READING VIOLENCE:

REPRESENTATION AND ETHICS

Allan Campbell Thompson

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ABSTRACT

The textual representation of an instance of violence involves three principle considerations: a notion of representation, a conception of violence, and an inter-relationship between ethical and aesthetic evaluations. By investigating these considerations within the context of postmodern thought, a more sensitive perception of textual representations of violence becomes possible. Any representation, prior to being read and interpreted, has no predetermined meaning, and therefore no inherent value. It is only through a process of reading that verifiability, the principles of appraisal and personal cognition become actualised. As any text is necessarily iterable – subject to infinite (re)interpretation within an infinite number of future contexts – any interpretation is determined by the intersection of the iterable text and the historically situated reader. Violence, which is defined as an act of direct or indirect intentional harm against a person's body or mind or property, may be experienced either as an event, or as a representation of an event. In instances of the representation of violence, the ethical perspective of the reader is influenced to a large extent by expectations of the text's verifiability, the linguistic register of the text, and the inter-subjective ethical framework at the moment of reading the text. The aesthetic evaluation of the narrative, which is closely associated with its linguistic features, is also closely related to this ethical perspective. However, normative systems of ethics are often inadequate in the face of the plurality of meaning and possibilities inherent in representations of violence, and therefore a postmodern conception of ethical thought seems most appropriate. Textual instances of violence therefore have the potential for representing a multiplicity of experiences and ethical responses, without necessarily having to rely upon problematic normative obligations of systemisation or duty. A recognition of postmodern ethical ambiguity, combined with a flexibility of moral outlook, allows the reader to develop a more nuanced approach to the ethical predicaments suggested by the representation of violence.

Keywords: postmodern ethics, normative ethics, representation, text, iterability, reader, fiction, non-fiction, violence, Holocaust.

DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination in any other university.

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CHAPTER 1

PREVIEW

"But does a preface exist?" (Derrida 1981: 9): The question of the role and purpose of a chapter devoted to the setting forth and summarising of the material to follow in a text points to the tension that necessarily arises between the formal dictates of an academic piece of writing, such as a thesis, and the postmodern suspicion of the prefiguring of meaning implicit in the inclusion of an introductory chapter. As Derrida suggests, "The preface would announce in the future tense ("this is what you are going to read") the conceptual content or significance … of what will *already* have been *written*" (1981: 7). The preface "falls like an empty husk, a piece of formal refuse, a moment of dryness or loquacity, sometimes both at once" (1981: 9). Consequently, rather than attempting to assert particular hypotheses prior to their formulation and substantiation in the text that follows, this preview (rather than *introduction* or *preface*) will include only the rationale for the study and a brief outline of its argument. In this sense, this chapter is analogous to what Derrida calls the 'exergue' in "White Mythology"; it stands "outside the work", but inscribes its effects on that which follows (1982b: 209, Translator's Note 1).

1. Rationale

This thesis on the textual representation of violence, and the problematics of exploring such representation through both ethics and a related aesthetic approach, is in many ways a continuation and expansion, on a higher level of theoretical complexity, of the issues explored in my research report, *The Representation and Aestheticisation of Violence*, which was completed in 2001 at the University of South Africa.[1] The initial impetus for

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[1] In the earlier study, the scope of the investigation was necessarily limited. In that study, three main issues regarding violence were investigated: the nature of violence; how violence is represented; and the aestheticisation of that representation. The argument was primarily concerned with the paradox of representing violence for artistic ends, or for purposes of entertainment. It was assumed that an instance of violence, be it personal or institutional, direct or psychological, is an occurrence that would result in feelings of distress for many people, particularly if they were victims of, or witnesses to, the event in

that study derived from an article in *Time* magazine of June 14, 1999, in which the so-called "Wilkomirski affair" was analysed. In 1995, Binjamin Wilkomirski published a narrative called *Fragments: Memories of a Childhood 1939-1948*, in which he purported to relate memories of his youth spent in Nazi concentration camps. Although the text was initially lauded as a powerful and moving work, such approbation was quickly negated and even reversed by the revelation in 1998 that the personal claims made about the narrative were a fabrication, and that Wilkomirski had never been an inmate of the camps. The *Time* article argued that "the warrant of personal witness increases the impact of a book. It is questionable whether *Fragments* would have caught the world's attention had it appeared as a novel. Indeed if read as fiction this volume could be seen as an unpalatably sensationalist work, using the Holocaust to exploit the imagery of raw horror". What the author of the article seems to suggest is that any frustration of a reader's expectations of verifiability and veracity in a text will necessarily have the consequence of an aesthetic and ethical re-evaluation of the narrative, particularly if the modification of perception were to be from the factual to the fictional.

Although the evaluation of the work had altered dramatically, the events depicted, the ethical questions raised, and the language employed for the purposes of narration, remained wholly unchanged: nothing had been altered by the controversy except the perceptions of the readership. Despite the postmodern declaration of the "death of the author" by Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault, which argues for the primacy of the interpretable text and the corresponding irrelevance of the biographical circumstances of the original writer, it seemed as if a large proportion of the readership of *Fragments* had conflated the representation offered in the text with the personal conduct of Wilkomirski. The controversy was further complicated by the context of the Holocaust, in which extreme and widespread violence was perpetrated on an institutional, psychological and personal level. Numerous Holocaust narratives, both fictional and non-fictional, have been published, many dealing with the same occurrences and ethical problems as

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actuality. However, the paradox resides in the representation of such instances, and my reasoning was that any event may be aestheticised in such a manner that the represented violence may be indirectly experienced without distress, and moreover enjoyed, by its potential readers.

Fragments. These have both informed and complicated the evaluation of the problematic Wilkomirski text.

The issues raised by the Wilkomirski affair in particular, and the textual representation of violence in general, are threefold. Firstly, there is the notion of representation and its correspondence to an external actuality. The relationship between representation and actuality therefore encompasses a consideration of the relations between factual and fictional modes of writing, and how these relations affect the perception of the reader of the text. Throughout this thesis, the term "actuality" is preferred to "reality". The reason for this is that the "real" is often considered as a fairly inflexible synonym for "the nature of things" – in other words, as J L Austin argues, it is implicitly supposed "that 'real' has a single meaning ('the real world' 'material objects'), and that a highly profound and puzzling one. Instead, we should insist always on specifying with what 'real' is being contrasted … and then usually we shall find some specific, less fatal, word, appropriate to the particular case, to substitute for 'real'" (Austin 1970: 88). Therefore, "actuality", in the less rigid sense of "existing conditions" (Oxford English Dictionary), is employed here primarily as a means of distinguishing between a textual representation and the prevailing conditions ("appropriate to the particular case") that provide the conceptual framework for interpreting that representation.

Secondly, it is important to take account of the means by which various forms of violence (institutional, direct or psychological) are textually represented, including a consideration of the aesthetic effects of both figurative and realist uses of language on the reader's response to that text. One of the most important concepts in a study of textual representation is the functioning of language in terms of various modes of aesthetic evaluation, and the resultant aestheticisation of the text concerned. The field of aesthetic enquiry is extremely broad, as evidenced by the Oxford *Encyclopaedia of Aesthetics* (ed. Kelly, 1998), a four volume work which attempts to cover all aspects of the aesthetic, including such diverse categories as Feminist, Japanese, and Kantian aesthetics. Consequently, to establish a single philosophical definition of "aesthetics" is problematic. *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy* offers the following definition (and

qualification): "Aesthetics is that branch of philosophy which deals with the arts, and with other situations that involve aesthetic experience and aesthetic value. Thus only part of aesthetics is the philosophy of art … Contemporary aesthetics is a rich and challenging part of philosophy, marked by a high level of disagreement even about what its basic problems are" (Honderich 1995: 13). However, in a narrower sense, aesthetics is often understood as being little more than the artistically appealing, or the beautiful, within the context of a specific culture or historical moment. In the introduction to *On Beauty*, for example, Umberto Eco writes that "our book could be accused of relativism, as if we wanted to say what is considered beautiful depends on the various historical periods and cultures. And this is precisely what we do want to say" (2004: 12). However, "aestheticisation" will be employed in a particular sense throughout this study, and it is necessary at this point to clarify what is meant by the term in relation to the investigation of ethics and the textual representation of violence**.** From this perspective, such an engagement with aesthetic experience and value is carefully circumscribed in terms of the goals and purposes of the current enquiry.

Any representation, whether fictional or factual, is an *aesthetic* representation which, owing to the limits of language and the nature of the potential reader's context, is related to what it represents through individual (inter)subjective perspectives. Whenever a text is written, the language employed may fall within a broad spectrum. The one end of that spectrum is inclined towards a pictorial/representational theory of language; that is, the text attempts to represent as convincingly as possible the event or person being depicted.[2] This would apply to much realist fictional writing, as well to narrative factual texts. In other words, the language is utilised in a manner that is as referentially unambiguous as possible, even if interpretations of the text are necessarily varied. At the other end of the spectrum would be texts that employ a linguistic register that is more specifically figurative. Although metaphor is implicit in all texts, this type of writing foregrounds language that is not explicitly representational. In other words, the reader of the latter text

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[2] The concern with language and representation in modern thought is central to understanding the nature of representation, and the focus of this study will be on postmodern thought, particularly in the work of Jacques Derrida, with an emphasis on *Of Grammatology*, "Plato's Pharmacy", *Limited Inc* and "White Mythology", in which notions of language, metaphor and meaning are related to the experience of the aesthetic aspect of textual representation.

is at a further remove from what is represented than the reader of the realist text.[3] It should be emphasised, however, that given the potential instability of linguistic meaning, the language used for the purposes of representation can never be bound to a single, definitive meaning. Nevertheless, the text whose linguistic register places an emphasis on reference uses fewer rhetorical or figurative strategies; the figurative and linguistically complex text includes these strategies in a manner designed to draw attention to the representation itself, thereby potentially augmenting the reader's perception of what is represented through various layers of noticeably metaphoric language. Consequently, in this thesis, the term "aestheticisation" will refer primarily to the functioning of language for (more or less) representational ends, rather than referring to any preconceived criteria relating to the beautiful or the appealing. The term "aesthetic" will then refer to the effect that such aestheticisation has on a reader's interpretation of a text.

The third issue raised by textual representations of violence is that of the ethical implications of reading such texts. As normative ethical theories are sometimes ill-equipped to deal with such representations, postmodern theories of ethics provide a possible alternative perspective on the problems raised by these texts.[4] In order to investigate these issues, various theories of representation, violence and the ethical have been explored and occasionally juxtaposed in order to develop one of the hypotheses for this study, namely that the ethical and aesthetic evaluations of textual representations of violence are necessarily interrelated.

2. Outline

The first two broad areas of discussion outlined above lay the theoretical foundations and working hypotheses for the investigation into the ethics of representing violence, with the study culminating in a consideration of the implications of a postmodern ethics. It is

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[3] In Chapter 5, Section 1.2, an example of each type of text is given: the first is taken from the novel *Hannibal*, by Harris, and is an attempt at realism; the second is taken from Koestler's *Darkness at Noon*, and is a more aestheticised text.

[4] The various theories examined have been selected according to their relevance to the topic under discussion. Although the focus is primarily postmodern, other theories have been considered, where necessary, and all have been closely scrutinised, or even re-evaluated.

therefore constructive at this point to provide an outline of the investigation to follow, so that the reader may from the outset develop a sense of the sequence of the argument before approaching the more detailed discussions within each section. The structure of the argument is as follows: Chapters Two to Five focus on issues of representation and reception; Chapter Six investigates the differing definitions of the term "violence", and how instances of violence are represented within the medium of a written text; and the later chapters are concerned primarily with ethical theory as it pertains to such texts – firstly from a normative ethical point of view, and then from a postmodern perspective, acknowledging various preconditions necessary for any ethical (re)evaluation of the representation of violence. It also seems helpful to provide an indication of the main theories which will be considered in the course of the discussion, and the sequence in which they will be treated.

The first section considers the problem of textual representation and linguistic meaning within a specifically postmodern framework. Various theories of representation will be employed in the study, and each will be critically explored at each appropriate stage. However, the Derridean discussion of iterability emerges as the approach to questions of representation which is most germane to this discussion. This suggests that for any text to function coherently as a representation, there must exist the possibility that it may be read and re-interpreted in a process of infinite repeatability. The reader, necessarily positioned within a specific contextual field, is ultimately responsible for shaping the meaning of a text. Using elements of the reader-response theory of Wolfgang Iser, combined with Stanley Fish's notion of an interpretive community, the proposed reader is referred to here as a *potential* reader: in order to read, there must exist a historical, current or future reader; in order for that reader to interpret and evaluate a textual representation, there must exist an iterable and contextual instance of writing.

Without such a potential reader, there can be no interaction with a text to produce multiple meanings and sets of values. The historiography of Hayden White and the philosophy of Paul Ricoeur form the basis for the discussion of the factual and fictional texts experienced by the potential reader. Various theories about narrative will be

considered, with two in particular being relevant to the reception of the iterable text: the notion of null denotation as articulated by Nelson Goodman, and the notion of deferred reality as proposed by Jacques Derrida. A crucial point of emphasis is that just as most factual texts are dependent upon fictional strategies and aesthetic techniques, so too are fictional texts dependent upon contextual re-readings of an extra-textual actuality, as experienced through linguistic aestheticisation.

The second section is concerned with the meaning of the term "violence", and the means of representing instances of such violence, with reference to the theories of Audi, Keane, Galtung, Wolff and Arendt. These theories are then evaluated in relation to a detailed discussion of a particular representation of violence, namely "The Pit and the Pendulum" by Edgar Allan Poe. Other texts which are instances of the representation of violence are used for illustrative purposes throughout this study. The principal narratives concerned – *Fragments* by Wilkomirski, "The Pit and the Pendulum" by Poe, *Last Exit to Brooklyn* by Selby and *Country of My Skull* by Krog – all clarify or illustrate specific arguments within the discussion. Various other texts, both fictional and factual, have also been cited in order to supplement and elucidate the arguments developed with respect to the principal texts. Each text has been chosen both as an instance of represented violence, as well as for its relevance to the argument as a whole. The study then uses the various hypotheses about representation, the relationship between fact and fiction and the representation of violence as a basis for a further investigation into the ethics of representing violence in textual form.

The third section is concerned with postmodern ethics. Following a critical discussion of the normative systems of Deontology and Utilitarianism, the focus of the study returns to the postmodern. The ethics of Emmanuel Levinas form the basis of the discussion which follows, although Levinas's thought is re-interpreted through the writings of Derrida. However, it is the interpretation of postmodern ethics by Bauman (whose writing is informed by both Levinas and Derrida) that provides the most practical framework, and the ethical pivot, on which to found the discussion of postmodern ethics and the representation of violence. The texts used as illustrations in this chapter are all instances

of Holocaust narratives, each written from a different perspective. By investigating aspects of these texts through Bauman's guiding assumptions such as ambivalence and choice, it becomes clear that the potential reader, by drawing on the possibilities of postmodern ethics, is able to enter into an ethical dialogue with a representation of violence that cannot be oversimplified through the imposition of normative criteria. The study concludes that only the potential reader who is able to re-examine such prescriptions critically can effectively evaluate such a narrative, both aesthetically and ethically.

CHAPTER 2

TEXTUAL REPRESENTATION AND MEANING

1. The Notion of Representation

Any discussion involving the notion of textual representation is complicated by numerous theoretical implications regarding the nature and definition of the term representation. The endeavour to attain an authoritative definition must necessarily be frustrated from the outset by the multitude of possible and potential understandings and applications of the word. For instance, in the conventional usage of everyday practical language, representation is often considered as the assignment of a role or function to an object or individual, who is designated as representative of a larger whole: s/he (or it) represents a company, an ideology, an event, or a school of thought. A differing, and more subtle and complex, understanding of representation is found in the suppositions of idealist philosophy, where representation develops into the negation of any absolutist claims to epistemological certainty regarding knowledge of the Kantian nouemon, the unknowable thing-in-itself: "On the path of *objective knowledge*, thus starting from the *representation*, we shall never get beyond the representation, i.e., the phenomenon. We shall therefore remain at the outside of things; we will never be able to penetrate into their inner nature, and investigate what they are in themselves, in other words, what they may be by themselves" (Schopenhauer 1958: 195). Yet another understanding of representation is that of formalist or New Critical readings: a textual representation is a means to aesthetic appraisal, by which the reader may evaluate and understand the text in terms of its content, form and use of language, without a specific relation to any external referent.[1]

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[1] "The new Critics … insisted on the presence within the work of everything necessary for its analysis; and they called for an end to a concern by critics and teachers of English with matters outside the work itself" (Guerin and Labor *et al* 1992: 72).

However, such evaluations are based less on *what* is represented than on *how* it is represented, with the consequence that pre-conceived notions of canonicity and valorisation may become more significant than the representation. The most obvious example of this is the continuing dominance of the Shakespearean canon in English literature, based largely upon historical convention and institutionalisation: "The issue of the value accorded to Shakespeare's works cannot be disentangled from the values that people have found within these works … Shakespeare provides the best specimen in English, one of the best specimens in any language, for investigating the mechanisms of cultural renown" (Taylor 1989: 6).[2] Although the judgement of value and its subsequent impact upon the production and reception of texts is integral to the formation of critical notions regarding the structures and significance of textual representation, more significant are the functions of representation that allow for a coherent reading – functions that are not necessarily assumed by any conventional criteria of assessment, and that are not dependent upon the location of the text in a specific cultural canon.[3] The purpose of this chapter is therefore not to attempt to isolate a single and universal definition of representation, which would be both presumptuous and unfeasible, but rather to consider the potential connotations and definitions that will be relevant to a study of representation within the context of textuality, particularly within the framework of this study.

The text has no inherent aesthetic or truth value: it is only through a supposition of the mode or genre of the narrative within a particular socio-cultural milieu, as well as a consideration of the reader's aesthetic expectations of the text (within his/her socio-cultural milieu), that any apparent differentiation is feasible. A text is (in isolation) no more than a collection of words, sentences and paragraphs that, when comprehended by a reader, will allow for the possibility of signification; any classification or evaluation of the text lies beyond the text, and it is at this point of evaluation that a postmodern conception of representation is most apposite. For example, Jacques Derrida considers

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[2] Taylor continues this theme in Chapter 6 of his book, "Present Tense" (1989: 298-372).
[3] This is not to deny that aestheticisation and valorisation have an effect on the reception and evaluation of textual representation. However, in this chapter the pertinent concern is with the notion of representation, rather than the implications of value judgements.

the problems of representation as central to both philosophical and critical discourses. In particular, he discards the influential Platonic model of mimesis that asserts that there exists both an original and a copy, which implies that the original is more significant than the copy.[4] If this were so, then representation would *always* be no more than a process of substitution, contaminated by its difference from what it purports to represent. However, the element of difference is not merely a substitution (or an addition) to representation, and language is not merely a substitute for speech and, by implication, any related thought and meaning. Derrida's primary concern in much of his work is to counter this privileging of speech over writing, with its attendant assumption of logocentric authority. Moreover, in *Of Grammatology*, he takes issue with this assumption in the work of Ferdinand Saussure.

As Saussure argues in his *Course in General Linguistics*, the linguistic sign consists of "not a thing and a name, but a concept and a sound image … I propose to retain the word *sign* to designate the whole, and to replace *concept* and *sound-image* respectively by *signified* and *signifier*" (Saussure 1959: 66-7). Any sign is both arbitrary – that is, there is no inherent and necessary relationship between the signifier and the signified – but fixed within a particular linguistic community – that is, no individual is able to alter the relationship between the signifier and signified, or the meaning of the signifier. Because of this relationship, Saussure argues that "in language there are only differences *without positive terms*" (1959: 120). "Conceptual and phonic differences" therefore determine the meaning of a word. The implications of this for meaning is that the object (the signified) is not necessarily understood in the same way when the word (the signifier) is employed, particularly as different communities (historical, cultural, linguistic) may use different words for the same object, or have differing conceptions of the same word. Language is an endless differential network of words – words that have meaning only because they differ from other words that have similar connotations or similar sounds (as well as from those that have different connotations and different sounds).

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[4] Derrida's critique of *mimesis* can also be found in "Plato's Pharmacy" (1981a), in which he argues that "Plato is bent upon presenting writing as an occult, and therefore suspect, power. Just like painting, to which he will later compare it, and like optical illusions and the techniques of *mimesis* in general" (1981a: 97); as well as in "The Double Session" (1981b) in which he deconstructs the negative assumptions of Platonic mimesis through a detailed analysis of a poem by Mallarmé.

Although he commends Saussure for some important discoveries, Derrida is also critical of Saussure's logocentric position that privileges speech over writing, and argues that it is only through writing (and the metaphors of writing) that Saussure can sustain his position in the first place. In other words, "something that was never spoken and is nothing other than writing itself as the origin of language writes itself within Saussure's discourse" (Derrida 1974: 44). Instead, Derrida suggests an "arche-writing", a writing that, rather than implying a pure meaning, is dependent upon the play of differences, and thereby exceeds the logocentric logic that is limited to a restricted referentiality between language and what it represents, between signifier and signified. Through arche-writing – a "movement of difference, irreducible arche-synthesis, opening in one and the same possibility, temporalization as well as relationship with the other and language" (Derrida 1974: 60) – representation can no longer be assumed to be a singular 'concept'. Instead, arche-writing is the *a priori* pre-condition of all possible knowledge: "we cannot *think* the possibility of culture, history or knowledge in general without also thinking the prior necessity of writing" (Norris 1987: 95). Yet the question remains, whether discussing arche-writing or the necessity of writing in general: *who* is it that necessarily writes?

1.1 The Author

The post-structuralist denial of the figure of the author has rendered the entire notion of "an author" of a text as problematic. Roland Barthes, in his essay entitled "The Death of the Author" (1977a), claims that critical acquiescence to the authority of the authorial figure (he who "confides" in the reader) can result only in a monolithic interpretation of the text. However, following the example of writers such as Mallarmé and Proust, whose texts question the role of the author, it is possible to liberate the text from the constricting context of the author's imposed individuality: "Once the Author is removed, the claim to decipher a text becomes quite futile. To give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing … literature (it would be better from now on to say *writing*), by refusing to assign a 'secret', an ultimate meaning, to the text (and to the word as text), liberates what may be called an anti-theological activity, an activity that is truly revolutionary since to refuse to fix meaning is, in the end, to refuse God and his hypostases – reason, science, law" (Barthes 1977a: 147). Barthes

triumphantly concludes that "[t]he birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author" (1977a: 148). The contextually placed reader is therefore the source of cognition rather than the author, and the result of multiple readings is an inevitable intertextuality, a complex mosaic of references, quotations, influences and linguistic networks that ensures that no text is a closed system, and that all texts are related to other texts in an infinite network of differentiation, thereby effectively negating any fixed point of textual origin (such as authorial intention). It is this network of intertextuality that determines the production of any text, thus ensuring that the very notion of origin becomes diminished to the point of vanishing.

Michel Foucault, in "What is an Author" (1969), also suggests that the imposition of the authorial figure inhibits a multiplicity of interpretations of the text. Using as a starting point Beckett's question "what does it matter who is speaking?", Foucault argues that the author-function is both contextual and variable, and can be characterised by four interdependent traits: "(1) the author function is linked to the juridical and institutional system that encompasses, determines, and articulates the universe of discourse; (2) it does not affect all discourses in the same way at all times and in all types of civilization; (3) it is not defined by the spontaneous attribution of a discourse to its producer, but rather by a series of specific and complex operations; (4) it does not refer purely and simply to a real individual, since it can give rise simultaneously to several selves, to several subjects – positions that can be occupied by different classes of individuals" (Foucault 1969: 113). In other words, there exists a disjunction between the author, as an individual who writes, and the author-function which is associated with differing "selves", and which serves as a signature of cultural value. Just as there can be no fixed meaning owing to the plurality of such differing selves, so too can there be no end to the practice of writing, and it does not, ultimately, matter "who is speaking".

Derrida's position on the Author figure is subtly different from that of Barthes and Foucault. In *Plato's Pharmacy*, he suggests that "[t]o a considerable degree, we have said all we *meant to say*. Our lexicon is at any rate not far from being exhausted" (1981a: 65). He then argues that the relationship between author and reader is not unproblematic, and

that the reader assumes in a qualified sense the role of author during each reading of a text: "If reading and writing are one, as is easily thought these days, if reading *is* writing, this oneness designates neither undifferentiated (con)fusion nor identity at perfect rest; the *is* that couples reading and writing must rip apart. One must then, in a single gesture, but doubled, read and write" (Derrida 1981a: 63-4). The dichotomy between the passive reception of reading and the active authority of writing is gradually diminished, and the ambiguous figure of the author (s/he whose signature marks the text), through the processes of intertextuality and repetition that develop as a consequence of the exhaustion of the lexicon, becomes progressively associated with the figure of the reader, even though the signature may remain.

Thus the role of author in the generation of meaning is marked by absence and rupture, and it is this that constitutes the act of the representation rather any notion of authorial intentionality: "For a writing to be a writing it must continue to 'act' and to be readable even when what is called the author of the writing no longer answers for what he has written, for what he seems to have signed, be it because of temporary absence, because he is dead or, more generally, because he has not employed his actual and present intention or attention, the plenitude of his desire to say what he means, in order to sustain what seems to be written 'in his name'" (Derrida 1988: 8). The meaning(s) and interpretation(s) generated by the acts of writing and representation must necessarily function within the space made possible by such an absence. Derrida, however, does not deny the historical existence of the author, or as he often puts it, the "signature", and many of his own texts are discussions and critiques of the work of particular authors, such as Saussure, Husserl, Plato and Rousseau. For example, in his discussion of the authorial function of Francis Ponge in *SignSponge*, he argues that the signature, ostensibly a monolithic symbol of authorial authority, is in effect subsumed within the narrative as the text becomes subject to a multiplicity of future interpretations: "The law producing *and* prohibiting the signature (in the first modality) of the proper name, is that, by not letting the signature fall outside the text any more, as an undersigned subscription, and by inserting it into the body of the text, you monumentalize, institute, and erect it into a thing or a stony object. But in doing so, you also lose the identity, the title of ownership

over the text: you let it become a moment or a part of the text, as a thing or a common noun" (1984: 363).

Consequently, this discussion will consider the author as analogous to the reader (in the sense of being such a "moment or a part of the text") in terms of any singular interpretation: a reading by the author cannot result in any assumptions of a definitive or privileged meaning, but rather is yet another singular reading among an infinite number of singular readings, similarly burdened – but also endowed – with its own presuppositions and situated within its own socio-cultural space. It is with this notion of the reader in mind that the following overview of the theory of representation is to be understood.

2. Some Accounts of Textual Representation and Linguistic Meaning

2.1 Why Referentiality Might Be Pertinent

To claim that there is an external reality ready to be "transposed" by representation is to employ the most basic – and most problematic – theory of meaning, namely the referential theory. The supposition of such a theory is that for any expression to be understood in a meaningful manner, it is necessary that that expression have an extralinguistic reference. Words are therefore substitutes or symbols for their extra-textual referents, and any meaning is to be found in the relationship between the expression and its referent (Alston 1964: 12). The obvious difficulty with this position, however, is that it is clearly not the case that all meaningful expressions actually refer to something. Syncategorematic terms – conjunctions, connectives, and so on – cannot generate meaning in isolation, and even commonplace terms present practical and theoretical difficulties. To use any word (for example, leaf) does not necessarily imply any singular instance of the object being represented: the word "leaf" can be used to refer

to any leaf, rather than a particular leaf.[5] To evade this objection by saying that the use of the word leaf is to refer to the class of "leaf" is still problematic, as it is not the case that when the word leaf is used in an utterance that the resulting reference is "to" an abstract class. The problem with the referential theory of language is that, although it is based on the important insight that language is used to represent objects outside (and inside) language, the matter has been oversimplified by insisting that *all* words and sentences are meaningful only in relation to extralinguistic entities, and this has undermined that very insight: "If referring is one linguistic job among others and is assigned only to some types of expressions, no account of meaning that presupposes that all meaningful units refer to something can be correct. More specifically, it cannot be the case that to say a word has a certain meaning is to say that it refers to something" (Alston 1964: 16). Nevertheless, it is neither practical nor possible to discard the referential theory altogether, and elements of the theory will remain important for the discussion which follows.

2.2 Intentionality

The phenomenogical theory of intentionality, as initially propounded by Franz Brentano, and later developed by Edmund Husserl, has a certain relevance for textual representation in that it does allow for the generation of multiple viewpoints and interpretations. Intentionality is an activity of consciousness in which mental states are directed towards what is external to them, even if that object of thought is an ideal construct (such as a mathematical concept), or an imaginary construct (such as a unicorn). These mental states can therefore generate a representation (as well as a misrepresentation) of a verifiable state of affairs in the world. Husserl makes explicit use of the terminology of the *noesis*, the "concretely complete inventive mental process" (Husserl 1983: 233), which has the function of constituting the signification of the external data. The noema is the object as intended by the conscious act (being both objective and transcendent), and is therefore distinct from the object in-itself (being subjective and immanent: the "noetic" meaning). Every act must have a noema, but not necessarily an external object. As a result, notions

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[5] This has resonance with Frege's notion of sense and reference, where the latter is the referential relationship between the word and object referred to, while the former is the contextual understanding of the representation (or modes of representation). Therefore two individuals may have two different conceptions regarding the same individual leaf (see Kenny 1995: 126-41).

such as unicorns, round-squares and fictional characters may be noematically perceived (transcendentally understood) without reference to a noetic actuality (an actual object-in-itself). Another key concept of Husserl's phenomenology is the necessity of transcendental reduction,[6] where empirical existence is subject to a process of "bracketing" through which any assumption, prejudice or culturally conditioned knowledge regarding the world is excluded from consciousness: "all individual objectivities which are constituted through the functional activities of consciousness in valuation and in practice are suspended – all varieties of cultural expression, works of the technical and of the fine arts, of the sciences also … Therewith *all the sciences natural and mental*, with the entire knowledge they have accumulated, *undergo disconnexion* as sciences which require for their development the natural standpoint" (1931: 171). Only through such reduction can the essence of experiencing phenomena be described.

However, Husserl's notion of the transcendental reduction has been criticised by some as being too idealistic. Hintakka makes the point that "You simply cannot be aware of a relation's holding between two terms if you are not aware of both of the two terms. If the entire object is in each and every case bracketed in the phenomenological reductions, it therefore becomes literally impossible for a phenomenologist to explain the relation of a noema to its object" (1995: 80). Heidegger, *contra* Husserl, argues for a grounding of phenomenology in the historical and the lived, with a consequent primacy of practical experience over theorising. In *Being and Time*, he excludes Husserl's concerns with the transcendental ego, consciousness and objectivity: "Phenomenology, for Heidegger, leads to a new way of seeing rather than to a set of philosophical propositions" (Moran 2000: 228). Similarly, Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology argues for the inclusion of the reduction in a manner that enhances, rather than diminishes, the relationship between theory and practical experience, in order to give an adequate description of human experience: "It is because we are through and through compounded of relationships with the world that for us the only way to become aware of the fact is to suspend the resultant activity, to refuse it our complicity … not because we reject the certainties of common

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[6] "The disconnexion from Nature was for us the methodological means whereby the direction of the mental glance upon the pure transcendent consciousness becomes at all possible" (Husserl 1931: 171).

sense and a natural attitude to things – they are, on the contrary, the constant theme of philosophy – but because, being the presupposed basis of any thought, they are taken for granted" (1962: xv). He goes on to claim that "The most important lesson which the reduction teaches us is the impossibility of a complete reduction" (1962: xv).

Such bracketing or reduction therefore allows for various aspects of the representation, many of which are not necessarily apparent from one point of view alone. This allows for an elaboration of an inter-subjectivity of consciousness in which each act of conscious perception anticipates other acts of perception. Such "operative" intentionality is "apparent in our desires, our evaluations and in the landscape we see, more clearly than in objective knowledge, and furnishing the text which our knowledge tries to translate into precise language" (Merleau-Ponty 1962: xviii). The implication of this is the possibility of a multiplicity of interpretations of noematic perceptions of a text, and it is Derrida's critique of phenomenology that argues for both the generation of a potentially infinite number of readings, as well as a more inclusive notion of the literary object. In *The Time of a Thesis: Punctuations*, he writes "[I]t was for me a matter of bending, more or less violently, the techniques of transcendental phenomenology to the needs of elaborating a new theory of literature, of that peculiar type of ideal object that is the literary object" (1983: 37). Combined with this is the emphasis on the necessary repeatability of a text as a condition for textual intentionality. In *Speech and Phenomena*, he emphasises the importance of (transcendent) repetition in the phenomenology of the (immanent) ideal or essence: "But this ideality, which is but another name for the permanence of the same, and the possibility of its repetition, *does not exist* in the world, and it does not come from another world; it depends entirely upon the possibility of acts of repetition" (1969: 12) This statement is a powerful critique of the transcendental phenomenology of Husserl, as well as the emphasis on experience and perception as articulated by Merleau-Ponty.

However, Derrida is not inherently opposed to the idea that intentionality, for all practical purposes, is an integral part of speech and meaning which allows for interpretation within certain contexts; he is opposed to the idea that intentionality is a means of determining

the *must* and the *should* of the workings of the text. As Peggy Kamuf claims, "[Derrida's notion of] iterability conditions any intention as possible but thereby impossible as a pure presence to itself" (Kamuf 1991: 81). The fact that a sign is repeatable is a limiting factor on the claims of intentionality to be the "determinable ground of signification" (1991: 80). This emphasis upon the importance of the possibility of acts of repetition becomes crucial in Derrida's formulation of the process of iterability, particularly in *Limited Inc* (1988), and it is this process, rather than intentionality, which will be considered as the key element in the interpretation of textual representation in this study.

2.3 Iterability

Phenomenological intentionality, therefore, is not a necessary function of or pre-condition for postmodern iterability. Although both speakers and writers generate words that have intentional significance, the graphic utterance differs from the phonic utterance in that the former allows for infinite future readings and (re)interpretations, whereas the latter assumes a logocentric authority of significance unadulterated by any possible future (mis)readings. Derrida challenges this view: all texts are instances of, or are influenced by, arche-writing. This is why he has labelled a text, whether written or spoken, as being iterable: to be intelligible, it must be both repeatable (in various contexts) and singular (having the potential to be understood uniquely in each one of those various contexts). One of the features of any written text is that, by its very nature, it is marked by the future absence of the initial readership and the subsuming of the original signature. This also reinforces the notion of the text: "If one admits that writing (and the mark in general) *must be able* to function in the absence of the sender, the receiver, the context of production, etc. that implies that this power, this *being able*, this *possibility* is always inscribed, hence *necessarily* inscribed as *possibility* in the functioning or the functional structure of the mark … it follows that this possibility is a *necessary* part of its structure" (Derrida 1988: 48).

In an interview with Maurizio Ferraris, Derrida asserted that "I prefer to speak of 'mark' rather than of language … it is the possibility of language, and it is everywhere that there is a relation to another thing or relation to an other" (Derrida and Ferraris 2001: 76). The

notion of iterability recognises that for any text to function coherently, there must exist the possibility that it may be read again and again over time, in a "structure of repeatability", even if both the author and addressee of the mark are dead or absent. Derrida claims elsewhere (*Limited Inc* 1988) that "[p]lenitude is the end (the goal), but were it attained, it would be the end (death)" (1988: 129) – death as the end of possibility, the end of the illusion of possibility, but also the condition of writing. "To be what it is, all writing must, therefore, be capable of functioning in the radical absence of every empirically determined receiver in general. And this absence is not a continuous modification of presence, it is a rupture in presence, the "death", or the possibility of the "death" of the receiver inscribed in the structure of the mark" (1988: 8).

The notion of the metaphysics of presence – the metaphysical, logocentric, assumption that language has a fixed, or at least stable, meaning or identity[7] – is therefore challenged by iterability: repeatability, the rupture in the (assumption) of presence, emphasises the continuously changing implications of the mark, and thereby allows for continuously changing interpretations of the text. The result of the deconstruction of presence is that there can be no stable origin, and there can consequently never be an ultimate interpretation of any text or utterance. To recognise the potential for deconstruction in any text is to recognise the implicit hierarchies, doctrines, ideologies and prejudices which purport to represent something definite and unshakeable outside of the words of the text, as well as to challenge the referential assumption that there exists an independent external reality that is *the* original as opposed to the copy of the representation.

Following the erasure of an originary context, and for a text to be readable, it must have the potentiality for being repeated again and again in an infinite variety of contexts, while simultaneously being potentially singular each time. Yet a singular reading – the theoretically unique interpretation available to every reader, is already compromised by

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[7] The metaphysics of presence is a feature of the Western intellectual tradition, based upon the assumption that meaning is "present" in every utterance. In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida employs the texts of Rousseau to deconstruct this presence (which is intricately linked to the logocentric assumption that privileges the immediate significance and authority of speech over the oppressive instability of meaning inherent in writing, a theme common to both Plato and Rousseau): "Self-presence, transparent proximity in the face-to-face of countenances and the immediate range of the voice, this determination of social authenticity is therefore classic: Rousseauistic but already the inheritor of Platonism" (1974: 138).

the paradox that the singular is determined by the general: "An absolute, absolutely pure singularity, if there were one, would not even show up, or at least would not be available for reading. To become readable, [the text] has to be *divided*, to *participate* and *belong* … any work is singular in that it speaks singularly of both singularity and generality. Of iterability and the law of iterability" (Attridge 1992a: 68). In addition, no context allows for saturation, and no meaning can be determined out of context. However, context is in itself not a definitive framing of the iterable text. In *Signature Event Context* Derrida argues that "a context is never absolutely determinable, [and] its determination can never be entirely certain or saturated" (Derrida 1988: 3). No implied frame, contextual or otherwise, can limit the potential meaning of the text, and what is external to it is constantly absorbed within its meaning.

Consequently, it is reasonable to maintain that any notion of meaning within the framework of textual representation is an acknowledgement that the word "meaning" is both epistemologically unstable and comprehensible only in relation to a variety of contextual factors (themselves variable and indeterminate), which are subject to various theories of linguistic understanding. Textual passages are necessarily iterable – repeatable but singular – and dependent upon the future absence of sender and addressee. The inferences to be drawn from such a notion of representation remain problematic, however, as iterability affects significantly more than just the individual reader's perception of the work: it also affects the aesthetic and cultural positioning of the text within a network of texts, as well as the implications that accompany perceptions of factuality and fiction. Prior to any reading, the text has only potential meaning. It is only through subsequent claims to veracity and actuality (or fictionality, see Chapter 4) within varying contexts that the text is read as a representation. It is only once this point has been reached that the potential functions of representation invite examination.

3. How Representation Functions: Some Central Questions

Before the implications of textually representing violence are investigated further, it is necessary to explore the various definitions of the term representation in order further to

clarify the sense in which it will be employed in later chapters. There are a number of diverse definitions of the verb "to represent"; however, the notion of representation in this study has been deliberately limited to those aspects of it that are of particular relevance to the iterable reading of a written text. Consequently, those definitions which are not wholly relevant (for example, "to present an image of through the medium of a picture or sculpture") have been excluded from consideration. Those identified as being significant for the functioning of textual representation, within the limits identified above, are as follows:

1. to stand as an equivalent of; correspond to
2. to act as a substitute or proxy
3. to use or serve as a means of expression
4. to exhibit the characteristics of; exemplify; typify
5. to set forth in words; state or explain; to describe; to make out to be

In order to qualify (in the sense of "to declare competent or capable, or to certify, as well as to modify, limit, or restrict") these five definitions, it is helpful to apply them to an example of a textual representation, thereby allowing for an exploration as to how representation functions within the text in terms of the Derridean notions outlined earlier. The following extract is taken from Antjie Krog's contentious narrative based on the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), *Country of my Skull* (second edition, 2002). The choice is calculated, in view of the ambivalence of a text that admits to a juxtaposition of historical actuality and fictional narrative: the author, in her acknowledgements, makes the startling claim that "I have told many lies in this book about the truth. I have exploited many lives and many texts" (2002: 294). The consequence of such an amalgamation is that the reader is never in the position of being able sufficiently to determine whether or not the testimony given in the following extract has any verifiable reference to a historical event, is wholly fictional, or is placed somewhere between the two (perceived) poles of historical record and invention. Additionally, due to the fragmentary mode of writing in *Country of my Skull*, the extract is itself a representation of the testimony of the event: although contextually linked to the

thematics of the text as a whole, this passage consists of the entire narrative of this specific event.

> It was Sunday. And cold. He came into the kitchen. "Make me some bean soup".
> "It's Sunday, *jong*, I want to cook special food."
> But he wanted bean soup.
> While dressing for church we heard the noise. The youths were coming down the road. We were standing in our bedroom. We were not talking. We were not moving. They surrounded the house and they shouted: "Let the spy *die*, let the spy *die*!" They threw stones through the window. When they left, he said to me: "Don't cry Nontuthuzelo. A person dies only once, not many times. I know now where these things are leading to. Come, let's make soup." We went to the kitchen and put the beans in the pot.
> Then someone we knew knocked at the door. "The comrades are burning your shop, Uncle Mick!"
> "I'll be back for lunch," he said to me.
> They told me afterwards. He walked up to the door of his shop, he didn't look back … someone in the crowd shot him in the back … They told me afterwards Craig Kotze had said my husband was the one who betrayed Steve Biko.
> (Krog 2002: 27)

3.1 Equivalence

The term "equivalence" is a problematic concept, particularly when used in relation to textual representation. Equivalence holds that A is equivalent to B, if and only if B is equivalent to A. Consequently, if A is the thing represented, and B the representation, then it becomes difficult to recognise the equivalence of the latter to the former, and *vice versa*, as equivalence implies an exact correspondence between A and B. The ambiguous implications of this definition of representation become immediately apparent. Can the given extract achieve any form of equivalence, and if so, to what extent? If it is assumed (for the purposes of this first definition) that the representation of the testimony has a factual basis in a verifiable historical event, can the position be maintained that the text achieves an *equivalence* of that event? Or is the equivalence to the testimony, which in its turn should be equivalent to the event? In either case, there are three possibilities of equivalence:

(1) The representation is equivalent to the event. In other words, the details of the description – the shouting of the youths, the making of the soup, the dialogue as given in the text, and all the rest – exactly correspond to the event as it happened in an external reality.

(2) The representation is the equivalent of the narrator Nontuthuzelo's recollections of the event: the text is necessarily a partial representation of the event, but nevertheless a complete representation of Nontuthuzelo's perception of the event. In other words, it is an event solely through its reconstruction in language.

(3) The representation is the equivalent of Krog's understanding of Nontuthuzelo's recollection of the event: the text is necessarily a collective representation of both the event and Nontuthuzelo's recollections of the event, as interpreted and represented by Krog.

It is obvious that the first possibility cannot be sustained – no written text can exhaustively represent an actual event; there must necessarily be omissions. The second possibility is to some extent more plausible than the first, but any acknowledgement of the fragmentary and selective possibilities inherent in any act of remembrance or testimony implies that the use of equivalence is the unnecessary assumption of a limiting concept that cannot be applied convincingly to the relationship between event and the textual representation of that event. The third possibility has further diluted that relationship to such an extent that the application of the term becomes incoherent. It is, therefore, unsustainable to argue that equivalence can function in terms of a textual representation.

Consequently, it is necessary to attenuate the rigidity suggested by the term, and instead substitute the term correspondence. The result is, in effect, an adaptation of the referential theory of meaning outlined earlier, also known as the "correspondence theory". The correspondence theory holds that propositions are true, if and only if they correspond to an existing state of affairs. However, apart from the difficulties of adequately interpreting contentious terms such as "truth" and "facts", the potential for misrepresentation, mistranslation or misattribution, combined with the iterable nature of the written text, would provide sufficient justification for rejecting a naïve relation of correspondence between what is represented and the representation. A further possibility is to substitute the term "resemble", which is also dependent upon the referential theory. However, Nelson Goodman is critical of a crude notion of resemblance in which "A represents B if

and only if A appreciably resembles B …A represents B to the extent that A resembles B" (Goodman 1976: 3). Accordingly, if A is considered to be the Krog extract, and B is the totality of the event referred to in the extract, then (according to the naïve view) the author is claiming that the text resembles the event. Assuming the event took place more or less as described,[8] it is still not reasonable to infer that the text resembles the event. If it is the case that not even a picture or a photograph of an event or object can represent that event or object *as it is*,[9] then it is even more the case that a sequence of signifiers only conventionally related to a signified can never be equivalent to, or even resemble, an event. The assumption of an ultimate meaning, a plenitude of presence, is unsustainable given both the limitations of referentiality and the functioning of iterability to which both the reader and the text are subject. This is not to suggest that there is *no* reality to which the text refers; rather, "we must avoid having the indispensable critique of a certain naïve relationship to the signified or the referent, to sense and meaning … that is, a pure and simple suppression, of meaning or reference" (Derrida 1981c: 74).

The representation of a historical event is, therefore, necessarily linked to human sentiment and experience; however, in consequence of the fact that it is only through language that the responses to such events can be articulated, such articulations are limited to what language is able to represent, and can therefore never be represented in totality. Selective representation is essential; generalisation is a necessary condition for coherent memory. If selective representation were impossible, then articulate testimony would be impossible. For example, consider the story "Funes, the Memorious" by Jorge Luis Borges (1964: 87-95). In this narrative, the protagonist can recall *everything* that has happened to him throughout his life, including every leaf on every tree that he has seen,

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[8] It is also necessary to query whether the representation is that of the TRC hearing, or of the actual event. In the former case, it would therefore be a representation of a representation, which involves further complexities. Does the extract resemble the hearing, which then resembles the event? Or does the event resemble the testimony of the event?

[9] "The reality in a photograph is present to me while I am not present to it; and a world I know, and see, but to which I am nevertheless not present (through no fault of my subjectivity) is a world past" (Stanley Cavell, in Mulhall 2002: 65). Also, in Goodman: "And even we who are most inured to perspective rendering do not always accept it as faithful representation … as the saying goes, there is nothing like a camera to make a molehill out of a mountain" (1976: 15).

and every letter of every sentence of every book that he has read.[10] The only consequence of such a totality of recall is that he "cannot act any more, cannot even move. What characterises the transmission of memory is the filtering out. And with the filtering out, comes generalization" (Interview with Umberto Eco, in David, Lenoir and de Tonnac 1999: 190-191).

In the Krog extract, such generalisation is manifest. As an illustration, consider the following straightforward sentence: "While dressing for church we heard the noise". In order to attempt a more comprehensive representation, it would be necessary to describe precisely which clothes were being put on, the current state of (un)dress, which church is being referred to (both as a physical building and as a denomination, as well as the importance of such a building/denomination for each of the persons involved), the colours of the room, its furnishings, its ornaments and pictures, the exact temperature outside and inside (what exactly is meant by cold?), the weather conditions, the lighting, the exact time, the position of the narrator, as well as any other persons in the house (are there only two? Or are others silent, absent from the representation?), the nature of the perceived noise - its level, intensity, and duration. Even if such detail were possible (or desirable), it could not encompass the various emotions felt by each person at the time, each one's states of mind, alertness, perception, religious and political beliefs, and the multitudinous panorama of possibilities that exist within the confines of this sentence. There may be *sufficient* or *adequate* representation for the purposes of the narrative – in other words, the representation allows for a certain limitation of interpretation that ensures the potential consensus required for comprehending the passage. However, there will never be an *inclusive* representation, and each reader will interpret that sufficiency differently from every other reader, even if the singularity of each reading is necessarily influenced by the general intersubjective and intertextual functioning of the iterable text.

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[10] "In fact, Funes remembered not only every leaf of every tree of every wood, but also every one of the times he had perceived or imagined it. He decided to reduce each of his past days to some seventy thousand memories, which would then be defined by means of ciphers. He was dissuaded from this by two considerations: his awareness that the task was interminable, his awareness that it was useless. He thought that by the hour of his death he would not even have finished classifying all the memories of his childhood." (Borges 1964: 93).

Consequently, no representation, no matter how detailed, can ever be the *equivalent* of the event in every respect, nor can it accurately *correspond* to the event, nor can it comprehensively *resemble* the event. Each utterance must necessarily fall under the constraints of a generalisation in which a large portion of the detail of the remembered event is omitted, or was never part of conscious awareness in the first place.[11] The conclusion drawn from this must therefore be that the correspondence/equivalence theory is not suitable with regard to notions of textual representation, and that even resemblance is not a necessary condition for representation – as practically anything may stand for anything else when appropriately governed by intention and context. As Goodman asserts, "a passage that describes … an object refers to, and more particularly *denotes* it. Denotation is the core of representation and is independent of resemblance" (Goodman 1976: 5). In addition, textual denotation understood as a signification or symbol of a referent rather than a resemblance, becomes subject to the differential network of language, which in turn allows for the infinite readings of an iterable text. Thus, the notion of denotation as a *substitute* rather than an *equivalence* is a more adequate account of the function of textual representation.

3.2 Substitution

To denote is to serve as a symbol or a name for the meaning of something, or to signify. Hence, it is not necessary to resemble, to imitate, or to copy that something: it is enough to act as a substitute or proxy in a textual and linguistic sense. In the above extract there are various labels: the youths, the soup, the house; these labels cannot be equivalent to the corresponding objects in the world, but rather denote them by standing in for them. However, Derrida's formulation of this as "there is nothing outside context" (Derrida 1988: 136), itself a reformulation (or clarification) of "there is nothing outside of the text" (Derrida 1974: 158) suggests that while it is impossible to determine meaning without a contextual framework, it is equally impossible for potential meaning(s) within

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[11] "Our acts are end points in long sequences of unconscious responses. They arise from a structure of habits and skills that is almost infinitely complicated. Most of our life is enacted without conscious awareness. Nor can it be made conscious … we think of our actions as the end-results of our thoughts. Yet much the greater part of everyone's life goes on without thinking … When we know what to do we are hardly conscious of doing it" (Gray 2002: 69-70).

that context to become saturated. The youths as represented in the extract will have different contextual significances for Nontuthuzelo, for Krog, and for every reader of the text. The term youth therefore denotes, as it is a substitute that suggests an interpretation dependent upon the personal history, contextual space and individual prejudice of every reader of the text. Although the descriptions of the youths, the soup, the house and all the other objects depicted by the representation are not comprehensive, they remain as labels, a potentiality that each depiction implies within the understanding of each addressee. Such substitutions may contain instances of referentiality, yet are equally exposed to the workings of subjectivity and inter-subjectivity, particularly in an encounter with textual representation which is dependent upon individual re-formulation and conceptualisation.

The difficulty with the notion of writing as supplementarity is the suggestion that it is little more than a substitute for authenticity, or, as Rousseau suggests, a "mediated representation of thought" (Derrida 1974: 144). The logic of supplementarity is not merely the substitution of language for actuality; it is the possibility of language itself, the condition for representation, and the inescapable dissolution of any 'frame' or 'boundary' or 'meaning' that the writer may assume – the author can always say "more, less, or something other than what he 'would mean'" (1974: 158). Supplementarity is therefore the confusion of signifier with signified, the association of the object or event with its textual representation, that results in the valorisation of a text: "Writing is dangerous from the moment that representation there claims to be presence and the sign of the thing itself. And there is a fatal necessity, inscribed in the very functioning of the sign, that the substitute make one forget the vicariousness of its own function and make itself pass for the plenitude of a speech whose deficiency and infirmity it nevertheless only supplements" (Derrida 1974: 144). Whatever Nontuthuzelo (if such an individual actually existed as a living person) understands by the representation, whatever Krog understands by it, or whatever the reader may understand by the language and content of the extract: these may all be verifiable within the framework of an actual historical event, as well as with reference to personal comprehension and interpretation of the event. However, no meaning is absolute, and no analysis can encompass a totality of interpretation regarding the denotations within the text. Any attempt to do so is to impose

meaning upon a text, and to ignore the differential network of language: pure meaning "would not be, from the outset, in the position of a signifier, would not be inscribed in the relational and differential tissue which would make of it, from the outset, a referral, a trace, a gram, a spacing. It could be shown that metaphysics has always consisted in attempting to uproot the presence of meaning, in whatever guise, from *différance*" (Derrida 1981c: 32). Yet how does this notion of *différance* provide the means of signification for textual representation?

Denotation may imply supplementarity, but rather than allowing for a complete or definitive representation of the object or event, it is both disrupted by, and added to, by the supplement, so that a definitive signification through representation is ultimately unattainable. Linked to this notion of supplementarity is the idea of *différance*.[12] Both differing and deferring, *différance* is not so much a concept as an instability implicit in any text which challenges any absolute or universal interpretations of the text; meaning is permanently deferred, and not subject to any extralinguistic reference: rather it is subject to its difference from other meanings and interpretations, regardless of the factual or fictional status of the narrative. Meaning can never be fundamentally accessible, present, or self-constituted: "It is because of *différance* that the movement of signification is possible only if each so-called present element, each element appearing on the scene of presence, is related to something other than itself, thereby keeping within itself the mark of a past element, and already letting itself be vitiated by the mark of its relation to a future element, this trace being related no less to what is called the future than to what is called the past, and constituting what is called the present by means of this very relation to what it is not" (Derrida 1982: 13). The potential signification of any text (including both the extract from *Country of my Skull* and the text in its entirety) is subject to supplementarity and *différance*: a deconstruction that will be both a feature and an example of the limitless possibilities of (re)interpretation resulting from future (re)readings. To represent may be to substitute or to supplement; but as even Plato is subject to infinite reinterpretation (and rewriting), as Derrida demonstrates in his

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[12] Although the term "notion" is misleading: Derrida has claimed in the essay "Différance" that it is that "which is not a name, which is not a pure nominal unity, and unceasingly dislocates itself in a chain of differing and deferring and substitutions" (Derrida 1982a: 26).

discussion of memory, speech and writing in *Plato's Pharmacy* (1981a), so every text (including the *oeuvre* of Derrida himself) will be subject to both the reinterpretation and the re-evaluation that are implicit in the open-ended chain of meaning enforced by the implications of *différance* and supplementarity.[13]

3.3 Means of expression

This definition necessitates a consideration of the nature of expression, and how this is relevant to representation. Firstly, as Goodman claims (1976: 85-87), representation is distinguishable from expression: one difference between the two is that representation is of objects or events, while expression is of feelings or other properties. Although both are instances of denotation, the one denotes the concrete, while the other denotes the abstract. Expression is more likely to be suggestive than imitative, and as a result is often more emotionally immediate than descriptive or mimetic representation. Additionally, expression is typically only connected to the object by convention: "Whereas almost anything can denote or even represent almost anything else, a thing can express only what belongs but did not originally belong to it. The difference between expression and literal exemplification, like the difference between more and less literal representation, is a matter of habit" (Goodman 1976: 89). Expression may also suggest the validation, through language, of pre-conceived notions.[14] An example of this can be observed in the experience of dramatic tragedy, in which the genres and conventions of the Western tradition ingrained in the consciousness of the Western spectator will often preclude any appreciation of, for example, the conventions of Japanese Noh theatre.

