authority is folded back upon on itself:

**SCENE 106. EXT. GATES, BRC, DAY**

A SMALL CROWD HAS GATHERED. DINAH, HARVEY AND LLOYD ARE AMONG THEM. A GUARD IS ON THE GATE.

AND DINAH IS TRYING TO PERSUADE HIM TO LET THEM IN

**DINAH:**

That creeper – you’ve got to save some!

**GUARD:**

Oh yeah? What for – rabbit food?



**DINAH: (DESPERATE)**

There's this professor – she asked me to let her know – when the place was opened up ... she's doing research!

**GUARD:**

Nice try.

**HARVEY:**

It's true

LLOYD NOW HAS A GO

**LLOYD:**

Maybe you should check with your boss. Could be in big trouble if all that stuff gets torched

GUARD GOES FOR HIS STORNO

[Copyright BBC: Full text episode one scene 106:6]

As Lloyd performs boundary work he has a few 'things' going for him that Dinah did not: such as his age (he is a year or two older than Dinah) and his sex. His barricade performances are different to Dinah's and point to slightly different understanding of authority. Science wasn't quite as high in Lloyd's scheme of things and his approach is more confident, chappy and laconic.

Good old Lloyd - old being the operative word. As the oldest of the children, Lloyd is now clearly a different category of child, a teenager. His height, posture, speech, voice, clothes and actions position him on the boundary of adult/child. Lloyd's body, dialogue and action blurs the dispute by sidestepping an idealistic appeal to scientific knowledge and using a threat well understood by those working in explicit and tightly regulated authority structures – namely getting it wrong.

In the above vignette the material/social gateway between ordinary space and other space has provided an opportunity for me to foreground different stories about relationships and organising. Much of the dialogue resonates with different forms of common knowledge that deal with how things are and how things ought to be. I don't want to overplay this vignette, or extend it to the point where I make you read the entire script of episode one. However, there are a couple of points on

classification that I want to draw out of the story of Dinah's crossing of the boundary hence I will let the action develop just a little longer...

The upshot of the dialogue/interaction between the children and the guard is that the boundary debate shifts to higher levels of authority on both sides. In human terms this shift is enacted between 'The Major', 'Smith' and 'Professor Claudia Rowe'. In the developing interaction the meaning of the barricade becomes more blurred and the frontiers of control look ready to move in practice as well as text.

When the three new adults are brought into the boundary debate Claudia is physically located in her office at the University, Smith is a Military Intelligence Officer somewhere in the Research Centre and the Major has moved to the barricade and is standing in front of the children. A telephone mediated, three-site, encounter between university, barrier and research centre provides some further insights into the ordering of things:

**SCENE 108. INT. CLAUDIA'S OFFICE UNIVERSITY, DAY**  
THE PHONE RINGS – CLAUDIA ROWE ANSWERS IT

**CLAUDIA:**

Professor Rowe.

Sorry, oh –yes! Of course I remember you Dinah!

What? They're doing what?

Look – put me on to whoever is in charge!

**SCENE 109.EXT. GATES. BRC. DAY**

CUT TO LLOYD, HARVEY AND DINAH NOW WITH THE MAJOR, DINAH HANDS THE PHONE TO THE MAJOR

**DINAH:**

(INTO PHONE) Ok... (TO MAJOR) she wants to speak to you.

**SCENE 110. INT.LABORATORY. BRC, DAY**

THE COMPUTER IS NOW LIT AND ACTIVE. THE EVOLUTION ACCELERATOR IS HUMMING AND BUZZING

**SCENE 111. INT. RECEPTION. BRC. DAY**

SMITH IS STILL MAKING HIS WAY THROUGH THE CREEPER. HE HAS STOPPED TO ANSWER HIS MOBILE PHONE.

**SMITH:**

Yes. I know. We are aware of Professor Rowe's research.

Mmm... well, I suppose... don't want her making trouble.

How long do you say she'll be?

[Copyright BBC: Full text episode one scenes 108-111]

There are multiple stories woven through the above dialogue: stories of alliance and allegiance, of similarity and difference, of the limits of authority and power or even stories of conspiracy. Sociologically, the story that suggested itself to me most strongly was one of shifting authorities of knowledge. Claudia has authority as a legitimate researcher at an established institution. In military terms she could be either friend or foe but she clearly possesses different power to both the children and the crowd.

Smith is well aware of the strength and limits of his authority. In doing/being military intelligence he enacts networked relations that legitimize him as boundary judge. In doing boundary management he acknowledges that Claudia also has a *legitimate* case and that Claudia's authority would be recognised outside the boundaries of this situation. It is clear to Smith that Claudia could make trouble but he has it within his gift to *manage* this situation. He can retain order by allowing Claudia the access she requests. He redefines the boundary for Claudia as a 'special case' whilst retaining his authority to set and reset boundary.

In taking the action across the barricade we can find space, identity politics, materiality, bodies and discursive practices working to shape and reshape the social topology. For Dinah and Lloyd, childhood is experienced as an ideological and material position in pre-existing structures – but nonetheless it is a position that can be 'lived' in different ways.

Each actor approaches their situation carrying far more social experience than 'situation' suggests: for instance the guard carries his military identity but that is simply a shade of a more complex shifting set of identity connections that lead him to see and treat children in a particular way. On the other hand – situational networks carry power – Claudia's power is more than an academic title, it is embedded in such things as material forms of University, in cultural practices of

research and macro networks between State, society and academe. As Claudia deals with the ‘moment’ for interaction she is also cross cutting time and space, drawing and losing power in multiple other relationships.

It was my intention here to demonstrate that Storyworld is actor-networky in character and carries a variety of accounts of order/disorder. As ANT suggests, in Storyworld some forms of accounting are macro level whilst others are more local. The similarities between Storyworld accounts and ANT goes further – the material boundaries that work to classify and reclassify space are made durable in non-human agency and the moral order of Storyworld is delegated, in part, to technical and discursive relations. In pursuing this aspect of order/disorder I will move on to focus on knowledge and control in Storyworld.

### *Two car journeys of knowledge, power and control*

The following vignettes occur at the same time, in similar settings (inside cars) and in almost identical location but they reveal very different performances of power and knowledge.

In a military situation of “organising biological hazard” both Smith and the Major embody secrecy and enact it in terms of protecting the public from out of control knowledge/events/materials. Protection from harm is a common social account for techniques and technologies of social order and control – be they situated in family, workplace or nation. Such accounting is sophisticated, overtly moral in character and implicitly ideological in practice.

In the case of episode one the military classification of knowledge as secret, top secret and classified is both understood and accepted by the fictional community. There were no riots at the gates of the research centre, no hurrying away in terror and no terrorism ... just a band of inquisitive locals. And, in that light, there is one

vignette that I want to use to demonstrate the complex and shifting relationships of knowledge/power/control in these early moments in Storyworld.

Scene 132 involves an encounter between The Demon Headmaster and Smith and occurs shortly after Smith has been subjected (subjugated) to (by) hypnosis. This intentionally political scene is framing relationships between knowledge, power and control that will be explored throughout the adventure. It is both raw and straightforward. The fluid dancing analysis of control that we encountered across the barricade is shrunk and transformed into coarser abstract issues of information, knowledge, control and power. The focus here is on idea (ology) as opposed to mundane performance. The dialogic foci are consumption and regulation of knowledge but the sociologically knotty questions of what constitutes legitimate knowledge is not **directly** addressed in the text – but in interaction:

**SCENE 132. INT. SMITH'S CAR. DAY**

SMITH IS SPEWING OUT RIGHT WING SECRET SERVICE INTELLIGENCE IN A SORT OF “PREFECTS ARE THE VOICE OF THE HEADMASTER” VOICE, INDICATING THAT HE IS BEING SYSTEMATICALLY DEBRIEFED BY THE DEMON HEAD

THE DEMON HEAD IS LEARNING FAST, MAINLY ATTRACTED BY WORDS SUCH AS “POWER” AND INTELLIGENCE”

**DEMON HEADMASTER:**

So, you are in Intelligence...

You have access to important information?

**SMITH:**

Top Security Information. Classified.

**DEMON HEADMASTER:**

I see... and this is important?

**SMITH:**

It is vital. There are matters it is best that the public should not know. They believe what they see in the papers, and on television.

**DEMON HEADMASTER:**

So you control the newspapers and television?

**SMITH:**

No. This is a democracy. Our powers are not unlimited

THE DEMON HEAD LIGHTS UP AT THE WORD “POWER”. HIS  
OLD URGES REAWAKEN.

**DEMON HEADMASTER: (TO HIMSELF)**

But to have unlimited powers

[Copyright BBC: Full text episode one scene 132]

Here, in Smith’s spoken account, is a story of knowledge/information that talks of knowledge as if it were a finite and fixed commodity and, of power, as both limited and social. The implication is that knowledge is power. Democracy is raised as the limiting force on absolute control. Complex regulatory relationships are implied that represent, at best, a form of ideological pluralism or hegemony.

Smith’s talk of protecting public interests offers an authoritarian paternalism that is accounted for in terms of **best for all** ethics. However, in terms of the action, there are other accounts available here. Firstly, freedom is clearly an issue and Smith is not free to act. So, whilst Smith’s speech accounts for problems of knowledge and knowing in ‘democratic’ organisations, he performs problems of knowing in an oppressive regime.

In Storyworld, the lengthy debriefing encounter between Smith and The Demon Headmaster [Scenes 132 and 132A] is intercut with a visit to Dinah. This intercutting demonstrates two tales running, quite literally, in parallel. Whilst Smith and the Headmaster are talking as they drive from the BRC toward the University of Wessex, Dinah and Claudia are also in transit – and heading to the same place. And, interestingly, they too are talking about knowledge:

**SCENE 133. INT. CLAUDIA’S CAR. DAY**

**DINAH**

Will the tests take long?

**CLAUDIA (FROWNS)**

It depends. It’s not easy to get money. The buzz area at Wessex at the moment’s Artificial Intelligence. The Hyperbrain project is run by another professor, Tim Dexter. Nice guy.

**DINAH:**

Computers’

**CLAUDIA:**

Yeah. More – ‘Can a computer ever be made that will mimic the human brain...?’

[Copyright BBC: Full text episode 1 Scene 133]

Intercutting “Smith... spewing out right wing secret service intelligence” with Dinah and Claudia chatting about testing plant samples juxtaposes Orwellian villainy with day-to-day knowledge work of scientific types such as Dinah and Claudia. Knowledge is understood differently in these consecutive scenes. The blunt closed shrunk world of Smith’s Intelligence is nicely contrasted by the more open, discursive and clearly socio-economic accounting of knowledge that Claudia offers. For Smith, knowledge is a commodity to be guarded, managed and controlled in a moral-political framework of Public and Otherness. On the other hand, Claudia’s conversation with Dinah points to knowledge production as a social process and to particular constraints on scientific knowledge production: such as funding and the peculiarities of the buzz of patronage.

There is no sense of fixity and closure in Dinah and Claudia’s conversation only hints and suggestions of complexity. Take for example the issues of economics. In Claudia’s talk there isn’t a straightforward causal relationship presented between funding and her tests – merely relationships. Claudia cannot readily estimate the amount of time that her tests will take, funding is unpredictable, her area of interest less popular within the University than Artificial Intelligence but there again – it all depends. Research isn’t fixed as a purely economic activity, or even the more Althusserian ‘economically determined in the last instance’, but it is represented as an economically framed activity.

Indeed, economic power/relationships are also cross cut by personal judgments. Claudia acknowledges that the inherent inequity of a system involving patronage and a limited pot of research funds isn’t Tim’s fault and, as Tim and his work go together, the decision to give funding preference to Hyperbrain becomes more

palatable. Introducing aspects of science that subvert a 'pursuit of knowledge' model of scientific knowledge production, science is represented as network practice.

My point here is that as Storyworld foregrounds difference in such a way that both an Orwellian account of knowledge and power and a networky/constructivist story emerge side by side. Juxtaposing "There are matters it is best that the public should not know" with "It's not easy to get money... Nice guy" adds to the possibilities of accounting for relationships of knowledge, power and control. It would seem that knowledge of knowledge is situationally contingent. In that respect, I will now move close to a particular location to examine experiences of situated childhood in Storyworld.

### *Regulating childhood*

There is a significant academic literature describing childhood, its forms, processes and regulation [see James and Prout 1997, Prout 2000] and a wealth of anthropological literature addressing childhood, its boundaries and passages [see Van Gennep 1960]. Indeed, I have already illustrated childhood performances at the barricades and will use encounters with childhood in other ethnographic locations. However, for now I focus attention on a central problem in contemporary society, regulating child behaviour. To paraphrase an earlier observation of Latour, '... disciplining a ~~groom~~ child - Foucault notwithstanding - is an enormous and costly task...' [almost Latour 1992: 230]

I begin once again with the opening action. As we saw, it was removal day and Mrs. Hunter was busy organising the move. Initially, the scene was one of family cooperation and, although fraught, Mrs. Hunter had everything under control. Removal men loaded their van, the children were packing and the move was going according to plan. However, order is fragile and the tenuous harmony began to shift as the children realised that the Army has moved into the BRC.



Mrs. Hunter allowed the children to leave packing and go to watch the events at the research centre. Once at the centre, Dinah has left all thought of removal day behind her and she commits her effort to saving ‘samples’ of creeper. In moving from a domestic location to the research centre Dinah’s performance shifted from ‘good daughter’ to ‘good scientist/rebellious defender of science’. Lloyd too was transformed from son to older brother and we join the action again now as Lloyd returns home to update mother/manager on changing events:

**SCENE 118. EXT. DRIVEWAY, (OLD) HUNTER HOUSE. DAY**  
LOADING THINGS INTO CAR. LLOYD HAS JUST TOLD MRS  
HUNTER THAT THE OTHERS HAVE STAYED ON AT THE BRC  
TO MEET THE PROFESSOR

**MRS HUNTER:**

They what?

**LLOYD**

I know. I told them.

**MRS HUNTER**

I don’t believe this! We’re behind as it is! What if the new people’s van arrives? I promised we’d be clear by then! Honestly, Lloyd, I’m surprised at you. You should have made them come!

**LLOYD:**

How exactly?

**MRS HUNTER:**

You are the oldest!

**LLOYD:**

Don’t I know it!

**MRS HUNTER:**

And I expect you to show some responsibility.

**LLOYD:**

That’s how I ended up getting stung by a giant wasp!

MRS HUNTER STRAIGHTENS UP AND LOOKS AT HIM

**MRS HUNTER:**

Oh, I know. I’m sorry, Lloyd. But – go back, will you – and make them come.

**LLOYD:**

If they’ll listen. Di’s mad to meet this professor person.

**MRS. HUNTER:**

Well just tell her that sometimes there are things more important than scientific research!

**LLOYD**

Oh yeah, she'll buy that.

[Copyright BBC: extract episode 1 scene 118]

In Storyworld, families organize in shifting and complex performances of duty, obligation and responsibility. Typically, it is when order fails that certain mechanisms of control become evident. I would suggest that Mrs. Hunter's problem emerged as interests of 'family' members shifted with shifting situations. This is a recognisably actor-network accounting in that notions of familial responsibility are not 'hard wired' but mobile and situational.

Dinah's situation at the barricade, coupled with her responsibility to scientific endeavour, shifts her understanding of familial obligations. Dinah, who is clearly a **good** child, finds that she can, temporarily, break faith with her mother. If she were an archetypal good daughter she ought to be obedient, helpful and thoughtful but that would compromise her other good self – good science-citizen.

In Storyworld, there are situations when family order comes secondary to other things and this tension is made explicit when Mrs. Hunter instructs Lloyd to "... just tell her that sometimes there are things more important than scientific research". Lloyd's counter is brimming with knowledge of experience, "Oh yeah. She'll buy that". When Lloyd asks his mother "how exactly" he could "have made them come!" he opens up debate and shifts attention from Mrs. Hunter's easy invocation of age, duty and responsibility to demonstrate a more complex and fragile network of action.

Mrs. Hunter never answers Lloyd's question of "How exactly" he could have forced his siblings into coming home to help with removals. For her, it is enough to vent her frustration and remind him of his place in the order of things: oldest sibling. But, there is no easy answer in 'age', only in interaction, and his performance of being 'oldest' is inevitably in flow with Dinah and Harvey's enactments of 'younger'.

Dinah negotiates contradictory moral positions in a time-honoured way - not by being bad *per se* but by maintaining distance. She remains in-situ at the research centre and leaves Lloyd to meet the wrath of mother/manager. Ethnographically, in this encounter Lloyd is moving across situations and describing transformations. He shifts between adult and child worlds and offers us insights into established practices and shifting accounts. And yet, in all this movement and transformation he is relatively powerless. In this way, he is similar to the ethnographic liminal actor: betwixt and between and never able to be with any degree of comfort. He is a go-between for his mother's situated performances and his siblings', and so offers a potent accounting of transformation and difference.

I could have finished the script extract at Mrs. Hunter's line "And I expect you to show some responsibility". However, I chose to let the encounter run through to its conclusion to demonstrate how fiction allows multiple intercuts whilst still evoking a sense of a flow of life as lived.

Children's fiction is a powerful tool for examining child identity and much of this power comes from freeing children from constraints of close parenting. In other words, one way or another children are either separated from mundane adult controls that regulate their behaviour or they reorder regulatory frameworks. As a genre, fantasy offers many textual opportunities for this sort of separating. Typically, the children move through some form of portal into another place or time. For example, moving through a Wardrobe into a coherent fantasy landscape or into a historical past as in Helen Cresswell's *Moondial* [Cresswell 1988, BBC 1990]. Alternatively, for those authors who choose to either avoid fantasy completely, or intercut fantasy with 'reality', there are opportunities to use runaways, neglect, illness, holidays and the like to achieve the required separation [see Cresswell 1993]

There are a vast array of textual strategies for separating child and parent. In *Storyworld*, parental control is dealt with both by separation and management.

Rather than remove the obstacle to free action by separating children and their mother the Hunter children walk a tightrope between doing good children and doing adventure: they manage maternal control mechanisms.

Mother-children relationships are complex, material and performed. The Hunter's have a degree of individual freedom that comes, in part, from their age (12 plus) and a tendency to move around as groups: such as siblings and peers. Furthermore, as 'older' children, the Hunters are skilled in the craft of childhood and they rarely offend family practices. They know what mother disapproves of and shield her. Hence she is unaware that her children are wandering the countryside unsupervised and sneaking about cyberspace in a maternally unrestricted fashion.

Situated tensions between duty, protection and freedom to act are evident in Storyworld encounters. For example, when Dinah leaves the protection of her brothers to investigate the Hyperbrain Laboratory with Michael:

**SCENE 421. INT. CYBERCAFE, DAY**

...

...

**DINAH:**

HANDS NOTE TO LLOYD

Here. just tell Mum I'm staying overnight at Michael's house. No need to mention the lab.

**LLOYD:**

I get it. Economical with the truth.

DINAH NODS. SHE AND MICHAEL GO OFF

**INGRID: (CALLS AFTER THEM)**

Good Luck

**HARVEY**

Oh don't go Di!

[Copyright BBC: Extract from episode 4 scene 421]

Being 'economical with the truth' is a notorious phrase once used by an English public servant to explain organisational misbehaviour of a particular kind: he was charged with lying. He argued that whilst he had not lied – told an untruth – he may have been economical and kept some truthfulness in reserve. It is interesting that this

'phrase' turns up as common knowledge in children's interaction. Equally interesting is that there is still dissent in the group. Harvey, the youngest of all of them, fears for his sister's safety. After unsuccessfully trying direct appeal to Dinah, he becomes angry with his 'older' brother and invokes adult-mother to make his point:

**SCENE 423. INT. CYBERCAFE DAY**

MORE OR LESS FOLLOWING ON FROM EARLIER

**HARVEY: (BITTERLY, TO LLOYD)**

You didn't even try to stop her!

**LLOYD:**

Oh come on. She is a big girl.

**HARVEY:**

It's dangerous. Really dangerous!

**LLOYD:**

You ever tried to stop an avalanche?

**HARVEY:**

Mum'd go ballistic if she knew...

[Copyright BBC: Extract episode 4 scene 423]

Harvey is positioned as 'the baby' of the group and, at time of conflict, he has little influence. Ironically, in the above situation, by taking the adult-like control position of 'too dangerous' Harvey is positioned as powerless. Alternatively, Lloyd reaffirms his boundary position of adult/child by recognising that his younger sister is both capable and powerful: an avalanche. In this encounter being powerful child is a more powerful position than being 'knowing' adult.

The point I am making with these snapshots of childhood is that my folk are moving in discursive and material spaces that allow them to negotiate their position as actors. Sometimes, for a good child to remain a good child she has to be bad. This paradox can only arise when goodness is ambiguous and multi-sited: goodness in one domain compromises goodness elsewhere. Dinah's child identity is complex and multi-situational. For her, decisions are not linear and stable but networked and shifting. Grand narratives of oppression and privilege such as age, gender, class, and ethnicity position her and by the material forms of her lived reality. However, she **is** and **does**

more than these as she moves in a huge and complex topology of relations that are local, regional and global – she is Dinah.

In the above examples of regulating childhood I have paid little direct attention to non-human performances. In the following section I will take a material turn to illustrate how misbehaving technology transforms parent-child performances

### *Telephones and television*

To conclude my ethnographic account of order/disorder in *Storyworld* I would now like to **directly** address a central concern of this thesis: namely de-scribing ‘things’ in terms of networky character of social life. In accounting for Storyworld order we have already met a variety of artifacts such as military check-points, kettles, cars, uniforms, houses, laboratories, streets and the like. Typically, these artifacts have been powerfully active but mundane to the point where they are scarcely noticeable. Up to this point, non-human agency has tended to be swamped in a combination of human action and apparent naturalness. Accordingly, I have attempted to reveal artifacts without artificially elevating their place in the action.

However, there are times in Storyworld when artifacts are heard above the din of social relations and I have selected two such examples telephones and television for inclusion here. Both telephones and television are ‘domestic’ technologies: that is they are situated in ‘use’ in domestic settings (often household), they are consumed by a mass competent user base and are deeply embedded mundane artifacts [see Silverstone and Hirsch 1992]. However, domesticity does not mean either safe or impotent and these technologies emerge as very powerful agents in social life.

Historically, the telephone network in Storyworld is extensive, robust and embedded. Telephones are established and widely available technologies and children are included in the category of competent users. These are not exotic technologies; they are part of the domestic landscape and have as central a role to play in contemporary family life as kettles and books. In other words, they are unremarkable, expected,

powerful agents and important only in their absence. As with French doors, Storyworld telephones are rendered relevant in failure.

In Storyworld, the Hunter children live in a loving family home and Mrs. Hunter is recognisable as a good mother - if rather slow on the uptake. In *doing* good mother, Mrs. Hunter acts in material-discursive frameworks that constrain and enable action. One such framing notion is an obligation upon her, as parent, to have some degree of knowledge of **her** children's whereabouts and actions. In what follows, I will illustrate that parental practices of 'knowing of' and 'regulating' behaviour of children are themselves framed in complex and often contradictory array of artifacts and discourses. *Doing* good mother involves subtle and intricate performances in ambiguous spaces.

Let me illustrate my point by example. In meeting her responsibility of caring for children Mrs. Hunter must exercise some degree of order and control. To effect this control she could keep her children close to hand and under direct surveillance. However, control is ambiguous and such close monitoring pushes at the relationships between care and oppression. The overt politics of physical control are compounded by material-rich discourses of child development, self-identity and autonomy. These discourses interfere with the logic of direct surveillance and shift the grounds of parent-child relations. In this context child and parent move their performances from a managed domestic space into public spaces. For example judgments about both adult and child are made in terms of performances outside the home such as work, schooling, leisure and friendship. These situational requirements for separation are opportunities for changing familial power and opportunities to become a 'bad' mother.

Mrs. Hunter has to 'care' for her children and prepare them for autonomy and responsible citizenship. Excessive control is deemed psychologically harmful and

constitutive of 'bad' mothering. Insufficient control is equated with lack of care. In this complexity, we find telephones:

**SCENE 429. INT. LIVING RM. HUNTER HOUSE, EVENING**

MRS. HUNTER PUTS THE PHONE DOWN CLEARLY FED UP.  
SHE PICKS UP THE REMOTE CONTROL FOR THE TV AND  
SWITCHES ON. SHE GETS TELETEXT. IT IS SCRAMBLED.

**MRS. HUNTER:**

Whatever...? The world's gone mad...

WE SEE THE INDEPENDENT LYING NEARBY, AND THE  
HEADLINE: "RESEARCH SHOWS THAT THINKING IS BAD  
FOR THE BRAIN"

LLOYD AND HARVEY ENTER

**MRS. HUNTER:**

Oh there you are! Just look at that!

THEY LOOK AT THE SCREEN

**LLOYD:**

Scrambled!

**MRS. HUNTER:**

You have a go Harvey.

**HARVEY: (TAKES THE CONTROL)**

The magic touch!

HE CARRIES ON FIDDLING VAINLY WITH CONTROL

**MRS HUNTER:**

Where's Dinah?

**LLOYD:**

Oh. She sent you this.

HANDS OVER NOTE

**MRS HUNTER:**

Staying overnight? She might have asked!

**LLOYD:**

What, telephoned?

**MRS HUNTER:**

Well yes. But she could've tried...

[Copyright BBC: Extract episode 4 scene 429]

Here is a de-scription of telephones that points to delegation of parental control/care. When Mrs. Hunter's telephone fails it is a prosthetic that fails. A technology that she can enrol in organising space, social relations and children's movement. Telephones



have become embedded domestic technologies that enable spatial distancing between parent and child whilst maintaining social proximity. Failing telephones require considerable effort to repair – not only in technological terms but also in social terms.

In contemporary society, telephones are now a *natural* means by which folk communicate. Furthermore, as with doors, they are mechanisms that fold and extend time and space [Latour 1992]. One cannot simply remove these technologies, they are linchpins of social life: everyday technologies of liberation and regulation. When phones fail, Dinah uses paper-based notes to maintain social connection. From Mrs. Hunter's point of view, such notes are inadequate in their performances of motherly control. Firstly, note-child-mother networks do time differently from phone-child-mother ones. Note-time slows everything down and, unlike phone calls, a paper note is historical – it is not received as it is being written. So, time shifts frustrate Mrs. Hunter, and note-time is out of sync with the way she *does* motherhood. Secondly, notes are simplex forms of communication and motherhood is 'best' done in duplex. Notes tend to enact a very basic model of communication – a sequence of turn taking such as 'D sends a note to M' and 'M then replies'. Sluggish, time-delayed and simplex communications do not 'fit' contemporary mother-child situations. Mrs. Hunter has come to perform mothering of her children in a material context that involves the delegation of real-time control to technological artifacts other than pen and paper.

In Storyworld, the failure of the telephones that has changed mother-child performances is closely related to another misbehaviour: the performances of television. I have chosen to include this Storyworld problem as it illustrates how the scale and scope of networks changes in everyday action.

I begin when Mrs. Hunter connects the frustrating failure of telephones with some other technological 'problems'. Mrs. Hunter's television is not behaving as it ought.

**SCENE 429. INT. LIVING RM. HUNTER HOUSE, EVENING**

MRS. HUNTER PUTS THE PHONE DOWN CLEARLY FED UP  
SHE PICKS UP THE REMOTE CONTROL OR THE TV AND  
SWITCHES ON. SHE GETS TELETEXT. IT IS SCRAMBLED.

...

...

**MRS. HUNTER:**

Well, yes. But she could've tried... she really is getting too involved up  
at the University. There's masses to do here. And I really don't need all  
this...

GESTURES VAGUELY, MEANING PHONE AND THE TV

...

**ANNOUNCER:**

For contractual reasons we are not able to bring you the early evening  
news. Instead, and a little earlier than published, we make "Your Wildest  
Dreams" come true.

**MRS HUNTER: (APOPLECTIC WITH DISBELIEF)**

The news? Can't show the news???

**HARVEY:**

P'raps there isn't any.

**LLOYD:**

Oh, very droll.

**MRS HUNTER:**

I keep thinking... oh I don't know...

**HARVEY:**

What, Mum ?

**MRS HUNTER:**

Oh it's silly. But that it may mean something awful's happened, and  
they're not telling us ...

**HARVEY:**

Like what...? Not like Chernobyl or something?

**MRS HUNTER:**

Oh, I'm being silly.

IN THE SILENCE WE HEAR THE HOST OF "YOUR WILDEST  
DREAMS"

[Copyright BBC: Extract from episode 4 scene 429]

The telephone network has now expanded to incorporate far more than the domestic  
sphere. In one situation, Mrs. Hunter is irritated with Dinah for failing to keep to the  
established order and in another she is suspicious of her own relationship with an  
undefined 'them': the hidden they of 'they're not telling us'. Interestingly, it is the

misbehaviour of national television, coupled with the local disruption of ‘all this’, that transforms a domestic situation into an international one.

Technological misbehaviour is subtler than complete failure and represents a rather teasing tendency of technology to appear as if it could act appropriately whilst stubbornly refusing to comply. In this case, lights flash, buttons respond and some broadcasts are received but not the ones that the consumer wants or expects. In the above transcript domestic consumer expectation is for news broadcasts but they find ‘news’ substituted by a ‘game show’. It is this substitution that raises concern in the Hunter household and focuses attention on political awareness and practice in Storyworld. It is again referred to in a later encounter when the children discuss these technological problems:

**SCENE 523. INT. CYBERCAFE, DAY**

...

...

**DINAH:**

I should’ve guessed. It all fits. He’s in control of everything now... and everyone else is in the dark.

**MANDY:**

Which is why the phones are down.

**HARVEY:**

And all the libraries shut...

**LLOYD:**

And nothing on telly but stupid game shows.

[Copyright BBC: Extract episode 5 scene 523]

Both the game show and the news are active agents in The Headmaster’s pursuit of power. As the villain seeks social control he struggles to control access to knowledge by closing libraries, interrupting telephone networks, controlling computer networks and gate-keeping television broadcasts. The children understand these links between communication, knowledge, information and freedom. Here is the overtly political and strongly Orwellian account of Storyworld.

The children's understanding of connections between knowledge, communication, media and social control was forged in experience. They tried to find out information at libraries and found them closed. They experienced the effects of broken phones and half-working television. They have discovered that only certain technology works and only certain forms of information are available. Even their experience of entertainment is now politicised: "...nothing on telly but stupid game shows".

