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11 Life Lines, Life Connections and Biographical Traces/Forms

BRIAN ROBERTS

Abstract

This article examines how we connect the myriad of events and feelings we experience - to render our lives meaningful. We imbue our experiences with meaning through relating time tenses, such as the past to the present, and attempt to render 'life' comprehensible, ordered and continuous. The lines of life that are formed, using a variety of life connections, are not necessarily according to a strict chronology. They may twist and turn within our conceptions of time and be reinterpreted as we record, retrieve, rehearse and relive the past, present and future. The article argues that the ideas of motivation and fantasy need to be addressed more fully within narrative and other biographical analysis by applying notions of traces and forms and, further, that the 'biographical' itself is being radically transformed. The article consists of a number of exploratory notes and speculations rather than following a conventional format.

Yet the celebrity is usually nothing greater than a more-publicized version of us. In imitating him (sic), in trying to dress like him, talk like him, look like him, think like him, we are simply imitating ourselves ... (Boorstin, 1963: 83)

Nor can one say with confidence that any popular hero, however ludicrous - say, the hippie - will not be the progenitor of a new way of life (Klapp, 1969: 255)

Narrative and the Human Perspective ⁽¹⁾

We search for meaning in life and a way of representing life in many ways - through poetry and dance, stories and gossip, painting and other visual media (see Finnegan, 2002). The unceasing quest is to give an understanding and form to experience, to locate us in place and time, to situate ourselves in webs of relations. In the endeavour to specify our connections, to delineate our boundaries of self and others, to think, ruminate and feel we are living and expressing a humanity: we seek not merely to understand the passing life, but to transcend the mundane and profane.

Man's (sic) individual and collective life has a spiritual reality, which is represented and explained to him through myths, folktales, folksongs, fables,

dreams, lyrical ballads, epics, parables, epilogues, allegories, and many other literary and artistic forms. These forms have emerged as an explanation of man's spiritual world, his personal world, in terms that make it comprehensible and meaningful to him. They derive from man's universal need to explain such matters as the origin of the world, the all-too-evident existence of pain and suffering, the reality of what he defines as good and evil, and his relation to the power or powers beyond himself. These matters, which have concerned man in every society in history, are felt and are answered in symbolic terms which are personal in nature.

(Bryun, 1966: 142-3)

The stories we tell, the dances and songs we perform, and visual expressions and all the multiple interpersonal links with others in sociality are essentially auto/biographical. The evolving statements of self, the flowing understandings of others, are part of the inextricable elements composing 'life lines' which *attempt* cohesion, unity and order. Writers using a narrative analysis of stories/plot in told lives have sought to uncover these processes. But, in such work often there are the lingering restraints imposed by post-structuralist imperatives: the centrality of the text, the reduction to linguistic or rhetorical schemas, the tendency to reduce 'real people' to mere mediators, rather than the constructors of 'narrative'. Analysis may become formulaic due to the fear of an intruding 'personal' and a 'realist' orientation; while forgetting the reality of the analyst as narrator: the individual becomes a 'paper being' (as declares Barthes) in narrative. However, it is not necessary to say that to recognise a 'human perspective' means the re-instatement and re-insertion of some unitary, omnipresent figure: the author as a 'full subject and the narrative the instrumental expression of that fullness' - as if narrative then becomes mere representation of individual as author and 'reality' (Sontag, 1983: 283). Hence, Barthes's view that 'Structural analysis is unwilling to accept such an assumption: who speaks (in the narrative) is not who writes (in real life) and who writes is now who is' is a premature announcement of the 'death of the author' (Sontag, 1983: 283). But, there is no need for rigid and divisive conceptions of the personal, authorship and subject when applied to life accounts - they are separable and yet interconnected. I am a person, an author, a subject (and as object of the account), and also the reader/audience of my own life account and others.

Freedom and Time

Ruin hath taught me thus to ruminat:
That Time will come and take my love away,
This thought is as a death, which cannot choose
But weep to have that which it fears to lose.