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[13] As an introduction to his critique of Plato, Derrida discusses the widely differing evaluations of the *Phaedrus* within the Platonic canon. Such multiplicity of interpretation is an indication of the shifting nature of canonicity and the impossibility of presence: "We are speaking of the *Phaedrus* that was obliged to wait almost twenty-five centuries before anyone gave up the idea that it was a badly composed dialogue. It was first believed that Plato was too young to do the thing right … in 1905 [this view] was reversed, not in order to bring about a recognition of the excellent composition of the *Phaedrus* but in order to attribute its faults this time to the senile impotence of the author" (Derrida 1981a: 66-7).

[14] This has resonance with the paradox of singularity, in which each reading "would consist in *giving oneself up* to the most idiomatic aspects of the work while also *taking account* of the historical context, of what is *shared* (in the sense of both participation and division, of continuity and the cut of separation), of what belongs to genre and type" (Attridge 1992a: 68).

The means by which representation and expression – the concrete and the abstract – are juxtaposed, determines to a significant extent the style of writing that will dominate a particular narrative. In the extract quoted above, expression is subordinate to representation – the text is both unembellished and unemotional in its account of the represented occurrence. Only two utterances entail expression. Firstly, an expression of trepidation and of imminent suffering is suggested by the words "do not cry, Nontuthuzelo". Secondly, an intersubjective evocation of the consequences of the impending hostility and fear is evident in the descriptions of the youths surrounding the house, the consequent stone-throwing, and the explicit threat in the sentence "Let the spy *die*". However Krog, as the author of a textual representation, is required by the limitations of language to use "more or less literal representations" in order to create the degree of expression required in the text, and the choice of descriptive style is what may be termed the aestheticisation of the narrative.

It is such aestheticisation that is often used to create a more literary effect through a reliance on figurative rather than literal language, and this is not confined to fictional texts.[15] Most realist fiction relies on assumptions of resemblance and reference in the attempt to recreate a plausible state of affairs through the deliberate avoidance of an excess of metaphorical representation. Yet the ideal of an objective and purely descriptive realist narrative (fictional or non-fictional) is unsustainable owing to the iterability of the text, as well as because of the intersubjective determination of interpretations of representation and expression. It has been asserted that, even more than the representation of objects and/or events, the representation of emotions and expression is conventionally determined. For example, Goodman cites Aldous Huxley's claim that "the artistic expression of [emotions] varies from age to age and from one country to another. We are brought up to accept the conventions current in the society into which we are born … Such conventions vary with great rapidity, even in the same country" (Goodman 1976: 90). To represent – or to experience a representation of – expression is unavoidably to remain confined within a socio-cultural paradigm determined by

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[15] The unsustainability of the dichotomy between conventional notions of fact and fiction will be discussed in more detail in Chapters 4 and 5.

convention and intersubjectivity, although this also applies to the representation of objects. As the textual representation of expression is more constrained by such limitations than the textual representation of events, a degree of aestheticisation and metaphoricity is both necessary and unavoidable when attempting to put into words emotions and expressions.

3.4 Exemplification

In his reading of Derrida's reading of Rousseau, Paul de Man writes that "[W]hat is being said about the nature of language makes it unavoidable that the texts should be written in the form of a fictionally diachronic narrative, or if one prefers to call it so, of an allegory. The allegorical mode is accounted for in the description of all language as figural" (De Man 1983: 135). However, despite the commonplace assertion that representations of expression are more figurative, whereas the descriptive representation of events or objects is more literal, it is more often the case that the latter is equally dependent upon a figurative style. This leads in turn to the claim that *all* representation is figurative, owing to the limitations of language that prevent it from encapsulating that which is denoted.[16] As figurative implies not literal, it is constructive to consider representation as more than merely a substitute: rather, representation exemplifies or typifies that which it denotes. Exemplification is an important feature of representation, as it is a mode of symbolisation that labels a representation: "while anything may be denoted, only labels may be exemplified" (Goodman 1976: 53). To exemplify is to illustrate by example, or to serve as an example of something; to typify is to embody the characteristics of what is represented. For instance, the representation of the serial killer Patrick Bateman in Ellis's *American Psycho* (Ellis 1991) both exemplifies the individual as sadist (which is in itself a label), as well as typifying the properties of sadism, cruelty and lack of empathy that necessarily characterise such an individual.

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[16] For example, in "White Mythology", Derrida argues for the dependence of philosophical texts upon hidden or ignored metaphors: "Metaphor is less in the philosophical text (and in the rhetorical text coordinated with it) than the philosophical text is in the metaphor. And the latter can no longer receive its name from metaphysics, except by a catachresis, if you will, that would retrace metaphor through its philosophical phantom: as 'nontrue metaphor'" (Derrida 1982b: 258).

Nevertheless, even this becomes too limited for the purposes of a general definition of representation as it implies an unrealistic reliance upon an unambiguous connection between an object or event and its representation. Yet, as the theory of the iterable text has clarified, it is neither practical nor feasible to exhaust the possibilities implicit in each instance of representation (even within the confines of an intersubjective conception of an adequate representation). For instance, consider the following sentence from the extract quoted above: "We went to the kitchen and put the beans in the pot". This is a reasonably intelligible utterance that records a commonplace occurrence. Yet the sentence cannot be an exemplification of the event as it is necessarily constrained in its exhibition of the characteristics of that event. As it stands, it is no more than a vague connotation of kitchen as a place where the beans and the pot would be kept. In order to exhibit the characteristics of that particular kitchen, the representation would need to be both extended and clarified. The label "kitchen" may exemplify the thought a reader has of his or her own experience of a kitchen; yet as far as the kitchen in the extract is concerned, any exemplification or typification of it must of necessity be re-interpreted and superseded by the experience of the reader – the representation of the text (which in this case is no more than a label) is insufficient in isolation, and subject to a multiplicity of inconsistent senses. The idea of a kitchen would evoke different images and expectations in the mind of such varying readers as a chef, a cleaner, a housewife, and an architect. All these (and all other) conceptions of the kitchen in the extract would be legitimate inferences as to its connotation, yet no single conception could encapsulate that connotation. Only a specific socio-cultural context of the narrative could potentially limit the possible denotations of kitchen.

Therefore, exemplification can effectively be understood as a reference relating the denotation to what is denoted, while the latter remains subordinate to an infinite number of possible sites of intersubjective interpretation. The text offers the possibility of interpretation and, simultaneously, the impossibility of a plenitude of interpretation. This concurrence is what Blanchot has recognised as the two-sidedness of the text: on the one hand, the text is part of our cultural heritage, and subject to interpretation by readers and critics; on the other, it "speaks only in its own voice and in so doing resists our attempts

to conceptualise it. It invents, so to speak, a new language that exceeds the boundaries of our critical competence" (Haase and Large 2001: 38). In order to illustrate this phenomenon, Blanchot compares the text to the Biblical narrative of Lazarus, who has just been raised from the dead. In Blanchot's account, the notion of the tomb becomes a metaphor for the isolated text, prior to the activity of interpretation. The figure of Lazarus then metaphorically embodies the meaning of the text. The conventional perception of the conclusion of the narrative is the manifestation of the resurrected Lazarus, fresh in the whiteness of his burial shroud: in other words, the meaning of the text that is made acceptable by the cultural construction of critics, readers and authors. But the resurrected Lazarus is also a bewildered figure, still bearing the odour of decomposition and the tomb, who represents the "opacity at the centre of every text, what remains after every interpretation, and which, like the secret of the tomb itself, refuses our grasp" (Haase and Large 2001: 40).

Such opacity denies the text an ultimate interpretation: any declared meaning of representation necessarily leaves a lacuna which "refuses our grasp". Interpretation is therefore dependent upon the functioning of representation within the text, rather than the text's existing as a vehicle for representation. The various readings articulated by interpretations of representation are reliant upon the positioning of the iterable text within the socio-cultural context of the reader, rather than on the idealistic assumption that representation can accurately portray the world as it is. As suggested earlier, the "word" cannot directly represent the "thing", but refers instead to an inestimable number of further words that ensure that the initial word can never reach a teleological moment of definitive meaning; each word ultimately points to the absence (the opacity) that is at the heart of language. As each word has meaning only within this chain, it follows that the events, ideas and objects represented by the text are sites of *différance* (in terms of both differing and deferring, thus rendering unstable any fixed meaning of any word within the text), the result of which is the potential for infinite (re)interpretation. In addition, interpretation does not only imply the possible, but also the impossible. Language therefore distances the reader from the immediacy of the experience: "A word may give me its meaning, but first it suppresses it. For me to be able to say 'this woman', I must

somehow take her flesh-and-blood reality away from her, cause her to be absent, annihilate her" (Blanchot 1995: 322). The reading and understanding of a text therefore exceeds the possible interpretations of the text, as there are always further possible interpretations concealed within the opacity and absence implied by iterability. As the metaphor of Lazarus and the tomb suggests, no individual reading can adequately conceptualise all the possibilities of the text – it is beyond individual critical and cognitive faculties to comprehend the totality of any text, and the limitations of language and textuality would suggest that the very proposal of such a totality is both naïvely idealistic and illusory. All that remains is the limited and limiting potentiality of representation within the confines of a relative contextual space.

3.5 To Set Forth in Words

It is this relative space that forms the basis for a primary objection to the fifth definition: if such a multiplicity of interpretations is necessary for any instance of textual representation to be even partially understood, then how is it possible that any text can adequately "set forth in words; state or explain"? In other words, how can the inscribed words and sentences of a text represent anything that exists outside of the narrative? This difficulty can be effectively addressed only if the notion of the text is placed under further scrutiny. It is often asserted that the concept text goes beyond inscription, that it is a "literary or other work (not necessarily linguistic or verbal) stripped of preconceptions about autonomy, authorial control, artistic or aesthetic force, and so on" (Hawthorn 1994: 213). This definition suggests that the term exceeds the limitations imposed by writing, and may refer to such diverse areas as methodological or ideological domains, discourses, or visual images. However, for the purposes of this discussion, "text" will be understood primarily in its limited sense as inscription, as instances where language has been written down and recorded, and thereby subjected to the potentiality of iterability.[17]

Such potentiality also depends upon varying estimations of the text based on factors such as the mode of composition (fact or fiction), the aesthetic assessment of the text, and the

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[17] Notions of ideology, discourse and imagery are not ignored as a result of this limitation, but will be acknowledged as contextual components of the iterable written text.

ethical implications of both the interpretation and the evaluation of the content of the narrative. These issues will be examined in more detail in the following chapters. What is important at this point is to clarify the necessary function of context within the interpretation of the text – "there is nothing outside context" (Derrida 1988: 136). Even the characters mentioned in the extract cited above, while having verifiably existed as historically situated individuals, become textual representations subject to (re)interpretation within varying contextual fields that locate the intersubjective attitudes of various readers, most of whom will not even know what these individuals looked like. The result is differences of perception that are frequently diametrically opposed in terms of ideology and cultural expectation. For example, one of the characters mentioned is Steve Biko. For the right-wing Afrikaner nationalist, Biko represents the dangers of Black emancipation; for the black African Nationalist, he is the symbol of defiance in the face of racial oppression. Yet for the narrator, Nontuthuzelo, the figure of Biko becomes not so much representative of a political position as the catalyst for a perspective on the murder of her uncle (although she will also have a particular political perspective on Biko)

Each interpretation of each representation, although contextually valid, cannot result in the encapsulation of the individuals denoted. Rather, any denotation becomes supplemented by language and connotations that serve further to remove the representation from the extralinguistic object it purports to represent, and to place it within the infinite chain of language. The text becomes subject to the accumulations of memory and meaning implicit in every word within what Derrida refers to as "arche-writing": "Writing supplements perception before perception even appears to itself [is conscious of itself]. 'Memory' or writing is the opening of that process of appearance itself. The 'perceived' may be read only in the past, beneath perception and after it" (Royle 2003: 64). To define any word it is necessary to rely on other words, which in turn require definition by yet more words, in an unlimited sequence of traces of deferred meaning.

Another issue that needs to be addressed when considering representation as a "setting forth in words" is that of aestheticisation. It is clear, for example, that a sentence such as "This is the light of the mind, cold and planetary"[18] is not the type of sentence likely to be encountered in the reading of a factual text such as a news report or a historical reference book. The result is that some thinkers have proposed a clear difference between a so-called "literary language" and everyday speech. However, it does not seem persuasive to argue for such a distinction, even when the argument is grounded upon issues of interpretation rather than aestheticisation. Any representation, be it fictional or factual, is necessarily an *aesthetic* representation which, owing to the limits of language and the pervasiveness of metaphor, is interpreted through individual (inter)subjective perspectives. Figuration necessarily permeates all language – the literary, the everyday, even the scientific – yet is readily understood, if not always recognised: "It is obvious that this sort of thing is possible only if these uses are somehow derivative from uses in established senses … We can distinguish different types of figurative use in terms of the basis of derivation" (Alston 1964: 96). It is the position of this study that aestheticisation is implicit within any text, subject only to differences of degree rather than a distinction between literary and non-literary methods of writing. The implications of this position for the interpretation of a text will be explored in some detail in the following chapter.

4. A Definition of Representation

To summarise: Representation must necessarily have some reference to the extralinguistic world; however, such reference is preliminary, incomplete and (inter)subjective, with no single theory of meaning so comprehensive as to exclude all others. In addition, any text as representation must be iterable – subject to repeatability in numerous contexts – and subject to the internal workings of *différance* and supplementarity. As a result of these conclusions, it is feasible to propose a working definition of representation that will form the basis for the following enquiry into the textual representation of violence. Thus,

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[18] Sylvia Plath: "The Moon and the Yew Tree" (*Selected Poems* 1985: 41)

Textual representation is the iterable, contingent and context-dependent denotation of extralinguistic objects, events, properties and notions in the form of written language, such representation being subject to infinite (re) interpretation.

If this definition is plausible, then it necessitates two principal suppositions. Firstly, the definition implies the neutral character of the text; that is, any perceived difference between a text that is factual and a text that is wholly or partially fictional is based on little more than intersubjective and conventional determinations of interpretation and context. This first supposition implies the second – that any meaning of a text is inseparable from the reader's perception and interpretation of that text. The effect of these two hypotheses is that the reception of a text is governed less by any intrinsic worth of the text than by the changeable and changing perceptions that determine the evaluation (ethical and/or aesthetic) that results from reading any instance of writing. It is within this framework of representation that the distinction between factual and fictional writing as textual representation can be analysed and questioned in the following chapters.

CHAPTER 3

THE POTENTIAL READER

A principal premise of this study is that any instance of representation is necessarily iterable. A consequence of this iterability for a theory of reading is that any text can acquire cognitive and aesthetic value only once experienced by a reader contextually situated within a particular historical and cultural milieu. It is therefore necessary to explore the implications of the notion of the "reader", as well as considering the role of that reader in the process of interpreting textual representation. Much of the following discussion is dependent upon the influence of reader-response theory, in which the reader is considered as to be any person within a specific contextual field who, through the act of reading, is able to establish a possible meaning (not *the* meaning) of that particular text. Reader-response theory is not a distinct school of thought, but rather a convenient label for a number of different theories which frequently differ with regard to the relationship between the reader and the text. It is consequently necessary to clarify the parameters of what is understood by a reader in terms of this particular study.

1. The Reader

The first notion that needs to be elucidated is the significance of the term reader. For the purposes of this study, a reader (and this notion includes the Derridean notion of reader-as-writer as discussed in the previous chapter) will be considered as an abstract or hypothetical entity, the potential individual/s to whom the narrative is directed, and the ultimate interpreter of the textual representation.[1] The advantage of this is that a reader can be conjectured without reference to a specific context, thereby allowing for a general rather than limited understanding of reading and representation. However, theories involving abstraction can result in the postulation of a reader who is relevant for one

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[1] The notion of the reader includes the Derridean notion of reader-as-writer as discussed in the previous chapter: "One must then, in a single gesture, but doubled, read and write" (1981a: 64).

particular theorist at a particular moment, and who may therefore be little more than the projection of that critic's perceptions of the ideal reader. Any notion of the reader assumed for the purposes of this study must consequently be hypothetical, but must also attempt to avoid unrealistic assertions of universality. Therefore, prior to any consideration of the characteristics of such an abstract entity, it is instructive to consider other instances of the hypothetical reader.

An influential model of the hypothetical reader is that postulated by Wolfgang Iser[2] – the "implied reader": "This term incorporates both the prestructuring of the potential meaning by the text, and the reader's actualization of this potential through the reading process. It refers to the active nature of this process – which will vary historically from one age to another – and not to a typology of possible readers" (Iser 1974: xii). Iser asserts that any narrative inevitably consists not only of the words of the text, but also includes omissions and gaps which must be completed or filled in by the implied reader, within the context of his or her own experiences, prejudices and socio-cultural context. Only after such filling in has occurred can the narrative be considered to have any meaning for that reader. In this sense, Iser is akin to Derrida in emphasising the necessity of context for textual interpretation, although Derrida's claim that "there is nothing outside context" (1988: 136) exceeds the limits of Iser's cognition of the role of contextuality in the act of reading. In addition, despite conceding the possibility of infinite re-interpretation, Iser maintains the primacy of the author in directing the conditions for understanding his or her text; his notion of the "prestructuring of the potential meaning by the text" quoted above diverges significantly from Derrida's emphasis on the potential for a re-creation of meaning following every reading of the iterable text. As suggested in the previous chapter, the author, perceived as one reader amongst a theoretically infinite number of readers, does not possess any authoritative interpretive ability or privilege with regard to his or her own text.

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[2] "Iser is, in short, a phenomenon: he is influential without being controversial, and at a moment when everyone is choosing up sides, he seems to be on no one side at all or (it amounts to the same thing) on every side at once" (Fish: "Why No One's Afraid of Wolfgang Iser" *diacritics* 11.1 (1981: 2).

Other notions of the reader similar to that of the implied reader include the "inscribed reader" and the "postulated reader".[3] The former is a reader who is presumed by the text, rather than marked in it, and consequently discovered only by investigating the context of the text when it was written. However, an iterable text is that which is singularly re-interpreted by each reader in a variety of contexts, rather than a text whose significance is predetermined at the origin of its composition. If such predetermination were possible, it would serve to privilege both the author and the origin of the narrative, thereby contradicting the notion of iterability, as well as the postmodern denial of the originary author-function. As a result, the intended reader theory will not be considered here. The relevance of the postulated reader, however, is not implied through a study of the text; rather, the characteristics of such a reader actually serve to create the text. This theory is proposed by Stanley Fish, who claims that the informed reader – one with the necessary linguistic, social and semantic competencies – is the reader best able to locate meaning in the text, although only within the constraints of an "interpretive community" which is characterised by shared conventions and normative practice. While a reader equipped with such competencies is required for any reading, there exist two major difficulties with this theory. Firstly, any assumption of the reader's characteristics implies an imposition on the part of the critic; and secondly, the degree of competency required to read a text is disputable, as is the resulting hierarchy of interpretation based on competing claims to interpretive authority.[4]

As a result of such objections to the various theories regarding the hypothetical reader, it is preferable to reformulate the notion. Rather than an implied, intended or postulated reader – all of which refer to the author or critic's ideal of a reader – it is perhaps more apposite to refer to a *potential* reader. A potential reader does not imply an ideal reading, in the sense that such a reading is able to generate a decisive interpretation. In addition, such a reader is not limited to any particular textual category or genre. The assumption of such a hypothetical reader re-emphasises the inevitability of iterability: "What I am suggesting is that formal units are always a function of the interpretive model one brings

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[3] Hawthorn 1994: 165-168 discusses various theories of reading, including both the postulated and the intended reader.

[4] Eagleton (1983: 54ff) provides a critique of this hierarchy in the work of both Iser and Fish.

to bear; they are not 'in' the text" (Fish 1980: 163). Even if a text is read within the framework of the formal and linguistic fundamentals of the narrative (what Roman Ingarden calls the skeleton, and Iser the primary code)[5] which allow for the filling in the gaps left by the unavoidable openness of any representation, the narrative is equally subject to re-interpretation within differing contexts. It is these gaps in the text, the absences implied by the words as inscribed in the narrative, that establish the possibility of re-interpreting the text. The potential reader is therefore not a reader who will conform to the formal properties or genre of only one type of text (such as literature, factual writing or popular fiction), nor one who is limited to a particular historical era or contextual perspective. Rather, such a reader will be receptive to differing modes of textuality, as well as being potentially situated in differing temporal and historical contexts. Consequently, there will be a theoretically infinite number of potential readers, corresponding to the theoretically infinite number of interpretations of an iterable text.

2. The Reader and the Text

Although an abstract hypothesis, the potential reader is latent within any text that is accessible for reading. Any person with the ability to comprehend a written description – in other words, a person possessing the competencies suggested by Fish's informed reader – will also be capable of interpreting that text. That each interpretation is determined by differing individual and social contexts suggests infinite possible readings of the same text. However, this does not imply that every text will acquire a wholly new and different meaning each time it is read. As the personal reading and experience of a text is contextual in a social, as well as in an individual, framework, the prevalence of inter-subjectivity – the conditioning of a community of people through historical, cultural and political conventions – creates the conditions for corresponding textual interpretations. Fish's observations on inter-subjectivity may refer specifically to the notion of literature, but in terms of the potential reader his comments are relevant to the reading of all texts: "The conclusion … is that it is the reader who 'makes' literature.

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[5] Jefferson and Robey 1986: 126ff.

This sounds like the rankest subjectivism, but it is qualified almost immediately when the reader is identified not as a free agent, making literature in any old way, but as a member of a community whose assumptions about literature determine the kind of attention he pays and thus the kind of literature 'he' makes" (Fish 1980: 11). This differs from Derrida's notion of the free play of signs in that the framework of the interpretive community, as postulated by Fish, is more limited and limiting in its assumption of the function of language. Derrida does not deny the role that an inter-subjective community can play in the interpretation of texts, but he also sees the text (and hence the interpretation of the text) as "overrunning" the limits of the community: "Thus the text overruns all the limits assigned to it so far (not submerging or drowning them in an undifferentiated homogeneity, but rather making them more complex, dividing and multiplying strokes and lines) – all the limits, everything that was to be set up in opposition to writing (speech, life, the world, the real, history, and what not, every field of reference – to body or mind, conscious or unconscious, politics, economics, and so forth)" (Derrida 1979: 257).

Bearing in mind this textual and interpretive overrun, differing interpretative communities will necessarily construct various inter-subjective interpretations of the same text, without there being any formal or linguistic modification of the text. For example, James Fenimore Cooper's novel *The Deerslayer*, written in 1841, became one of the most popular novels of the nineteenth century, thus influencing generations of readers' opinions regarding the conflict between the British and the French in the wilderness of North America in the latter half of the eighteenth century. Although the characters and events are highly stylised, it was based upon contemporary popular and romanticised assumptions of life on the frontier, and generally considered to be an accurate representation. The supposition by the readership of a verifiable and directly referential description allowed the textual representation to be taken literally, rather than as a narrative that served to confirm contemporary assumptions of cultural, moral and racial supremacy. Yet in the introduction to the American Wordsworth edition of the novel published in 1995, Hilary Soames reacts to such an interpretation with outrage:

> A reader coming to *The Deerslayer* in the 1990s must simply grit the teeth, count to ten, and implore historical relativism for mercy. So much of what has proved lethal in American life is encapsulated in this hero, Natty Bumppo. Scarcely a chapter goes by in which he doesn't parade both racial and sexual superiority in some egregious manner and, of course, with the best intentions. After all, white men have their 'gifts', as Natty calls them. Which is not to say he does not acknowledge the 'gifts' that belong to 'red-skins' or 'females'. It is just that Natty's 'gifts' are the ones that always prevail"
> (Cooper 1995: i).

It is improbable, given the intersubjective context of the time, that many white European or American readers of the novel in the 1840s would have experienced or interpreted the text in a manner analogous to Soames. This serves to highlight the importance of the context in which an interpretation of an iterable context is undertaken. Soames's criticism of the text may highlight contemporary concerns with political and gender issues either ignored or not recognised by the novel's original readership. However, her views, compelling and persuasive as they may be within her own intersubjective interpretive community, cannot be considered as a definitive reading of the text.

Of course, it is not necessarily the case that all *present-day* readers of the novel would interpret it as she has done. The inter-subjectivity that is implicit in the readings of critical discourse is often understood in a different manner from the inter-subjectivity of popular discourse. This implies that the literary-critical community is likely to have differing inter-subjective assumptions from readers of popular fiction. For example, Janice Radway suggests (in a study of the Book-of-the-Month clubs) that the reading strategies and interpretations of women who read such texts do not correspond to the ways in which they were assumed to have been read by academics, and that this has implications for the continuing divide between the academy and the general reading public: "[W]hat has appeared as intellectual warfare over aesthetic issues has actually been a dispute over the exercise of cultural authority" (Radway 1992: 514). Therefore it must be recognised that various readings may be considered irrelevant, or even flawed, by different types of readers in differing inter-subjective communities. Although the dominant discourse will assume interpretive authority, the notion of the potential reader rejects assumptions of infallibility, instead acknowledging that *any* reader may at *any* time interpret a text within the framework of competing conventions, even though any

individual reader will not be able to take account of more than a few of those competing conventions.[6]

The notion of the potential reader is related to the theories of Fish, whose own assumptions of the role of the reader within an interpretive community presuppose a similar inter-subjectivity. However, it must be emphasised that this relationship is necessarily qualified, owing to certain reservations regarding two assumptions implicit in Fish's theory. Firstly, Fish maintains that a reader, in order to create meaning, in effect invents the physical text. The text can no longer be considered as an depository of meaning, or an objective authority, and is not even an object in its own right: "The objectivity of the text is an illusion and, moreover, a dangerous illusion, because it is so physically convincing. The illusion is one of self-sufficiency and completeness" (Fish 1980: 43). Secondly, Fish proposes that the reader is always reading a set of personal presuppositions back into the text, and as a consequence the reader will always interpret the text in a manner predetermined by those same presuppositions: thus, "reading … consists of nothing but replications of independently existing collective interpretive strategies" (Lang 2005: 3). However, it is more plausible to consider that all readings have the potential to re-formulate existing ideas into innovative conceptual thinking. To imply, as Fish does, that a text can only confirm what a reader already knows – thus negating the possibility of developing or modifying knowledge and understanding – fails to acknowledge the probability of new or altered perceptions (and the acquisition of facts of which the reader was previously unaware) that is frequently actualised through the reading of an iterable text by a potential reader. It also tends to limit the possibilities of both language and context, whereas the differential network of language within fluid contextual fields allows for infinite re-interpretation of iterable texts, something not possible in the closed cognitive system of language postulated by Fish.

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[6] Such interpretive freedom results in the related topic of the micro-narrative (minority discourses contrary to the conventions of the dominant discourse), and the related problem of relativism. These problems will be discussed fully in the next chapter. However, the existence of such problems does not negate the efficacy of the potential reader in determining individual meaning through inter-subjective interpretation.

Therefore, if an instance of textual representation is, as argued in the previous chapter, iterable, contingent and context-dependent, then it is obvious that the interpretations of that text will be determined by both socio-cultural factors and the differential nature of language, rather than by any transcendent notions of aesthetic evaluation. In order so to interpret the text, there must exist a potential reader, who may be defined as follows:

> *A hypothetical reader who may be regarded as any historical, contemporary or future interpreter of an iterable and contextual instance of writing.*

Without such a reader to read the iterable text, the narrative remains without signification: "A span of writing is worth nothing in itself; it is neither good nor bad, neither true nor false" (Derrida 1981b: 185). Any text, rather than existing as an absolute and solitary locus of meaning, is present as potential signification within the intertextual system of texts and configurations of signs. The potential reader who reads and interprets this text is necessarily entering into this system or network. Therefore, following from these conclusions regarding the notion of the relationship between the potential reader and the iterable text, it is now feasible to consider the implications of differing modes of textuality for the aesthetic and ethical evaluation of textual representation.

CHAPTER 4

FACTUAL REPRESENTATION

As Hamlet observes: "for there is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so" (II.ii.249-50), a comment that may reflect (and encourage) moral and aesthetic relativism, but which encapsulates the difficulties intrinsic to the acknowledgment of the iterability of the text and its subsequent unlimited re-interpretation. The dilemma facing a postmodern conception of textuality is that, if there are an infinite number of possible interpretations, then it would be inconsistent to privilege some at the expense of others; however, there also exist certain points-of-view that are divergent from, or even hostile to, the dominant narrative (referred to as micro-narratives), and which may be considered ethically and socially insupportable.[1] However, if textual evaluation is dependent upon context, then even the aesthetic and ethical potential of these objectionable micro-narratives need to be critically considered. Before discussing the ethical evaluation of a text, however, it is necessary to discuss the contextual interpretation of a text, and this is largely dependent upon the reader's expectations regarding the authenticity and/or veracity of an iterable text situated within the intertextual system of texts and configuration of signification discussed in the previous chapter.

1. Factuality and Fictionality

When reading a text, the common expectation of the reader will be that the text will belong to one of two broad categories, either the factual or the fictional. The former is typically understood as being representative of a state of affairs that obtains or has obtained in the world, and that is consequently verifiable. The latter is typically considered to be without any concrete denotation of verifiable historical events and

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[1] These could include Holocaust denial, racism, xenophobia, and various forms of religious fundamentalism, to name but a few.

personages; a fictional text is consequently considered to be an invented state of affairs. Yet both views tend to presuppose an absolute state of factuality or fictionality which is difficult to sustain when the representation of the text is more closely scrutinised.

Regarding the factual (or non-fictional) text, the necessary limitations of language preclude any narrative from being wholly factual owing to the inevitable contextual plurality that is crucial to any (re)reading of an iterable text. Additionally, any unqualified references to an external actuality within the textual descriptions of a so-called factual text are destabilised by the aestheticising effects of figurative language, as no such reference could ever occur in a purely literal fashion. Conversely, it is equally erroneous to categorise a text as purely fictional, thus denying it a verifiable extra-textual reference: no text or narrative can be wholly imaginary. A sentence can produce cognition within the consciousness of its reader only if it can be understood within the limits of the experiences of that reader. No text can be understood (and thus interpreted) without a sufficient prior knowledge that allows for a contextualisation and positioning of that sentence within a certain socio-cultural and linguistic framework (even if that framework is removed from its original context). All reading is subject to differing perspectives, and is dependent upon subjective or intersubjective experience. For instance, a science-fiction novel set in the distant future that postulates entities and objects that are physically and intellectually incompatible with the daily existence of the reader can be understood only in terms of that reader's prior knowledge. It is possible to describe something that does not exist, but the individual elements that make up the description must be recognisable to the reader in order for cognition to be possible.[2]

Consequently, it can be asserted that there can be no text that is wholly factual, nor can there be a text that is wholly fictional. Rather, all texts necessarily include certain elements of both factuality and fictionality, with one or the other type being dominant

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[2] This is a notion long recognized in philosophy. For example, Hobbes in *Leviathan* (1651) writes of imagination that "*simple imagination* [is] when one imagineth a man, or horse, which he hath seen before. The other is *Compounded*; as when from the sight of man at one time, and of a horse at another, we conceive in our mind a Centaure" (2005: 10). Similarly, in 1739 Hume writes of "fables and romances", wherein "[n]ature there is totally confounded, and nothing mention'd but winged horses, fiery dragons, and monstrous giants. Nor will this liberty of the fancy appear strange, when we consider, that all our ideas are copy'd from our impressions" (2005: 7).

with respect to the genre or the style employed.[3] This chapter will therefore be divided into two sections. The first will concentrate on the strategies and assumptions that are inherent in the production of the factual text; the second on those inherent in the fictional text.

2. The Factual Text

2.1 Factual Representation

The first question to be investigated concerns the conditions necessary for the construction of a factual text, and whether or not such a text can properly be said to exist. This question is fundamental as any text that purports to be wholly factual necessarily presupposes a number of conditions. In the first place, such a text is required to refer to an extralinguistic event that has occurred in the past. Such an event may have occurred earlier today, or in a previous year, or even centuries ago. In this sense, every instance of factual writing is simultaneously an instance of historical writing, a "series of propositions which are supposed to correspond point by point to some extra-textual domain of occurrence or happening" (White 1978: 122). Secondly, in order for a textual representation of an occurrence to be considered factual, such an occurrence must also be sufficiently verifiable: it must be known to have occurred, or be subject to empirical and/or scientific evidence that will prove that it has actually occurred. Thirdly, the text should be an attempt to represent that event *as it happened*. That is, it should avoid fictional representations (or representational strategies) that co-mingle with any strategies of factual representation.

The latter condition therefore entails the (unsustainable) proviso that any historical narrative must be composed in a style that avoids aestheticising language – a language that relies on figurative strategies and is thereby subject to charges of a subjective distortion of the facts which form the basis of the representation. Derived from

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[3] It will also be necessary to consider the many texts in which the balance between the two modes is deliberately constructed so as to be less obvious, with neither fact nor fiction being the dominant mode: such texts as the historical novel, the projected scenario, the factional text, and the narrative that juxtaposes historical figures and events with fictional characters and occurrences

nineteenth-century historiography, this stipulation was a result of the imperative that the historian (or any writer of factual discourse) should "expunge any hint of the fictive, or merely imaginable, from his discourse, to eschew the techniques of the poet and orator, and to forego what were regarded as the intuitive procedures of the maker of fictions in his apprehension of reality" (White 1978: 123). The author must not only be disinterested – free of any prejudice, bias and socio-cultural positioning – but also competent to compose a narrative that will convey that state of disinterestedness to any reader who reads the text in the future. Yet, as was concluded in the previous chapter, language is both ambiguous and self-referential, and no interpretation can exist outside context. The attempt to draw a sharp distinction between the literal and the metaphorical must necessarily fail owing to the fact that language can be explicated only within the terms of further metaphoricity within the endless differential network of words. To claim that a factual text has meaning without recourse to metaphor is merely to ignore the metaphors that determine the representation: "Henceforth the entire teleology of meaning, which constructs the philosophical concept of metaphor, coordinates metaphor with the manifestation of truth, with the production of truth as presence without veil, with the reappropriation of a full language without syntax, with the vocation of a pure nomination" (Derrida 1982b: 270).

Such a "manifestation of truth" – the principle of an absolute factuality – therefore remains both unfeasible and idealistic. Yet it is unclear exactly how much of language can be considered tropic. Derrida seems to suggest that all language, and hence all textuality, is little more than a succession of tropes. Yet a subtler interpretation of his argument is that it is not so much that tropes are *deliberately* employed in a text, but rather that they are both pervasive and inevitable, to the extent that the entire narrative may be metaphorical without a reader's perceiving it as such. The result is a text that presupposes a manifestation of authority and immediacy, but is in fact reliant on the representations of (obsolete) metaphors that are no longer familiar to the reader (including the author-as-reader). This phenomenon was recognised by Nietzsche as one of the principal motivations for the assumption of a transcendental and universal truth: "Truths are illusions which we have forgotten are illusions; they are metaphors that have

become worn out and have been drained of sensuous force, coins which lost their embossing and are now considered as metal and no longer as coins" (Nietzsche 1873: 118). If Nietzsche is justified in this assertion, then much of what is written, factual or fictional, is metaphorical, a notion that has fundamental implications for the understanding of textual meaning.[4]

Another problem with the notion of the factual text is that of the construction of the narrative. To construct a factual text is to reorganise the random concurrence of a myriad of events that make up the text of *the* event into a misleadingly teleological whole.[5] This gives the impression that the event being represented was inevitable and logically ordered, subject to the dictates of a plot. Such reorganisation of disparate events into a logical whole is an instance of what White would identify as an example of a "fictional matrix".[6] Yet the view of history as a structured development is common, despite the evidence that history entrenches certain conclusions while excluding others, the latter becoming "mute and forever closed signs – Derrida will later speak of "cinders" – [which] endanger history in both senses of the term: no historical enquiry can account for them, and they cannot be said to exist or occur in the same manner as identifiable events or recognisable objects" (Fenves 2001: 285). Certain events are selected from a random number of events and thereby privileged, while others are omitted: those that are selected become the basis of the factual text that serves to impose a selective meaning on history at the expense of those excluded. The result is what could be called a "tyranny" of historical discourse that imposes cognition based upon the ideology of the dominant discourse, as well as creating the framework for revisionary or alternative histories opposed to that discourse.

Yet herein lies the paradox of factual representation: owing to the volume of data available to the historical writer, as well as to the seemingly random disorder of the inestimable number of events, it is only through the selective organisation of certain

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[4] The nature of metaphor will be discussed in further detail in Section 2.2 below

[5] An historical event is neither immediate nor brief. This is why Ricoeur has chosen to label representations of historical events as "quasi-events", brought about by the collective will of the "quasi-characters" involved. Direct access to the event is not possible. (See Ricoeur 1984: 230ff).

[6] For example, see the discussion in White: "The Historical Text as Literary Artifact" (1978: 81-100).

events that any meaningful narrative may be constructed. This paradox is articulated by Derrida's considerations of an "a historicity of meaning" in the essay "Violence and Metaphysics", in which he is compelled to defend his use of the term history: "For our own reference to history, here, is only contextual. The economy of which we are speaking does not any longer accommodate the concept of history such as it has always functioned, and which it is difficult, if not impossible, to lift from its teleological or eschatological horizon" (Derrida 1978a: 148). Each factual (historical) text must therefore be considered to be re-contextualised by teleogical boundaries within the fictional matrix of narrative, as a pre-condition of its own meaning. Even texts that offer seemingly random impressions, testimonies or events cannot avoid the limiting structure of the implied historical narrative, nor escape the interpretation of the historian: "A historical narrative is thus necessarily a mixture of adequately and inadequately explained events, a congeries of established and inferred facts, at once a representation that is an interpretation and an interpretation that passes for an explanation of the whole process mirrored in the narrative" (White 1978: 51). It is therefore within this limiting narrative structure that the notion of the factual text will be considered.

In order to illustrate these conclusions, consider the following extract taken from Antony Beevor's narrative of the fall of Berlin at the end of the Second World War. The claims of the narrative are based on verifiable historical events, thereby classifying the text as factual. Nevertheless, certain fictional strategies and linguistic limitations ensure that the text cannot maintain an ideal of absolute factuality.

> General Günther Blumentritt, like most of those in authority, was convinced that the bombing raids on Germany produced a real '*Volkgenossenschaft*' or 'patriotic comradeship'. This may well have been true in 1942 and 1943, but by late 1944 the effect tended to polarize opinions between the hardliners and the war-weary. Berlin had been the city with the highest proportion of opponents to the Nazi regime, as its voting records before 1933 indicate. But with the exception of a very small and courageous minority, opposition to the Nazis had generally been limited to gibes and grumbles. The majority had been genuinely horrified by the assassination attempt against Hitler on 20 July 1944. And as the Reich's frontiers became threatened both in the east and in the west, they drank in Goebbels's stream of lies that the Fuhrer would unleash new 'wonder weapons' against their enemies, as if he were about to assume the role of a wrathful Jupiter flinging thunderbolts as a symbol of his power. (Beevor 2002: 4)

This text is a typical example of popular historical writing, and provides an indication of exactly why the language of any factual text must be both contingent and dependent upon the tropes and strategies of fictional writing. Beevor is referring to a number of confirmable occurrences in this passage, such as election results, the attempt to assassinate Hitler, and the decline of Nazi military power as the war turned against Germany in 1944. Such events can be verified through testimonies, documents, media footage and so forth, and there can be no doubt that they did in fact occur in some form. The problem lies once again with the limitations inherent in any textual representation of the occurrences. The text can be interpreted only within the framework of the data provided, as there is no possibility of a direct and unmediated experience of the events represented by the narrative. For instance, to claim that "with the exception of a very small and courageous minority, opposition to the Nazis had generally been limited to gibes and grumbles" is to accept as adequate a generalised intersubjective conception of such vague terms as small, generally and minority. How small, how general, what minority? It is naturally impossible (and undesirable) to include within a description *all* the possible data. Nevertheless, the very absence of minutiae must necessarily result in differing interpretations of the words in question, and the accuracy of the narrative constructed by such sentences – although cognitively adequate – is compromised in term of any absolute factuality.

It is within this ambit of adequacy, or sufficient meaning, that factual texts must function. It is not necessary to have access to the exact statistical percentage of the minority in order to acquire a sense (rather than a knowledge) of the implications of the sentence, and the employment of generally understood terms does not result in the text becoming unintelligible. The structure of the text assumes that those competent in the use of the English language will have the skills necessary to interpret the words as intelligible, thus allowing for a sufficient understanding of the text without an expectation of a totality of knowledge. Yet this does not negate the requirement that the iterable text must be *interpreted* by its readers, and will thereby be subject to different points of view, different contexts, and different intelligibilities, not all of which may correspond with each other in the interpretation of the text. It is the process of (re)interpretation that determines that any

reading of the factual text is only understood within the terms of the fictional text: "There are different historiographical modes – different ways of hypotactically ordering the facts contained in the chronicle of events occurring in a specific time-space location, such that events in the same set are capable of functioning differently in order to figure forth different *meanings* – moral, cognitive, or aesthetic – within different fictional matrices" (White 1978: 127, author's emphasis).

Yet another reason as to why the "fictional matrices" created by the interpretation of factual texts result in such variability of meaning, even within the ambit of sufficient knowledge, is the unavoidable use of tropes and figurative language within historical discourse. The claims of Derrida's "White Mythology" – that "[in] effect, there is no access to the usure[7] of a linguistic phenomenon without giving it some figurative representation" (Derrida 1982b: 209) – contradict the aim of the traditional historian to eschew figurative language; rather, the actuality is that s/he is compelled to employ linguistic tropes owing to the very nature of language, given the way in which it signifies. If the extract is examined more closely, it is evident that Beevor has utilised a number of tropes in order to emphasise certain elements of his text, to the extent that the meaning generated by the reader has less to do with the original events and data than with the (re)interpretation of the assortment of metaphors.[8] Thus, opinions are "polarized", the majority "drink in" Goebbels's "stream of lies", and, most overtly, Hitler assumes "the role of a wrathful Jupiter flinging thunderbolts as a symbol of his power". Although overtly tropic, this text will be accessible to any reader with sufficient knowledge, or with access to the information needed to comprehend the imagery. This may occur without necessarily consciously relating the metaphors to a specific source, and even without pre-knowledge of Classical mythology and its narratives of the god Jupiter (the Zeus of Greek mythology) and his destructive thunderbolts. The use of figurative language in a

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[7] "Usure", means both the acquisition of interest, and deterioration through usage, thereby implying the compounding of signification as well as its cognitive depletion. (See Derrida 1982b: 209, note 2).

[8] This is not necessarily a negative strategy, given the impossibility of a neutral historical language. As White has claimed, "[The] *aporia* or sense of contradiction residing at the heart of language is present in *all* the classical historians. It is this linguistic self-consciousness which distinguishes them from their mundane counterparts and followers, who think that language can serve as a perfectly transparent medium of representation and who think that if one can only find the right language for describing events, the meaning of the event will *display itself* to consciousness" (1978: 130, author's emphases).

factual text can be either explicit (as in Beevor's text), or unconsciously conventional, whereby metaphors that have lost any tropic connotations become included in the text, despite being unrecognised by the reader. Nevertheless, deliberate or otherwise, the use of tropes in factual writing must be acknowledged as a means of allowing for understanding. As meaning-generating devices their inclusion has cognitive implications for any narrative. It is, therefore, necessary further to discuss the importance of figurative writing, particularly the trope of the metaphor, in relation to factual representation.

2.2 Metaphor

Derrida's claim that cognition is possible only if it "constructs the philosophical concept of metaphor with the manifestation of truth", was mentioned earlier (Section 2.1, p49). It will therefore be constructive at this point to examine in some detail the nature of metaphor.[9] In the terminology of I. A. Richards, a metaphor is a figure of speech which operates by reassigning the meaning of a name or description (the tenor) to an object (the vehicle) by means of substitution, omitting the "like" or "as" common to simile (which is effectively a diluted form of the metaphor). According to Aristotle, one of the first philosophers to comprehensively study the trope, the metaphor has three distinctive features. Firstly, it is a figure of speech that involves a noun;[10] secondly, it involves a movement between terms; and thirdly, it is the transposition of a name. It is therefore a substitution of an alien term for the original term which, by association, enhances or reveals an alternative or subtler understanding of the original term. As a result, the metaphor becomes an effective poetic means of providing both pleasure and education, as the knowledge being conveyed is conveyed more intensely and more effectively than if the tenor were employed without the substitution. Paul Ricoeur argues that this Aristotelian notion of metaphor as a tropic intensification of meaning has relevance for both rhetoric and the text: "With respect to structure, [metaphor] can really consist in just one unique operation, the transfer of the meanings of words; but with respect to function, it follows the divergent destinies of oratory and tragedy. Metaphor will therefore have a

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[9] The following discussion forms the basis of a technical understanding of the use of metaphor which is necessary to an understanding of the postmodern critique of tropic textuality.

[10] "Noun" is understood here as being within the extended, ancient Greek sense of nouns: see Ricoeur 1977: 17.

unique *structure* but two *functions*: a rhetorical function and a poetic function" (Ricoeur 1977: 12). The poetic function is concerned primarily with fictional writing, and the rhetorical function with oratory. Yet both have implications for a factual text. If most of what is ostensibly verifiable in an extralinguistic actuality is represented through metaphorical rather than literal means, it follows that the eventual interpretation of a text by a particular reader in a particular context is a result of the functioning of fictional and/or rhetorical strategies, rather than a result of any immediacy or literalness contained within the representation. Interpretation is therefore primarily dependent upon the efficacy of the metaphors employed in the narrative. When metaphor is explicitly utilised in a text, it is not as a means to the verifiability or actuality of the events or objects represented. Language is a conventional system, and metaphor serves to accentuate the inherent artificiality of the representation when considered in relation to the events or objects represented, rather than providing a simple picture of the perceptible world.

For example, in the extract by Beevor quoted above, it is stated in the text that the German people believed that Hitler was "about to assume the role of wrathful Jupiter flinging thunderbolts as a symbol of his power." When analysing this trope, it is obvious that the tenor is Hitler as the "defender of the Reich" (itself a metaphor, as no single individual could be the sole defender of an entire nation), and that the vehicle is the Roman deity Jupiter, himself an appropriation of the Greek deity, Zeus. There is a substitution of the mythological figure Jupiter for the historical figure Hitler, thus employing a fictional character to act as a vehicle for a factual one. The metaphor is also implicitly sardonic: Jupiter was the supreme god of Roman mythology, the "bringer of light" who determined the course of human affairs.[11] The origin of the image of the thunderbolt can be traced to Greek mythology, where Zeus (later Jupiter) freed the Cyclops from the captivity of Cronos, and was rewarded with the thunderbolt as a weapon of offence (see Graves 1960: 40ff). Later writers, most notably Ovid in the *Metamorphoses*, portrayed the power of Jupiter as being embodied in the thunderbolt: "The omnipotent father … mounted to the highest point in heaven, that height from

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[11] Although, ironically, Jupiter has also been superseded as a god, now being regarded as no more than a myth.

which he is wont to spread clouds over the broad lands of earth, whence he sends forth his thunderings and hurls his flashing bolts" (Ovid 1955: 58).

By employing the term "Jupiter", Beevor evokes the notion that the German people perceived their Fuhrer as a locus of military omnipotence and political power, with the word thunderbolt serving as a metaphor for the instrument of that power. The extended metaphor of divine power is built upon a loose understanding of a mythological trope, which becomes implicitly ironic owing to the information to which we have access regarding the historical character of Adolf Hitler – particularly in comparison to the mythological Jupiter – and his incapacity in the face of the Russian assault on the Third Reich – in contrast to the suggestion of the power associated with the thunderbolts. Beevor is not claiming that Hitler should be associated with Jupiter; he is asserting that the majority of the people of Germany made that assumption, and this intensifies the irony of the metaphor when considering the ultimate outcome of the fall of Germany in 1945. This assumption of an assumption by an entire nation further complicates the metaphor. Beevor is assuming the metaphor on behalf of a significant proportion of a country's population who lived more than half a century ago; in addition, he is assigning the metaphor not so much to a noun (Hitler), but to the abstract and ill-defined notion of a role that that noun was expected to play. This, of course, leads to a further metaphor, wherein the expected function of an individual becomes the tenor, the vehicle being terminology borrowed from the vocabulary associated with the theatre: a role to be played, or an actor, or a scene from a play. It is evident that Beevor's metaphor is essentially a metaphor that is dependent upon yet more metaphors, which may (or may not) be concurrent with others, in a regression that may not be infinite in itself, but is not traceable to some final and original originary moment.

It is frequently maintained that the meanings of words either change or are reassigned over periods of time, and that words such as 'role' have a dual meaning: as the part an actor is expected to play, as well as the expected performance of an individual. If this were so, then it would to a significant extent negate the implications of the metaphor in the extract quoted. However, there are at least two principal rebuttals to this objection to

the metaphoricity of the factual text. The first is Nietzsche's assertion (quoted in Section 2.1, p51-2) that any claim regarding literal meaning in representation (Nietzsche's *truths*) is no more than "metaphors that have become worn out and have been drained of sensuous force". Such transfer of meaning is indicative of the wearing out of the original metaphor, a reassignment that has taken place because the original force of the metaphor has been lost. The resultant text is then mistaken for a literal representation, when it in effect consists of metaphors that have deteriorated through usage (this is the point of Derrida's term "usure", discussed in Section 2.1, p54). Secondly, following on from this point, it is possible again to consider the notion of the trace, briefly mentioned in Chapter 2, Section 3.2. Whenever a term is employed, its prior meanings are perhaps no longer present, but have left their mark as a structure of difference, which inscribes a relation to what is now absent: "Traces thus produce the space of their inscription only by acceding to the period of their erasure. From the beginning, in the 'present' of their first impression, they are constituted by the double force of repetition and erasure, legibility and illegibility" (Derrida 1978: 226). The trace inhabits the word in all its occurrences, even if the word role has a number of meanings as a result of a variety of interpretations. The result is that the metaphor of Jupiter becomes a metaphor of linguistic entities. There is no originary essence, no single term that can be said to be *the* origin of the tenor or the vehicle.

This point is emphasised in "White Mythology", where Derrida deconstructs firstly the notion of origin,[12] and secondly the distinction between concept and metaphor. Such an opposition is based on the supposition that a concept provides a means of bringing some external truth – with an implied purging of figurative language – before the mind, whereas metaphor merely establishes a link based on an analogy – which is permitted in philosophical discourse only if it allows for a return to some conceptual truth: "The philosophical evaluation of metaphor has always been ambiguous: metaphor is dangerous and foreign as concerns *intuition* (vision or contact), *concept* (the grasping or proper presence of the signified), and *consciousness* (proximity or self-presence); but it is in

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[12] Derrida had previously deconstructed the notion of origin, most notably in *Of Grammatology* Part II, Chapter 3 (1974: 165-268).

complicity with what it endangers, is necessary to it in the extent to which the de-tour is a re-turn guided by the function of resemblance" (Derrida 1982a: 270). Yet, since most language is fundamentally metaphorical, all texts allow their readers to believe that they are in control of the language, when in actuality it is the tenors that have been overlooked. Derrida also emphasises the contradictory nature of metaphor: as language tends to become more metaphorical, so too do the original meanings of the "dead" metaphors become unavailable: "in the Ricoeurean sense that if a metaphor is dead, then it is no longer a metaphor – it is just language" (Simms 2003: 129).

Therefore, Ricoeur has questioned the notion of the dead metaphor *as metaphor*, together with the consequent assertion of an essentially defunct metaphorical language. For Ricoeur, metaphors are a means of cognitive access to the world we inhabit, which both informs and is informed by the texts that we read and interpret. Thus the use of metaphor – existing metaphors and, more importantly, new metaphors – allows for an increase in human knowledge and self-awareness: "[Metaphor] … guarantees the very transference of meaning and gives poetic language its characteristic of semantic 'plus-value', its capacity to be open to new aspects, new dimensions, new horizons of meaning" (Ricoeur 1977: 296). This does not seem at odds with Derrida's notion of metaphor; yet Ricoeur's notion of metaphoricity is based less on individual terms than at the level of the sentence. Thus, to substitute *Jupiter* for *Hitler* is not a substitution of a "deviant" term for a proper term; rather, it is "the interaction between the 'focus' [Jupiter] and the 'frame' [Hitler] within the context of the whole sentence" (Simms 2003: 76). This results in three differing tensions: firstly, between the focus and the frame; secondly, between the figurative meaning and the literal meaning;[13] and thirdly, between the implications of the word "is" which also entails "is not". This tension, according to Ricoeur, gives rise to the process which invites the reader to interpret the metaphor, hence disclosing a locus of meaning.

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[13] Although Derrida would argue that, as metaphor is endemic to language, the tension between the figurative and the literal would be a matter of perception and interpretation rather than an absolute dichotomy.

Even if Ricoeur is accurate in his assumption that human knowledge is increased by metaphors through acts of interpretation (rather than by a presentation of objective facts), the problem still remains as to the veracity of a factual textual representation that is fundamentally metaphorical. This issue is further complicated by Ricoeur's claim that poetic language, being the most metaphorical, is the language that is most able to portray human experience. For example, is it the case that Beevor's (factual) narrative is more capable of increasing the knowledge of events that actually did occur as a direct result of his employment of metaphor than the narrative by an author who assumes a style of writing that endeavours to eliminate all deliberate use of tropes? One answer to this is to reiterate the point of view outlined in the previous chapter that no writing is disinterested, and that all readers and all authors are necessarily linked to certain ideological and cultural contexts. In addition, any author who attempts to avoid tropic devices in his or her discourse is not only attempting the impossible, but in doing so is subjecting his or her narrative to the charge that it is of little interest, as well as biased: "Any historian who simply described a set of facts … would not only not be very interesting but could legitimately be labelled a *doctrinaire* thinker who had "bent the facts" to fit a preconceived theory" (White 1978: 129). Thus it is not possible to portray a historical event in a manner that is wholly objective, as the choice of facts – as well as the language employed in writing them – would inevitably indicate the positioning of the text within a specific ideological and cultural framework.