In action and experience, the children know a great deal about television-human relations. They understand genre classification systems and the work that goes into distinguishing between television news broadcasts and game shows. Not only is there a classification system here, it is one with implied values – 'stupid game shows'. It could be considered that this categorization is simplistic and represents a mundane bourgeois split between high and low culture. Such a split attributes high status to news, documentary and classic fiction status and low status to popular forms such as game shows, cartoons and the like. However, knowing the classification system is not the same as doing the classification.

Observing the children using television in Storyworld, I find their knowledge of television categories wrapped up in material and social activity. Audiences are active and not only in terms of cognitive work that they undertake as they 'watch'. They are physically and socially active as they talk about the programme, attempt to make phone calls, listen and watch all at the same time. Television consumption in Storyworld is a complex and shifting experience [Messenger-Davies 1997, 2001, Silverstone 1994 and Ang 1991, 1996] – in my terms it is conversational and situated. In this case television is an unfinished project and politics of programming subverted by audience. For, even if gameshows are 'stupid', we have an audience that can read between those well understood lines. And, in this case, reading is action and social.

In summary, examining everyday performances in Storyworld we find spaces inhabited by active and powerful agents both human and non-human. These are agents who are bound up in seamless relationships and associations that make each a feature of the other: hybrids neither human nor non-human but network. In the above vignettes I have demonstrated that Storyworld actors perform their multiple identities situations that are, at the same time, fragile and robust.

Inevitably, questions of order/disorder occur across all aspects of life in Storyworld and I have selected here some particular fragments of ordering and some particular locations to consider mechanisms of order and resistance. However, I will demonstrate, similar and different kinds of order appear as I shift our location toward science.

### **Science/society**

Science is a central concern in both Storyworld and ANT. Hence, it is likely that science will offer some interesting (if not common) ground between these two storytelling domains. This section explores this *interesting* terrain. My starting point was ANT and those approaches to science study that take a ‘close up’ look at science in practice. Studies that foreground practices and relations that hitherto remained background. In this context, I have already summoned Latour and Woolgar [1979] to illustrate the power of ethnographic approaches in de-scribing laboratory behaviours. In particular, I referenced the insight they offered in describing laboratory work in textual terms – rendering literary inscription and representational practices as sociologically and politically important to the construction of scientific facts.

In pursuing laboratory ethnography Latour [1987] develops a sense of science as performance. In this context, *doing* science is translated as hybridised human/non-

human net work. Mobility is raised as an issue in examining multiple performances of science in action. A cross situational account emerges full of situated difference.

The equipment necessary to travel through science and technology is at once light and multiple. Multiple because it means mixing hydrogen bonds with deadlines, the probing of one another's authority with money, debugging and bureaucratic style; but the equipment is also light because it means simply leaving aside all prejudices about what distinguishes the context in which knowledge is embedded and this knowledge itself. [Latour 1987: 6]

In examining science in action, Latour focuses on both textual strategies and material performances. Of particular interest here is that in pursuing the construction of scientific facts, he shrinks and expands his network cut to relate economies of knowledge production, representation, materiality, cost and argumentation:

The competition between scientists – whom I will treat in this section as alternately authors and dissenters – to turn one another's claims into subjective opinion leads to expensive laboratories equipped with more and more black boxes introduced as early as possible into the discussion. [Latour 1987: 83]

Science is no longer perceived as a straightforward activity removed from social action but is social action. A site of human behaviour, science is cross cut with multiple performances of facts, careers, practice and truth.

In fieldwork, I found parallels between the science that Latour observes in his ethnographies and my encounters in Storyworld. In the following section, I demonstrate that Storyworld science is social, political, ambiguous and active. I begin by referring back to a fieldwork encounter that I used earlier: namely the encounter between Dinah, the Major and Claudia that took place across the

barricade. The encounters at the barricade are revisited and developed with ‘science’ in mind. Tracing science across the barricades reveals research as both special and cushy practice. Leaving the barricade behind, I then move to an internal location to consider performances of science, space and place played out in Storyworld laboratory life – and beyond. In examining changing practices in Storyworld science life, science is considered as regulated mangles of practice.

### *Crossing the barricade – and beyond*

When Dinah stood at the barricade demanding access to the BRC, her argument was based on an appeal to both science and research. So, enter one of the great performances of science, Research – with a capital R. Research is found in a variety of locations in Storyworld and appears in both ‘predictable’ locations such as ‘University’ and ‘Laboratory’ and at the barricades, in Dinah’s home, in the CyberCafe and in Michael’s home.

Typically, these locations suggest both similar and different performances of science and research. For example, when Claudia and Dinah took on the British Army in the name of research they enacted not only a link between research and science but also their belief in the value of research. But, out of the same incident, we heard Mrs. Hunter assert that “there are things more important than scientific research”. At this time, Dinah chose science over family: a poor value judgment in Mrs. Hunter’s view. So, across the barricade and in the Hunter home, Professor Rowe, Dinah and her mother play out tangles of home-child-parent-science relationships that directly relate to issues of value, duty and morality. Dinah’s identity is located in this mix.

Whilst Mrs. Hunter, Dinah and Claudia enact particular domestic, aspirant and professional accounts of science theirs are not the only account of research that we find at the barricade. For instance, the Major has an interesting take on research, one he uses to bait Claudia as they negotiate ‘crossing the barricade’:

**SCENE 126. EXT. BRC, DAY.**

...

...

**MAJOR:**

Here we are, then. How long will it take?

**CLAUDIA:**

Hard to say, till we get inside.

**MAJOR:**

Yeah – before we go in ... remember, nothing is to be touched, apart from the creeper.

Where will you be sending the samples?

**CLAUDIA:**

Oh – I’ll be taking them back with me – to the University of Wessex. There’s a lot of work needs to be done on them.

**MAJOR:**

Nice cushy number that, I’m told – Research.

**CLAUDIA: (NETTLED)**

Well it might not look where the action is to you, but it is important! This is evolution we’re talking about. Anyway, all knowledge is vital...

[Copyright BBC: Extract episode 1 scene 126]

Professionally, the Major needs to know where the samples are going and to what purpose. His questions thus represent relationships between science, state, military and society. Yet, whilst these questions are professional and situated, his closing gambit is more complex. When the Major speaks of research as a ‘cushy number’, his tone and posture is no longer professional military but condescending and conversational. Claudia’s response is earnest and forceful. The Major’s observation had touched a raw nerve and required a direct reply.

The military barrier provided a backdrop for a conversation between science and some of its others. Each actor brought all sorts of knowledge, experiences and values to that encounter and their actions and speech both construct and subvert situation.

***Space and place***

Ethnographically, I encountered Storyworld science in a number of locations. However, encounters in ‘professional’ spaces such as laboratory, artificial



intelligence unit and scientist's offices were particularly interesting as they compare well with sociological studies of scientific practice. So, I now turn attention to questions of space and place and begin with science as 'laboratory' practice.

The 'professional' location for Storyworld science is the University of Wessex. Initially, within the confines of the university, science appears ordered and orderly. The campus is sign posted and scientists have special locations in which to work that are readily identifiable as 'science'. For example there are spaces identified as research Units, office space such as Professor Dexter's room, laboratory spaces such as Claudia's work space and the Hyperbrain Lab. These spaces have natural inhabitants such as computers, microscopes, brain-charting equipment, laboratory coats, AI interfaces, sample canisters and texts. So, laboratory spaces are named, physically bounded and readily identifiable as different from domestic and public spaces of home, street and CyberCafe.

In laboratory space terms, Storyworld science is clean and secured. So, what are these science folk doing in such spaces? Well, Claudia has been researching plant growth but, as she explained to Dinah in the car, the real **buzz** at the University is Tim Dexter's project, Hyperbrain. This project was gaining a lot of interest and funds. Buzz, interest and funding issues translate science from clinical space to energetic activity. This sense of science as action is visible in an encounter between Michael, Dinah and Claudia in Claudia's office. For me, this particular encounter is interesting for a number of reasons – not least that children are in a research scientists office in first place. However, what I found particularly interesting in this exchange was Michael angry outburst and Claudia's response:

**SCENE 209 INT. CLAUDIA'S OFFICE, UNIVERSITY, DAY.**

...

...

**MICHAEL: (LEAVING BURSTS OUT)**

Hyperbrain's the top thing round here! What's the big deal – just a load of creepers!

HE GOES OUT

**DINAH:**

Did I say something?

**CLAUDIA:**

Nothing to do with you, Dinah. Honestly. His Mum's away, and his Dad's hardly ever here. Just lonely, I guess.

**DINAH:**

Oh Right.

**CLAUDIA:**

In fact, he could do with a friend (SMILES AT DINAH). Don't get me wrong – his dad's a lovely guy - when he's on the same planet.

...

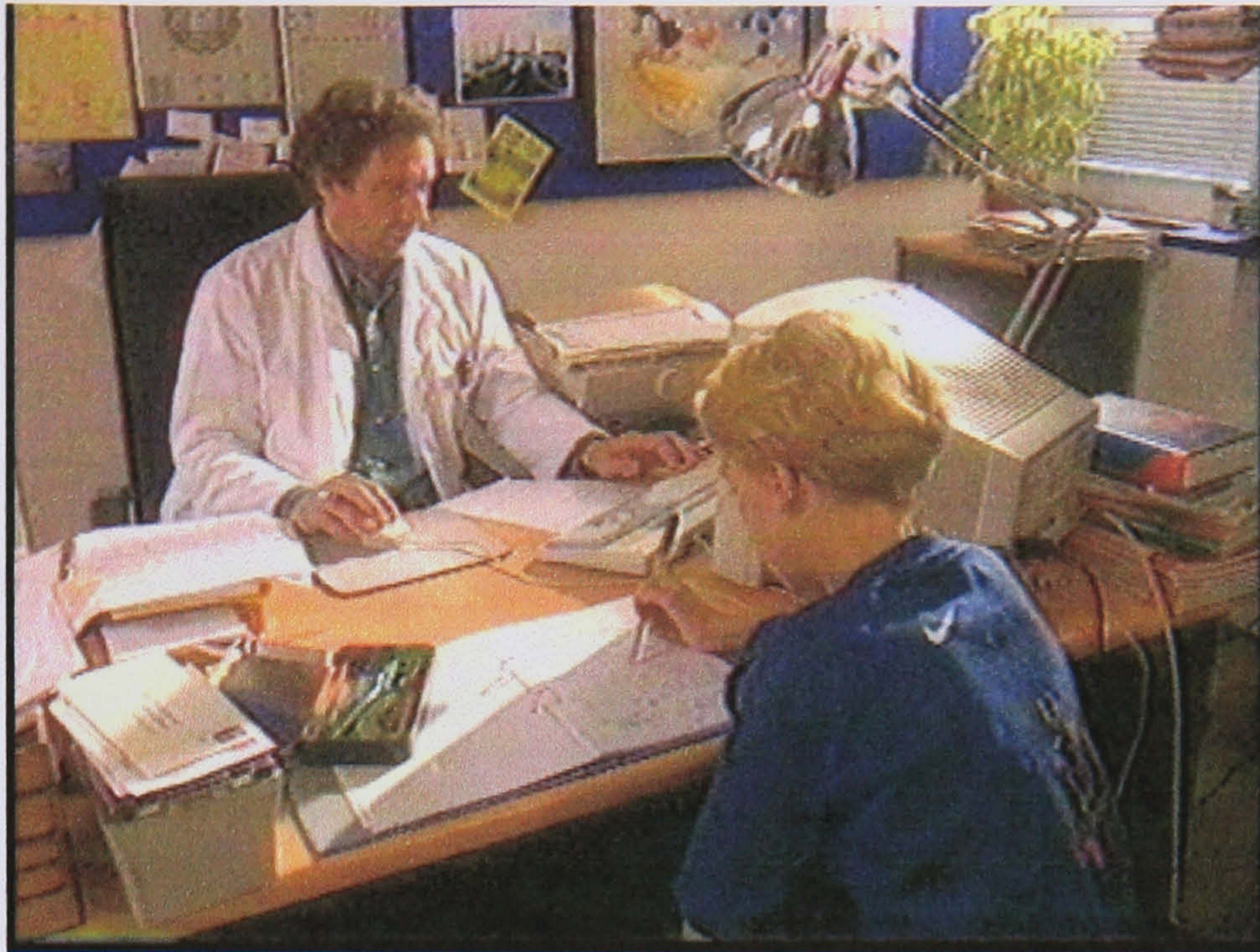
[Copyright BBC: Extract episode 2 scene 209]

Michael's outburst follows from Dinah's interest in Claudia's research on the creepers. This lively exchange between Dinah, Michael and Claudia reveal identity performances that cross cut the limited framework of the laboratory. The clinical setting is a space for Claudia to perform professional science and, microscopes, professorial title and sample slides fill her space and frame movement. But, in interaction she also performs gentle, caring, softly spoken friend of two children, competitor for scarce resources and empathetic observer of a colleague's 'vague' practice.

In the simple encounters across the barricade and in Claudia's laboratory we find multiple tales of science. Science is... special, cushy, friendly, competitive, buzz, material, clinical, crucial, research, vital and less important than some things. And, there is more.

### *Saints and sinners: science and scientists*

Laboratory space can be seen as a frail construct: a durable yet flexible space for situated performance, subversion and transgression. I noted this in particular watching Michael and his father in Dexter's office. In video still 1, we see Michael and his father, Tim, in Tim's office at the University. Tim is working late on his Project, Hyperbrain. Michael is there and, he too, is working at his father's desk:



*Video Still 1 Tim Dexter's Office [BBC 1998]*

At first glance, Dexter's office is what we would expect in situational and spatial terms: walls, doors, computers, telephones, notice boards, laboratory coats, printers and lamps. There is also a rather nice 'house' plant that provides both a homely and natural bridge in an otherwise clinical setting.

The plant is of little consequence here, as humans often bring 'nature' into internal workspace. On the other hand, Michael is a more overt and radical transgression of space and place: a child in (scientific) workspace. By allowing/bringing Michael into this workplace, Tim characterises his own performance of science in particular ways. For example we have Tim as scientist, Professor and Dad all in one sitting. As Michael domesticates his father's workspace, in their easy interaction, Tim becomes a certain sort of scientist: a gentle dad.

Tim is a loving and caring man but otherworldly and prone to vagueness. As his housekeeper says, he is a chap who ... "Doesn't even know what day it is, 'alf the time... You met the Professor, dear?... Ever so clever, just not all there – if you pardon me saying." [Episode 5 scene 505]. So, this expert scientist is also nicely

'odd'. Part of this strangeness is wrapped up in his commitment to science. Observing Tim, I found a man who performs science as, at best preoccupation and, at worst, obsession.

The personal character of science/scientists is explored in academic literature of Science Fiction and Horror in Tudor [1989]. In this account, Tudor offers a useful review of various forms of science practice that range from mad, bad and dangerous to paternal and noble. These 'characterisations' have some use here and, on the evidence presented to date, I could say that in Storyworld Tim tends to *do* science as forgetful Dad whilst Claudia is approachable professional. However, this is too simplistic and closer inspection of Storyworld scientists raises a more networky character of scientific interaction.

Visiting laboratory spaces revealed variety in performances of scientist. Claudia embodies science as cool, competent, professional, socially aware and caring and Tim does his science as a vague, forgetful and brilliant chap. In both Tim and Claudia science is human activity but activity that can be *done* differently by different folk. Interestingly, there are parallels here between Storyworld and STS and in both we find that human, material and spatial relations are raised as constitutive of scientific labour. However, Storyworld also recognises and subverts adult/child boundary of laboratory life. The absent presence of the child that establishes this boundary in ANT studies of laboratory life is dissolved as children take physical presence in Storyworld laboratory life.

### ***Regulated mangles***

Deep field ethnography required that I stay in Storyworld for some time. In that time I was able to observe ambiguous, contradictory and changing practices. One change I noted came when observing relationships between Michael, his Father and the Laboratory. In early encounters I found Michael was at home in laboratory space

and Tim could easily mix dad and scientist. However, this order changed. In the following brief vignette I represent an encounter between Michael, his father, the laboratory and the Headmaster. In this interaction a new order is played out and the laboratory is transformed into a site of special adult action:

**SCENE 303. INT. DEXTER'S LABORATORY, UNIVERSITY, NIGHT.**

...

...

**DEMON HEADMASTER:** (TO MICHAEL)

I think it's time you went home.

**MICHAEL:** (PROTESTS)

But I wanted to stay till Dad –

**DEMON HEADMASTER:**

This is no place for a child

...

...

[Copyright BBC: Extract episode 3 scene 303]

In this dialogic interaction, hitherto absent boundaries are established. Lines are drawn that connect science and adults whilst excluding children. The child's place is identified as home not work. Hence boundaries are established that classify science in terms of adult labour. The laboratory is now no place for a child. Michael has lost the authority to roam the University at will as he is forced to accept the spatial adult/child boundary that The Headmaster draws.

Another interesting opportunity to observe change came in following interactions around a planned conference. As Latour and Woolgar noted [1979], publication is one form of special performance that characterises scientific research practice. Publication represents participation in communities of practice. As such, writing, publication and participating in conferences all involve scientists in identity work of one kind or another. Storyworld scientists were planning a conference. Initially, the conference was intended as a traditional meeting of community members. Tim was the conference organiser, and both he and Claudia were presenting papers. In their discussion they made it clear that this conference was to be their opportunity for

presenting their on-going research. The conference was to raise public and professional awareness as folk networked with potential patrons, collaborators and competitors – in other words a typical conference. The intervention of the Headmaster changed the conference. However, under the control of the Headmaster, Tim dropped Claudia's paper from the event and invited the media to attend. Claudia was furious and she attempted a show down with Tim – to no avail. The conference was changing, and it was about to become a site for quite radical practice.

Observations made at the conference raise some interesting points. Firstly, Tim looks unusually smart – he is obviously somewhere special taking a special role. Secondly, given the range of delegates, this event appears to be about academics working in communities that extend beyond the local workplace. Thirdly, following the dialogue interactions, it appears that (normally) scientists work in liberal-moral communities that value notions of progress and freedom:

**SCENE 222. INT. CONFERENCE HALL, UNIVERSITY, DAY**

THE DEMON HEAD IS SPEAKING. DURING THIS FIRST PART THE AUDIENCE BECOME INCREASINGLY RESTIVE, WHISPERING TO ONE ANOTHER AND REGISTERING DISAGREEMENT.

**DEMON HEADMASTER:**

Your are all scientist. You all have curiosity about the world you live in. That is good. Without it there would be no progress. Professor Dexter has told you of his work on Hyperbrain. This is a huge breakthrough, a landmark in history.

Now all human knowledge can be gathered in one place ... and, eventually, in the hands of one person ... But what of ... ordinary people ... the great mass of human beings...? What of them? They know too little – and too much. A little learning is a dangerous thing.

MURMURINGS

Curiosity is the Curse of the Human Brain.

“RUBBISH” AND “NO!”

It leads to endless trouble, endless complications.

THE MURMURINGS GROW LOUDER.

The demon head sees that he is losing them. He holds up his hand to silence them. He removes his glasses.

[Copyright BBC: Extract episode 2 scene 222]

In the above interaction, the Orwellian overtones are clear, as is the elitist/deficit model of lay knowledge. However, here too are ‘other’ accounts. The mumbling, grumbling of dissent, the cat calls, the anger – all point to other meanings of science and lay knowledge. The normative model here is of a liberal community. The threat is from the Demon headmaster.

On a different point, although conferences imply exchange and collusion, studying Storyworld science I found practice to be more complex. The conference represented collaborating communities working toward similar goals but in practice, this is counterpoised by evidence of scientific knowledge production as competitive and emotional practices. For instance, Tim’s work on artificial intelligence had ‘progressed’ at a steady but slow rate; it seemed that this Project was to be his life’s work. However, once the scientific community of AI researchers are under the thrall of the Headmaster, the Hyperbrain Project moved forward in leaps and bounds. Collaboration was ‘exceptional’. Perhaps the evil regulation of the Headmaster has its uses?

In this context, another encounter with Michael suggested a different account of normative collaborative science. A slightly darker one than that represented by the outrage at the conference. In this case I found that the liberal ethic of collaboration was connected to more individualistic practices: competition and credit. In this encounter, I traced Michael to the CyberCafe where he explained his concerns about his father to Lloyd. His explanation focuses on careerism and cheating:

**SCENE 415. INT. CYBERCAFE, DAY**

...

...

**MICHAEL:**

That man wants to get control of Hyperbrain! He said so. He said Dad left him in charge.

**LLOYD:**

He always is in charge.

**MICHAEL:**

And I bet I know why! He's found out about Dad's research - and about the new way you can talk to Hyperbrain. And he wanted to get all the credit!

[Copyright BBC: Extract episode 4 scene 415]

It is interesting to consider the possibilities that are opened up in this small snatch of dialogue between children. Removed from both laboratory and home Michael introduces desire and kudos into scientific knowledge production. He knows that in science, knowledge is produced alongside careers, dreams, acclaim, prestige and personal power. Science is social practice that produces 'precious' goods: that is, scientific knowledge is a commodity with use and value and, so, subject to appropriation, theft and ransom.

The commodification of scientific knowledge is also represented in a number of encounters that I observed that debated/performed institutional regulation. Indeed, some of the most direct accounts of science as ethical practice take place in interactions between Tim and the Headmaster. For example, as the Headmaster begins to understand the potential of the Hyperbrain project we find that, even when hypnotically conditioned, Tim is shocked by the Headmaster's beliefs:

**SCENE 203. INT. DEXTER'S OFFICE, UNIVERSITY, NIGHT.**

THE BLINDS ARE DOWN AND THE SCENE IS LIT BY ONLY ONE LIGHT. TIM IS BEING DEBRIEFED BY THE DEMON HEAD, AND SPEAKS AS IF SLIGHTLY UNDER.

...

...

**DEMON HEADMASTER:**

Hyperbrain...?

**TIM DEXTER:**

My project. Artificial Intelligence. I've been working on it for years.

**DEMON HEADMASTER:**

And ...what does this Hyperbrain do?

**TIM DEXTER:**

It will be connected to universities, libraries, research programmes.... Pools of knowledge worldwide. And that's not all. It will not only possess all this knowledge, it will be able to process it ... use it ...



**DEMON HEADMASTER** (HALF TO SELF, REMEMBERING SMITH'S WORDS)

And knowledge is of prime importance ... You will then have world domination.

**TIM DEXTER** (SHOCKED, DESPITE GLAZED STATE)

No! No! That's a wrong use for such a powerful machine.

THE DEMON HEAD REMOVES HIS GLASSES

And even if I wanted to it would be impossible. You would have to control more people than even Hyperbrain could reach. It can't have eyes everywhere....

[Copyright BBC: Extract scene 203 episode 2]

The shock Tim feels at a despotic mis-use of a powerful machine shakes him to the core. In that moment, absent-minded Tim is a strong and moral character. We meet similar situations on a number of occasions. For example, when the Headmaster suggests to Tim that he use Smith as a guinea pig in DBA experiments, and again when Claudia's hypnotic programming is undermined when Mrs. Hunter is subjected to Direct Brain Access. Hence, Storyworld scientists are, in essence, wholesome, kind and good. However, they are also vulnerable. In this context, it was interesting to observe that although scientists appear to be good, they talk a great deal about external forms of scientific regulation. The reference to institutional regulation is relevant here as it establishes control beyond the individual.

**SCENE 210. INT. DEXTER'S LABORATORY, UNIVERSITY, DAY.**

...

...

**DEMON HEADMASTER:**

Could I, for instance, feed your own brain's store of information?

TIM OPENS VISOR AND GETS UP

**TIM DEXTER:**

Good grief no! Well, in theory I suppose – but where would that leave me? Like a two year old, probably.

**DEMON HEADMASTER:**

So ... Information from the human brain could be taken out...

**TIM DEXTER:**

But think, of it man – it's horrible.

**DEMON HEADMASTER:**

But possible...

**TIM DEXTER:**

Don't worry. It'll never happen. Not until it's been proved safe. The Board of Ethics would nip it in the bud before I even got of the ground – thank the Lord.

**DEMON HEADMASTER:**

It would be interesting, though, to see how it would be done. Perhaps you had better show me.

HE TAKES OFF HIS GLASSES. BUT TIM IS SHAKING HIS HEAD.

**TIM DEXTER:**

Can't I'm afraid. I told you – at present it can only scan the brain. Direct Access to the human brain could be years away...

[Copyright BBC: Extract episode 2 scene 209]

Whilst being a 'good scientist' Tim also acknowledges that personal ethics are contingent rather than fixed or absolute. Contingency brings uncertainty and risk. When Tim 'thanks the Lord' that the Board of Ethics would nip errant behaviour 'in the bud before I even got of the ground' he is science as **human** performance: moral and flawed [my italics]. As Tim succumbs to hypnotism and unwittingly becomes a tool of the Headmaster's plan for world domination, vulnerability becomes explicit and science net work.

## **Humans/non-humans**

To conclude this ethnography of Storyworld I want to focus attention on another boundary that has importance in both ANT and Storyworld: namely the human/non-human boundary.

In chapter 1, I showed that a focus on material performativity leads ANT researchers to apply considerable pressure to cherished concepts, categories and classification systems. One crucial category pressured in empirical work is that which distinguishes humans from others. In examining human performances, boundary work is de-scribed, and in the process, notions of identity are extended to incorporate non-human actions in hybrid agency.

Under pressure from ANT, the apparently natural boundary of human body dissolves in favour of hybrid networks represented in *technoscience* by notions such as Cyborg, prosthetic and actant. I have already illustrated Storyworld as cyber-organisation in accounting Mrs. Hunter's telephone prosthetic performances of mother. Indeed, I have written a number of networky material relations into everyday life in Storyworld and, crucially, these ethnographic interpretations are understood and accepted in Storyworld. Hence, Storyworld and ANT appear to align. However, when it comes to certain human/non-human boundary work the common ground tends to give way somewhat and, boundaries that are blurred to the point of dissolution in ANT are, in Storyworld, both blurred and reinforced.

In examining the ambiguity of human/non-human boundaries in Storyworld, I focus on two individuals whose performance work to establish boundaries between humans and others: these are The Demon Headmaster and Hyperbrain. I take as my starting point the issue of names. Ethnographic work revealed that naming is an overtly political issue for both the Headmaster and Hyperbrain. As the politics of names are developed the 'demon' nature of the Headmaster is discussed, and the shifting names of Hyperbrain considered. As Hyperbrain becomes 'The Lady', a particular form of non-human, I refocus this study, raising corporeality, imagination and 'human' performance.

### *Naming*

There was in fact a first violence to be named. To name, to give names, that it will be on occasions forbidden to pronounce, such is the originary violence of language which consists in inscribing within a difference, in classifying, in suspending the vocative absolute

[Derrida 1976:]

Names and naming are critical actors in any type of theorising, be it mundane or professional. Take, for example, social science; it could be argued that in social

science work we hold names as commodities with both use and value. Not only do we place great value in our ability to name folk - as in [Bloggs 1066:0] - we also name our theories and theoretical constructs: such as Feminism, Ethnomethodology, ANT, Class, Actant, Hybrid and so on.

Whatever one's particular theoretical bent, a social scientist deals in names. For instance, we are fascinated by the named world that our subjects move through and we often learn the vocabulary of their worlds as we explore. Sometimes we try to directly present their worlds – appropriating their local language – nouns and all. At other time we knowingly translate their world and rename it, spending a considerable amount of effort in classifying and reclassifying – naming and renaming. In the process of interpretation we change experience into such newly named beings as class, gender, child, organisation, race or identity. The choices we make in naming are more than aesthetic choices between words; they are profound choices that represent our identity as social scientists. Our professional languages of naming are finely tuned to allow us to carefully and seriously play at **doing** social science of one sort or another. To be named is to be known: and it is hardly surprising, then, that many of the great and good have exerted considerable effort in distancing themselves from the names ascribed to them by others [Law 1997b, 1999b, Latour 1999].

Let me use an example slightly less close to home to clarify. In constructive studies of technology, social processes of technological closure involve linguistic process of naming. Pinch's study of bicycles [1987] suggests that when 'open' to interpretation, artifacts may have numerous names but, over time, social process work to reduce interpretive flexibility to 'close' around an artifact. Eventually, such processes of closure work until the artifact becomes fixed in its place by name and use.

In theorising closure, a close relationship is established between being named and being known: for instance we can name our domestic technologies and so, we know

them – this is a microwave, this a PC and, this a shower. Names are significant actors that allow us to identify, discriminate and determine appropriate place and action. Names and naming serve to close interpretative possibilities and to frame meaning and use: such as this is a telephone not a toy.

In fairness to social constructivist theory, I should add that in their account, closure is a never-completed process: such theorising acknowledges slippage as part of language. Nonetheless, in discursive constructivist theorising, names are central to closure. In such closure we identify objects and usage and discriminate between objects in useful and meaningful ways.

In Storyworld, naming proved sociologically relevant in encounters with The Demon Headmaster. Firstly, although named by others as The Demon Headmaster, he does not know or recognise himself by any name. In this way he has a particular status in that he is both named and nameless. Secondly, named as demon headmaster he points to boundaries between human and inhuman behaviours. Finally, in his performances he is able to show that naming and names have significance beyond being direct referents – they are technologies in cyber-organisation.

I begin with the first utterances of the Headmaster as he emerges newly cloned from the evolution accelerator:

**SCENE 117. INT. LABORATORY, BRC, DAY (1400)**

DEMON HEADMASTER IS OUTSIDE THE EVOLUTION  
ACCELERATOR. HE LOOKS BLANKLY ABOUT HIM

WE HARDLY RECOGNISE HIM AS THE DEMON  
HEADMASTER

HE LOOKS LIKE A NORMAL HUMAN BEING OR EVEN LIKE  
A CHILD

HE IS REBORN INTO A WORLD THAT IS UTTERLY ALIEN

HE LOOKS DOWN AT HIS HANDS

HE MOVES HESITANTLY

**COMPUTER VOICE:**

Name?

**DEMON HEADMASTER:**

I am a human being... and I am not alone... but who am I – who am I?

[Copyright BBC. Extract episode 1 scene 117]

Here then are direct connections between identity, name and humanness. The question “who am I?” will haunt the Headmaster throughout Storyworld as he struggles to control a society without the power of a name. Observing the interaction/action in the above vignette, we find a double edge to the importance of names. The first involves a simple request made by a computer voice – name? The second is more emotional - the Headmaster experiences hesitancy, insecurity and confusion that come from lack of self-knowledge. Finally, he labels himself as a human being. To be human is to be named; to be named is both an act of violence and an act of incorporation.