(William Shakespeare, Sonnet 64: 11-14 in Alexander, 1951; Coveney and

Highfield, 1991: 23)

We live according to meanings within our intersubjective world - but we also are in a continuous search for deeper meanings or realities - a freedom which we assume will come from greater self-knowledge, the revelation of a hidden basis for existence, or some unfolding secret through which we will find stability, peace and harmony. Yet, such a programme for establishing 'true' or fundamental meanings is itself a constraint: an attempt to essentialize, rigidify, and predict - in the end to defeat meaning: a 'freedom' from the tyranny of representation which will only render freedom restricted or itself devoid of recognition. The individual 'seeker' becomes the 'lost' as the pursuit of freedom is devalued as against the next 'realisation', as gratification replaces development, and 'freedom' becomes itself a fetishized object or measured objective. In all this, the sense of time takes on a new aspect. The seeker is caught between the unsatisfactory immediacy of gratification, as supported by the commodification of time and 'freedom' and some far-off unrepressed existence. The unrealisable attainment of 'essential' self-insight and life-meaning become intensified into a disabling unease as the future tenses of time lengthen and blur. The answers become more outside the grasp, disappointment the increasing probability. The individual is left in the limbo between immediate solutions to self-doubts and the impossibility of complete self-knowledge.

Order is freedom only if it is founded on and sustained by the free gratification of the individuals. But the fatal enemy of lasting gratification is *time*, the inner finiteness, the brevity of all conditions. The idea of integral human liberation therefore necessarily contains the vision of the struggle against time'.

(Marcuse, 1969: 155)

We exist in the implications of a fundamental paradox: the pursuit of freedom can only be realised by order, continuity and coherence. We search for meaning and yet, eventually, this very act puts all meaning - even any definition of freedom in doubt. Although, aware of our own finiteness we seek a transcendence which divorces us from the realities of daily existence and denies our inevitable ending. The result is disenchantment with daily existence, as any project for freedom cannot equate with possible life lines.

Time, Narrative and Dialectic

Our knowledge of daily life is not without hypotheses, inductions and predictions, but they all have the character of the approximate and the typical ... Anticipations of future states of affairs are conjectures about what is to be hoped or feared, or at best, about what can be reasonably expected. (Schutz, 1972: 98)

Within the study of narrative the connection with time has been seen as especially important - as an inextricably bound within narrativisation. For Ricoeur, narrative has a basic feature - 'the temporal dialectic': the plot is the 'objective correlate of the act of following a story' 'events are made into story through plot' (Ricoeur, 1981: 173).

But, 'narrative time' is only one - and a simple form - of biographical time, which rests on a particular model of life: chronology of 'story', a clear sequence of development. Although realising there is a greater complexity within specific narratives, narrative analysts need to take the fact that individuals re-sequence, leave gaps, emphasise some parts more, and 're-collect' memories, and differ in extent of 'fictionalising' or 'storying' life rather further (see Strawson, 2004). Jean Luc Goddard says somewhere in relation to film: 'every film must have a beginning, middle and end but not necessarily in that order' - so with 'life itself'. Life experience has many 'life lines' and forms of connection - only some (or parts) generally equate to the story as self-edited by the giver (from previous stories, fragments of stories, half-forgotten, newly 'remembered' events), or as analysed by the biographical researcher or even as told to oneself or others at a particular time and place.

A 'story' is a changing narration - what has been storied is shaped at a particular time of creation; 'storying' is part of a broader endless process of storing - connecting and memorising - as life proceeds. Thus to equate the act 'narration' (oral, written or in other forms) too narrowly with narrative as plot and story is to limit the range of human expression. It is to see us as 'storied selves' - as composed merely of stories, and ultimately, as stories of the present moment, thus also narrowing the biographical perceptions of time. Narrative does play an important part, as Ricoeur argues, in establishing humanity 'along with human actions and passions' and, further, 'brings us back from within-time-ness to historicity, from 'reckoning with' time to 'recollecting it' (Ricoeur, 1981: 174). However, 'plot' and 'story' as analytical devices only go so far - not all experience is storied, stories change even within a given interview let alone from interview to interview, or diary to interview, written story to interview and so on; there are multiple, hidden stories, secret stories, and different versions of stories for different audiences and situations. Different genres and rhetorical conventions create different accounts of the same 'story'. Crucially, attention must also be paid to how life connections are drawn. A more comprehensive way to understanding 'accounting' (in the various senses of the term) is to see us as attempting coherence, continuity and

order to establish meaning by a complexity of life connections and lines. In a human perspective, a biographical understanding of the individual does not disappear into the schemas of story or language structure. Such a 'humanistic' view fully restores the following: emotion, motivation, the multiplicity of forms of sensual communication (see Finnegan, 2002), the perceptual shifts in time tenses between past, present and future, and the complex intertwining of life lines.