It is therefore necessary – in order to make the text appealing and/or relevant for the reader – that figurative language and teleological plot development be used by the writer of factual texts. In such a way, the narratives of great classic historians such as Michelet and Tocqueville, as well as those of contemporary historians such as Beevor and Schama,[14] will be considered more significant than those whose narratives assume that there exists the possibility of an objective text with inherent and universal truths waiting to be discovered by the attentive reader. In terms of tropic discourse, the strategies and styles of the factual text are dependent upon the same resources as those employed by the

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[14] Examples of classic historical texts include Jules Michelet's *Histoire de France* (1833-67) and Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* (1835-40). Contemporary historical texts include Simon Schama's *Citizens* (1989) and Antony Beevor's *Stalingrad* (1998).

fictional text. This does not diminish either mode of writing, but rather emphasises that "all written discourse is cognitive in its aims and mimetic in its means … history is no less a form of fiction than the novel is a form of historical representation" (White 1978: 122).

2.3 Types of Factual Texts

There exist numerous varieties of factual text. As has already been noted, any instance of factual writing is in some sense already an instance of a historical text, limited to an instance of writing which refers to or represents a determinable prior event or occurrence, and which is told with reference to the documents, testimonies and other data necessary for the production of the final text (such text being subject to iterability and re-interpretation). The historical text can be distinguished from texts such as journalism which concentrate on the immediate past, and which are dependent upon the continuing development of the events or occurrences being narrated. Another type of factual text is the (auto)biography; this would include testimony, collections of letters, memoirs and curricula vitae. The genre of biography (or autobiography) could be considered as a branch of historical writing which concentrates on the events as they pertain to a particular individual or individuals, rather than on the events themselves (although the writer-as-reader has a uniquely subjective relation to the text of an autobiography). Other forms of factual writing include scientific and mathematical texts, company reports, and critical writing (although the latter perhaps blurs the boundaries between the factual and the non-factual), and numerous other types of writing which refer to or represent events, objects or people in the world (or the differing attitudes of people towards such events and objects). As it not possible to consider each instance of the modes of factual writing in this discussion, three particular types of factual writing have been selected: the testimony, the scientific text, and the newspaper article.

2.3.1 Testimony

Testimony implies a declaration of reality or fact, the giving of evidence testifying to a verifiable event. This notion, of declaring the truth or the facts, is frequently associated

with oral or written statements representing the memories of an individual (or group of individuals) who have been witness to, victim of, or in some other way involved in, a specific historical event. In most cases of the representation of violence, that historical event has been of a particularly traumatic nature, and the testimony given is a means by which that individual may recall his or her memories of that event within the broader framework of the historical narrative. Such a recounting may be through the medium of the autobiography (as well as the biography), memoirs, filmed and written interviews, or any other medium through which the voice of individual experience is privileged above the historical context of the testimony. Therefore, testimony may be considered as the foregrounding of individual voices within the framework of the representation of a historical event, where such voices "stand in" for the event (although the event itself can never be sufficiently represented – see Chapter 2, Section 3), thereby singularising the individual's experience of that event.

Yet such foregrounding highlights the representational tension that exists between the experiences of the individual (narrated as an isolated testimony), and the narrative of the event as a whole (within which that isolated testimony is relatively insignificant). It is only in the consideration of a grouping of testimonies – all of which must correspond to a considerable degree to the relevant historical occurrences – that testimony may be considered pertinent. Ricoeur asserts that the only authentic history is to be found in the narratives of peoples, countries and civilisations, and the role of any individual is largely irrelevant to these narratives. Individual testimony may provide one person's perspective on the overall narrative of the event, but such a perspective necessarily includes the possibility, even probability, of prosopopoeia – the "rhetorical introduction of a pretended speaker" (OED). When the event is as momentous and as emotive as the Holocaust, for example, there exists "a delicate balance between the need (a) to use narrative imagination to revisit trauma and allow for a healing-mourning process and (b) to respect the unspeakable evil of that trauma" (Kearney 2002: 49). There is a contradiction within the very act of testimony: it consists of a memory mediated through the discourse of a moment which is temporally removed from that same discourse. Another moment in time (the historical event in question) therefore declares – as if an

instance of absolute truth – the events of the past. This contradiction is highlighted by a Holocaust survivor reflecting on his own testimony: "This cannot be described, for there are no words for it … how can one describe things that cannot be described, for which there are no words? But words must be found … and so every author uses words that 'did not exist' but that were within his scale of possibilities and within his knowledge of the facts. Thus contradictions were unavoidable" (quoted in Kearney 2002: 64).[15]

To question the testimony of the individual is not to advocate that individual voices should be silenced. Rather, it is to argue that only within the context of a testimony shared between many voices can a plausible history be narrated. Any instance of testimony – like any instance of historicity - is subject not only to the variable contexts of the testifier and his or her audience (who may experience the text at different times and in different places), but is also subject to the same limitations of language that necessarily pre-empt any totality of meaning. Testimony is representation compounded by the additional difficulty of fragmented memories and differing contexts, combined with a sense of heightened intensity. Testimony can refer only to isolated instances in one individual's experience, whereas those experiences represent only an infinitesimal fraction of the irrecoverable totality of the event. As it has already been argued that the totality of any event cannot be accessed owing to the impossibility (and undesirability) of recovering every detail, so the recollections of any individual can be no more than a fragmented representation of a historical event.

In addition, a shared testimony must also necessarily reflect and determine a particular standpoint, depending upon the context of the testimony as a whole. The testimony of concentration camp survivors will approach the narrative of the Holocaust from a perspective different from that of the testimony of the concentration camp guards. Even the testimony of inmates would be subject to different contexts of place, experience and positioning within the system: kapos, *sonderkommandos*, labour prisoners, those used for

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[15] This has resonance with the Wilkomirski case, where the juxtaposition of historical fact and invented narrative creates contradictions not unlike those mentioned above, but which become problematic owing to the ethical implications of misrepresenting the testimony of the Holocaust. This will be discussed in some detail in Chapter 9, Section 2.

medical experiments – all would have a differing testimony, and the collation of testimony can reflect only these circumstances rather than narrating a unified whole. This raises the problem of the micro-narrative, and the role of ideology in determining testimonial authority. This will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 9, Section 2.1. Moreover, although testimony often suggests a moral imperative, which allows for the possibility of an articulation of empathy and which outlines certain ethical considerations that are relevant to both the event and the future perception of the event, it is not necessarily the case that it is the means of ensuring that violent historical events – such as the Holocaust – cannot happen again.

Another dynamic to be considered is that of the intentions of the individual recording an instance of testimony. Although post-structuralist theorists argue against the significance of the author in determining the meaning of a text, it remains the case that the ethical and aesthetic evaluation of a text – particularly a testimonial text – is often determined by the reader with regard to the integrity and plausibility of the author. For instance, when the revisionist historian David Irving brought a libel suit against Deborah Lipstadt for denouncing his perspective on the Holocaust, the London High Court found against him. This judgment could be regarded as being based as much on Irving's unacceptable anti-Semitic agenda as on his biased historical methodology.[16] Therefore, it is pertinent to question the ideologies, the emotions, the agendas attached to any act of testimony; as well as the assumptions of the reader of testimonies. For example, consider the controversy generated by the publication in 1979 of *Testimony*, the purported memoirs of composer Dmitri Shostakovich (edited – some claim invented – by Simon Volkov). For many readers, *Testimony* was an accurate and verifiable representation of the years of Stalinist terror. Yet, for others, *Testimony* was no more than anti-Soviet propaganda, distributed in the West by Volkov and others opposed to the communist state. The opening paragraph is indicative of this struggle to enforce a single ideological viewpoint as true, yet it simultaneously asserts its own claims to infallibility: "These are not memoirs about myself. These are memoirs about other people. Others will write about us. And naturally they'll lie through their teeth – but that's their business. One must speak

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[16] See Evans: *Lying About Hitler* (2001), Chapter 1: "History on Trial (1-39).

the truth about the past or not at all. It's very hard to reminisce and its worth doing only in the name of *truth*" (Volkov 1979: 1, italics added).

Yet to assert truth is to avoid the contingency of the term based on differing theories, contexts and individual (as well as social) constructions. It is not possible for a reader without access to supporting evidence to separate truth from falsehood. Naturally, those others will make the same claim. It was only after Maxim Shostakovich, the son of the composer, defected to the West in 1981 that he was able independently to verify his father's text, thus vindicating those who had believed it from the beginning. Yet even his verification is qualified: "It's true. It's accurate. Sometimes, for me, *there is too much rumour* in the book, but nothing major. The basis of the book is correct" (quoted in MacDonald 1991: 7, emphases added). Yet to separate the "basis" from the rumour was not possible, and the controversy continued. Many queried the proportion of the text composed by Shostakovich himself as compared to any reconstructions by Volkov. If both, as suggested by the text, were disillusioned with the Soviet state, then any assumed objectivity becomes suspect – even if objectivity were possible in the first place.[17] This may be an exaggerated instance of the problems facing the reader of testimony, but it does reveal the extent to which the verifiability of a testimony is determined by individual and social constructions of truth, coloured by prejudice and (inter)subjectivity, rather than by the unobtainable ideal of objective historical fact.

Although the narrative of testimony may serve to personalise the historical event for a reader, and even allow that reader the possibility of empathy through the re-interpretation of the textual fragments of another's memories, that experience cannot be conflated into the actuality and totality of the event. Even historical narratives (such as those by Beevor), which amalgamate personal testimony within the macro-historical sequence of events, are limited in their evocation of "what it was like to be there". If contemporary occurrences are accessible to the reader only through the limiting medium of language, subject to contextual considerations, then historical occurrences, subject to the

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[17] In the preface to the 1979 translation of *Testimony*, Volkov mentions that, in conversations with Shostakovich, the composer "often contradicted himself. Then the true meaning of his words had to be guessed" (1979: xiv).

complexities of iterable textual re-interpretation (and mediated through contemporary language and contexts) become even more problematic in terms of their claims to truth value. This in itself re-emphasises the literary and fictional tropes and strategies that characterise historical texts. As White has pointed out, those narratives that do not attempt to avoid literary techniques, but rather embrace them, are generally acknowledged as being the more significant and appealing texts. Such acknowledgment confers on the latter text an authority and influence among potential readers that may be less apparent in the reception of instances of the former. If this is the case, then notions of verifiability become inextricably related to the aesthetics of the textual representation.

2.3.2 Scientific Narrative

One of the more contentious claims of postmodern literary theory is that empirical science can be likened to the narratives of history and fiction. It is therefore no more than a narrative, just one more contextually determined narrative among many others. For example, Paul Feyerabend asserts: "I want to defend society and its inhabitants from all ideologies, science included. All ideologies must be seen in perspective. One must not take them too seriously. One must read them like fairytales which have lots of interesting things to say but which also contain wicked lies, or like ethical prescriptions which may be useful rules of thumb but which are deadly when followed to the letter" (1975: 290). Similarly, although not as radically, Rom Harré attempts to "bring out the narrative conventions according to which discourses are produced by members of the [scientific] community. What story lines do scientific discourses reveal?" (Harré 1990: 83). The objective of both is to discard the meta-narrative of science, which attempts to propose an objective and disinterested explanation regarding the nature of the world, free from moral, ideological or social constraints, and which assumes both teleology and universalizability. However, several of the postmodern critiques of science have been devastatingly refuted by scientists and philosophers who have exposed the faulty scientific reasoning behind many of the more excessive claims. For example, Baudrillard's contention that the "space" of war has become a "non-Euclidean hyperspace" has been dismissed by Sokal and Bricmont as being a fundamental misunderstanding (or deliberate misrepresentation) of scientific terminology, since it is

senseless to talk of a Euclidean *space* of war in the first place. They also criticise Feyerabend's pronouncements, arguing that his "methodological relativism, if taken literally, is so radical that it becomes self-refuting" (Sokal and Bricmont 1998: 78). Therefore, to avoid accusations of insignificance in the light of the verifiable evidence of scientific discovery and discourse, the claim that the language of science is prone to multiple interpretations must be investigated without resorting to a critique of the scientific texts themselves; rather, an investigation into the context of the iterable textual representation that frames and determines those texts is necessary.

It should be re-emphasised at this point that although all language and representation is subject to iterability and context, the narratives within which the language is framed are frequently dissimilar. Thus a literary specialist, for example, will be less likely to comprehend the intricacy and terminology of scientific discourse than a person actually trained in that discipline. Yet a scientific paper remains as an example of narrative (albeit of a specialised type), whose conclusions may or may not be verifiable, and whose language, although specific to the scientific branch of study, is subject to the same limitations as any other instance of textuality. In addition, the way in which such a paper is structured reinforces the notion that it is a narrative. Harré argues that "these texts have been written within the conventions of a certain rhetoric and embody certain narrative conventions … Each 'secretes' its own favoured philosophy of science" (1990: 89). Scientific texts are consequently not as conclusive and as objective as the scientific community would like to believe. Each discovery is usually presented from the point of view of the I of the narrator of the text, or more often, the inclusive we that constructs credence in the illusion of unity of the scientific community, a community placed within a historical time and space (a specific example of Fish's interpretive community). Yet this implies that the texts are written by actors or agents (the scientists) for the eventual benefit of an audience: "it is in the presence of an audience, like that of the people of Rome in Browning's *The Ring and the Book*, that places the event in human history, shows it is important, makes it an event" (Myers 1990: 108). The event in question is the conclusion of the scientific narrative: such texts are typically constitutive of a supposedly

unequivocal conclusion – the proof of an initial hypothesis – with a large proportion of the work done in the laboratory being omitted from the final draft.

One of the more important principles of the philosophy of science is the qualification of the inductive method in empirical science. Employing the notion of the "falsifiability criterion" developed by Karl Popper, this theory holds that all conjectures and conclusions are subject to the *absence* of contradictory data. As a result of the possibility of such data's being discovered in the future through re-examination and re-hypothesisation, even the seemingly most obvious scientific conclusions should be regarded as at least potentially contingent. In addition, Harré has argued that the identical scientific hypothesis is phrased in a certain style when a scientist employs it to support his or her own observations, but in different style when used to counter the observations of a competitor: "In the actual system there is a marked asymmetry in the criteria by which one judges one's own hypotheses and those which are used to undermine the credibility of those of a rival" (Harré 1990: 93).

This would suggest that the understanding of a scientific text is as much determined by narrative re-interpretation within a differential network of metaphoricity as is the interpretation of all other texts, factional or otherwise. For example, consider the following: "Through direct nucleotide sequencing and other methods, it soon became clear that the gene in eukaryotes is composed of coding and non-coding segments interspersed between the beginning and the end of the genetic message" (Myers 1990: 109). Although – to the non-scientist at least – much of this sentence is semantically inaccessible, certain metaphoric tropes are obvious – "it became clear", "coding and non-coding", "the genetic message". Derrida, in "White Mythology", discusses the use of the scientific word "cell" in terms of its origin in the honeycomb structure of the beehive: "This animal metaphor of the hive, analyzed here in its determined effects on the development of a theory, is put into *abyme* [a connotation of infinite reflection] … in order to figure the metaphoricity of the concept, the metaphor of the metaphor, the metaphor of metaphoric productivity itself" (Derrida 1982b: 262). The unfeasibility of achieving comprehensiveness and universalizability is also evident in the use of words

such as "other methods", "soon" and "interspersed", all of which contain a degree of uncertainty and semantic contingency, and which refute the myth of the totalising and unambiguous potential of science: "Descriptive completeness of detail at the factual level must be recognised to be in principle impossible. It is a red herring that can and should be put aside in any serious deliberations about the completeness of science … it is absurd to ask for something that cannot possibly be reproduced" (Rescher 1984: 17).

Although many scientists may argue against universalizability (for example, Popper's falsifiability criterion), the notion of the scientific text as having a potential for truth and objectivity remains pervasive. Yet, just as a historical text may be rewritten and re-understood in innumerable different ways, so too is the scientific text open to re-interpretation. The conclusions of the narrative may be accurate within the limited framework of the study, yet still subject to empirical verification and changes in linguistic meaning. As the text employed to describe or discuss these findings is necessarily contingent, it must be considered as inherently subjective, or at least inter-subjective. The project of science can therefore never be ultimately concluded. As Rescher argues in *The Limits of Science*, this is due in no small way to natural science's being "subject to domain-external incapacities. We must recognize that various important evaluative and cognitive issues lie altogether outside the province of science as we know it" (1984: 217). Such issues incorporate notions of methodology and verifiability (the province of the philosophy of science); however, the nature of language and representation, functioning within the space of iterability and context, ensures the contingency of all texts – even those derived from scientific discourse.

2.3.3 Journalism

The newspaper article, like any historical text, concerns itself primarily with events that have happened in the past. Although it claims to be dealing with current events, or events that may have occurred in the immediate past, the most recent news report is instantaneously part of historical discourse, even when dealing with events that are continuing: anything else can be no more than opinion or conjecture as to the possible or

probable consequences of the ongoing event.[18] As the newspaper article is composed by employing the same natural languages (even if in a different style) that are employed to write other factual texts, and as it uses several of the same tropes and rhetorical devices, it is not necessary to recapitulate the theories advanced earlier that highlight the contingency and iterability of any textual representation. Rather, it should be sufficient to refute the notion that the newspaper article can attempt to be a mirror of reality – a true and objective reflection of recent occurrences in the world. The very notion of objectivity becomes incoherent in terms of postmodern notions of representation, as it implies a view from nowhere, itself an impossibility when considering the interpretation of an iterable text. Michael Schudson argues that, far from aiming at objectivity, "objectivity in journalism, regarded as an antidote to bias, came to be looked upon as the most insidious bias of all. For 'objective' reporting reproduced a vision of social reality which refused to examine the basic structures of power and privilege" (Schudson 1978: 160).

However, the possibility of an objective news report is the principal premise of the article "What is News?" by D. Bradley (1965). Bradley's opening statement immediately emphasises the idealistic notion of the news report that is both true and objective: "It is the *honest* and *unbiased* and *complete* account of events of interest and concern to the public" (1965: 95, emphases added). He then re-emphasises this claim by asserting that "News … is *supposed to be* honest, accurate, concise and easy to understand. It should not be written to serve any special interests, groups or individuals" (1965: 96, emphasis added). With reference to the earlier discussions on the nature of representation, particularly within the framework of the historical text, it is clear that Bradley's analysis is both practically and empirically falsified by the ways in which newspapers reflect different ideologies, and give different accounts of the same event. That Bradley is not wholly unaware of this is indicated by various qualifications within his article that serve

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[18] The paradox of current affairs is that any notion of the present is immediately in the past, as the present is an infinitely small point that no longer exists the moment it is uttered or occurs. This traditionally logocentric notion implies that the present is both static and irrevocable. However, as Derrida argues, the present is also necessary for the "movement of signification" as "each element appearing on the scene of presence, is related to something other than itself, thereby keeping within itself the mark of its relation to the future element, this trace being related no less to what is called the future than to what is called the past, and constituting what is called the present by means of this very relation to what it is not" (Derrida 1982a: 13). The implication is therefore that the present is defined by the very absence of past and future.

to undermine his own rhetoric. Firstly, he is compelled to suggest doubt regarding his own declarations by the inclusion of the modifying phrase "is supposed to be…" in the second sentence quoted above. Secondly, he claims that an editor creates news by selecting particular stories for the editorial columns. He refers to the editing process as one which "may not change the content or slant [the stories] without removing the wire service identification" (1965: 95), which implies that if an editor does happen to slant a story, then all that is necessary is that he or she omit the wire service identification (which will have its own slant on the story in any case). He continues by listing the ways in which stories may be "consciously or unconsciously" slanted – through selection, excitement or interest value, the position of the article on the page (and on which page), the use of illustrations, the lack of time to check facts. With regard to the last, and using Bradley's own emphasis, he writes that "*A story that is incomplete may be slanted because it omits some of the facts*" (1965: 96). It has already been established that no text, historical or otherwise, can include even *most* of the facts, never mind *all* of the facts, even if the previous sentence assumes the omission of the word relevant before the word facts. Bradley then claims that only through a comparative reading of the same story written from different points of view in different newspapers will a reader arrive at an idea of the truth. Yet even a multitude of texts covering the same event cannot result in a plenitude of meaning, even less a totality of universal meaning.[19]

It was argued earlier that one of the reasons for the absence of universal meaning is that any text (or group of texts), due to its iterability and contextual positioning, reveals to a greater or lesser extent various prejudices, socio-cultural stances, and subjective points of view. Most readers are familiar with the rhetoric of persuasion that is implicit in the employment of the term terrorist as opposed to freedom fighter, or the term traditional belief as opposed to the term superstition. There can be no point of view from nowhere, and newspapers are perhaps, implicitly or explicitly, the most common conveyers of

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[19] For example, Rissover and Birch (1977: 114-137) is relevant: "The Press Reports and Comments on the Conflict at Attica Prison, September, 1971". Even after reading eleven articles on the same event, the impression is one of eleven points of view rather than one single truth. Even so-called live television coverage will be determined by the ideology of the network (as presented by the reporters). Coverage by CNN will not present the same truth of an event as coverage by an Arabic network such as al-Jazeera, for example.

propaganda and (mis)information. Martin Quigley (1971: 100-106) has identified seven elements of persuasion that are used by propagandists, and all seven can be found in any edition of any newspaper accessible today. These are: name-calling (to influence judgement or opinion); generalities (an identification with virtue and emotion); transfer (to carry over objects of admiration to support a particular viewpoint); testimonia; "plain folks" (to identify with the "everyman"); card-stacking (to falsely or misleadingly tarnish an opposing viewpoint); and band wagon (everyone does it) devices. It is not necessary to enter into a discussion of each element, but it is worth noting Quigley's comment that "whether the object of the persuasion is to implant the big lie or to impart the big truth, the elements of persuasion remain the same" (Quigley 1971:102). Similarly, John Elridge writes that "it is not reality that is constructed [by the news] but a semblance of it" (Elridge 1993: 4).[20] This may seem self-evident, since representation is not reality; yet it does emphasise that, rather than being objectively factual, the news story is essentially a narrative mediated by various different persons acting within a limited period of time, and this narrative is predominantly determined by the dominant discourse that holds in that society, be that discourse political, financial, cultural or religious. Although newspapers for minority communities will use their own discourses, these will necessarily have less readership and influence than those of the dominant discourse.

Newspaper articles are not so much a chronicle of the facts but rather a series of overlapping and competing narratives, where the discourse of various micro-narratives will inevitably be subordinated to the narrative(s) that reflect the prevailing power-base of that society. George Orwell, whose experiences in the Spanish Civil War led him to believe that much of the newspaper reporting on the war was not only highly subjective, but often deliberately inaccurate and misleading, highlights this narrative phenomenon: "From the anti-Fascist angle one could write a broadly truthful history of the war, but it would be a partisan history, unreliable on every minor point. Yet, after all, *some* kind of history will be written and after those who actually remembered the war are dead, it will be universally accepted. So for all practical purposes the lie will have become truth" (Orwell 1942). However, he is also aware that such (inter)subjective interpretations of

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[20] To represent reality or truth is clearly not feasible in any case, not only in cases of journalism.

events are unavoidable, and that any notion of objective reporting is impossible: "One is practically obliged to take sides, and it must be clear enough whose side I am on … I warn everyone against my bias, and I warn everyone against my mistakes" (Elridge 1993: 7).

It may therefore be concluded that newspaper articles are no more true' and accurate reflections of reality than any other text, and are similarly contained within a particular discourse. As Storey suggests, even texts critical of the dominant discourse are "always critical within a discursive practice which ultimately works to contain such criticism" (2001: 80). Although some general notion of what is happening may be gleaned from the article (or, preferably, from a number of articles written as competing narratives), the omission and bias (deliberate or otherwise) that determine much of the information ensures that the news conveyed by the article is both contingent and partial. As Schudson comments, "the news story informs its readers about politics, but in a specific way. Its meaning lies in the instructions it tacitly gives about what to attend to, and how to attend, within the going concern of American political life. It asks readers to be interested in politics, but politics as the community of journalists conceives it" (Schudson 1995: 70). Therefore, just as in the texts of history, testimony and science, there is nothing inherent within the narrative of an instance of journalism that can coherently be labelled objective, and hence factual, in any absolute sense that excludes context, interpretation and bias.

2.4 Factual Texts and Interpretation

Yet to deny claims to an absolute factuality is to be subject to accusations of self-reflexivity, linguistic idealism, and both moral and cognitive relativism. For instance, Richard Kearney identifies two particular problems that are implicit in any postmodern narrative critique of factual representation. The first problem is concerned with the "danger of certain postmodern arguments that the narratives of the Shoah, like all other narratives, are bound to the self-referentiality of language and so can make no truth-claim to any kind of reality outside of the narrative texts themselves (what Baudrillard calls 'irreference')" (Kearney 2002: 8). The second is the problem of the micro-narrative, referred to earlier in this chapter: By insisting on a contextual and iterable narrative "the

danger [exists] of disintegrating into a medley of relativistic micro-narratives: the way the Shoah can be told in a thousand different ways – pro-Jewish, pro-Nazi, pro-communist, etc. – and you can take your pick since any one of these language games is as good as the next" (Kearney 2002: 8).

However, to maintain the notion of the self-referentiality of language is not necessarily to suggest that an external actuality is non-existent except as a linguistic entity, nor that subsequent determinations of meaning are unrelated to such an actuality. Rather, it argues that access to, and cognition of, the external world (and its re-interpretation through representation) are only feasible in terms of the mediation of language, with all the limitations and possibilities for interpretation that such a mediation implies. In the case of the factual text, the representation interprets an occurrence that is verifiable, even if the narrative necessarily fails to encapsulate the event in its totality. (Inter)subjective interpretation based upon social and cultural discourse determines the particular emphases of the text – either in composition or interpretation. Therefore, for any discourse to propose an absolute truth-claim is to assume and impose an artificial infallibility. The danger that exists, *contra* Kearney, is not that of an attenuation of referentiality with an attendant inference of relativism, but rather an assumption of an authority of interpretation. To disallow an external actuality may be incoherent, but to re-categorise a dominant interpretation as truth is to prescribe an interpretive autocracy.

However, the issues raised by notions of relativism and the supposed equality of micro-narratives remain problematic. Nevertheless, to argue that textual representation is context-dependent and iterable does not necessarily entail the conclusion that all narratives are cognitively or ethically equivalent, nor that competing narratives are all uniformly relevant to the events that they are purporting to represent. It may be the case that the interpretations of the dominant ideology, combined with verifiable historical evidence, will negate the more extreme micro-narrative claims. For example, narratives of the Holocaust that deny the scale of the event (such as those by David Irving) are largely discredited by competing texts that convincingly demonstrate the actuality of the event. In addition, there exist competing micro-narratives within the various discourses,

all of which insist upon interpretive preference. Sim offers the illustration of the Western European political left in the twentieth century, "where we find factions subdividing into even smaller factions over fine differences of doctrine that outsiders could hardly recognize existed … As much energy could be expended in fighting each other as in fighting the established political power" (Sim 2005: 45). Although no narrative (dominant or otherwise) can include all the particulars of a historical event, various opposing narratives will highlight (or exclude) relevant data in order to accentuate specific characteristics that serve to substantiate their interpretation of the "quasi-event". Yet no micro-narrative is given credence purely on the basis of its being a micro-narrative, and interpretation is always subject to falsification through verifiability. Dominant narratives determine to a large extent the intersubjective analysis of any event, yet any imposition of interpretation can never presuppose infallibility. Micro-narratives do exist, and do compete for dominance, and there exists a constant latent possibility that any micro-narrative may develop into a dominant discourse. The danger of micro-narratives lies less in their existence than in the potential that one consisting of uneven (and perhaps objectionable) ethical premises may assume dominance (as happened with the micro-narrative systems of Nazism and apartheid). However, this leads in turn to another problem: that of the interpretation and determination of ethical criteria.[21]

Therefore, to refer to a factual text is to refer to a narrative that confirms the conclusion (reached in the first chapter) that any textual representation is the iterable, contingent and context-dependent denotation of extralinguistic objects, events, properties and notions in the form of written language, such representation being subject to infinite (re) interpretation by the potential reader. A factual text can therefore be defined as follows:

> *A factual representation is an instance of an iterable text, representing actual persons, situations and events, in which meaning is made possible through the presuppositions and contextualisation of the potential reader. Such a text has reference to an extra-textual actuality,*

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[21] The idea of the iterability and contingency of language as an ethical problem will be considered in more detail in Chapter 8, which deals with the ethics of representing violence.

> *although access to such actuality is mediated through the language and*
> *form of the text.*

According to this definition, the factual text cannot be said to be fundamentally different from the fictional text. Therefore, the following chapter will investigate in more detail the strategies and assumptions of fiction, before any conclusions regarding the association between the two modes may properly be made.

CHAPTER 5

FICTIONAL REPRESENTATION

1. The Fictional Text

Before discussing the theory, nature and strategies of fictional representation, it is first necessary to address the notion that there is any significant distinction between "literature" and "fiction" that is relevant to this study. The term fiction is in itself problematic; yet when used as an extension of the field of literature, it becomes additionally burdened with notions of value, canonicity and privilege. As Derrida claims, "[t]he terribly equivocal word *fiction* (which is sometimes misused as though it were coextensive with literature) says something about this situation. Not all literature is of the genre or the type of 'fiction', but there is fictionality in all literature. We should try and find a word other than 'fiction' " (Attridge 1992a: 49). Accordingly, the notion of fictionality that will be employed in this text is not dependent upon the value-laden assumptions implicit in the perception of the "literary text". What is important is not so much the value accorded to certain texts but the implications of the iterable representation for the potential reader. To consider a text iterable is to assume that the notion of value will be relevant to an aesthetic evaluation subsequent to the reading of the text; this is fundamentally different from the idealistic notion that the text contains any intrinsic value. A case in point is the Shakespearean canon, considered by some to be universal in its appeal and timeless in its relevance. Yet any contextually interpreted text – even a text by the playwright whose work is regarded as the core of the Western canon – is contingent upon aesthetic re-evaluation and cognitive re-interpretation based upon differing spatio-temporal perspectives. As Gary Taylor, himself a prominent Shakespearean scholar, has noted: "Shakespeare's works are no more immortal than the scores of plays by the great Greek dramatists that have evaporated. Those plays succumbed to the fall of old power structures and the rise of new ideologies ... Shakespeare is just as vulnerable to accidents of war and shifts of ideology, just as helpless against the political power of a reigning orthodoxy" (Taylor 1989: 378-9).

The word literature will therefore be utilised only in cases where certain theorists (Derrida, Blanchot, Miller) have preferred to use it in a particular context, but with the implied understanding that "there is fictionality in all literature". Otherwise the word fiction will be retained to describe the mode of textual composition that represents characters, situations and events that are not verifiable, or that juxtaposes representations of the actual and the imaginary, or that attempts to portray the possibility of an alternative actuality.

1.1 Representation in Fiction

Two issues need to be explored when discussing fictional representation: firstly, the nature of fiction and its relationship to iterable representation, and secondly, the association between fictional and factual texts. The commonplace perception of fiction is that it is both imaginary and invented, and consequently stylistically and aesthetically divergent from instances of non-fiction. However, as was concluded in the previous section, it is not possible for there to be a text that is *wholly* factual; in other words, a text that succeeds in circumventing the pervasiveness of fictional strategies, modes and assumptions. It is likewise unfeasible to assume that there may be a text that is wholly fictional: in other words, a text that is entirely imaginary and invented, with no representation of (or reference to) any verifiable external actuality. On the contrary, in order to be understood by a historically situated reader, any instance of a fictional text must necessarily be dependent upon conventional expectations and suppositions, even if cognitive modification is required to facilitate and appropriate the claims of the text into the pre-knowledge that has been fashioned within the reader's consciousness through social, political and cultural contextuality. Again, *contra* Fish (see Chapter 3, Section 2), this is not to propose that the possibility of further knowledge is impossible or exhausted, nor to suggest that anything considered original is merely a variant of existing cognitive and aesthetic patterning. Rather, it is to suggest that the acquisition of any new understanding by the reader is dependent upon a re-interpretation of that text within the framework of the reader's personal accumulation of prior knowledge. Such re-interpretation will then increase that accumulation, which may be employed in another instance of reading.

Although this relationship is applicable to any text, factual or fictional, it is perhaps more obvious when someone reads a fictional narrative. An author may represent in his text what seem to be wholly imaginary occurrences and fantastical characters, which are nonetheless rendered comprehensible by their relation to existing verifiable actualities (see note 3 above). For example, consider the following passage, which is extracted from a work of science-fiction by novelist Ian Banks:

> Uagen Zlepe, scholar, hung from the left-side sub-ventral foliage of the dirigible behemothaur Yoleus by his prehensile tail and his left hand. He held a glyph-writing tablet with one foot and wrote inside it with his other hand. His remaining leg hung loose, temporarily surplus to requirements. He wore baggy cerise pantaloons (currently rolled up above the knee) secured with a stout pocket-belt, a short black jacket with a stowed cape, chunky mirror finish ankle-bracelets, a single-chain necklace with four small, dull stones and a tasselled box hat. His skin was light green, he was about two metres standing straight on his hind legs and a little longer measured from nose to tail. Around him, beyond the hanging fronds of the behemothaur's slipstream-ruffled skin foliage, the view faded away to a hazy blue nothing in every direction except up, where the creature's body filled the sky.
> (Banks 2000: 75-6)

Apart from the deliberately alienating effect of unusual proper names (an effect common also to factual texts representing unfamiliar locales and persons with unusual names), the description above is as recognisable, and consequently as easy to understand and interpret, as any factual text (or as any realist fictional text). The portrayal of Zlepe, a character not empirically an element of any actual human experience, is made probable by the juxtaposition of descriptions that emphasise the incongruity of the whole while simultaneously assuming an awareness of the elements that make up the invented creature. Although each reader will necessarily interpret the passage differently, within the inter-subjective limits suggested in Chapter 2, familiar descriptions of his "prehensile tail", his height (measured from "nose to tail"), and his ability to employ all limbs equally, coalesce to create the impression of a simian being, which would be recognisable to most readers. Although the colour of his skin deliberately detracts from the common notion of an ape, the concept of the colour green can readily be applied to the representation. Other commonplace descriptions include those of the ape as a scholar, his flamboyant clothing, and his inscribing of his experiences. A further combination of recognisable representations results in the object of the "glyph-writing tablet". A "glyph"

is a rare form of hieroglyphic, and the word tablet is reminiscent both of the slabs of stone or wood employed in ancient times for purposes of writing, as well as the contemporary portable computer known as the tablet PC. Although a more exact description of the glyph-writing tablet is not supplied, sufficient information is present in the text for the reader to comprehend the possibility of the object, despite its having no physical foundation in the world of the reader's experience.

More alienating for the reader than the figure of Zlepe is the depiction of the (living) object to which he is clinging – the behemothaur – which is a deliberate linguistic conflation of terms combining the impression of a creature of immense size (the behemoth) with the nomenclature for ancient and unfamiliar life-forms (the –othaur). In addition, the behemothaur is depicted as being impossibly massive – almost the size of a small planet together with its own atmosphere and eco-system – and quasi-sentient (or at least instinctive), drifting through the universe in search of other behemothaurs. This may appear ludicrous to some, amusing to others, ingenious to yet others, but again all would be able to comprehend the creature, based on the supplied information. Even if it were the case that each reader were requested to describe his or her own conception of the behemothaur, and that each description turned out to be different from every other, this would not detract from the interpretation of the creature initialised by combining recognisable terms and representations into a totality that, in itself, is not a recognisable element of a world external to the representation.

The conclusion to be reached regarding the representation of non-verifiable objects, occurrences and characters in fiction is that any potential reader – whether reading a narrative that is foreign to normal human experience, or a text that is concerned with familiar and demonstrable events and characters – has the ability to construct a meaning from that text by drawing on existing experience. Although many such reconstructions will be referential in nature, owing to the need to reformulate a mental image of a represented entity, not all fictional representations are of physical objects, and reformulations of ideas, notions and perceptions are equally relevant to the experience of fiction.

1.2 The Characteristics of the Fictional Text

When considering a text known to be factual, the potential reader is confronted with representations of occurrences, characters, situations and places that are presumed to denote a concrete actuality that either exists or has existed at some time in the past. Such a reader may be aware that metaphorical and narratological strategies are implicit in the factual text, but this does not negate the actuality of the depictions and descriptions. Rather, to be so aware tends to emphasise the manifest inadequacy of any textual representation, and to suggest that the representation is both limited and limiting in its attempts to depict extra-textual events in the world. When discussing representation in fictional texts, however, there arises a further complication: the degree of realism employed by the author. This is often combined with, although not exclusive to, the degree of aestheticisation employed in order to achieve a certain result. It was argued earlier (with regard to the Beevor text) that aestheticisation is an inevitable attribute of the factual narrative. However, in the non-fictional text it is frequently less apparent than in the fictional text. This can be seen in a consideration of the following extracts: both are taken from the fictional genre of the novel, and both depict an instance of violence involving firearms.

(i)

> A dull blow struck the back of his head. He had long expected it and yet it took him unawares. He felt, wondering, his knees give way and his body whirl round in a half-turn ... It got dark, the sea carried him rocking on its nocturnal surface. Memories passed through him, like streaks of mist over the water ... A second, smashing blow hit him on the ear. Then all became quiet. There was the sea again with its sounds. A wave slowly lifted him up. It came from afar and travelled sedately on, a shrug of eternity.
> (Koestler 1941: 215-16)

(ii)

> The blanket fluttered, air slammed. Starling shot Evelda Drumgo through the upper lip and the back of her head blew out. Starling was somehow sitting down with a terrible stinging in the side of her head and the breath driven out of her. Evelda sat in the road too, collapsed forward over her legs, blood gouting out of her mouth and over the baby, its cries muffled by her body.
> (Harris 1999: 16-17)

Both of these descriptions are examples of how language within the context of a fictional narrative is subject to selective aestheticisation. Although both use the medium of a descriptive language comprehensible to a potential reader within the familiar form of the

novel, the degree of aestheticisation determines to a large extent the ethical and aesthetic evaluations resulting from reading the text. All fictional accounts are necessarily instances of aestheticisation to some degree, but that degree is largely determined by a combination of the genre of the text and the degree of figurative language employed in the text. This is evidenced by further analysis of the two examples given above.

The first extract – a textual depiction of an execution – is an instance of a description that has a higher degree of aestheticisation. Koestler's narrative is dependent upon figurative, specifically metaphorical, strategies that serve either to diminish the perception of the violence as a literal possibility, or conversely to heighten the perception of the violence in a non-literal manner. This is not to claim that the effect of the description is diminished – such depictions often acquire even more aesthetic power as a result of skilful aestheticisation. Rather, the argument is that the aestheticisation further removes the actuality of possible violence (as understood by a potential reader) from the experience of reading the text. In such a case, description will function within a framework that emphasises the representational possibilities of the language. Figurative language, in such a text, has precedence over the extra-textual re-formulation of possible and actual events and experiences. The passage becomes both metaphorical and comprehensible owing to the juxtaposition of the alienating and the familiar through the use of figurative devices (particularly the extended metaphor of the sea) that are employed in such a manner that "even though [they are] used in none of [their] established senses … this sort of thing is possible only if these uses are somehow derivative from uses in established senses" (Alston 1964: 97).[22]

The employment of metaphorical figuration is therefore the primary reason for textual aestheticisation.[23] As discussed earlier with regard to the non-fictional text, a metaphor

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[22] This may be not quite consonant with Derrida's account of the innovative aspect of metaphor, but even if the language employed is innovative, a relationship with established senses would have to exist in order for such language to be comprehensible .

[23] Many postmodern novels, employing the style of "metafiction" in which attention is drawn to the artificiality of the construct of the text, employ metaphors in which the tenor and vehicle are deliberately incongruous. Waugh gives an example from Muriel Sparks' novel *Not to Disturb*: "lightning … [illuminates] the lily-pond and the sunken rose garden like a self-stricken flash photographer, and like a zip-fastener ripped from its garment by a sexual maniac" (in Waugh 1984: 17). The effect of such

implies using a specific term (the vehicle) in a differing sense (the tenor), thus disrupting that term's original sense. In the first extract, the loss of consciousness experienced by the protagonist (the vehicle) is metaphorically depicted by the tenor of a vast and darkening ocean. By working through this sense of the ocean as signified to unconsciousness and death, the author is able to moderate the violence of the character's death by suggesting that he experiences it as analogous to the undulating motion of a calm sea ("a wave gently lifted him up"). Even his last thoughts are included within the extended metaphor as "streaks of mist over the water". The reader is not unaware of the violence of the representation, but the metaphorical language serves to direct the response that a potential reader may have by aesthetically eliminating any graphic or realistic reconstructions of the violence. This is not to suggest that the extract is wholly figurative, and devoid of any realist description. Yet even the descriptions of the shooting – the "dull blow", the "smashing blow" – are metaphorical, even if more graphic than the dominant and extended metaphor of the ocean.

The second extract is an example of a text that depends on a less figurative style in order to create its realistic effect. Although metaphor is necessarily present in the depiction – the air "slammed", Starling's breath is "driven out" of her – it is stylistically divergent from the metaphoricity of the first extract: extra-textual re-formulations of possible events and experiences have precedence over metaphorical language. The degree of aestheticisation is limited as the representation attempted by the text is more narrowly descriptive of the actuality of a similar occurrence, and so less figurative. Yet, the very attempt by writers of realist fiction to diminish the distinction between the factual and the fictional becomes equally paradoxical: "the nascent realist novel declares its independence … as a self-sustaining reproduction of actuality while at the same time insisting on its dependence on that actuality as a true eyewitness account" (Furst 1995: 7). This paradox is further complicated by "the realist's insistence on equating truth with illusion [which] means that they could achieve their aims only on the level of pretence, by prevailing upon their readers to accept the validity of their contentions and to believe

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language is determined by the strangeness of the relation between tenor and vehicle as well as by its appropriateness to the description. Such a metaphor paradoxically evokes an image that is unfamiliar, while simultaneously heightening the effect of the description.

without reservation in the reality of the fictive worlds they created" (1995: 9). Despite the realist techniques of the second extract, there are no such actual persons as Starling or Drumgo, yet Harris' style of writing presupposes a deliberate disregard for this illusion, as the reader replaces it instead with a ready acceptance of the paradox of a possible actuality of the event. The passage is realist because it interweaves elements of reality with the illusion implicit in the fiction, "yet that illusion can be presented in a manner designed to elicit belief in its truthfulness" (Furst 1995: 12).

However, for any potential reader to accept the possibility of verifiability in a realist text, certain contextual expectations need to be realised. These contexts and constructs of time, situation, and socio-cultural space largely determine the nature of the response of the reader to the iterable text. Realism is necessarily relative to, and dependent upon, context, so that "for a Fifth-Dynasty Egyptian the straight-forward way of representing something is not the same as for an eighteenth-century Japanese; and neither way is the same as for an early twentieth-century Englishman … realism is a matter not of any constant or absolute relationship between a picture and its object but of a relationship between the system of representation employed in the piece and the standard system" (Goodman 1976: 37-8). This suggests that the conditions necessary for evaluating a narrative as realist are based less on direct references to an extra-textual actuality than on a frame of reference familiar to the reader. Representation, particularly realist representation, is therefore "a matter of habit" (1976: 38). This has important implications for all types of text. Factual texts, even more than fictional, are written predominantly in a realist mode, and are hence subject to the same conditions of context and circumstance. Strategies of reading, combined with an iterable textuality, determine evaluative responses to both fictional and factual writing.

Factual texts are primarily realist, while differing instances of fictional representation fall into a wider spectrum of aestheticisation. Nevertheless, even if highly aestheticised texts are usually fictional, there is still a close correspondence between the fictional text and the factual text, both of which are intrinsically reliant on figurative language. The implication of this assertion is that it becomes problematic to declare any absolute

boundary between factual and fictional representations The text, prior to reading, makes no specific differentiation between types of writing, apart from the degree of aestheticisation employed. This, however, is clearly not an adequate indicator as to whether the text is of one or the other. This is further complicated by the strategies of much fictional writing: even though (arguably) "fact, not truth, is the opposite of fiction, … fiction, which goes out of its way to avoid the appearance of the fictitious, is bound to involve a contradiction in terms" (Furst 1995: 10). It is therefore essential, before returning to a critique of the fact-fiction dichotomy, to consider the theories which attempt to explain exactly how fictional texts evade "the appearance of the fictitious".

1.3 Theories of Fiction

1.3.1 Null Denotation

Various theories of fiction concern themselves with the paradox that a text with no verifiable extra-textual reference is still able to function in such a manner as to generate an aesthetic response in a reader as though it did have reference to an existing actuality. The first theory to be considered here is that of null denotation, as proposed by Nelson Goodman. Goodman's claim that there can be no representation without denotation has already been considered in the first chapter – that is, the notion of denotation as a textual substitute for the referent, rather than an instance of equivalence. The problem that now arises is that of a denotation within the text that is not a substitute for anything outside of the text. Goodman illustrates his theory by referring to two fictional descriptions: firstly, that of the character of Pickwick, and secondly that of a unicorn. A reader may comprehend either portrayal, while at the same time acknowledging that neither exists in any verifiable physical sense. In other words, the descriptions are examples of null denotation. Yet this fails to explain how it is possible that the passage can represent a *something* (in this case Pickwick, or the unicorn), while simultaneously not representing anything actually existing or having existed. Goodman argues that the description is not a description of Pickwick *as* Pickwick, or a description of a unicorn *as* a unicorn, but rather a "Pickwick-description", a "unicorn-description". This means that a text "cannot,

barring equivocation, both represent Pickwick and represent nothing … but a [description] may be of a certain kind – be a Pickwick-picture – without representing anything" (Goodman 1976: 22). Nevertheless, although it is possible to consider classifying the various descriptions into a Pickwick-description or a unicorn-description, there exists no clear indication as to the appropriateness or means of classifying fictional textual representations: "The way [descriptions] are thus classified into kinds … is far from sharp or stable, and resists codification. Borderlines shift and blur, new categories are always coming into prominence, and the canons of classification are less clear than the practice" (1976: 23).

Even so, a reader does not comprehend an instance of fictional narrative through classifying it according the type of description it suggests. The question is how that description – which has null denotation – has the potential for meaning, particularly when it is clearly not a part of that reader's direct experience. It was suggested earlier in this chapter that the elements that constitute any fictional description are known to the reader in advance, rather than in their totality, and it is the conflation of these elements that creates the necessary conditions for the generation of understanding and meaning in any text. Goodman takes this notion further by claiming that "we can learn, on the basis of samples, to apply 'unicorn-picture' not only without ever having seen any unicorns but without ever having seen or heard the word 'unicorn' before" (1976: 24). By comprehending the actuality of a single horn, combined with the knowledge of what a horse is, one may re-arrange these familiar elements into what may ultimately be determined as a "unicorn-description", which allows for each potential reader to empirically interpret the characteristics of a unicorn, despite there having been no such existing entities as unicorns. Similarly, the character of Pickwick may be understood as a "man-description" which corresponds to the reader's understanding of a man combined with the various textual representations of the characteristics of that particular man as suggested by Dickens's narrative: "Understanding a term is not a precondition, and may often be a result, of having to apply the term and its compounds" (1976: 25). The reason that this understanding remains unproblematic is that, although a description must denote

something in order to represent it, it is not necessary for a description to denote anything in order to be a something-representation.

It is also the case that, just as most factual texts are dependent upon fictional strategies and techniques, so too are most fictional texts dependent upon a contextual re-reading of an extra-textual actuality. One way in which this occurs is through the re-organisation of the familiar elements of a null denotation into a coherent whole (as in the case of the unicorn discussed above). Another is the cognition of descriptions that are not wholly null denotations, but that do include specifically verifiable extra-textual elements, characters and/or occurrences. For example, the Dickensian fictional character Barnaby Rudge is the protagonist of a novel that includes the historically real character of Lord George Gordon, as well as the historically verifiable occurrence of the Gordon riots, which took place in London, an existing metropolitan area. However, all the above constituents are combined within the framework of a fictional narrative, and hence each should be considered as having an indeterminate (if not null) denotation, despite their having some reference to existing characters, places and events. Indeterminate denotation should be considered in the same manner as null denotation – rather than attempting to glean any actual reference from the text, the reader should consider the entire text as being fictional, albeit with suggestions of possible historical connections. For example, without a verifiably factual text that corresponds to the Dickensian representation, it is not possible (nor desirable) to determine the veracity of Dickens's description of Lord Gordon. As Goodman asserts, "where we cannot determine whether a picture denotes anything or not, we can only proceed as if it did not – that is, confine ourselves to considering what kind of picture it is. Thus cases of indeterminate denotation are treated in the same way as cases of null denotation" (1976: 26).

Therefore, the first characteristic of a fictional text is that it has null denotation, that its reference to an extra-linguistic actuality is either non-existent, or is qualified by the framing of any verifiable reference within the overall structure of a non-factual linguistic representation. Even if the language and compositional strategies of many fictional texts are technically and semantically indistinguishable from the language of factual texts (and

vice versa), the comprehension and evaluation of the narrative subsequent to the reading of the text determines its reception as an instance of either null denotation or, conversely, as a historically verifiable representation.

1.3.2 The Theories of Pretence, Illusion and Counterpart

The notion of null denotation does not in itself offer a solution to the paradox implicit in a cognitive response to fictional writing. Colin Radford, in "How Can We Be Moved by the Fate of Anna Karenina?",[24] argues that such a paradox is based on three premises. These are:

1) In order to be affected by an instance of fictional writing, we must accept as true the concrete existence of the characters and/or situations we are responding to.

2) Yet such belief is unattainable when experiencing fictional texts, due to the unverifiable and imaginative nature of the narrative.

3) However, fictional characters and situations can and do affect and involve the reader in a variety of ways.[25]

The paradox is that although any two of the premises may be true, the third will always be logically incompatible. As a consequence of this, any emotional or affective involvement with a fictional text – even though such involvement determines to a large extent the potential reader's evaluation of the text – can be considered not only irrational, but incoherent: "Our being moved in certain ways by works of art, though very 'natural' to us and in that way only too intelligible, involves us in inconsistency and so incoherence" (Radford and Weston 1975). Yet Radford's theory of the illogicality of reading the fictional text merely asserts that fictional writing is irrational, and therefore largely inexplicable, even though he is compelled to concede that a reader will not necessarily question the experience of reading fiction. As he fails to offer any theory as to how what may occur (apart from dismissing it as incoherent), and as he does not attempt to explicate that experience, it is necessary to study other theories that consider in more

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[24] The following discussion develops points made by Schneider 2006 in "The Paradox of Fiction". http://www.utm.edu/research/iep/f/fict-par.htm. Accessed 2 November 2007

[25] Although there are various ways of responding to a fictional narrative, many theorists concentrate on emotional responses. By responding thus, a reader is compelled to relate to and empathise with the characters in the narrative as if they were actual. While responding in a more analytical and less emotional manner does not negate the experience of the text, it diminishes to a certain extent the affective experience.

detail the implications of responding to a fictional text of null denotation as if it were demonstrable in an external actuality. Such theories include the Pretend theory, the Illusion theory and the Thought theory.

The Pretend, or Simulation, theory bases its argumentation on a rejection of the third premise – that fictional characters and situations can emotionally involve the reader in a variety of ways. Kendall Walton, for instance, argues that it is not possible to experience any genuine emotion when experiencing a work of fiction. Rather, the reader is subject to a series of "quasi-emotions" which give the impression of the emotion, but which are constructed through the combination of pre-existing criteria and second-order beliefs regarding the characters and situations depicted in the narrative. The analogy he employs is that of a childhood game of make-believe. Just as for a child the hobby horse *is* an actual horse, so too will the potential reader believe in the prop (the text) which creates the conditions for the response to that fictional text. Although the use of words as props occurs primarily in fictional language,[26] it is as a psychological rather than as a visual prop that they are employed: "The reader of *Anna Karenina* does not merely note that it is fictional that Anna is unfaithful to her husband, suffers the disapproval of society, and is finally driven to throw herself under the wheels of a train. It is fictional in the reader's game that he learns about all this, that he sympathizes with Anna, and suffers with her. He imagines learning about an actual Anna, and imagines sympathizing and grieving for her" (Walton 1994: 294). Novels and other forms of fictional representation are therefore assumed to be a specific category of psychological game, in which words become symbols not dissimilar to pictures.

If this is the case, then the descriptions, evocations and representations that are required for the stimulation of the imagination are dependent firstly upon the linguistic and semantic strategies of the text, and secondly upon the empathetic and cognitive abilities of the reader. If the fictional representation is cognitively and contextually interpretable by the potential reader, then it is the more likely that the reader will be able to *pretend*

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[26] According to Walton, the words of a factual text contain mere information, as opposed to being props for the imagination. Yet this was disputed earlier in the chapter, with Hayden White in particular criticising such naïve assumptions of the existence of an objective historical text.

that these occurrences and characters are actual, and there will be a correspondingly greater probability of imagined empathy. Walton argues that what distinguishes an aesthetic response from a genuine response is that we do not act upon the former response. Yet, as Paskow comments, "It is simply not true that a person's actional inhibitedness in the face of artistically fictional events is a sufficient reason for doubting the authenticity of his or her self-described emotional responses" (Paskow 2004: 50). Similarly, Scholdan argues that the experience of empathy is primary, requiring an "abstraction from your own embodiment, and the very concrete imagining of somebody else's experience". Without this empathetic aspect of the experience of fictional narratives, then, the "stories do not make sense, … they do not give enjoyment, neither intellectually nor emotionally, they do not offer an adequate imagining of the world, if the reader is refusing to or unable to be affected sympathetically by the perspective from which the story is told."[27] This implies that to acknowledge as pretence any empathetic response to the fictional text is to refute the "concrete imagining of somebody else's experience", thereby negating the possibilities contained within such a response.

Another objection to the pretend theory of fiction is that the notion of quasi-emotions is problematic within the presumably authentic experience of responding to a text. However, it is generally the case that a reader will not accept a narrative as factual to the same extent that he or she would suppose a historical account to be actual.[28] The emotions generated by a reading of the former text are therefore effectively dissimilar to the emotions generated by a reading of the latter. This disjunction between actual emotions and an imaginative emotional response has resulted in some theorists proposing a theory of Illusion as superseding the theory of Pretence. This theory rejects the second premise of the paradox of fiction, that belief is unattainable when experiencing fictional texts, due to the unverifiable and imaginative nature of the narrative. The Illusion theory argues for a contrary point of view: the fictional text is a generator of belief, rather than dependent upon existing beliefs that are prior to reading.

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[27] (Scholdan 2003: http://www.political-science.at/forschung/Fiction.htm, Accessed 2 November 2007).

[28] Paskow, arguing from a realist perspective, claims that in order to understand emotional and cognitive involvement in a fictional situation, it is necessary to accept that situations exist independently of the reader. However, there must also exist a simultaneous acceptance of an inherent quality of make-believe in the text (Paskow 2004: 62ff).

Yet the earlier objection that behavioural disanalogy militates against authentic belief becomes even more relevant in the case of the Illusion theory: "Hardly anyone ever literally believes the content of a fiction when he knows it to be a fiction; if it happens at moments of forgetfulness or intense realism in the story (which I doubt), such moments are too brief to underwrite our often sustained responses to fictional events and characters" (Currie 1990: 188).