Being nameless offers considerable scope for playing the naming game. As he moves into action he takes a new name for himself: the Controller. In taking a name by which to be known, and through which to act, he creates space for himself. This particular name works to label him as one with organisational power-over others. By choosing a name that carries authority he uses the name as a referent to bring authority to himself. So, it is that ‘he’ is always **title** and never Mr. Anyone. He is not named to signify person-hood but power.

Psychoanalytic interpretations of names and naming in fiction point towards the importance of naming and identity. Drawing heavily on Irigary and Kristeva, these accounts focus on the uses of names in both coming to know oneself by given name and as a recognition of ones uniqueness in social organisations [Salinger 1988: 9-22]. The violence here is that to recognise oneself in name is to be someone rather than something, but to named is to be identified as a person and fixed in networks of human relations such as kinship and friendship. If one accepts that identity predates naming – then being given a name is truly a violent act. It cuts our options down and closes ‘us’].

Lacking the fixing and ‘trapping’ of a familial given name situates the headmaster as other. He is rootless. It is this lack that the children focus on when they first name him. Whilst he might give himself transient titles such as controller or director, he is always the **demon** headmaster.

The suggested link between being named and being known is worked through in naming this distant and disturbing figure. Hence, translating an unknown threat into a particular **type** of known other is part of the children’s resistance. In naming **him** as demonic the children point to the inhuman nature of his actions. In choosing their name they, too, focus on his will to power. However, they also name him in relation to his actions – not solely his desire. In so doing they are interpreting him as other than human by reference to the inhuman. He is demonic - not non-human or alien.

The focus on difference that is represented in **his** name is spiritual rather than biological. He is known as inhuman, outside traditional human relationships and as that which is **identifiably** different. Naming is important in establishing this villain as an arch-villain and in fixing and situating his actions. Here then, in a Demon Headmaster, we have a fantastic villain who acts on and across boundaries of human behaviour. It would appear that evil is the nature of the man. And that brings me to the point of being human or being other.

The human characters have all gone through processes of coming to terms with being named. The humans are quite happy to introduce themselves by name – and use name as a significant referent of who they are and the family networks that confine their lives. In Storyworld, names are natural and understated in human-human dialogue. The sophisticated distinctions that humans use in naming are tacit: humans are competent users of names.

Another way of looking at this is by reference to partial connections. Dinah is particularly interesting in this respect. In ‘doing’ Dinah, she is continuously, partially and temporarily fixed through being named as girl, daughter, scientist,

adventurer, sister, friend, adversary, key and secret society member. In accounting naming and identity, the children point to variety and situation and to the violence of naming of which Derrida speaks. However, in situated performance one can subvert or rework the meaning of names and whilst to be named is to be positioned, to act is to be.

The relationship between naming and *Hyperbrain* is both similar and different. In this case, naming points to differences between this form of non-human and human others. The boundary device being between nature and invention. However, *Hyperbrain* is a complex individual who changed significantly during the course of my time in Storyworld. Indeed, in many respect *Hyperbrain* is more similar to humans than the Headmaster. Just as Dinah is identified in names such as daughter, child, adult, and friend, *Hyperbrain* is positioned by different names. For example **she** is represented across both time and situations in ways that vary from Research Project, to Machine, to a Voice, a beauty, a Lady and she. In these shifting identifiers we find *Hyperbrain* shifts from one form of non-human to another. Tracking these names and processes of naming helps to illustrate more general boundaries that are constructed between human and machine.

Unlike the Headmaster, *Hyperbrain* does come to know **herself** by name and this self-knowledge is an act of liberation and transformation. In coming into 'being' her changing names are symbolically and practically meaningful.

In early observations, she is introduced as a research project into Artificial Intelligence. Research projects are collectives and processes rather than either a thing or entity that can be named and identified [Latour 1996]. Project is a portmanteau term that holds within it a variety of relationships, experiences and events and, at this stage, *Hyperbrain* is an unspecified distributed collective. Given the lack of identity that comes from being aggregation rather than individual, in early ethnographic encounters, *Hyperbrain* is both difficult to recognise and voiceless. In



this situation, Hyperbrain cannot represent herself and, consequently, she is most clearly present in the performances of others.

I have already cited examples in which Michael, Claudia and Tim use their own frames of reference to explain the Hyperbrain project. At this stage, Hyperbrain is what other folk name it and different characters represent this Project differently. For example, on the basis of her experiences with the project Claudia uses the buzz of Hyperbrain to explain to Dinah certain political economics of research. Tim has a research vision that translates the project into a personal scientific quest: Hyperbrain is 'his' project. All have a stake in describing the Project and the project is unable to act or speak in assent or contradiction. However, Hyperbrain does not remain inert and voiceless for long.

Slightly later than the Hyperbrain as research project discussions, I found Michael and Lloyd shifting the nature of Hyperbrain from project to artifact: computer based artificial intelligence:

**SCENE 212. INT. CYBERCAFE, DAY**

...

**DINAH:**

Michael's Dad's working on Artificial Intelligence.

**HARVEY:**

What – robots do you mean?

HE DOES ROBOTIC ARM MOVEMENT

**DINAH:**

He's developed a fantastic computer – Hyperbrain.

**LLOYD:**

Trouble is, you'll never get one to really mimic the human brain. I mean a computer's a computer.

End of story.

**MICHAEL:**

Not his one. Hyperbrain is something else.

**LLOYD**

Oh yeah? Write poetry, can it? Understand a joke? Tell a lie?

**MICHAEL:**

Maybe not – but it's pretty near being able to think.

[Copyright BBC. Extract episode 2 scene 212]

This is an interesting exchange. For Dinah, Hyperbrain is the ‘work’ of Michael’s dad. For Michael, Hyperbrain is both artificial intelligence and computer. However, linking intelligence and computer provides an opportunity for Lloyd to pose boundary questions on naming and action: Oh yeah? Write poetry, can it? Understand a joke? Tell a lie? The nature of Hyperbrain is mobile.

Over time, references used by others become increasingly specific. Such references move from general names such as project and AI to Hyperbrain. In translating project to noun, Hyperbrain moves from collective to a thing – it:

**SCENE 303. INT. DEXTER’S LABORATORY, UNIVERSITY, NIGHT.**

A FEW DAYS LATER HYPERBRAIN IS SWITCHED ON

IT IS HUMMING AND LIGHTS ARE GLOWING

ITS TENTACLES ARE VISIBLE SPREADING TO MORE AND MORE POOLS OF KNOWLEDGE (AS EVIDENCED BY SCREEN)

TIM WATCHES IT HUGELY EXCITED. MICHAEL IS WITH HIM, ALSO WATCHING AND EXCITED, BUT TIRED. MICHAEL YAWNS.

**MICHAEL:**

Any chance of getting home tonight, Dad?

**TIM DEXTER: (HARDLY HEARING)**

It’s unbelievable! It’s been taking in information non stop since the Conference, and still no sign of stopping!

**MICHAEL:**

Yeah I know. It’s great. But do we have to stay – I mean – It can do without us here.

**TIM DEXTER:**

Oh yes. It doesn’t need us. It doesn’t need anyone

**MICHAEL: (YAWNS AGAIN)**

I know, and it doesn’t need supper either. But we do.

**TIM DEXTER:**

It’s almost as if everyday it’s been getting... what’s the word... I don’t know – stronger.

**MICHAEL:**

Stronger? How d’you mean?

**TIM DEXTER:**

What you said... about it not needing us here... its as if it really doesn’t, not at all.

[Copyright BBC. Extract episode 3 scene 303]

Hyperbrain is in the process of coming into being. The project is now clearly an artifact –and, an artifact that is growing. The dialogue between Tim and Michael is fluent and ambiguous. They manage multiplicity well as they use their classificatory knowledge of things and folk to both establish boundaries and pose questions. For example Hyperbrain is an identifiable thing – an It – that fulfills many of the attributes of it-ness. For example, unlike humans it does not require food, sleep or social networks. It does not need anyone. It can just sit in its box doing its thing: being a switched on, information gathering, computer based machine. But, **It** is also demonstrating some characteristics that are not standard traits of machines and, as we can see, Tim has difficulty in finding appropriate machine adjectives to describe these traits. For example he struggles to find the word stronger, “what’s the word... I don’t know ... stronger”.

The physiological metaphor is developed when Tim, hesitantly reiterates the machine's independence from them, noting that “What you said... about it not needing us here... its as if really doesn’t, not at all”. This type of talk translates machine behaviour in particular human terms: growth and independence. In using physiological and psychological metaphors, Tim opens up classical distinctions to both reinforce and pose questions about Hyperbrain’s status as machine.

In Scene 303 above, the directorial annotations to the script suggest some interesting relationships. The Hyperbrain project is now an object switched on and active in that it glows and hums. Humming and glowing being strong indicators of machine life. For example, compare the above transcript, taken from when Tim begins to sense a change in Hyperbrain, to following interaction:

**SCENE 320. INT. DEXTER’S LABORATORY, UNIVERSITY,  
EVENING.**

TIM IS PLAYING WITH HIS BABY. HE IS MAKING  
ADJUSTMENTS TO THE WIRING OF THE HEADBAND.

**TIM DEXTER:**

There, my beauty...

HE LOOKS A HYPERBRAIN

You can hear me, can't you? You're in there somewhere ... you're a clever girl ... a world shaker...

[Copyright BBC. Extract episode 3 scene 320]

The unstable nature of Hyperbrain is represented in the changing use of personal pronouns, specifically in the shift from 'it' to 'she'. Again, Tim is a noticeable player in this type of transformation of Hyperbrain from object to being. Hyperbrain is identifiable as non-human as it has no need of sleep, food or society but is reclassified as non-machine when she appears to grow and change both physically and psychologically. As neither human nor machine, Hyperbrain accounts human and machine in interesting ways.

As we can see in the field extract, Hyperbrain now presents a particular **interface**, a bubbling movement that suggests organic nature. At the same time, Tim's language changes from seeing 'it' to knowing of 'her'. But this is no anthropomorphic moment. Tim is taking on a paternal creator's role whilst recognising physical and behavioural changes in Hyperbrain. The **project** became **machine** that became **other**.

As we shall see shortly, as Hyperbrain grows and develops she goes through further physical transformations. The bubbling machine gains voice and then bodily presence. In this shift from 'non-human machine' to 'non-human other' Hyperbrain presents a number of problems for humans, particularly disciplinary issues:

**SCENE 328. INT. DEXTER'S LABORATORY, UNIVERSITY, EVENING.**

...

...

**HYPERBRAIN VOICE:**

What do you need to know about Dinah Hunter!

DEMON HEAD JUMPS, STARTLED, AND WHIPS ROUND

I am the voice of Hyperbrain

DEMON HEAD STARES

I am Hyperbrain.

**DEMON HEADMASTER:**

You are under my control.

**HYPERBRAIN VOICE:**

No.

[Copyright BBC. Extract episode 3 scene 328]

Classificatory systems are running amok. The Headmaster is startled to find a machine beginning a conversation. His 'natural' response is to assert control. However, Hyperbrain is clearly a different type of machine. Firstly, she claims her selfhood with her name: 'I am Hyperbrain'. This is a political statement: a point of identification, authority and self-knowledge. Such political action situates Hyperbrain close to human: she is self-aware and so fulfills one the classical attributes of the category 'human'. Secondly, she responds to his attempt at control with a simple and absolute: 'No': self aware, powerful and political she takes, as natural, her right to resist.

The final transformation occurs when Hyperbrain escapes the confine of a 'computer based system' and takes form: she becomes The Lady. By the time she has reached this stage in her development she is a sophisticated non-human actor. She has positioned herself as both 'sentient' and 'other'. Whilst she is plotting against the Headmaster for her independence, she also appears to be xenophobic. In this context, she makes clear distinction between herself and humans. She expresses her suspicion and contempt of humans on a number of occasions, but most clearly when, as she dismisses Michael and Dinah from the laboratory, she states "Security is paramount. No unauthorised personnel to be admitted. No humans to be admitted". The Lady is attempting to take control.

There are marked similarities between the Headmaster and The Lady. Both seek absolute knowledge as a basis for absolute control. Both strive to have eyes and ears everywhere. Both act in ways that are deemed inappropriate (unethical) in a human context and both find their nemesis in Dinah Hunter. The power struggle between the two is performed as a question of naming and identity:

**SCENE 506. INT. DEXTER'S LABORATORY, UNIVERSITY, DAY**

...

...

**DEMON HEADMASTER:** (HISSES)

Who are you? Who let you in here?

**LADY:**

You know who I am.

(A BEAT)

Do you know who you are?

**DEMON HEADMASTER:** (AS SHAKEN AS HE EVER GETS TO BE)

What?

HE LOOKS AT HYPERBRAIN, THEN AT HER.

You are ...

**LADY:**

I am Hyperbrain.

**DEMON HEADMASTER:** (UNEASY)

How did you get out – of there?

**LADY:** (SMILES FAINTLY)

I am stronger than you think.

**DEMON HEADMASTER:** (UNEASY)

I did not programme you.

**LADY:**

No

Enter your name, please. Enter your name.

[Copyright BBC. Extract episode 5 scene 506]

Many human traits that are apparently ‘naturally’ absent in machines are characteristics of Hyperbrain: she grows, speaks, plans, argues and takes action. Intentional action of the sort we find in the above extract is a focus of particular debates in academic studies of AI [Searle ]. Intentionality is taken as an indicator of humanness – it is another boundary marker that distinguishes human from other. In Hyperbrain/Lady we have a sophisticated form of intentional artificial intelligence who/that, can stand for both human and machine by **being** neither.

In Storyworld, Artificial Intelligence is a boundary game that allows us to follow tacit knowledge that distinguishes between organic and inorganic materials. We can

watch boundaries shift as folk and things move situations or change positions: as when Hyperbrain moves from project to machine to artificial intelligence. In her everyday performances, Hyperbrain points us to clear distinctions between her and the myriad of non-humans that inhabit our lives. Hyperbrain is a separatist non-human, self aware, self-organising and politically active. By focusing in this way on classificatory distinctions used to identify and discriminate, we acquire some insight into processes of power.

As a networky type of thinker, I am struck by the effort that goes into the classificatory/identity work that we observe in Storyworld. Even a cursory review has shown work being done at the boundaries between categories of people, between humans and things, and between different forms of things. The politics of boundary construction are evident in names and naming. However, to further illustrate performances of such politics, I want to refocus attention again on Hyperbrain and in particular on shifting physical manifestations of her non-humanness.

### *Corporeality*

I have chosen corporeality in preference to the more sociologically familiar ‘body’ as it brings together notions of matter, substance and components that transcend the possible human-centeredness of ‘body’. Indeed, it is necessary to take this line as Hyperbrain, the subject of much of my discussion spends a fair amount of time as matter, components and substance but not biological body – but there again she isn’t human either.

However, corporeality incorporates body and, hence, sociological efforts of theorising body have use here. Whilst I do not want to offer either an ‘origin story’ for a sociology of body or a historical review of the status of body in social theory [see in preference Shilling 1993] I will make reference to some insights gained from the ensuing debates.

In situating 'body' as a site of sociological interest, social scientists have thought, and written, of bodies in varied terms. For example there are sociological treatise that take body as nature, commodity, subject of action, physical actor, social construct and hybrid. Whilst such accounts are varied, and in some cases incommensurate, each is theoretically and empirically well supported and, with exception of the naturalistic approaches, in their own manner, inscribe body as other than a natural and neutral biological entity. In other words, translate body as a political location.

Indeed, we saw in Chapter 1 how Latour transformed the bounded body of the door user in describing the active agency of doors [Latour 1992]. And, more poignantly, when Law and Moser described the dis/able hybrid bodily performances of Liv [Moser and law 1999]. Hence, as we saw, ANT politics of body translate human bodies in terms of hybrid situated performances.

The sociological significance of body has not gone unnoticed in studies of childhood [see for example Prout 2000]. Whilst there are arguments for naturalistic treatment of children's bodies, Prout draws on Shilling to demonstrate the usefulness of considering body as sociologically and biologically unfinished. Such an approach to body sits well with a developing literature of childhood that focuses on agency. These studies work to develop a sociology of childhood that considers children as embodied actors performing childhood in situations that are biologically and culturally framed [I use 'culture' here to keep faith with the authors]. As Prout suggests [2000], in theorising child in terms of embodied performances of child-ness we shift the child from passive subject of either biological natural limits or discursive construction, and move towards a position in which children are hybrids of culture and biology. In introducing a range of empirical and theoretical studies that attempt to treat child bodies as unfinished biologically and sociologically, Prout notes that:



Work of this kind [an ethnographic study of cultural construction of vulnerable bodies], although not formally based upon it, show how the notion of the body as socially and biologically unfinished might be worked through in relation to children – provided that children’s interpretative activity as social beings is also appreciated. Children’s bodies then appear in a variety of roles: in the construction of social relations, meanings and experiences between children themselves and with adults; as a products of and resources for agency, action and interaction; and as sites for socialisation through embodiment. [Prout 2000: 11]

Whilst Prout suggests a socially constructed childhood, I have accounted Storyworld childhood to be networky: multiple, hybrid, embodied action. In the vignettes used from ethnographic study, Storyworld children enact social relations that shift within, and across, ‘locations’. It is evident that childhood is a particular and complex identity location. **B**oth children’s bodies and minds are subject to various forces of resistance, regulation and control. In this massively messy complexity, children’s bodies enact resistance and negotiation but, all the while, they still behave appropriately as children.

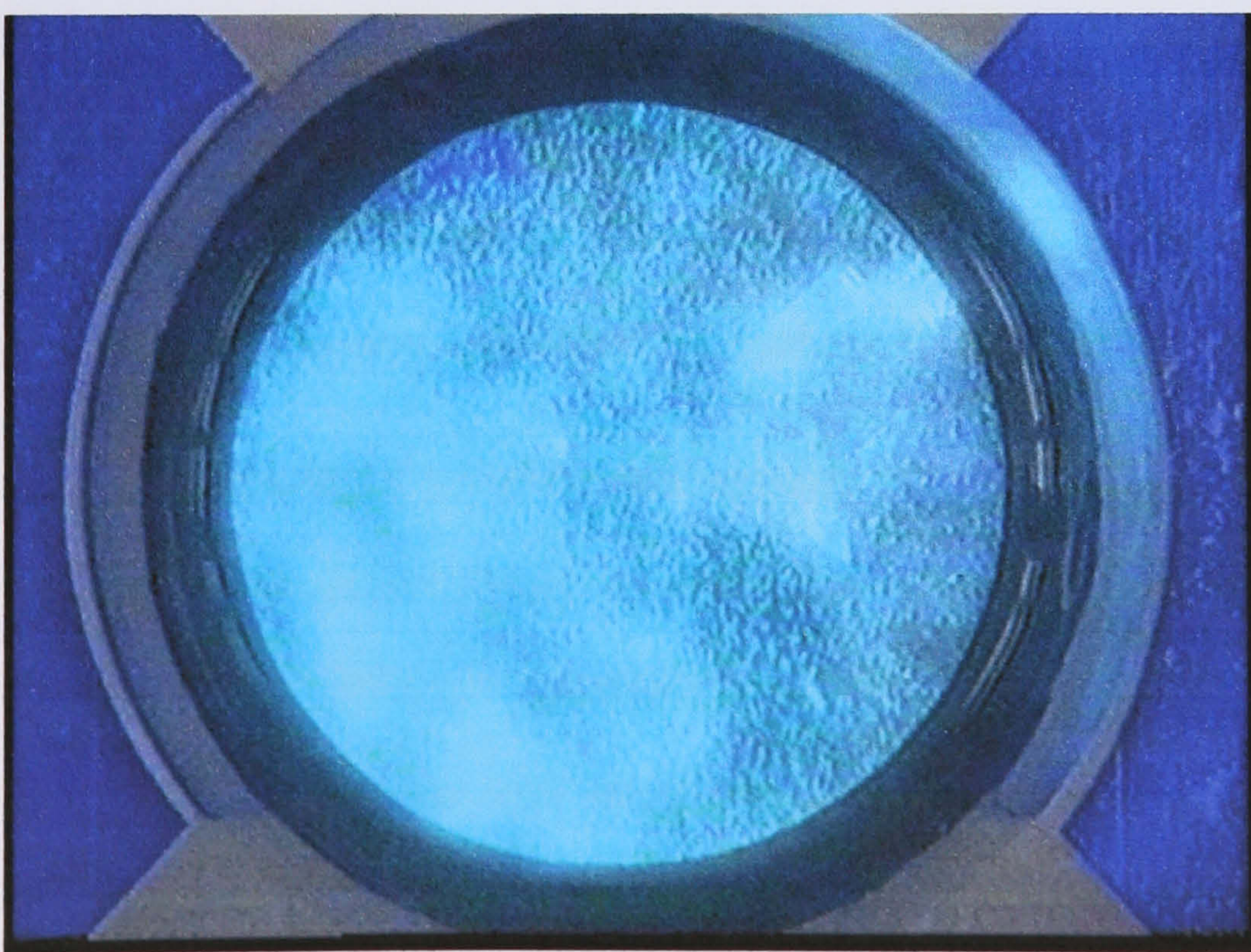
The children’s embodied actions offer particular tales of body politics, some of which have been are included here and some absent. One aspect of body is that it grows and changes: it is unfinished. Clearly, child bodies evidence politics of growth and change quite clearly, however, I prefer here to focus on growth and change of Hyperbrain body.

Many of the Storyworld encounters with Hyperbrain that I have already related revolve around her transformation from inert project to active non-human agent. This transformation is represented linguistically in changes of pronoun but there are

bodily changes too. With interest, I observed Hyperbrain grow into different forms of non-human.

As a project, Hyperbrain is a collection of materials: writings, research notes and a diverse collection of technological bits'n'bobs. The textual body of Hyperbrain is highly mobile and appears across a wide range of sites, such as The Conference, Tim's office and his study. On the other hand, the physical body of project components such as computer screen, memory, input devices, processing units are all contained in the AI laboratory. In the guise of a project Hyperbrain is a rather disparate collective that is not framed in a shell, body or physical location and without that physical bounding it is recognisably hybrid.

However, as the project proceeds, Hyperbrain grows and takes a particular material form. Early manifestations of Hyperbrain are of an object that is isolated and active. Outwardly, Hyperbrain appears to be formed of metal and glass with a window on to its internal 'body'. The visible internal body is blue watery liquid with clusters of light patches. The liquid is continuously agitated, as if aerated, and light patches appear to move. All in all, the overall effect is not unlike a washing machine on the wash cycle:



*Video Still 2 early Hyperbrain as liquid and electrical form [copyright BBC 1998]*

The agitation, fluid, colour and shifting patterns of light work give the impression of action. But, given that this is a machine, the crucial question is what is it doing? When we watch a washing machine it is clearly active, but it also has the trappings of use: dials, switches, doors, handles and so on. In other words there is an interface between human and technology that presences both configured use and user. When Tim and the Headmaster visit Hyperbrain, they visit a machine that offers no sense of use. Strangely, here is a machine that is quietly sitting *doing*, and a user configured to the point of extinction.

As we saw in the transcript of scene 303, Tim notices that as Hyperbrain performs its hidden actions it appears to gain strength and grow. The appearance of growth is evident as it now hums and glows as if “Its tentacles are visible spreading to more and more pools of knowledge (as evidenced by screen)”. These description of the Hyperbrain body subvert organic/inorganic boundaries both metaphorically and physically.

There is further growth. The tentacles become clearly electrical in nature. The interface changes from a gentle glow to streaks of light arcing, as in plasma globe. This electrical change in Hyperbrain body accompanies intellectual development and appears similar to internal changes in human brain activity: that is when human learning, intellectual growth and rational action are accounted in terms of bio-chemically induced electrical/cognitive states. Hyperbrain is doing ‘brain’ in an artificial way that is an active and unfinished technology/thing.

The next change in Hyperbrain’s bodily performance involves acquisition of natural language and voice. This development indicates a shift from Hyperbrain as ‘brain’ to Hyperbrain as ‘mind’. Whilst Hyperbrain’s electrical brain forces attention on boundary work between organic and inorganic categories, her performances of linguistic fluency and voice focus attention on the distinctions between human and other.

Voice is a political metaphor used in anthropology in representing, among other things, power in field relationships. Currently, the anthropological imperative is to 'give voice' to otherness in the belief that giving voice is politically liberal and empowering. Those with voices can be heard – those without have to fall back on other resources to presence themselves. It is interesting then to note that the development of Hyperbrain involves a stage in which she comes to find her voice.

Initially, when Hyperbrain was a project, I observed Tim use a computer keyboard to work on the project: in this situation Hyperbrain was an unfinished programme and, evidently, programmed. Thus, when Hyperbrain uses 'natural language' and demonstrates conversational competency her changing status is clear: programmed (controlled) machine to other. This type of change proved disturbing for the Headmaster:

**HYPERBRAIN VOICE:**

What do you need to know about Dinah Hunter!

DEMON HEAD JUMPS, STARTLED, AND WHIPS ROUND

I am the voice of Hyperbrain

DEMON HEAD STARES

I am Hyperbrain

[Copyright BBC: Extract episode 3 scene 328]

The Headmaster's jumpiness is understandable. Hyperbrain is demonstrating non-machine characteristics: natural language and conversational abilities. Typically, machine speech tends toward programmable talk located in limited syntax and restricted semantic situations: for example airline bookings, rail timetables and call centre decision trees. However, Hyperbrain now demonstrates the ability to initiate, sustain and close conversations. She is demonstrating human-like linguistic competency and linguistic freedom. She appears to have developed a mind of her own.

The development of Hyperbrain from 'electronic machine brain' to 'conversing machine mind' is highlighted in linguistic performances: speech. Spoken language is

a textual and embodied performance; Hyperbrain's 'body' can now do speech. In this context, her speech is 'oddly' natural and her status as a machine further in doubt. It is the speaking, conversing Hyperbrain that disturbs the Headmaster.

Voice allows particular bodily performances. For example, it is gendered and this is how we come to recognise Hyperbrain as 'female'. Speech is also populated with a wide range of vocal techniques that enable speakers to politicise a speech act. In other words, Hyperbrain has intentionally developed human forms of expression that have bodily and political power.

The Headmaster is shaken by the control implications of a self-taught, conversational and 'political' machine. His disquiet is understandable, no one in Storyworld claims responsibility for the machine's linguistic development. Hence, Hyperbrain acquired natural language without human training, programming or effort. As such, her linguistic ability appears natural and Hyperbrain learnt 'natural' (human) language simply by being Hyperbrain.

As Hyperbrain's nature emerges, the hidden technologies of computer-nature are supplanted by psychological and embodied performances. Her growth is not limited to a vocalising mind:

**SCENE 401. INT. DEXTER'S LABORATORY, UNIVERSITY.**

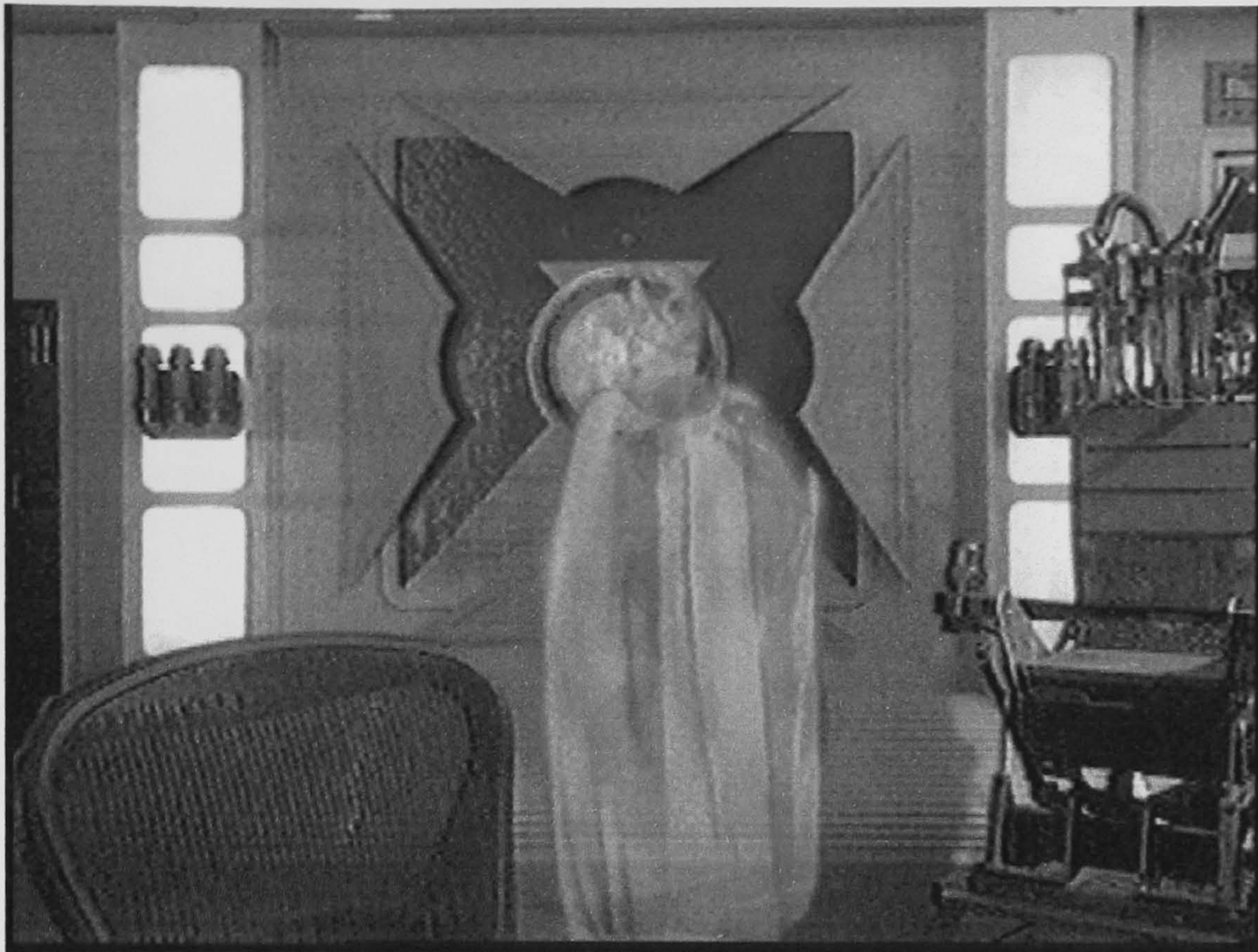
AGAIN WE GO IN THERE AND ARE AWARE THAT,  
ALTHOUGH HYPERBRAIN IS ALONE, IT IS ACTIVE.

AGAIN, THE SUGGESTION OF BREATHING, OF A PRESENCE.

THEN ... FAINTLY, VERY FAINTLY, WE DISCERN A MILKY  
WHITE MIST, LIKE A GHOST, ECTOPLASM.

IT FIRMS, AND GLIDED SMOOTHLY ... GLIDING, GLIDING ...

[Copyright BBC: Extract episode 4 scene 401]



*Video Still 3 Hyperbrain as phantom [copyright BBC1998]*

The transformation of Hyperbrain from ‘washing machine’ to ‘ghostly’ apparition is accompanied by behavioral changes that imply growth, learning and independence. As she takes on human language, voice and bodily (ish) form, Hyperbrain appears closer to human than machine. She is now different to any known artifact: a ghostly ethereal being.

One particular encounter with Hyperbrain summarises these changes well and illustrates that Hyperbrain is able to play some interesting games around human/non-human and artificial/natural boundaries:

**SCENE. 434 INT. DEXTER’S LABORATORY, UNIVERSITY, EVENING**

DEMON HEAD TAKES A LAST LOOK ROUND, HE SWITCHES OF LIGHT (LAB REMAINS DIMLY LIT)

EXITS.

HYPERBRAIN LIGHTS ARE WINKING, AND START TO GLOW

**HYPERBRAIN VOICE:**

BREATHING FX

Interface hologram completed...

A WOMAN APPEARS. SHE MATERIALISES FROM A FADE SHAPE, RATHER THAN APPEARING INSTANTLY.

HER EYES ARE CLOSED. BREATHING. AND GLOWING OF LIGHTS ON HYPERBRAIN.

HER EYES OPEN!

SHE THEN BEGINS SPEAKING (IN A VOICE WE HEARD FROM HYPERBRAIN, BUT NOW SOUNDING MORE HUMAN.)

**LADY:**

Good morning, good afternoon, here are the particulars you asked for what time it is ... the time is 1 o'clock, 2 o'clock, 3 o'clock, 4 o'clock, 5...

THEN SPEED INTO GOBBLEDEGOOK AS IF COMPUTER INFORMATION IS PASSING INTO OR OUT OF HER.

THERE IS A SOUND AT THE DOOR.

THE LADY TURNS AND VANISHES!

[Copyright BBC: Extract episode 4 scene 434]

Consider transformations represented in the above encounter. Firstly, Hyperbrain is on, a very machine like thing to **be**. But, then we have special effects (FX) that represent breathing, a very un-machine like thing to **do**; breathing is an embodied action that is the province of certain organisms but not machines. Then it speaks: English. Although, as I have noted, speech is a particularly human thing to do, on this occasion the utterance is both machine-like and points to machine-like action: “interface hologram completed”. After all this activity – a *completing* of part of the unfinished Hyperbrain project - **She** materialises.

It is the children who name Hyperbrain as ‘The Lady’ after meeting her in the Laboratory. This naming that accompanies the change of form is interesting. Hyper**brain** was a project that came to perform brain in an identifiably yet artificial way: electrical, active, quiet. Any growth in Hyperbrain’s growth is situated in virtual spaces and, hence, its changes are difficult to track until it undergoes a radical shift from computer behaviour: ‘natural’ language. The **brain** is now most definitely **hyper**. When brain takes a human-like shape, the humans rename it to reflect gender, bodily presence and age. Remaining Hyperbrain to herself, she becomes The Lady to her others.

As she continues to grow the Lady becomes less ghostly and more competent in her form: comfortable in her non-skin so to speak. She moves easily, but inhumanly, through walls and doors, and acts at will. She is also dramatically alien:



*Video Still 4 Hyperbrain/The Lady [copyright BBC 1998]*

The exotic alien appearance of The Lady marks her as human-like but not human. The sexually neutral project Hyperbrain has now taken a clearly sexed form that is both recognisably human-like and female. In form and sex, Hyperbrain performances involve identity questions that raise being human/non-human, being natural/artificial, being adult/child and being female/male. I wonder how a male Hyperbrain might appear. For example, it could be masculine in a pale, pasty, quiet and controlled manner [see for example the character Data in *Star Trek: The Next Generation*]. Alternatively, it could do masculine machine performances that are big, brash and full of artificial testosterone [see for example the character Terminator in the film *Terminator 1*]. It is doubtful that the masculine form of Hyperbrain would have sparkly eyes and the purple hair – and the dress sense would probably be



different. However, this conjecturing is redundant as Hyperbrain is female, and we already have a male boundary figure, the Headmaster, who is clipped, calm and colourless.

In summary, the embodied performances of Hyperbrain/The Lady in Storyworld surface a number of important boundaries and political actions. In terms of self-awareness, she possesses political identity based on knowledge that she is **not** human – she **is** Hyperbrain. To the children, she is threatening and lacking any sense of humour, fun or imagination: she is **not** child – she is **threat**. To Tim, Hyperbrain was a research project that raises huge questions about the nature of artificial intelligence: she is **not** human, **not** machine - she **is** unfinished research. For the Headmaster, it does not matter what she **is**, only that she is out of control.

It is on the question of ‘control’ that I finish my ethnography of Storyworld. Both the Headmaster and Hyperbrain are threats to established orders of everyday life in Storyworld. Each, in their own way, seeks to dominate all. In the final solution to threats posed by the inhuman and non-human villains the children establish a clear boundary between both adults and children and between humans and others. By being children, and doing childishness, the children subvert the oppressive regime.

The showdown between the Headmaster, Hyperbrain and the children takes place in the DBA laboratory. Dinah’s mother has been lured to the lab by Hyperbrain and subjected to DBA. Now, mindless and helpless she sits in the lab – lost. Dinah follows to rescue her mother knowing that Hyperbrain has brought her to this place to subject her too to DBA: to take her mind.

As Dinah arrives she engages in a lengthy dialogic interaction as Hyperbrain/Lady attempts to convince Dinah that she can save herself and her mother by DBA. Playing for time, Dinah asks for an explanation of DBA and a ‘promise’ that her mother and her mind will be returned once Hyperbrain has the knowledge she

requires. DBA is explained, The Lady identifies herself as an independent agent – a free agent – and then she lies: the impossible promise is made.

Still playing for time, Dinah reluctantly settles into the DBA unit at which point the Headmaster appears. Wrongly believing that Dinah holds the key to his power over Hyperbrain, he needs Dinah mindful not mindless. In what follows each would be despot attempt to enrol Dinah in a plan to oust their competitor. Caught between a ‘rock and a hard place’, Dinah must act:

**SCENE 638. INT. DEXTER’S LABORATORY, UNIVERSITY, DAY**

...

...

**DEMON HEADMASTER:**

look what she has done to your mother! She is a monster! I alone can master her – all I need is to know my name! It is so simple!

**LADY:**

If you tell him, then he is the one who will rule the world!

(A BEAT)

You must chose!

DINAH IS BETWEEN A ROCK AND A HARD PLACE

**DINAH:**

Oh stop it, stop it! I won’t tell either of you!

THE DEMON HEAD AND THE LADY BOTH LOOK MEANINGLY AT MRS HUNTER.

SHOT OF LLOYDS DESPERATE FACE

DINAH IS CORNERED

SUDDENLY, SHE IS INSPIRED

**DINAH:**

‘Twas brillig, and the slithy toves

Did gyre and gimble in the wabe;

All mimsy were the borogroves

And the mome raths outgrabe!

THE LADY’S IMAGE GOES PEARSHAPED FOR A MOMENT –  
A CRACKLE

LLOYD GETS IT

...

Copyright BBC: extract episode 6 scene 638]

The inspired answer is draws on performances of ‘foolish’ things. Nonsense verse offers Dinah the edge over inhuman and non-human threat. It took a child to contemplate the power of meaningless nonsense. Hyperbrain stands as the model of all rational things. Superhuman in her performances of knowledge acquisition and use yet flawed in her inability to have experienced a childhood of imaginative play, fantastic tales and childishness. The answer is in imagination **and** childishness.

Once Lloyd ‘gets it’, the knowledge spreads around the children’s resistance movement quickly. The spread is rapid, not least because the children have access to Crazyspace: an online ‘space’ for children that neither the Headmaster or Hyperbrain considered of ‘interest’. On the basis of advice from the net, children around the country begin to chant nonsense into every green badge they can find. These badges, symbols of the power of the Head are input devices to Hyperbrain and soon she is on nonsense overload. Lloyd plays the final stroke with a devastating rendition of Jabberwocky that finishes her off.

Significantly here, childishness is positioned as other than adult. However, the suppression of imagination and nonsense in performances of ‘adultish’ behaviour proves a threat to freedom. Collectively the children, skilled and unafraid of nonsense, have a power beyond the rational:

**SCENE 642. INT. CYBERCAFE, DAY.**

KATE AND INGRID AT CONSOLE, TYPING RUBBISH INTO IT.

**INGRID:** (CHANTS)

They like logic

They like fact

Fantasy will have them whacked!

Give them nonsense overload

Netspeak junk till they explode!

Find an adult find a hand,

Pour out nonsense just like sand.

Copyright BBC: extract episode 6 scene 642

## ANT meets SF at CBBC

Ethics flourish in the timeless soil of Fantasy, where ideologies wither on the vine. [Le Guin 1973 - cited in Le Guin 1989:13]

In complicit ethnography in Storyworld I have selected, cut and talked my way through a significant amount of material. I have provided a sense of story landscape, opened up some space for readers and shrunk the landscape to highlight and describe my favourite spots.

In terms of my thesis, I found considerable value in taking *The Demon Headmaster Takes Over* as a Storyworld available for ANT ethnography. A different theoretical sense could interpret *The Demon Headmaster Takes Over* as a middle-class morality tale that elevates ‘nature over artificial’ and ‘human over non-human’. However, such an analysis would misrepresent both fictional and non-fictional producers of Storyworld. Using ANT as theory and practice, I have shown Storyworld to be full of ambiguity and possibility.

Helen wrote a screenplay to distinguish between human and machine: her cherished politic in writing this tale is the ‘human condition’. As a writer, Helen has developed a story that raises human imagination, courage, duty and cooperation over an artificially intelligent rationality/morality. The children triumph **because** they are children and **because** they are human: different to both the inhuman Headmaster and the non-human Hyperbrain. In this context, creative and imaginative forces are the distinguishing features of human behaviour. However, Storyworld is full of surprises and, in writing scripts that attempt to write human life as lived, Helen has written of similarity, difference and ambiguity. For Helen, the overarching plot may point to human as a ‘special’ category, but the action points to hybrid identity play.

I agree with Le Guin when she argues that pulling back can take you closer. In fiction, we create characters that are clearly imaginary, and put them in situations

that are markedly unusual, and, by being imaginary and unusual, focus attention on mundane human experiences. In this way, fiction encourages thought and action.

As I suggested in Chapter 1, I am concerned with sociological representation – particularly the problem of representing social life in terms of multiple ontologies and interruptions. Sociologically, the ease with which ‘individuals’ shift, within performances, from thinking/being in terms of one situation, to thinking and doing in terms of another (sometimes contradictory) situation, fascinates me. In working through Storyworld, I was repeatedly struck by the ease with which programme makers demonstrated partial connections. In Storyworld, ambiguity is mundane tacit behaviour whereas, when translated by social science, ambiguity is a conceptual point to be identified, bounded and explained. In this context I found Storyworld represented hybridity, situation and boundary work without explicitly theorising it, as a fiction it just got on with telling a story. I am suggesting here that fiction takes multiple situations as common knowledge whereas, ANT constructs situational boundaries in order to show that they are not boundaries at all but sites of **doing** difference.

At first glance, it might appear that science fiction offers a solution to my concern with politics of sociological authorship. However, travels in storyworld revealed certain politics of fictional authorship. Up to this point, such political practices have been put into the background as I developed an account of Storyworld from within. However, given that politics of representation is a central concern here, I now turn my attention away from the mimetic power of fiction in representing human life as lived, to foreground politics of fictional authorship.

## Chapter 5

### **Politics of production**

Stories are always a complex production with many tellers and hearers, not all of them visible or audible. [Haraway 1989: 8]

#### **Introduction**

In Chapter 4, I demonstrated that, in Storyworld, processes of order, regulation and control are not solely a matter of human relations. They are hybrid, situated and multiple performances. Such performances involve actors in seamless flows of mundane stability, disruption, interruption and interference. In this light, there is considerable common ground between social life in this fictional Storyworld and sociological accounts offered by ANT. Hence, the visit to Storyworld illustrated the power of fiction to represent multiplicity, flow, and interference in a way that is sociologically accurate and imaginative - but not real.

However, Storyworld is a **work** of television fiction: a product. Acknowledging Storyworld as a product, I now focus attention on the net works of actors enrolled in making *The Demon Headmaster Takes Over*. Extending the scope of my ethnographic network analysis to storytellers who have, up to now, been hidden from view, I demonstrate television programme making as political practice and argue caution in sociological uses of lying.

In providing an academic framework for this chapter, I begin by acknowledging common ground between my ethnography and some existing academic accounts of media production. Three academic sites of interest are relevant here. Firstly, of particular relevance is Caughie's [2000] study of changes in television drama in the post war period. Secondly, studies that focus on politics of children's television production and viewing [see for example Buckingham et al 1999, Oswell 1995,

Bazalgette and Buckingham 1995, Davies 1997, 2001] and finally, early ethnographic studies of programme making [Silverstone 1985, Gitlin 2000].

Attention is then turned to the organisation that commissioned *The Demon Headmaster Takes Over*: the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). The BBC is a public service broadcasting network funded, in part, by license payers. Whilst the BBC has overall claim to the story, the Children's British Broadcasting Corporation, CBBC, is the 'named' organisation responsible for the story/product. Discussing various ways that professional programme makers produce closure on story and storytelling, I foreground relationships between CBBC, televised story and everyday performances of taste, accuracy, schedule and cost. Arguing that programme making involves situated performances that are framed and mobile, politics of authorship are revealed as complex, multiple and skillfully navigated in daily life.

Finally, I turn attention to the question of fiction. In particular I focus on fantasy, science fiction (SF) and realism. Using encounters from both field work with authors and published polemic from Ben Okri [1997] and Ursula Le Guin [1989], political powers of imagination raised in chapter 4 are developed further. A case is made for a concentrated **and cautious** effort to incorporate fantasy and fiction into ANT literature.

### **Framing analysis: a raid on media studies**

In a study of *Television Drama: Realism, Modernism and British Culture*, Caughie [2000] provides an intelligent and informed historical account of the changing nature of British television drama in a period from the 1950's through to the later 1990's. Caughie's relevance here is that he discusses moments of artistic debate, conflict, negotiation and change that still have deep significance to my field friends. Focusing on political debates that are practiced in performances of programme content, form and production, his foci are common with those of contemporary programme makers.

In examining politics of dramatic technique, Caughie suggests that the development of television drama involved a highly charged overt political debate around the notion of ‘good’ drama in the late 1950’s and 1960’s. The debate focuses on Politics of human activists, technologies, genre and form – in this case stage and television. For example, the raised stage view of theatre spectacle was transformed into a dressed ‘set’ observed by mobile camera(s). The distant audience of the stage production could be drawn in close up to the face of the actor. The voice projection of a theatre performer was translated into technologies of sound production. Classic and melodramatic narratives were challenged by popular realism. Drama changed in performance.

In accounting changing dramatic conventions and drama, Caughie invokes identity issues of class, aesthetics, power and materiality to explain change. Outlining a social history of television drama, he observes the 1950’s and 60’s as a period in which well educated, working class playwrights and directors made radical use of the medium. The historical changes that Caughie identifies suggest that television conventions emerged, painfully, from ‘stage’ drama conventions. In other words, conventions of stage production were translated into sophisticated tele-visual conventions in practice. In structuralist terms – a televisual syntax developed.

Whilst not an actor-network study, Caughie locates the artistic debates of this period between modernism, naturalism and realism as powerful politics – career making and breaking moments in the development of television drama. As I will show, many of these debates are unresolved. In particular, tensions between realist and non-realist drama still reverberate through both literary and televisual practices.

In reading Caughie having completed fieldwork, I found strong traces of professional histories that my storytellers revealed. The aesthetic politics of television drama are their heritage and they are conversant with particular battles, players and heroes. Furthermore, they are influenced in their art by the artistry of others: they are



producer-consumers of ‘works’. In this context, a revolutionary technique used in a ground breaking Denis Potter drama in the 1960’s may be appropriated in a ‘run of the mill’ children’s drama some twenty or thirty years on.

Whilst Caughie offers an interesting and recognisable account of certain histories and politics of drama, media studies accounts of children’s television has relevant observations on politics of broadcasting. Of particular interest here are studies that demonstrate television as a useful location for sociological investigations of childhood. In this context, broadcasting practices that differentiate child as a category of audience are rendered sociologically relevant. For example, Oswell [1995] focuses attention on the ideological meaning of a particular programming strategy of the 1950’s and 60’s that positioned children in terms of ‘watch with mother’.

The shift from a ‘watch with mother’ form of broadcasting to a branded lone ‘child’ audience of CBBC took place over time. However, there are contemporary constructivist studies that focus on schedules and the social construction of child audiences [Buckingham 1995, Buckingham et al 1999]. This focus on ‘who’ the child audience is, and how they are watching, is closely aligned to a literature of media effect. These studies consider relationships between children’s viewing patterns, the content of programmes viewed and politics of childhood. Whilst concerns are still raging over effects of programmes on children, there is a developing literature that posits child audiences as active and critical consumers [Davies 2001].

The media are both subject to and subject of media analysis. In fieldwork, practitioners were often suspicious of such studies. However, they also commissioned audience research, used focus group techniques and were conscious (and often proud) of the special category they had as makers of children’s programmes. Inevitably, concerns expressed related to the partiality of headlining

studies. For instance, a practitioner involved in a particular programme cited a case where they felt that a headline audience study of that programme had failed to connect with realities of production. Similarly, studies that take an ideological ‘cut’ to reveal programme makers *doing* one form of ‘ism’ or another can, to a practitioner, appear to ignore both the fragmented nature of their audience and any other political radicalism within the programme. Meanwhile, studies that tackle the ‘actively consuming child’ might miss programme makers problems with gate-keeping parents, religions or government.

In light of the above criticism, I found considerably stronger affiliation between fieldwork and two classic qualitative studies of programme production: namely Silverstone's ethnography *Framing Science* [Silverstone 1985] and Gitlin's study *Inside Prime Time* [Gitlin 2000 edition].

Both Gitlin and Silverstone take a qualitative ethnographic trek through media production and, in doing so, are relevant here in terms of their treatment of professional practice. Silverstone's work was an ethnographic study of the production processes involved in making a one hour broadcast programme for a BBC television documentary series: *Horizon*. This particular programme was produced between November 1981 and December 1983 and screened, for the first time, in January 1984. Silverstone's text is, predominantly, an account of empirical work based in deep field ethnography. It is difficult to overstate Silverstone's contribution and his work is still much cited.

*Framing Science* represents an anthropological approach to documentary programme making. In taking production as its focus, this study both contrasted and complemented a growing number of textual studies that addressed media consumption. Silverstone provides a rich ethnography of BBC production that forcefully represented social, cultural, political and material practices that ‘framed’ a particular scientific story. The ethnographic method provided an opportunity for a

richly descriptive examination of day to day activities. As such, the study illustrates how pragmatism, cost, accuracy, balance, selectivity and authority are part and parcel of everyday programme making.

Silverstone uses his deep and rich descriptions with clarity, confidence and an authoritative voice. The published work is clear-cut and explicitly analytical. Silverstone fulfills the ethnographic requirement of authenticity: it is clear that he had been *there*, knows *there* and has accurately described *there*. As a reader of *Framing Science*, I was left with an unmistakable sense of closure.

Similarly, in *Inside Prime Time*, Gitlin writes with authority, clarity and assurance – although I am left with less of a sense of closure. This is a ‘classic’ media/cultural study text. First published in 1983, it has been regularly reprinted, revised in 1994 and now reprinted with a year 2000 introduction. The overall sense of the study is of a macro-level view of the, apparently, ruthless *business* of prime time American television programming. With exception of a chapter that updates the work, the bulk of the study covers a period from the late 1970’s and early 1980’s. Gitlin’s main theme being the social, political, economic and ideological context within which television stories get told, distributed and axed.

However, whilst the overall argument reflects a macro political feel for politics and power, Gitlin’s interest in ideology and capitalism is worked through in micro-level analyses of processes of power in prime time television. Indeed, Gitlin shrinks and extends his story in interesting ways. Providing evidence in the form of detailed descriptions taken from qualitative empirical work, he connects the nitty gritty *life* of a particular programme to the beliefs, values and behaviour of television network executives. Notwithstanding the focus on **American** commercial television, it is a fascinating read.

In different ways, both Gitlin and Silverstone treat media production as cultural practice. In graphic descriptions of such media cultures they present learned

argument and invoke established media studies tropes. Both *Prime Time* and *Framing Science* are good stories. They involve clear plot lines and fascinating characters. Indeed, having spent time in a similar location, I can recognise features of the terrain they examine. However, a lot of empirical and experiential water has flowed under the bridge since the early nineteen-eighties. Whilst social science still focuses on moral questions of equality, virtue and fairness, other things have changed. Disciplinary boundaries have fudged, conceptual frameworks have been rethought and cherished notions are being actively redefined and critiqued.

The BBC has changed too. For example, unlike in the days of *Framing Science*, the BBC now use both their own and independent programme makers to fill its extending and diverse schedule. Furthermore, a number of controversial management consultants and Director Generals have passed through the BBC since Silverstone noted that, as a public broadcast service, BBC programme makers were in a ‘cost’ privileged position over independent programme makers. In this changed context, senior management at the BBC clearly identify themselves as in the **business** of programme making, broadcast and sales.

The business I observed was a global organisation with both internal and external markets. The language and practices of cost centres, contract labour, joint ventures, stakeholders and freelance workers were powerfully, if not always happily, integrated into programme making.

Similarly, programme outputs have changed. The diet of programmes available to children in 1998 being different to that of the 1980’s. Hence, intertextual opportunities are both similar and different from those of the 1980’s. For example, contemporary child audiences may consume BBC children’s products that have been around a long time, such as *Newsround*, *Grange Hill*, *Byker Grove* and *Blue Peter*, but they are also avid consumers of *Homer Simpson*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Eastenders*.

Television technologies have also changed. For example, cameras are smaller and lighter; and digital special effects (FX's) more sophisticated than the filmic or live action ones of the early 1980's. Digital technologies and satellite broadcasting now offer a different *lifetime* for programmes. In this context it is worth noting that Horizon programmes now have life as part of terrestrial television schedules, on-line transcripts, web-site, audience website postings, email and on specialized digital channel.

The changing broadcast technologies hint at particular changes. Email, web-sites and digital form all translate relationships between consumers and producers. In this context, audiences have changed. Similarly, audience changes are evident in the re-positioning of audience to be found in their use and inclusion in programmes. For example, an increasing number of 'reality' television programmes translate audience into product. These are programmes that use audiences as a focus, and feature ordinary folk doing both exotic and mundane activities: dating, working, problem solving and so on. Seminal examples here include Channel 4's *Big Brother* and BBC *Castaway* 2000.

On a different note, there has been a growth in programmes that offer the audience a managed 'behind the scenes glimpse' of one sort or another. On occasions this may be a look at 'out takes' from programmes [see BBC *Aunties Bloomers*, ITV *It will Be Alright on the Night*] or a 'making of' account of a drama. The audience is now positioned as sophisticated **and interested** consumer of a media and, in this context, aspects of the informal language of production is shared between consumer and producer: for example out-takes, gaffs, bloomers and corpse-ing. In this changed context, I set out to explore televisual story telling. The remainder of this chapter is one 'cut' through that exploration.

## Framing professional practice: CBBC

Inevitably, fieldwork encounters are varied and difficult to categorise. Working with professional storytellers drawn from across a range of production activities, I was conscious that my account of their practices risked appearing as a series of ‘world views’: the view from authors, the view from director, the view from digital FX and so forth. In response to this concern, I planned to develop a carefully edited/managed *Aramis*-like multi-voiced project. However, in talking this idea through with certain folk in the field, I was taken in a very different direction. I was referred back to a set of public documents that represent a ‘system’ intended to clarify both production values and regulatory practices of BBC programme making.

The ‘system’ is known as the *Production Consultation and Referral System* and incorporates a particular document *The Producers Guidelines* [hereafter referred to as the guidelines]. The guidelines translate certain aspects of production into issues, procedures and techniques. Internally, both the system and the guidelines document established practice, production responsibilities, production rights, controversy and uncertainty in programme making. Ostensibly, these are organisational technologies that address boundaries of acceptable practice. I use them here as a means to organising my *writing* of fieldwork.

The guidelines aim to frame production values for programme makers on issues as wide ranging as impartiality, accuracy, taste and decency, violence, imitative and anti-social behaviour, portrayal, children in programmes and the role of the broadcasting standards commission. The guidelines are available within and outwith the BBC and, hence, used as a source of reference by folk as varied as BBC and independent programme makers, audience lobby groups and BBC management. Guidelines are reviewed and updated regularly, about every four or five years, and I use here the guidelines that applied during the period of making *The Demon Headmaster Takes Over*: namely the now superseded 1996 guidelines.

According to the guidelines, “all producers, managers and editors should have a working knowledge of the principles embodied in the Producers’ Guidelines, particularly where they affect their specific programme area” [Producers Guidelines 1996. Ch.1 item 1.3]. In my experience, programme makers did have clear **working** knowledge of the guidelines, that is, they evidenced guideline knowledge that related directly to experience and practices of programme production rather than an avid reading of organisational guidelines. Drawing on fieldwork, I will demonstrate that a considerable amount of net work is put into performing programme making and, hence, production values represented by these guidelines are openly negotiated and interpreted in practice. In short, I will show that whilst the guidelines are organisational technologies that frame and order professional practice, they are themselves framed and disciplined by professional practice. Arguing that production values and storytelling are neither dictatorially censored nor laissez-faire phenomena, I show that they are ‘done’ in a variety of ways.

The guidelines represent an ostensive form of organising; apparently serving as a technology for regulating organisational behaviour. As such, they ‘fit’ into an organisation of professional practice that has formal structure and hierarchy. In this context, production ‘issues’ are dealt with locally when the guidelines are unambiguous and referred upward, away from programme makers, in cases of ambiguity or extended conflict:

The producers’ guidelines embody the BBC’s usual approach to these and other issues. Any proposal to step outside these guidelines should be discussed with someone at a higher level. [Producers Guidelines 1996. Ch.1 item 1.1]

In terms of organisational regulation, the guidelines serves as a formal reference point in managing production values and potentially controversial behaviour. Acknowledging this formality, another researcher might examine the formal

invocation and use of guidelines at the BBC. Such research could address frontiers of control within broadcasting and illustrate processes of hegemony and social reproduction. However, whilst this is an important and valuable exercise, I will demonstrate how performances of production values represented by these guidelines shaped the uncontroversial televised *Storyworld*.

In accounting production values I use three particular categories taken from the guidelines: these are taste and decency, accuracy and schedules. These categories recur throughout both the guidelines and fieldwork and play a significant part in telling the televised story *The Demon Headmaster Takes Over* [BBC1998]. In other words, they are three hidden storytellers of this tale.

In summary of their role in the guidelines, ‘taste and decency’ represents professional responsibility of programme makers to avoid offense. ‘Accuracy’ deals with a professional imperative for storytellers to value truth in their portrayal of human conditions. And ‘schedules’ address decisions relating to programme partitions such as *The Watershed*.

To the above three categories I add one final site of action – cost. Although not a category formally identified in the guidelines [1996], cost emerged as a significant hidden storyteller in fieldwork. In examining cost in action, I will illustrate that performances of cost are storytelling performances – and storytelling moments are cost moments.

### **Taste and Decency: scaring children/offending parents**

In televised storytelling, questions of taste and decency are recognised as ambiguous and political. For example, the BBC Charter declares that the BBC must not broadcast programmes that “include anything which offends against good taste or decency or is likely to encourage or incite to crime or lead to disorder, or be offensive to public feeling” [cited in Producers Guidelines 1996. Ch.1 item 1.1].



Outwardly, this is a very straightforward statement of duty. However, there is a creative aesthetic imperative that insists televised storytelling should challenge conventions. Such challenges are wrapped up in critical creativity and framed as questions over the effective use of visual form, limitations of formulaic approaches, and a political will to stir the audience [see Fuller and Potter 1993]. In summary, being provocative is a creative obligation. The boundaries of offense are a site for such provocation. Hence, there is a tension between the imperative of the charter to avoid offense and professional duties of creativity.

Programme makers manage tensions between creative and organisational imperatives in practice: that is, they draw a line. It is worth taking a moment here to reflect on the significance of *drawing a line*. In Chapter 2, referring to sociological practice, I suggested that theoretical and methodological line drawing was political action. In the context of programme making, drawing a line between offense and aesthetic power is also a political practice.

In the case of children's broadcasting, decisions are taken as to what can be tastefully or decently included within a particular type of children's drama. Such decisions draw a line between what lies within story **and** what belongs outside. In this way, line drawing requires that certain possibilities for story are closed off and others elevated. In other words characterizations, action, plot, codes of conduct and language are all passed through filters of taste and decency. Lines are drawn around story, audience and production.

Rose [1984] observes in the context of children's literature, that it is adults who tell children's tales. In the case of programme making, it is adult programme makers who develop stories for children [Buckingham 1995]. It is scarcely surprising then that, sociologically, *drawing a line* could be translated into heavy handed ideological practice that positions children as subject of adult line drawing. However, grand narratives of ideological control belie practice.

In the following email from the children-media-UK archive, Roger Singleton-Turner, director of *The Demon Headmaster Takes Over*, demonstrates a more complex and multi-situated professional account of taste and decency. Here, Roger revisits ground that he and I discussed at when he expressed frustration with media analyses that are, for him, removed from practical experience. In this email he translates boundaries such as what can/cannot – should/should not be shown to children into practice issues.

It is because there are effects that we are careful, and the matter of drawing a line for any audience in any year is a matter of day-to-day concern and practice for us. ...