Whereas the Pretend theory denies the third premise, and the Illusion theory denies the second, the Thought theory rejects the first premise of the paradox of fictional representation, that the reader must accept as factual the concrete existence of the representation. This theory also requires a modification of the third premise in order to suggest that it is the possible counterparts of the text that are important to cognition, rather than the narrative. Thus the argument advanced in this theory is that our beliefs and responses to actual events are of a certain type, and not necessarily the model for the beliefs and responses suggested by the fictional text. In addition, to respond to a text does not imply any beliefs regarding the extra-textual actuality of the characters and events depicted in the text. A text is therefore more depiction than belief, and our responses to it are a mental reconstruction of that depiction. What is pertinent is not whether something exists or not, but whether or not the qualities of the character or situation depicted allow for the possibility of its existence, and consequently for the reader's response to that existence. Currie argues that "we experience genuine emotions when we encounter fiction, but their relation to the story is causal rather than intentional; the story provokes thoughts about real people and situations, and these are the intentional objects of our emotions" (Currie 1990: 188). However, the problem with this standpoint is that it tends to avoid the possibility that a fictional representation could interact with the reader's experience without evoking specific individuals or occurrences.

Each of the theories of fiction discussed in this section contributes certain pertinent notions to the problems inherent in the paradox of fictional representation; however, none is able comprehensively to explicate the aesthetic and cognitive implications of the reading of a non-factual narrative. The Thought theory appears to be the most credible

theory, within this framework for considering fictional texts, owing to its insistence upon a re-interpretive and contextual juxtaposition of experience and narrative, separated from notions of extra-textual belief. However, a central hypothesis of this study is that there is no intrinsic difference between a factual and a non-factual text, prior to and even throughout the reading of the text. A more comprehensive theory of fiction – one that recognises this hypothesis as credible – is necessary before any conflation of the two perceptions of representation is possible. Such a theory is to be found in the Derridean notion of literature as a deferred reality, in which fictional narrative is rendered plausible as a result of the functioning of the iterable, contextual and intertextual possibilities of textual representation.

1.3.3 Deferred Reality

J. Hillis Miller has defined literature[29] as "a strange use of words to refer to things, people, and events about which it is impossible ever to know whether or not they have somewhere a latent existence" (Miller 2002: 45). This definition is particularly relevant to Derrida's speculations regarding fiction, a subject which runs throughout his own texts: "My most constant interest, coming even before my philosophical interest I should say, if this is possible, has been directed towards literature, towards that writing that is called literary" (Derrida in Attridge 1992a: 33). Later in the same interview, he re-emphasises the crucial significance of literature: "Experience of Being, nothing less, nothing more, on the edge of metaphysics, literature perhaps stands on the edge of everything, almost beyond everything, including itself. It's the most interesting thing in the world, maybe more interesting than the world" (1992a: 47). For Derrida, literature not only exists *in* the world (as well as exceeding the world), but is a commentary upon and reflection *of* the world.[30] His refutation of the language of literature as being somehow divorced from (or parasitical upon) everyday discourse, results in a conception of fiction

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[29] It should be emphasized once again that although the following discussion employs the term literature, this is in most cases co-extensive with the term fiction, and will be considered as such here. As mentioned earlier, Derrida does not regard fiction as necessarily literature; nevertheless his observations do have relevance to the reception, and production, of all fictional texts.

[30] This claim has resonance with the realist position that "artistic expression and the experience of it is always *about*, an attempt to "comprehend," our real world" (Paskow 2004: 64).

that places it firmly within the ambit of the experience of the everyday. It employs the same strategies and is subject to the same contextual re-interpretations as the language of factual representations, the principal difference being not in the words of a text themselves, but rather in the variable consequences of changing conventions, which in turn confirm the continuing iterability of any text. In addition, fiction – often considered as either frivolous or irrational – encapsulates the stratagem of the deconstruction of meta-narratives: "In this century, the experience of literature crosses all the "deconstructive" seisms shaking the authority and the pertinence of the question "What is … ?" and all the associated regimes of essence or truth" (1992a: 48).[31]

Derrida's insistence upon the importance of the functioning of the fictional representation therefore not only considers the characteristics and potentiality of literary discourse, but also suggests a correspondence between fictional and factual texts. In texts such as "Ulysses Gramophone: Hear Say Yes in Joyce", "… That Dangerous Supplement …", "The Double Session" and "Plato's Pharmacy", Derrida continues the investigation into the affiliation between so-called literary and non-literary language – either by examining the strategies of specific authors (for example Joyce, Blanchot, Plato and Mallarmé), or by considering the language of specific texts (*Ulysses*, *Death Sentence*, *Phaedrus, Fable*). In addition, many of his texts also include discussions that are specifically concerned with the production and reception of fiction in general. Two texts which have particular relevance for this study are the interview with Attridge, "This Strange Institution Called Literature" (already referred to above), and the essay "Psyche: Invention of the Other" (1989).

Unlike a historical or other factual text that has explicit extra-textual reference to events or characters in the material world, every fictional text (while still linguistically and conventionally linked to the world) "gives news of a different and unique alternative reality, a hyper-reality. This reality does not seem to depend on the words of the work for its existence. It seems to be discovered, not fabricated" (Miller 2002: 80). Thus, for

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[31] It is important to note that Derrida does not consider there to be an essence of literature; rather it is an indistinct and indefinable institution: "The existence of something like a *literary reality in itself* will always remain problematic … there is no assured essence or existence of literature" (in Attridge 1992a: 73).

Derrida, a fictional text employs the terminology of invention as production,[32] rather than the terminology of creation. Apart from the invention of machines, the only other "authorized" example of invention is the fictional narrative: "people invent *stories* (fictional or fabulous) … Someone may invent by fabulation, by producing narratives to which there is no corresponding reality outside the narrative" (Derrida 1989: 322). As commonly understood, the act of invention implies the process of creating something that did not previously exist, or at least a process of rearranging pre-existing elements into an innovative and previously unavailable form. Yet invention is not of necessity an act of creation, particularly within the context of fictional composition. It is rather invention in the archaic sense of discovery: "invention finds or discovers things … invention can display its originality only in the value of form and composition. As for 'ideas', they belong to everyone; universal in their essence, they could not ground a property right" (1989: 313-4). In other words, it is only through utilising what already exists that invention is possible: "[Invention] unveils what was already *found* there or is still not created, is only put together, starting with a stock of existing and available elements, in a given configuration" (1989: 338).

This notion, already discussed earlier in relation to the science-fiction text by Iain Banks, is dependent upon the limitless potential for textual (re)invention. However, Derrida's interpretation expands the implications of this re-arrangement by seeming to suggest that any fictional narrative exists independently of its author, and would continue to exist even if it were never actually written down. On a superficial level, this appears to be reminiscent of the Romantic assumption of the genius, whose act of composition was determined by his or her capacity to accumulate transcendent ideas which could then be re-assembled as linguistic structures and forms in order to create the perfect artwork. Yet a more nuanced reading suggests a fundamental difference: Derrida is not arguing that there is a literal, pre-existing and transcendent accumulation of ideas, but rather that any author necessarily employs existing social constructs and notions in order to invent a narrative: "There is no natural invention – and yet invention also presupposes originality,

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[32] The notion of production is neither absolute nor determinate: "[F]or the moment I leave to the term "production" a certain indeterminacy" (Derrida 1989: 322).

a relation to origins, generation, procreation, genealogy, that is to say, a set of values often associated with genius or geniality, thus with naturality" (1989: 316).

However, although most texts are identified by a signature, which often lends recognition and status to the text (despite the infinite re-interpretation which serves to supersede the relevance of the author-function), textual invention transcends the signature to become both an opportunity and an imperative for iterability: "Invention is not only that of a poetic fiction, a work whose production becomes the occasion for a signature, for a patent, for the recognition of its status as a literary work by its author and also by its reader, the one who judges … It also puts out a machine, a technical mechanism that one must be able, under certain conditions and limitations, to reproduce, repeat, reuse, transpose, set within a public tradition and heritage" (Derrida 1989: 333-4). An invention of a literary text is subject to the same iterable conditions that accompany all texts, resulting in a subjection to interpretation and re-interpretation in various contextual spaces. In addition, the fictional text remains fundamentally indistinguishable from any other type of text, at least until read and evaluated within the framework of an intersubjective interpretive community. "The discourse … will have to have its invention evaluated, recognised and legitimised by someone else … the other as a member of a social community or of an institution" (1989: 315).

The iterable consequences of the invention of a text therefore result in a narrative that is dependent upon pre-existing ideas, events and contextual paradigms, as well as being simultaneously a text that is a "disordering mechanism, [which must] open up a space of unrest or turbulence for every status assignable to it" (1989: 335). It thus "always presupposes some illegality, the breaking of an implicit contract; it inserts a disorder into the peaceful ordering of things; it disregards the proprieties" (1989: 312). A fictional text is conceivably an effective disordering mechanism than other categories of text: "By inventing the possible on the basis of the possible – that is, something quite other that can also be quite ancient – a set of present possibilities … has to declare itself to be the invention of that which did not appear to be possible" (1989: 340-1). Such invention of the (im)possible leads from the notion of invention to the notion of a fictional text in

terms of its status within an iterable framework of reception. In order to investigate this notion more fully, it is essential to isolate two significant statements Derrida has made with regard to the relation literature has to the material world.

The statement which is most pertinent for this study is that "there is no literature without a *suspended* relation to meaning and reference" (Derrida in Attridge 1992a: 48). This is a direct refutation of the theory that holds that factual writing is distinct from, and therefore fundamentally unrelated to, the fictional text. Just as White has argued that historical discourse is characterised by the imagery, strategies and forms of fictional writing, so too are fictional texts dependent upon, and related to, meaning and reference in an external actuality. Literature is not merely an opportunity for a text to subvert discourse with a mischievous play on factuality; rather, "literature, in the neologistic sense in which Derrida formulates it, is at once more significant and more spectral. As [Derrida] puts it: 'the possibility of literary fiction haunts so-called truthful, responsible, serious, real testimony as its proper possibility. This haunting is perhaps the passion itself, the passionate place of literary writing, as the project to say everything'" (Royle 2003: 101). The fictional becomes inextricably linked with the factual; there can be no "truthful testimony" without the *possibility* of fiction and, as argued in the previous chapter, notions of testimony are inextricably related to the aesthetics of the textual representation.

This is related to Derrida's other statement regarding the possibility of literature: not only is it in a suspended relation with meaning and reference, but it is "an institution of fiction which gives *in principle* the power to say everything, to break free of the rules, to displace them, and thereby to institute, to invent and even to suspect the traditional difference between nature and institution, nature and conventional law, nature and history" (Derrida in Attridge 1992a: 37). The result of this radical irresponsibility is that the text may say anything "while remaining shielded, safe from all censorship, be it religious or political." That this is an ideal, rather than a present state of affairs, can be seen by the continuing persecution of writers opposed to the dominant discourse of various societies and cultures. Radical textual irresponsibility is "the highest form of

responsibility [linked to] to the experience of a promise engaged, that is always as endless promise" (1992a: 37-8). The idea of irresponsibility is in itself a refutation of the view that fiction has no relation to the material world. (Ir)responsibility must have some relationship *to* that world, for if there were no such relationship, and no extra-textual reference, then fictional texts would have no meaning, and this notion of the ideal democracy would be incoherent. The "irresponsible" therefore has the potential to become "responsible" by actualising the relevance of the fictional text to social and political expression.

Consequently, the possibility of fiction in an ideal democracy is also the possibility of political freedom in the actual world. It is the potentiality of writing to depict or narrate anything, even if it disrupts or transforms the perceptions and prejudices of the potential reader. Without necessarily having a concrete extra-textual actuality, such a text can represent events and characters as if they had such an actuality – in other words, a suspended relation to the extra-textual. Fiction has both a social and a political connotation, functioning intertextually as cause and as effect. The theoretical implications of this hypothesis of literature as necessary to the functioning of any society, as well as the suspended nature of fictional narrative, suggest that there exists the possibility of a fulfilment of the expectations of existing societies, as well as a simultaneous disruption of those expectations. The effect of this thinking is to extend the potential for cognitive, evaluative and aesthetic capabilities within various cultural and political contexts.

In order to create the conditions for a suspended relationship to an external actuality, much fictional writing remains necessarily referential to a certain degree. The referential function is therefore never negated in a fictional narrative, but is itself always suspended or implied. The potential reader, to echo Coleridge, must frequently and consciously suspend disbelief[33] – that is, he or she must enter into a implicit contract with the text that allows for the possibility (if not the actuality) of the verifiability of the text. This has

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[33] Coleridge, in his *Biographia Literaria*, Chapter 14, writes that his *Lyrical Ballads* "transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith" (Coleridge 1978: 518). This notion is equally relevant to the reading of prose fiction.

resonance with the notion discussed earlier that fictional writing is a form of hyper-reality, that "literary works refer not to the real world but to an independently existing alternative world" (Miller 2002: 76). Derrida employs the Sartrean conception of the text as functioning either as "transcendent" or as "non-transcendent" in order to clarify his discussion of literature: a transcendent reading is one that "means going beyond interest for the signifier, the form, the language (note that I do not say 'text') in the direction of the meaning or referent" (Attridge 1992a: 44). This would suggest that a fictional narrative, without an external referent, implies a non-transcendent reading – a reading that does not extend beyond the language to an external actuality, even if the reader is able to achieve a suspension of disbelief – while a factual narrative is necessarily transcendent. Yet, as Derrida claims, "Literature has no pure originality in this regard. A philosophical, or journalistic, or scientific discourse, can be read in a 'nontranscendent' fashion … One can do a nontranscendent reading of any text whatever" (Derrida in Attridge 1992a: 44). It should also be noted that just as there is no text that is absolutely fictional or factual, so too is there no text that is absolutely transcendent or non-transcendent. Each potentiality must inform the other in a process of iterable intertextuality that gives significance to the reception of the text: "[N]o text resists [a transcendent reading] absolutely. Absolute resistance to such a reading would purely and simply destroy the trace of the text" (1992a: 47).

1.4 Fictional Texts and Interpretation

To read a text is, in turn, to be open to expectations of (non-)transcendence. For example, in Peter Carey's novel *My Life as a Fake* (2004), the central character causes a literary scandal by submitting poetry to a literary journal for publication in the name of a non-existent persona. One poem begins as follows:

> Swamps, marshes, borrow-pits and other
> Areas of stagnant water serve
> As breeding grounds …

The editor of the journal is subsequently deceived into endorsing both the talent of the non-existent poet and the aesthetic power of his poetry. Yet the "poem" is almost

immediately revealed as being little more than a found verse re-formulation of "an army manual of mosquito eradication" (Carey 2003: 40), produced without altering the text in any way other than the arrangement of the structure of the sentences. This incident, though fictional, emphasises the possibility that a transcendent reading, even if opposed to a non-transcendent reading of the same text, may be substituted for the latter (depending upon the reader's expectations regarding the text).[34] To read the text in its original form, employing a transcendent understanding of it as a factual document, would be to understand it as a direct reference to the "swamps, pits and other areas of stagnant water" that provide the breeding areas of the common mosquito. Yet to read it in a non-transcendental fashion suspends such reference, and the expectations of the reader are disrupted in order to incorporate the fictional implications that entail a suspension of disbelief. This is a clear illustration of how the mechanism of the iterable text serves to alter the perceptions and expectations of the reader with each instance of its reception, necessitating a diverse understanding of precisely the same narrative within varying contexts. Social, political and cultural contexts, as well as interacting with one another, also interact with the language, structure and style of the text in order to contribute to the various possible meanings of any future reading. The response to such a reading is determined more by the iterability of the text than by the specific words of the text.

2. (Non)Fiction: Conclusion and Summary

The consequence of the iterability of a textual representation is that it challenges the assumption of a fact-fiction dichotomy, as well as the assumption that factual writing is superior to fictional writing. The notion that fictional writing is neither transcendent nor grounded in any external actuality has resulted in its being considered frivolous: for example, in the context of speech act theory, theorists such as J. L. Austin have labelled fictional or literary texts as "non-serious", "infelicitous", "etiolated" and "parasitical" on normal (that is, factual) speech acts (Miller 2001: 59). However, this assertion that instances of non-factual representation do not constitute speech acts is ill-considered,

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[34] This confusion – between a transcendent and non-transcendent reading – has certain ethical and aesthetic implications which will be discussed in more detail in the final chapter.

given the fundamental similarity between the two modes of textuality. Derrida confronts and reverses Austin's linguistic strategy by pointing out that his critique is necessarily inclusive of the very elements of language that he seeks to dismiss: "For, ultimately, isn't it true that what Austin excludes as anomaly, exception, 'non-serious', *citation* (on stage, in a poem, or a soliloquy) is the determined modification of a general citationality – or rather, a general iterability – without which there would not even be a 'successful' performative? … a successful performative is necessarily an 'impure' performative" (Derrida 1988: 17). In addition, the potential for fictional texts to say anything regarding the world places them firmly within the socio-political sphere; as such, they must be considered as both as serious as, and as equal in importance to, factual texts.

The (re)interpretation of any text, factual or fictional, is rooted in the juxtaposition of the experiences of the reader with the iterability of that text, which is simultaneously non-transcendent and transcendent, and which provides a grounding in actuality while also giving an insight into that actuality, whether it is a deferred or a verifiable reality: "One can always inscribe in literature something which was not originally destined to be literary, given the conventional and intentional space which institutes and thus constitutes the text" (Attridge 1992a: 46). Such texts will then be subject to re-interpretation within differing contexts that obtain in the world, in a process of social and textual intertextuality and iterability. To privilege factual texts over fictional texts is to ignore this functioning, and to attempt to sustain what has been shown to be a false dichotomy. It is now possible to conclude with a definition of a fictional textual representation:

> *A fictional representation is an instance of an iterable text, representing actual and/or imaginary persons, situations and events, in which meaning is made possible through the presuppositions and contextualisation of the potential reader. Such a text has a deferred relation to actuality and a null denotation, although access to such actuality is mediated through the language and form of the text.*

This definition is almost identical to the definition given at the end of the previous chapter:

> *A factual representation is an instance of an iterable text, representing actual persons, situations and events, in which meaning is made possible through the presuppositions and contextualisation of the potential reader. Such a text has reference to an extra-textual actuality, although access to such actuality is mediated through the language and form of the text.*

It is now clear that the only important differences between the two modes of representation exist in the perception of the potential reader as to whether or not the text has a verifiable extra-textual reference. Although elements of aestheticisation and form will necessarily also serve to determine evaluation, these elements in themselves do not constitute a significant difference between the fictional and the factual: a realist novel may be less figurative and aestheticised than a historical text; a biography may take the structural form of a novel. Language necessarily precludes a direct correspondence between the object and the representation, thereby allowing the reader to introduce his or her own pre-suppositions (and suppositions). This implies that the defining aspect of any text is to be found in the interaction between the text and the contextual response of the reader. The resulting evaluation of the text has both ethical and aesthetic implications, and it will be argued in a later chapter that ethical considerations in important ways determine the aesthetic evaluation of an iterable text. However, having discussed in detail the implications of the reading of both factual and fictional texts, it is now possible to consider how such readings function in instances of the textual representation of violence.

CHAPTER 6

VIOLENCE AND REPRESENTATION

1. The Notion of Violence

As illustrated by the comparison between the descriptions employed by Harris and Koestler in the previous chapter, the effect of the representation of violence in a text is influenced primarily by the mode of aestheticisation employed by the writer. Thus, a textual description that is based upon a realist mode of writing will represent violence in a more vivid and graphic manner than a representation that relies on an increased employment of figurative language, which tends to attenuate the actuality of the violence for the reader. In any textual narrative, the language will always serve as a mediator between the object or event and its representation. It is therefore necessary to recognise that many realist descriptions of violence aspire to remove, or at least diminish, the distance between the two. Conversely, many metaphorical descriptions of violence will attempt to avoid explicit recording of details.

Before such representations – either realist or figurative – can be discussed in any detail, it is essential to examine what the notion of violence entails; in other words, what is violence, and how does it relate to the conclusions regarding the characteristics of factual and fictional texts as reached in the previous chapter. The word derives from Old French via the Latin *violentia* (impetuosity), although the roots of the word lie in both *vis* (force) and *latus* (to carry). Its present participle *violans* is a probable source for the modern English "violence", and is therefore, etymologically speaking, indicative of a sense of forcefully carrying forward. (Audi 1972: 62). However, the term violence, as used in a contemporary context, is particularly difficult to define with any precision, as a consequence of the multifarious and wide-ranging understandings of the term in common usage, as well as the appropriation of the term within a variety of ideological and political contexts. Therefore, arriving at a plausible definition of violence involves a consideration

of a number of diverse theories. The political theorist C. A. Coady has identified three general types of definitions of violence: the wide, the restricted, and the legitimist (Coady 1986: 24ff). These will now be discussed in more detail, although it must be emphasised that there is an inevitable conceptual intersection between the different types.

1.1 Restricted Definitions

The restricted definition is the most familiar type, concentrating on interpersonal acts of force involving physical injury. The Oxford English Dictionary definition is typical of this emphasis: "the exercise of physical force so as to inflict injury on or damage to persons or property; action or conduct characterised by this". Other examples of restricted definitions of violence would include "the exercise of physical force against someone who is thereby interrupted or disturbed, or interfered with rudely or roughly, or desecrated, dishonoured, profaned or defiled" (Keane 1996: 65) and the claim that "an act of violence occurs when injury or suffering is inflicted upon a person or persons by an agent who knows (or ought reasonably to have known) that his actions would result in the harm in question" (Coady 1986: 29). However, the most comprehensive restricted definition of violence is that of Robert Audi, so this will be discussed in more detail: "the physical attack upon, or the vigorous physical abuse of, or vigorous struggle against, a person or animal; or the highly vigorous psychological abuse of, or the sharp, caustic psychological attack upon, a person or animal; or the highly vigorous, or incendiary, or malicious and vigorous, destruction or damaging of property or potential property" (Audi 1971: 60).[1]

Audi is insistent that any definition of violence must be vague, as the term violence is itself vague. He also points out that, despite the prevalence of violence throughout history, there has been not a single major thinker who has produced a thorough analysis of the concept. He develops his definition of violence by establishing a central definition, and then adding to it and modifying it until the final definition quoted above is reached. Such modifications include the consideration of psychological violence, the recognition

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[1] It should be noted, however, that as Audi includes property in his definition, he goes beyond a strictly restricted definition.

that certain sports (for example boxing and wrestling) involve violence that is neither illegitimate nor unjustified, and the argument that physical abuse is only one variety of violence. He also questions whether the notion of motivation or responsibility for an act of violence is coherent, as there exists the possibility of inflicting violence without there necessarily being any accompanying accountability (as in the case of the insane). Additionally, the relationship between violence and the violation of moral rights is intricate, and it remains indeterminate whether the one will always entail the other.

What is obvious is that any violence to animate beings, and particularly vigorous violence, involves suffering or injury, or both. This becomes more complicated in the case of aestheticised or metaphorical representations, especially when the meaning of the term is altered in order to express emotions (such as disapproval or anger), or when it is contextually placed within differing textual conventions in which various words are indiscriminately and wrongly used as substitutes for violence. Such substitution would include the use of the terms force, terror, brutality and aggression. However, force can be used without violence, and violence can be used without force. Similarly, violence does not necessarily entail terror, and terror does not always include violence. The same reasoning can be applied to the notions of cruelty, brutality and aggression. For example, the laws of a state may force compliance, without necessarily involving violence as a coercive factor; conversely, much state propaganda – institutional violence – does not rely on force as much as persuasion.[2] The physical violence common to sports such as boxing or rugby does not necessarily generate feelings of terror in the participants or the spectators; yet terror (without the prospect of violence) may be experienced when anticipating the imminence of something feared (stage fright, for instance). Similarly, although both cruelty and brutality imply the employment of violence, it is not the case that violence is always cruel and brutal. The question also further arises as to whether or not violence is always aggressive. Capital punishment in the United States, for example, is usually carried out with clinical precision rather than anger or aggression. Audi acknowledges that various disciplines may employ more specialised definitions that

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[2] Proponents of the wider theories of structural and cultural violence would argue that violence does not have to be overt to be violent, and that the resulting oppression is a paradigmatic case of violence in action. This will be discussed in more detail in section 1.3.

correspond more specifically to their interests (psychological, philosophical or sociological). However, the broader classification of violence, understood within the limits of the restricted definition, remains adequate for the purposes of most studies.

The restricted definition as proposed by Audi is therefore the definition most appropriate to many of the realist texts that use violence in a graphic manner. A reader who is aware of the imagery of actual violence – through the media, fictional or factual narratives, films, and direct experience of violence – will be capable of transposing that awareness into an understanding of the violence that is represented. How that reader reacts to the violence, though, is dependent upon a variety of factors. These include comprehension (the relevance of the iterable text to the contextually bound reader, and the accessibility of the language within that context), verifiability (the mode of composition, as well as its relation to the expectations and socio-cultural positioning of the reader), aestheticisation (the degree of figurative language employed), and context (the intersection of the representation and the intersubjective conventions that position the potential reader within a certain historical milieu). The relative importance of each factor will be considered differently by various readers, thus resulting in infinite (re)interpretations of the same iterable narrative. For example, a reader may be distressed by the overt physical violence of a text, but be unmoved by the implied psychological violence. One reader may be resentful of the depiction of violence enacted upon a particular minority or social cluster, while another would consider it socially justifiable and aesthetically pleasing.

The controversy surrounding the publication of the novel *American Psycho* is a clear instance of this diversity of opinion regarding the representation of violence. The text, which features graphic descriptions of violence against women, resulted in protests by those who felt that such depictions were an exploitation of the frequently enacted violence against women[3], yet it received simultaneous approbation from those impressed by its implicit allegorical critique of the decay of modern society.[4] From the latter point of view, the extremity of the violence was considered a positive aspect of the text,

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[3] Murphet 2002: 65-71 – Chapter 3: "The Novel's Reception".
[4] An example of this is to be found in Norman Mailer's review of the novel for *Vanity Fair*: "Children of the Pied Piper" (Mailer 1998: 1065-77).

whereas in the former opinion, such violence was both unacceptably graphic and dangerously sexist. This example has obvious implications for a definition of violence: it is not satisfactory to concentrate solely on the restricted type of violence, while disregarding the others. Both legitimist and wide definitions need to be considered in any analysis of a text concerned with violence.

1.2 The Legitimist Definition

A legitimist definition entails a theory that argues for or against the legitimacy of the state's employment of violence to serve its own ends. This often becomes the locus of a critique of the abuses of state violence. For example, Arendt's assertion that "violence is nothing more than the most flagrant manifestation of power" (Arendt 1970: 35) reflects the legitimist position, as does Wolff's theory that violence is "the illegitimate or unauthorised use of force to effect decisions against the will and desire of others" (Wolff 1969: 15). Both Wolff and Arendt's positions are worth discussing in more detail in order to gain a clearer understanding of the legitimist position regarding violence.

1.2.1 Robert Paul Wolff

Wolff's conception of violence is based on a model of "philosophical anarchism", which aims to challenge the very legitimacy of any social system based on domination and hierarchy. In such systems, violence is calculatingly used by power elites either to impede efforts at political transformation or to entrench inequalities of power, privilege and wealth. The concepts of violence and non-violence become confused, as they are based on the notion of legitimate authority, which in itself is seen as an incoherent assumption. Wolff investigates the relationship between power and authority, between legitimate and illegitimate political authority, and the ideological use of violence as an instrument of domination. He refuses to separate the definition of violence from the structure of the class struggle, thus producing a thesis that is a powerful critique of the belief that violence can be defined in a value-free and objective manner. Wolff defines power as the capacity to generate and thereafter enforce decisions of social importance. He then defines authority, although also a form of power, as a right to be earned rather

than enforced. The exercise of force – change through physical effort – is ethically impartial. It is a means to power, but never a guarantee of achieving it. Hence, power is exercised by means of the instruments of force, authority and social opinion. If violence is, as quoted earlier, "the illegitimate or unauthorised use of force to effect decisions against the will and desire of others", it is inconsistent to consider murder as violent when capital punishment is not considered violent. Similarly, most agree that theft is an instance of violence, yet might argue that the same is not so for taxation. Violence, as a normative concept, becomes an implicit appeal to legitimate authority.

It is therefore erroneous to limit violence to physical injury, as political and institutional violence both depend upon the exercise of authority. Wolff claims that it is impossible for any state to have the absolute right of command applicable to all citizens who are obliged to obey. Democracy is not a valid system either, as it does not in practice allow for an authentic distribution of the legal apparatus. Yet society always concedes authority to an established government, and Wolff argues that this displays a superstitious belief in the capacities of the state, as well as a naïve view of representative government. Additionally, if violence can be described as the illegitimate use of force, then it should never be employed as a political instrument; rather, if the use of force were permissible, it would not be violence (by definition), and if the use of force were violent, it would not be permissible. Consequently, if violence is illegitimate, then every political act is necessarily violent, and there can be no such concept as legitimate authority. There exists no coherent distinction between violence and the legitimate use of force, and the question of the appropriateness of, and justification for, violence is rendered equally incoherent. Even when social ends are achieved with minimal violence, this is unjustified as there is no clear line of distinction between legitimate and illegitimate forms of process. Just as in a dictatorship, the rights of a democracy are founded upon superstition and the myth of legitimacy. However, according to Wolff's point of view, there is also no merit in the doctrine of non-violence, as it assumes the *possibility* of legitimate government, and non-violence thereby becomes merely a subjective ideal without moral rationale.

Wolff identifies four conceptions of violence which correspond to four distinct socio-economic classes. Firstly, for those with financial and political interests, violence is equivalent to illegality, and this class condemns all challenges to the authority of the state and all assaults on the rights of property. Secondly, the affluent, educated, technical and professional middle class welcome dissent and favour civil disobedience as long as it does not challenge their own socio-economic arrangements. Thirdly, the working and lower-middle classes (the white backlash), who have a political alliance with the old wealth regard violence as street crime, marches and riots. Lastly, the outclass and its sympathisers perceive the connotations of violence as reversed: the police and employers are violent, while their own violence is seen as legitimate – even though the rest of society suppresses it. Yet whatever class considerations are invoked, Wolff contends that no serious consideration should be afforded to the insistence that some forms of violence are more justified than others. Physical harm differs in degree and not in kind from non-violent action. The myth of legitimate authority is a secular reincarnation of worship, and a belief in legitimacy is irrational.

However, the consideration of an instance of actual violence and the representation of that violence exposes the problematic nature of Wolff's position. If, as he asserts, there is no fundamental difference between legitimate and illegitimate violence, then the distinction between justified and unjustified violence is eliminated in favour of an absolute denunciation of all violence. Yet, in terms of such reasoning, a Holocaust narrative such as Filip Müller's *Eyewitness Auschwitz* (1979) – part of which testifies to the insurrection of the *sonderkommando* and the resulting devastation of an Auschwitz gas chamber – represents an illegitimate undertaking, owing to the framework of the violence that informs the representation. In other words, although the violence of the gas-chamber is to be condemned (because it is violent), the violence of the resistance to it is equally to be condemned (because it is violent). Thus every micro-narrative of violence becomes equally unacceptable. Yet, just as it was argued in the previous chapter that not all micro-narratives are equally acceptable, it is similarly the case that not all micro-narratives are equally unacceptable. Wolff's argument that any act of violence is illegitimate implies that any representation of violence is in its turn illegitimate. Again, it

is clear that the assumption of an absolutist standpoint is not sustainable. This does not in itself negate the importance of the legitimist position; however, for a more realistic example of the legitimist argument it is necessary to consider Arendt's *On Violence*, which combines a wide definition of violence with the legitimist position.

1.2.2 Hannah Arendt

In the first part of the text, Arendt claims that in a century of wars and revolutions, violence has emerged as the common denominator. The technology of war means that there are no longer winners, that there can be no talk of victory (rather, she prefers the term deterrence), and that only poorer countries can actually afford to wage war without fear of annihilation. Violence is taken for granted, being a part of everyday life, and writers such as Sartre, Mao Tse-tung, Marx and Fanon seem to accept in their writings that it is part of any revolutionary struggle. Yet revolutions do not necessarily change the world, only its personnel, and the progress of science, having outstripped the progress of humanity, can no longer act as the standard for evaluating the latter. In the second section, she argues that in the political realm violence is often considered to be the flagrant manifestation of power. There are elements of both power and violence at the root of all forms of government, as Wolff asserts. Yet Arendt contends that it is the bureaucracy that is the most dangerous element in society, as it is a rule by Nobody.

She also argues that the principal difference between power and violence is that power needs numbers to be effective, whereas violence needs implements. An extreme form of power would be all against one, and an extreme form of violence would be one against all, with the help of implements. Power cannot be equated with violence, as violence is an unsatisfactory means of establishing a democratic power base using the solidarity of the people. Violence may be able to destroy power, but it cannot create it. The result of violence will be further violence, rather than any stability offered by power. Just as Audi criticised the use of related terms as synonyms for violence, so does Arendt argue that there are crucial conceptual differences between terms such as violence, force, strength, authority, and power. It is tempting to regard power as violence; yet violence is the last

resort of a failing power structure, with revolution illustrating the gap between theory and practice: the chances of a successful revolution, she suggests, decrease with the technological advances of the state. Yet the gap between the implements of the rebels and those of the state is so vast that technology ultimately makes little difference. Only where power has disintegrated are revolutions possible. Violence is consequently a last resort of power to entrench an inadequate government; the state rules by violence when power is lost.[5] Yet, whereas power requires legitimacy without justification as an appeal to the means of the past, violence requires justification through an appeal to a future end, but can never be legitimate. The further the ends of violence recede into the future, the less justifiable it is. Consequently, violence is not the opposite of non-violence, but of power. To speak of non-violent power is redundant.

The third part of the text is a critique of various justifications for violence. For example, some argue that a propensity for violence and the quest for power are fundamental to human nature, rather than being a rational process. Sorel couches his exaltation of violence in non-political, biological terms, thus conceptualising violence in order to give support to the claim that it is a natural requirement for the intersubjective existence of the human race. However, the danger of allowing for a legitimacy of violence is that if the objectives of violence are not quickly achieved, then the means threaten to overwhelm the end. In addition, the greater the bureaucracy, then the greater the attraction of violence, owing to the probability that no one individual will be held accountable for the consequences. Neither power nor violence is natural; rather, they are both political.

Arendt's arguments are firmly based upon the idea of violence as an institutional and political concept, in which the direct, physical violence of the restricted definition is just one more consequence of the "meta-violence" of the state.[6] As far as representation is concerned, such violence would appear in books such as Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, in the xenophobic press of any nationalist conflict, and in any text that purports to be, overtly or

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[5] The increasing repression that marked the final years of the apartheid regime, in which the creation of a virtual police state took place (all to no avail), may be seen as paradigmatic of this phenomenon.

[6] These concerns are explored further in other writings, particularly in her study of the machinations of genocide, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (1963), and in her first book, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951).

covertly, an instance of propaganda. But to acquire a definition of violence that is predominantly applicable to the textual representation of violence, it is essential to investigate the broader implications of the wide definition of violence, particularly as advanced by John Galtung.

1.3 The Wide Definition: Galtung and Cultural Violence

The wide definition, similar to the legitimist position, is primarily concerned with structural (or institutional) violence and thus includes "within the extension of the term 'violence' a great range of social injustices and inequalities" (Coady 1986: 24). Such a definition allows for the two seemingly contradictory claims that violence can be eliminated from society, and that violence should be met with violence. An example of a definition of violence that could be considered as being of the wide type is that of John Galtung, who identifies four classes of basic human needs that are negated through acts of violence. These needs are survival, well-being, identity and freedom. Thus, violence takes the form of "avoidable insults to basic human needs, and more generally to *life*, lowering the real level of needs satisfaction below what is potentially possible" (Galtung 1990: 40). The repudiation of these basic needs is a combination of direct, structural and cultural violence, the latter being an extension of structural violence.[7] Cultural violence is "those aspects of culture, the symbolic sphere of existence – exemplified by religion and ideology, language and art, empirical science and formal science … that can be used to legitimise direct or structural violence" (1990: 39). Cultural violence also includes institutional and nationalist symbols such as flags, military displays and national anthems.[8] Yet, such symbols represent only particular aspects of a culture rather than embodying the culture in themselves, as it is not possible that entire cultures can be classified as violent. Cultural violence therefore functions by legitimising the symbology of the state, thereby legitimising the direct and structural violence that may possibly

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[7] Direct and structural violence can be considered as two overarching categories or "supertypes", with cultural violence as the third supertype. Direct violence is an event – the physical harm done to an individual or individuals; structural violence is an institutional process of repression that varies in its effects; cultural violence is an invariant, remaining essentially the same for long periods.

[8] In cases such as post-1994 South Africa, although the new flag and national anthem would be seen by many as an attempt at achieving cultural peace, others (such as the Afrikaans Right-wing) would view these as a violent imposition of cultural dominance by the new discourse.

result.[9] Galtung's "wide" notion of cultural violence looks at the way in which all forms of violence are legitimated in society; the way in which the resulting moral paradigm is altered or maintained, and the way in which the pervasiveness of the violence in society is obscured.

Galtung broadens his definition of violence into a "Typology of Violence" (1990: 40), which is a total of eight different types of violence based upon the effects of structural and direct violence upon the basic needs mentioned above. Some of the categories are obvious, for instance killing (the negation of survival needs through direct violence), and maiming (the negation of well-being needs, also as a result of direct violence). Less obvious are instances of violence in which the perpetrators are shielded from the consequences of their actions. Thus, included under the category of maiming is the insult to human needs brought about by siege or sanctions, which often result in protracted but calculated suffering owing to malnutrition and a lack of medical attention. The impact of these deprivations inevitably affects the weakest in society to a greater extent. Another example is the category of desocialisation, which involves both alienation from one's own culture and resocialisation into another culture, through (for example) the imposition of the language of the dominant discourse. An individual excluded from that discourse becomes further marginalised and violated by being compelled to adopt and express the prevailing cultural norms and conventions.

Galtung's typology emphasises the way in which violence effects a causal flow from the cultural via the structural to direct violence. The cultural indoctrinates society into considering the twin elements of repression and exploitation as conventional and normal. Any resistance to such indoctrination results in both direct violence and counter-violence as a cultural struggle within the structure develops. Both direct and structural violence necessarily create needs-deficits, or trauma, as violence will tend to breed violence (and counter-violence) within various cultural domains. Each domain becomes a possible site for cultural, structural and direct violence, with each domain having more or less

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[9] The opposite of cultural violence would be cultural peace: those aspects and symbols of a culture that serve to justify and legitimise peace.

influence over the violence possible in the other domains. For example, in the domain of religion, cultural violence is enabled through a belief in a transcendental God (and, usually, a corresponding idea of transcendental evil, personified by the figure of Satan). Indoctrinating certain elements of the population with a belief in being among the elect will invariably lead to a cycle of structural and direct violence as a result of the Chosen People's translating this belief into both direct and structural violence.[10] Also essential to the implementation of cultural violence is the related domain of ideology: "With the decline, and perhaps death, not only of the transcendental but also the immanent God through secularization, we could expect successors to religion in the form of political ideologies, and to God in the form of the modern state, to exhibit some of the same character traits" (Galtung 1990: 46). When this occurs, the increased prospect of structural violence becomes evident. Many examples exist of such violence, the most virulent being that of discrimination, whether against women, other races or other faiths – which overlaps with the notion of election discussed above. The ideology of nationalism is also particularly conducive to structural violence, with its close links to pre-existing notions of divine election. In the ideological domain, the state inherits the right to destroy life, if not to create it. The combination of the ideology of the nation state with a theologically based chosen-people complex results in a particularly dangerous form of cultural violence, contributing to the intensification of situations such as the conflict in the Middle East, and the subsequent rise of religious fundamentalism in various forms.[11]

Two other domains which are particularly relevant to the representation of violence are those of language and art. The representational nature of the iterable text was shown earlier to be contextually dependent upon various factors, such as time, place, and socio-political situations. Yet inter-subjectivity and convention also provide the structural apparatus necessary for the generation of cultural violence. For instance, many spoken and written languages utilise predominantly male pronouns, thus implicitly generating gender discrimination. Attempts to transform such language usage represent a deliberate

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[10] This will be further elucidated in the discussion of Poe's "The Pit and the Pendulum" in Section 2 below.

[11] "The forces of discrimination, tyranny and cultural oppression are currently flourishing around the globe, in the West as well as in the Third World … The more optimistic postmodern theorists may think we live in a postmodern world where grand narratives are in irreversible decline, but in reality we inhabit a fundamentalist world where those narratives are in rude health" (Sim 2004: 19).

cultural modification which is opposed to assumed cultural violence.[12] Similarly, cultural violence may function through the medium of art. Any society can thus (re)invent itself in terms of its dominance over those considered antithetical to its own social and cultural paradigm.[13] Conversely, art may serve as a verification of the ethical norms and cultural values demanded by both the state and the civil society which sustain that particular state. Works of religious dogma, nationalist xenophobia and political propaganda are the most common manifestations of this type of artistic cultural violence. Within any (or all) of these domains, violence can commence at any corner of the direct-structural-cultural triangle, and thereafter be transmitted to any other corner. Consequently, violence as a feature of the cultural domain is particularly relevant to the following discussion, both as representation and as an actual event.

1.4 A Definition of Violence

Before suggesting a possible working definition of violence that will be used in the following chapters, it is worthwhile to summarise the preceding theories of violence with reference to the classification of the types of violence suggested by Newton Garver. Garver claims that violence should be classified into four different kinds, based on two criteria: "whether the violence is personal or institutionalised and whether the violence is overt or a kind of covert or quiet violence" (Garver 1972: 49). The four kinds of violence can be summarised as follows: Firstly, there is *overt personal* violence. This would include the physical assault or use of force on the body of one person by another. Muggings, rape, assault, and torture: all of these instances of violence are overtly personal, although not necessarily exclusively so, as overt personal violence is frequently one of the consequences of overt institutional violence. Audi's definition would be appropriate here, although his conception of violence also includes the psychological (covert violence) and violence to property. Overt institutional violence, the second

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[12] To this may be added the possibility that to change from one cultural paradigm to another entails the possibility of new forms of cultural violence.

[13] The notion of the Other – that which is the not-I, which is different from the subject who observes and judges – will be discussed in more detail in later chapters. Examples of the Other in art include paintings such as Delacroix's *The Death of Sardanapalus*, which portrays the Oriental as both exotic and savage; novels such as the *Deerhunter* series, which demonise the native American; and films such as *The Eternal Jew*, which was used to de-personalise the Jewish population in Nazi Germany.

category, would include the types of violence identified in different ways by Wolff, Arendt and Galtung: national and international wars, police violence and capital punishment. This would entail the legalised and state-sanctioned violence of a country or institution against another state or institution, or against individuals opposed to that state or institution. Thirdly, there is covert personal violence. Once again, it is the use of violence by individuals against other individuals, but with the difference that the effect is primarily psychological. Covert personal violence is characterised by such methods as non-physical intimidation, the withholding of information or the creation of misinformation, and the deliberate establishment of a climate of fear. The fourth and final type of violence is that of institutional covert violence, characterised chiefly by the entrenchment and enforcement of ideologies upon a population by the state. Slavery, class/race/gender oppression, control of the media and the flow of information, as well as various forms of propaganda, are examples of this type of violence. Wolff's thesis is most relevant here, while Arendt's applies to a lesser extent.

These four types of violence are obviously not mutually exclusive. For example, institutional violence almost always involves the use of individuals who employ overt personal violence as a consequence of the sanction given them by the state, and personal violence often affects the ways in which the state will react institutionally. Likewise, covert personal violence is often accompanied by overt personal violence, which may, in turn, be state-sanctioned and therefore ideologically determined. In addition, there may be degrees of violence, although these are difficult (if not impossible) to quantify into a systematic and monolithic whole. Only with a degree of inter-subjective agreement may any comparison may be made between, for example, overt personal and covert institutional violence, and even then this can be achieved only within the limiting confines of a direct comparison of individual instances of violence. Violence must also be considered as both an event and a representation of an event, whether or not such an event is historically verifiable in an external context. Thus, it potentially occurs (or has occurred) as an event in a temporal and spatial dimension, while involving a perpetrator of the violence, as well as a victim of that violence. To consider violence as an event does not preclude long-term instances of covert and indirect violence. As a representation,

violence is the textual articulation of the causes, effects, or occurrences of a possible event of violence.

The definition of violence that will be used in this study can therefore be divided into three separate, but interrelated, propositions:

1) *Violence is an act of direct or indirect intended harm against a person's body or consciousness or property.*
2) *Such violence is determined by the normative and conventional possibilities of the society in which it exists.*
3) *Such violence is experienced either as an event, or as a representation of an event.*

In order to explore the validity of these propositions, it is useful to apply them to an illustrative text. The chosen text is a short narrative by Edgar Allan Poe, "The Pit and the Pendulum", which is particularly relevant to this discussion owing to its representation of various types of violence: institutional, structural, physical and psychological. It is therefore possible to employ this narrative to examine the effect that the actuality of an event of violence has on its own representation.

2. "The Pit and the Pendulum"

Violence exists both as an event and as a representation of an event, with the latter being subject to varying degrees of aestheticisation, which determine the potential reader's attitudes towards, and perceptions of, the representation. By representing the different types of violence in textual form, the author aestheticises the experience (actual or imagined) of the violence, and situates it within the framework of the intersections of the differing types of violence (covert, overt, personal, and institutional). Yet, as for all instances of representation, the representation of violence is subject to the interpretation of a potential reader, prior to which it is neither factual nor fictional. Such a reader will likely be ignorant of the verifiability of the narrative, and will experience "The Pit and

the Pendulum" as an instance of an iterable text, in which meaning is actualised within that reader's contextual positioning. It is only in response to the confirmation of the fictional mode of the narrative that the reader may presuppose a deferred relation to actuality, and a null denotation. Such confirmation may be effected in a variety of ways. These could include prior familiarity with Poe's *oeuvre*; the acquisition of supplementary information (from critical texts, teachers, or interaction with other readers); or a general knowledge of the fictional canon.

Assuming that the reader has decided that the narrative is an example of a fictional text, it is now possible to investigate the representation as an example of deferred reality. The plot of "The Pit and the Pendulum" concerns the experiences of a (fictional) narrator, who has been captured and condemned by the courts of the Spanish Inquisition, and who faces the unnamed and unnameable horrors of the Inquisition's dungeons. The aesthetic response to the text is, to a large extent, dependent upon the juxtaposition of verifiable instances of historical actuality and the fictional narrative that is positioned within that actuality. The violence represented in the narrative is therefore framed by the historical event of the Inquisition, and although the character of the narrator is an invention, the representation of the violence that he experiences is intensified by the reader's recognition of that verifiable framework. The language employed by Poe to aestheticise the depicted violence is deliberately disconcerting, as he does not aestheticise the violence by means of a vocabulary that diminishes the intensity of the representation. Rather, he employs a language that heightens the experience of the violence by compelling the reader to fill in the numerous "gaps" in the text (using Iser's terminology)[14] with his or her pre-knowledge of the actual Inquisition.

The representations of various aspects of the experience of violence are utilised in order to generate a sinister, but compelling, fictional narrative. The reason for the work's continuing reputation as one of the more violent of Poe's tales is not so much a result of the descriptions of direct individual physical violence (descriptions of the kind that are to

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[14] For a discussion of Iser's reader-response theory, including his notion of filling in the "gaps" when reading, see Chapter 3, Section 1 of this study, as well as the chapter "Asymmetry between Text and Reader" in Iser 1978: 166-169.

be found in texts such as *The Black Cat*, *The Tell-tale Heart*, or even *The Murders on the Rue Morgue*), but rather owing to the conflation of the various types of violence outlined in the previous section into the experiences of one individual (the narrator, a prisoner of the Spanish Inquisition). This ensures that "The Pit and the Pendulum" is significantly more violent than the narratives that concentrate primarily on the representation of direct violence. Poe skilfully accomplishes a subtle combination of cultural and structural violence, juxtaposed with the experience of psychological violence as a consequence of the threat of physical violence. The language of the text is further coloured by a concentrated use of metaphor when portraying violence. The combination of such imagery with the realistic representation of the gradual mental breakdown of the protagonist creates a narrative of violence that is simultaneously appalling and powerful.

2.1. The Structure of the Narrative

The text is divided into seven principal sections, each, excepting the last, framed by a period of sleep or "insensibility". The Latin motto that precedes the narrative sets the tone for what will follow: "The unholy gang of torturers fed its long furies from the blood of the innocent and was not satisfied" (261).[15] Taken from a quatrain composed for the gates of a market on the site of the Jacobin clubhouse in Paris, the inclusion of this motto by Poe indicates a certain intertextuality of violence as he explicitly links the violence of the Inquisition with the violence of Robespierre and the Jacobins during the French Revolution,[16] although, interestingly, the prevailing ideologies and forms of violence of each are very different: it is the concept of violence that links them, rather than the specific historical details. Each of the sections of the narrative contains at least one type of violence that predominates, although the other types are always present to some degree. The structure follows a clear development from institutional to direct violence, and from covert to overt violence: the first section and many of those following are clearly psychological in orientation (although this is largely determined by the

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[15] All quotations from "The Pit and the Pendulum" are taken from the 1986 Penguin edition.

[16] Although the rest of the motto is more optimistic, claiming that violence will eventually be destroyed: "Now that the fatherland is safe, the cave of death is broken; where terrible death was, life and health appear". This has reference to the brief and ultimately unsatisfying final paragraph of the narrative, in which the narrator is miraculously saved at the instant before his death.

manoeuvrings of the structural violence which pervades the text) – the sentence of death, the terrible anticipation of execution, the unknown darkness of the pit, the awareness of the rats, and the threat of the pendulum. Yet, subtly at first, and then with more emphasis, the overt potentialities of violence emerge. The application of torture, particularly by means of denying sustenance, the attack by the rats, the nameless horror in the pit, and finally the contracting heated iron walls, forcing the narrator to the edge of the pit, are all instances of increasing personal overt violence. Only the brief *deus ex machina* that occurs in the last paragraph allows for any respite from the claustrophobic representation of that violence. An outline of the sections, and the type of violence prevalent in each, is set out below:

Section	Event/s	Type of Violence
I. 261-633	Death sentence, vision, insensibility, discussion of dreams.	Institutional, leading to psychological with the implication of direct physical.
II. 263-264	Insensibility, memory, darkness, confusion.	Institutional, leading to psychological with the implication of direct physical.
III. 264-265	Swoon, fear, recollection of rumours of horror, measurement of wall.	Psychological, implying physical.
IV. 265-267	Sleep, food, measurement of wall, the pit, return to wall	Psychological, implying physical.
V. 267-270	Sleep, light, paintings on wall, tied to frame, no water, rats, the pendulum, horror	Physical, reinforcing the psychological.
VI. 270-274	Insensibility, descent of pendulum, escape	Physical, reinforcing the psychological.
VII. 274-276	Paintings on wall, heated walls beginning to contract	Physical, reinforcing the psychological.
Coda. 276	Rescue by the French – *Deus ex Machina*	Structural (in opposition to the institutional violence of section 1).

2.2 Institutional and Structural Violence

As can be seen from the table, two types of violence frame "The Pit and the Pendulum", namely the institutional and the structural. The two terms may appear to be interchangeable; however, institutional violence is generally considered to be violence

propagated by the state or some other apparently legitimate body, whereas structural violence may be the violence of the State *or* the violence committed in opposition to the State. As was noted earlier, some critics – particularly Coady – have criticised the idea of structural or institutional violence as being too wide to form a meaningful part of an acceptable definition of violence, and prefer to omit it in favour of the restricted definition that emphasises personal or direct physical violence. Yet, in a detailed discussion of the violence represented in any text, it becomes limiting not to include the effects of structural violence on the events of the narrative, an inclusion consistent with the second part of the definition formulated in section 1.4; such violence is conditioned, and made possible, by the normative and conventional possibilities of the society in which it is found. Poe's concern is not so much with the structural violence of a particular society, but rather with the institutional violence of the Catholic Church in its most notorious and extreme manifestation: the Spanish Inquisition. The Inquisition (the Spanish Inquisition in particular) has become a part of the popular consciousness of the West, and a symbol for the worst excesses of structural violence.[17] Maurice Bloch, in an essay on the relationship between violence and religion, argues that the two concepts are far more closely related than is generally realised (Bloch 1998: 163-178). There are at least three types of violence associated with religion: first, the violence caused by religion, such as religious wars and intolerance; second, the way in which religion can accompany violence, for example the role religion plays in military and/or ideological activity; and third, the violence that forms part of the religion itself, such as ritual sacrifices and symbolic representations of violence (for example, a crucifix).

The narrator in "The Pit and the Pendulum" is subject primarily to the first two instances of religious violence. The opening paragraphs of the story emphasise the role of institutional violence as employed by the Inquisition at Toledo. The Spanish Inquisition began in 1478, and its most infamous Inquisitor was the Dominican prior, Tomas de

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[17] However, the horrific reputation of the Inquisition, while not without historical veracity, is often exaggerated. Kamen writes that "the proportionately small number of those actually burnt is an effective argument against the legend of a bloodthirsty Inquisition" (1965: 187). Similarly, Hamilton argues that "Once the Inquisition was established, except for isolated instances, … the pyromania which had characterised lay attempts to suppress heresy came to an end" (1981: 57). Consequently, the institution referred to by Poe has more to do with the popular "legend of a bloodthirsty Inquisition" than with a verifiable historical reality.

Torquemada. It was under Torquemada that the Inquisition burnt 250 heretics between 1485 and 1501 in Toledo, the setting for the narrative. Baigent and Leigh describe a typical Inquisition trial as follows: "In practice, the accused was tortured until he was ready to confess – which, sooner or later, he almost inevitably would be. At that point, he was carried into an adjacent room, where his confession was heard and transcribed. The confession was then read back to him and he was formally asked if it was true. If he replied in the affirmative, it was recorded that his confession had been 'free and spontaneous' … Sentencing would follow" (Baigent and Leigh 2000: 35). Contemporary accounts of the *autos-de-fe* added much to the reputation of the Inquisition as a medium for institutional violence that finds expression in Poe's tale: the narrator is the victim of one of the most familiar forms of structural violence, and is wholly at the mercy of his persecutors. In the opening lines he is "unbound" by them; he is "permitted to sit"; he is addressed by "black-robed judges", who, in "inquisitorial voices" proceed to announce the "dread sentence of death". In addition, these judges have a "stern contempt of human torture" (I:261).[18] Such language is common when describing structural violence; the employment of capital punishment as an ideological weapon, the institutional decrees that determine the fate of the individual, and the enforced subjugation are all features of a society in which the powerful dominate the weak, and in which institutional violence is legitimised by political, ideological - or, in this case religious - criteria. It should also be noted that in Poe's narrative the language used is predominantly negative in tone, reflecting the point of view of the narrator in opposition to the institution that is persecuting him. The terminology of institutional violence is thus inverted and (re)contextualised through the voice of the victim. Accordingly, those who are condemned by the Inquisition are "victims of its tyranny" (IV:267), the religious beliefs of his persecutors are "the charnel superstition of the monks" (V:268), and the experience of the victims is tempered by "the hope that triumphs on the rack – that whispers to the death-condemned even in the dungeons of the Inquisition" (VI:272).