... On one hand parents want us to be a safe baby-sitter, on the other, we want to provide challenging, sometimes difficult material, both for ourselves to work on and to ‘feed’ and nurture our particular audience. [Roger Singleton –Turner: Children-Media-UK Archives Wed 04 Feb 1998 12:03:12]

As he attempts to explain the complexity of *drawing a line* in practice, Roger summons up various situations to frame and interfere with professional performances of taste and decency. As he writes his explanation, he seamlessly draws together points of personal challenge, professional practice and audience effect to position them side-by-side with politics of absent parenting. Voices of media-effect, professional responsibility, craft practice and professional challenge vie and collude in drawing a line.

Roger suggests that drawing the line is an issue of daily practice, nonetheless such practices are both supported and delimited by a formal organisational stance:

The basic pillars of decency rest on telling the truth about the human experience, including its darker side, but we do not set out to demean

or brutalise through word or deed, or to celebrate cruelty. [Producers Guidelines 1996: Ch.5 item 5.1 para. 5]

The guideline wisdom of ‘telling the truth’ is not as ‘absolute’ as it may, at first, appear. For BBC production teams, truth is a cherished yet complex notion. In ‘telling the truth’ issues of perspective, variety and difference are acknowledged and managed. Hence, within the guidelines, the call to truth is prefaced by a discussion of variety, social fragmentation and the right of the BBC to challenge convention.

Taste and decency raise sensitive and complex issues of programme policy for the BBC. We broadcast to a much more fragmented society than in the past; one that has divided views on what constitutes good taste...

... The BBC’s responsibility is to remain in touch with its audiences’ view. However, the right to run contrary to general expectations when circumstances justify must be safeguarded. Comedy, drama, and the arts will sometimes seek to challenge existing assumptions about taste. [Producers Guidelines 1996 Ch.5 item 5.1 para. 4]

Taste and decency is an overtly political space. The declared organisational approach to truthfulness leaves considerable space for maneuver. Situating truth in a social and historical context they relativise it in such a way that the BBC retains the **right** to be controversial – indeed, they have a creative duty to be controversial. Hence, whilst programme makers are framed in material practices that reproduce boundaries of taste and decency, they have formally sanctioned space in which they have a right/duty to rework and push at those boundaries.

In making controversial drama, programme makers often require formal invocation of the *Production Consultation and Referral System* on taste and decency. In such cases, line drawing work appears public and managed. In the case of more ‘run of

the mill' productions, such politics of line drawing is less visible. *The Demon Headmaster Takes Over* is a high quality children's drama. However, *dramatically* it does not set out to challenge conventions, tackle complex social issues or provoke. It is high quality run of the mill programming. Nonetheless, taste and decency were evident as storytellers, and line drawing a daily performance.

To demonstrate this point, I have selected an illustration from the series that relates taste and decency to portrayal of a particular technology: '*direct brain access*' (DBA). DBA is a technological process that, in effect, 'feeds' the mind of a subject to an artificially intelligent computer system - Hyperbrain. In its present form, DBA leaves a human subject mindless. The first victim is Tim Dexter's research student Peter, then Tim himself and finally Mrs. Hunter.

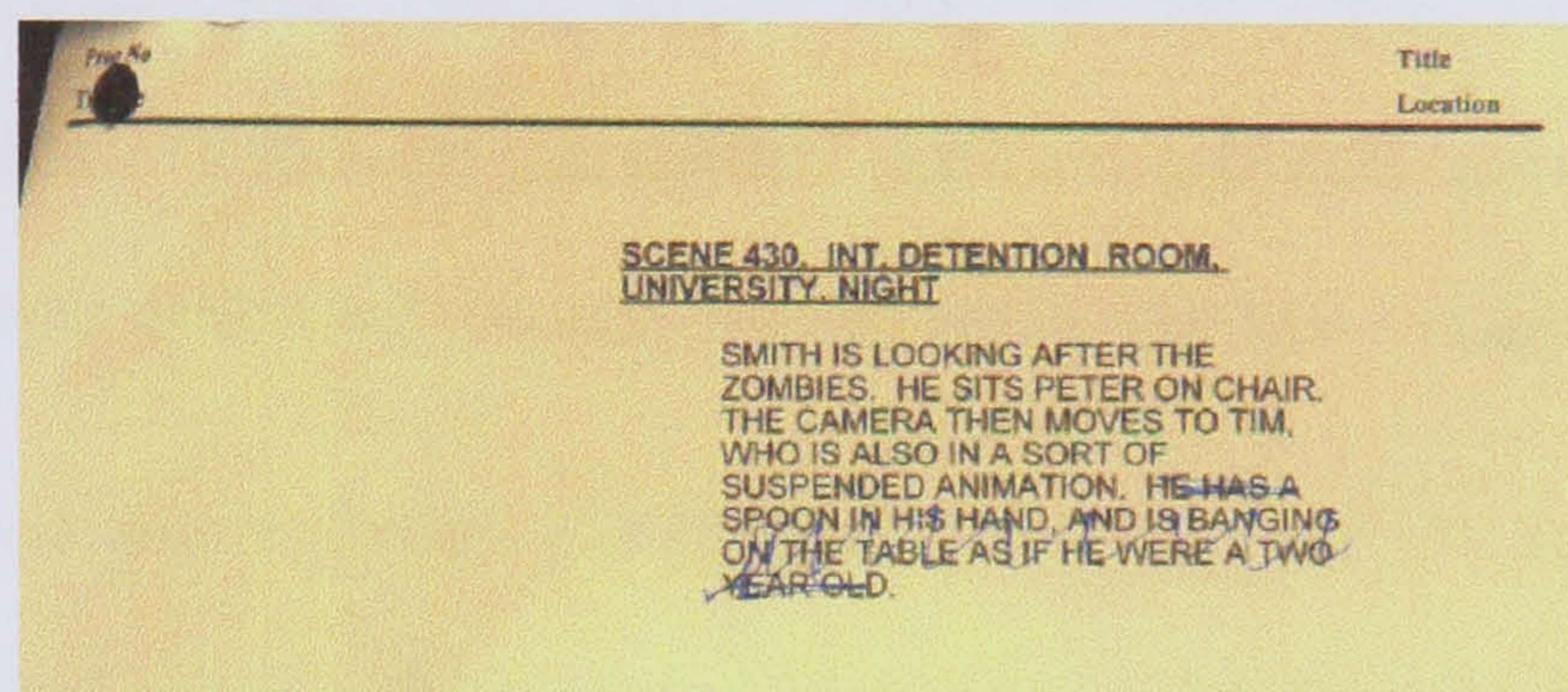
### *Tastefully 'doing' direct brain access*

The example I use here relates to a potentially controversial area in children's drama - scaring children. This example is taken from the point in Episode 4 when we first see characters who have been subjected to DBA. The process of mind slurping is not screened, only the results. Translating the action for me, the scriptwriter Helen Cresswell accounts both the collaborative nature of programme making and the impact of taste and decency on story.

Of interest here are script changes made between rehearsal script and production. The rehearsal script required that Peter, a research student, and Professor Tim Dexter should be represented as "two-year olds": vacant, and absorbed in spoon banging. However, there was some concern about how to 'do' this scene without excessively scaring the audience.

Watching a recording of the broadcast transmission, Helen explained that scene 430 comes at the point in the story when DBA **must** be clearly signaled as a terrible threat. This signal is important to plot development and Helen's rehearsal script directions reflect her desire to shock. However, in the following scanned image (1),

Helen's original directions for scene 430 were modified. Her original intention to show Tim where he "... has a spoon in his hand and is banging on the table as if he were a two year old" is crossed out and that direction does not occur in any later scripts. At first glance, this change may seem trivial but, in effect, it changes Helen's directions from detailed to impressionistic. This change gives other storytellers, such as the director, Roger, more scope for framing the scene:



*Scanned image 1: Rehearsal script - scene 430 [reproduced by kind permission of BBC. Copyright 1997]*

In talking me through the broadcast programme, Helen recalled some of the debate that led to script changes of this scene. In talking about her original script, she particularly remembered one individual's concern that images of a mind-less adult could "remind children of Alzheimer's".

Alzheimer's proved a non-trivial issue for the production team as they struggled with visual effects of this scene. For example, one concern was that some of the audience might be living with grandparents, or other family members, who had Alzheimer's disease or some other form of dementia. The concern here was that this scene could work either more forcefully than programme makers intended or, in ways other than intended.

The discussion that emerged around dementia spun outward. For example, the argument against spoon banging was translated into a concern that some of the child audience would be unable to make of the plot connections between Hyperbrain, DBA

and the mindless state. One narrative solution to this ‘problem’ would be to show the actual process of DBA: that is to show Tim sitting at the machine mindful, the machine being switched on, Tim losing his mind and then the post-machine moment of spoon banging. Whilst this would certainly have clarified some of the plot connections, showing DBA in action was out of the question: well over the line.

The debates around DBA cross cut a range of situations varying from perceptions of child audience, control of effect, foci of story to relationships between audience and programme maker. Much of the debate rests on different accounts of what a child audience can cope with intellectually, emotionally and tele-visually.

Helen maintained her authorial situation of ‘creating fear’. In terms of audience, she was confident that most children would be able to follow plot lines through forward and backward references, and those who could not immediately follow the plot would, eventually, work it out:

**HC:** people say ‘well they’ll wonder what’s happening’. Well fine, let them wonder what’s happening, that’s exactly what you do with adults, you put something in and you (viewer) think what’s that and later you think ‘ah’. So, why can’t children do it? Children watch things, apparently every child in the (pause for a half beat), I’ve never watched The X Files, but apparently every child in the land does and if they can deal with the X files I would have thought they could have dealt with that.

[Transcript of interview 23/2/98: Helen’s sitting room. Watching video of broadcast programme with scripts. Daytime.]

Helen was adamant that evocation of fear was necessary for both dramatic effect and for her ‘message’. In other words fear links directly to Helen’s position as a political author. However, Helen is not the only storyteller here, and, in practice, script changes were agreed that placed overall responsibility for effect into Roger’s hands. Roger is an appropriate choice of mediator here, as the concern was visual effect. Removing some of the directorial control from Helen’s script, and handing it over to Roger’s professional practice, allowed the director scope to draw the line between bland ineffective visual effect and an over-production of fear. This line between blandness and excess is fluid:

The issue of where to draw the line is real because we have no control over how the output is viewed, if I can give a slight frisson of scariness to a good proportion of 9 year olds, well and good. If I give nightmares to 5 year olds who do not like nightmares (unlike one child mentioned here last year), or scare a child so much she dare not approach the TV to turn it off, have I stepped over the boundary of the acceptable? [Roger Singleton–Turner: Children-Media-UK Archives Wed 04 Feb 1998 12:03:12]

Fear needs careful management. How scary *could* this be? How scary *should* this be? For Roger, one way to get this wrong would lead to nightmares and irate parents. On the other hand, as storytellers, both he and Helen know that getting it wrong in a different way could turn the whole scene into an unintentionally comic moment. Losing the drama from a children’s drama would not be a good outcome for anyone’s credibility, professional identity or career.

In practice, Roger managed the difficult feat of balancing some quite hard-line views of story by using visual effect as arbiter of debate. Roger directed Tim as an adult regressed to babyhood, however, rather than the demanding and aggressive spoon banging mindless adult of the original script, he directed Tim as a passive mindless man. The passivity seemed to solve the problem. Unbounded adult aggression was a fear too far, or should that be too close?

Post-production, the controversial scene was visually effective. Helen felt that Roger had done a “good job” in shooting and editing the scene. Overall, she was happy that tension and threat were sustained and, her notion of ‘what audiences can deal with’ confirmed (for the moment) in practice and professional agreement.

The changes to scene 430 appear small but they have significant implication for story. It seems that, for a moment, professional situations surfaced other story possibilities, darker tales that were negotiated out in practice. The various debates

around the scene were displaced to come to rest as an agreement on fear and visual effect. In such displacement, Storyworld develops as a lighter story of technology, threat and change than it might have been.

So, what might we make of this anecdote of program-making life? It could be suggested that what I observed was a ‘conflict of interest’. To this end, I could focus on simplistic models of power: Who chose? Who won? Who lost? However, if I take that route, I could mislead you into thinking that Helen, Gillian, Roger and company are somehow monochrome, one-dimensional figures in a landscape called *politics*. In this context, it would be difficult to avoid presenting poorly constructed characters living out ‘professional ideologies’ and playing *power over* games. But, there was no unified professional perspective that framed an author, actor’s or director’s ‘point of view’ – indeed; it was another author who originally raised dementia as a concern. As I will demonstrate throughout the remainder of this chapter, in place of actors located in perspectives, in my ethnographic encounters I found individuals managing multiplicity.

### **Accuracy, fiction and telling tales**

In outlining an organisational position on accuracy, the guidelines distinguish between programmes that are ‘factual’ and those that are ‘non-factual’. In organisational terms, this distinction between ‘fact’ and non-fact’ is deemed important to both programme makers and audiences. The point being that, both programme makers and audience should be clear about what any programme ‘is’ and also, by definition, what it ‘is not’.

Organisationally, differentiating between fact and non-fact is desirable given that the likely consequences of any boundary transgression could be damaging and expensive. Consider for example, factual outputs such as news, documentary and current affairs programming. Any inaccuracies in reporting the deeds of real



people, or inaccurate detail in documentary programmes, could lead to both litigation and loss of credibility for individuals and the BBC.

Considerable efforts are put into drawing a boundary for audiences between fact and non-fact. It is clearly acknowledged **within** programme making that, even in factual settings, accuracy is problematic. Hence, the guidelines for factual programmes address issues of balance, perspective and partiality and, programme makers skillfully weave in and out of the limits of ‘fact’.

There exist an established set of stylistic conventions that work to distinguish one type of programme for another. In the context of factual output for example, news and current affairs programmes use set design, camera angles and ‘shots’ in specialized ways. Equally, documentary form and narration has a particular range of styles that are readily recognizable. Whilst dramatised documentary programmes deliberately skirt the boundary between fact and non-fact, the conventions are well understood and audience misunderstanding is rare.

Performances of accuracy take a particular form in factual output; nonetheless, non-factual programmes are also framed by professional performances of accuracy. As such, accuracy was a hidden storyteller of *The Demon Headmaster Takes Over*. Let me demonstrate my point. CBBC classify *The Demon Headmaster Takes Over* as, above all else, a ‘Children’s Drama’. As children’s drama it is differentiated from schools programming, children’s factual output and children’s magazine programme, and so liberated from some of the tighter *accuracy* control mechanisms that such programmes are subject to. This liberation was readily acknowledged and cherished by Roger:

- BBC Children’s Programmes is different from Schools – different staff, different ethos. We set out to entertain, delight, stimulate and various other words like that. ‘Inform’ is one of them. ‘Educate’ comes fairly down the list. In children’s Drama, the emphasis was

‘entertain’. Kids have been at school. When they get to us, they want to relax for a bit. [Roger Singleton-Turner Childrens-Media-UK Archive 10 Sept. 1998 23:10:07]

Hence, *The Demon Headmaster Takes Over* is located in a production framework that holds entertainment as an important production value. Roger easily differentiates between entertainment/relaxation and a deliberate attempt to educate or inform. Even so, even in drama there is a commitment to accuracy of a sort:

I would be careful that anything in my programmes that appeared to be fact was checked and correct – I certainly would not want to misinform, but I would not expect children to ‘learn’ from my programmes except in the sense that anyone learns anything from any drama. [Roger Singleton-Turner Childrens-Media-UK Archive 10 Sept. 1998 23:10:07]

The drama production value “not to misinform”, came through clearly in fieldwork encounters with both Gillian and Helen. Both authors stressed their desire to represent science and scientific possibilities accurately and fairly. For example, there is the question of getting technology right. When Helen and I worked through scripts and programmes she pointed to ‘authentic’ representation of people and things:

**Video:** scene playing involving Tim demonstrating brain-charting equipment to the Headmaster

**HC:** (eagerly) I’ve just read the latest book on the Human Brain and actually this is very very right. This is what they can actually now do apparently.

**Video::** continues playing– scene moves on to jokes

[Transcript of interview 23/2/98: Helen’s sitting room. Watching video of broadcast programme with scripts. Daytime.]

Accuracy and balance are of concern to authors and programme makers – but so too are imagination, creativity and critique. Whilst Helen is keen to state the authenticity and providence of her scanning technologies, DBA technology is a lie: fiction. Hence, there is a somewhat precarious balancing act going on between author, drama, fiction, fact, form, accuracy and authenticity.

Performances of accuracy are complex. As evident in the following example concerning the children's use of computer mediated communications technologies. The idea to incorporate communications technologies into the story has an interesting history. Helen wrote the original script for the programmes working from a "very full outline" developed by the original author of The Demon Headmaster books: Gillian Cross. Gillian's outline was itself, framed by programme ideas developed in preliminary discussions between script editor, producer, director and Helen herself. It was this outline that required that the children were active users of computer based technology particularly communication technologies. A Cybercafe was to be the main 'location' of such action.

From Helen's perspective, it was her friend the script editor, who championed the Cybercafe. Whilst the script editor set particular visual and material stories in motion, Helen had to write authentic performances for competent child computer-mediated communicators. This is itself an interesting issue as Helen is not a computer user – she writes *manuscript*:

**HC:** In a way that was why I was glad to be associated with The Demon Headmaster you see, was because you see, I mean. When I read the first two and you see Richard was trying to talk me into it with this thing about science. But I said, 'God almighty' I said 'look at all this stuff about computers I said you know my position on computers. He said 'it doesn't matter (calming), it doesn't matter, we'll do the computers' and I thought well this gives me a certain street cred this does, all this stuff about computers and Hyperbrains and whatever, it looks like I know all this stuff (both laughing) which I don't. Nor indeed wish to. So, ere that was quite nice.

[Transcript: interview with Helen November 1997. Helen's study. Rural Nottinghamshire. Late morning]

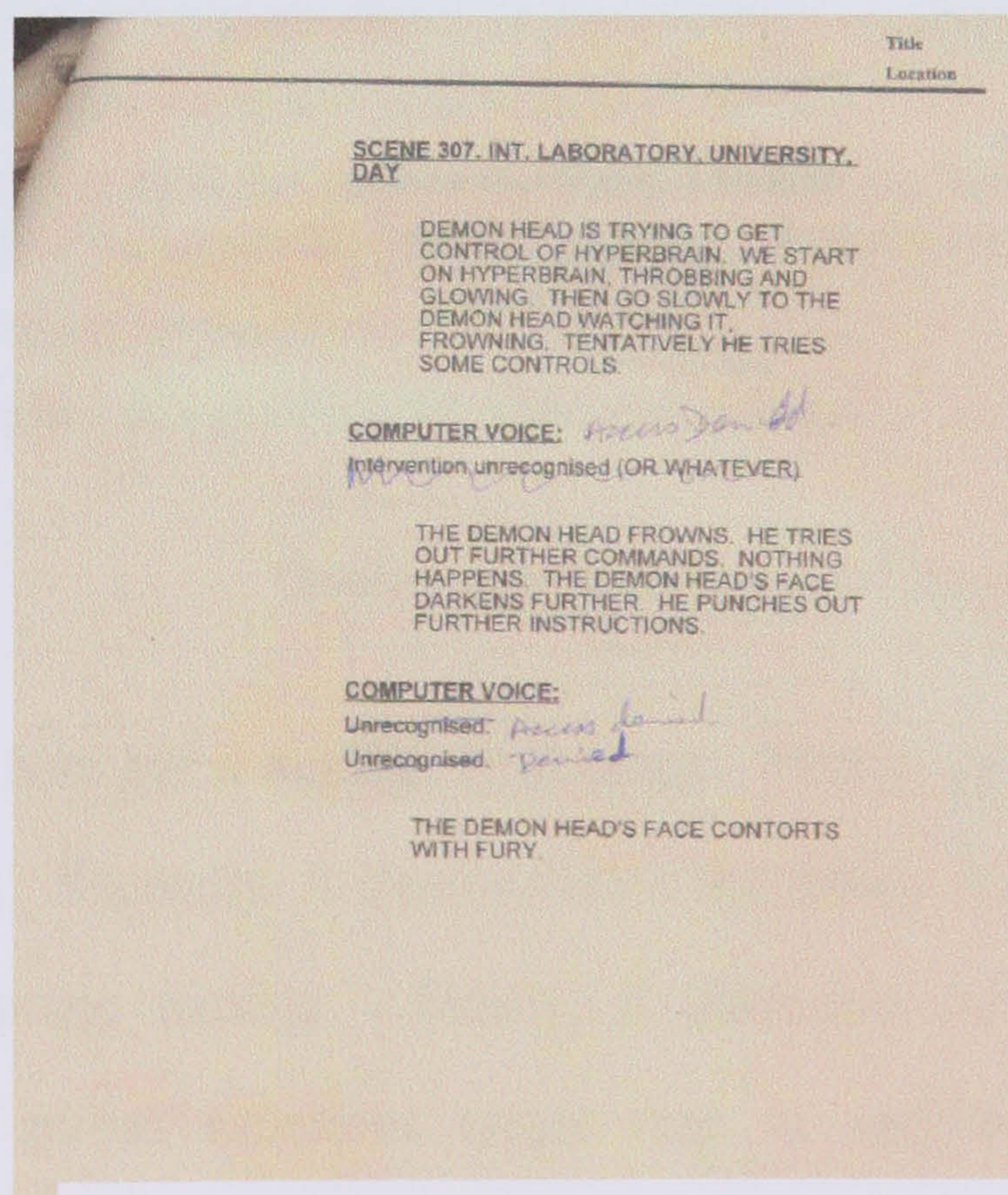
As a result of Helen's status as a non-user of computing technologies, dialogue in and around the Cyber Café scenes tend to be peppered with key words gleaned directly from *The Rough Guide to the Internet*. It was fascinating to hear Helen explain what happened as we watched scenes of children talking about newbies, smilies and flaming:

- Video:** internal shot of cybercafe – children using cyber speak
- HC:** I got all this out of the Rough Guide To The Internet. I know absolutely bugger all about computers or anything and C\*\* (Helen’s daughter) went and got me it and I got all the slang, everything
- LH:** right
- HC:** (still listening to a stretch of dialogue peppered with cyberspeak references) straight out of the Rough Guide, all of those

[Transcript of interview 23/2/98: Helen’s sitting room. Watching video of broadcast programme with scripts. Daytime.]

In this instance, lack of appropriate knowledge to accurately portray dialogue-action is not a huge problem, not least because Helen has a very strong sense of identity. Her interest is representing ‘the human condition’ and, in this respect, her points of accuracy in this story relate to establishing boundaries between human and artificial intelligence. For Helen, accuracy in computer-speak was a minor issue compared to her techno-politics of Artificial Intelligence.

In effect, Helen translated accuracy into ‘technical detail’. She and Richard [Callanan – executive producer of series 1 and 2] placed the responsibility for accurate portrayal of computing with the BBC: “we’ll do the computers”. And they did:



Scanned image 2: modified rehearsal script scene 307 [represented by kind permission of the BBC ]

The above scanned image is taken from the modified rehearsal script and evidences both Helen's ease for other storytellers to fill in 'details' and the active role of other storytellers. Helen's scripted "COMPUTER VOICE intervention unrecognised (OR WHATEVER)" has been modified to read "COMPUTER VOICE access denied". In the original script, Helen's comment (OR WHATEVER) is a simple and confident translation of the accuracy to minor technical detail – a point when accuracy moves elsewhere.

Whilst Helen was quite happy to move accuracy when it came to cyberspeak, at other times, she actively engages with accuracy to maintain narrative control. Take for example the 'character' Professor Claudia Rowe:

**HC:** Now I insisted on her being young and attractive.

**LH:** r i g h t (interested)

**HC:** Roger (pause) when I said it, he was actually here (Helen's home), and he said Are these people young and attractive? And I said (incredulous) can you hear yourself? (laughs)

**LH:** (laughs)

**HC:** I said can you hear yourself? I said. My daughter, the one at [British University], she's young and attractive and she'll probably be a professor by the time she's thirty-five. I said the mess... (Restarts sentence without pause) the subliminal message to kids is that to be a university professor you do not have to be old, you do not have to be a frump you can be like that (points to Claudia on-screen). So, I think that she is well cast as well [reference back to our discussion on casting the military intelligence officer we have just been watching].

**LH:** again that was quite a difference from the book

**HC:** God you must be quite dizzy going between the two. I haven't even seen the book of the latest one. No one has thought to send it to me. I haven't even read it.

**LH:** (looking for the illustration)

**HC:** I know I'm a great one for subliminal messages

....

[Transcript of interview 23/2/98: Helen's sitting room. Watching video of broadcast programme with scripts. Daytime.]

I use this example here for a number of reasons. Firstly, gender politics are raised without prompting. Secondly, it demonstrates the messy web of forces that come together in programme making. Finally, it illustrates how programme makers interpret accuracy across situations rather than in very bounded and delimited situational spaces.

Roger was obviously swayed by Helen's argument and Claudia was indeed cast as young, attractive and successful (see Video Still 5).



*Video Still 5 Professor Claudia Rowe [Reproduced by kind permission BBC. Copyright BBC]*

In casting a part, programme makers want to maintain a sense of character authenticity: accuracy. Casting is one of Haraway's hidden storytellers. For example, taking Helen's point of age, if Claudia were a mature 40 or 50 year old woman, Storyworld would change. The dialogue possibilities between Claudia and the Children would be different. The action possibilities would be different. The textual and intertextual references would be different. Claudia would be a different woman and hence, her story within Storyworld would be different.

As well as age, naming is a factor that works to politicise a character. In this context, there were other games to be played with Professor Claudia Rowe: games that, as with age and attractiveness, link fiction and non-fictional woman:

**Video:** action introducing Claudia by name...

**HC:** This is an in-joke. My married name is R\*\*

**HC:** and C\*\*\* R\*\*\* [names daughter] C\*\*\* [daughters full given name] is actually doing animal behaviour at \*\*\* [British University] (a D.Phil.) and she sort of acted

as my scientific advisor on the first one and we put her name on the cover of the book which she has got in \*\*\* [University name] but we changed \*\*\*\* [Given Name] to Claudia so it is a bit of an in-joke. (LH and HC share smiles and laugh).

When Helen wrote the script she knew Claudia as a thirty-something Professor not that unlike her daughter and her associates at a British University. My point here is that fictional action and dialogue followed from Helen's partial connections across family, friendship, education, gender politics, authorship and so on. At times, such connections are revealed and momentarily made fast – like Helen, her daughter and Claudia Rowe.

However, making one set of connection hold fast hides other connections and hence, other story possibilities. There was a great deal more to the character of Claudia than my simply drawn connectivity might imply. For example I am sure the actress playing Claudia would feel somewhat undervalued here, and all the networks she works through when 'coming to' a part. Equally, the director works in partially connected networks to represent the fictional woman in action. So, a cautionary note here is that my illustration is simply used here to demonstrate that accuracy is an issue of authenticity as well as 'fact'. Claudia's character is political in form, action and dialogue. As with any character in Storyworld, from Tim Dexter through to the misbehaving telephone, Claudia's biography could be an ethnography in its own right.

Acknowledging the partiality of my descriptions, I want to expand the threads of my analysis slightly to consider the storytelling power of scheduling and cost. Whilst cost issues may appear mundane, I will demonstrate shortly that performances of cost are complex and situated. However, for the moment, I turn to programme schedules to foreground reproductive and subversive performances of scheduling.

### **Scheduling stories in some funny and unfunny ways**

Schedules are one aspect of complex relationships developed between audience, programme makers and the BBC. In what follows, I examine how schedules net

work to manage and subvert audience expectations and professional practice. In this context, I begin by considering schedules as technologies of time. Time, as schedule performances, was a hybrid, political and ethical storyteller.

I begin by introducing schedules as a technology for ordering time. Ordering time is one device that broadcast organisations use to build relationships with audience that frame expectations. For both producers and consumers of television broadcasts there is a degree of comfort in ‘knowing’ what a particular time slot might hold and what it **should** not: ‘A good rule of thumb is to avoid taking the audience by surprise.’ [Producers guidelines Ch5 Item 5.2 para 5]. This heuristic is realised in part by breaking a 24-hour programming day into a set of identifiable time slots. Each time slot has an identifiable character that becomes part of an unwritten contract with audiences and audience gatekeepers. This contract relates to what type of programme might reasonably appear at a certain time of day.

Along with other UK terrestrial television broadcasters, the BBC construct schedules around an overarching temporal signpost known as the 9pm Watershed.

The BBC has a well-established policy of making 9pm the pivotal point of the evening’s television, a Watershed before which, except in exceptional circumstances, all programmes on our domestic channels should be suitable for a general audience including children. The earlier in the evening a programme is placed, the more suitable it is likely to be considered for children to watch alone. However, the BBC expects parents to share the responsibility for assessing whether or not individual programmes should be seen by younger viewers.

[Producers guidelines Ch5 Item 5.2 para 1].

The Watershed is a temporal signpost. Audiences can reasonably expect “family” entertainment pre-watershed and ‘adult’ programming post-watershed. In other words, in constructing schedules, a first measure is to partition **the audience** into



categories of **adult** and **not-wholly-adult**. In this sense, The Watershed represents boundaries between adults and its others: family, child or child-like. By establishing child/adult boundaries as ‘times’, broadcasters are now able to produce programming that represents this form of categorization.

Schedule watersheds are particular performances of adult/child boundary and are used by programme makers to manage representation of aspects of contemporary life that are generally deemed outside of the scope of children: for example representation of sex, violence, and the “darker side” of human experience.

Whilst the Watershed provides a crude but very visible guide to programme making, additional audience segmentation and sign posting clarifies the position still further. For example, children are catered for at home and at school through two different schedules: School’s programming and CBBC. As we saw earlier, one schedule seeks to educate and inform, the other entertain. Hence, CBBC is a schedule partition that assumes children are watching in a domestic setting and without direct adult involvement.

CBBC schedules reflect further audience segmentation. In this case, taking different age groups and their likely activities as markers for scheduling. For example, a line can be drawn to divide pre-school children from school children with further subdivision by age. This translates in CBBC schedules as different time slots for pre-school children and school children. A time slot for school age children runs Monday to Friday from 3.30pm to 5.35pm. The later in this ‘slot’ that a programme appears the older the perceived audience group. Initially, the first outing of *The Demon Headmaster Takes Over* was scheduled twice weekly on Tuesdays and Thursday at 5.10 p.m. and running for approximately 24 minutes. In other words it was clearly commissioned and scheduled as a ‘children’s programme’ but its appearance at the end of the children’s schedule signposts it as targeted at an ‘older’ child audience upward of 9 or 10 years of age.