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[18] All quotations are referenced by section and page number, based on the structural table showing the divisions of the narrative (see Section 2.1).

The opening paragraphs emphasise this aspect of the fear caused by such violence, although the trial itself is not described apart from the pronouncement of the sentence of death. Capital punishment is in itself a prime example of institutional violence, as oppositions between authority/individual, contempt/fear, and perpetrator/victim are generated: the judges of the Inquisition have a "stern contempt of human torture" as opposed to the narrator, who is forced to accept the "decrees of what to me was Fate" (I:261). The oppression which characterises this opening section is notable for its use of the violence caused by religion, as well as the violence accompanying it, in terms of Bloch's analysis, yet it also presents the narrator as a type of sacrificial victim of the Inquisition. In particular, his incarceration in a dark dungeon/torture chamber with a nameless horror in the pit evokes episodes in legend and mythology where victims are sacrificed or forced into conflict against the horror of mythical creatures.[19] This is further emphasised by Poe when the narrator refuses to describe the horror glimpsed in the pit: "Yet, for a wild moment, did my spirit refuse to comprehend the meaning of what I saw? At length it forced - it wrestled its way into my soul - it burned itself on my shuddering reason - Oh! for a voice to speak - oh! Horror - oh! Any horror but this! With a shriek, I rushed from the margin, and buried my face in my hands - weeping bitterly" (VII:275). It is a feature of structural violence that the oppressed are denied a voice, that the "unspeakable" (both literally and metaphorically, the refusal to describe, but also the confrontation with that which is appalling to describe), is a result of the overarching control generated by the agents of the violence. To have a voice is to generate the possibility of dissent; to silence the voice is to control it. In addition, the victim's rejection of articulation can be considered as a narrative strategy which serves to intensify the horror for the reader through the potential of narrative gap-filling.

The suffering of the narrator as a result of institutional violence is confirmation of Arendt's thesis that violence is not a natural phenomenon; rather, it is a process engendered by human action within the realm of human political affairs (Arendt 1970: 82). Consequently, structural violence may be regarded as a result of the socialising

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[19] Examples include the Norse hero Beowulf who battles the monster Grendel *Beowulf*, and the Teutonic hero Sigurd who slays the dragon Fafner in *The Saga of the Volsungs*. Both these myths depict a human hero in conflict with the horrors of the unknown and the alien.

process that, following the political and contractarian theory of Hobbes, is not possible without the threat of violence: "Covenants, without the Sword, are but Words, and of no strength to secure a man at all" (Hobbes 2005: 53). Hobbes also argues that most subjects give obedience not only in recognition of the threat of state violence, but also out of the conviction that the state will act against those who are violent. A teleological theory of socialisation will argue that the violence is consequently both defused and sublimated. However, it is more probable that the disciplinary and punitive violence of an institution has been redeployed and sanitised rather than eliminated. This is reflected in the narrator's incarceration, secreted away from any potential witnesses, as well as in his own ignorance of the specific consequences of that incarceration: "there came thronging upon my recollection a thousand vague rumours of the horrors of Toledo" (III:264); also, "the death just avoided, was of that very character which I had regarded as fabulous and frivolous in the tales respecting the Inquisition" (IV:267).

Any state (or, in this case, religious institution) may be little more than an instrument of domination, supported by a strong and armed force, whose subjects are permanently threatened by violence. In the case of structurally violent states or institutions – such as totalitarian regimes, or religious structures such as the office of the Inquisition – those directing the employment of violence rationally calculate the effect of the violence as a system for subjugating and terrorising entire societies, with the obvious intention of eliminating any meaningful resistance. For example, the aim of the Inquisition was not so much to save souls, as to "achieve the public good and put fear into others" (an Inquisitor writing in 1578, quoted in Baigent and Leigh 2000: 67). Such excesses of cruelty are an inevitable addendum to the civilising process, according to Zygmunt Bauman, who argues in *Modernity and the Holocaust* that the removal of the means of violence from the individual and into the hands of the State is a recipe for barbarity, no matter how advanced the society is considered to be: "The Holocaust was born and executed in our modern rational society, at the high stage of our civilisation and at the peak of human cultural achievement, and for that reason it is a problem of that society, civilization and culture" (Bauman 1989: x).

This suggests that totalitarianism is not a mere accident of history; rather, civilisation co-exists with mass murder. An indication of this juxtaposition of civilisation and barbarity is exemplified by the illustrations discovered by the narrator on the wall of his cell. Poe describes how the narrator is faced by offensive images painted on his dungeon wall, which are deliberately created with the intention of terrifying whoever views them, thus transforming art into a means of generating violence: "The entire surface of this metallic enclosure was rudely daubed in all the hideous and repulsive devices to which the charnel superstition of the monks has given rise" (V:268). Later, the paintings become part of the whole process of torture (see Section 2.5): "These colors had now assumed, and were momentarily assuming, a startling and more intense brilliancy, that gave to the spectral and fiendish portraitures an aspect that might have thrilled even firmer nerves than my own" (VII:274).

One of Arendt's arguments in her study is that violence needs implements in order to be effective, and that violence cannot be equated with power. The result is the potential for institutional terror, where power has disintegrated and violence alone remains (Arendt 1970: 7). This becomes particularly relevant to the discussion of "The Pit and the Pendulum", especially in the passage in which the narrator speaks of his imminent demise: "That the result would be death, and a death of more than customary bitterness, I knew too well the character of my judges to doubt" (III:265). The combination of structural and direct violence implied in this passage also suggests a resistance to the institution. Although it is not stated whether the narrator has employed violence himself, he stands in opposition to the Inquisition and the society it represents. Despite the opposition of Wolff and others to any form of violence, the plight of the narrator implies that there are times and places where reactionary violence may be deemed necessary and justified. In this sense, structural violence (as opposed to institutional violence) becomes closely related to the ideals of social justice. The *deus ex machina* of the ending is an appropriate example: a French force overthrows the Inquisition, thereby saving the narrator but, in all probability, its leaders will set up a new political and social order liberated from the totalitarianism of the church (and therefore creating in its turn the conditions for a new constitution of institutional violence).

Although contentious, the justification of violence as a means to counter violence has been considered appropriate in extreme cases. Audi has identified three principles whose fulfilment may form the basis for such justification. Firstly, there must be justice: a state can be just only if it refrains from injuring, impoverishing or interfering with its subjects. In this sense, the Inquisition that sentences the narrator to the horrors he experiences can be considered as neither just nor legitimate. Secondly, there is the prerequisite condition of freedom, which argues for the most wide-ranging freedom possible within the limits of justice. Again, the isolated suffering of the narrator denies any justification for the violence employed against him. Thirdly, there should exist a structure of welfare. Audi is arguing here from a utilitarian viewpoint, suggesting "reasonable steps to maximise the proportion of happiness over suffering, giving primacy to the reduction of suffering over the increase of happiness, and to the increase of happiness below the minimal acceptable level of well-being, over comparable interests above it." (Audi 1971: 81). There is little doubt that the aim of the inquisitors is completely contrary to these principles. Walter Benjamin (1978: 57-69) has argued that in order to identify whether or not structural violence is justified, it is necessary first to answer the question as to whether it is a means to a just or to an unjust end; – in terms of achieving that end, the violence must either be law-breaking (in terms of replacing an unjust system with a just system), or law-preserving (as in the case of the state's punishing criminals). Following Hobbes, Benjamin states that every solution remains impossible, if violence is totally excluded on principle. This suggests that there can be no justification for the extremes of violence committed by the Inquisition in this narrative, and the direct and structural violence of the French is consequently justified in its endeavour to combat the illegitimate violence of the religious institution.[20]

It has been noted that the corollary of structural violence is cultural violence, defined by Galtung as any aspect of a culture that can be used to legitimise violence in its direct or structural form. Thus, religion, ideology, art, language and science all contribute as

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[20] The justification of structural violence is presumably applicable only in cases where peaceful negotiation has failed. It is not clear in this narrative whether this is the case; however, it is unlikely that negotiations with proponents of a "Chosen People" would succeed (see Sim 2004, Chapter 4: "Religious Fundamentalism" pp59-101; as well as the discussion of the theories of Galtung in Section 1.3 above).

aspects of culture to the continuation or propagation of institutionalised violence by providing the latter with an innocuous or acceptable façade (although this is not their primary purpose). As far as such violence is concerned, the archetypal violent structure has exploitation at its centre; this leaves marks on the mind and spirit, as well as the body. This is reflected by the narrator's declining mental state as the full effects of the direct violence (which is a consequence of the institutional violence) are made known to him: "Long suffering had nearly annihilated all my ordinary powers of mind" (VI:271). In this case, the institutional violence of the religion of Inquisitorial Roman Catholicism, one of the primary tools of cultural violence and an ideology in its own right, is particularly relevant to "The Pit and the Pendulum". As an ideology it debases the value of individual tenets and principles in favour of the dominant discourse. At this point, structural violence as a response to institutional violence becomes feasible.

The omnipresence of institutional violence is personified in the suffering and exploitation of the victim of that violence. In "The Pit and the Pendulum", the language of the protagonist who experiences personal violence, both psychological and physical, reflects the consequences of institutional violence. He is not merely distressed by the proceedings; he is "sick to death"; he "shudders"; he sees lips "writhe with a deadly locution"; his sensations are "swallowed up in a mad rushing descent as of the soul to Hades" (I:261-2). Many of Poe's descriptions are similarly figurative, to the point of deliberate aestheticisation. However, as suggested in Chapter 2, this is unavoidable as the functioning of language presupposes an interpretive mediation between the reader and the concrete actuality of the violence. Thus a trope such as the "mad rushing descent…to Hades" becomes the principal means by which an interpretive response to the violence may be effected. The power of the metaphor creates a cognitive framework through which the potential reader may re-contextualise and re-interpret the text in order to generate a personal significance. The trope of "Hades" assumes an extreme emotional response of despair and terror, owing to the cultural and social implications of the belief in Hades (in Greek mythology), and its counterpart and successor – Hell (in Christian theology). The intertextual and intersubjective trace implied by the term Hades is also significant in light of Derrida's view that the origins of language themselves are

figurative (Chapter 2, Section 1, p11). As a textual description, the tropic denotation of the narrator's feelings is far more effective (and, paradoxically, more violent) than a straightforward effort at describing the same reactions in a language that avoids (as far as this is possible) figurative aestheticisation.

Such imposition of violence was the primary means used by the Inquisition to control the religious and ideological doctrines of the time and, as the narrator is only too aware, the use of torture is the favoured method that is invaluable to his persecutors. The formal sentence of torture was intended to extract the confession required by the Inquisition to execute a heretic at the stake, and, "if in the torture he should die or suffer effusion of blood or mutilation, it should not be attributed to [the torturers], but to him for not telling the truth". (Baigent and Leigh 2000: 72). Moreover, "obdurate heretics … were not those who refused to recant, but those who were expected to disclose" (Hamilton 1981: 46). Although the exact reason for the Inquisition's displeasure with the narrator is never revealed (apart from a reference to "Inquisitorial vengeance" (VII:275)), there seems to be sufficient justification for the judges to impose the ultimate sentence.[21] However, as he is yet to discover, the violence that he thought would end with his confession and subsequent execution will be maintained in an increasingly exaggerated manner, but with an emphasis on direct and psychological torture.

2.3 Overt Physical Violence
Direct personal physical violence is the type of violence that is most often accepted as definitive, following the restricted definition of violence such as that offered by Coady. In such a definition, violence is an event, rather than a process (such as in institutional violence), and is always perpetrated by a person or small groups of persons, and done to another person or small group of persons. The result of overt physical violence is frequently physical injury, and in its extreme case, the taking of a human life. The civil

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[21] His crime must have been serious, though. Baigent and Leigh note that, "in general, a death sentence was the last resort. Most Inquisitors preferred to keep a ''saved' soul in a more or less intact body, which … testified to the mercy and greatness of the faith" (2000: 35). In addition, "it is worth emphasising that the Inquisition usually avoided the extremity of the stake whenever possible. Copious and extensive efforts were made to try and convert stubborn heretics" (Kamen 1965: 187).

and religious wars of recent times have gone beyond the limitations of structural violence into a fetishisation of direct violence, where there exists a marked absence of any moral, political or legal restraint. Robert Fisk, a journalist covering the Algerian Civil War in the 1990s, writes that "the sadism as well as the scale of the attacks mark a new depth of savagery, something we have never seen before, entire villages liquidated by the knife, their population slaughtered en masse like animals, cut open, axed down, hacked apart … When we are taken to these flat, poor hamlets – Bosnian-style ghost towns of crumbling walls and collapsed roofs – even the cops and soldiers fall silent. Through shame or guilt?" (Fisk 2006: 701). Although such mass executions took place in earlier periods– the Roman destruction of Carthage, the Crusades, pogroms in Eastern Europe – Fisk suggests that the political, religious or nationalist motivation for earlier atrocities has been supplanted by violence for violence's sake. Even if his point is debatable, recent events have evidenced a radical loss of humanity, and the disruption of any previous distinctions between the violence of war and the violence of crime. Fisk writes of a baby who "has its throat cut after a discussion among the intruders about the morality of killing children" (2006: 697).[22] In effect, those who commit violence for violence's sake call into question the legitimacy and efficacy of necessary violence, so threatening the "Burkean pact between the dead, the living and the unborn" (Keane 1996: 67). In many ways, the direct violence inflicted on the narrator is a consequence of a fetishisation of violence as imagined by Poe. Even if the religious motivation is in place, the excess of the violence implies such a fetishisation.

The experience of the narrator is divided between both the threat of direct violence, and the actual use of direct violence upon his person. Many of the threats against him are part of the psychological violence that he experiences; however, the actuality of the direct violence that lies behind those threats is what results in the psychological violence in the first place. For instance, consider the threat of the *auto-da-fe*: the literal meaning of this term is an "act of faith", and it was the process of trial and public execution by fire.

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[22] Although the Algerian War is a particularly horrific example, other twentieth century conflicts in Vietnam, the Middle East and Europe, as well as the civil wars in Bosnia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Iraq, have witnessed the same loss of distinction between the violence of war and the violence of crime, with a resulting fetishisation of direct personal violence.

Although an actual *auto-da-fe* is not described by Poe, the awfulness of its possibility is acknowledged by the narrator: "The condemned to death, I knew, perished usually at the *autos-da-fe*, and one of these had been held on the very night of the day of my trial … Victims had been in immediate demand" (II:264). This supports Keane's claim that direct violence is the denial of a subject's individuality (we never know the name of the narrator, or anything about him save his experiences in the dungeon), as well as the assumption of an event that will typically end with the injury to, or even extermination of, the subject. The fact that the narrator is condemned to capital punishment may be considered (by some) as an indication that he is being executed for legal and legitimate reasons, despite the problematic nature of the institutionalisation of state (or, in this case, religious) violence. Yet, as Wolff has argued (see section 1.2 above), it is illogical to suppose that any violence is legitimate. It is only the context (and subsequent authority) of the discourse that allows for the perpetration of violence that varies with political circumstances.

The calculating nature of the punishments inflicted on the narrator is directly relevant to Arendt's argument suggesting that the phenomenon of violence cannot be dismissed on ontological and biological grounds: in other words, to claim that violence is inevitable – as it is part of the human condition – is to evade the contradictions that such a position entails. If such notions were essentially reasonable and verifiable, then violence would be both instinctual and irrational. In addition, the ontological-biological argument is effectively an ontology of pessimism which attempts to replace the doctrine of original sin, without suggesting a substitution for divine retribution. In response to this, Arendt argues that violence is only irrational when it involves the natural human emotion of rage directed against substitutes (see section 1.2.2 above). Violence is more often rational because it is employed in order to accomplish certain ends that justify it in the short term. By using violence in such a manner, the agent of the violence is committing a relational act, one that depersonalises the object of violence, thereby indicating a negation of any respect for that object. It is "a denial of a subject's freedom to act in and upon the world" (Keane 1996: 65).

The effects upon Poe's narrator are in themselves depersonalising – "Long suffering had nearly annihilated all my ordinary powers of mind. I was an imbecile – an idiot" (VI:271) – but nowhere is this more apparent than in the nature of the pendulum itself, scientifically constructed to descend incrementally until it slowly, but inevitably, dissects its victim. This implement is clearly an instrument of violence of rational design, intended to cause the maximum suffering possible: "Its nether extremity was formed of a crescent of glittering steel … as keen as that of a razor" (V:269). The crescent "was designed to cross the region of the heart" (VI:271). The rationality that had been integral to the operation of the apparatus is made even more apparent when the narrator escapes from the table to which he was strapped down: "I had scarcely stepped from my wooden bed of horror upon the stone floor of the prison, when the motion of the hellish machine ceased and I beheld it drawn up, by some invisible force, through the ceiling. This was a lesson which I took desperately to heart. My every motion was undoubtedly watched" (VI:271). The violence inflicted upon the narrator now includes not only the psychological threat of direct violence (the pendulum), but also the institutional violence of continual surveillance. Foucault links this surveillance to Bentham's notion of the panoptican, in which an observer in a central tower may observe many (isolated) individuals simultaneously, while being hidden from view himself. The prisoner, therefore, "is seen, but he does not see; he is the object of information, never a subject of communication … Hence the major effect of the Panoptican: to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power" (Foucault 1977: 200-1).[23]

It is clear that the use of such various types of violence damages both the temperament and the sense of personal value of the victim. This is illustrated by the effects that the violence has on the narrator. Repeatedly, the horror of the situation is overwhelming, and he lapses into insensibility: "all sensations appeared swallowed up in a mad rushing descent as of the soul into Hades. Then silence, and stillness, and night were the

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[23] Bentham's Panoptican employs bright lighting to constantly illuminate the inmates, whereas the narrator spends much of his time in complete darkness. Foucault therefore considers the panoptican as the inverse of the dungeon: "It reverses the principle of the dungeon; or rather of its three functions – to enclose, to deprive of light and to hide" (1977: 200). Nevertheless, the principle of the violence implied by a constant surveillance by those in power is common to both.

universe" (I:262); "My excessive fatigue induced me to remain prostrate; and sleep soon overtook me as I lay" (III:265). Apart from such episodes of unconsciousness, he is also reduced to uncontrollable physical responses to his situation: "I gasped and struggled at each vibration. I shrunk convulsively at its every sweep" (VI:271-2); "With a shriek, I rushed from the margin, and buried my face in my hands – weeping bitterly" (VII:275).

This loss of selfhood is a direct result of the notion of violence encapsulated in Keane's definition: "The exercise of physical force against someone who is thereby interrupted or disturbed, or interfered with rudely or roughly, or desecrated, dishonoured, profaned or defiled" (see 1.1 above). To this may be added Audi's qualifier that physical violence must be "vigorous": violence is "the physical attack upon, or the vigorous physical abuse of, or vigorous struggle against, a person or animal" (Audi 1970: 60), and Arendt's assertion that violence must be instrumental (this is particularly appropriate to this narrative, with objects such as the pit, the pendulum, and the constricting walls all being instruments of the Inquisition's violence). The narrator's reference to torture surely encompasses all of the definitions and notions explored above.[24] Inquisitorial torture was one of the most relentless means of inflicting direct violence: "The techniques of the Inquisition seemed designed, at least in theory, to keep absolute bloodshed to a minimum. Inquisitors had few compunctions or scruples, of course, about inflicting physical pain in the name of spiritual welfare … But most forms of torture – such favoured devices as the rack, the thumbscrew, the strappado and water torture – [were] contrived to cause maximum pain and minimum mess" (Baigent and Leigh 2000: 28). It is interesting to note in the light of this that many of the narrator's experiences of direct violence do not include immediate suffering; rather, they conform to Galtung's typology of violence regarding the insult to human needs through maiming. Thus instances such as the deprivation of sustenance, the exposure to hordes of rats, and the confinement in a cell without light all are instances of direct violence, even though the effects are not necessarily immediately physical, but rather designed to prolong the violence: "Neither

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[24] The torture of the narrator prior to sentencing is not described in the text. However, the opening lines refer to his experiences: "I was sick – sick unto death with that long agony" (I:261).

could I forget what I had read of these pits – that the *sudden* extinction of life formed no part of their most horrible plans" (IV:267: Poe's emphasis).[25]

The violence against the narrator is, following Galtung's theory, an insult to both human needs and life, and is all the more culpable as it represents an avoidable insult. Deliberate deprivation, starvation, malnutrition, and denial of medical attention are all an integral part of Poe's narrative: "The blackness of eternal night encompassed me. I struggled for breath. The intensity of the darkness seemed to oppress and stifle me. The atmosphere was intolerably close" (III:264 – deprivation of light); "[The pitcher of water] must have been drugged; for scarcely had I drunk, before I became irresistibly drowsy" (V:267 – deprivation of consciousness); "I saw, to my horror, that the pitcher had been removed. I say to my horror; for I was consumed with intolerable thirst. This thirst it appeared to be the design of my persecutors to stimulate: for the food in the dish was meat pungently seasoned" (V:268-9 – deprivation of water). The presence of the rats is another type of direct violence that corresponds to Galtung's notion of misery: "[The rats] writhed upon my throat; their cold lips sought my own; I was half stifled by their thronging pressure; disgust, for which the world has no name, swelled my bosom, and chilled, with a heavy clamminess, my heart" (VI:273). The result of this violence is to depersonalise the narrator, to make him an object with little or no control over his destiny, his actions or his life. Even as he escapes one type of death, he encounters another – there is no way out: after escaping the pendulum, he realises that "I had but escaped death in one form of agony, to be delivered unto worse than death in some other" (VII:274). This last statement is revealing, as it contradicts the commonplace assumption that the ultimate violence is the extinguishing of human life. Yet this passage represents the possibility of death as a release, rather than as a violation.

It has been argued above that, for a restricted definition of violence, it is necessary to avoid confusing the term violence with related terms such as misery, cruelty, force, power, aggression, terror and the like, most of which imply violence, but which are not

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[25] Again, the pre-knowledge of potential violence fostered by the Inquisition acts as a form of psychological violence due to the cultural and structural conditioning of the population.

necessary causal phenomena of violence. Although the narrator experiences all of these at the hands of the Inquisition, they remain an adjunct to, rather than an integral part of, the narrator's experience of violence. Often these subsidiary terms are employed as metaphors or similes for violence, when in fact they do not reflect the actuality of direct physical violence, and stretching the definition makes violence indistinguishable from notions such as misery, alienation and defilement. Yet they do serve to increase the effect of the violence, particularly in the case of psychological violence, without necessarily being violent in themselves. Aggression may almost always involve violence, or at least suggest the threat of violence, but it does not follow that violence always consists of aggression. When the narrator is faced with the descending pendulum, he is surely threatened with extreme violence; yet the calculating construction of the machine seems to imply that there is little or no aggression – rather, there is calculated malevolence, with the machine being an implement rather than an instance of violence. Similarly, force may involve violence, but not necessarily so, and violence need not include force. The narrator may be compelled into a state of imprisonment against his will, but much of the violence he experiences does not involve the physical use of force. However, the experiences of the narrator are in many cases instances that conflate these terms with the terms of the violence. Consequently, it is justifiable to consider the various adjunctive terms as an integral part of the overall denotation of direct physical violence as represented in this particular narrative.

2.4 Psychological Violence

Psychological or covert violence is any type of violence that depends upon an attack on, or an abuse of the mental well-being of, an individual or group of individuals. In this sense, threats of physical violence, prejudice, the offering or withholding of information that may cause anxiety to an individual, and the physical violence done to the property or acquaintances of the individual may all be considered as being psychologically violent. Unlike many commentators on violence who prefer to concentrate on physical and/or structural violence (Keane, Coady, Benjamin, *et al*), the second part of Audi's definition of violence deliberately includes the psychological as a form of violence: "Violence is the highly vigorous psychological abuse of, or the sharp, caustic psychological attack, upon a

person" (Audi 1971: 59). Similarly, Galtung asserts that "a violent structure leaves marks not only on the human body but also on the mind" (Galtung 1990: 40). Psychological violence may be a result either of direct violence or of structural violence, or a combination of these. Thus, although Keane prefers to limit a definition of violence to that which causes physical harm, he also considers the modern state an instrument of domination through which its subjects are "permanently under a cloud of threatened violence", and such a rational and calculating potential for violence is used as "a technique of terrorising and demoralising entire populations, preventing them from engaging in organised resistance" (Keane 1996: 30). Again, the parallel with the Panoptican is apt: "The crowd, a compact mass, a locus of multiple exchanges, individualities merging together, a collective effect, is abolished and replaced by a collection of separated individualities. From the point of view of the guardian, it is replaced by a multiplicity that can be numbered and supervised; from the point of view of the inmates, by a sequestered and observed solitude" (Foucault 1977: 201).

The panoptical structure of the Inquisition (its priest and judges representing Foucault's "guardians") has already been examined as a prime example of institutional violence, as well as the ways in which that violence results in overt physical violence. But perhaps the most disturbing aspect of the text of "The Pit and the Pendulum" is the covert violence that is inflicted on the narrator by the agents of institutional violence. The narrator, upon awaking in the dungeon, dreads his first glance at what surrounds him, "not that I feared to look upon things horrible, but that I grew aghast lest there should be *nothing* to see" (II:264).[26] When he does begin to explore his surroundings, he realises that "it seemed evident that mine was not, at least, the most hideous of fates" (III:264). Yet it is soon obvious that this optimism is erroneous, as throughout the text the narrator is made aware of the effects of his ordeal. The result is that he frequently desires the fate previously considered "most hideous": "And then there stole into my fancy, like a rich musical note, the thought of what sweet rest there must be in the grave" (I:262); "Then, very suddenly, *thought*, and shuddering terror, and earnest endeavour to comprehend my real state. Then

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[26] Here violence takes the form of a wilful removal of the limits of the explicable. The deliberate excision of any relation to what had previously passed as reality becomes an extreme application of violence.

a strong desire to lapse into insensibility" (II: 263); "Death would have been a relief, oh! how unspeakable!" (VI:272).

It has been noted that the extinction of life is the extreme consequence of physical violence; it follows, then, that to create in the mind of an individual the desire for death is an extreme form of psychological violence. To do so further denigrates the dignity and self-respect of the narrator, and the psychological torture soon achieves the required effect: "By long suffering my nerves had been unstrung, until I trembled at the sound of my own voice, and had become in every respect a fitting subject for the species of torture which awaited me" (IV:267). The consequences of this state of mind include a refusal to accept what is actually happening as the narrator's responses become increasingly irrational: "I half-smiled in my agony" (V:270); (VI:271); "And then I fell suddenly calm, and lay smiling at the glittering death, as a child at some bauble" (V:270). The violence has not caused only physical harm, but has also reduced the psychological state of the narrator to something less than human – that of an imbecile, or an idiot.

This suggests some of the effects of the psychological violence experienced by the narrator; yet the question that still remains unanswered is how the violence is implemented. Initially, the pronouncement of the death sentence is psychological, sending the narrator into a swoon of "delirious horror" (I:261). Yet the true nature of the sentence is realised only after he has awakened from unconsciousness: "Was I left to perish of starvation in this subterranean world of darkness; or what fate, perhaps even more fearful, awaited me?" (III:265). It is this ignorance of one's fate, and the anticipation of a feared unknown, that is perhaps the true characteristic of covert violence. The narrator is aware that this is the ultimate aim of his tormentors: "There was the choice of death with its direst physical agonies, or death with its most hideous moral horrors. I had been reserved for the latter" (IV:267). The institutional nature of the violence is cited in the rumours that had become associated with the prison of Toledo, "strange things narrated – fables I had always deemed them – but yet strange, and too ghastly to repeat, save in a whisper" (III:264-5). This is clearly a confirmation of the "cloud of threatened violence" identified by Keane. The horror of the rumours is

intensified by the realisation that "the death just avoided, was of that very character which I had regarded as fabulous and frivolous in the tales regarding the Inquisition" (IV:267). This indicates a subtle link between the psychological and the covert violence. What had previously been only anecdotal (the institutionalised cultural violence) now becomes directly relevant, and the previous dismissal of the frivolous now transforms itself into an immediate apprehension of actual, direct physical violence.

Following Arendt, it has been suggested that violence is by its very nature instrumental. The pendulum as object, the unnamed horror in the pit and the contracting walls are all instances of implements used to inflict physical violence, and the apprehension of such physical violence is a fundamental part of the psychological violence of the narrative. However, the threat (and the implement) need not entail exclusively a threat of physical harm. Often, exposure to distressing images or information will also have the desired effect. In this narrative it is the "artwork" that decorates the walls of the dungeon – typical of the influence of cultural violence, but also distorted in order to suggest the physical violence that might follow – that serves as the instrument of psychological violence: "the figures of fiends in aspects of menace, with skeleton forms, and other really fearful images" (V:268). As the narrator becomes further disorientated owing to the extremes of violence inflicted on him, the images assume "a startling and most intense brilliancy, that gave spectral and fiendish portraitures an aspect that might have thrilled even firmer nerves than my own. Demon eyes, of a wild and ghastly vivacity, glared upon me in a thousand directions, where none had been visible before, and gleamed with the lurid lustre of a fire that I could not force my imagination to regard as unreal" (VII:274-5). Once again, personal psychological violence is effected through the machinations of institutional violence, as the threat of an eternity of damnation in Hell – a familiar threat in the history of Christian discourse – is exploited to instil alarm and compel conformity in those subject to the authority assumed by the Church. The effect that such psychological violence has on the narrator (although his religious beliefs are never revealed by Poe) corresponds with the conventional and contextual religious beliefs that would have been pervasive at the time, additionally serving to intensify the experience of the representation by the potential reader. There are many further examples

in the text of the characteristics and effects of psychological violence. What needs to be re-emphasised is that such violence rarely exists in isolation from instances of institutional and/or direct violence. On the one hand, it is the threat of physical violence that makes psychological violence possible; on the other, it is the structure of institutional violence that allows for covert violence, either directly (as in the case of Poe's narrator), or indirectly (as in the case of the political or religious indoctrination of entire communities). Consequently, it becomes impossible to eliminate psychological violation as an integral feature of any definition of violence.

3. The Representation of Violence

The three main categories of violence – institutional, physical and psychological – are often mutually interdependent, and it is difficult, particularly in a text such as "The Pit and the Pendulum", to consider only one type in isolation. Narratives that are instances of representations of violence will necessarily include all three types, although it is often the case that one type may be more obvious, or even predominate. In order to investigate the representation of violence effectively, whether in fictional or non-fictional form, it is necessary to acknowledge the inter-relationship that exists among the different types. With this in mind, it is possible to re-formulate the earlier definition of violence as a definition that will form the basis for the following discussion regarding the ethics of the representation of violence. Thus, the textual depiction of violence can be considered as:

> *The iterable representation of an act of direct or indirect intentional harm against a person's body or mind or property which is comprehended by a potential reader whose experience of the representation is contextually determined.*

CHAPTER 7

REPRESENTING VIOLENCE

1. Representation of Violence and the Potential Reader

In order for a potential reader to read a textual representation of violence, he or she must engage with an iterable text that has no initial verifiability nor value, and that depicts an instance of direct or indirect harm to another. Yet, each new reading implies a process of interpretation and evaluation that will (re)situate the text within a specific social and cultural context. These processes reflect such external influences as reader expectation, canonicity, and ethical and aesthetical evaluation. The ethical discourse that is dominant in a particular context will contribute to the continued reception of a textual description of violence. It can therefore be asserted that there exists a correlation between the aesthetic evaluation of a text and the ethical assumptions that exist within a particular socio-cultural context. The inter-subjective aspect of ethical values, considered in relation to the inter-subjective aspect of iterable textual representation, suggests an effective inter-relation between aesthetic and ethical interpretation. This assertion that there can be no objective ethical values has important implications for the efficacy of evaluative enquiry:

> The claim that values are not objective, are not part of the fabric of the world, is meant to include not only moral goodness, which might be most naturally equated with moral value, but also other things that could be more loosely called moral values or disvalues – rightness and wrongness, duty, obligation, an action's being rotten and contemptible, and so on. It also includes non-moral values, notably aesthetic ones, beauty and various kinds of artistic merit … clearly much the same considerations apply to aesthetic and to moral values, and there would be at least some initial implausibility in a view that gave the one a different status from the other.
> (Mackie 1977: 15)

Yet it would be erroneous to conflate ethical judgements with aesthetic evaluation, particularly when the two are closely interlinked through the reading of a text representing violence. It is therefore essential to determine exactly what is implied by an ethical experience of representation, in terms of reader expectation within an interpretive

community, and to investigate how (and under what circumstances) such an experience is possible.

The ethical implications of reading instances of textual violence result from the dual nature of the representation. On the one hand, there is the act or event of violence that is represented in the text. This may be in contravention of the values and norms of a particular society, and as a result offensive to many potential readers. Yet, on the other hand, the ethical issues raised by the depiction of the violence may go beyond the textual depiction, thereby situating the text within a broader ethical discourse. Although to represent an act of violence is not necessarily to approve of it, it may be the case that a reader will confuse a representation of violence with an endorsement of the act itself, rather than reading it as a critique of that act, or as a critique of the society in which such an act is possible. The notion of iterability, however, does argue for continuing and infinite re-interpretation, and this would imply that a text, applauded in one interpretation for its stance against violence, will be strongly censured for rationalising, or even glorifying, violence in another interpretation. This chapter, therefore, will consider how competing ethical discourses construe the textual representation of violence, and how such interpretations both influence, and are influenced by, the aesthetic evaluations of the narrative by the potential reader.

In "Lesson 6"of J. M. Coetzee's *Elizabeth Costello*, the protagonist is forced into an ethical dilemma owing to her reading a representation of violence – a text detailing the executions of the *Wehrmacht* officers who had participated in the plot to assassinate Hitler. The ethical dilemma is directly related to the graphic realism of the representation, supported by the historical fact of the violence:

> That is what Paul West, novelist, had written about, page after page after page, leaving nothing out; and that is what she read, sick with the spectacle, sick with herself, sick with a world in which such things took place, until at last she pushed the book away and sat with her head in her hands. *Obscene!* She wanted to cry … because such things ought not to take place, and then obscene again because having taken place they ought not to be brought into the light but covered up and hidden for ever in the bowels of the earth, like what goes on in the slaughterhouses of the world, if one wishes to save one's sanity.
> (Coetzee 2003: 158)

The dilemma that Costello must confront is that between the act of reading (and being gratified by) the represented violence, and the impending remorse at her subsequent distancing from the actual violence: "*I do not want to read this*, she said to herself; yet she had gone on reading, excited despite herself" (2003: 178). Coetzee, through the persona of Elizabeth Costello, is unable to resolve this problem of reception. Instead, the inadequate stipulation is made that some things ought not to be written, and that the writer who does venture to do so becomes complicit in the actual violence. This applies particularly if the representation is excessively explicit, or relies on cliché and sentimentality. However, to suggest that to represent violence is ethically questionable, and that to avoid it somehow prevents the violation of the integrity of potential readers, seems to be an abrogation of the latent possibility that representations of violence may generate an ethical response that would not necessarily be a mere glorification of violence. In addition, to avoid the representation of violence that has actually taken place (or that could conceivably take place), does not negate the actuality of the violence. For example, in *Disgrace*, Coetzee does not describe the rape of Lucy; yet the potential of the violent act remains implicit throughout the narrative, no less so than in the more overtly descriptive text read by Costello. The reader is as likely to fill in the gaps of the implicit violence as he or she is to bear in mind the graphic descriptions that both upset and fascinate Costello.

The ethical predicament outlined in *Elizabeth Costello* encapsulates the particular problems that exist in the reading of a text that represents violence. There are therefore at least two questions that need to be considered. The first concerns the ethical and moral issues involved in the experience of reading; the second is how those issues interrelate with the determination of aesthetic evaluation. In other words, how is it possible that an experience of reading a description of violence may result in an ethical response that is not necessarily the same as that which would result from witnessing an instance of actual violence, and what would be the aesthetic implications of that experience? It has already been suggested that ethics and aesthetics are closely related in texts that depict violence. Although it may be possible to read a text as a linguistic construct without evoking further judgement, most representations of violence, whether the violence is direct or

indirect, structural or psychological, will be read within a framework of ethical values. The ethical connotations of the text will therefore interact with aesthetic considerations, influencing such factors as the appraisal of the proficiency of the representation, as well as the awareness of the metaphoricity and/or realism of the depiction.

As has been established in earlier chapters, a textual representation is the iterable, contingent and context-dependent denotation of extralinguistic objects, events, properties and notions in the form of writing, such representation being open to infinite interpretation, but simultaneously constrained by communities of understanding which allow for inter-subjective and sufficient meaning to be generated with respect to any text. The ethical dimension of reading therefore takes place within that inter-subjective space; that is, the generation of meaning that precipitates ethical cognition by the individual within the context of his or her socio-linguistic community, and is framed by the ethical norms that necessarily exist within, and are determined by, that community. However, it will be argued here that most ethical norms are open to question with regard to a responsible and ethical reading of a text that is explicitly or implicitly violent, and that the notion of an ethical system is incoherent when applied to the notion of an iterable and contextual representation of violence. In addition, any discussion of such representation needs to consider how the language employed to depict acts of violence creates the conditions for the generation of an ethical response by a reader.

There are at least three aspects that are instrumental in responding to a representation of violence. These are the inter-related concepts of expectation, aesthetic preference and justification, which occur respectively prior to, during, and subsequent to reading. The first, expectation, may be defined as the contextualisation of a potential reading prior to the reading of the text. The second, aesthetic preference, assumes the reader's capacity to apply and modify that contextualisation within a particular framework throughout the experience of the text. The third, justification, is the capacity of the reader to recognise the reading of a representation of violence as a potentially aesthetic experience, which is based on the ethical criteria suggested by expectation and preference. These three aspects will now be considered in more detail.

2. Aestheticisation and Expectation

The language employed to represent or describe acts of violence, whether direct or indirect, individual or structural, is conventionally negative in tone: such acts are usually described as being committed or perpetrated against victims. The notion of violence is therefore considered as being destructive, and consequently detrimental to any conception of what (most) individuals would consider to be socially acceptable. The result of this negative lexicon is that a representation of violence intimates a pre-determined ethical latency which becomes a crucial aspect of the creation of the ethical and aesthetic process when the text is read. As argued in Chapters 4 and 5, the degree of aestheticisation employed is largely responsible for the degree of realism experienced by the reader, and this has implications for the ethical response to the text. The aestheticisation of violence is the way in which violence is projected so that feelings of disgust and other negative emotions (fear, outrage, horror, and so on), that would accompany a real-life instance of violence, may be replaced with an appreciation of, and satisfaction with, an aesthetic or literary modality of representation. This applies more often in texts that are understood to be fictional, or at least historically removed from the context within which the reader is experiencing them. In such cases, the representation may modify the ethical response of the reader from the negative connotations of actual violence into the less negative connotations of aestheticised violence. For example, consider the following extracts, each taken from a text concerned with conflicts in Northern Africa

1. Fatima Ghodbane was wearing a veil in her classroom in the Mohamed Lazar school when they came for her in March 1995, six men armed with hunting guns and pistols … they tore off her veil, tied her hands, stabbed her in the face and then cut her throat [and] placed her severed head outside the classroom door.
(Fisk 2006: 695)

2. On an undamaged portico clustered six thousand men, women and children, Jewish refugees. Legionaries who still had vivid memories of comrades who'd been burned to death on one such portico as a result of Jewish duplicity torched the portico, and all six thousand perished. At the same time, priests who tried to surrender were put to death.
(Dando-Collins 2002: 254)

3. Gradually people came to the end of the avenues; they hurled into the flames pearls, gold vases, cups, torches, all their wealth; the offerings became more and more

splendid and numerous. At last a man tottering, pale, and hideous with terror, pushed
a child; then a small black mass could be seen in the hands of the colossus; it was
swallowed up in the great dark opening.
(Flaubert: 1977: 240)

All three texts deal with accounts of atrocity, yet not many readers would react in the same way to each; the first, a recent and verifiable murder in Algeria; the second, an account of the sacking of Jerusalem almost 2000 years ago; the third, the fictional re-creation of child sacrifice in Ancient Carthage. A reader will probably feel more revulsion at the immediacy of the first extract.[1] Yet to read of the atrocities of the Roman Legions in the early Common Era will not evoke comparable feelings of horror and despair –the distancing effect of history situates the violence within a different ethical paradigm: a reader may still be disturbed by the violence, but often only in relation to his or her current contextual position. The juxtaposition of the historical representation and the contemporary context allows for a reaction to the violence, rather than for an empathy with the particular victims of that violence. Similarly, although the verifiable practice of child sacrifice in ancient Carthage may still evoke a negative reaction, the horror of the third extract again lies in the representation of the event, rather than in any specific empathy for individual victims. A reader may enjoy Flaubert's novel as a fictional recreation of a historical era, and appreciate the historical information of Dando-Collins's account of the fall of Jerusalem. Yet to realise that Fatima Ghodbane was actually murdered in recent times creates an immediate ethical response to the first extract, which is opposed to the meta-responses experienced when reading the aestheticised representations of the other two extracts.

This notion of a pleasurable meta-response to aestheticised violence, as contrasted with the response to actual violence, has long been a topic of discussion in aesthetic theory. For example, both Aristotle and Hume considered the problem of an aesthetic response to an event that would usually cause anguish when experienced in actuality. Aristotle concluded that it is the means of imitative representation (the aestheticisation) that allows for a positive response. He claims in the *Poetics* that even the sight of unpleasant

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[1] The author admits that to bear witness to the atrocity makes him complicit, even though ignoring atrocity does not erase it: "The moment I open the papers each morning, I feel I must look over my shoulder to see if anyone is watching me. Merely to look at these terrible images is a criminal act" (Fisk 2006: 695).

representations such as corpses or "lower animals" is made pleasant by the excellence of the imitation (Aristotle 1965: 35).[2] Likewise, Hume's essay "Of Tragedy" argues that any experience of a representation of tragedy (which, by its very nature, involves violence of one sort or another, be it institutional or personal), that in an external actuality would cause distress, is accompanied by two conflicting emotions. The first and dominant emotion is pleasure at the manner of representation. The second, subordinate, emotion is the negative emotion caused by what is represented. The former emotion, being the dominant one, absorbs the latter negative emotion without diminishing any of its intensity, thus increasing the feelings of delight in the aesthetic representation: "The force of imagination, the energy of expression, the power of numbers, the charms of imitation; all of these are naturally, of themselves, delightful to the mind: and when the object presented lays also hold of some affection, the pleasure rises upon us by the conversion of this subordinate movement into that which is predominant" (Hume 1757b: 126). Although this hierarchy of emotion is not absolute, and may be inverted by some readers, the continuing popularity of tragedy seems to suggest that the pleasure experienced through reading an aestheticised representation of violence tends to prevail over the attendant negative emotions evoked by the violent circumstances represented.

An aestheticisation of a representation of violence therefore involves the imaginative re-construction of a represented world in which the response to the portrayal is shaped by the mode of representation. The degree to which figuration, metaphor and other tropic devices are used also helps to establish whether the reader experiences the depiction as more or less explicit. When reading a text, the reader is placed in a situation where he or she is accountable for the imaginative construction of the events portrayed. Even in a linguistically unproblematic text, the particulars supplied by the author have to be interpreted and reinterpreted throughout the reading. The result of such reader-response "concretizing" is that "the reader makes implicit connections, fills in the gaps, draws inferences and tests out hunches ... The text itself is really no more than a series of 'cues'

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[2] It is not necessarily the case that aestheticisation would result in appreciation, as there is always the possibility of revulsion. Aristotle's argument, however, seems to emphasise the excellence of the representation, and not necessarily an appreciation of the subject-matter. These considerations are also inevitably dependent upon such aspects as the degree of mediation and the contextual space of the representation.

to the reader, invitations to construct a piece of language into meaning" (Eagleton 1983: 76).[3] Additionally, the social positioning of the reader is instrumental in establishing the ethical structure necessary for forming an aesthetic assessment. The expectations that influence the value of a fictional text will be affected by the aestheticisation of the narrative; those that influence the attributed value of a factual text will be affected by the verifiability of the narrative. Whereas aestheticisation is an accepted and even desired element of reading fictionally represented violence, the expectations of the potential reader of a factual account of violence would probably result in some hostility towards excessive degrees of aestheticisation.

The ethical response of the potential reader is therefore significantly influenced by his or her expectations regarding the potential factual or fictional modes predominant in an unread text. To frustrate those expectations often results in a dramatic reconstitution of the aesthetic response of the reader. An example of this is the controversy surrounding Norma Khouri's *Forbidden Love*, published in 2003. Supposedly a factual account of a Jordanian honour killing, the author admitted after publication that certain names, dates and locations had been fabricated, ostensibly to protect the individuals involved in the narrative. The response of the publishing company to the admission is revealing. In a radio interview, a managing director of the company announced that it would not publish the sequel to the book, because "if there are serious factual inaccuracies – which she has admitted to – then how do we know what to believe? You know, if the book is non-fiction, everything within it *has to be true*, and she can't pick and choose which bits are true and which bits are not" (quoted in *The Star* newspaper, 19 August 2004; emphasis added). What is significant about this example is that, prior to the author's admission that she had altered certain passages, the book had sold over 250,000 copies. In other words, the ethical judgment of the readers, grounded upon specific expectations based on issues of belief and verifiability, determined the positive aesthetic approval of the narrative. Despite the author's protestations that she would "never call that book fiction, and I will never call that book a novel", the ethical response to the non-verifiable elements of the narrative in many cases reversed this aesthetic response. It is therefore apparent that

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[3] The discussion in Chapter 3, Section 1 has relevance to this argument.

ethical expectations determined aesthetic evaluation before and after the revelations of fabrication, despite the text's remaining identical throughout. What is paradoxical about this example is that, if the author had initially acknowledged that certain segments of the representation had with sound reason been altered (as was the case with Krog's *Country of my Skull*), then the expectations of the readers would have been less compromised by any modification to the supposed factuality of the text, and the subsequent aesthetic response would have been more likely to remain positive.[4]

3. The Problem of Aesthetic Preference

If expectation is a precondition for reading a text, then aesthetic preference is the subsequent process through which that text is experienced. If ethics and aesthetics interact in representations of violence, then in order to be aware of how this occurs, it is necessary to consider the functioning of preference. The notion of aesthetic preference has frequently been assumed to be the province of competency. In other words, some individuals may consider themselves exclusively competent in the determination of a cultural paradigm through which certain standards of preference are considered appropriate, usually to the detriment of other standards of preference that do not conform to the dominant paradigm. For example, Hume claims in "On the Standard of Taste" that "a true judge in the finer arts is observed, even during the most polished ages, to be so rare a character; strong sense, united to delicate sentiment, improved by practice, perfected by comparison, and clear of all prejudice, can alone entitle critics to this valuable character; and the joint verdict of such, wherever they are to be found, is the true standard of taste and beauty ... Though men of delicate taste be rare, they are easily to be distinguished in society, by the soundness of their understanding and the superiority of their faculties above the rest of mankind" (Hume 1757a: 140).

Hume's conception of the "true critic", he or she who personifies a justification of a certain taste, is further developed by the Kantian premise of "disinterestedness": "*Taste* is

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[4] The effect of expectation on texts whose factual status is placed in doubt will be discussed in more detail within the framework of postmodern ethics in Chapter 9, Section 2, where the similar case of Wilkomirski's *Fragments* will be considered.

the faculty of estimating an object or mode of representation by means of a delight or aversion *apart from any interest*" (Kant 1993: 165). Kant's argument is that any individual who satisfies the condition of disinterestedness must necessarily experience the same reaction to an artwork as any other individual who also satisfies that condition, and such an experience is therefore indicative of an absolute criterion of judgement, liberated from any confining contextual partiality. Yet it has been maintained throughout this study that any text is necessarily iterable, and hence contextually dependent: there exist no universal or absolute standards of aesthetic preference, but only context-dependent (re)interpretations of representations of an extra-textual actuality, be the text null or verifiable in its denotation. Both Hume and Kant tend to perpetuate an error by ignoring the context of the judgement. Since responses to any reading are determined by context and the iterable nature of the narrative, it is not convincing to privilege one standard of aesthetic preference over another, be that the preference of the majority or otherwise. To privilege the estimation of the majority is problematic as aesthetic preference cannot be determined solely on the basis of a superiority of numbers, and the minority position cannot be discarded merely because it is inconsistent with the majority outlook. A further problem, disregarded by proponents of an absolute standard of aesthetic preference, is that of the competency of the judges themselves. There can be no decontextualised and objective point-of-view regarding aesthetic preference; therefore any judgement of a text can only be subjective. This can be seen in the debate regarding Herbert Selby's novel *Last Exit to Brooklyn*, in which differing responses to the text resulted in differing evaluations regarding the worth of the text.[5]

The development of a conception of aesthetic preference, once separated from notions of universality, can be influenced by a consideration of the role of ethics in its determination. However, it is necessary to reiterate that ethical judgement and aesthetic evaluation, are not identical, although the two inform and influence each other, and it is erroneous to attempt to conflate the two. A judgement of the *aesthetically* good is not equivalent to a judgement of the *ethically* good, and it is not legitimate to advocate that ethical and aesthetic concerns are interchangeable. For example, Nazi concentration camp

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[5] The controversy surrounding *Last Exit to Brooklyn* will be discussed in detail in Chapter 8, Section 1.1.

commanders listening to the music-dramas of Wagner and reading the texts of Goethe and Nietzsche cannot be censured for being aesthetically hypocritical, even though their ethical justifications may diverge from contemporary ethical opinion.[6] Aesthetic preference, liberated from the universal, becomes a social construct, relative to socio-cultural conventions which determine the intersubjective judgements available to the potential reader. Yet even the endeavour to manufacture the conditions necessary for a transgression of the prevailing standards of aesthetic preference is determined by the dominant standard. Transgression can take place – and can be defined as such – only in response to the terms dictated by the canonical texts which dominate the established criteria, and which through closely associated ethical norms determine any inter-subjective aesthetic judgment. This also explains the seeming divergence of judgements within the same discourse, as most instances can be related (either positively or negatively) to the paradigms dictated by the current discourse or ideology. The suitability of representations of violence must be established according to intersubjective standards of aesthetic preference and ethical rightness, that are in turn determined by the contextually prevalent ethical norms.

One response to this relativism of aesthetic preference has been that of the pre-critical approach, in which any critical awareness of the issues involved in the production, distribution and appreciation of a text becomes irrelevant to the initial aesthetic evaluation of that text. The leading proponent of the pre-critical approach was Susan Sontag, whose essay "Against Interpretation" argues for an "aesthetics-of-silence", in which all art is empowered to resist the imposition of the intellectual will. In this view, the critic is involved in a process of the sterilisation of aesthetic preference, of creating an impenetrable intellectual aura around art which effectively robs it of its excitement, significance and relevance to the potential reader: "Interpretation ... violates art. It makes art into an article for use, for arrangement into a mental scheme of categories" (Sontag

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[6] It is also not necessarily the case that their ethical reasons for reading a text are equivalent to their actions as exterminators. A reading of Nietzsche may be undertaken on grounds of philosophical enquiry rather than as a validation of a *Übermensch* philosophy, and Wagnerian music-drama may be enjoyed on auditory or narrative grounds rather than as a vehicle for racial or nationalist considerations. The individual reading of a text is determined by inter-subjective prejudices and attitudes, but such intersubjectivity is not exclusively dependent upon only one possible ethical norm.

1966: 53). However, many of the proponents of the pre-critical school, by following an egalitarian position in rejecting accepted standards as elitist and opinionated, display a dogmatism and authoritarianism reminiscent of many other twentieth-century critical and literary-theoretical approaches.[7] Given the iterable nature of the text, it is not possible to avoid interpretation, and even a cursory approach to a text must necessarily include elements of interpretation, even if these are not articulated in a recognisable critical discourse. A postmodern response to the pre-critical approach would need to question the implication of an individual standard of aesthetic preference which is divorced from both intersubjective interpretation and the possibilities of contextual iterability.

It is therefore not possible to circumvent the notion of aesthetic preference altogether, as it exists as an important feature of the ethical dimension of reading and interpreting any text. This follows from the prevailing intersubjective, pre-existing aesthetics and ethics of a potential reader, combined with the precepts of reception theory and iterability. Aesthetic preference is essential to the reading process, and therefore contributes to the ethical process in which differing representations of violence are justified (or repudiated) in the opinion of the potential reader.

4. The Justification for Violence in Texts

The reading of a narrative representing violence is a means towards an active response to that representation. This is not necessarily an *enjoyable* response; rather, an active response is one in which the reader experiences what Feagin refers to as a "meta-response". This is the consequence of an active involvement in a text while experiencing the representation, even if the emotions generated by the representation are considered negative. It implies that the potential reader can experience the emotions generated by a

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[7] This can be observed in the writings of Leslie Fiedler, who "would make the gut reaction the be-all and end-all of art" (Guerin et al, 1992: 5). His essay "Cross the Border - Close the Gap" in Waugh 1992: 31-47 is a clear example of his theoretical position. It is sometimes ironic that critics argue against interpretation. In an appreciation of Susan Sontag's career following her death in 2004, a *Time* magazine article noted that "she argued for a more sensuous, less intellectual approach to art. It was an irony lost on no one, except perhaps her, that she made those arguments in paragraphs that were marvels of strenuous intellection" (January 10 2005).

violent occurrence without actually having to experience the trauma of the event: "The fact that pleasurable meta-responses to our sympathetic responses to tragedy are appropriate to art but not in life suggests one respect in which aesthetic emotions are different from the emotions of life … The peculiarity of the responses hinges on the fact that what one initially responds to is not real" (Feagin 1983: 313). Representation provides the framework for the meta-response, with such a response being evaluated in terms of the prevailing inter-subjective ethical constructs combined with the degree of aestheticisation present in the individual text.