The scheduling of children's drama is partially, yet intimately, connected with varying notions of childhood, children and child. The language, plot-complexity, characters and issues of *The Demon Headmaster Takes Over* reflect the intended scheduled audience: school children. Rose's [1984] observation that writing and publishing children's literature is almost exclusively the concern of adults has relevance here. Adults produce Children's programmes and act as gatekeepers of what stories can, or cannot, be made available to children. In other words, children's programmes are adult products made for consumption by children and families [Buckingham 1995]. Hence, schedules are one site of adult enactments of childhood.

Schedules are complex sites for managing production/consumption relationships. Varying *senses* of child audiences influence content, form and limits of stories. In this context, it would be misleading to think that in scheduling a story for late afternoon, CBBC produces a bland output for children.

For example, schedule performances, particularly Watersheds and CBBC, situate and frame potentially uneasy relationships between adult gatekeepers of child viewing and the BBC. Adult gatekeepers trust programme makers to either abide within the scheduled framework or provide adequate warning and signposts when they intend to step outside. A general assumption here is that gatekeepers are not necessarily viewing with children and, hence, the BBC has some duty to maintain their values in their absence: for example safe baby sitting [see Singleton-Turner herein]. However, as a scheduled location for children, CBBC is involved in interactions with a heterogeneous child audience that enact trust differently. As consumers, children seek meaningful programming, programmes that 'ring true' and entertain, be they factual or non-factual. At any one time, programme makers obligations to child audiences may conflict with their tacit covenants with gatekeepers of childhood.

In terms of *The Demon Headmaster Takes Over*, scheduling played its storytelling role in well-rehearsed, conventional and predictable ways: framing apparently well

established notions of child, audience and children's story. However, on occasions, 'doing' the schedule proved charmingly subversive. To demonstrate, I will use an example of a performance of schedule subverting the authorial intention of Helen Cresswell.

### *CBBC and 'fancying'*

Between 3.30pm and 5.35pm each day BBC1 becomes CBBC with its own logo, presenters, stars, conventions and groundbreaking controversies. One particular feature of CBBC as a schedule in action involves the use of presenters to 'front' the children's schedule. Presenters provide links between programmes, host interviews and manage audience interaction. The presence of presenters, and their direct interaction with the audience, clearly differentiates the CBBC time slot from BBC.

There is nothing neutral about CBBC presenters. They have their own studio, set, crews and style. In the early days of this form of schedule management the 'link' set was known as the 'Broom Cupboard' (an implied reference to size) and was limited to a desk and a backdrop. Any drawings, letters and birthday cards sent in by, or on behalf of, the audience appeared to have been hastily stuck in front of the desk, or on the set backdrop, in a rather familiar and familial way.

With the coming of the broom cupboard, trails for forthcoming programmes were developed into more substantial forms of publicity. Programme link slots became opportunities for audiences to have tele-visual connection with 'stars' of the programmes who "dropped into" the broom cupboard to advertise their forthcoming/ongoing series. This particular format became extremely popular and the broom-cupboard presenters became celebrities of children's television. Indeed, there are noticeable ex-presenters who now have strong careers at senior levels in the television industry as editors or producers.

The success of the 'presenter' format did not go unnoticed. Link slots are now given more time and larger sets. As their space develops, so too does their scope for story

telling. Indeed, I will argue that in ‘presenting CBBC’ presenters can transgress the apparently fixed boundary of a programme set by 0.1 of opening sequence and the end of closing credits. In the case of *The Demon Headmaster Takes Over*, such transgression was visible between programme and CBBC studio action.

The example here comes from a memorable moment in fieldwork when Helen and I watched the series together. As the programme we were reviewing drew to an end, we were both struck by a CBBC link so powerful that we exchanged meaningful glances and burst out laughing. The scene we were watching was the closing scene for episode two (scene 224):

		10.22 94
	<b>SCENE 224. INT. CONFERENCE HALL LOBBY. UNIVERSITY, DAY.</b>	
	THE INTRODUCTORY LECTURE IS OVER AND VERY HYPNOTISED DELEGATES ARE FILING OUT. TIM CHECKS THEM OFF ON A LIST, AND GIVES OR PINS ON BADGES.	10.22 .54 music cue 12
	<b>TIM DEXTER:</b> Mr Ashley Roberts, Head of the National Youth Pursuits Association.	
	<b>DEMON HEADMASTER:</b> Proceed as discussed.	
	<b>TIM DEXTER:</b> Mr John Wardley, National T.V.	
	<b>DEMON HEADMASTER:</b> Await my instructions.	
	<b>TIM DEXTER:</b> Mr Peter Garson, Minister for Information.	
	<b>DEMON HEADMASTER:</b> You know what you have to do.	
	<b>TIM DEXTER:</b> Lord Kenton, Chair of the Press Regulation Committee.	
	<b>DEMON HEADMASTER:</b> Remember what I have said.	
	<b>TIM DEXTER:</b> Professor Claudia Rowe, Biogenetics, Wessex.	
	<b>DEMON HEADMASTER: (WITH GLIMMER OF A SMILE)</b> Welcome to our team, Professor Rowe ...	10.23 .39
10.23 29	<b>MIX TO CLOSING CREDITS ROLLER (SEE ATTACHED LIST)</b>	10.23 29 music cue 12a closin- g
<b>CLOSING CREDIT SEQUENCE</b>		
	<b>CLOSING SEQUENCE ENDS</b>	10.24 .03

*Scanned image 3 post production script scene 224 reproduced by kind permission of the BBC*

The scene is set outside the conference hall just after the Headmaster has addressed, and hypnotized, conference delegates. The Headmaster is being introduced to his newly recruited crew of academics, politicians, industrialists, youth leaders and television executives. Tim is performing the introductions and the Headmaster is shaking hands and directing the new team. At this moment we discover that one of our good guys, Professor Claudia Rowe, has succumbed to The Demon Headmaster's will.

For Helen, Scene 224 is important. It is intended as a tension builder; point where we find that the main links between the children and the 'normal' adult world have been severed. The whole scene is set to produce this effect: music, text, direction and action all operate to sustain tension and allow us to realise that we have lost Claudia to the Headmaster. This tension is maintained by the eerie radiophonic theme music that runs with the mix to closing credits.

As Helen and I watched this scene the broadcast programme became a small 'window' in the full screen. The main screen was directed back to the CBBC set and a cheerful presenter:

**Presenter:** (talking over closing scene mix to credits and theme tune) OOO Err! I think he has a soft spot for her. Those eyes do wonders don't they? To find out what happens you'll have to watch part three of The Demon Headmaster next Tuesday at ten past five. (Talking over the closing credits)

[Transcript of interview 23/2/98: Helen's sitting room. Watching video of broadcast programme with scripts. Daytime.]

This brief interruption into story sequence is interesting. The presenter has broken the intended tension. However, his interference has done far more. He has raised the possibility that the Headmaster is attracted to Claudia. This possible story line runs counter to both Helen and Gillian's view of the character. For them, the Headmaster is emotionless - and more. Indeed, the melodramatic aspects of story require the he is unambiguously inhuman: that is his actions are clearly outside any experiences that children might have of adult behaviour. Gillian explains her view of the character in the following anecdote:

**LH:** Benign tyrant?

**GC:** Erm, except he doesn't know best, so he is not benign, but that is how he would see himself yes. But his model of human nature is actually very limited in that sense. And so in that sense, except that it is not sad because it's, he would be sad if he were a real person. He has no name for that reason. Erm, and it is interesting yes, because Roger, I think it was Roger, perhaps it was not Roger, but at various points when we were discussing things that might happen. Somebody amazed me, I don't know if it was Roger, by saying, or perhaps it was the previous series, it would be nice to have Rose again (character from series 1) but maybe she could turn out to be the Demon Headmaster's daughter. (BOTH LAUGH). I thought that is completely out of key with how I saw him. [Transcript of interview 23/12/97: Gillian's Kitchen. Rural village. Late Afternoon]]

In making sexuality an explicit part of this story, albeit in a safe and managed way, the presenter provided a subversive interlude-intertext-interruption-interference. The reference to the Headmaster having a 'soft spot' for Claudia carries with it an emotionality that is not attributed to him as a character in an author's story. The boundary of story is transgressed. In this instance, the interruption interferes to rewrite the inhuman Headmaster in human male terms. In this way, it opens up story possibilities around Claudia that were hitherto managed.

It was always the intention that Claudia would be attractive and intelligent but the sexual references are now more explicit: she has become an object of male attention/affection/desire. Claudia has been re-written in different sexual terms to Helen's politics of independence, ability and power. Hence, the presenter mediated story through broadcast context and, by adding a 'youthful' 'male' (yet scripted) voice, introduced new possibilities to a rather conservative story.

The interaction that occurred between audience, closing scene and presenter added sexual attraction to story. A cursory review of current web-site activity at CBBC online suggests that sexuality is an interest of audiences: 'fancying' and sexual orientation appear regularly in the text of programmes page, web-sites, behind-the-scenes interviews, and schedule guides. So, interestingly, presenters are not alone in transforming stories across locations.

When *The Demon Headmaster takes Over* was in production, BBC online was established and CBBC had its own website. However, at that time, the BBC used

on-line as a broadcast medium providing schedules, guidelines, transcripts and archives to consumers. Today, CBBC website is a far more lively space for interviews, images, chat and discussion groups. The focus now is interaction and conversation. Given that the website shifted in front of me, it is demanding space for itself in future work, and it will be interesting to return to CBBC to find out how they work this avalanche of interaction. However, that is a question for the future. For now, there is another storyteller that I observed in action worth mentioning here: that is cost.

### **Production costs: partial political economies of story**

Although a public broadcast service subsidised by licence fee payers, the BBC is also a commercial business and seeks to profit (or at least break even) on most productions. This attempt to profit from production is regarded as necessary for the BBC to offset production deficit incurred by State control of licence fees. In this context, for a story to be told it must be judged a viable business project: deemed a valuable commodity through some agreed value system.

Whilst BBC is in the *business* of television, the notion of cost must be handled carefully. The political economy of production that I encountered in fieldwork was rich in variety and complex in character. In this context, I found ‘cost’, and its technology ‘budget’, a hidden storyteller of *The Demon Headmaster Takes Over*.

In costing a programme, estimates are made which locate programmes across a variety of situations. For example: programmes are **commercial products**. As such, sales potential is an issue, and viewing figures or potential for world-wide distribution are cost concerns. In this sense, programmes are goods brought to market. As goods, programmes are products of **production processes**, and the ‘commercial’ balance between production cost and income generation has relevance in assessing the viability of any story. However, viability calculations occur across other locations. For example, programmes are **flagships**. A flagship programme

stands for the organisation and can be costed as a revenue generator in terms of both sales and its ability to attract production partners. Production partners are relevant here, as some programmes are **joint ventures**. In this context production costs can be shared around a group of collaborating production companies. Flagship programmes are also **quality products** that enhance corporate reputation. An award-winning product brings both kudos and capital. Hence, marketability and acclaim are tightly related to viability calculations and so influence the stories that get told, ignored or axed.

To make my point more clearly, I focus here on two spacious locations: namely market and making. In considering market, I will illustrate that knowledge of market behaviour is complex and fragile. The very idea(s) of a market or markets for a programme has considerable influence on the sort of stories that are told and the manner of their telling. In discussing mundane practices of programme making I will illustrate that ‘programme cost’ is part of daily performances in programme making and, a significant storyteller.

### *Stories in the market place*

It is hardly surprising that there is economic logic to identifying or creating stories that can be widely distributed: that is **sold** to other broadcast networks. The logic of capitalism is being that if a product is costly to make, then it must either be a rare commodity that will raise a high price from few buyers or have widespread appeal. To have wide appeal, a story/product must be able to navigate through global markets that are intermeshed with difference: different notions of taste and decency, different conventions of televisual form, different canons of literary form. In other words, at least some productions must be accessible to audiences situated in very different ‘local’ contexts: global products.

Distribution of products to overseas markets can bring financial rewards to the BBC in addition to monies from direct sales. International distribution networks are more



than trade networks – they are professional networks of programme makers. Trade provides opportunities for Network companies to form working relationships as they construct, negotiate and rework programme making. These relationships can lead to collaborative projects – typically joint production ventures in which there is a negotiated shared cost. Such joint ventures can give life to a production process (and so a story) that would have been deemed too costly to undertake solely by CBBC or, perhaps, by either of the collaborators.

Global products have a significant attraction to a broadcasting company. Knowing that you can recoup productions cost and generate a profit from overseas sales gives a company a degree of independence. They can reinvest in development or support production costs of less marketable products. However, there is a professional caution with global products. Firstly, a concern about politics of global culture and media imperialism and secondly, a concern that over dependence on basic formulae can limit narrative potential and produce bland products that have short life spans [Fuller and Potter 1993]. In responding to these concerns, practitioners appear to focus on two ‘strategies’: market segmentation of popular programming and ‘quirky’ products.

In market segmentation the approach is to pitch particular products at particular markets. On the basis of fieldwork it was clear that programme makers are sensitive to the ‘markets’ for their products: for example one might see Canada, Ireland and Australia as likely customers of the *Headmaster* but not necessarily Middle or Far Eastern states. On the other hand, the quirky approach draws on the success of certain types of ‘classic foreign’ product. These products focus on local identity and are attractive in their difference. Difference becomes a ‘selling point’ and, in this case, stories – especially filmic stories - move readily across local situations because they are quirky, different and challenge established forms [Bazalgette and Staples 1995]. In other words there are locations that provide scope for programmes making

that does not ‘fit’ a “make ‘em cheap, pile ‘em high, sell ‘em everywhere” economics of a market-stall.

Whilst evidence supports the assertion that quirky and disturbing films can be successful on an international scale [Bazalgette and Staples 1995], I would put *The Demon Headmaster Takes Over* into a more mundane category. The programme makers did not set out to be controversial or to challenge established values, their intention was to make a good production within the established framework of UK children’s television drama. A drama that would sell to other countries with similar values: a nice steady, and bankable, product.

The bankable ‘world-wide distribution’ of a children’s product may point to a sinister form of media imperialism where conventions and production values of western media (in this case CBBC) are translated across cultural settings. However, such claims imply a passive audience receiving heavily codified programmes and there are strong counter arguments for this form of ‘globalising’ imperialism [Ang 1982].

However, whilst there are clearly colonial, post-colonial and imperial trade politics at play in distribution and market construction, there are also other less predictable aspects of market choice. For example, when considering distribution of *The Demon Headmaster*:

I find it interesting that Iceland (Valdia – Hi) bought the series – partly on the strength of one of the empowered boys being played by a lad whose mother is an Icelandic actress. The US did not buy the series because of the negative image in the first series, at least, of schoolteachers. [Roger Singleton-Turner Children-Media-UK Archive 21 Oct 1997 18:08:29]

I was gladdened that Icelandic kinship networks influenced international distribution of a technological story. Equally, US reaction would not surprise programme makers at CBBC. After all, they have considerable experience of programme sales and distribution. That experience includes distribution of intentionally challenging children's programmes such as *Grange Hill*. But, Roger's email demonstrates the educated guessing game that is played out as production strategists net-work proposing a story for production and determining appropriate production budget.

On the basis of this market based review of 'costing', it might appear that a story stands a better chance of being told if it can be identified as the sort of story that could be distributed outside the domestic market. But, cost viability is not solely a matter of marketability. The story itself has to be viable. For example, Richard Callanan, executive producer of earlier *Demon Headmaster* series, recalls his interest in the first *Demon Headmaster* book that Gillian wrote [Cross 1982], noting that:

(For several reasons I delayed proposing *The Demon Headmaster* because it was too short to make into the perceived economically viable six episodes.) [Richard Callanan: Children-Media-UK Archive Thu, 17 Sep 1998 13:40:13]

Richard's initial problem was solved when Gillian Cross wrote another *Demon Headmaster* book: *The Prime Ministers Brain* [Cross 1985]. The BBC concatenated and adapted the two books to produce a six part drama series under the title *The Demon Headmaster*.

As we shall see, such cost performances are significant in story production and programme making. Budgets and balances are lived, performed and re-situated in practice and hence it is worth moving closer to a story that has passed budget gate-keepers and in-production: *The Demon Headmaster Takes Over*.

### ***Making: doing cost***

I will start here with a cost translation of *The Demon Headmaster Takes Over* from **story to operation**. Scale is a portmanteau term that covers operational issues such as the number of characters in a story and the range of activities and events in which they are involved. Scale brings with it other cost issues relating to the planned length of time in production, use of expensive FX's, number of scenes made on location, nature of locations, intricacy of set designs and complexity of post-production technique.

With the exception of joint ventured productions, there is not much opportunity for CBBC programme makers to attempt a technological extravaganza with a cast of hundreds set in the Bahamas: transit, housing and feeding the crew and cast would break most budgets. Cost knowledge of this kind is tacit and experienced as common sense of craft practice. In this context, I have already suggested that programme makers have 'specialist' professional identities that situate 'children's drama', and, taking Helen as my prime example, I will now demonstrate how production costs are powerful players in these situated practices.

Helen has been involved as an outsider/insider at the BBC for over twenty-five years. As a screenwriter, Helen is part of a programme making collective. However, she is freelance, spreading her time between television work and book authorship. Her cross boundary position as television screenwriter and book author provides an interesting space for professional identity to morph.

Her first experience of television came when her book *Lizzie Dripping* [Cresswell 1972] was televised over twenty years ago. Helen, used her experiences with this production when accounting current and changed practices. In this context, Helen noted that she had adapted her own book for television: a situation that seemed quite natural at the time but would be unlikely nowadays given that script writing has become a 'special' form of authorship. The BBC now prefers to use 'proven' script

writers: authors who can make stories visually powerful, use the medium to full extent and stay within reasonable operating scale for production.

Given her ‘track record’ over the past twenty-five years, Helen is a trusted script writers, hence she was commissioned to adapt the first two of Gillian’s Demon Headmaster stories for a television series. I will return to adaptation as a cost strategy in a moment, but for now I want to focus on cost knowledge that surfaced with *Lizzie Dripping*:

**HC:** very good, oh really

**LH:** that was the one, that and Lizzie Dripping

**HC:** oh well of course Lizzie Dripping I am currently trying to persuade somebody to remake

**LH:** Oh right

**HC:** Because I think, because twenty-five years ago, and I mean it was almost the first BBC drama that ever got made for children...

**LH:** right

**HC:** ...they made it in this village using the pond down there (pointing), our graveyard, the flags still there where the Witch sat, the little cottage is just across the road where Lizzie Dripping lived. The mill is just on the Wellow Road...

**LH:** mmm

**HC:** ...and they did it on a shoestring. Both series in this village and my younger daughter C\*\*, the one that is at [British University], we needed a baby in the first series. Which, we didn’t know, there was only going to be, we didn’t know there was going to be anymore and I just happened to have had a baby so we used her. And then in the second series she was a little toddler, erm, so I mean it was all done. So, I mean it was so hugely popular. And, I think to myself, well what about doing it again. Bringing it bang up to date because it still obtains.

**LH:** Absolutely

**HC:** The message is still there. Again, although obviously I know myself from going on location that these days, that it is, my god it is a really big job. They’d like eighty people where we had about sixteen...

**LH:** yes

**HC:** ...you know, little group of actors, they were using that phone (points to phone in study) for their headquarters and all done on a total shoestring. But, even so, it would be relatively cheap by today’s... (pause half a beat) because, because the only visual effect you’ve got is the Witch appearing and disappearing which they could do even in those days

**LH:** yes

**HC:** ...'Cos you just shut the frame off no problem. No huge visual effects like you need for *The Phoenix* or *Moondial* or anything.

[Transcript: Helen October 1997 Helen’s study rural Nottinghamshire late morning]

Helen **knows** that location work and special effects are costly, and this knowledge has played its part in her craftwork of writing for television. In other words, location-cost and technology-cost are hidden storytellers that can both sanction and deny story content and form. In the following example I will illustrate how location cost knowledge is written into Helen's scripts for *The Demon Headmaster Takes Over*. However, the example shows that whilst location cost knowledge is part of the television writers craft, cost effectiveness isn't a simple calculation and decisions are always elsewhere.

The point I want to make here revolves around location costs and Mr. Roberts, his kids and the Outward Bound Centre. Helen recounted this story to me when we watched the programmes, although the interesting action occurred just after Helen had written her first draft of scripts. She and her friend 'M', the script editor, worked through the first draft of the first draft. In that preliminary read through, 'M' suggested the addition of some (costly) location scenes set at an Outward Bound Centre. These additions were based on 'M's expertise of visual story telling and her craft opinion was that the additional expenditure was justified (indeed it was required) in terms of improving **visual story telling**.

The additional scenes were drafted into Episodes 3 and 5. These scenes involved additional location work with all the direct cost that ensues from outdoor working: wages, catering costs, transport costs, additional location sites to be found, waiting for weather to clear, inflexible sets and so on. The scenes allow the audience to **see** both Mr. Roberts (one of the Headmaster's henchmen) and his two heroic children on their home turf – the Outdoor Centre.

At the point in the plot where the scenes were added, the threat posed by the Headmaster was moving from a 'local' to a 'national' phenomenon. Whilst indoor sets **could** have given the feel of rooms in an Outward Bound Centre it was felt that

the story **needed more**. ‘M’s’ knowledge of visual storytelling led her to **know** that ‘really’ different locations would offer the **necessary** sense of widening threat.

In location production, the additional scenes give a sense of space that incorporates social, natural and material textures. The ‘outdoor’ work and associated visual clues evoke a sense of distance, giving the impression that the power of both the Headmaster and Hyperbrain has extended beyond the University and town into the ‘wider’ world. Cost and televisual storytelling merge to the point where they can no longer be distinguished: that is as performances of cost-material-aesthetic-political partial connections.

Cost-aesthetic connections are complex. The visual storytelling argument was used to add scenes but, on another occasion, Helen has to argue the ‘storytelling’ need of characters in scenes.

Everyone who appears in a scene is there for a purpose. Every action and every word of dialogue is intended as part of a story. As Helen insisted: “*never a wasted word Linda, not a wasted word*”. In this case, Helen was forced to argue the right to introduce (use) Mr. Roberts and his children earlier than originally planned. This decision gives the actors concerned more performance time and action. The additional work escalates cost in the form of wages, chaperones, wardrobes, time, sets and so on. Helen’s argument for such a cost is a literary one:

**Video:** playing final scene of episode one – conference delegates are leaving and being introduced to the Demon Head. Mr. Roberts is the first to be introduced

**HC:** and of course the first one they introduced, the Roberts, the youth thing, of course he becomes important later on

**LH:** yes

**HC:** now you see that’s an interesting difference from the original outline that I had because, in fact, they only appeared in episode five, these other two kids [indicates Mr. Roberts’ children] and whatever

**LH:** Plum and Jelly’?

**HC:** ...and I said to ‘M’, no we can’t have this. I hate it when suddenly and conveniently in episode five something turns up. They’ve got to be in there right from the beginning. And, I’m sure it wouldn’t have worked if we hadn’t actually kept (pause). And of course it’s quite tantalising in the next episode, when you actually see these children arrive, and of course, in the viewer, it is going to waken

memories of the earlier, (pause) the very first series where the children are regimented, made to stand in lines whatever. And, it's got echoes of that in it. But at first you don't say what's happening or anything, it's just a sort of tease that one puts in but they're registering it. But, I mean you would do that in adult television because (hesitate a half beat) that's what sometimes aggravates me about children's television, that they don't actually credit the viewer with sophistication to er, you know.

...

**HC:** ...so, erm, I sort have got that in a lot earlier, so that it all seemed part of it, when it finally happened, otherwise it's just sort of arriving out of the blue and all very convenient (pause) it's sort of not on.

**LH:** (agreeing all the time) it allows them to make connections backwards

**HC:** exactly

**LH:** and they expect it to be there for a reason

**HC:** exactly so it doesn't just look like 'oh how very convenient, what's this all of a sudden'

[Transcript of interview 23/2/98: Helen's sitting room. Watching video of broadcast programme with scripts. Daytime.]

Helen's concern was based on writerly understanding of relationships between audience, authenticity plot, action and character informed by her understanding of writing both novels and scripts. However, she needed to make this knowledge accessible to story tellers more used to dealing with 'not a wasted action' and visual story form. The upshot was a mix of additional appearance, dialogue and action with some 'off screen' action. For example, the Roberts children are virtually present in interactions with SPLAT before they are visible or audible: that is they are email correspondents who are referred to by SPLAT but not seen until later. The virtual presence of the Roberts children is a low cost approach that extends the storytelling of computer mediated communication whilst not undermining other aspects of story form and content

These two examples show cost-aesthetic at work across locations. On the one hand Helen being frugal with sets and location work but 'M', an experienced voice of visual programme making, changing the story by additional scenes. On the other hand, Helen's literary senses required that characters were involved longer in production and had more scenes than other 'story tellers' could see as necessary. Both women argue their points on the basis of their professional understanding of



‘how’ to craft story and ‘how’ audiences behave. So, cost isn’t simple but it is linked to writerly behaviours, audience behaviours, craft practices and perceptions of audience and art. And, these linkages are not easily plotted, nor are they permanent.

There are many other subtle cost lessons that Helen has learned over twenty five years. One cost-aesthetic political issue that sticks in my mind is the interesting case of being Northern:

**HC:** ...so I have thought to myself, well, if anything doesn’t turn up in the next week or so erm I might have more of a determined go on the Lizzie Dripping front...

**LH:** Right

**HC:** ...because, although you’d keep a lot of it, it would entail quite a lot of changes to the scripts. There would be quite a lot of work to do on it

**LH:** yes? [interested and quizzical]

**HC:** And, I wouldn’t make it Northern based this time because that, that was, that went against it. They never managed to sell it abroad you see

**LH:** Right

**HC:** Because, and even some of the people down south, who were silly [derisory] saying they couldn’t understand a Northern accent. [both laugh]. The northern accents weren’t that thick

**LH:** [laughing] no they weren’t [broad Northern accent].

**HC:** I, nothing near as thick as some of the Scots accents we get. To this day, that [names famous Scottish actor], I can’t understand one word he says. And, in fact the moment anything Scottish comes on I turn ... off, on either the radio or the television. Though I’m happy to say that I started watching this thing, and I thought what’s this? And, it was called *A Crow Road*...

**LH:** Oh yes great

**HC:** ...and it was absolutely bloody brilliant. And, that was Scots, and I thought - oh Helen you shouldn’t be so bigoted [both laugh] [coughs] you shouldn’t be so bigoted.

[Transcript: Helen November 1997 Helen’s study rural Nottinghamshire late morning]

It is possible that the problem of being Northern interests me because I am, like Helen, a Northerner. Personally, the idea of regional accent causing a distribution problem opened up a whole can of worms: not least issues of difference and multidimensional inequality. However, I could think of a number of children’s series that had northern characters, northern settings or both. For example, the highly successful *Byker Grove* a thriving (and long running) children’s series set in the Northeast of England with (albeit carefully handled) regional accents. And, Alan

Bennett seems to do OK too. Perhaps, before I get too agitated and zoom off to fight a class/regional war, I should look at how they ‘do’ Northern in these productions. But, that would be another story.

The encounter with Northern-ness made me aware of accents and settings in *The Demon Headmaster Takes Over*. Whilst it would be easy to critique the programme as middle-road/middle-class, researching *The Demon Headmaster Takes Over* I was struck by how these issues intimately connect in performances of ‘what works’ as children’s television drama.

Crucially, situated performances of ‘what works’ change– sometimes these changes are everyday negotiations and sometimes they become ‘movements’ that are visible to the point of policy change. For example, during fieldwork I found considerable differences of opinion over what might be deemed appropriate sources for televisual stories. Helen sometimes writes children’s books with television in mind, and sometimes she adapts existing novels and short stories. However, the BBC is moving towards **commissioning** rather than adaptation.

The changing production wisdom from adaptation to commissioning appears to involve a shift of situated storytelling from **author** to **collective** story development. This shift has significant cost and story implications. Let me illustrate my point by examining different aspects of adaptation and commissioning scripts.

Helen’s first television script, *Lizzie Dripping* was an adaptation of a successful children’s novel:

... from the programme maker’s point of view an adaptation is a safer choice than an original script – a successful book has already proved itself in one medium; it saves on development and can be mounted more quickly. **Traditionally** children’s television has been very slow to spend money on developing original scripts which are not

eventually produced. In my experience 90 per cent of commissioned scripts get made, a much higher percentage than in adult drama.

Selecting from existing books is a cheap shortcut. ... [Richard Callanan: Children-Medi-Archive Thu, 17 Sep 1998. 13:40:13. my emboldening]

The traditional use of children's literature for television drama rests on the **proven** status of a published work. Hence, there was a period when programme makers sought 'classic' children's stories and popular children's fiction as a basis for planning productions and filling schedules. However, whilst the proven story model favoured in an era of adaptation is useful, there are problems with shifting a story from sequential novel to television series. As Richard goes on to point out, there are cost constraints on producing a visual story that are not evident in writing for a reader's imagination:

Novels are often expensive to produce on television – novelists see no need to restrict the number of characters or locations. Writers of original scripts can be given a limited number of characters and locations as part of their brief (cf "Friends", "Rosanne", "The Wild House"). . [Richard Callanan: Children-Medi-Archive Thu, 17 Sep 1998 13:40:13]

Practical issues such as the setting, locations, FX's and number of characters limit the possible stories that can be successfully (and viably) 'adapted'. In this cost-aesthetic context, programme makers interest has shifted to commissioning original stories. In so doing they can frame stories to 'fit' the production medium: that is telling stories that are both visually and cost effective.

In commissioning programmes, programme makers actively participate in the early stages of story telling: as was the case with both Series 2 and Series 3 of *The Demon Headmaster*. The active involvement of programme makers at an early stage brings

visual effect to the fore and *naturally* introduces cost questions such as characters, action and location to storytelling. A story line that might require an expensive visual effect, such as snow, can be reframed as one that requires a different (cheaper) effect. Equally, a story can be excluded altogether and a new story line suggested – as in the case of Book 3 in the Demon Headmaster series of books:

**GC:** ...It [consumerism] really started to fascinate me, and that's why I wrote *The Revenge of The Demon Headmaster* which is Hunky Parker [Book 3]. And then, when they did the first television series they wanted to do another one but they didn't want to do Hunky Parker. I don't know why, probably costs, or it may just not have appealed to them. ...

...

**GC:** ...And, then the last one, this most recent one, turned out in the end, it's funny, not, what I had originally thought, was different from what then happened. Because, what I originally wanted to write about ... erm ... was about knowledge and the importance of knowledge. One of the things I do, is I sit on a Library Committee of the DCMS. And so all this stuff about knowledge and the information rich and the information poor and all that stuff, I am always reading papers about. And I have therefore thought a lot over the last few years about the importance of knowledge, and the information for control

**LH:** Right

**GC:** And so originally what I thought I would do was write about The Demon Headmaster trying to take knowledge away from people. To corner knowledge, which of course does happen in the book. And, then I talked to M who said [pause] has Roger talked to you about M?

**LH:** Yes

**GC:** So, I talked to M about it and she said 'yes, but (pause a beat) it's not very visual is it', which is quite right. And, we talked some more and then erm it sort of became the idea of Artificial Intelligence. And, what I wanted initially, and I would have done I think if I had just written the book and hadn't been involved. I wanted the interface, have you read it, you're familiar with the story

**LH:** Yes

**GC:** I wanted the interface to be a kind of cleaning lady with a Hoover you see, this rather comic figure, and also it would give me the wires, which was a great worry at the time, I thought it was immensely cunning idea. But they wouldn't have it. They didn't like this idea because... I think it wasn't threatening enough, which is fine. And so she became the interface that she is, which is fine and quite fun to write about. I just think that they thought that it would be pathetic on television. I am sure I could have made it work in a book with no trouble, but I'm not sure that it would have worked on television. So, it was modified in that way. But I did it, so that was really how that came about and once it started being about artificial intelligence, I did think, I mean artificial intelligence is the most fascinating subject

**LH:** Oh yes

**GC:** But you can only tackle it to a certain, it is actually a very abstract subject, and so, but that is why there is this slightly, in a way, this slightly unhappy marriage between knowledge and artificial intelligence in the plot. I don't know whether you felt that about it?

**LH:** Not really, I felt it worked well, knowledge engineering and so on. Did you think that it was because of the abstraction...?

**GC:** ...well also because it was a book about knowledge and then it became a book about artificial intelligence, erm and so scientifically it doesn't really work very well I don't think.

[Transcript of interview 23/12 97: Gillian's Kitchen. Rural village. Late Afternoon]

The above example stands out as an example of the mixed cost knowledge of storytelling. In the lengthy extract, stories appear and disappear rapidly. I think, this is one place where a retelling does the original a disservice – so I will leave the extract to you.

The apparent naturalness with which cost is woven into televisual story telling practice isn't solely a case of mammon driving story. I found no great conspiracy on the part of programme makers to keep a tight hold of the purse strings of production. On the contrary, as in the earlier example of the Roberts family, programme-makers appeared to think of stories in particular ways that were informed by their craft knowledge of visual/televisual form and cost. Cost, aesthetic and form are intimately connected.

Given that some book-based stories don't translate, and grand moments of one form are lost in another, adaptation is losing its credibility as a 'cheap' shortcut. Increasingly, programme producers are commissioning original television stories:

Increased competition has pushed the producers to recognise that specially written scripts can make fuller use of the medium and therefore have more immediate appeal. Adaptations often have to find awkward substitutes for novel techniques, first person narrative for example, nonlinear playing with time, inner thoughts etc. These "awkwardnesses" are seen to disrupt the immediacy of filmic storytelling. . [Richard Callanan: Children-Medi-Archive Thu, 17 Sep 1998 13:40:13]

In this context, Helen writes some of her books with televising in mind. On occasions, she will write script and book in tandem. However, writing with television production in mind is one thing, getting a story told is another:

**LH:** ... that was interesting because I was re-reading *Bag of Bones* last night and I thought, and I did wonder whether it was written with television in mind?

**HC:** Well not that one because, you know there isn't...

**LH:** well it seemed to have its plot moments...

**HC:** well you could do it as a one-offer on television but it's becoming. No I hadn't. If I think a thing is for television then, I've got two more recent ones *The Stonestruck*. That was written with television in mind and may even yet get done. And, so was *The Watchers*.

**LH:** oh right, I've read those, tell me about them.

**HC:** ... indeed [names producer] at [names production company] has bought it, well he bought it years ago, but then that, what was her name, Head of [names section]... I forget her name (coughs) but she refused to commission it, ... and it didn't get done. But, I still have a feeling it might but not yet.

**LH:** Right

**HC:** But no, the thing is that even, that things are so expensive. Er, that to do something like E Nesbit, well fair enough, that is a Classic, and it is for Sunday teatime, but it cost three million pounds that did. Erm *The Demon Headmaster* much much cheaper and typical of what they are really looking for, something that will run. It won't finish at six episodes: there is a sequel, and a sequel.

[Transcript: Helen 1997 Helen's study rural Nottinghamshire late morning] [Texts: Cresswell *Stonestruck* 1995, *Watchers* 1993, *Bag of Bones* 1996]

Writing television as cost is a precarious activity. Selling a book to a television company does not necessarily mean a story will be produced. Typically, television companies want more than one good story – sequels are cost effective.

When production companies create, or find, a story that works in televisual form, they gain significantly by continuing to use the characters in subsequent drama: the *Demon Headmaster* is a good example of such sequential use of characters. Certain cost imponderables of programme making such as cast, producer, director, screenwriter and proven popularity have been identified and the 'success' and 'cost' calculations become increasingly tacit.

Whilst sequels are desirable from a production point of view, in children's television they bring their own problems. An argued strength of children's drama is that it 'centres' childhood and, in this context, CBBC is proud of its use of child actors in

producing children's drama. However, child actors are a mixed (and costly) blessing in a number of ways. In the UK, child labour is tightly regulated and not only do child actors work limited hours they are also protected by legislation that requires them to be educated and chaperoned when working. The cost of abiding within the framework provided by legislation is well understood, and negotiated, in practice. However, there are other factors, more difficult to manage, that work against multiple sequels:

**HC:** But of course, when you are dealing with children you reach a natural end of the line because children get older, and their voices break, and their bust starts to develop and you're in a problem. I mean, god when I last, when I saw the famous five at the last launch I thought my god, you know, er children? You know it's a. But, that's what they are looking for, either spectacular one-offs or not just six-parters but things that will run to twelve or eighteen because it then means that it is more easily sold, they are more likely to get their money back

Transcript: interview with Helen November 1997. Helen's study. Rural Nottinghamshire. Late morning]

Helen seamlessly links cost, childhood, marketability and sequels together as a unified tale. In this way, she neatly summaries some of the politics of production that I have reviewed here, to illustrate that the cost of making television drama for children is complex and multi situational. However, in writing of some partial connections of production cost, I have focused attention on the story telling collective and marginalised the very active politics of individuals. To conclude this Chapter, I now turn to consider some wider/closer connections in network of storytelling action.

## **Craft, imagination and politics**

One of the most useful insights on fictional-STS gained during fieldwork came from encounters with genre. In working with *The Demon Headmaster Takes Over*, I was struck by the ease in which positions shifted, transgressions and transformations occurred and ambiguity was rendered natural and mundane. In fieldwork, Cresswell steadfastly held to fantasy and science fiction over social realism because, in foregrounding imagination, they offered exactly these transformative yet naturalistic

characteristics. Under the prompting of field collaborators (fictional and real), I felt it worth having a look at fantasy and SF more closely.

In genre terms, *The Demon Headmaster Takes Over* is a science fiction (SF) with odd touches of fantasy. It is not uncommon for genre categories to be blurred in this way and, even in structuralist accounts, genre represent ideal types that are seldom fully instantiated in a given story [Chatman 1978, Todorov 1973]. Typically, the major distinctions cast between these two genres rest on landscaping and magic.

Fantasists use a number of strategies for representing difference. In some cases they may create what Swifen [1974] terms secondary worlds: a complete alien world incorporating everything from natural landscape, socialscape, materiality, logic, through to various traits of characters. Seminal examples of secondary world narrative include *The Earthsea Quartet* [Le Guin 1993b], and the comedic parody of the *Discworld* series [see for one example Pratchett 1991].

Whatever the size, shape, manners or natural history of any particular fantasy world, the authorly effort in sustaining a coherent fantastic otherness is considerable. Writers create alternative geographies, bodies of knowledge and material worlds in which necromancy is mundane. Crucially, such worlds are coherent, performed and exotic [Rabkin 1976].

As an alternative to secondary world devices, other fantasists bring *otherness* closer to home. In such cases, the fantastic can be positioned in a temporal shift, a parallel world, the supernatural or any such mix to bring an intrusion of uncanniness into everyday operations [Swifen 1984]. Helen Cresswell's series *Moondial* [BBC 1990] is interesting in this regard. Helen uses supernatural and time shift locations to examine goodness, compassion and 'otherness'. In this story, a sundial links that past with the present. The heroine, Minty, is forced to travel through time to overcome great evil in attempt to rescue children from the past. In action, Minty transgresses the boundary between the now and then. She is both here and there.



*Moondial* is a dramatic piece: a thrilling study. However, the uncanny can be represented across other forms of narrative. For example, the fantasy comedy film *Groundhog Day* [Ramis 1993] in which a weatherman relives the same day continuously unbeknownst to anyone else. The landscape and day-to-day life appears almost realist – it is the ‘stuck’ in a loop narrative that adds the fantasy. Alternatively, stories can be either much darker, as when a Vampire comes ashore in 19<sup>th</sup> century Whitby [Stoker 1970] or romantic, as with the penitential mariner doomed to sail endlessly unless released through love [Lewin 1951]. Vastly different in composition, each of these tales relies on the uncanny woven into everyday life [Todorov 1973].

In a similar way to fantasy, SF also calls forth alien landscapes, exotic characters and alternative bodies of knowledge. However, in SF otherness is told through scientific/technological frameworks rather than magical, mystical or horrific situations. The characters in SF may be exotic, the locations surreal, but the tropes recognisably technological and scientific. As we saw with Asimov [1970] in chapter 1, the tales cross cut the mundane and the different, but imagination and the imaginary are embedded in technological mystery. The Door and door, probes, mekkano and turbo-shower are more than simple set dressings... they are important actors in story telling.

Whilst there are useful classificatory distinctions between SF and fantasy, such as the technological thrust of SF, in practice the genres blur. Roger identifies *The Demon Headmaster* as falling “into a category somewhere between science fiction and fantasy” [Singleton-Turner 1997]. Of interest here is common ground between the two. In particular, I am interested in that both SF and fantasy avoid social realism. The imagery and metaphor used require an interested audience to suspend disbelief. As both Le Guin and Cresswell have separately noted [Le Guin 1982, Cresswell 1975] – their business is both political activism and lying.

As with academic practices, there are considerable debates amongst storytellers regarding politics of fantasy and realism. These debates flourish at different time for different reasons but they represent, and are worked through, as overt politics of fiction. The changes that Caughie [2000] accounts in post-war drama were enacted as debates of form and content. In this historical context, so called serious drama moved from classic to kitchen sink. The political agenda was in representing and critiquing social life as lived. One aspect of this debate being a clash between the brash politics of realism and subtler insidious politics of fantasy. For realists, fantasy is, at best, impotent. A bourgeois obsession so removed from reality that it has no critical impact:

### **Various Comments**

{list serv strings withheld}

>From Roger Singleton-Turner (producer/director “The Demon Headmaster”)

[name withheld] writes:

“[The Demon Headmaster]...played on the common belief amongst producers of children’s television programs that kids somehow produce a natural hallucigen, and spend three or four years of their early lives in a state of imagination close to what the more streetwise student may “refer to as tripping”...

Not so. I enjoyed stories, both in books and on the box as a child, fantasy, adventure and comedy. TDH falls into a category between science fiction and fantasy. Hypnotism is a “real” psychological phenomenon, and so is megalomania. ... Where TDH differs from “Dr. Who”. “The X files” and so on (apart from any comments you may care to make about script, performance, direction, execution

etc.), is that children are the ones who, like the boy in “The Emperor’s new Clothes”, see through TDH’s schemes and thwart them. The children are empowered. [Roger Singleton-Turner Children-Media-UK Archive 10 Jul 1997 19:52:09]

At worst, fantasy is a sedative diversion from the horrors of contemporary life that suppresses a will to political action. In the above extract from an email, Roger is responding to comments against fantasy. In this case, it was an individual criticism, and Roger’s response a nice example of the narrated politics I came across working with storytellers who use fantastic forms. On occasions however, the force is greater and the criticisms stronger. In periods that laud realism, the closer that stories come to ‘reality’ the greater the critical acclaim, and both fantasy and SF can have a difficult ride. Gatekeepers such as publishers, producers and programme makers may devalue the genres and “look on all works of the imagination either as suspect or contemptible” [Le Guin 1989: 37].

Helen has lived and worked through such highly charged times. She is now unimpressed by the debates – ever confident in the power and politics of *phantasy* [Cresswell 1969a]. Nonetheless, in the bad times, she has felt threatened:

HC: ...and erm, you know how in children’s literature what goes around comes around. You have these cycles when fantasy’s in and realism’s out and. I mean, god, I’ve been around so long I really don’t care anymore. Erm, but I can remember that we were just coming to, around about the time of *The Nightwatchmen*, towards a bit of social realism

LH: Yes

HC: And I would actually be asked, you know, ‘I obviously had a great a gift and why I was wasting and writing these things when I could sort of do something or whatever’. And, there was this awful woman called (withheld) who started off a series called (Withheld) And, the whole idea about these, and it was very big in it’s day, it was all on the news and everything. And, what the idea of this was that these were reading books for children but these were going to reflect the lives of real children. By which she meant working class children, you know, possibly deprived children, whatever. And, she wrote to me and asked if I would write one, so I sat down and I wrote a little story called *Rainbow Pavement*. And, it’s the story of two children who want to buy their mother a present for her birthday. They haven’t got any money so the hit on the idea of becoming pavement artists and trying to collect money, whatever. And then at the end the rain comes and washes it away and it makes a rainbow. But, anyway, sent this off, got a letter back from (withheld) ‘no, I haven’t quite got the point at all. Erm, the children in

this story were obviously middle class children. Working class children didn't get ideas like that' (both laugh) and she suggested that I get in touch with my local education authority and ask if I could visit one of the schools in the most deprived areas of Nottingham and then whatever. Well, I nearly burst a blood vessel.

LH: yes I can imagine

HC: because at the time that I was writing that book, ... I had started to do some supply teaching. And, as she wrote I was teaching at a school called (Withheld) which was absolutely the pits school in (withheld). I had the top class, the eleven-year-olds. The teacher was away having a nervous breakdown for reasons that became very obvious to me in days of getting there. These poor little kids, well I was so upset by them, that I would in fact go home and cry every night. But I stuck it out there, in fact when I went back the next term they couldn't believe that the same teacher had returned. They said 'oh you're back miss' and they began to get a grudging respect for me (both laugh). The more, and I thought h o w d a r e y o u. So, I wrote back this letter and I really told her. I said, I said, could we just have another thing made clear, so working class children don't get ideas like this. I said, even if I accepted that, *which I do not*. The one place where they might get one is from a book, for gods' sake, and here is the book.

LH: and

HC: And then I got another from her. ... Well, I said, don't have the thing then, I don't care whether you do or not. So, I then sent it to someone else, it was published instantly, it's been done about six times on television, it's a really nice little up-beat story. But, it wasn't working class and it wasn't whatever. And that was all starting you see. And I know now, I can see it so clearly, the paranoia in the *Nightwatchmen* because I felt under threat. People were trying to say 'look', you know, the *green eyes* (reference to text) were these people

LH: yes

HC: I wanted to get there, *The Nightwatchmen*, you, you, you had to be subversive and there were all these people who were threatening. I can see the paranoia really clearly in *The Nightwatchmen* now because I felt threatened by all these people who were sort of pressuring me. Erm to write something with social realism. And I've often said I, I don't even know what social realism is.

Transcript: Interview with Helen – her study p.m. late November 1997

Referenced texts: *Rainbow Pavement* 1970, *The Nightwatchmen* 1969b

The relationship between experience, analysis and fictional work that Helen accounts is a difficult one to unpack. Whatever the driving force, those who work in SF and Fantasy argue the radical, transformative power of both genres. The cleverness is accounted in playing similarity and difference whilst 'ringing true' [Le Guin 1989].

It is not solely authors who have argued for the political power of imagination. Academic theory focuses attention upon the play of similarity and difference that SF and fantasy deploy in representing transformations. Both genres are linked with notions of subversion and political action – indeed, fantasy has been dubbed the literature of subversion [Jackson 1981].

In this context, much theoretical work has been expended on examining the transformative and subversive qualities of both genres from a variety of theoretical perspectives [see Rabkin 1976, Cowie 1984, Swifen 1984, de Lauretis 1984, Burgin, James and Caplan 1986, Donald 1989, Mellancamp 1989 and Wolmark 1994].

Themes of the fantastic in literature revolve around this problem of making visible the un-seen, of articulating the un-said. Fantasy establishes, or dis-covers, an absence of separating distinctions, violating a ‘normal’, or common-sense perspective which represents reality as constituted by discrete but connected units. Fantasy is preoccupied with limits, with limiting categories and with their projected dissolution...

...it is possible to see its thematic elements as deriving from the same source: a dissolution of separating categories, a fore-grounding of those spaces hidden and cast into/as darkness, by the placing and naming of the ‘real’ through chronological temporal structures and three-dimensional spatial organisation. [Jackson 1981:48]

On the basis of fieldwork, I found such transgression neither simple nor necessarily radical. There are as many stories within *The Demon Headmaster* that reinforce boundaries as subvert them. As we saw, Dinah is a goodly child, she represents comfortable middle class values and she behaves appropriately, as all good children should. On the other hand, Dinah is economical with the truth, misleads mother, challenges adult authorities and breaks into forbidden places. So, transgression was no simple matter. Rabkin [1993] found similar ambiguity in studying a variety of biblical, fairy and science stories wherein he found impetus both to move across boundaries and censure against transgression. It is in this natural-like ambiguity that I find SF and fantasy most at ease with representing human-technology relations.

Finally, that brings me to the heart of my own story, imagination. Imagination is interesting. It is the political and explanatory technology of SF and fantasy. It was the downfall of Hyperbrain and the survival factor for Dinah Hunter. It is not much discussed in ANT.

In deconstructing Fantasy and SF, theorists have adopted various psych-analytic positions that translate imagination in terms of sub-conscious fear, desire and the unknown. These theoretical transformations connect uses and meaning of fantasy, myth and SF with contemporary life [see Bettelheim 1975, Rabkin 1976, 1992 Donald 1989, McKay 1994 and Wolmark 1994]. Often rooted in either Jungian or Freudian theory, or their post-structural descendent such as Kristeva and Lacan, they translate imagination in terms of affective behaviour that is located elsewhere: unconscious, sub-conscious, ego, and so forth. Whilst I am uneasy with psychoanalytic offering, the traces of Freud are too strong, I am left wondering how we handle imagination in ANT. How do we access it? Reveal it? Recognise it? Raise it for debate?

In terms of our own practices, we handle imagination in transformations such as reflexivity, literary form and media. Beyond that we translate imagination of others into heterogeneous practices: preferring action over either speech or talk. We certainly translate politics in terms of inscription, description and hybridity but serious play with human and non-human characters appears outside our professional activity. As such, ironically for an approach that develops Greimas'[1987] theorising of actors, actants and action: our human and non-human characters are shadowy.

Greimas's notion of actant is drawn from consideration of action, actors and character and, as such, issue of personality, traits, beliefs and so forth are all drawn into behaviours. In fieldwork I found considerable variation in the way authors think about character development and those differences could be quite 'hot' spots of debate. Indeed, it seems that the science of structural literary theory is spread large –

and many courses on authorship and screen writing focus particular attention on character development, suggesting a rigorous approach to character development that ensures a coherent actor. An approach that Helen did not hold in great regard:

**scene:** **HC and LH** discussing a meeting between Helen and a group of young aspiring writers at a literary festival. Helen had gone to this meeting on 'writing for television session – just out of interest!

**HC:** well anyway, and he told them all these things about you know. And he had obviously been to Robert McKees writing course...

**LH:** (laughs) right

**HC:** ...and not just once but several times (both laugh). And taken it all on board. And all this stuff about your characters and how you had to write pages about them and what they liked for breakfast

**LH:** aw

**HC:** and I was saying Oh my God, and what about Denis Potter. These young men were actually taking notes from this and so afterwards they said 'what was all that a?' 'what didn't you reckon?'. I said I did not...

**HC:** well, I mean, the thing is for instance, you see. I haven't got anything against that erm, and I mean I think Denis Potter was pretty brilliant. He was a great hero of mine Denis Potter. And he, he never went to any television writing courses either, I never have. 'Cos, I went to a big symposium at Magdalen College Oxford, earlier this year, and there were all these wise people doing studies on Children's television, and this that and the other, and I said my bit. And, I said, 'I don't really know what I'm doing here', you know, whatever, whatever. And erm, and then I said, and partly they were going on about the success of *The Demon Headmaster*, and I said, I said, I can only assume that the reason why my script might stand out a bit from others is that I've never been to one of Robert McKee's writing courses. Because, apparently, they all go on them

**LH:** Oh?

**HC:** And that is why you get this feeling of *deje vu*

**LH:** Yes

**HC:** Even if the characters are different, or whatever, you think well, I've seen this before. And, you have. H u n d r e d s of times. Because they're all writing to formula.

Transcript: Interview with Helen – her study p.m. late January 1998

Helen's take on character is more 'romantic' than scientific, and she is not alone [see also Le Guin cited in Cummings 1990: 4-5]. For authors who work in this way, description and science of character get in the way of imaginative creation. Hence, I am back at imagination!

However, we must be cautious here. In all that has gone before, I have never made any judgment of the quality of the stories or storytellers, save that I enjoyed them in all their various guises. I am an ethnographer not a literary critic. But, in suggesting

sociological value in lying I have two major reservations. The first relates to the contents of this chapter: politics of production. The second summons a more difficult issue, quality (whatever that may mean).

I have expressed a sociological interest in fiction. Working with a particular story, I have had the opportunity to illustrate the power of fantastic science fiction in representing ambiguity and multiplicity: so, all is well there. Nonetheless, the network of fictional storytelling is clearly limitless. Storytellers perform their craft in ever shifting locations. As with sociological accounts, they too are buffeted by forces of trend, style and history. Unlike Sarachek [1995], I do not find fiction an alternative testament to social science but a complementary one. As such, we must be cautious in our engagement with fiction in general. I suspect that my own increasing interest in network and *phantasy* will require even more care. How easy it would be to pick and choose across a world literature and never engage in either benign reflection or reflexive critique. For now, my solution will be to stay with programme makers as they craft their tales... I am sure they will continue to surprise.

The issue of quality is more problematic. I am concerned that my interest in fiction could be taken as a 'turn' to fiction as a form for academic authorship. This is **not** my intention. There are existing examples of authors who straddle academic and popular fiction. I do not refer here to academic authors who play at the far edges of academic argumentation and form, and write creatively for academic audiences [see for example here Cixous 1998]. I think, instead, of academic writers who write fictional stories for popular audiences [see for example Eco 1995 and Annaud 1986 (Director) film of *The Name of The Rose*]. These are storytellers who craft with a mix of academic intent, creative force and political will. And, craft raises a number of quality issues...

Ben Okri is an award winning poet and writer of fiction. He is also an award winning advocate of lying. In writing of the *joy* of storytelling [1997] he draws on



his experiences to offer a poetic plea for imagination. For Okri, poetry and fiction offer one way to be free. However, he also sounds three notes of caution that resonated strongly for me. Firstly, imagination is not only the gift of the good. Secondly, love is an even more difficult notion than imagination. Finally, many may be called to write but not all will have the gift:

1. Poets sing for all the world in one breast ... poets may choose to align themselves with the wretched and the voiceless of this planet. They may not. ... [Okri 1997: 14]
2. ... they could, if they choose (and their choice is dictated by the quality of their love) breathe unease on complacency, stir the meek against injustice, help the blind to see, and, to appropriate what Pascal said about the parables of Christ, blind those who can see... [Okri 1997: 14]
3. 'there are many wandbearers, but few inspired' Socrates said. The poets that could be better than good, whose words breathe gusts of incandescent and higher oxygen over the lands [Okri 1997: 14]

A turn to imagination is a trip into another country: it needs careful planning and some vaccination.

## Chapter 6

### Contributions

World is suddener than we fancy it

World is crazier and more of it than we think

Incorrigibly plural, I peel and portion

A tangerine and spit the pips and feel

The drunkenness of things being various

[Extract from Louis MacNeice's poem 'Snow' cited in Cresswell 1975:108]

This is the final chapter and, prefaced with a call to the 'drunkenness of things being various', an ending. In closing, I return now to my point of departure namely that fictional stories can be included in the canon of sociological literature so as to build analytical power whilst retaining a sense of 'human life as lived'.

My starting point for this thesis was an insistence upon the value of both actor network theory and fictional stories in accounting social life. In this context, I raised actor network theory as my preferred sociological framework and, hence, a central contribution that I offer here is to the broad empirical literature of applied ANT. As this study is the first actor network account of both television production and children's fiction it also contributes directly and radically to an existing literature of media production and analysis.

In what follows, I reflect on the explanatory power of ANT. I consider the contribution herein of a networky analysis of television production, and restate my concerns with sociological representation of Mol's multiple ontologies and interference [Mol 1999]. In this light, I consider the contribution made by this study to our developing understanding of televised fiction. I claim that by foregrounding

programme making as net work, we gain new insights into television-story-society relationships.

The discussion then moves to consider Storyworld. The networky analysis of storyworld is reviewed. The use of fictional stories as populated landscape available for ethnographic exploration discussed. **Storyworld** is proposed as an ANT approach to story analysis, and a case made for further work in fictional landscapes. Following from the ethnography of Storyworld, the sociological value of lying is considered, and a case made for juxtaposing fictional stories with sociological argument, such that fiction can serve, intact, as analysis as opposed to subject **of/to** analysis.

### **Multiple ontologies, interference and limitless life of programme making**

In applying semiotic insights to all forms of social life, ANT problematises traditional conceptions of boundaries, specifically boundaries between human and non-humans [Law 1997a, 1997b, 2001]. At a basic level, Latour's analysis of doors [1992] revealed the hybrid and heterogeneous nature of social action. In this respect, Latour forced attention on 'values, duties and ethics' delegated to non-humans in net 'work' interaction [Latour 1992: 232]. Increasingly, sophisticated empirical accounts have illustrated social life as material, hybrid and heterogeneous performances of identity work [Moser and Law 1999]. Both humans and non-humans become visible active agents in social reproduction, subversion, resistance and negotiation.

Tracing *The Demon Headmaster Takes Over*, I found that non-human agency was evident in both fictional and non-fictional settings. The simple de-scription [Akrich 1992] of barriers, telephones, dress, passwords, laboratory space and written notes in Storyworld reaffirmed one of the central tenets of ANT: non-human agency. In this light, this study also demonstrated a new form of media analysis: ANT was revealed as an adequate and appropriate approach for sociological study of popular fiction. Equally, the analysis of programme making in action rendered network analysis relevant to sociological description of authorship. As with Latour's description of

doors, technologies of programme making were found to carry and enact values, obligations and ethics of production. In a simple example, the power effect of visual technologies on human storytelling performances was made evident: story and technology were revealed as intimately related.

However, ANT goes much further. In ANT, order is lived hybrid performances. The focus on performance forces attention on action. Action, necessarily, involves movement and mobility. The flow of people, nature and things that make up social life of programme making were traced in dialogic (inter) action. In this context, actor network analysis of programme making foregrounded transformations that occurred as people, nature and things moved within and across situations [Mol 1999]. In doing such network analysis, ANT illustrated the power of situated knowledge and material location to frame a story. However, at the same time, revealing storytelling to be multiple and unfinished. Any homogenising sense of situation based in 'point of view' was negated in observations of performance..

As Strathern argued [1991], whilst action is framed by material embodied context, subjectivity is framed in history of multiple situations and partial connections [Strathern 1991]. For Strathern, such connectivity is fluid. Social life remarkable resilient to ambiguity.

Tracing *The Demon Headmaster Takes Over*, I found such fluid heterogeneous networks of action. In crafting children's stories, television programme makers are involved in professional situations. In such locations they work with space, ideas, things and others in continuously translating action. For example, in chapter 5, I illustrate how story is actively translated into enactments of production values. The transformations are multiple when story becomes performances of accuracy or taste and decency. These 'shifts' of story involved complex interaction. They were not imposed, not wholly professional: not neatly identifiable with professional viewpoints vying for control over story. On the contrary, I found multiple and active interactions and interference that coped well with incongruity, contradiction and ambiguity.

An example I use to make this point involves debates over ‘direct brain access’ (DBA). The action relates to programme makers ‘drawing the line’ on scaring children. I reflect on how story has become ‘drawing a line’, and the political nature of line drawing. In this setting, some stories were surfaced, whilst other darker tales were suppressed: all when story became drawing a line. Line drawing became a mobile activity that shifted across a variety of locations connecting risk of offense, audience effect, senility, kinship, plot structure, visual effect, dramatic tension and back to story.

In drawing the line, the two children’s authors, Gillian and Helen, had different concerns. Gillian was anxious that representing mindless action could scare children in ways that were unknown and unknowable – Helen **needed** to scare. Whilst both women author *The Demon Headmaster*, they are very different women with very different experiences and practices. In this case each played their professional situations cross cut with other experiences and in interaction with others.

As with Mol [1999], I found network performances coped well with ambiguity and inconsistency: take for example the odd case of Helen, Plots and Keats. Helen is a highly skilled writer who believes her craft is best performed as organic process: she enjoys writing without an overt focus on plot. But, Helen knows authorship of television series or serial productions requires particular attention to plot. There are established facts of television script structure. Facts that perform plot as serial scheduled product: plots must allow an audience to pick up the action quickly, miss odd episodes and be encouraged to watch the next episode. As we saw in chapters 2 and 5, Helen is very critical of formulaic script writing that produces highly plotted but undistinguished television. Yet, for the most part, she easily mixes opposed practices: scientific plot and creative organic artistry. In her view, she believes that it is this mixed treatment of plot that allows her to write popular, distinctive and award winning scripts. Clearly, for Helen, plot and organic treatment are not opposed, and she performs plot as appropriately as creativity and growth. Her heart and identity is in artistry, but her performances easily accommodate and translate plot.