Yet the textual representation of violence encapsulates a paradox, which can be described as the contradictory notion of an aesthetically satisfying response to a representation of an instance of violence which would typically be considered objectionable or disconcerting in a verifiable, actual occurrence, as discussed earlier in relation to the texts of Fisk, Dando-Collins and Flaubert. That response suggests a particular ethical stance, which in turn influences the aesthetic response to the text. When the text in question is fictional, the reader reacts to it in a manner governed by the aestheticisation of the representation: hence the meta-response. The awareness that the violence is an instance of a null denotation allows him or her to experience it in a different manner from that in which it might be experienced or witnessed in actuality. The response that results in such a case is primarily ethical and aesthetic, rather than a direct emotional response. Yet factual accounts, as explained in Chapter 4, frequently employ the tropes and syntax of fiction, and such instances of violence are evaluated in a manner indistinguishable from the interpretation of fictional narratives. The result of this is that the reading and evaluation of non-fictional narratives is indistinguishable from the reading of fictional narratives except for the sort of reader expectation. Nevertheless, even if the expectation that a text is the representation of an actual event or person is vindicated, the reason for the continued reading of that factual representation of violence remains comparable to the reading of a fictional representation of violence.

The notions of expectation and aesthetic preference have already been discussed. What needs to be further clarified is the third *a priori* condition for the development of an

ethical response to a narrative concerning violence: the notion of justification. The degree of justification afforded to a representation will generate an ethical space within which the text may be evaluated aesthetically, and is therefore essential to a discussion of the paradox of representing violence. Therefore three potential accounts of the paradox of responding to a representation of violence will be considered, namely catharsis, sensation-seeking, and the motive of justice.

4.1 Catharsis

The first mention of catharsis in a literary-critical context appears in Chapter 6 of Aristotle's *Poetics*: "A tragedy is the imitation of an action which is serious and, having grandeur, complete in itself, done in language seasoned with embellishments, each appearing separately in different parts of the work, in dramatic rather than narrative form, accomplishing by way of pity and fear the catharsis of such feelings" (Aristotle 1965: 39). Yet the notion of catharsis has become particularly ambiguous in its various manifestations, and nowhere more than in its literary context. There exists much disagreement as to whether catharsis is a process of purgation, cleansing or purification, whether it is an experience of rational consciousness or an emotion, and whether it is a medical, psychological or literary phenomenon. Any definition of catharsis is therefore very much dependent on the critical or philosophical point of view of the writer. For example, Belfiore defines it as the "process of removing the shameless emotions that prevent the soul (*sic*) from acquiring, preserving or regaining emotional excellence" (Belfiore 1992: 340). Guinagh's definition is more explicitly psychological, "a conflict model between two forces: one to express emotions, and the other to stop the expression of emotions" (Guinagh 1987: 15). Malcolm Budd offers two differing aesthetic definitions. On the one hand, it is a "pathological theory" which "construes catharsis as purgation and represents tragedy as affording a pleasurable relief of its distinctive emotions by means of a previous excitation of them" (Budd 1995: 110). On the other, it is the "refinement or purification of the tragic emotions effected by the disengagement of the emotions from that concern for the self in which they are found" (1995: 111).

Such variation of opinion regarding the exact nature of catharsis is closely linked to the fact that the word is used in at least two equally relevant Greek contexts.[8] In the medical context, it refers to purgation: "tragedy gives the public a therapeutic stimulation of the passions and will drive the audience to a crisis, followed by relief and a calm pleasure" (Belfiore 1992: 261). In the religious context, it refers to the purification associated with ritual. A further interpretation is apparent in an ethical context, the Aristotelian framework through which the development of character is dependent upon the ability to rejoice and to feel pain correctly. An experience of a representation of distressing violence should, therefore, produce such harmony (through catharsis) by confronting "reasonable fears". This provides an opportunity to contemplate a paradigm of violence by observing its relation to feelings of repugnance, while not being physically threatened by the violence.

Accordingly, depending upon the sense in which the term is employed, catharsis either excises or purifies emotions. The implication of this is that it facilitates a positive aesthetic experience of the representations of violence by either purging or purifying the excess of negative emotions that would be apparent in an encounter with actual violence. Yet to claim that catharsis removes a harmful excess of pity and fear is implausible, primarily because it is not necessarily the case that the potential reader is inherently possessed of such an excess. On the contrary, it seems more probable that for most readers the experience of reading violence arouses emotions rather than eradicating or alleviating them. To remove certain emotions from the reader's evaluation of a representation of violence is also not necessarily beneficial. However, if neither type of catharsis is essentially relevant to the ethical or aesthetic evaluation of textual instance of violence, then most of the justifications for the representation of violence which rely upon such a theory become unconvincing, if not incoherent. In the case of such reliance, the notion of catharsis becomes more of an excuse, and less of a justification, for the violence.

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[8] The word catharsis occurs 161 times in the authenticated works of Aristotle. 128 of these are used in a biological or medical sense, and the remainder are used in discussions of metaphysical, political or aesthetic issues (Belfiore 1992: 260). The dispute as to the definition of the term has resonance with Derrida's discussion of the *pharmakon* (as poison or cure) in "Plato's Pharmacy" (Derrida 1981a: 61-172).

Despite this, certain contemporary theories of catharsis persist in arguing that representations of violence "help people deal with real fears of things within and without themselves, even enabling them to rehearse their own deaths ... [such displays] help audiences to confront personal guilt indirectly, so that they might initiate real or imagined sins through the controlled trauma of the [representation]" (Zillmann 1998: 184). The indirect experience of violence is thus supposed to liberate the reader from negative emotion. Yet the application of this theory presupposes that conditions already exist that allow relief to manifest itself. The problem that arises is that "the presumption of fears, deficiencies, or impulsions is thus paramount … Unfortunately, it is this presupposition that gets in the way of providing testable verifiable proposals" (1998: 184). Another compelling argument against the cathartic potential of representations of violence is that, if it does result in purgation (or purification), then the repeated incidence of relief-providing stimuli may promote the development of negative reinforcement. The consequence of this is that, if a reader is exposed to frequent instances of depicted violence, then even more exposure to even greater degrees of violence would be required in order to achieve the same degree of relief. As a result of these and earlier objections, the argument for catharsis as a sole justification for the enjoyment or endorsement of representations of violence cannot be sustained. To conclude that such representation allows for a catharsis of those emotions that would otherwise cause or encourage actual violence cannot comprehensively elucidate the characteristics of representations of violence, or the gratification obtained from reading them. It is necessary, therefore, to examine two influential alternative theories that endeavour to justify an aesthetic response to the textual representation of violence.

4.2 Sensation-Seeking

Edmund Burke's essay "A Philosophical Enquiry into the Sublime and the Beautiful" of 1757 offers a precise articulation of what has become known as the sensation-seeking theory of violence. According to Burke, the vast majority of mankind is highly attracted to the violent and the tragic, to the extent that "there is no spectacle we so eagerly pursue, as that of some uncommon and grievous calamity." Burke further asserts that "we shall be much mistaken if we attribute any considerable part of our satisfaction in tragedy to a

consideration that tragedy is a deceit, and its representations no realities. The nearer it approaches the reality, and the further it removes us from all idea of fiction, the more perfect is its power" (Burke 1998: 93).[9] Burke's hypothesis of the sublime is also based on the notion that the average human being is governed by a desire for (safe) sensation. This is consistent with certain recent studies (McCauley 1998: 150) which conclude that people with a high propensity for sensation or thrill maximisation have tendencies towards disinhibition, boredom and the need for yet more extreme experiences. This thrill-maximisation confirms the objection that representing violence encourages negative reinforcement as proposed in the previous section. This has been attributed to the "civilising process" in which aestheticised violence gives a means of filling the void left by the decreasing opportunities to experience violence directly (Goldstein 1998: 217).[10] Similarly, Vicki Goldberg (1998: 27-52) has argued that as the dying and dead become removed from personal experience, so images of violence have increased. The idea is that as society becomes more enlightened, and consequently comparatively monotonous, the need for alternative sensations increases, as well as for experiences that challenge the ethical norms of society without significantly violating them. Those who fall into the category of sensation-seekers are more likely to respond positively to texts that operate at a low level of linguistic aestheticisation, such as Ellis's *American Psycho*, Selby's *Last Exit to Brooklyn*, and Harris's *Hannibal*. Representations of institutional violence (without corresponding representations of personal violence) and highly aestheticised violence, as in Michaels's *Fugitive Pieces* and Koestler's *Darkness at Noon*, do not guarantee the required stimuli for thrill maximisation.[11] However, such sensation-seeking often results in little more than habituation and negative reinforcement, as those who

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[9] Although Burke argues that most people would prefer to watch the burning of London than a play (1988: 94), to articulate the effect of the sublime concerning the representation of actual tragedy is often considered improper, despite the fascination felt by the witnesses. An extreme example of this is the response of the composer Karlheinz Stockhausen to the 9/11 attacks in America: "What happened there – they all have to rearrange their brains now – is the greatest work of art ever" (Minor 2001: 1). The disapprobation that followed this comment, however, suggests that such a blurring of the distinction between art and actual disaster is ethically unacceptable to most readers: "Many perceived that what the German composer did was unspeakable … because he dared to articulate the ineffable and the horrific in the name of art" (2001: 2).

[10] That the "void" exists was starkly proven by the thousands of people who, from choice, watched the video of the execution of Saddam Hussein on the Internet. It is not necessarily the case that only those of a certain psycho-pathological makeup would wish to witness the actual death of another human being.

[11] For examples drawn from each type of text, see Chapter 5, Section 1.2.

initially respond to the scenes of violence are liable to experience an attenuation of emotional response through repeated exposure.

This sensation-seeking, although consistent with reasons for the enjoyment of represented violence, is not necessarily a justification for those representations. The ethical and moral issues raised by sensation-seeking seem to be inherently unconstructive, and the value of texts such as Poe's "The Pit and the Pendulum"[12] is compromised by the negative implications of thrill maximisation, which implies the glorification of violence for its own sake. The ethical enquiry into representations of violence needs to take into account the ethical issues at stake with regard to actual violence; consequently, sensation-seeking cannot be a factor in that enquiry. What is more significant is the notion of the justice-motive, which determines to a far larger extent the inter-subjective evaluation of narratives.

4.3 The Justice Motive

The justice motive attempts to give a rationale for representations of violence through its dependence upon the punitive possibilities foregrounded by the text. In a large number of texts, from *Beowulf* to *Hannibal*, plots are dominated by situations in which the harmony of the social order is threatened by an external power, often represented by a character alien to the ethical norms of that society. Harmony may be restored only through the intervention of an heroic individual who is recognisably part of the threatened society, and who is able to counteract the destructive potential of the threat. Any acts of violence perpetrated by this individual are condoned and encouraged, with the result that such instances become justified through the reader's recognition of their necessarily punitive nature. Such identification is thus considered satisfying to the potential reader whose socio-cultural context places him or her on the side of the hero. However, the violence of the protagonist has to occur in response to the violence perpetrated by the threatening figure: "any gruesome retributive killing has to appear just, and this appearance has to be prepared by witnessing the party to be punished perform increasingly despicable heinous crimes. This is to say that escalations in the portrayal of righteous, enjoyable violence

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[12] This text is discussed in Chapter 6, Section 2.

necessitate escalations in morally enraging, evil, and distressing violence" (Zillmann 1998: 206). Readers who experience revulsion at the acts of the violent Other are hence deemed more liable to encourage the representation of punitive violence, thus effectively sanctioning the latter as aesthetically gratifying. The justice motive can be employed either to allow the reader to approve the violence necessary to eliminate any threat, or it can be excluded altogether in order to create sympathy and/or empathy for the protagonist (as in "The Pit and the Pendulum", where the narrator is unable to effect any punitive violence in response to the violence enacted upon him).

The justice motive is an element, explicitly or implicitly, of any representation of violence. In texts in which it is explicit, it suggests that certain specified instances of violence are to be celebrated, owing to their potential for serving punitive ends. In addition, such representations are often a reflection of the institutional violence that determines the character of the socially acceptable individual who is able to triumph over the menace of the alien. Yet this division of responses to representations of violence is subject to the same objections to violence suggested by Wolff in the previous chapter. Wolff argues that the violence of a murder and the violence of a legal execution are only distinguishable by means of recognising the assumed legitimacy of the latter.[13] Similarly, each representation of violence is indistinguishable from the others as acts of violence, since they differ only in terms of degree and the conflict between the same and the Other. However, both explicit and implicit instances of the justice motive reflect a certain contextual positioning that influences not only the ethical appraisal of the value of a text, but also its subsequent aesthetic evaluation. The justice motive therefore provides the most compelling hypothesis with regard to the justification of the representation of violence as a condition for the ethical evaluation of an iterable text, even if this hypothesis is still flawed in certain respects.

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[13] The execution of Saddam Hussein, with its attendant controversy over his status as martyr or war criminal, is again relevant, as it highlights this ambiguity between the terms murder and execution. For many Sunnis, his killing was murder, while for many Shiites it was justice.

5. Concluding Remarks

It is therefore evident that there can be no single explanation for the appeal of representations of violence, although some theories, particularly the justice motive and elements of the catharsis theory, may clarify certain aspects of the paradox in certain cases. Contextual differences ensure that diverse ethical responses and evaluations are to be anticipated, with various degrees of aestheticisation allowing for differing degrees and types of aesthetic responses. Before reading, the text has no intrinsic value or meaning. However, once the process of reading has begun, then an implied ethical space is generated by the potential reader, subject to that individual's inter-subjective application of expectation, aesthetic preference and justification. These factors, in turn, inform and are informed by the ethical norms and assumptions of the reader's socio-cultural milieu. Yet the expectation of achieving universality is again shown to be unrealistic, as no single norm or system of values can satisfactorily elucidate the potential ethical understandings of a representation of violence. The next chapter will therefore articulate this problem further by examining some of the foremost normative ethical theories in relation to such texts, as well as elucidating some of the deficiencies of these theories.

CHAPTER 8

NORMATIVE ETHICS AND THE REPRESENTATION OF VIOLENCE

1. Ethical Theory and the Textual Representation of Violence

The previous chapters have all served to outline the conditions necessary for an ethical response to the representation of violence. To summarise:

1. Textual representation is the iterable, contingent and context-dependent denotation of extralinguistic objects, events, properties and notions in the form of written language, such representation being subject to infinite (re)interpretation.

2. The only significant difference between a factual and a fictional representation is the perception of the potential reader regarding the verifiability of the text.

3. Violence depicted in a text is the representation of an act of harm experienced by a potential reader whose understanding of the representation is contextually determined. The three conditions of expectation, aesthetic preference and justification also serve to influence this experience.[1]

Drawing on this summary, it is now feasible to reflect on the ethical dimensions of reading a representation of violence. As an example, consider the following extract. It depicts a public execution in Paris in the nineteenth century: an instance of direct personal violence initiated as a consequence of institutional violence. The isolated extract cannot be distinguished as being either definitively factual or fictional. As it stands, it could be a passage from a realist novel, a historical account, or even a fictional recreation of a factual occurrence.[2] Since the reader has no direct access either to the context or the historical verifiability of the event, he or she is compelled to make certain ethical

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[1] However, all three notions can be considered as being problematic in various respects (see Chapter 7, Sections 2 and 4).
[2] Such de-contextualisation is not common, but is employed here to illustrate the way in which supposition and contextualisation serve to read the text in a particular manner.

suppositions which are based on inter-subjective notions of taste, justification and expectation. However, the conclusions reached by the reader are subject to some modification when the previously concealed context is revealed, or when the assumed perspective is subsequently altered. The ethical response to a reading of the text is therefore largely a result of the (re)formulation of the contextual space within which the iterable narrative is (re)interpreted.[3]

> [The crucifix] was carried round the foot of the scaffold, to the front, and turned towards the criminal, that he might see it to the last. It was hardly in its place, when he appeared on the platform, bare-footed; his hands bound; and with the collar and neck of his shirt cut away, almost to the shoulder. A young man – six and twenty – vigorously made, and well-shaped. Face pale; small dark moustache, and dark brown hair … He immediately kneeled down below the knife. His neck was fitting into a hole, made for the purpose, in a cross plank, was shut down, by another plank above; exactly like the pillory. Immediately below him was a leathern bag. And into it his head rolled instantly.
> The executioner was holding it by the hair, and walking with it around the scaffold, showing it to the people, before one quite realized that the knife had fallen heavily, and with a rattling sound.
> When it had travelled around the four sides of the scaffold, it was set upon a pole in front, a little patch of black and white, for the long street to stare at, and the flies to settle on. The eyes were turned upward, as if he had avoided the sight of the leathern bag, and looked to the crucifix. Every tinge and hue of life had left it in that instant. It was dull, cold, livid, wax. The body also.
> There was a great deal of blood … A strange appearance was the apparent annihilation of the neck. The head was taken off so close that it seemed as if the knife had narrowly escaped crushing the jaw or shaving the ear; and the body looked as if there was nothing left above the shoulder.

The act of reading this passage will generate a number of different emotions in various readers, depending on the context of both the reader and the reading. For example, some may experience revulsion at the immediacy of the violence.[4] Some, assuming that such an execution is an extension of a legitimate legal process, may feel a certain gratification in terms of their personal advocacy of capital punishment. Others may experience the satisfaction of voyeurism or *schadenfreude*. Yet no matter which sensation is generated in response to the text, it is consistently a direct result of an ethical reaction to reading the depiction. This is the import of the statement that every representation of violence

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[3] It is worth re-emphasising at this point that an unread text can be neither true nor false; similarly it cannot encapsulate ethical values in the abstract. Its ethical space must be generated through the contextual positioning of the reader who reads it.

[4] Many may also experience revulsion at the realism of the representation – as pointed out earlier, less graphic representations are more likely to be considered ethically and aesthetically satisfactory by those who would be offended by a text written in a realist style.

presupposes an ethical space, as it allows for an interaction between the act of reading and the ethical presuppositions of the reader regarding the context of the narrative. The structure of presupposition is determined by the intersubjective ethical norms of the community of which the reader is constituent to which the reader belongs; this is also influenced by the (non)fictional potential of the text (within its own socio-cultural context).

It is apparent that the reactions experienced when the reader opens up an ethical space which was not previously available are also affected largely by the mode of composition. Hypothetically speaking, if the above passage were known to be an extract from a realist novel, then the ethical response would be experienced in a different manner from that evinced by a factual account: as a historical novel simulates history, the awareness of that simulation will be more likely to evince a meta-response (see Chapter 6, Section 4). This is not to suggest that the intensity of the response would necessarily be attenuated through experiencing a text as fictional rather than factual. However, if the representation is an instance of a deferred reality or null denotation, then the ethical implications would not be directly applicable to any verifiable individual or community in an extra-textual actuality. To reveal the context and genre of the text will therefore contribute significantly to the shaping of its ethical space.

Thus: the passage is an extract from a newspaper report composed for the *London Daily News* in 1845 (Dickens 1845: 4-5). This places the representation in a verifiable and chronological framework. It is now known to be a non-fictional account of a historically distant occurrence. Another relevant piece of information that will affect the reader's response is that it was written by Charles Dickens, an influential case of the Foucauldian signature of cultural value implied by the death of the author. Such data, revealed prior to reading the text, may result in many linking the text to Dickens's more prominent fictional output, particularly the scenes in *A Tale of Two Cities* in which descriptions of the guillotine are handled similarly to the factual account. While this does not negate the historical veracity of the account, Dickens's reputation as a famous novelist may result in the representation's assuming more importance than the actual event. The reader's ethical

evaluation of the text is largely determined by his or her knowledge of relevant contextual information (whether this was obtained prior or subsequent to reading the text). This information is never absolute, however. As argued in the discussion of *Forbidden Love* in the previous chapter, if it were later suggested to the same reader that the passage was, in fact, extracted from a work of fiction, then the resulting ethical evaluation would probably be radically transformed, to the extent of effecting a negation (or even a reversal) of any previous judgments regarding the text.[5] This change would likely occur even if there were no suggestion of deliberate deception, although in such a case the severity of the transformation would be less acute.

It is therefore evident that pre-existing ethical concerns and expectations (together with varying standards of taste and limits of justification) determine the way in which any representation of violence will be evaluated. However, the sentiment expressed by Hobbes in *The Elements of Laws* remains the central difficulty when attempting to isolate the means by which such ethical concerns are articulated: "Every man, for his own part, calleth that which pleaseth, and that is delightful to himself, GOOD; and that EVIL which displeaseth him; insomuch that while every man differeth from other in constitution, they differ also from another concerning the common distinction of good and evil" (Higgin 1999: 86). The problem of the very existence of a divergent number of normative ethical systems seems to be illustrated by Hobbes's judgement regarding the parochialism of each. The assumptions of the value systems of deontology and utilitarianism will now be examined in some detail, firstly to clarify their claims to a universal conception of the ethical, and secondly to apply those claims to reading representations of violence.[6]

1.1 Deontological Ethics

Any attempt at establishing the foundations of an ethics of textuality must take into account three principle factors: the subject (or potential reader) who reads; the text; and

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[5] For an example of how initial evaluations may be reversed owing to a change in the factual status of a text, see Chapter 8, Section 2. Dickens's fiction may be regarded as giving a "true" picture, even though his characters are imaginary.

[6] There are numerous other philosophical accounts of ethics, including virtue ethics, hedonism and contractualism. However, the two mentioned above have been selected for discussion on the basis of their particular relevance to the normative production and reception of representations of violence.

the social, political and moral context in which such a reading may occur. Following the precepts of Kantian philosophy,[7] the human mind (the subject) can be hypothesised only in terms of the way in which it thinks. Similarly, the world (the object's of the subject's experience) can be hypothesised only in terms of the way in which the mind is related to it: "Thoughts without content are empty; intuitions without concepts, blind" (Kant 1993: 69). The result is that the human thinking subject is inextricably linked to the objects of the world. The world can be divided into two types of reality: the phenomenal (the world as it appears to us) and the noumenal (the world as it actually is). Kant's basic premise is that the subject can experience the object in a coherent fashion only if the subject is orientated towards, or perceived by, the object. The possibility of cognition or knowledge in the thinking subject is therefore constituted on transcendental *a priori* grounds; cognition is assumed to be of universal significance as it is not rooted in any social or cultural context. Hence Kant can claim a universal account of rational cognition, although knowledge of the phenomenal world is inextricably linked to a subjective view of it: "So soon as we abstract in thought our own subjective nature, the object represented, with the properties ascribed to it by sensible intuition, entirely disappears, because it was only this subjective nature that determined the form of the object as appearance" (1993: 62). The subject who reads is therefore experiencing the textual representation primarily in a Platonic sense: as an appearance within consciousness, with no access to the real world, and mediated through the medium of the text and the "subjective constitution" of the empirical.

The idea of the subject also becomes important to the notion of ethics in the Kantian system. Graham (2004: 115) has identified three main premises that serve to establish this system, namely intention, universalizability, and duty. The first of these argues that it is the product of a good will that is essential to ethics: the consequences of the actions of the subject, and even the actions themselves, are largely irrelevant to the conception of a good moral life. The second concept, universalizability, is based upon the notion of the maxim (defined as an action for a reason) and the subsequent obligation of adherence to

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[7] Kantian philosophy is a complex and challenging area of enquiry, and the following summary is not intended to be exhaustive or definitive. Although some simplification is unavoidable, it provides the basic framework for an ethical conception of a text grounded upon Kantian precepts.

the categorical imperative, which claims to transcend the subject's cultural context by demanding rational principles of action that are assumed to be universal. As Kant's conception of the categorical imperative is based on the precepts of practical reason (principles of ethical reasoning not governed by any passions or emotions), this obviates the need to include a corresponding empiricism based on sensory experience. As a result, the third claim, that the moral life consists in duty for duty's sake, asserts that obedience to the moral law *for its own sake* is a prerequisite of practical reason. Yet the consequence of a duty-bound ethics largely removes the subject as the principal actor within the ethical space, and replaces him or her with the dictates of the society or community which determine the practical nature of that duty.

It has been argued in this thesis that an autonomous, ahistorical and disinterested knowledge is unattainable. Nevertheless, it is constructive to examine how the particularly influential ethical theory of Kant can be applied to an ethics of reading. His system is fundamentally based upon the second premise above, namely universalizability. This includes the application of the Kantian categorical imperative as defined in his *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*: "There is, therefore, only one categorical imperative. It is: Act only according to that maxim by which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law" (Kant 1785a: 86). By this, Kant insists that consideration of a particular course of action must include a consideration by the subject of whether or not it should be the case that every subject (each having the same reasoning) should act in an identical manner. A further imperative that Kant derives from this basic categorical imperative is the so-called "practical" imperative: "Act so that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or that of another always as an end and never as a means only" (1785a: 94). The obvious problem with the categorical imperative, however, is its supposition of universalizability, its assumption that all individuals, regardless of any particular context, will necessarily aspire to identical universal maxims. The flaw in this assumption is made evident when two maxims contradict each other: this results in the emergence of a dispute over which has ethical superiority: the universal or the historical. It will invariably be the case that the maxim of the dominant (or at least more powerful) discourse will prevail, a situation which tends to render the entire

conception of the categorical imperative incoherent. In other words, if any situation allows for one maxim to dominate whenever an ethical dilemma takes place, then the ideal of universalizability is necessarily undermined.[8]

The assumption of ethical dominance based on notions of a categorical imperative is relevant to the generation of an ethical space within a textual representation, as it allows for the probability of censorship in some form. That this is not confined to deontological ethics will be demonstrated in later sections. However, censorship tends to be most prevalent within the dictates of a duty-based ethics. A censor may be defined as:

1. A person authorized to examine various texts (books, letters, articles etc.) in order to suppress in whole or in part those considered obscene, morally unacceptable, politically unacceptable, and so on.

2. Any person who assumes the power to control or suppress the activities of others, usually on moral or political grounds.

With these definitions in mind, consider again the extract by Dickens. It may be hypothesised that Dickens's maxim as regards the account of the event could be: "it is necessary to describe the event I witnessed in order to arouse opposition to capital punishment".[9] This maxim would then will the universality of free speech and an opposition to the institutional violence that legitimises capital punishment. However, a censor employed to safeguard the political foundations of that institutional violence could probably experience the extract as a disparagement of the state and its institutions: his (contrary) maxim might read: "No person shall undermine the legitimate practices of the state". Yet another censor – one concerned with maintaining a certain imposed moral order – might employ the maxim that "no text shall depict violence in a manner that may corrupt the sensibilities of the reader". The latter two maxims would necessarily contradict the maxim of the author. Yet, as the censors implement the values propounded

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[8] Yet this incoherence does not preclude many from employing the categorical imperative for their own ends while simultaneously assuming ethical authority. Graham quotes Arendt's assertion that the Holocaust was made possible by "the odd notion … that to be law abiding means not merely to obey the laws but to act as though those concerned were the legislator of the laws that one obeys" (2004:121).

[9] This is but one possible maxim, and it is used to illustrate the point that competing maxims negate universalizability. Although the extract does not overtly imply this maxim, it is suggested here as an illustrative possibility, rather than an as ethical position adopted by Dickens.

in the dominant discourse – in this case, the state – they not only have the opportunity to participate in the determination of the ethical system that obtains within that discourse, but are mandated to enforce that system through the suppression of any narrative considered to be subversive. Each contributor may in good conscience follow the precepts of his or her own conception of the moral law. Yet the differences of opinion that can and do exist render the categorical imperative ineffective in dealing with any incongruity. If the dominant ethics is deontological, then the categorical imperative will be employed to suppress objectionable texts, most commonly on religious, sexual, political or social grounds (the latter including representations of violence). To illustrate this further, a consideration of the attempted suppression of a representation of violence – Hubert Selby's *Last Exit to Brooklyn* – is instructive.[10]

Last Exit to Brooklyn is a fictional narrative which includes a series of episodes describing incidents in the lives of various New York characters of a lower economic class. The narrative includes graphically detailed depictions of direct personal violence, including scenes of brutal sexuality. The language is demotic, often omitting punctuation, and the narrative as a whole "portrays a hellish existence that appears to continue as the characters age" (Karolides, Bald and Sova 1999: 384). Although available in the United States for a number of years, the book's publication in the United Kingdom in 1966 resulted in "the sad and shameful case in which two British Members of Parliament, motivated by the desire to protect the public from reality, arraigned *Last Exit* under the Obscene Publications Act and – on 10th December 1966, at Marlborough Street Magistrates' Court, London – had the satisfaction of hearing an order for the forfeiture and destruction of three copies of the book. Mr. Leo Gradwell, the magistrate responsible, pronounced that *Last Exit*, 'taken as a whole, would tend to deprave and corrupt, and I cannot think, in spite of the evidence I have heard, that it can be justified by literary merit'" (Anthony Burgess, in Selby 1993: xiii). It is worth noting that the two Members of Parliament concerned were both of the British Conservative Party, a political

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[10] Various texts that were suppressed on grounds of their representation of violence could be included in this discussion. Many of these are to be found in *100 Banned Books* (Karolides, Bald and Sova: 1999). The case of *Last Exit* is therefore illustrative of the effects of the censorship that often results from adherence to a duty-bound ethic.

organisation known for emphasising the notion of so-called traditional moral values, and that although over thirty expert witnesses were called to defend the literary and ethical value of the book, it was found by the jury to be obscene, and that "the effect of reading the book was to horrify, shock, disgust, and nauseate" (Karolides, Bald and Sova 1999: 385).[11] This is an obvious example of the way in which differing conceptions of morality conflict with one another. On the one hand, there were those who considered the book objectionable not merely for themselves as readers, but for *all* potential readers. This assumption of ethical authority resulted in the imposition of the categorical imperative as an embodiment of a particular social preconception, and the perception of a repressive state morality attempting to impose ethical precepts. On the other hand, there were those who found the novel to be both socially relevant (owing to its critique of institutional and direct violence), as well as having literary value.[12]

The consequence of such divergence of opinion necessarily argues against a deontological theory of ethics, as any system which assumes a universal ethical authority cannot be considered practicable when applied to an iterable text that is subject to infinite re-interpretation within various contextual spaces. As texts, even Kant's writings cannot be excluded from this principle. It is therefore necessary to re-evaluate the Kantian system with regard to the individual subject, as well as with regard to the community in which the potential reader is situated. Any community, to a large extent, acts to determine and construct the inter-subjective attitudes, prejudices and beliefs of its constitutive subjects. However, the concerns of the potential reader that result in various individual responses to a narrative may deviate from those which involve the community as a whole, particularly when the ethical issues are politically or culturally imposed. The inter-subjective shaping of the reader needs to be considered in conjunction with the

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[11] However, the ruling was reversed on appeal, and *Last Exit* became one of the last literary texts to be prosecuted under the Obscenity Act. Nonetheless, the moral stigma imposed by the "moral authority" remained: "It is unfortunate that so many newcomers to *Last Exit to Brooklyn* will be approaching it in a muddle of expectation that, thanks to its long ordeal in the courts, has more to do with what has been said about the book than what the book itself says" (Burgess in Selby 1993:xiii).

[12] It is interesting to speculate on what grounds the thirty defence witnesses would have objected if the text had been found to have had no redeeming literary, social or ethical features. In this case, the categorical imperative of the freedom of speech would have been the only recourse, and as has clearly been shown here, such imperatives are incoherent in their assumption of universalizability.

context of an individual experience of the text, even if the latter is dependent upon the former.

There are two ethical questions that are relevant to any such experience. The first is an ethical evaluation by the culturally situated reader, and the second is the ethical situation as depicted in the text. Although the two are interdependent, the question to be asked is how an interaction between the two areas of concern creates the conditions for an ethical experience of the text. Consider again the extract by Dickens. The text makes no explicit claims as to the author's point of view at the time of composition. Although necessarily employing tropic language, the narrative attempts to describe rather than to evaluate or to opine. Yet if Kant's practical maxim – "act so that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or that of another always as an end and never as a means only"[13] – is applied to the passage, then certain ethical issues become apparent. For Dickens to describe the execution, it is necessary for him to make use of the characters in the account as a means to a journalistic end – the story. The motivations for this may be diverse: for financial remuneration, for attracting readers, for publicity, or for an ethical reason such as objecting to institutional violence. Whatever the motivation, the characters in the text become subordinate to the broader concerns of the narrative in that they are used as a means to an end.[14]

This subordination occurs despite the assumption that even textually represented humanity is connotative of humanity in an extra-textual actuality. The question becomes even more problematic when the textual representation is known to be fictional. The individuals depicted in *Last Exit to Brooklyn* are described as existing in conditions of squalor and violence, and a potential reader may simultaneously empathise with, and be disgusted by, such depictions and such characters. Nevertheless, the characters do not actually exist in any verifiable actuality. Instead, they remain depictions within a deferred

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[13] Kant 1993: 94

[14] It should be emphasized again that the pre-knowledge of the reader is important. The victim of this execution is historically verifiable; therefore the depiction presents a different situation from the imaginary fictional construct of *A Tale of Two Cities*, even though the empirical foundation for both representations may be identical. Additionally, the historical character is clearly the more exploited individual in terms of being employed as a means to Dickens's ends. It is difficult to argue that fictional characters, no matter how realistically they are depicted, are ethically disadvantaged by being used thus.

reality, which argues for a meta-response on the part of the reader, therefore affecting the ultimate ethical evaluation of the iterable text. Yet, as a deferred reality, the circumstances described by the narrative are extrapolated into a possible event. The characters and situations described could occur, and plausibly might have occurred in a manner not identical to, but recognisably similar to, the events represented. The reader could then envisage the narrative as being potentially actual, if not verifiable, and could thus formulate an ethical response to the text (even if that response were determined by a meta-emotional reaction). Another possible reading would be to regard a fictional state of affairs as either symbolic or paradigmatic of an actual ethical situation, even if the text is not didactic. This would accommodate the possibility of a broad ethical conception as guiding an ethical inference in instances of null denotation, that could nevertheless be applied in actuality, following the Kantian principles of intention, universalizability and duty. Yet, as has been illustrated, the conditions for any such formulation will be established by the dominant norms of the society in question. As any aesthetic evaluation is to some extent influenced by an ethical evaluation, a further consequence of this imposition of moral norms is that the dominant discourse also influences the subsequent aesthetic value of a narrative, and hence its potential for inclusion in the prevailing canon.[15]

Such problems regarding the imposition of a deontological ethical system suggest that any system of ethics based on the necessity of following the dictates of duty cannot consistently assume a universal ethical space when someone reads a textual representation of violence. The entire notion of obligation is subject to the conventional and contextual attitudes of discourses external to the text, and it makes little sense to endeavour to impose an incoherent universalising ethical system upon an iterable narrative. This becomes even more evident when the prevailing discourse is hostile to the text in question, as in the example of *Last Exit to Brooklyn*. It can therefore be concluded

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[15] This can often lead to a contradiction between ethical and aesthetical evaluations. For example, Shakespeare's *Henry V* owes much of its canonical status to an ethics of patriotism that permeates the drama (as was particularly pertinent in Britain during the Second World War); yet it contains episodes in which the king acts in a manner contrary to common ethical opinion – for instance, the order for the massacre of French prisoners in 4.6.53-55. Later readings of the play therefore value its openness to ambiguity and its sensitivity to the challenges posed in wielding political or military power.

that deontological ethics are inappropriate with regards to an ethical (re)evaluation of an iterable representation of violence.

1.2 Utilitarianism

The Kantian ethical system postulates that the notion of duty is the fundamental requirement of moral enquiry and worth; however, it has been argued that an unacceptable consequence of this system is that it allows for the potential for censorship and the suppression of texts which are unacceptable to those whose authority determines the ethical maxims of society. In other words, the argument that this system of ethics has universal relevance is not unproblematic. In contrast to this imperative to duty, the doctrine of utilitarianism emphasises the consequences of any action, with a corresponding highlighting of the importance of happiness and the potential for its realisation: "actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness. By happiness is intended pleasure, and the absence of pain; by unhappiness, pain, and the privation of pleasure" (Mill 1861: 99). This statement is a re-formulation of the "Greatest Happiness Principle" of Bentham, and reflects a point of view that is fundamental to contemporary conceptions of morality: "[It] is not an exaggeration to say that utilitarianism has come to be the main element in contemporary moral thinking. A great many people suppose that there can be no serious objection to the moral idea of maximising happiness and minimizing unhappiness, both in personal relationships and in the world at large" (Graham 2004: 133).

However, it is necessary to distinguish between two different conceptions of utilitarianism, namely act utilitarianism and rule utilitarianism. The former argues that it is purely the actions of the individual that result in the maximisation of happiness for the greatest number of people; the latter argues that this is open to abuses that will not be acceptable to society, despite any maximisation of happiness. Rule utilitarianism argues that any actions are necessarily moderated by rules and norms that govern human behaviour. For example, even if killing someone will result in a more general happiness (for the purposes of organ harvesting, for instance), the injunction or rule against murder

will obtain in most cases. As rule utilitarianism is a more flexible interpretation of utilitarianism, it is this form of the theory that will be considered in this discussion.

If it were the case that the maximisation of happiness is the primary ethical impulse for many individuals, and if it is the case that there is a close interplay between ethical evaluation and aesthetic judgement when reading representations of violence, then it must follow that rule utilitarianism plays a crucial role in the ethical judgement of textual representations of violence and any subsequent aesthetic determination. The significance of a representation of violence is established in utilitarian terms by evaluating its potential for generating a positive response within a community of potential readers. Yet such an assumption is both problematic and inadequate, as once again a normative ethical system maintains an assumption of universality regarding the cognition of such terms as happiness and pleasure.

The difficulty in defining happiness is inextricably linked with the problem of immeasurability in attempting to quantify an emotion or state of mind. Even if this were hypothetically possible, it is not obvious what the exact meaning of happiness might be, and how that definition might be limited in order to attain universal ethical appeal. Mill's claim that "by happiness is intended pleasure, and the absence of pain" leads to the objection that utilitarianism is no more than an egotistical mode of thought that not only allows for, but encourages, a hedonistic approach, depending upon how the notion of pleasure is conceived and (re)contextualised within any given community. This, in turn, may encourage actions that could be construed as offensive to those whose conception of pleasure is opposed to the hedonistic approach. The potential consequence of this possibility as applied to the act of reading would be the production and distribution of texts that are deliberately contrary to what many people would consider acceptable. Yet the philosophical doctrine of utilitarianism, despite having a strong hedonistic bias due to its emphasis on pleasure, does not allow for egotistical hedonism. This arises out of the ethical prerequisite that the welfare of society as a whole is more significant than the personal fulfilment of individual needs. In addition, any society will have in place communal sanctions and safeguards. Consequently, the dissemination of texts widely

deemed to run contrary to a general expectation of happiness would be considered unacceptable.[16] Rather, a utilitarian thinker would argue for generalised benevolence – the happiness of an individual may be important, but it is not more important than the general happiness of all.

In order to explore the problems of this theory as applied to the violence represented in texts, consider again the novel *Last Exit to Brooklyn*. It was argued that this text was subject to censorship because the depiction of violence in the narrative deviated from the Kantian maxim adopted by certain discourses. In a similar manner, utilitarianism can also be suggestive of normative conceptions of happiness, and consequently normative conceptions of what is acceptable or not acceptable in a society at any given time. The following extract from the novel is illustrative of how utilitarian theory can be applied to the representation of violence. It describes an instance of direct physical violence that takes place when a soldier is attacked by members of a Brooklyn gang:

> He tried to roll over on his stomach and cover his face with his arms, but as he got to his side he was kicked in the groin and stomped on the ear and he screamed, cried, started pleading then just cried as a foot cracked his mouth, Ya fuckin cottonpickin punk, and a hard kick in the ribs turned him slightly and he tried to raise himself on one knee and someone took a short step forward and kicked him in the solarplexus and he fell on his side, his knees up, arms folded across the abdomen, gasping for air and the blood in his mouth gurgled as he tried to scream ….”
> (Selby 1993: 7).

Because rule utilitarianism is a consequentialist theory which requires an informed moral choice regarding any matter, the utilitarian is required to consider all the possible consequences of any action. In order properly to apply this requirement to the extract, it is necessary to investigate the issues involved from the point of view of the historically situated reader, as well as from the point of view suggested by the tone of the narrative. In the first place, consider a potential reader who is opposed to the above representation on utilitarian grounds. Such a reader would argue that the consequences of reading such a passage would minimize rather then maximise the general happiness, hence effecting a deprivation of happiness for many. This on its own would contradict any arguments for

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[16] It should be noted that just as egotism is rejected by utilitarianism, so too is altruism. A text that puts others' interests above our own is also contrary to the ideal that everyone's interests are to be equally regarded.

the moral worth of the text. The reasons for this disqualification would be based on an estimation of various consequences of reading the text. These could include the following:

1) The text represents a level of violence that would result in emotional and aesthetic disturbance to the sensibilities of many readers. As more readers would be disturbed than pleased by the explicit and graphic representation of violence in the text, the consequences of reading it are negative, and therefore ethically unacceptable.

2) The text represents a level of violence that may influence others to emulate the actions of the text. This argument is based on the possibility that the violence represented is not only disturbing, but also has the unacceptable consequence of provoking actual violence.[17] As any such acts influenced by the reading of the text will probably result in more pain than pleasure to society as a whole (the only pleasure experienced being that of the perpetrators of the violence), the consequences are negative and therefore ethically unacceptable.

3) The violence of the text is heightened by depictions that avoid aestheticisation. As a result, the violence is made explicit rather than being moderated by the employment of figurative tropes. This aspect of the text would result in many readers either choosing to abandon the reading because of an inter-relation of aesthetic and ethical qualms, or not reading the text at all in response to negative reports concerning the representation. Any counter-claims made for the text's social relevance or aesthetic worth would then be considered subordinate to the sensationalist potential of the text. The non-aestheticisation of the violence becomes a negative factor with negative

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[17] That this is a fairly prevalent concern can be seen by the number of books banned or suppressed as a result of their representations of violence. These include *A Clockwork Orange*, *Lolita*, *Naked Lunch*, *Last Exit to Brooklyn*, and *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. The charge against the latter was that it "glorify[ies] criminal activity, ha[s] a tendency to corrupt individuals, and contain[s] scenes of bestiality, bizarre violence, and torture, dismemberment, death, and human elimination" (Karolides, Bald and Sova 1999: 362). Proponents of the opinion that those experiencing representations of violence will be likely to commit actual violence also frequently refer to the reading habits of serial killers as evidence for this view. For example, Ian Brady was apparently obsessed with the sado-masochistic texts of the Marquis de Sade. (http://crime.about.com/od/murder/p/brady.htm Accessed 2 November 2007).

consequences for the reception and enjoyment of the text, and is therefore ethically unacceptable.

These are just three possible considerations of the negative consequences of reading a representation of violence such as *Last Exit to Brooklyn*. However, a potential reader could be a utilitarian whose conception of the work was based on positive consequences that would refute the three points given above. In this case, the reasons for a consequentialist approval of the text (and refutation of the stated negative consequences) could read as follows:

1) An extremely graphic representation of violence may result in an emotional and aesthetic disturbance to many readers, but it is precisely such agitation of feeling that will have the positive consequence of negating much of the indifference to the social and cultural issues that are identified in, and critiqued by, the text. Therefore, despite its representations of extreme violence, the text serves a moral purpose and is ethically acceptable.

2) To claim that the text negatively influences the potential for (or makes possible the conditions for) actual violence is to ignore the capacity for violence inherent in such readers in the first place. To remove responsibility from the reader is to be open to the erroneous conflation of a chain of consequences with a chain of responsibility. Another problem inherent in the chain of consequences is the unpredictability of determining exactly what might or might not happen as a result of reading the text. It is often too easy to use hindsight as a guide to moral reasoning; but there is no possibility of isolating the ultimate consequences of reading the text, even after the event, and there can be no elementary event that can be identified as being the fundamental cause of all the following consequences. Any text is necessarily iterable, and therefore open to infinite interpretations by an infinite number of readers in differing contexts. It is not possible consistently to apply a utilitarian norm to each potential reader, as each likely consequence is not only refuted by each possible contradictory consequence, but is also subject to a variety of ethical spaces in which

moral judgement is articulated. Another contradiction is that the violence of many conventional canonical texts equals or exceeds the violence represented in *Last Exit*, sometimes through a preoccupation with violent events, as well as through the language of the representation. For example, *Hamlet* contains various instances of direct, institutional and psychological violence. Yet the canonical status of the drama has created a body of criticism that recognises that it is not preoccupied with violence for the sake of violence (unlike, for example, *Titus Andronicus*). Yet even *Titus* is not subject to the accusations of the glorification of violence that are common against texts such as *Last Exit to Brooklyn*. This lack of consistency negates any universalising assertion concerning the negative consequences of the violence characterising the latter narrative. In addition, and in pursuit of the first argument, the descriptions of violence may positively influence many readers better to consider, or even actively to promote, an opposition to institutional violence. The consequences of such an influence would be positive, and therefore the text serves a moral purpose and is ethically acceptable.

3) The conscious aestheticisation of the representation in order to alleviate the explicitness of the violence would be to mitigate its potential for effect, with the consequence that its reception would have less impact, both aesthetically and socially. To argue for an overtly figurative representation at all times is to ignore not only the inherent potentiality of different modes of representation, but also the potential for aesthetic effect. This point of view refutes the Aristotelian argument that imitation is in itself the aesthetic objective of art, even if it represents the disturbing or the socially unacceptable; in the *Poetics*, Aristotle writes that: "[A]lso inborn in all of us is the instinct to enjoy works of imitation. What happens in actual experience is evidence of this; for we enjoy looking at the most accurate representations of things *which in themselves we find painful to see*, such as the forms of the lowest animals and corpses" (Aristotle 1965: 35, italics added). This is not to argue that all representation should endeavour to be realistically descriptive (even if this were possible), but rather that the reading of any text depends on differing types of

representation which are contextually bound to the aesthetical and ethical expectations of the reader.

This gives some idea of the problems of reading a text under the influence of utilitarian ethics. Yet another complexity lies in the creation of the ethical space in which the actual description offered by the extract occurs. As far as the ethical difficulties raised by the events represented in the narrative are concerned, the characters in the representation are acting in a manner contrary to expected utilitarian social norms. Read in isolation, the extract gives no indication of the reasons for the assault on the soldier (and indeed, even in the context of the whole chapter, there is no justification for the savagery of the attack). However, let it be assumed that the assault was justified. An act-utilitarian would not see the events described as being morally questionable. If the assault on one individual would prevent the general unhappiness of many, then there is no moral problem. Yet a rule-utilitarian would argue that social norms and expectations would militate against such an attack, unless the consequences of avoiding it were too obvious to ignore (in which case a new rule could be formulated allowing for such instances). This, however, suggests a problem with a normative system of utilitarianism: rules and norms may be transformed or even re-invented to suit certain situations as they occur. Although opportunistic amendments to reframe universal rules are not necessarily part of the ideal utilitarian system, there exists the possibility that any incommensurability between the notions of justice and welfare can be conveniently modified: "any such conflict can readily be eliminated by carefully refining the rule to take account of these special circumstances; in other words by coming up with a different rule. It follows that on the rule utilitarian account of the matter there is no real dilemma … act and rule utilitarianism are co-extensive" (Graham 2004: 148).

The result of the contradictions and ambiguities of utilitarian thought is that, despite its centrality to contemporary ethical opinion, any utilitarian judgement regarding the ethical evaluation of a textual representation of violence will be problematic. A utilitarian moral pronouncement is dependent upon the pre-existing ethical views of the potential reader that are suggested by the inter-subjective social and historical context. A

utilitarian system is therefore subject to the same contextual problems as a deontological system, even if the former does attempt to adjust contingencies in order to accommodate differing demands or expectations. Consequently, the system should be treated with equal caution when considering the evaluation of the ethical concerns relating to the textual representation of violence.

2. Towards a Postmodern Ethics of Reading

A conclusion that should be considered is that normative systems and theories of ethics are inadequate when faced with iterable representations that, owing to their depictions of instances of violence, create the possibility of multi-faceted ethical readings. Firstly, it is important to take account of a reading that acknowledges the contextual position of the reader who engages with the text; and secondly, it is pertinent to acknowledge a reading that recognises the relevance of the ethical implications of the context of the representation. For example, to read a history of the Roman Republic is not automatically to agree with the ethical thought of the time (although it is not inconceivable that some might agree with the Roman ethics). There needs to be a division between the context of the potential reader's assumptions, and the context of the text. Moreover, the problems that exist within normative systems are further exacerbated by ethical thought which is often not equipped to deal with extreme situations that occur beyond the boundaries of what is considered normal within any particular discourse at any particular time. Many acts of violence, as well as their representation in an iterable textual form, include such examples of extreme situations. John Gray in *Straw Dogs* recounts the story of Roman Frister, a concentration camp inmate whose theft of another inmate's cap saved him from execution, but resulted in the execution of that other inmate. Gray's conclusions suggest the complacency and inadequacy of contemporary ethical thought when faced with extreme violence: "Moral philosophy has always been an exercise in make-believe, less realistic in its picture of human life than the average bourgeois novel. We must look elsewhere if we want anything that approaches the truth … Morality is supposed to be universal and categorical. But the lesson of Roman Frister's story is that it is an inconvenience, to be relied upon only in normal times" (2002: 90). Although this

statement may initially seem to be a naïvely wholesale dismissal of familiar forms of moral philosophy, accounts by Beevor of the Second World War, Fisk of the conflicts in the Middle East, and Herr of Vietnam,[18] suggest that moral values which are generally conceived to address the norm become, in extreme situations at the least, inherently problematic. This can also be seen in fictional texts in which violent situations become subject to critically focused, ethical scrutiny. For example, in *Heart of Darkness*, Marlowe returns to Brussels after witnessing extreme violence in the Congo. The result of his journey is an ethical re-evaluation of his notion of how individuals function within their own conception of a normal society, ignorant (wilfully or otherwise) of the violence perpetrated in the name of that society: "I found myself back in the sepulchral city resenting the sight of people hurrying through the streets … They trespassed upon my thoughts. They were intruders whose knowledge of life was to me an irritating presence, because I felt so sure they could not possibly know the things I knew" (Conrad 1983: 113).

In addition to extreme situations, the criticism that morality is a convenience or an ideal rather than a practical norm is also characteristic of the paradox of "moral luck": "A person can be morally responsible only for what he does; but what he does results from a great deal that he does not do; therefore he is not morally responsible for what he is and is not responsible for" (Nagel 1979: 163). Nagel gives the example of a concentration camp guard who would never have become one if the Nazis had not come to power – his situation was determined by circumstances beyond his control. Similarly, if a reckless driver kills a pedestrian, he is considered to have acted unethically; if he gets home without incident, he escapes censure. Moral luck can also be applied to the ethical process involved when reading representations of violence. Although the contextual and inter-subjective positioning of a potential reader necessarily influences the ethical evaluation, circumstance and luck also play a role in that process. As far as reading is concerned, moral luck suggests that any ethical interpretation is established largely by

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[18] *Berlin* (2202) by Beevor; *The Great War for Civilisation* (2006) by Fisk; and *Dispatches* (1979) by Herr are all texts in which ethics becomes no more than a relative term. This would be the likely case in any historical account of conflict or other extreme situations. This claim will be extended and defended in Chapter 9.

conditions outside the control of the potential reader, the result of which is that any ethical interpretation of the text – whether within the context of the reader's experience or within the content of the narrative – is largely dependent upon external criteria which constrain the choice and opinion of the reader, and which necessarily preclude any attempts at universalising ethical space. Although Nagel's paradox may lead to a position where all ethical action is simultaneously random and pre-determined, it does expose the inadequacy inherent in a naïve assumption of ethical authority. It also serves to re-emphasise that any ethical position must be considered relatively with respect to the circumstances surrounding each moral choice.

This leads to the implication that the dictates of normative ethics are often superseded by personal choices. The idea of such a subjectivist ethics provides a useful counterpoint to the systems of deontology and utilitarianism. The ethics of egoism are based on the assumption that what is desirable for the individual is the basis of ethical endeavour and the foundation for the generation of value.[19] Hence, a rational egoist would argue that one *ought* to fulfil personal desires, as there is no other rationale for meaningful action. This is coextensive with the implication of psychological egoism that no person will consciously act in a manner contrary to his or her desires; desire is therefore the ultimate consideration in leading the good life. Even if the action itself is not desired, the consequences of the action must be, and therefore the notion of "wanting" still determines the subjective action. For example, a person who alleviates the suffering of others through charitable donation will gain personal satisfaction in performing such an act, even if his or her actions result in some form of personal material loss.[20] What matters in determining the ethical life is the desires of the individual; any ethical conventions and normative systems of the state or civil society are secondary, an obstacle to be overcome (or at least bypassed) on the path to personal satisfaction. The philosopher who did more than any other to advance the notion of egoist ethics – and in

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[19] Note that there is a subtle difference between selfishness and egoism. The former disregards all others' feelings in favour of a promotion of the self; the latter includes others' feelings insofar as they correspond to what is most desired for the self.

[20] Note that this claim for ethical fulfilment through the satisfaction of desire is contrary to the Kantian concern with duty: a person who fulfils any desire (including the desire for satisfaction) when seeking to act ethically is not disinterested, and therefore (according to Kant) not acting in a genuinely ethical manner.

the process became of particular importance to postmodern thinking – was Friedrich Nietzsche.

Nietzsche's ethics of egoism is of particular relevance to this discussion of the ethics of representing violence, owing to its interrelation with aesthetic considerations. As there can be no ethical phenomena, but rather only a "moral interpretation of phenomena", then the choice of how to act "ultimately has to be made on aesthetic grounds. The idea of the free creativity of the artist is decisive in this choice" (Megill 1985: 31). The free artist can create or invent the conditions for a confrontation with pre-existing ethical systems which have lost their validity, if not their normative power, owing to a negation of theistic authority (the "Death of God"). It follows that if the notion of religious authority is ethically extraneous, then any theological claims for a foundation of ethical behaviour are questionable. Instead, the solitary and independent artistic individual – the *Übermensch* – must challenge the residue of such an ethical system through the predominance of his own will to power and sense of purpose. The *Übermensch* is someone who determines his own values, and has the self-mastery to implement these values in everyday life: "a man to whom nothing is forbidden, except it be *weakness*, whether that weakness be called vice or virtue" (Nietzsche 1968: 113). Nietzsche's initial role models for the *Übermensch* were the artists Goethe and Wagner, and consequently his notions of the transcendence of normative ethical systems were largely founded upon aesthetic, rather than political or social, considerations: "To give 'style' to one's character – a great and rare art! He exercises it who surveys all that his nature presents in strength and weakness and then moulds it to an artistic plan until everything appears as art and reason" (Nietzsche 1974: 290). This is closely interlinked with his assertion that the development of ethical authority is a feature of class-based (and religious) conventions of right and wrong, which has various implications for the interpretation of representations of violence.