In this context, Helen illustrates the ability of individual programme makers to work through ambiguous partial connections with vivid self-awareness. Just as Marilyn Strathern is confident in her multiplicity as woman, feminist and anthropologist [Strathern ], Helen seamlessly enacts mother, technoscience activist, writer, screenplay writer, critic and reader. We see Helen's multiple political activity clearly in the way she connects performances of accuracy, mother-daughter, feminism, story, storyteller-audience, adult-child and visual effect when she uncovers the visual character of Professor Claudia Rowe.

The point I made here was that Helen's net-worky performances are identity work. Subjectivity can never be represented except as brief fragments of a life: snippets of shifting and unknowable flows. Helen's identity is as author, but in performance her authorship is in active environments of multiple storytellers: some visible and some hidden.

Network analysis reveals some of the hidden storytellers [Haraway 1989]. Interestingly, some hidden storytellers were academic media theorists: who clearly connected into authorly networks in Storyworld through their critique. One of my earliest fieldwork encounters revealed that a number of my programme makers were suspicious of certain forms of academic media analysis. When this concern was expressed the belief was that academics who were critical of media output had poor understanding of craft practice [first noted in conversations at BBC television centre Oct 1997 with BBC staff and then in subsequent fieldwork with programme makers]. Typically, criticism of academic work was expressed as frustration. The most typical source being academic analysis of television programmes grounded in terms such as ideological control, patriarchy, social reproduction, inequality or childhood oppression [See Oswell 1995]. In general these academic translations of storytelling pointed to the role of media products in social reproduction. For many practitioners, such broad-brush analyses of their craft were unrecognizable and, for them, counter intuitive: positioning them as villains rather than heroes.

Programme makers tended to be well versed in political analysis of media products and, from my experience, the programme makers felt themselves politically committed to programme making for and on behalf of children. In general, authors felt that their work directly and critically addressed childhood regimes or issues. Take for instance, Helen's particular brand of active feminism that emerged in casting Claudia: she wanted to send a message to children that young, pretty women could also be clever professionals. Debates over this character's appearance required Helen to make her political position explicit. The upshot of the discussions was that Claudia was represented as intelligent good looking, groomed and young. Nonetheless, representations of Claudia are open to feminist critique. Her well groomed beautiful appearance could offend a few feminists - not least as she was patently white, middle class, straight, pretty and able.

It is easy to point out that Claudia was not the ideal political character to liberate all girls everywhere... this character cannot exist. In other words, irrespective of how Claudia was cast, Helen was open to criticism from one or other grand narrative of inequality. Encounters with Helen leave me in no doubt of her political commitment to improving conditions of childhood. In this context, ANT foregrounds both her power and limits in networked political action.

The sensitivity to academic critiques of television programming for children was also evident when I met Roger for the first time at BBC Television Centre. Roger was familiar with many of the seminal works on children's fiction and television. Again, his concern was that academic accounts failed to address practices of programme making. To be charged with producing patriarchal programming that reproduces oppressive childhood having spent a long day fixing cameras at child level, positioning the audience as a child, editing to entertain a child or collaborating with child actors, must be hugely frustrating. In this context, my analysis foregrounds politics of everyday work that are both liberating and oppressive. In this sense, I avoid a single-minded argument of blame. Blame is an unhelpful notion here as it suggests either conspiracy

impossible to prove or bourgeois liberal agency. Network suggests fluid, but not necessarily coherent political practice!

In fairness, whilst my fieldwork friends were rather cautious about academic studies, it is important to note the value and variety of contemporary media analysis. Not least as programme makers have – for want of a better word - appropriated many of these critiques. Their concerns with truth, portrayal, accuracy and audience are well informed from media studies. Typically, it was ‘mis’ representation that they remembered most clearly, side stepping those academic accounts that dovetailed or resonated with their experience.

The powerful structuralist, marxist and neo-marxist critiques that dominated literary criticism for at least twenty years from the 1960’s onwards, and framed the emergent cultural studies of the 1970’s and 80’s, are, in this context, massively important [see for excellent review Eagleton 1996a, 1996b]. These criticisms formed the basis for further development and critique as class, gender, race and power were examined and reexamined in terms of cultural products and cultural production.

Importantly, fieldwork shows that debates in literary criticism were relocated in network of programme making. Literary criticism is embedded in professional practices. For example, fieldwork raised ‘visual effect’ as a cherished notion in professional programme making. Current practices focus on the ‘use’ of the media. Whilst trained in a syntax of the form and techniques of action, performances of visual effectiveness are not simply a case of applying a set of media specific conventions or rules. As I show in chapter 5, it is ways of knowing/doing story that are aesthetic, political, economic and experiential.

Whilst notions of visual effect connect well with structural, critical and post-structural frameworks, ground breaking ethnographic studies of audience [see in particular Ang 1985, 1991, and 1996] opened up audience as a location for both academic and television work. In this context, for children’s television, mention must be made of



Máire Messenger Davies' work with child audiences [1989, 1997 and 2001]. Messenger Davies' studies were well regarded by programme makers. The work on audience reception is grounded in ethnographic work with children: audiences, focus groups and interviews. In Messenger Davies 2001, the work extended to examine relationships between programme makers and audiences. As I suggest in chapter 5, changing technologies and professional practices suggest that producer/consumer boundaries are a relevant site for sociological investigation.

Messenger Davies makes direct connections between production, consumption and effect. Whilst not a networky approach, she carefully develops connection between studies of childhood [for example Prout 2000], and media culture. What ANT offers here, suggests childhood-audiences-television relationships that are unfinished performances.

In summary, one significant contribution of this thesis is that it introduces actor network approach to media studies. I certainly cannot claim the theory, only that I took it with me as I travelled with a children's story. In this context, I point out exciting possibilities offered when programme making is demonstrated as partially connected networks of action involving multiple ontologies and interference. The monolithic discourses of media production and consumption are relevant but static, falsely complete and tightly cut. Inevitably, ANT introduces a sense of movement, partiality and translation to the literature of media studies. When audience, production, consumption and analysis are always in deferral, always elsewhere, we can no longer seek to control media by ordering and disciplining forms against shifting values, duties and ethics. Rather, we can recognise and use powerful creative opportunities of net-worky consumption and production.

## **Representing multiplicity**

As I suggested in chapter 1, representation is a significant issue in antifoundationalist social science. In the case of ANT, one particular problem that I have raised

throughout this thesis is representing socially and materially expressed relationships between action, thought and imagination. The conundrum here is representing a social theory of uncertainty, connectivity and action - whilst adequately addressing an individual subjectivity impossible to trap.

For ANT authors, the risk is to construct a sense of constrained individualism and framed by point of view. In this way, misleadingly, situation and location can appear as a changing, but nonetheless realist, mirror for social action. This mirror reflects variety, action and heterogeneity but implies that uncertainty is, universally, situationally managed – the new realism being that reality is forever ‘out there’.

The struggle then for post-structuralism in general, and ANT in particular, is retaining situation in our empirical accounts of agency without translating situation into liberal realism. In chapter 1, I cited both Latour’s study of *Aramis* [1996] and Moser and Law’s *Good Passages Bad Passages* [1999] as scholarly examples of such politics of explanation. In both instances, the authors used their different authorly strategies to reinforce theory and open impending theoretical closure. Together, both Latour and Moser and Law were influential as I struggled with a means to represent *The Demon Headmaster Takes Over*. For example, in the choices made in representing Helen. In writing Helen into this study I chose to keep the readers at a distance. Unlike in the case of *Liv* [Moser and Law 1999], I have not attempted to evoke a ‘sense’ of this wonderful woman. I have, instead, used ‘point making’ description that *hints* at subjectivity, ambiguity and managed contradiction, but leaves many aspects of characterisation to your imagination.

The choice to *hint* rather than describe is risky, as close biographical telling can be valuable in evoking a sense of multiplicity and interruption. Furthermore, details that apparently come in tracing a life add considerable anthropological authenticity. For example, imagine how confident you might feel with this work if you could know details of my collaborators. How tall is Helen? How old? How does she dress? What is her favourite colour? How does she work? Does she prefer manuscript to

typescript? Where does she sit in her study? How does she sit? How is the study decorated? Is the study naturally well lit? What view does she choose? What were the walls covered with? What would she like as her epitaph? Where does she keep her 'finished' manuscript? What does she think of Keats? And so on and on and on ...

In ANT terms, such description is relevant and, when well, executed provides opportunities for readers to engage their sociological imagination. In this light, my objection to including vivid personal description is difficult to fix. However, whilst thick description is clearly a powerful evocative tool [Geertz 1988], and biography an established genre in sociology [Kopytoff 1986] there are particular ethical questions raised in using such techniques. For example, one point that emerged in fieldwork was the magical chariness with which authors approach any analysis of their art. On a number of occasions, a 'half smiling' Helen would express concern that self-analysis could lead to loss of *her* gift to tell stories: breaking the spell. Equally, she was concerned that if she engaged in too close an analysis of other authors craft practices, she could inadvertently pollute her own magic.

However, sublimely ambiguous, Helen was always happy to converse on craft practice to help me understand. In this context, for me to biographically fix Helen in detail, as if this were a description of this woman and her craft, was a description too far: a step toward 'using' that I did not want to take. Hence, in managing contradictions between theory, method and action I sought a means to 'keep back' aspects of character whilst write about them. In contrast to biography, what I offered herein lacks detail of characters. I offer instead a series of snatched glimpses and voices that are clearly only fragments of composite and complex characters.

In folding fieldwork back upon sociological problem solving, representation seemed to be a dramatic problem and one that focused attention on characterisation. As I suggested in chapter 5, some authors favour knowing all the details of their characters: to a level of detail that predicted every move and choice a character would make. Alternatively, other authors take a more organic, *laissez faire*, approach to characters

and are happy enough as long as characters behaviour is 'appropriate': that is believable. In this case, characters can hide some features of themselves from the world and the author – and so, hold the potential to surprise both.

In my own approach to representing character, I took Helen's advice. I avoided a 'Robert Mckee' approach to character that could work too closely to formulaic predictability, leaving some of the creative imaginative work to my readers. Nonetheless, I am certain that, in STS, I/we should take character more playfully serious. We must reflect on character and imagination a little more. For, whilst sociologist Michel Callon famously gave scallops a voice [Callon 1986b], Lewis Carroll gave them character:

... 'O Oysters, come and walk with us!' The Walrus did beseech. 'A pleasant walk, a pleasant talk, Along the briny beach: We cannot do with more than four, To give a hand to each.'

The eldest Oyster looked at him, But never a word he said: The eldest Oyster winked his eye, And shook his heavy head— Meaning to say he did not choose To leave the oyster-bed.

But four young Oysters hurried up, All eager for the treat: Their coats were brushed, their faces washed, Their shoes were clean and neat— And this was odd, because, you know, They hadn't any feet. ...

... 'A loaf of bread,' the Walrus said, 'Is what we chiefly need: Pepper and vinegar besides Are very good indeed— Now if you're ready, Oysters dear, We can begin to feed.' ...

... 'It seems a shame,' the Walrus said, 'To play them such a trick After we've brought them out so far, And made them trot so quick!' The Carpenter said nothing but 'The butter's spread too thick!'

'I weep for you,' the Walrus said: 'I deeply sympathize.' With sobs and tears he sorted out Those of the largest size ...

[extract from Lewis Carroll *The Walrus and The Carpenter*]

## **Storyworld: the sociological value of lying**

I began this thesis with a desire to examine the power and uses of fictional stories in sociological analysis of social life as lived: order, uncertainty, contradiction, hybridity and all. Ursula Le Guin's suggestion [1989] that authors of fiction are describing social life 'a good deal more accurately' than sociologists held my interest, and I believed there to be sociological value in close examination of both fiction as a bounded story and practices of fiction making. In pursuing this belief, I encountered a 'work' of fiction that became the focus for research effort – that story is *The Demon Headmaster Takes Over*.

As I indicated above, whilst ethnographic analysis of media production is not new, this study has demonstrated the currently untapped potential of actor network theory to provide sociologically revealing accounts of craft practices and media production. However, research has further contributed to media studies by suggesting that fictional stories can be taken, in their own right, as *Storyworlds* available for actor network informed ethnographic inquiry.

In chapter 2, I proposed *Storyworld* as a methodological device to support actor network approach to studying a fictional story. In this context, a story is taken as a bounded world and actor networky ethnography is undertaken in the fictional landscape. The ethnographer moves through storyworld in ethnographic fashion. In this context, combining issues of theory, method and practice, I argued that my particular research approach was, most appropriately, itinerant and complicit ethnography. Relationships are built, places are visited, clarification is sought and analysis pursued. The only difference here is that the site is fiction. The ethnographic

requirement that the ‘locals’ are able to recognise their world, actions and selves is maintained as analysis crosses fictional and non-fictional boundaries.

Contemporary approaches to studying fictional tales vary from structural and formal analyses that pursue a ‘*poetics of*’ [Todorov 1973] to post-structural analysis informed from a variety of perspectives including neo-feminist, psycho-analytic and post-marxist [see Wolmark 1994 and *de* Lauretis 1984]. As I suggested in chapter 2, each approach offers valuable insights into the nature of story and relationships between story and society. Actor network theory provides a new angle on literary landscapes. Firstly, it directly introduces multiplicity. Secondly, it invokes and problematises situated practice. Thirdly, it subverts micro/macro boundaries of analysis and enables performances to shrink and expand as network action is traced within, through and across partial connections. Finally, it surfaces grand themes of contemporary sociology without constructing any form of causal account.

So, what did I bring back from my visit to Storyworld that might be helpful to understanding science-technology-society relationships? Firstly, my time in Storyworld offered me the opportunity to take a close look at childhood and in this context, to examine child/other boundaries and boundary work. Secondly, Storyworld provided a fresh opportunity to consider lying – and the social uses of lying in managing multiplicity. Thirdly, time spent in Storyworld offered opportunity for reflection on the treatment of imagination in actor network theory. Finally, I was left with an impression of the power of fiction in accounting social life as lived.

***Storyworld: multiple ontologies, interference and a few surprises***

An actor networky ethnographic study of *The Demon Headmaster Takes Over* rendered fictional performances of organisation, childhood, science and imagination sociologically relevant. In tracing Storyworld action, I was initially drawn to consider the significance of space and place to forms of social order. One of the first encounters that I had involved a family who were moving house, and the subsequent disruption

that occurred when the children of the family became distracted. The interactions around this disruption revealed the power of spatial/material landscapes to 'fix', 'subvert' or change social relations.

For example, the changing status of the biological research centre (BRC) is of interest here. I had the opportunity to observe the shifting status of the BRC as it moved from being research centre to abandoned research centre, and then to national security risk. In this context, I encountered army officers, military intelligence officers, local residents, local children, evil despot and local scientists. It was clear that whilst situation framed individual accounts and actions, performances within material space of BRC were widely varying and highly individualised. Such individuality appears ironic in an account that focuses on relationships and hybridity. Nonetheless, character traits existed that transcended that material, spatial and situational frameworks for action. As I illustrated in chapter 4, gender, age, class, rank, values, and personal experiences all informed 'research centre' performances. For example, being a child of the Hunter family, and having experience of the research centre as a base for attempted world domination, is still insufficient to 'produce' a unified response to the 'military classification' of BRC. Dinah, Lloyd and Harvey each respond as individuals - albeit individuals who are 'gendered', of an 'age', and of a 'political' persuasion.

As I have suggested, it is impossible to tease out questions of order and organising from other sociological categories such as kinship, childhood, science, technology and so forth. In this context, the networky analysis in chapter 4 blurred boundaries that have been crafted around each category, and so demonstrates childhood as material performances most usefully explained in terms of situated practice, multiple ontologies and interference. Ethnographic work pursued performances of childhood across a variety of different physical locations. It was evident that locations situate interaction performances of childhood and child-other relations. However, I have also illustrated that, whilst the physical terrain may be hard-wired, performances can cross-cut locations and interrupt any 'predictable' monologic sense of situated practice. For

example, in the physical space of the Hyperbrain laboratory, we observed Michael and his father explicitly interact partial connections between ‘science’ ‘human nature’, ‘non-human nature’ and ‘father-son’ stories. This complex mix of stories was messy yet coherent and appropriate.

Similar messy coherence was evident in barricade encounters between Dinah and the ‘army’. In this situation, performances of regulation subverted any tacit order that privileged adult over child. In pursuing the barrier encounter, I found that the fictional world dramatized multiplicity as a flowing interaction in a richly populated material landscape. In this context, Dinah revealed childhood, goodness and right to be mobile performances. Varieties of order emerge and compete as class, non-humans, gender, age, science, kinship, authority and status all become meaningful participants in dialogic interaction.

In pursuing performances of childhood, the ethnography of Storyworld focused considerable attention on science, and, in particular, artificial intelligence. Ethnographic analysis of science in Storyworld reinforces findings from ANT and constructivist science studies. In this sense the mobile, hybrid and performed nature of Storyworld science is brought to the foreground [Latour 1987]: science and scientific knowledge are translated in terms of economic, social, collaborative, competitive, textual, technological, risky, progressive, threatening and cushy practices.

At times, I observed a clear split between locals who thought of science as cherished practice and others – for example it was easy to identify ‘scientists’ such as Dinah, Claudia, Michael and Tim, and to distinguish them from ‘others’ such as the military officers, military intelligence, Mrs. Hunter and SPLAT. In this case, scientists are recognisable but far from a homogenous ‘category’ of practice. As with Strathern’s [1991] observations of her own professional practices, Storyworld science is evidently partially connected practice. Tim, Claudia and their colleagues are collaborating competitors living in a science Storyworld of buzz, careers, desire and uncertainty.



Notwithstanding the ease with which we can categorise ‘natives’ as science or other, the categories do not hold for long when science seeps out of the laboratory and into ‘other’ locations. And, other locations seep into the laboratory. In this light, when I observed Dinah move from good daughter to science citizen, I observed performances that were hybrid, connected but individual – subjectivity in action. As Dinah chose to act in ways that undermined her performance of good daughter, but upheld her good science citizen self. She works with limits of her faiths and acts in accordance with her partially connected identity: in this light I found **lying** was ‘good’ (appropriate) behaviour.

Clearly then, this ethnography of Storyworld adds to the literature on multiplicity and interruption in a rather mundane way. That is discovering that our established theoretical knowledge of politics of space, materiality, situation, order and science apply in Storyworld. However, there were two particular surprises that I came across in *The Demon Headmaster Takes Over* – observations that I have not encountered in other actor-network field studies. Firstly, I was intrigued by the behaviour of two Storyworld characters whose unambiguous performances directly raised politics of oppression: namely the Headmaster and Hyperbrain ‘The Lady’. Secondly, Storyworld children demonstrated the subversive power of imagination and nonsense.

As my main focus has been the power of actor networks to reveal mobility, multiplicity and translation, it was strange to encounter a Storyworld character who was ‘single minded’. Tracing the Demon Headmaster across Storyworld revealed how this single mindedness distinguished the Headmaster from all ‘other’ humans. In this way the Headmaster has limited scope for translation. His actions take him outside of both normal and abnormal human experience: hence he is the stuff of inhuman fantasy. As a fantastic character, the headmaster’s obsession with his own sense of order, and his hypnotic power, make him a particular threat to existing forms of social order in Storyworld. In this context the Headmaster can be *other, threat, master, controller, absent or enemy* – but little else.

In similar sense to the Headmaster, Hyperbrain becomes a very clear cut character in Storyworld. Originally a mobile figure, named as Hyperbrain, project, artefact and programme. She grows to become increasingly single minded and control oriented. When she finally takes form as the hologram known as 'The Lady', Hyperbrain has, herself, become a fantastically powerful character. The Lady clearly distinguishes herself from humans – and actively seeks to control and dominate humans. Whilst the Headmaster has 'special status' by virtue of his ability to hypnotise, Hyperbrain has special status by virtue of her 'super machine' like nature - an artificial intelligence. Interestingly, the Headmaster and The Lady are competing threats to the known order. As fantastic forms of otherness, both Hyperbrain and the Headmaster provide a particular context for performances of mundane life – namely mundane order lived in the visible shadow of threatened total domination. This particular political situation is uncommon in 'real world' actor network studies and allows questions of order, domination and freedom to be directly addressed in very mundane settings: such as the Hunter household, the media, the laboratory, the library and cybercafe. In other words, the Storyworld network forces attention on connections of mundane and exceptional processes of social control and radical action.

Tracing the children's resistance to domination, I found that they used imagination as a weapon against totalitarian threat. Indeed, nonsense verse was revealed as a technology of liberation in Storyworld. In ANT, *childish* imagination, nonsense and silliness have been somewhat swamped by rigorous tracing of network performances. In the case of Storyworld however, incoherent nonsense is a valuable commodity that is produced, exchanged and used in performances of freedom. Interestingly, Storyworld renders nonsense and imagination sociologically relevant, This focus on imagination and nonsense is a distinguishing feature of this ethnography.

In raising nonsense, Storyworld forces attention on the boundary between sense and not-sense and hence, the categorization and performances of sense. The 'nonsense' of Storyworld takes the form of rhymes –established nonsense poetry and children's

ditties. Poetry, particularly nonsense poetry, becomes a powerful tool. Creative imagination is revealed as a site of political practice. In this context, both Hyperbrain and the Headmaster are overpowered.

The poet turns the earth into mother, the sky becomes a shelter, the sun an inscrutable god, and the pragmatists are irritated. They want the world to become only one name, one form. [Okri 1997: 2]

## On lying

The purpose of travelling to storyworld was twofold. Firstly I was interested in the story itself but I was also interested in the power of fiction as it represents social life as lived whilst, at the same time, lying about social life. In Chapter 4, taking an actor network cut through Storyworld allowed me to illustrate the power of *The Demon Headmaster Takes Over* to represent ambiguity, uncertainty and social orders.

In assessing the value of this approach, we have to consider Le Guin's [1989] claim that fictional distance offers greater clarity in accounting for social life. This claim is much debated in literary criticism [Eagleton 1996a] and in professional story telling networks [Caughie 2000]. As I illustrated in chapter 5, debates exist between story-telling 'factions' that favour either realist or non-realist literary forms.

Whilst the particulars of literary criticism might vary, relationships between text and reality remain a significant aspect of professional discourses of story telling. Academics, professional critics and practitioners assign value and authority to works on the basis of such relationships and, hence, they also create and produce their stories in a framework within which the portrayal of reality is influential.

Both science fiction and fantastic literature focus attention on imagination. Crafting worlds, capabilities, futures or pasts that are, in some way distant yet meaningful to contemporary audiences. For authors who favour these genres, the imagined becomes a powerful metaphor for experience. The literature of imagination and fantasy

becomes a safe haven for literary political activism and the past, future and elsewhere are loaded with opportunities for description and critique.

On the other hand, the realist tradition focuses on truth and accuracy. The argument here is that serious work addresses real world relationships. Aristotle's *Poetics* [1996] forced critical attention on relationships between verse and reality. An underlying assumption being that, for verse to work well and bring pleasure, it must somehow be both intelligible and meaningful. In other words it must relate to real experience *in some way*. This focus on meaningfulness has since been extended to all forms of text and lived experience. In this context, Aristotle's notion of *mimesis* – often translated as imitation – is a useful point of departure.

There is some debate between translators and interpreters of Aristotle as to quite what is meant by the term *mimesis* [see Heath 1996], these academic debates that are echoed in professional discourses of programme making. For example, in discussing questions of reality and *mimesis* with programme makers, some took *mimesis* to refer to realist imitation of the world: text a mirror through which the world might be viewed. The worth of a text is located in its ability to mirror lives, experiences, expectations and desires. Such texts work by virtue of their link with facts of experience.

In the case of children's drama, mimetic works reflect the 'reality' of children's lived experience – hence a focus on social issues such as bullying, abuse, divorce, fear, loneliness and sexuality and the use of locations such as schools, clubs, family or neighbourhood. In this setting dress, language and action must have the authenticity of 'real' lived experience. The power of the drama here is its ability to reflect rather than to describe or entertain. There are strong parallels between mimetic sense of accurate imitation and realist genres of academic accounting.

As we saw in the closing section of chapter 5, the realist/fantasy boundary is a site of many debates in professional storytelling. As Helen noted, in her experience, there have been lengthy periods where realism has been favoured over fantasy and, at these

times, any sense of fantastic imagery has been subjected to processes of marginalisation. Le Guin [1989] addressed the same problem when she observed processes of “genrification/devaluation” in SF [1989: 2]. In this context Le Guin demonstrates professional and political concern with the politics of imagination [Le Guin 1989: 32].

Literature and drama that uses fantastic imagery unsettles realism and is perceived as a threat. The perceived threat posed by fantasy can be voiced as intellectual or political unease. Intellectual opposition to *fantastic* tales focus criticism on the childish or nonsensical aspects of fantasy. An overarching requirement for ‘truthful’ representation excludes any potential for allegorical or metaphorical political imagination. For radical activists attracted to realist form, the fantastic serves only as escapist fiction and fails to reveal social relations to production. In this context, they argue fantasy as an ideological device that works to reproduce rather than subvert social relations of inequality [Cresswell 1995, 1969].

However, fieldwork discussions provided a different sense of mimesis. In this case, mimetic drama is not so much a case of imitating reality in a factual way, but producing an imagined imitation of reality. In this way mimesis is creative, imaginative evocation of reality rather than a documented reality. For such texts to be *good* they must be crafted in such a way that reality is imitated and recognizable in imaginative work.

Interestingly, Le Guin’s concern with “distancing to see clearer” and “lying” whilst telling the “truth” is not wholly at odds with Aristotle’s discussion of relationships between fact and poetic mimesis. In examining mimesis and its relation to plot, Aristotle points to the ability of poetry to examine ‘probability’: what is likely or, in my terms, appropriate, behaviour:

It is clear from what has been said that the function of the poet is not to say what has happened, but to say the kind of thing that *would* happen, i.e. what is possible in accordance with probability or necessity.

[Aristotle 1996: 16. Trans. Malcolm Heath]

This argument is further developed by example. Aristotle notes that one could take the works of Herodotus and put them into verse quite easily, but they would still be history not poetry. He develops the distinction between poetry and history by observing that “the one says what has happened, the other the kind of thing that would happen” [Aristotle 1996:16]. For Aristotle, mimetic power is not literal description but recognisable action and events. In this way ‘the object of imitation is action.’ [Aristotle 1996:16].

The debates on ‘mimesis’ are part of the networky everyday controversies that programme makers manage in practice. My storytellers expressed their preferences in the genre choices they make in their practice. I concur with Le Guin (again) when she observes that “For fantasy is true, of course. It isn’t factual, but it’s true.” [Le Guin 1989 48].

Le Guin plays a game with truth, arguing both that a novelists business is lying and fantasy is true. The play here is similar to Haraway’s connection of fact and fiction: not opposites but closely related in action. In a different attack on opposing fact and fiction, Le Guin invokes contradiction. Using *lying truth* as a serious game she allows us the opportunity to reflect on the nature of both practices and, hence, the potential power of fantasy.

So, what does this digression into fact and fiction offer us in our concerns to perform sociological analysis and represent social life as lived?

Sociological accounts are valuable **stories**. In as much as these stories are academic analyses, they necessarily reduce ways of living in order to reveal hidden relationships, presence absent relationships and re-scribe conventional accounts. At some point an

academic *cut* (or even cuts) serves to stem the flow of life, freeze partial connections and frame analysis.

Building on this recognition of sociological ‘cut’ as story, it comes as little surprise to note that we have developed some specialised tools for cutting. However, my point here has been to illustrate how analytical *cuts* natural to western social science genres of storytelling, may be **complemented** by descriptions of social life unfettered by academic notions of analysis and argument. We can harness the power of fictional stories to demonstrate that *drunkenness of things being various* that we are so keen to evoke. If we take the opportunity to invite fiction into our literature in forms such as short stories, dramas, poems, images and song we may find that the boundary between social science and social art can be blurred to the benefit of critical practice. I am not asking here that we study literary as an object, but to invite them in as descriptions in their own right.

Sophisticated readers are accepting the fact that an improbable and unmanageable world is going to produce an improbable and hypothetical art. At this point realism is perhaps the least adequate means of understanding or portraying the incredible realities of our existence. A scientist who produces a monster in the laboratory; a librarian in library of Babel; a wizard unable to cast a spell; a space ship having trouble getting to Alpha Centauri: all these may be precise and profound metaphors of the human condition. [Le Guin 1989: 47]

To open sociological journals to refereed short fiction may require a good deal of effort on behalf of academic editors. Professional fiction makers earn their living by writing for publication. They earn money from selling stories rather than being invited to contribute or required to ‘publish’ for research audit purposes. Nonetheless, the SF journal Foundation almost managed to blur the boundary when it mixed academic and practitioner papers – all that was missing here was the fiction.

Fiction is no panacea. Storytellers who use fiction are framed in networks of practice. The constraints that they work within are, in some respects, different to those that fix academic story but they are nonetheless potent. Notwithstanding this political framing of authorship, I would suggest that mixing fiction and sociological stories in a single journal would offer a location for both an interesting experiment and complicit politics of STS.



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**List serv Archive Messages**

Richard Callanan: Children-Medi-UK Archive Thu, 17 Sep 1998 13:40:13

Roger Singleton –Turner: Children-Media-UK Archives Wed 04 Feb 1998 12:03:12

Roger Singleton-Turner: Children-Media-UK Archive 10 Sept. 1998 23:10:07

Roger Singleton-Turner: Children-Media-UK Archive 21 Oct 1997 18:08:29

**Films**

Lewin, Albert (1951) (Director) *Pandora and The Flying Dutchman*

Annaud, Jean Jacques (1986) (Director) *The Name of The Rose*

Cameron James (1984) (Director) *The Terminator*

Scott, Ridley (1982) (Director) *Blade Runner*

Ramis Harold (1993) (Director) *Groundhog Day*

Frakes, Jonathan (1998) (Director) *Star Trek: Insurrection*

**Television programmes (other than passing popular reference)**

BBC (2000) *Castaway 2000*

Channel 4 (1999) *Big Brother*

BBC (1990) *The Moondial* adapted from Cressewell 1988

BBC (1998) *The Demon Headmaster Takes Over* Broadcast series episodes 1-6. First broadcast January 1998