One potential consequence of an assumption of a Nietzschean ethics is that any potential reader may individually determine the framework of the ethical space generated by the reading of any text. A person may choose to read (or not to read) any text simply because

he or she wants to do so, and the resultant ethical judgement is dependent upon personal choice alone. Contrary to the dictates of much ethical theory, the reading assumes a personal moral (and hence aesthetic) evaluation of the text, one not necessarily imposed by structures and imperatives external to the desires and preferences of the individual reader. There are, however, two main objections to this idea. The first, discussed in detail in earlier chapters, is that it is not possible wholly to disregard culturally imposed notions of value and ethics. To argue for an insulated interpretation of any text is to deny the functioning of both iterability and inter-subjectivity. The crucial and disruptive antecedent of iterability becomes the locus of the destabilisation of the context affecting a particular ethical and aesthetic evaluation of a representation of violence. Secondly, there exists the potential for the imposition of an ethical framework by the dominant discourse, despite egoistic claims for individual responsibility. This is owing to the contradictory notion that the text which the individual may consider morally acceptable in terms of his or her own preferences should be considered appropriate for all. John Stuart Mill recognises (and criticises) this egotist impulse in *On Liberty*: "The practical principle which guides them to their opinions on the regulation of human conduct is the feeling in each person's mind that everybody should be required to act as he, and those with whom he sympathizes, would like them to act" (Mill 1999: 33).

Thus, an egoist who is offended by a narrative such as *Last Exit to Brooklyn*, in terms of his own experience of distaste at its explicit representation of violence, may anticipate that all other readers would experience a similar response. In the same way , an egoist who finds the text to be a constructive critique of institutional and direct violence in society will anticipate that all other readers should have a similar opinion of it. If such an egoist is in a position of influence, then his or her personal opinion may be extrapolated or even imposed upon those not in positions of authority. Therefore the contradiction that characterises the Kantian imperative – that contradictory maxims undermine assumptions of the universal – is also a flaw of egoism, as there is no possible consistency as to which desires are broadly acceptable when generating an ethical judgement. On the contrary, it appears that in terms of an unadulterated egoism everything and anything is permitted.

However, it has been argued that any text is subject to a number of determining factors prior to ethical or aesthetic evaluation. Firstly, it must be read and understood in some form. The fact that various readers exist in the same time, place and milieu creates the conditions for inter-subjective opinion, which in turn allows for recognisably similar interpretations of the narrative, even if the judgements pronounced upon it are varied. This variety has implications for the ethical aspects of the representation: although these are based on the same intersubjective patterns that influence the cognition of the text, problems arise as competing systems of ethical thought fail to establish their own ethical standards that can coherently be applied to society as a whole. Although the dominant discourse may attempt to impose ethical norms and standards, these must be considered as no more than contingent and temporary owing to the iterative nature of the text which allows for infinite re-interpretation within infinitely variable contexts and a multiplicity of intersubjective societies. *Last Exit to Brooklyn* no longer provokes the same opposition that it did upon its initial publication. On the contrary, the edition used for this study is published as a "modern classic". The fact that the evaluation of the text has been modified from a novel that "depraves and corrupts" to the status of a classic, with all the canonical implications that this suggests, is the most obvious indication of the difficulty in claiming any type of universality for the ethics or aesthetics of any text.[21]

The canonisation of texts is a process which is continually shifting. For Selby's novel to reach the status of a modern classic is not indicative of a teleological progression indicating that it has achieved its ultimate position in the canon. There are many who would still regard the text as obscene and its representations of violence as ethically objectionable. If such a grouping were to dominate critical discourse in the future, then it is likely that the status of the text would once again be modified in order to accommodate the prevailing ethical norms of that society (which would not preclude it from still being acceptable within other discourses and societies). This discussion has necessarily been

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[21] This process can also work in the opposite direction. Many critics, while not denying Shakespeare's centrality to the canon, query the assumptions that have determined that centrality. Gary Taylor, arguing from a materialist and New Historicist theoretical perspective, argues that no text's position in the canon is assured: "Shakespeare's works are no more immortal than the scores of plays by the great Greek dramatists that have evaporated. Those plays succumbed to the fall of old power structures and the rise of new ideologies … Texts are material objects, like buildings; without maintenance they decay" (Taylor 1989: 378-9).

selective, and has not attempted a comprehensive survey of the gamut of moral philosophy. Nevertheless, in view of the theories investigated above, the conclusion that there can be no single ethical standard with which to judge a representation of violence suggests that there must rather be a plurality of ethical systems and kinds of thought in order to accommodate various ethical situations in different contexts. Yet even such a position seems inadequate, as it may allow for an ethics of convenience in which readers may discard those ideas not appropriate to their purpose at the time of reading a particular text. Consequently, although some degree of pluralism is unavoidable, it is also necessary to investigate another mode of ethical enquiry into texts that feature representations of violence, namely the seemingly contradictory field of postmodern ethics. Such an enquiry will be undertaken with reference to the extreme example of violence, the Holocaust. Yet before this can take place, the ethical and aesthetic implications of such texts need to be investigated in more detail.

CHAPTER 9

THE CASE OF *FRAGMENTS*

1. The Holocaust Narrative

Acts of genocide, particularly in the twentieth century, constitute a crucial failure of ethical responsibility and regard, and by investigating in more detail examples of the Holocaust narrative, it will become clear that the responses to such representation – and particularly the responses to the representations of direct, institutional and psychological violence – are governed by ethical as well as aesthetic concerns, both of which will influence future evaluations of these texts. The conclusions reached regarding this process can then be applied to certain postmodern conceptions of ethics which are appropriate to such representations. The following texts were deliberately chosen to reflect different methods of representing the violence of the Holocaust, and each will be considered from the point of view of the characters depicted in the narrative, as well as from the point of view of the expectations and intentions of readers of the narrative.

Consider the following four quotations, each drawn from one of the chosen texts. The extracts, taken out of the context of their narratives and historical space, are all similar in tone, style and mode of narration. Each is narrated in the first person, each is an example of direct violence (informed by institutional and psychological violence), and each portrays in a descriptive passage one single event within the context of the Holocaust.

> 1.
> After a while I heard the sound of piercing screams, banging against the door and also moaning and wailing. People began to cough. Their coughing grew worse from minute to minute, a sign that the gas had started to act. Then the clamour began to subside and to change to a many-voiced dull rattle, drowned now and then by coughing. The deadly gas had penetrated into the lungs of the people where it quickly caused paralysis of the respiratory centre. (115-6)

> 2.
> I saw a photograph of Jews being shot in Russia. The Jews were in a long row, naked; some were standing at the edge of a pit and behind them were soldiers with guns, shooting them in the neck. It was in a quarry, and above the Jews and the soldiers

there was an officer sitting on a ledge in the rock, swinging his legs and smoking a cigarette. He looked a little morose. Maybe things weren't going fast enough for him. (150-1)

3.
His tone of voice became increasingly brutal. "Do you see that chimney over there? See it? Do you see the flames? (Yes, we did see the flames.) Over there – that's where you're going to be taken. That's your grave, over there. Haven't you realised it yet? You dumb bastards, don't you understand anything? You're going to be burned. Frizzled away. Turned into ashes." (41)

4.
I hear a strange crack – and someone besides me drops to the ground without a sound. In disbelief and horror I stare at the little boy. His face lies there in the sun, absolutely white, but no blood on it. I'm surprised there's no blood. But his forehead is all pushed in, there's a deep hollow in it, exactly the same size as the ball. I keep looking down – still no blood, but I know the little one is dead. (78-9)

Despite the evident similarities of these extracts, each is from a Holocaust narrative that is subtly different from the others owing to its peculiar mode of composition. Thus, one is a work of fiction, another is autobiographical but written as if it were a novel, a third is both factual and historical, and one, initially assumed to be factual, was later proven to be fictional in its autobiographical detail. Despite these differing literary and linguistic constructions, all employ a style of language that is primarily descriptive, a style which attempts to avoid the deliberate aestheticisation of the violence represented. Yet, even with knowledge of this contextual information, it is still not possible confidently to determine which extract belongs to which text. Similarly, the extracts which are representations of historically verifiable events cannot be distinguished from those that are fictional. Although the texts may be read, and subsequently evaluated, without any prior knowledge on the part of the reader, any contextual information in the narrative serves to facilitate a more inclusive process of ethical-aesthetic evaluation.[1] Knowledge of the context of any particular text does not in itself determine subsequent ethical and aesthetic evaluations of the text, but rather aids in the formulation of a more coherent response, particularly if the information is inter-subjectively accessible.

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[1] There are texts where no such information is available, and as a result the events depicted are not verifiable, even if probable. In such cases, evaluation has to take place with the proviso that the conclusions reached as to the veracity of the text are necessarily contingent and dependent upon future access to information.

Here then is the pertinent information about each extract.[2] The first, from *Eyewitness Auschwitz* by Filip Müller (1979), is extracted from memoirs that are both personal testimony and historical narrative, a text that is considered verifiable and factual. The second is taken from Bernhard Schlink's novel *The Reader* (1997), which, in contrast to Müller's narrative, is fictional – even though that fiction is set within the recognisable framework of a historical occurrence. The third extract is from *Night* by Elie Wiesel (1960), a narrative combining factual occurrences and testimonies within the conventions of a fictional narrative (often referred to as faction). This autobiographical novel is deliberately ambiguous as to the distinction between fact and fiction, though the protagonist, Eliezer, is clearly a vehicle for Wiesel's own testimony.[3] The final extract is taken from Binjamin Wilkomirski's *Fragments* (1995), a controversial text which was proffered as a true but fragmented memoir of the author's experiences as a child in the concentration camps. However, after investigation it was determined that the details of Wilkomirski's involvement as a child victim of the Holocaust were little more than a fictional interpolation within the textual conventions of Holocaust narrative. The following discussion will concentrate primarily on the Wilkomirski text, but with frequent reference to the other three texts, within the framework of an ethics of reading textual violence.

One purpose of this chapter is to investigate the impact of expectation and ethics on the process of evaluation of such texts, and the interrelation that exists between ethics and aesthetics when attempting such an evaluation. Consequently, when the verifiability of a text such as *Fragments* is found to be contrary to the expectations of a potential reader, then both ethical concerns and aesthetic evaluation are subject to re-formulation. Evaluation becomes conditional upon context. This will be demonstrated in the

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[2] These texts can also be considered within Barthes's notion of text/context/intertext: each extract is understood in relation to a common context, and the intertextuality that necessarily occurs when reading them. They each function, and are therefore experienced, specifically within the complex relations and multiple meanings that are made possible by the potential influence of, and expectation raised by, Holcaust literature as a genre. (see Barthes: "How Many Readings" in *S/Z* 1974: 16).

[3] Francois Mauriac, in the preface to *Night*, tells of his meeting with Wiesel, and how the text (although written as a novel) is a personal testimony to the suffering of Wiesel and all victims of the Holocaust: "What I maintain is that this personal record, coming after so many others and describing an outrage about which we might imagine we already know all that it is possible to know, is nevertheless different, distinct, unique" (in Wiesel 1960: 8).

discussion of the controversy surrounding the "Wilkomirski affair",[4] especially when it becomes clear that any alteration to the perceptions of a text will probably be accompanied by a re-interpretation (and re-evaluation) of that text by the same readers who initially formed judgements about it. Such a re-interpretation of the narrative is not possible solely in terms of the words of the text, nor with regard to any aesthetic or ethical implications initially assumed through reading the narrative. Instead, it commences in terms of the reader's inter-subjective and contextual response to the altered verifiability of the details of the narrative. Although the words of the text remain identical, it is this damaging generic shift that is more often subject to critical scrutiny.

2. The (Re-) Interpretation of *Fragments*

2.1 The Wilkomirski Affair

The debate regarding ethics is indicative of the relativity and contextual determination that must necessarily exist within any assumed ethical position. Additionally, whenever an ethical stance is proclaimed, implicitly or otherwise, the outcome is similarly contingent upon, and open to, current and future critical re-evaluation. Nevertheless, it is often the case that when an aesthetic conclusion is reached regarding any representation of violence, following the relevant determination of the criteria required by any particular ethical system, then that conclusion is considered (by the proponents of the system governing the conditions of judgement) to be unassailable. For example *Last Exit to Brooklyn*, discussed in the previous chapter, is a text that was evaluated as being ethically and aesthetically objectionable by the proponents of one particular ethical system (primarily because of the violence of its representation), while simultaneously being evaluated as ethically and aesthetically satisfactory by the proponents of another system, with each justifying their conclusions through appeals to differing contextual criteria of acceptability.

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[4] The term "The Wilkomirski Affair" is taken from the title of Stefan Maechler's exposé of the fraud perpetrated by Wilkomirski in presenting his text as truthful testimony (Maechler 2001).

That text was accepted by both parties as being distinctively and unambiguously fictional, and the expectations regarding its ethical and aesthetic qualities were based upon that assumption. However, a fictional textual depiction is in most cases indistinguishable from a factual depiction, and a factual account is almost always identical to a fictional account, particularly when the context and generic identity of the text remain unclear to the reader. The interpretation of the iterable text, rather than being narrowly confined to the text, is therefore dependent upon expectation, knowledge and context. When these are challenged or disproved in some way, the resultant tergiversation is often disproportionate, despite the words of the text remaining unaltered. The recent furore surrounding the publication of Norma Khouri's *Forbidden Love* has been cited in Chapter 5 as an example, and this disjunction between text and context is equally apparent in the Wilkomirski affair, which offers a clear example of how the evaluation of a representation of violence can often consist of the imposition of expectation and a reliance on imposed ethical imperatives.

In 1995 Binjamin Wilkomirski published his memoirs of his early childhood in two concentration camps during the Holocaust. This text – *Fragments: Memoirs of a Childhood, 1939-1948* – was acclaimed as a document that, through its narrative power and graphic depictions of the author's experiences, was aesthetically and ethically equivalent to other canonical Holocaust texts such as *The Diary of Anne Frank* and Eli Wiesel's *Night*. Jonathan Kozol, writing in the *Nation*, October 28, 1996, comments that "this stunning and austerely written work is so profoundly moving, so morally important and so free from literary artifice of any kind at all that I wondered if I even had the right to try to offer praise" (Kozol 1996). The Internet book site, bookpage.com, includes a review by Michael Rose, who identifies the major ethical issues raised by the text. He urges readers to confront the violence depicted in the text because it accurately reflects the horrors of the Holocaust, as well as confirming it as a "reproach to wilful innocence … [I]t does not get any worse than this. Until you confront the things that are recounted in this book, you will not have reached the limits of conceivable inhumanity. In all times and in all places, people have visited dehumanizing cruelty upon other people. Every bit

of that unredeemable history is compressed, concentrated, and surpassed in this little memoir".

Fragments was endorsed by the US Holocaust Memorial Museum, and won the National Jewish Book Award for 1996. In France it was awarded the *Prix Mémoirs de la Shoah*, and in Britain it won the literary prize of the *Jewish Quarterly*. Wilkomirski undertook a number of lecture tours to promote the book and to recount his war-time experiences. However, Daniel Ganzfried published an article in August 1998 which attacked *Fragments* as "an internalized collection of images by a man whose imagination has run away with him", and argued that "Binjamin Wilkomirski, alias Bruno Dossekker … knows Auschwitz and Majdanek only as a tourist" (quoted in Maechler 2001: 129). Following this, various other sceptical readers challenged the veracity of Wilkomirski's account. Stefan Maechler, a Swiss historian, undertook an investigation into the affair at the behest of the book's publishers, and his conclusion was that "the elements of Wilkomirski's story are full of contradictions both in their particulars and in regard to historical reality. Above all, however, they are incompatible with his own biographical reality. There is not the least doubt that Binjamin Wilkomirski is identical with Bruno Grosjean, and that the story he wrote in *Fragments* and has told elsewhere took place solely within the world of his thoughts and emotions" (2001: 268). In short, concluded Maechler, Wilkomirski had invented his personal history as a victim of the Holocaust, and had asserted that the text produced consisted of factual (if fragmented) memories, when in actuality it was a fictional narrative set within a verifiable historical context.

Disapprobation quickly followed the revelations. Many of the awards were withdrawn,[5] television and publicity appearances were cancelled, and the text of *Fragments* became unavailable except in second-hand bookshops, and as an appendix to Maechler's report.

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[5] Interestingly, not all the awards were withdrawn, as some felt that there was not enough evidence that Wilkomirski had misrepresented the truth of his childhood. Some also felt that his narrative was valuable with or without verifiability. For example, the American Orthopsychiatric Association (ORTHO) awarded him the seventh Hayman Award for Holocaust and Genocide Study "in recognition of his writings and collaborations with clinicians, which have furthered the understanding of genocide and the Holocaust" (Maechler 2001: 156). This indicates that, for a few readers, the value of the text lay in its textual evocation of the Holocaust, rather than in the verifiability of its composition. However, for many other readers, the latter became the crucial element in re-evaluating the text.

Favourable aesthetic judgment of the text was transformed into antipathy in response to Wilkomirski's duplicity and his manipulation of the expectations of his readers' notions of historical truth, even though these were largely extra-textual considerations. Following this reversal of critical and public opinion, the affair was seized upon by the micro-narrative propagated by right-wing revisionist historians as a means of promoting the theory that the entire event of the Holocaust was imaginary; they argued (fallaciously) that if this one text was proven to be fake, then all Holocaust memoirs must also be considered suspect. An example of this line of argument can be seen in the comparison of *Fragments* with Wiesel's *Night* when the former was used to discredit the latter: both were thereby alleged to be little more than deliberately false testimony. Professor Arthur Butz, writing in a revealingly anti-Semitic essay in *The Journal of Historical Review*, argues that Wilkomirski's memoirs "are contrasted for example to Elie Wiesel, who cannot be discredited on the basis of identity, since he is a Jew who was actually interned at Auschwitz. Against Wiesel's concoctions society has yet to develop an effective defence, by listening to revisionists instead of its current leaders. Wilkomirski's *Fragments* is no more or less plausible, in itself, than Wiesel's *Night* … My point right now is that Wilkomirski was discredited only on the basis of identity. We can also observe that the Wilkomirski book shows that the filthy imagination that was required to create Elie Wiesel's *Night* is not unique to Jews" (2000 www.heretical.com/miscella /butz2. html). This last sentence in particular is revealing in that it explicitly reveals the ideology assumed by the writer (which up until this point had not been overtly apparent) through an *ad hominem* attack on the entire Jewish community. That he subscribes to a minority micro-narrative can be seen in his complaint that society as a whole rejects revisionism, instead being sympathetic to the perception of the Holocaust determined by the dominant discourse (the "current leaders"). The verifiability of Wilkomirski's deception is not at issue so much as its usefulness in confirming an ideological standpoint based upon a contextual ethical appraisal.

The questions that arise from the controversy surrounding Wilkomirski and *Fragments* underscore numerous implications for the reception of fictional and non-fictional texts, particularly when the reader is confronted by the various ethical dimensions implicit

within the aesthetic evaluation of a text that depends upon representations of violence for its ethical and aesthetic effect. The following discussion will therefore concentrate on this ethical/aesthetic dimension of the varying responses to the text, as compared with the responses to texts such as *Night*, *The Reader* and *Eyewitness Auschwitz* that make different claims with respect to historical veracity and representations of violence, and which therefore arouse potentially differing ethical expectations in the potential reader.

2.2 The Aesthetic Evaluation of *Fragments*

An essential concern when considering the text of *Fragments* is the aesthetic response to the text prior to the disclosure of its inherent fictionality. In other words, it is necessary to examine the prevailing conditions for evaluation when it was initially assumed that the text was a factual testimony of a child's experiences of the Holocaust. The critical opinion of the work was generally positive, with laudatory reviews and the awarding of the numerous literary prizes mentioned above – although this was tempered by some commentators' criticism of a "pornography of violence".[6] The text is, as the title suggests, fragmentary: impressions, ideas, almost random in their presentation, which are recounted as if any formal narrative continuity would somehow diminish their effect. Wilkomirski claims that "My earliest memories are a rubble field of isolated images and events. Shards of memory with hard knife-sharp edges, which still cut flesh if touched today. Mostly a chaotic jumble, with very little chronological fit … If I'm going to write about it, I have to give up on the ordering logic of grown-ups; it would only distort what happened" (Wilkomirski 1995: 5). He then claims that he is "not a poet or a writer. I can only try to use words to draw as exactly as possible what happened, what I saw; exactly the way my child's memory has held on to it; with no benefit of perspective or vanishing point" (1995: 5-6). These two statements, in particular, form the basis of the ethical perspective proposed to the reader, which will in turn determine to a large extent the aesthetic judgement applied to the text. Although it is impossible now to evaluate the text from the perspective of its being a verifiable document of historical events, it is necessary for the discussion which follows to focus on the narrative without considering that a fraud was perpetrated, and that the events are not historically verifiable. It will then be clear

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[6] See Maechler 2001: 277

that ethically, as well as aesthetically, the text reflects the concerns of the other texts that function within the intertextual field of Holocaust literature.

The Holocaust may be regarded as a testament to the possibilities and consequences inherent in an unthinking and uncritical adherence to an exclusionary ethics which culminates in the denial of the right of the excluded to exist. The justification for the adoption of a dominant discourse which results in the negation of the ethical status of others becomes – perversely – an appeal to rationality and logic when implementing a strategy of exclusion. Anyone approaching the Holocaust must necessarily confront both the enormity of the historical event, as well as his or her own personal response to it. Wilkomirski's autobiographical claims are asserted within the framework of this confrontation, and through avoiding narrative logic and sequential structuring, he attempts to circumvent the necessity of merely telling another story. Instead, he produces a text that through its very juxtaposition of disparate "shards of memory" provides an aesthetic representation that is all the more poignant for its assumption of a childlike innocence far removed from the "ordering logic of grown-ups". The events are generally depicted in a sparse writing style, employing short sentences that again suggest an impression of innocence: Wilkomirski's attempt to "use words to draw as exactly as possible what happened".[7] The effect of this is a sequence of scenes which renders inconsequential the fragmented style of the text by enabling the reader to witness disparate events from the perspective of a child. The assumption is that the reader can be transformed into a witness through the representations of the narrator. For example, consider the following description:

> What I saw on the ground, up against the wall, was the two bundles, still lying there, or rather, what was left of them. The pieces of cloth were undone, lay around all torn, and in among them the babies on their backs, arms and legs outspread, stomachs all swollen and blue. And where once their little faces must have been, a red mess mixed with snow and mud.
> Nothing else to see – except the skulls were smashed open.

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[7] However, as has been concluded in a previous chapter, any attempt at factual writing is compromised by the limitations placed upon representation by the inevitable and unavoidable strategies of fictional writing, and the play of *différance* in language.

> A mass of yellow, sticky-shiny stuff had flowed out and was splashed against the wall, on the ground, and right across the path I had to follow. My stomach heaved with horror and disgust.
> (1995: 104).

The graphic nature of this description achieves two effects. Firstly, it puts the reader in the place of the narrator in such a way that he or she is led vicariously to experience the violence of the scene through a re-interpretation of the testimony of the narrator. The testimony therefore is transferred to, and indirectly becomes part of, the reader's consciousness. Secondly, as the representation has little in the way of attenuating figurative or aesthetic language, the horror and terror experienced by the narrator is intensified, thereby increasing the probability of empathetic dismay felt by the reader when engaging with the text. The representation achieves an ethical effect which, through its very violence, becomes almost anti-aesthetic, a negation of the Aristotelian claim that there is beauty to be found in the mimetic portrayal of corpses.[8] Even though each individual reader will relate to (and therefore experience) the depiction differently according to his or her own cultural and historical context, and even though iterability over time will ensure an infinite variation of interpretation of the details of the representation, the sparse and brutal descriptive style of writing constructs a scene that will remain ethically unacceptable to most readers. If the scene had been portrayed differently, with a greater reliance on figurative language, then the immediacy of the violence represented would almost certainly have been correspondingly reduced.

The aesthetic evaluation of *Fragments* is founded not so much on the quality of the writing (thus dependent upon criteria of textual effect, skilful turns of phrase, and effective employment of figurative language), as on the reliance on a sparse and descriptive style for recounting events that would be diminished by the use of such strategies. The resultant ethical and emotional responses of most readers would be characterised by empathy, sympathy, and outrage at both the individual acts of violence

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[8] Aristotle's theory may be valid in many instances of aesthetic representation – and principally in fictional or artistic contexts – but when it forms an integral part of a testimonial description, such as that extracted above, the verifiable immediacy of the violence emphasises an ethical response which tends to subordinate any potential aesthetic response, even in such cases of false testimony.

represented in the text, and at the institutional violence that makes such individual acts of direct violence possible. This is largely dependent upon the reader's ethical situation. In other words, the response to the text is essentially determined by the ethical space of the potential reader, who is situated, and responds, within a certain historical and contextual milieu. As occurred with the re-categorisation of *Fragments*, any radical revision of the ethical context and intertext of this space will probably result in a negative response to, and consequent re-evaluation of, the (unaltered) text.

2.3 The Ethical Re-evaluation of *Fragments*

However, the ethical re-evaluation that formed the basis of the reaction to the exposure of the fictionality of *Fragments* was not informed by aesthetic considerations: the narrative remained unaltered, the text after the exposure remained identical to the text before the exposure. Yet the fact that ethical assumptions can at any moment transform aesthetic evaluation, even in a given text, is a clear indication that it is ethics rather than aesthetics, at least in the case of representations of violence, that is instrumental in determining the formation of value judgement. A further question is whether there would be a re-re-evaluation of *Fragments*, if another investigation were to vindicate Wilkomirski and discredit Maechler. However, assuming that Wilkomirski did fabricate his Holocaust experiences, it is necessary to investigate the basis of the ethical critique of the text through the experience of the narrative as a combination of verifiable events (in terms of the general historical record of the Holocaust) and the fictional situations invented by Wilkomirski.

Some commentators, while relegating the re-evaluated text to the realm of empty narrative, and even kitsch, suggest that Wilkomirski did not necessarily set out deliberately to falsify his account. Richard Evans, commenting on the "bizarre mental world [of those] in the outer reaches of 'Holocaust studies'", writes that Wilkomirski "had made the whole story up from a mass of survivor literature which he had somehow internalized and digested until he had become convinced that the experiences these books recounted were his own" (Evans 2001: 261). It is worth repeating Derrida's comment that "[i]f reading and writing are one, as is easily thought these days, if reading *is* writing, this

oneness designates neither undifferentiated (con)fusion nor identity at perfect rest; the *is* that couples reading with writing must rip apart" (Derrida 1981a: 64-65), because if it is the case that Wilkomirski became "convinced that the experiences these books recounted were his own", then the intertextuality of *Fragments* becomes determined largely by the (con)fusion of Wilkomirski's thoughts combined with a Holocaust intertext. The consequence of this is that "there is every indication that Wilkomirski found his own narrative true and authentic because it unleashed such stunned silence, such waves of sympathy. Perhaps he did not really believe his story, but he did believe in his own telling of it" (Maechler 2001: 273). Maechler also suggests that "Wilkomirski's book has created this sort of resonance because in a certain sense he does relate authentic facts – that is, his own nightmares. He puts into words events he has created by self-hypnosis and possibly by other techniques, experiencing them so intensely that he possibly considers them true memories. His book is true in the emotionality it evokes, in the density of its horrors; that is perhaps also why so many genuine survivors have found their experiences expressed therein" (2001: 277-8). Testimonial textuality, verifiable or not, becomes a kind of implicit inter-textuality in which (actual) memories of Holocaust survivors resonate through the (fictional) text, thereby blurring the distinction between the imagined and the actual.

If the effect of the text of *Fragments* has been to create a plausible narrative based upon a personal understanding (as opposed to experience) of the Holocaust, then an ethical injunction against falsehood becomes less of an issue in determining ethical culpability. In addition, like any text, it becomes a site for multiple interpretations. This is evidenced by the fact that, even after the invention had been exposed, various individuals and groups continued to support the author and his text. For example, Deborah Lipstadt (the academic whom Holocaust denier David Irving attempted to sue for defamation) continued to use *Fragments* in her lectures on "Voices of the Shoah". Other sources overtly dismissed the effect of the revelations on the aesthetics of the work. Maechler quotes an editorial in the *St. Galler Tagblatt* that argues that "the horror that Wilkomirski describes through the eyes of an uncomprehending child still retains its collective and historical, albeit not its biographical, truth" (in Maechler 2001: 287).

By situating his text within a historically familiar framework using events and characters common to conventional public perceptions, Wilkomirski succeeded in creating a realistic impression of the Holocaust, if not the verifiable specifics of its actuality. This found particular resonance in the collective memory of many in the West for whom the Holocaust has assumed paradigmatic proportions. Wilkomirski merged historical detail with a fabrication of his own involvement. As it has already been argued that *any* text can approach an external world only indirectly, the events narrated in *Fragments* are no more nor less actual than any other factual or fictional representation. Yet, as Maechler argues, once the link between the first-person narrative and the historical record is shown to have been fabricated (through a generic and perceptual shift from autobiography to fiction), the initial aesthetic empathy created by the text is diminished: "What was a masterpiece becomes kitsch. Lacunae previously filled by readers with some knowledge of what is unutterably horrible are suddenly left empty. The text … is mercilessly reduced to its sheer material value. What remains is childish speech. The book is no longer an incarnation of horror" (Maechler 2001: 281). Not only is the link between the narrator and notions of verifiability compromised, but the relationship between the text and the expectation of the reader is irreparably damaged by this generic and contextual shift. Yet, as the preceding discussion seems to indicate, the choices facing the reader of *Fragments* must of necessity be informed by moral choices that are aporetic – the "not knowing where to go" (Derrida 1993: 12).

In Derridean terminology, drawing on the meaning of the Greek word, an *aporia* is a logical difficulty: "Once a system has been 'shaken' by following its totalizing logic to its final consequences, one finds an excess [which] can only be conceived as *neither* this *nor* that, or both at the same time" (Alan Bass, translator's introduction: xvii-iii in Derrida 1978). The inconsistencies and doubts that arise in the experience of representation and ethics can thus appropriately be described as aporetic. The inevitability of an aporetic reading is particularly relevant to the ethical (and hence aesthetic) evaluation of *Fragments*: "Where the figure of the step is refused to intuition, where the identity or indivisibility of a line is compromised, the identity to oneself and therefore the possible identification of an intangible edge – the crossing of the line – becomes a *problem.* There

is a *problem* as soon as the edge-line is threatened" (1993: 11). The "edge-line" that is threatened by the Wilkomirski case becomes emblematic of the aporia of moral choice inherent in any textual representation of violence. As the interpretation of a text is both iterable (in terms of future potential readers), and contextually situated (by individual readers within a specific socio-cultural milieu), *Fragments* represents an aporetic condition in which the intertextual actuality of the Holocaust as event and as text results in a narrative that becomes a site for multiple interpretations, while simultaneously being problematised by notions of verifiability and veracity.

It is therefore clear that the ethical and aesthetic problems raised by any consideration of *Fragments* are both ambiguous and perhaps even insoluble. As was argued in the previous chapter, the conventional notion of a normative ethics is inadequate when attempting to resolve the issues inherent in the plethora of meanings and plurality of contexts that are inescapably a part of any reading any textual representation of violence. The text of *Fragments* has no inherent meaning; rather, it suggests the infinite openness of any text to reading(s). When considered as a factual text, it portrays certain situations which are read in terms of an ethical response, and in a manner that allows for a generally favourable aesthetic evaluation. However, when evaluated as largely fictional – particularly as a fiction revealed as opposed to a fiction proclaimed – the initial judgement of those same ethical situations becomes compromised, and the feeling of a betrayal of the reader's expectations leads to a potentially negative aesthetic judgement of the text. This aporetic situation is a clear case in point showing where a postmodern notion of ethics becomes an appropriate approach to the evaluation of the representation of violence. An ethical standpoint that fails to acknowledge an aporetic reading of an ethically ambiguous text, preferring to subordinate it to a normative systemisation of ethical imperatives, is attempting to impose a single moral perspective, which will also have possible negative implications for an aesthetic evaluation of the representation. The problem that exists regarding the Wilkomirski case, however, is that the ethical issues raised by the situations described in the representation become compromised through a damaging generic shift, and consequently the text becomes assessed in terms of that change of context rather than in terms of the ethical representations within the narrative.

Even though the words remain unchanged, the narrative will always be subject to re-reading, and its meaning becomes increasingly unstable. It is only through a postmodern reading of the text that a reader may acknowledge the iterable, and hence variable, potential of representation, a potential that serves as a means to ethical and aesthetic responses in the historically situated reader.

CHAPTER 10

POSTMODERN ETHICS

1. The Possibilities of Postmodern Ethics

It was suggested earlier that the conventional notion of a normative ethical system is intrinsically inadequate when confronted with the plethora of meanings and plurality of contexts that are inescapably part of any reading of violence in a text However, by acknowledging the potential suggested by postmodern notions of the iterable text, an appropriate response to such a text may be attempted, as such readings allow for an appreciation of the iterable nature of the text that in turn shapes the ethical and aesthetic (re)interpretations of the potential reader. This is not to suggest that a postmodern reading is the only reading – this would merely replace one dogma with another – but rather that such a reading is better suited to interpreting a text within the framework of iterability and plurality. Similarly, a coherent postmodern reading would not necessarily exclude considerations articulated by normative ethical systems, but would rather include them in a pluralist understanding of the text. In contrast, an ethical system or theory that tends to refuse a pluralist approach, and instead attempts to subject the text to normative systemisation, is imposing both an ethical and an aesthetic imperative on the reader of the narrative.[1]

Yet the notion of postmodern ethics seems intrinsically contradictory. Postmodernism, in its refutation of systemisation and its consequent rejection of the idea of an exclusionary ethics, has been subject to much criticism for endorsing an ethical relativism that disregards many of the fundamental principles which are assumed by conventional moral

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[1] It should be noted that the term "ethics" as used throughout this study so far suggests the inter-subjective behavioural expectations and value-systems that are evident within a community or society. However, Levinas uses the term as a reflection of individual interaction and responsibility to the Other. Therefore, in discussions of Levinas's notion of the ethical, the latter use will be implied.

philosophy. In addition, the negation of the meta-narrative, and hence any notion of a fixed authority, seems to advocate the preclusion of any notion of a personal morality or public ethics. Yet some thinkers recognise the negative implications of an outlook that dismisses ethics altogether. Zygmunt Bauman, in particular, is highly critical of philosophers who argue for a movement away from the ethical. For example, he questions the methodology of theorists such as Gilles Lipovetsky, who assert that the postmodern era is characterized by "liberation" from moral worries: "Lipovetsky, like many other postmodern theorists, commits the twin errors of representing the *topic* of investigation as an investigative *resource*; that which should be *explained* as that which *explains*. To describe prevalent behaviour does not mean making a moral statement" (Bauman 1993: 3). Bauman similarly rejects the notion of moral relativism, where *any* moral position is defensible within its own cultural and social context: to argue for the non-universalizability of ethics is not to endorse naïve relativism, but to recognize the normative attempt to disregard differences, thereby "channelling … moral capacities to socially designed targets" (1993: 12). Other commentators have called upon the more radical theorists to relate their conjectural positions to the practice of daily life: "Many postmodernist thinkers still need to come to terms with their implied ethical bottom line, which … should be, not an indifferent relativism, but at best a tolerance of the fact that the values involved in different works of art and different ways of life are, as a matter of undoubted fact, incommensurate, and often in conflict" (Butler 2002: 122).

It is therefore evident that postmodern ethics have the potential for a practical relevance with regard to human existence and conduct (and the textual representation thereof), rather than remaining a theoretical and abstract critique of normative ethics, with little or no useful implications for the individual reader. Such relevance is even more apparent in the representations of occurrences of tension, conflict and violence. Although starkly different from a postmodern position, Gray's comment that ethics is only a convenience for normal times is reinforced by Levinas's condemnation of the suspension of the ethical in practice: "The state of war suspends morality; it divests the eternal institutions and obligations of their eternity and rescinds ad interim the unconditional imperatives … War is not only one of the ordeals – the greatest – of which morality lives; it renders morality

derisory" (Levinas 1969: 21).[2] To apply normative standards of morality to extreme situations (such as those depicted in the Holocaust narratives cited in the previous chapter) is to insist upon absolute (and hence unattainable) standards of ethical conduct from individuals whose very existence depends on a suspension of the imperatives associated with conventional ethical systems. It is to impose unrealistic ethical criteria on persons and situations beyond the experience of those evaluating such decisions and actions.

What postmodern ethics does suggest is an alternative to the coercive potential of ethical systems that rely on both prescription and proscription. This is clear in the ethical concern apparent in the work of theorists such as Levinas, Derrida (albeit obliquely) and Bauman. All have engaged with the possibility of the ethical within a postmodern context without sacrificing or denigrating the ethical impulse (for Levinas, the ethical impulse is vital), and their conclusions exhibit an overriding concern with the relationship with, and responsibility to, the Other, as well as an awareness and critique of normative ethical systems. Of the three, Bauman remains the theorist whose work is most relevant to a practical consideration regarding the postmodern ethics of representing violence. The philosophy of Levinas and Derrida is often abstract and removed from such practicality, even when they do apply to specific circumstances (such as in Derrida's consideration of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission).[3] Nevertheless, an understanding of the terminology employed in the writings of Levinas (and in the writings of Derrida on Levinas) is necessary in order properly to consider the postmodern ethical thought of Bauman. It is for this reason that certain components of this specialised vocabulary, combined with the complex question of *différance*, need to be clarified prior to any further consideration of the theories of Bauman as applied to the violence of the Holocaust narratives discussed in the previous chapter.

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[2] This is why Levinas aims to establish ethics as "first philosophy". His position, discussed further in Section 1.1 below, is metaphysical rather than conventionally normative. However, it is worth distinguishing between the ethical theory of Levinas (phenomenological or otherwise), and the practical critique of applied ethics as articulated by Gray.

[3] Derrida: "Archive Fever", seminar given at the University of the Witwatersrand, August 1998. (Hamilton *et al* 2002): Derrida engages with the concrete by questioning the notion of forgiveness as a political end, rather than as an end in itself.

1.1 Levinas

Faced with the ambivalence, aporia and contradictions of ethical choice, it may appear that the recompense of adhering to a normative ethical system is that it provides the individual with the means of negotiating the complexities of moral issues by formalising various rules, laws or methods through which the initial consequences of actions may be considered, evaluated and acted upon. In such a manner was the potential of moral convention realised, and if consequences are unforeseen, or rules found to be inadequate, then it is always possible for the individual to claim that he/she did what was possible or expected at the time. There is further some provision for the formulation of amended and/or new rules. In a postmodern ethics, however, such an attitude is no longer adequate. Instead, the ambivalence and uncertainty of the ethical moment becomes manifest. Rules and conventions which favour adherence to a code or to an imperative are challenged by the demand of, and encounter with, the Other[4]. To recognise this is to replace predictability with uncertainty, and to acknowledge some doubt as to whether our actions are appropriate in the circumstances. The self comes to the realisation that the standard of ethics set by a direct confrontation with the Other cannot be met; rather, it can only be attempted within specific social and personal contexts. It is this attempt to engage with the Other that is the crucial feature of the philosophy of Levinas, particularly as discussed in the early strongly phenomenological text *Totality and Infinity* (1961, English translation 1969), as well as in the later *Otherwise than Being, or Beyond Essence* (1974, English translation 1981), a text in which Levinas attempted to move beyond the constraints of phenomenological methods and their assumptions.[5]

The primary issue that situates Levinas outside the scope of normative ethical systems is his assertion that ethics is not merely a branch of philosophy, but rather fundamental to it. Ethics is therefore first philosophy. In other words, ethics precedes ontology; not in the sense of a chronological (an ontological) "before", but rather in the sense of a rejection of

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[4] Throughout this Chapter, a capital O will be consistently used for "Other", although the lower case form may appear in direct quotations from various texts cited.
[5] Apart from these texts (which offer differing versions of the ethical), the texts of Davis 1996, Bauman 1993, Critchley 1999 and Furrow 1995 have been consulted in order to acquire a general overview of Levinas's theory, which is particularly complex and abstract. Some simplification is inevitable; however, the purpose of this overview is to isolate elements of Levinas's thought which are relevant to Bauman's conception of postmodern ethics, rather than to attempt a comprehensive critique of Levinasian theory.

the hierarchy suggested by ontology: "Western philosophy has most often been an ontology: a reduction of the other to the same by interposition of a middle and neutral term that ensures the comprehension of being" (Levinas 1969: 43). Consequently, ontology suggests a "territory without morality", from whose perspective "moral relationship can only be a later addition, an artifice, never fully legitimate, forever an alien and awkward body, forever questionable and cast in a position in which apology is constantly demanded and never really accepted" (Bauman 1993: 71). It is in consequence of ethics being a "later addition" that the Other loses individuality through becoming subsumed within the Same, thereby becoming subject to the oppression implicit in the power of the dominant I. By refusing to recognise the Other as Other, the Same as dominant I erects a barrier supported by the notion of the community, in which membership is defined through exclusion. The result is an increased potential for violence and discrimination: "The people inside the community feel that they are good, even elect, civilized, noble and right-minded … the borders of morality are the borders of the community, and as a result those outside it are often not even regarded as human beings. The community thus opens the door to persecution" (Sofsky 2002: 74).

It may therefore be claimed that to ignore philosophies that disregard the moral relationship with the Other could result in persecution, and even genocide, of that Other. The Holocaust is the most obvious example of the collapse of ethical regard, and in *Otherwise than Being*, Levinas dedicates the work "[T]o the memory of those who were closest among the six million assassinated by the National Socialists, and of the millions on millions of all confessions and all nations, victims of the same hatred of the other man, the same anti-Semitism."[6] The indifference to the plight of the Other implicit in much ontological thought generates the space that may bring to fruition an event such as the Holocaust, and that allows for places such as Auschwitz. Derrida acknowledges this potential for violence in his early discussion and critique of Levinas's *Totality and Infinity*, "Violence and Metaphysics": "Incapable of respecting the Being and meaning of

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[6] To emphasise Levinas's concern with totalitarianism based on his own experience of institutional violence is not to commit any form of an intentional fallacy, but rather to situate his ethical theory within a broader ethical framework of which he had direct experience. "Levinas maintained that the forebodings, the reality, and the memory of the Holocaust always dominated his thinking" (Peperzak, in Levinas 1996: ix). Levinas himself is careful to emphasise the philosophical rationale of his argument in its own terms.

the other, phenomenology and ontology would be philosophies of violence. Through them, the entire philosophical tradition, in its meaning and at bottom, would make common cause with oppression and with the totalitarianism of the same. The ancient clandestine friendship between light and power, the ancient complicity between theoretical objectivity and techno-political possession" (Derrida 1978a: 91).

The actualisation of violence and oppression, with its attendant potential for atrocity and cruelty, must be considered as a failure of humanity as a whole. Just as Adorno questions the possibility of the aesthetic after Auschwitz,[7] so too does Levinas query the possibility of ethics in a post-Holocaust world, a world in which the project of modernity is complicit: "The essential problem is: Can we speak of an absolute commandment after Auschwitz. Can we speak of morality after the failure of morality" (quoted in Furrow 1995: 140). The representations of the violence of the Holocaust militate against absolute commandments, and instead re-emphasise that the failure of morality made explicit by such violence is the result of violence against the notion of the Other.

To avoid any dismissal of the Other, the *I am for* must necessarily be considered before the *I am*. The "I am for" is actualised when I strive towards the Other as neighbour, one who transcends the faceless and anonymous accumulation of humanity. In such a manner, I not only give active direction to myself as a moral agent and part of humanity, but also the Other as an integral part of that same humanity. The meeting with the Other becomes "an encounter with the human in the total nudity of its eyes" (Sim 1998: 304). The Other is revealed as irreducible to the Same, and inexhaustible, just as I am irreducible and inexhaustible: "The nakedness of the face is not what is presented to me because I disclose it, what would therefore be presented to me, to my powers, to my eyes, to my perception, in a light exterior to it. The face has turned to me – and this is its very nudity. It *is* by itself and not by reference to a system" (Levinas 1969: 74-5). There is a special significance of the "face" for Levinas which is apparent throughout his career. In a 1988 interview, Levinas asserted that "the absolute nakedness of a face, the absolutely

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[7] "Cultural criticism finds itself faced with the final stage of the dialectic of culture and barbarism. To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric. And this corrodes even the knowledge of why it has become impossible to write poetry today" (Adorno 1967: 34)

defenceless face, without covering, clothing or mask, is what opposes my power over it, my violence, and opposes it in an absolute way, with an opposition which is opposition itself" (Bauman 1993: 72). This opposition becomes an opposition against the Same, the dominance of which is assumed by any endeavour towards the universalisation and absolute grounding of the ethical.

To acknowledge exteriority,[8] where both the Other and I cannot become objectified as one, nor wholly defined as other; "makes possible the pluralism of society" (Levinas 1969: 291). It grounds both the social impulse, as well as the notion of human responsibility. The exposure to the gaze of the Other, just as he is exposed to my gaze, results in an acknowledgement not only of the exteriority of the Other, but the interiority of my self as witnessed by the gaze of the Other. This becomes a particular responsibility of the individual ethical agent, rather than being mere obedience to a universal imperative or utilitarian systemisation. In such a manner is the naïve notion that the "we" is the plural of the "I" negated, as the "I" has a multi-dimensional nature that only becomes "we" when I command the Other, and am commanded by the Other. The result is that "our moral party is not one of fusion, of dissolving my saintliness and your alterity in a common standard that obliterates the individuality of both" (Bauman 1993: 53).[9] Yet the question that remains is directed towards the likelihood of avoiding such subsuming of the Other into my ideas, personality and prejudices. The Other must therefore be approached with neutrality, without expectation – particularly when the Other has the potential not only of being a victim, but also the potential of being an oppressor. There is a responsibility to the Other that must operate without the necessity of reciprocal responsibility – this is crucial for Levinas.

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[8] "Exteriority" is that considered as "other-than-Being"; this thinking is flawed, however, because "by a process of recuperation … the other-than-Being turns out to be part of Being after all, only erroneously or provisionally separate from it" (Davis 1996: 35). In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas writes that "Being is Exteriority … Such as conception would in the end destroy exteriority, since subjectivity itself would be absorbed into exteriority [which would] encompass the very interiority that justified this appellation" (Levinas 1969: 290).
[9] For a discussion of Levinas's conception of the standards of saintliness, see Bauman 1993: 51-3: Saints are described as doing things which "[go] beyond and above 'sheer decency' or 'the call of duty'" (1993: 52).

This responsibility of the ethical agent is a crucial part of Levinas's ethical conception. True responsibility lies in refusing to use the standards of my morality as something with which to measure ethical standards in others. Responsibility is truly for the Other as my unconditional consent to his command: "The freedom of another could never begin in my freedom, that is, abide in the same present, be contemporary, be representable to me. The responsibility for the Other cannot have begun in my commitment, in my decision." (Levinas 1981: 10). Bauman argues that this results in the only foundation that ethics requires: taking responsibility by accepting that I am already responsible, with all the ambivalence that that leap entails. In stretching out towards the Other, the ambivalence and responsibility of ethics become the only foundation for the ethical agent: "I am I in the sole measure that I am responsible, a non-interchangeable I, I can substitute myself for everyone, but no-one can substitute himself for me" (Bauman 1993: 7). This "relationship of substitution" is therefore not a relationship in the sense commonly understood, as it is from the I to the Other with no reciprocity, no expectations, and no assumption of dialogue. Instead, "I" is substituted for the Other as if I were the Other, thus being both responsible to, as well as responsible for, the Other, prior to any responsibilities I may assume for myself. This manages to circumvent one of the central problems of moral philosophy: the prevalence, even dominance, of egocentric ethics, what Levinas refers to as an "egology".[10] To claim substitution and responsibility "circumvents another problem of egology, the claim that all my interests are interests *of* the self, since my moral responsibilities are in the first instance *for* the Other … This is more of a dialectical confrontation such that face to face grounds both the Other and oneself without reducing or absorbing either to the other" (Werhane 1995: 64-5).

Such ethical responsibility to the Other is largely shaped by what Levinas refers to in *Otherwise than Being* as "the Saying and the Said". The latter, referring to the utterances and statements of ordinary discourse that are subject to normative criteria of verifiability and convention, implies the former, which is the encounter with the Other inferred through each such utterance or statement. In other words, whereas the Said is the

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[10] "The ideal of Socratic truth thus rests on the essential self-sufficiency of the same, its identification in ipseity, its egoism. Philosophy is an egology" (Levinas 1969: 44).

necessary outcome of the meeting with the Other, the Saying (or, alternatively, "to Say") is the condition for the face-to-face which acknowledges the inexhaustibility of the Other prior to essence: "This Saying has to be reached in its existence antecedent to the Said, or else the Said has to be reduced to it. We must fix the meaning of this antecedent … Saying signifies otherwise than as an apparitor presenting essence and entities" (Levinas 1981: 46). The Saying therefore not only constitutes the Self and the Other relationally through the exteriority of the latter, before the discursively formalising nature of the Said grounds him/her in the systemisation of Being, but also makes possible the phenomenon of language within the ethical impulse: "The Saying is the sheer radicality of human speaking, of the event of being in relation with an Other; it is the non-thematizable ethical residue of language that escapes comprehension, interrupts philosophy, and is the very enactment of the ethical moment from the Same to the Other" (Critchley 1999: 7).[11] For Levinas, the possibility of meaning, when governed by the Said, is rule-bound owing to its dependence upon the ontological (even if it does assist in the facilitation of ordinary human interaction). Yet in the space manifested by the Saying, language provides the possibility of a transcendence of representation, an "extended epiphany" in which the Other and I become constituted in relation to one another. The possibility of language therefore provides the grounds for ethical interaction; conversely, the ethical arises as a precondition for the generation of language. Furthermore, just as the Saying provides the condition for language, so too does it provide the conditions for justice, which may be described as ethical responsibility placed within the "full light of the public order" (Levinas 1969: 212). To deny the Saying is to deny justice, thereby allowing for potential instances of tyranny and oppression as a result of an egocentric discourse that depends upon the systemisation of, and blind obedience to, the network of rules and obligations implied by a primacy of ontology and a subsequent dominance of traditional moral philosophy.

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[11] Werhane (1995: 61) has argued that this reliance on a (pre)-language that both constitutes the Same and conditions the encounter with the Other is echoed in the rejection of an egocentric ethics through language in the later thought of Wittgenstein, where Wittgenstein not only asserts the impossibility of a private language (language is repeatable, reproducible and comprehensible to a community), but also questions the possibility of the Self as wholly interior.

Yet the actuality and manifestation of justice, although germinated in the encounter with the Other, exists only when the encounter with the Other has been exposed to the third, the "neighbour of my neighbour". No longer is ethics prior to ontology since the very fact of the third Other determines the ontology of the society, the imposition of duties above rights and the creation of community. "The other who is the Third can be encountered only when we leave the realm of morality proper, and enter another world, the realm of Social Order ruled by Justice – not morality" (Bauman 1993: 113). The ambivalences and competing ethical systems of society now intrude upon the consciousness of the individual agent. It is at this point that the ethical space is exposed to the practice of postmodern ethics as described above. This is the moment of choice, and within that choice, the acknowledgement of the ambivalence inherent in the notion of ethics owing to notions of context, convention and what may be considered a normal society (see Note 20 below). Postmodern ethics therefore facilitates the encounter with the Other and the limitless responsibility towards exteriority, and suggests a potential for ethical practice. It is at this point that the reading of an iterable text makes possible an ethical effect upon the reader in response to the demands of the Other.

1.2 Derrida: Re-reading Levinas

Levinas's ethical thought is less concerned with debating specific ethical dilemmas than with the context in which a choice is to be made, and many of the instances of textual representations of violence cited in this study seem to suggest a setting aside of Levinas's account of the encounter with the Other. Therefore, a more practically orientated approach to postmodern ethics is necessary, and this can be introduced through the medium of the re-readings of Levinas by Derrida. It was mentioned earlier that Derrida approaches the question of ethics obliquely and with some hesitation, and some commentators have noted that Derrida's reluctance to engage directly with ethics is determined to a large extent by the necessity of critiquing (deconstructing) the philosophical discourse of ethics as it has been conventionally understood, prior to any suggestion of a postmodern ethics.[12] In *Limited Inc a b c ...*, Derrida responds to the

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[12] "Derrida's hesitance about speaking without hesitation on ethics and politics – one might even say his *avoidance* of these matters – is essential to the deconstructive enterprise … *deconstruction is a*

question of the ethical by asserting that to characterise such issues (under the rubric of 'unconditionality') seems "essentially associated with philosophemes that themselves call for deconstructive questioning. Through these difficulties, another language and different thoughts seek to make their way" (Derrida 1988: 153). Derrida's ethical horizon, although not explicit, is nevertheless inextricably linked with the pre-ontological notion of ethics as first philosophy as suggested by Levinas, and it is possible to acquire some insight into Derrida's project through his writings on Levinas, particularly in the texts "Violence and Metaphysics" and *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*. These texts offer various possible areas of enquiry that are of relevance to this study of the ethics of representing violence: one would be the nature of the term ethics; another the presence of the third, or the neighbour of my neighbour; and yet another Derrida's notion of hospitality (and the *arrivant*) as this both refers to, and complements, Levinas's notions of the Other, responsibility, and justice.

Derrida's deconstructive orientation towards conventional approaches to language leads towards a view of ethics that is understood as aporetic and iterable, therefore suggesting meanings that lie beyond traditional moral philosophy. In *Altérités* Derrida writes that: "I believe that when Levinas speaks of ethics – I wouldn't say that this has nothing in common with what has been covered over in this word from Greece to the German philosophy of the 19th Century, ethics is wholly other, and yet it is the same word" (Critchley 1999:16). Ethics becomes anterior as well as exterior to ethical responsibility, while simultaneously implying a reliance on conventional ontological notions of morality. De Vries claims that, for Derrida, "[r]esponsibility, the whole drama of decision and testimony, of act and passion, would thus consist in the reiterated engagement of this very difficulty – or aporia – of engaging … the ethical, the political, and the religious. [It compromises the infinite] by translating it into an inescapably limited set of principles and rules, laws and customs" (2001: 174).

'philosophy' of hesitation, although it must be understood that such hesitation is not arbitrary, contingent, or indeterminate, but rather, a rigorous, strictly determined hesitation: the 'experience of undecidability" (Critchley 1999: 42). Critchley also argues that "an ethical moment is essential to deconstructive reading … deconstruction 'is' ethical" (1999: 2)

The notion that the infinite is necessarily reduced to the finite or the practical, and the reliance of "first philosophy ethics" on ontology, forms the basis of Derrida's critique of Levinas in "Violence and Metaphysics". Derrida's critique is apt, as it suggests an engagement with the concrete that is discordant with Levinas's insistence that first philosophy ethics can only be considered prior to ontology. Levinas is charged with employing the very structures he sought to subvert while asserting an ethics as first philosophy, in order to make that assertion possible in the first place: "By making the origin of language, meaning, and difference the relation to the infinitely other, Levinas is resigned to betraying his own intentions in philosophical discourse. The latter is understood, and instructs, only by first permitting the same and Being to circulate within it" (Derrida 1978a: 151). As a result, ontological terms rooted in Western discourse and moral philosophy –hospitality, responsibility, justice – are employed in terms of ethics as first philosophy. Such terms are then re-inscribed by society in commonplace perceptions of principles, rules, laws and customs, and become an integral part of their practical vocabulary. Yet despite Derrida's claim that Levinas's ethics goes beyond the boundary of what can be considered ethics in day-to-day discourse, there still exists an unavoidable tension between the demands of the ethical Saying and the actuality of the ontological Said.

Perhaps following the unavoidability of such a tension, Derrida re-enters the ethical debate, re-interpreting ethics and responsibility as "absolute hospitality".[13] In *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*, he raises the question of "the relationships between an *ethics* of hospitality (an ethics *as* hospitality) and a *law* or *politics* of hospitality, for example, in the tradition of what Kant calls the conditions of universal hospitality in *cosmopolitical law*: 'with a view to perpetual peace'" (Derrida 1997: 19-20).[14] Derrida then asks the question whether it is even possible that an absolute hospitality (as proposed by Levinas) is able to complement (or even create) the conditions for law or politics: "How, then, are we to interpret this impossibility of founding, of deducing or deriving? Does this

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[13] Up until the death of Levinas, and the publication of *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas* in 1997, Derrida had paid relatively little explicit attention to Levinas's thought apart from the essay "Violence and Metaphysics" of 1978. However, Levinas remains an implicit influence on Derrida's writing.

[14] Levinas considers ethics as constitutive of an *a priori* state of peace (as opposed to Kant's ethical thought which looks forward to an ideal of peace as an interruption or end of a perpetual state of war).

impossibility signal a failing? Perhaps we should say the contrary. Perhaps we would, in truth, be put to another kind of test by the apparent negativity of this lacuna, this hiatus between ethics (first philosophy or metaphysics – in the sense, of course, that Levinas has given to these words), on the one hand, and, on the other, law or politics. If there is no lack here, would not such a hiatus in effect require us to think law and politics otherwise?" (1997: 20-21).

Derrida's shift to modifying ethics (or hospitality) can rather be considered as the *possibility* of a movement towards law and principles, in other words towards a praxis as opposed to a les practicable theory of ethics. Similarly, the notion of absolute hospitality can be considered as being feasible through a similar striving towards an ethics that can be applied in concrete situations; the infinite becomes subsumed within the finite, and the finite within the infinite. If this were not the case, then the notion of absolute hospitality would become subject to the potential criticism of irrelevance.[15] However, this relationship between absolute hospitality and law is necessarily aporetic. Derrida accordingly asks "whether the ethics of hospitality [in Levinas's thought] would be able to found a law and a politics, beyond the familial dwelling, within a society, nation, State or Nation-State" (Derrida 1997: 20).

One possibility posited by Derrida that may possibly bring about a conjunction between the abstract and the actual within the context of hospitality – the future and possible ethics – is the figure of the *arrivant*: a who or what that arrives at the door, monstrous, unexpected, and absolute. The absolute arrivant is "not an invader or an occupier, nor is it a colonizer, even if it can also become one, [is] not someone or something that arrives, a subject, a person, an individual, or a living thing" (Derrida 1993: 34). Rather "it" is an absolute hospitality, a *yes* to the future, a means to an event, a name which allows for the irreducibility of the Other. Although absolute, and therefore non-individual and non-subjective, to acknowledge the *arrivant* is to recognise a potential locus between abstraction and praxis, between absolute hospitality and the means of thinking ethics in

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[15] In a discussion of J. M. Coetzee's *Age of Iron*, Derek Attridge comments on this aspect of absolute hospitality towards the Other: "The longing for unmediated communication, … is driven by a fantasy of total union that cannot, in reality, exist between individuals" (Attridge 2005: 93).

the happenings of daily life. Without such acknowledgement, both absolute hospitality and the ethics of daily life become compromised owing to the negation of the former within normative ethical systems in which the ontology of the Said dominates (or even eliminates) the possibility of the Saying.

Yet the praxis of ethics in everyday existence is dependent not only upon the relationship of the Same to the Other, but also upon the relationship of the Same and the Other to the third, or (to use Levinas's terminology, the "neighbour of my neighbour"). If this were not the case, there would be little or no distinction, and no difference, beyond the encounter with the Other, and all encounters would follow the pattern of Same and Other: "The third would thus protect against the vertigo of ethical violence. For ethics could then be doubly exposed to such violence: exposed to undergo it but also to exercise it. Alternatively or simultaneously. It is true that the protecting or mediating third, in its juridico-political role, violates in its turn, at least potentially, the purity of the ethical desire devoted to the unique. Whence the terrible ineluctability of a double constraint" (Derrida 1997: 32). The third is therefore both the violation of the first philosophy and the opening up of the world of law and principle. Derrida plays with the relationship between singularity and universality, that at once fascinates and eludes him: "In and for itself, the ethical relationship could not rest in itself … And yet in the one for the other, face to face with the other, I am, in a way, facing all others. The introduction of the third – justice in Levinas's sense – is therefore as much the promise and enactment as the interruption and violation (Derrida says 'perjury') of ethical responsibility" (de Vries 2001: 186).

Additionally, for there to be even the possibility of justice, and the subsequent welcome of the Other and the third through hospitality, there must also be the possibility of a perversion of justice. This is why Derrida claims it is irresponsible to have a good conscience, to have no need to compromise or negotiate: this would assumes a bifurcated "all-or-nothing" notion of an absolute hospitality. The third therefore provides not only a rupture of the absolute hospitality, the "first philosophy" ethics, but in making justice possible, it also allows for laws, politics, principles, and ethical imperatives. Just as

representation is possible only through the conditions of the iterable, so too are ethics and hospitality subject to differing interpretations within different contexts: "what remains is to articulate this unconditionality with the determinate (Kant would say, hypothetical) conditions of this or that context; and this is the moment of strategies, of rhetorics, of ethics, and of politics. The structure thus described supposes both that there are only contexts, and that nothing *exists* outside context …The outside penetrates and thus determines the inside" (Derrida 1988: 152-3). Derrida here highlights the aporetic challenge of ethical enactment: although ethics as first philosophy remains theoretical, the encounter with the third that breaks that chain of responsibility to the Other opens up the world of law and ethics, which are then interpreted according to the context of the act. It is at this point that the postmodern potential for ethics as articulated by Bauman – ethical thought and action within a morally ambivalent and non-foundational social space – becomes significant, through the encounter with the law, the principles, and the politics of the everyday. It is at this point that the possibility of postmodern ethics with regard to reading textual instances of violence becomes viable, even if the language (and to some extent the thought processes) of Levinas and Derrida are so different from those of Baumann. Despite the change of register, the influence of Levinas and Derrida on Bauman's argument cannot be underestimated.

1.3 Postmodern Ethics and the Holocaust Narrative

Derek Attridge, in a discussion of the ethical in the works of J. M. Coetzee, claims that theories of ethics as asserted by philosophy, politics and religion, becomes embodied and concretized in works of literature, that it is the literary texts that "do justice" to the ethical impulse: "There is thus an ethical dimension to any act of literary signification or literary response, and there is also a sense in which the formally innovative text, the one that most estranges itself from the reader, makes the strongest ethical demand … if, however, the literary text is an event of signification (which is to say human signification), the demands it makes – to respect its otherness, to respond to its singularity, to avoid reducing it to the familiar and the utilitarian even while trying to understand it – may be ethical in a fundamental, nonmetaphorical sense" (Attridge 2005: 11). He then claims that "Otherness, then, is at stake in every literary work" (2005: 12). However, in a

postmodern sense, Otherness is not necessarily limited to fictional or literary texts, but is apparent in all texts as the potential reader is confronted by the Other in an infinite variety of guises and contexts. The Other as represented in textual violence – fictional or factual – suggests a complex ethical ambiguity, both in terms of the situation represented by the text, as well as the situation of the reader at the moment of the text's reading. It is precisely in reading such texts that the question of Otherness is exposed, as the reader's response to the text (either endorsing or rejecting its portrayal of Otherness and exteriority through the textual representations of violence) will contribute to both an ethical and an aesthetic evaluation of the text, within certain contextual intersubjective constraints.

When the text in question is a representation of violence, particularly when the violence is not only direct in nature but also directly influenced by institutional violence, then the process of (re)interpretation becomes more significant in its bearing on the reader and that reader's encounter with the Other. This is primarily because texts that depict violence often portray the dichotomy between the Same and the Other (as victims or perpetrators) far more explicitly than other texts. In addition, similar narratives may be employed by competing ideologies to support diametrically opposed instances of the Said, even when many of such instances are fallacious or expedient. Yet the issue of the significance of micro-narratives within and opposed to the dominant narrative discourses remains problematic, particularly in cases where the dominant discourse assumes dominion over the determination and deployment of the ethical space within a particular society.

This representation of violence is perhaps most apparent in the literature of the Holocaust, where testimony, history, fact and fiction often compete for prominence with respect to the objectives of current ideologies, not all of which are necessarily concerned with the facts as they were generally perceived to have happened. Bauman highlights this appropriation and deployment of memory by criticising the state of Israel which "tried to employ the tragic memories as the certificate of its political legitimacy, a safe-conduct pass for its past and future policies, and above all as the advance payment for the

injustices it might itself commit" (Bauman 1989: xi).[16] This analysis may be open to contestation; however, the notion of perception and memory is often fundamental to the construction of judgment and discrimination: Richard Evans, in an account of the Irving-Lipstadt libel case, contends that the concluding ruling against Irving could be perceived as being grounded less on Irving's biased historiography, than on the general opinion that his agenda was objectionable (Evans 2001). Irving's historical revisionism is a clear example of a micro-narrative which is opposed to mainstream historiography. The micro-narrative of Holocaust denial claims to prove that the Holocaust did not occur to the extent claimed by mainstream historians. Texts are used in attempts to disprove (rather than confirm) the events that constitute the public perception of the Holocaust by disputing the details contained within selected testimonies, memoirs or historical reports, or by extrapolating passages from fictional narratives in order to assert that the textual and historical archive of Holocaust history is no more than a fiction.

This process of (re)interpretation over time, of reading texts according to context and discourse, is consequently informed by ethical concerns as much as by social ideology. Conversely, political discourse informs the ethical norms prevalent at any one time, and as argued above, it is such reliance on the dominance of the ontological Said that negates the unconditional responsibility to the Other, thereby suggesting a domain that allows for the possibility for violence and even genocide. The Other, denied exteriority, can only be subsumed into the Same, or, in extreme cases, eliminated. When opposed to the dominant discourse, the Other is denied the right to welcome and justice within that discourse, with negative consequences for both oppressor and victim: "In actions beyond one's imagination such as the Holocaust, the notion of injustice was played out from an egocentric condition. But it was ultimately self-defeating, since the conquerors could not be or have meaning without the conquered, the Other" (Werhane 1995: 66). The

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[16] This is perhaps most apparent in the current Middle East conflict, where charges of anti-Semitism are common against critics of Israel's military and political policies. Following the Second World War, the idea of anti-Semitism has become inextricably combined with the memory of the Holocaust, with the result that anyone who is critical of Israel is considered by many to be somehow complicit with the Nazis. Those who portray the Palestinian point-of-view of the conflict are frequently attacked both officially and through the press in this manner. Israeli Journalist Amira Hass, often critical of her government's actions in the West Bank, writes that "I get messages saying I must have been a *kapo* (a Jewish camp overseer for the Nazis) in my first incarnation" (Pilger 2004: 333)

implication of this, that the Nazi regime has become defined primarily in relation to the peoples it oppressed and subjugated, suggests that reliance on egocentric aspirations can do no more than position the Same and the Other in a more obvious opposition than would be the case if these aspirations were less explicit.

2. Bauman, Ethics and *Fragments*

To consider an understanding of ethics as a means of investigating issues within the context of the concerns raised by the postmodern critiques of representation and society is not to assume that such an ethics is unconditional. As Bauman points out, "the novelty of the postmodern approach to ethics consists first and foremost not in the abandoning of characteristically modern moral concerns, but in the rejection of the typically modern ways of going about its moral problems … The great issues of ethics – like human rights, social justice, balance between peaceful co-operation and personal self-assertion, synchronisation of individual conduct and collective welfare – have lost none of their topicality. They only need to be seen, and dealt with, in a novel way" (Bauman 1993: 3-4). The focus of this section will therefore fall on the possibilities suggested by postmodern ethics when faced with the ethical ambivalence of the violence of Holocaust texts (both from the perspective of the potential reader's expectations and from the point of view of the narrative), and how the process of aesthetic evaluation is affected and effected through an innovative ethics that critiques, and in some cases even repudiates, the prohibiting and universalizing elements of normative ethics.

The four Holocaust texts cited above, without regard to their individual historical verifiability or literary genre, all have a bearing on this critique. Yet differing perceptions of genre affect the potential reader's reaction to each text, irrespective of common ethical concerns. Wilkomirski may have created a fiction in which the verifiability of the historical context cited disguises the fictionality of the text, and Wiesel's *Night* may be deliberately composed of both factual and fictional elements. However, both texts reflect the Nazi philosophy that through its very systemisation rejected and ultimately attempted to eliminate the Other. Wilkomirski, by highlighting that attempt through the depiction of

violence, created an ethical framework for characters who either did not exist in a verifiable actuality, or who did not in actuality experience those events. Such a betrayal of the expectations of the reader was felt by many of his critics as diminishing the genuine suffering of those who did experience the horrors of the Holocaust. Nevertheless, the personal events described in the text – although not factual in themselves – reflect the actual historical violence of the Holocaust through particularly powerful and familiar representations: "Readers find in Wilkomirski's text essential historical facts that are already known or sound plausible. They automatically locate the story within the realm of reality. The context and the individual facts scattered within it lend the narrative the authority of fact" (Maechler 2001: 279).

Wiesel's narrative is also literary rather than testimonial in its representation, yet *Night* has not been subject to the same controversy that resulted following the exposure of Wilkomirski's inventions. The ethical response to the Wilkomirski affair therefore seems more concerned with the avowed intentions of the author, and the subsequent correspondence between the text and the expectations of the potential reader. Such a reader may feel horror at the execution of a child as narrated by Wiesel (1960: 76-7), while accepting that the description may be invented. However, the probability that such an event could have occurred ensures that the description remains powerful and disturbing. Yet a description of the death of children in *Fragments* (1995: 69-71), when revealed as fiction rather than proclaimed to be fictional, paradoxically tends to negate the power of representation. The implication of this is that many readers, particularly those who rely on ethical concerns within a normative system, become more focused on an imperative for absolute truth than on the potential for ethical diversity inherent in any morally ambivalent representation. Wiesel is known to be a Holocaust survivor; therefore any instances of fictionality in his narrative are considered legitimate: verifiable autobiographical status appears (in this case) to negate legitimate adverse criticism of the text.[17] Wilkomirski, on the other hand, was shown to be personally unconnected with the

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[17] There has been negative criticism of Wiesel, but this has appeared only occasionally, and mainly on certain web-sites (see http://www.counterpunch.org/ and http://www.theonion.com/ Accessed 2 November 2007). However, mainstream literary evaluations of *Night* have been overwhelmingly positive, and the impact of Wiesel's writings is reflected his being awarded the 1986 Nobel Peace Prize.

events; therefore the instances of fictionality in his narrative are considered unjustifiable. The imperative for truth can therefore more accurately be acknowledged as an imperative for authenticity. It becomes irrelevant to such readers that Wilkomirski may be a recognised authority on the Holocaust. The violation of the expectation of authenticity is extrapolated into a violation of ethical norms, which in turn results in a negative re-evaluation of his text.[18]

By discussing *Fragments* in terms of a postmodern ethics indifferent to, or critical of, claims of absolute authenticity, it is possible to create an awareness of the continuing ethical concerns that permeate the textual depictions of violence. Bauman has identified the main assumptions of such an ethics as follows: ambivalence; multiplicity of choice; aporia; non-universalisation; and the encounter with the Other. By applying each of these assumptions in turn to the issues raised in *Fragments* and the other texts concerned with the Holocaust, it is possible to form a hypothesis concerning the relevance of postmodern strategies to the ethical and aesthetic evaluation of textual violence.

2.1 Ambivalence

Postmodern ethics assumes that all individuals are morally ambivalent. The bifurcated notion of humans as being fundamentally good or fundamentally bad is no more than a construct propagated by normative ethical systems, and such efforts "are either ineffective or result in exacerbating the evil they wish to disarm. Given the primary structure of human togetherness, a non-ambivalent morality is an existential impossibility" (Bauman 1993: 10).[19] Such ambivalence suggests that the notion of a normative ethics that categorises humans, as well as their actions, within pre-conceived notions of the ought, is problematical. As discussed previously, Levinas in particular rejects this attempt at "interiority", arguing instead for the primacy of the "exteriority" of

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[18] However, the notion of violation in terms of self-misrepresentation is also pertinent to a re-evaluation of the aesthetics of the text. After the "death of the author", authorial self-misrepresentation becomes less relevant to textual interpretation, even if (as Foucault argues), the name of the author often remains as a guarantor of cultural value.

[19] The notion that such moral systems exacerbate evil is explored by such diverse thinkers as Russell (*Why I am not a Christian* 1996), Holloway (*Godless Morality* 1999) and Bauman (*Modernity and the Holocaust* 1989).

the Other that does not constrain him or her within the moral expectations of the Same. This, in effect, negates the ineffectiveness of normative ethical systems in confronting the ambivalence suggested by the Other.

However, the assumption of bifurcation is evident in most ethical systems. The "us versus them" argument is an obvious rhetorical ploy in many ideological conflicts.[20] Such argument results in the deliberate exclusion of the Other from any serious ethical consideration, and can be seen within micro-systems as well as within larger conflicts. For example, Bauman quotes David Roskies's comments on the bifurcation of oppressor and victim as the theoretical study of the Holocaust became entrenched within the interests of particular ideologies: "The more the grey was eliminated, the more the Holocaust as archetype could take on its specific contours. The Jewish dead were absolutely good, the Nazis and their collaborators were absolutely evil" (quoted in Bauman 1989: x). To challenge this view often results in a hostile response, as evidenced by the virulent criticism of Hannah Arendt when she "was shouted down by a chorus of offended feelings when she suggested that the victims of an inhuman regime might have lost some of their humanity on the road to perdition" (Bauman 1989: x). In other words, Arendt was criticised because she argued against the unthinking bifurcation of good and evil, of universal victim and universal oppressor. Yet her argument does not diminish the event of the Holocaust. Rather, it is to suggest that within the comprehensiveness of that history, events occurred that challenge absolutist notions of bifurcation. For example, in *Fragments*, a mother and child are saved by an SS guard from those selected for extermination:

> They were standing next to a stacked pile of corpses. The SS men were patrolling impatiently up and down.
> Then something completely extraordinary happened. A uniform, a young one, came slowly up beside Mila's mother, looked her up and down for a moment, then grabbed hold of her and with a single heave threw her on top of the corpses that were next to them. Mila was being held tight by her mother's hand, so she was carried along with her.

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[20] Such an argument is a presumptive informal fallacy of relevance: "In limiting the field, the perpetrator is leaving out of the discussion material which could well influence the outcome. The fallacy … is caused not by the intrusion of irrelevant material, but by the exclusion of relevant items" (Pirie 1985: 21).

> They lay there, frozen with terror, on the cold bodies. They didn't understand what had happened, or why; it had all happened so fast. But they did understand that now there was a way out. (1995: 81)[21]

This passage is remarkable in that it juxtaposes the direct effects of institutional violence – the stacked corpses, the mother and child waiting to die – with the almost inexplicable action of an SS soldier who saves them from certain death. This passage does not suggest that the SS man was "absolutely good", yet it also refutes the notion that he was "absolutely evil". Compare this passage with another from *Night*:

> The head of our tent was a German. An assassin's face, fleshy lips, hands like a wolf's paws. He was so fat he could hardly move. Like the leader of the camp, he loved children. As soon as we arrived, he had brought them bread, soup and margarine. (Actually, this was not disinterested affection: there was a considerable traffic in children among homosexuals here, I learned later).
> (1960: 59)[22]

In this extract, Wiesel's description challenges the notion that the victims of the Holocaust were possessed of an inherent goodness. Both passages reinforce Bauman's insistence that "a non-ambivalent morality is an existential impossibility". To insist on absolutes is to deny ambivalence, and to deny ambivalence is to assume the tenets of a normative ethical system (either that of the dominant discourse, or that of a competing counter-ethics) without question or critique. The danger of such compliance, particularly concerning notions of absolute good and evil, is that it becomes easier to demonise and eliminate those who are labelled by the prevailing norm as "evil". As Adam Morton writes in his text, *On Evil*: "The danger is this. Thinking in terms of evil can give us the same attitudes as evil-doers. They often think that their victims deserve what they get, that they are worthless scum, inferior beings, or dangerously alien. They often think, in fact, that their victims are evil. Thinking in terms of evil can, if we are not careful, make us accomplices in atrocity" (Morton 2004: 6).

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[21] It is possible that the portrayal of a humane Nazi in this text contributed to its hostile reception. However, such portrayals are not limited to fictional texts, and an invented representation in one text does not negate similar representations in other texts.

[22] Similar accounts of the inhumanity of victims towards one another are evident in explicitly historical and factual texts (see Müller 1979: 42ff). Again, this argues against ethical bifurcation.

2.2 Choice

Bauman insists that ethical phenomena are not deontological, where only one good or correct choice is identifiable among numerous inappropriate choices. Such choices are non-rational, even irrational. As was seen in the discussion of utilitarianism in the previous chapter, the consequences of any act are not foreseeable beyond a certain point, and even the most altruistic and seemingly rational of ethical acts may result in negative consequences in the longer term, even to the extent of the Other's becoming subject to, and thereby enslaved to, the expectations of the I.[23] The idea that there is only one choice is often causally linked to the quasi-religious insistence on free will, where the only good choice is paradoxically not to choose, since to choose (or rather, to choose independently of the dictates of accepted moral practices) implies to choose the incorrect or evil option. Again it becomes apparent that the validity of a normative ethics is applicable only within a presumption of normality. To make the right choice is generally unproblematic when the given options are relatively well defined, and the moral norms and related punitive measures of society obvious to all within that society. In terms of the Holocaust, however, such norms become virtually meaningless, subsumed beneath the institutional and direct violence that governed the lives of the dominant and the marginal discourses alike. Chapter 7 of *Fragments* recounts how the narrator, in order to relieve the intense discomfort of a panic-stricken new prisoner in his block, advises him to soil the straw in which he is lying rather than to wait for the bucket that serves as a latrine – even though to do so is to transgress the regulations set down by those administering the camp:

> "Just go in the straw, right where you are," a loud voice said suddenly.
> At first I was stunned, then I shook – that sounded like my voice. It *was*.
> With horror I realized that I'd said right out loud, really loud, what I only thought I was thinking.
> Everyone listened tensely. The footsteps went away again. The new boy whimpered quietly, but it didn't sound like pain anymore, it sounded like relief and exhaustion, and soon we were all asleep.
> (1995: 63)

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[23] For example, the motives governing the missionaries in Africa in the nineteenth century may have been personally altruistic, but their efforts also proved favourable to those whose interests were more exploitative, resulting in an increased misery and destruction that could not have been foreseen by the Church. See Pakenham *The Scramble for Africa* (1991).

The following morning, when the transgression is discovered by the guards, they demand of the prisoners the name of the responsible party. It is at this moment that the narrator is faced with his moral dilemma, a dilemma not wholly comprehensible to readers unacquainted with the breakdown of moral certainty:

> Should I identify myself? Protect the new boy? Should I say it? Yes, I should say that I was the cause of it.
> I stood frozen, didn't say a word, didn't step forward, and knew in despair that my fear and cowardice were winning out …
> Fear and guilt choked off my breath. I couldn't stand it any more. I wanted to sink into the muddy ground, become invisible.
> (64-5)

The narrator chooses to stay silent, and the inmate who followed his advice is exposed and executed as a result ("There was a crack of bones, then hard footsteps and the sound of something being dragged toward the block in the rear" (66)). The choice faced by the narrator is less a matter of normative morality – although the narrator is subsequently consumed by guilt and shame – and more a matter of survival. There is no clear right or wrong choice. Many readers, from the vantage point of a normal society governed by reasoned moral paradigms,[24] may claim to be appalled at the actions of the narrator, preferring (from their own moral perspective) that he do the "right thing" (as if there were only *one* right thing to do) and sacrifice himself for the new boy – although it is likely that both would have been murdered as a result. Yet the ethical ambivalence that is intrinsic to every moral choice, even in so-called normal times, cannot be satisfactorily answered by applying one's own particular standards to a context such as the one described above. To do so contributes the imposition of moral preference upon the Other, and to a refusal to acknowledge the contextual ethical space in which the choices of the Other are made. This is not to maintain the relativist position of the potential ethical purity of an principled Nazi, but rather to emphasise that the motives governing the moral

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[24] To label a society normal in an ethical sense is to imply that the moral decisions to be made are consistent with that society's conventional expectations. Thus, for an educated citizen in ancient Athens, to have a male lover was consistent with that society's paradigms; the same could not be said to be the case in present-day middle America, for instance. The decision faced by the narrator above, though, is clearly within an ethical situation determined by a micro-narrative unacceptable to the majority of readers in contemporary society. Conventional ethics can function satisfactorily only when placed within a relatively stable framework of a society where extremes such as the Holocaust have no place.

choices of an individual are determined by both personal circumstance and social convention, and are consequently frequently aporetic rather than immediately evident.

2.3 Aporia

Because humans are morally ambivalent, the moral choices that are faced, whether acted upon or not, are inevitably distinguished by irreconcilable conflicts and contradictions. Such choices are therefore aporetic (see Section 2.3 of Chapter 9), and aporia as a condition of postmodern reading becomes a condition of postmodern ethics. To make a moral choice is to create a chain of consequences, some obvious and others unforeseeable. Yet to avoid making a choice is not possible, as to attempt to do so constitutes a kind of choice. The contradictions and conflicts that result are liable to be simply accepted by those for whom a teleological ethics prescribes a bifurcated perception of morality, and who are inclined to categorise individuals and cultures within a framework determined by the dictates of the Same. This analysis of human ethical thought assumes a calculated transgression by the Other of the ethical norms of the Same, that the Other is working within the same moral paradigm as the Same. Yet it is clear that those who are considered as transgressors are not necessarily operating within the same ethical framework, and may not even consider themselves as transgressors.[25] For example, the truck driver in *The Reader* argues that the executioners "don't hate the people they execute, and they execute them all the same … He's doing his work, he doesn't hate the people he executes, he's not taking revenge on them, he's not killing them because they're in his way or threatening him or attacking him. They're a matter of such indifference to him that he can kill them as easily as not" (Schlink 1997: 150). Even executioners, habituated to the acts of violence for which they themselves were directly responsible, did not necessarily view such acts as the consequences of a moral choice. However, indifference must be considered in itself as a moral alternative, particularly when informed by ideological concerns that de-personify or objectify the Other (which results in an incapacity to sympathise or empathise with the Other), and the consequences of choosing indifference cannot be subsequently disregarded. To do so is to ignore future

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[25] Although this is not a Levinasian notion, the potential for differing ethical frameworks is consistent with a postmodern recognition of an ethical ambivalence of choice.

consequences and conflict as a result of the act of indifference, or to acquiesce in a system in which killing members of a particular group becomes part of an established bureaucratic process.[26] As Bauman emphasises, the consequences of a moral choice are often impossible to foresee, but both a choice and the implications of its consequences cannot be avoided. It is these consequences that are open to scrutiny by later observers, yet the ambivalence of the context is often ignored. The representation of such choices, particularly within the context of acts of violence, re-affirms this aporetic situation for adherents of all ethical systems, and therefore serves both as a critique of, and a warning to, the ethical suppositions of potential readers in differing circumstances.

2.4 Universality

To assume a foundational or universal nature of the moral impulse is to assume sanctioned authority, which may in turn lead to an oppression of opposing views and a denial of ambivalence and aporia. To do so leads once again to a rejection of the ethics of the Other, with a simultaneous privileging of the assumed universal ethic. Although such a position would not necessarily lead to oppression, in its extreme form the privileging of a universal ethic ignores the life-expectations of the Other altogether. This would then justify any oppression in terms of the ethics of the oppressor, without regard to those beyond the scope of its concerns: the alien, the outsider, the Other in all its forms.

In *Modernity and the Holocaust*, Bauman observes that the ethical assumptions of the Nazi system excluded any moral consideration for the victims of the genocide, or the possibility that the Other might have moral considerations of his or her own. This is most vividly apparent in the screening of members of the concentration camp death squads in order to eliminate any sadists or over-zealous executioners; Himmler is said to have "expressed deep, and in all likelihood genuine, concern with maintaining the mental sanity and *moral standards* of his many subordinates engaged daily in inhumane activity; he also expressed pride that, in his belief, both sanity and *morality* emerged unscathed from the test" (Bauman 1989: 20, italics added). To be a Nazi executioner was to keep

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[26] See Goldhagen, D *Hitler's Willing Executioners* (1997) in which he argues that wilful indifference to genocide is equivalent to complicity. Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (1963) highlights the potential for acquiescence in atrocity under the guise of bureaucratic duty .

one's morality intact, despite the disagreeable nature of the work. The language used by the Nazi guards in the texts cited supports this notion that the denial of exteriority of the Other is fundamental to the assumption of moral infallibility within a universalizing ethical system. The complete physical and psychological manipulation of the Other becomes necessary. For example, in *Eyewitness Auschwitz*, Filip Müller recounts how, dismayed by his own complicity in the murder of his fellow Jews as a member of the *sonderkommando*, he opted to join a group of Jews in the gas chamber. Before the gas is released, however, he is dragged out by the SS guard, Kurchuss:

> Kurchuss was the first to recognise me and at once set about me with his truncheon. I fell to the floor, stood up and was knocked down by a blow from his fist. As I stood on my feet for the third or fourth time, Kurchuss yelled at me: 'You bloody shit, get it into your stupid head: *we* decide how long you stay alive and when you die, and not you.' "
> (1979: 114)

Similarly in *Fragments*, in the incident described above when the narrator has to decide whether or not to admit his own complicity, the SS hunt for their victim with the words "Whatever swine is responsible, identify yourself" (64). Although the language of abuse commonly includes references to animals and sub-human behaviour, the abuse suffered by the characters in these texts is governed by the pervasive institutional violence which has the effect not merely of insulting, but also of producing a dehumanisation of the Other. The attitude of the SS officer who greets the new inmates in *Night* is described in such terms: "He looked us over as if we were a pack of leprous dogs hanging on to our lives" (Wiesel 1960: 50). Later, when the prisoner in charge of their block offers words of encouragement, the protagonist Eliezer notes with relief that these are "the first human words" they have heard at Auschwitz (53). The moral system has divided the Same from the Other, and although the Others may seek to retain their ethical commitment in contradistinction to the Same, the potential exists for a diminution of the assumed ethical values that previously gave direction to both parties.

2.5 The Encounter with the Other

The Other, the not-I, becomes the locus of ethical thought and praxis through the recognition of the Other as Other. The inclination to act ethically must take as its starting point an encounter with the Other, with all the responsibility that this entails. Combined with the notions of ambivalence, non-universalizability and aporia, the encounter with the Other creates the conditions for a postmodern ethics. Throughout the texts cited above, there are encounters with the Other: the Other as oppressor, the Other as victim, the Other as fellow-victim. Yet the consequence from a narrative point of view is an emphasis on the distortion of the Self, and the denial of the Other. This occurs to such an extent in *Fragments* that the narrator is forced to submit to utter isolation: "Nothing connects to anything else anymore. Nothing is in its right place. Nothing has any value … I'm just an eye, taking in what it sees, giving nothing back" (87). Similarly, in *Night*, the deeply religious narrator is alienated from the ultimate Other synonymous with God, and this is interpreted as the betrayal by God not only of the narrator, but of all His people: "Behind me, I hears the same man asking: 'Where is God now?' And I heard a voice within me answer him: 'Where is He? Here He is – He is hanging here on this gallows …'" (77).[27] This sense of isolation is common to the narrators of all these texts: "Wiesel appropriately named this factual account of his experiences *Night*, for, indeed, it shows the profound darkness and utter loneliness into which his spiritual and physical being had fallen" (Bialosky 1977: 65).

Yet these descriptions of a separation from, and an indifference to, the Other also serve another ethical purpose, one that is most apparent in representations of violence: the demand on the reader to experience that alienation through the representation. It is only through such an interaction with the representation through reading that the reader may be made aware of the vital importance of future encounters with the Other that will be informed by the ethical thought and practice. Even a text such as *Fragments*, whose ethical foundations are questionable in view of the deception attempted by the author,

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[27] The ultimate Other, according to Levinas, is derived from encounters with individual Others: "Monotheism signifies this human kinship, this idea of a human race that refers back to the approach of the Other" (Levinas 1969: 214). This makes Eliezer's rejection of God even more profound, as it implies a negation of his previous and potential encounters with all Others.

becomes a locus of ethical praxis owing to its positioning within possible experience.[28] Such a framing of the ethical experience is partly the rationale behind considering a text that is particularly violent as aesthetically justifiable, even if its topic may be objectionable. There is clearly division of opinion as to the ethical possibilities inherent in the aestheticisation of violence: the debate over texts such a *Last Exit to Brooklyn* is a case in point, as is the debate over *Fragments*. Yet the key question to be asked is whether the representation – violent as it may seem – allows for an encounter with, and a responsibility to, the Other. The answer to this must take as its starting point the Other as Other – or put differently, the Other undefined by the dictates of the ontological Same – without necessarily resorting to the rules and imperatives of normative ethical systems. Although this rejection of universalizability may imply that it is a purely individual matter as to whether or not the encounter with the Other takes place, it is rather the case that the way is opened for an inter-subjective ethics that is not dominated by the decisions of the Same, yet is shaped by the aporia of responsibility in the face of duty.

In *The Gift of Death*, Derrida investigates this aporetic relationship between the universal and the singular, as suggested by Kierkegaard's Abraham in the latter's *Fear and Trembling*. For Abraham to obey God's command to kill his son Isaac is to transgress the universal ethic, to act singularly and without precedent, law or convention. The temptation for Abraham is therefore the safety of normative responsibility; yet this would signal his irresponsibility: "If decision-making is relegated to a knowledge that it is content to follow or to develop, then it is no more a responsible decision, it is the technical deployment of a cognitive apparatus, The simple mechanistic deployment of a theorem" (Derrida 1995: 24). Derrida, at once following and critically interpreting Kierkegaard, suggests that normative ethical systems reduce the aporia of decision to the certainty of knowledge, and such a reduction suggests a denial of responsibility towards the Other: "Kant explains that to act morally is to act "out of duty" and not only "by conforming to duty." Kierkegaard sees "acting out of duty," in the universalizable sense of the law, as a dereliction of one's absolute duty" (1995: 63). To respond to the call of

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[28] "His book is true in the emotionality it evokes, in the density of its horrors; that is perhaps also, why so many genuine survivors have found their experiences expressed therein" (Maechler 2001: 278).

the Other is singular, in opposition to the universalized call of duty and responsibility. To respond to the Other as wholly Other goes beyond normative ethics and responsibility, placing each individual in the place of Abraham, faced with the aporia of decision-making: "I am responsible to any one (that is to say to any other) only by failing in my responsibility to all the others, to the ethical or political generality. And I can never justify this sacrifice, I must always hold my peace about it. Whether I want to nor not, I can never justify the fact that I prefer or sacrifice any one (any other) to the other" (1995: 70).

Derrida also recognises that although assigning responsibility to singularities (as opposed to the universalizable) is unjustifiable, it is also fundamentally unavoidable, even when considering something as seemingly banal as feeding one's own cat while ignoring the potential hunger of all other cats (1995: 71). Yet to recognise the aporia without acting purely "out of duty" is to recognise the dichotomy between a singular and a universal ethical response. Similarly, Bauman's notion of a postmodern ethical reading is critical of any coercive ethical system that attempts to limit or constrain the aporia facing the ethical individual. Such an approach is necessarily suspicious of the humanist belief in a "non-ambivalent, non-aporetic ethical code" (Bauman 1993: 9). The postmodern moral crisis is identifiable in a distrust of moral authorities, suspicion of any assertions of infallibility, and an ambivalence regarding the instigation and consequences of moral action as defined by normative ethical systems. Instead, the staring point is the Other, and it is only through the Other that the moral self may be realised. A postmodern ethics of reading contributes to a re-establishment of the relationship with the Other that had become fragmented through the project of modernity: "A postmodern ethics would be one that readmits the Other as neighbour … back from the wasteland of calculated interests to which it had been exiled; an ethics that restores the autonomous moral significance of proximity; an ethics that recasts the Other as the crucial character in the process through which the moral self comes into its own" (Bauman 1993: 84).[29]

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[29] This seems to run the risk of once again reducing the Other to the Same; however, this would be the case only if the notion of inter-subjectivity was little more than a subjectivity imposed by the Same upon the other, rather than, as Bauman insists, being an "autonomous significance of proximity".

3. Postmodern Ethics and the Representation of Violence

There remain various implications of postmodern ethics for the textual representations of violence. Firstly, there is the notion of justice and the third. It has been argued that Levinas's ethical theory approaches a potential for practical human interaction through Derrida's introduction of the third (particularly in the notion of the *arrivant*, that third who is monstrous, unexpected, and absolute – see Section 1.23 above), and the movement away from an ethics focused upon the individual into a social, political and cultural sphere in which the ambiguities and aporia of postmodern ethics become immediate and relevant. This is most clearly seen in *Night*, where Eliezer's encounters with human Others becomes projected into his encounter with the divine: "Never shall I forget the nocturnal silence which deprived me, for all eternity, of the desire to live. Never shall I forget those moments which murdered my God and my soul and turned my dreams to dust. Never shall I forget these things, even if I am condemned to live as long as God Himself. Never" (1960: 45). The intervention of the negating third – the neighbour of my neighbour – has replaced the singularity of the initial (and peaceful) Other. What this suggests is not a naïve acceptance of the third, nor is it a confirmation of a relativism that prohibits ethical judgement. What the third does is to create the conditions within which a contextual and practical ethics may function, not necessarily built upon Kantian or other imperatives, but faced with the ambiguity and aporia common to individual experiences within the context of differing occurrences and cultural contexts.

This is particularly applicable to any discussion of the ethics of *Fragments*, in view of the non-factual foundations upon which it bases its ethical assumptions. In terms of reader-response theory, the encounter of Wilkomirski and the Other becomes the encounter between the context of the reader and the reading of the text. The representation of specific ethical contradictions juxtaposed with the familiar factual background of the Holocaust contributes to a reading of the text that becomes in its ethical implications more ambivalent and complex than would be the reading of a specifically factual representation, such as *Eyewitness Auschwitz*. The latter evinces moments that are

excruciating in their immediacy, and the reader is faced with situations that he or she justifiably believes to be historically verifiable, even if these situations still present moral ambiguities. In the former text, however, the reader is faced with representations of intolerable events that are in all likelihood fictitious, even if probable with respect to the expectations of the reader with some knowledge of Holocaust history and testimony. Some would feel that the juxtaposition results in a text devoid of both authenticity and aesthetic value: a text that will be experienced, as Maechler argues, within "the context of familiar historical events, so that the childish inner world is dialectically connected with the objective horrors of the Shoah. But once this assumption of authenticity falls away, the interior and exterior worlds of *Fragments* merge seamlessly into one, and all that is left is the world of trivialities" (2001: 282).

Nevertheless, upon closer investigation, it is clear that the situations are *not* trivial, and it cannot be denied that the actuality of the Holocaust as a multi-faceted set of events is verifiable, even when presented in fictional form. The fictional form of a text such as *Night* does not suggest insignificance, nor do the inventions of Holocaust novels such as *The Reader* invite accusations of inconsequence. The ethical problems that characterise the controversy surrounding *Fragments* exist primarily because of the modification of the perceptions initially fulfilled in the reader prior to the revelations of the textual invention; that is, ethical disapprobation is a consequence less of the textual representation of violence than of the unexpected and therefore unwelcome transformation of the status of the represented Other, combined with the extra-textual deception perpetrated by the author. The encounter with, and representation of, the Other with which the reader can identify and empathise – the child Wilkomirski – together with the implementation of the violence of the Nazis, creates an undemanding and comfortable atmosphere within which the ethical implications of the Holocaust can remain clear within a normative ethical evaluation of the situation.

Yet, when the notion of the Other becomes destabilised, and when the child Wilkomirski is revealed as a fictional character, that impression is disturbed, and replaced with a null reference to the external world. This serves to negate the sense of actuality within which

individual empathy, framed by the expectation of verifiability, may function (yet this is not problematical within avowedly fictional texts). The result is a transfer of the ethical connotations from the reading of the text to the context of its composition. It is not implausible to assert that if Wilkomirski had from the outset proclaimed his text to be largely fictional (just as Wiesel makes no claims to unqualified historical truth in *Night*), rather than endeavouring to portray the experiences in the text as an accurate chronicle, then the critical and ethical reaction would have remained focused upon the text rather than upon the author. The aporia that necessarily exists between ethics and law becomes subject to normative ethical rules in the case of *Fragments*. There arises an irrational confusion between what is represented and the behaviour of the author: rather than being permitted to concentrate upon the potential for ethical evaluation that the depictions of violence in the text demand the reader is directed instead into an aesthetic judgement founded upon moral imperatives which act to exclude considerations of the representational function of the text. Such confusion leads to a (re)evaluation of the text that is contrary to postmodern notions of iterability, ambiguity and responsibility to the Other (hospitality). The result is likely to be a conventional and normative response to a monolithically conceived text, as opposed to a pluralist reading of an iterable text.

Therefore, the potential of postmodern ethics, even in (and perhaps particularly in) an ambiguous and aporetic text such as *Fragments*, permits the reader to enter into an ethical dialogue with a representation of violence that cannot be categorised, bifurcated and rendered safe by the normative processes of traditional ethical systems. The representation of violence challenges such assumptions, and although the reader is faced with anxiety and doubt, it is through recognising and confronting such ambiguity and aporia that the potential for postmodern ethics may be individually realised. The extent to which the text is a representation of the ethical, whether this be overt or implicit, is combined with the ethical context of each reader, thereby effectively amalgamating potential ethical and aesthetic evaluations of iterable texts such as *Fragments*, *Night*, *Eyewitness Auschwitz* and *The Reader*. By recognising the possibilities of ambivalence, choice, aporia, non-universality, and the encounter with the singular and wholly Other, the potential reader is paradoxically able to exceed the particular and to embrace the

general – paradoxically, since the postmodern ethical encounter is often considered as being inextricably linked to the singularity of situations or contexts. However, is must be acknowledged that such a reading can be achieved only at a price. As Derrida writes in *The Gift of Death*, "as soon as I enter into a relation with the other, with the gaze, look, request, love, command, or call of the other, I know that I can respond only by sacrificing ethics, that is, by sacrificing whatever obliges me to respond, in the same way, in the same instant, to all the others" (Derrida 1995: 68). Yet by transcending the duties and impositions that are accepted by normative ethics in particular situations, the reader is able to confront the universal in a manner that will allow for a re-integration into the singular, and is thus more effectively equipped to confront the ambiguities of the ethical implications of singular instances of the textual representation of violence.

CHAPTER 11

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

1. Summary

The preceding discussion took as its point of departure various hypotheses regarding representation and the reception and evaluation of texts.[1] Firstly, it was assumed that a textual representation, until read and interpreted within certain verifiable contextual frameworks, cannot immediately be construed as either fictional or factual, and therefore has only potential value and meaning. However, any reading necessarily initiates an interaction between reader and text, which then makes possible critical attention and interpretation. Furthermore, the text may be considered as iterable, contingent and contextual, as well as subject to infinite (re)interpretation and (re)evaluation through infinite future readings in an infinite variety of situations and contexts. The person who interprets and evaluates the iterable text is any potential reader, that is, any person within a specific historical and temporal context who, through the act of experiencing a text, arrives at a singular meaning for that text (even though there will be multiple meanings for multiple readers through time, as well as within the same epoch). Although a text is presumed by a potential reader to be either factual or fictional, such boundaries become unsustainable when the factual narrative is found to be reliant upon fictional strategies, as well as when the fictional text becomes reliant upon a reader's acknowledgement of extra-textual actualities that frame its reference to a deferred reality.

A textual representation of violence is the iterable depiction of an act of direct or indirect intentional harm, perpetrated against a person or property. Just as there are various types of violence – such as the direct, psychological, cultural and institutional – so there are also various ways of representing that violence. Certain texts represent direct violence,

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[1] Throughout this study, the conclusions reached regarding representation, ethics and violence are contingent. Just as a postmodern ethical response to a representation of violence will be open-ended, and therefore capable of accommodating ambiguity, so too will any corresponding conclusion remain open to modification.

which is necessarily informed by cultural and institutional violence. These texts depict violence in ways that are graphically descriptive and often disturbing to the reader. Other texts are composed in more figurative, and therefore aestheticised, language. In such narratives, the reaction of the reader to the representation of violence is often less immediately visceral, since the linguistic register places less emphasis on reference and the actuality of the violence described in the text. Nevertheless, whatever the degree of aestheticisation, any representation of violence (factual or otherwise) presupposes ethical considerations, whether those considerations are concerned with the occurrences and persons represented in the text, the reader's responses to those occurrences and persons, or the implications that the representation has for social and individual responses to existing circumstances. Yet a satisfactory ethical response to an ambiguous instance of textually represented violence is frequently constrained by the limits of normative ethical systems. It is at this point of intersection between the representation of an ambiguous instance of violence, and the potential reader's response to that representation, that a postmodern ethical response is most pertinent.

2. Conclusion: The Potential of Postmodern Ethics

An example of such ambiguity can be found in the play *Lear*, by the English dramatist, Edward Bond.[2] Bond defends the excessive violence to be found in the play, arguing from an ethical standpoint that representations of violence are not only unavoidable, but even necessary for an authentic response to actual circumstances: "I write about violence as naturally as Jane Austin wrote about manners. Violence shapes and obsesses our society, and if we do not stop being violent we have no future. People who do not want writers to write about violence want to stop them writing about us and our time. It would be immoral not to write about violence" (Bond 1972: v). Bond notes that the representation of violence has been a ubiquitous feature of writing throughout history.

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[2] *Lear*, a re-interpretation of Shakespeare's *King Lear*, imagines Lear as a tyrannical king of England who has built a huge wall to keep put his enemies. He is subsequently deposed by his ruthless daughters, who are in turn deposed by the Stalinist figure of Cordelia. Blinded by his daughters and exiled by Cordelia, Lear attempts to dismantle a part of his wall, knowing that he will be shot. The play has been hailed as a "myth for our age, expressing what Bond calls 'pessimistic optimism'" (Patterson 2007: 231).

Whether factual or fictional, or any combination of the imagined and the actual, examples are readily available from all historical periods, and in all genres.

These representations often confirm Bond's point about violence "shaping" society. The siege of Troy as envisaged by Homer in *The Iliad* is an early instance of institutional and psychological violence, and the specific description of the climactic battle between Achilles and Hector in Book 22 is clearly a representation of direct violence. Yet differing interpretations of that violence result in differing socio-ethical assumptions. The representation of violence in this poem strongly influenced Ancient Greek notions of heroism and just war for many centuries. For example, at the time of Alexander the Great many Greeks considered Homer's poems "as a source of ethical teaching, and from what is known of political life in Alexander's Athens, the combative code of the *Iliad* had in no way been outgrown … Homer's Achilles sums up the doubts and conflicts of *to philotemo*, a hero's emulous struggle for glory; the ideal is a lasting one, and against the perspective of Macedonia it would have made living sense" (Fox 2004: 62-3). Yet the ethic of this "combative code" of violence is inverted by Shakespeare in *Troilus and Cressida*, where the struggle between Homer's protagonists is cynically transformed into duplicity when the cowardly Achilles orders his followers to murder the unarmed and conceited Hector. In this play, the reader is compelled to observe how characters "brutalise themselves in order to survive in a brutal world. The irony, or rather the tragedy, lies in the fact that in so doing, they earn the esteem of their society" (Dollimore 1989: 41).

Just as Shakespeare re-interpreted the violence represented in Homer's poetry, so too does Bond's ultra-violent rewriting of *King Lear* reposition the original "so that we now have to use the play for ourselves, for our society, for our time, for our problems" (Patterson 2007: 231). The representation of violence is therefore integral to the ethical assumptions of the society in which the texts were written, and in which they are read. When Bond writes that "it would be immoral not to write about violence", the point of his argument is that to dismiss the textual representation of violence is to ignore the actuality of violence in the world. Furthermore, his assertion that the future is threatened

by that same violence places his utterance (and his play) firmly within an ethical tradition that confronts the existence of violence and its effects, rather than seeking to avoid such pressing topics. If it is immoral, as Bond claims, not to *write* about violence, it would therefore be immoral not to *read* about violence, given the proviso that any potential reader needs to be equipped to respond ethically to the representation. To read a text is, in one sense, to write or rewrite it (even if the initial writer reads it in a different sense from subsequent readers). Consequently, Bond's argument that there is a compelling moral pressure to write about violence is equally pertinent to the morality of reading about violence. "One must then, in a single gesture, but doubled, read and write" (Derrida 181a: 64).

To read such texts morally is clearly not a call for censorship or suppression – to be one of those "who do not want writers to write about violence" – but rather to recognise the ethical implications of the texts, and to respond to those situations both in terms of the reader's contextual positioning, and the contextual positioning of the representation (and of the characters who are integral to that representation). Such recognition allows the potential reader to respond more fully to the aesthetic representation of the text, while the aestheticisation of the violence in turn informs the ethical response to the text. The most obvious example of the interaction between ethical and aesthetic considerations, as emphasised in Chapters 9 and 10, is the Holocaust narrative. These texts reflect the actuality of an extreme ethical failure of society. This failure is made evident through the representation of institutional, cultural, psychological and the direct use of violence against an Other who has been excluded from any significant ethical concern. It is this exposure of ethical failure that is perhaps the most significant contribution to a postmodern response to the textual representation of violence. However, this is not to suggest that a potential reader evaluating a text through notions of postmodern ethics is confronted with differing aporias from those faced by a reader working within the tenets of a normative system. Rather, a reader with postmodern ethical notions in mind is better able to evaluate those aporias when dealing with the multiplicity of variable implications suggested by differing contextual frameworks.

Although postmodern ethical thought cannot claim to alter the fact of violence and its influence on readers, spectators, victims and perpetrators, whether textually or in actuality, what it can achieve is a heightened awareness of the social (and individual) possibilities implied by the experience of reading a representation of violence. A potential reader's sensitivity to these implications can then increase awareness of, and sensitivity to, the actuality of violence in society. The importance of cultivating such an awareness and sensitivity to the destructive power of violence is considerable, considering the continuing pervasiveness of actual violence in the world today. The attacks on the World Trade Centre in 2001, and the brutal response of the USA in Afghanistan and Iraq have, in a sense, defined the opening years of the twenty-first century as a period of continuing conflict and atrocity.[3] In his book on violence, Wolfgang Sofsky argues that "the twentieth century began with the highest of hopes, and ended in many parts of the world in pain and despair … it would run counter to all historical experience to believe that the worst, the 'unimaginable', could not happen again. It is therefore essential to dispel all deceptive idealistic images once and for all" (Sofsky 2002: 61, 63). To argue that postmodern ethics could significantly reduce the prevalence of actual violence is perhaps one such idealistic image. Yet an awareness of its potential could contribute towards individual sensitivities towards the foreseeable consequences of such violence for the Other, whether in the actual world, or as a textual representation. To treat fellow human beings as merely "Others", thus denying them those attributes which are most commonly and creatively associated with being human, is to run the risk of the "unimaginable" envisaged by Sofsky.

In Chapter 2, Section 3, some consideration was given to the representation of an instance of violence from Antjie Krog's *Country of my Skull*. The exploration in this text of the testimonies brought before, and the findings of, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission include disturbing, graphically descriptive depictions of similar instances of anger and aggression. Yet despite this surfeit of violence, the last sentences (written just

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[3] Robert Fisk's study of the Middle East, *The Great War for Civilization* (Fisk 2006), discussed in Chapter 7, Section 2, is an important account of the "unimaginable" violence that the twenty-first century has inherited from the twentieth.

two days after 11 September 2001) argue persuasively for the recognition of the Other, for the ethical need for "Being-for":

> How do we become released into understanding, into becoming whole among others? How do we *make* whole? How close can the nose curve to tenderness; the cheek to forgiveness? … We have to hear each other's scalp and smell each other's blood and baled belonging. We have to learn the deepest sound of each other's kidneys in the night.
> We *have* to become each other, or for ever lose the spine of being.
> (Krog 2002: 293)

Krog's sentiments are echoed by the postmodern ethics of Bauman: "one must assume that moral responsibility – being *for* the Other before one can be *with* the Other – is the first reality of the self, a starting point rather than a product of society" (1993: 13). Yet Bauman is not quite as idealistic as Krog – she argues that in order to become moral, we *have* to become each other; he argues that any such imperative is not practical, and that we should be wary of normative ethical systems: "Our collective moral responsibility, much as the moral responsibility of every man and woman among us, swims in the sea of uncertainty. Uncertainty was always the home ground of moral choice, though modern moral philosophy … did [its] best to deny it in theory and repress it in deed" (1993: 222). Although Bauman clearly articulates his distrust of normative systems, he also reminds the reader that the dead remain dead, and that the atrocity and prejudice and hate that have existed in history continue to exist today (1993: 224). Nevertheless, an acceptance of postmodern ethical uncertainty, combined with a flexibility of moral outlook, allows an individual to respond positively to the poetic idealisation of Krog's appeal to "become each other", whilst simultaneously accepting the necessarily contingent nature of that notion. Such aspirations could at least motivate some readers to develop sensitivities which work against the potential for extreme violence predicted by Sofsky.

A final example serves to illustrate this possibility. At the conclusion of Bond's play, Lear repudiates the repression and violence that had characterised his reign, and that characterises the present governance of Cordelia. In doing so, he knowingly confronts the inevitability of his own execution, in what seems to be an inconsequential gesture of defiance against the indifference of society to the violence that has become

commonplace. The stage direction at this point reads simply "The workers go quickly and orderly. One of them looks back" (Bond 1972: 88). This spontaneous act of looking back, of noticing and bearing witness to the suffering of another, encapsulates that "first reality of the self, a starting point" identified by Bauman as essential to any assumption of postmodern moral responsibility.

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