Narrative, Alienation and Time

Thought which is totally unscientific and even which contradicts experience may yet be entirely coherent in that there is a reciprocal dependence between its ideas. Thus I may instance the writings of medieval divines and political controversialists as examples of mystical thought which, far from being chaotic, suffers from a too rigid application of syllogistic rules. Also the thought of many insane persons (monomaniacs, paranoiacs) presents a perfectly organized system of interdependent ideas. (Evans-Pritchard, 1934, in Worsley, 1970: 204)

Narrative and time in life accounts must be considered existentially with attention to feeling and emotion, as innermost expressions of our being - to provide a humanistic perspective on individual biographies. For example, Adam, in also recognising the 'multiple time dimensions of our lives' points to the alienation of time produced by clock time. To de-alienate clock time we need to be aware of its machine made character (Adam, 1995: 54). She argues that if we relate to death to clock time we take away the 'essentially human understanding of that event; we dehumanise death' (Adam, 1995: 54). Biographical understanding needs to retain the idea of time-openness, contingency and meaning re-creation: narrative analysis, certainly in a restrictive usage of story is at base a developmental, chronological model - not that unlike notions of life course, life stages and life history. As Adam concludes, there

As such, concern with the multiple time dimensions of our lives is no mere theoretical, academic exercise; rather, it is a strategy for living. For this purpose, temporal time, the symbol of life, needs to be allowed to take high visibility. Recognizing time running out as our creation, temporal time as present-creating becoming, and both as fundamental to our lives enables us to review the mutual implication of time and health and gives us choice for action.

(Adam, 1995: 54; see also Adam, 1990: 127-33)

Life Connections

Straightforward words
seem paradoxical

(Lao Tzu, 1963: 140)

Narrativists and others have commonly noted various orders of connection within lives. For example, in relation to life changes, especially where disruption occurs - epiphanies, moments, conversion, episode (see Denzin, 1989) - notions having roots in traditional religious or other thought and practice. Another connection is by the use of metaphor to describe a life as a whole - as journey, flow of a river (using rhetorical forms), or as a tragedy, romance, etc. (drawing upon literary and dramatic forms). Finally, at the level of academic interpretation - the life as a whole seen as a 'course' (cf. road/river), a 'history' (as in the stages of life in natural history), or cycle (again from natural history), plan (perhaps from military or planning), account (as in accountancy), and so on. The exploration of life connections reveal a more detailed way in which the basic elements of experience, as given in the told life, are related. They are employed by individuals in their attempts to give continuity, coherence and order - to give a humanity - a least the semblance of will and social competence.

The story and plot or any life account depends upon rhetoric (eg. metaphor, simile) and other features such as 'turning points' but detailed life connections as timed linkages between life's elements have perhaps been neglected. Life connections can be of many kinds, from the perceptions of fate, coincidence, choice, determination of circumstance, chance, destiny, fate, karma, luck, providence, fortune, accident, kismet, design. In making connections we link one experience-event to another diachronically or synchronically to lay the basis of an 'understanding' of our lives.

Types of Life Connections include:

Coincidence - the coming together of events which seemingly are not formally related.

Contingency refers to chance occurrence, one event dependent on some other incidental happening, accidental, conditionality, according to certain conditions (Fowler and Fowler, 1964: 264).

Deja-vu - a feeling of return, a curious awareness of having experienced similar circumstances previously (see Cohen and Taylor, 1978: 47-8).

Fate 'Power predetermining events unalterably from eternity ... of destiny, what is destined to happen; appointed lot of person, person's ultimate condition' (Fowler and Fowler, 1964: 440; see Goffman, 1967: 161-170; Miller, 1958).

Fortune - luck, chance upon, to seek better fortune, to fall in fortune - to be fortunate/unfortunate.

Preordained - pre-given, current circumstances predetermined.

Repetition is a recognition of how we ascribe the return of experience, events and feelings but to avoid paralysis and fragmentation and create a 'viable self') it must become recurrence as re-evaluated in current consciousness (see Cohen and Taylor, 1978, ch. 3; Frank, 1984; Roberts, 2003: 17).

Serendipity is the propensity for accidental or unexpected discoveries.

All of these life connections (and others) form the intricacies of the myriad life lines, which compose the 'life'. When found in a life line some indicate a more active shaping of the life by the individual, others more governed by circumstance, as apparent when joined with rhetorical elements such as metaphor, simile and metonymy: ie. 'my life has been a 'journey'; 'river', etc.

Motives and Life Connections

In fact, an oral culture has no experience of a lengthy, epic-size or novel-size climactic linear plot. It cannot organize even shorter narrative in the studious, relentless climactic way that readers of literature for the past 200 years have learned more and more to expect - and, in recent decades, self-consciously to depreciate. It hardly does justice to oral composition to describe it as varying from an organization it does not know, and cannot conceive of. (Ong, 2002: 140)

An important issue in narrative analysis arises from its foundation in structuralist origins. The focus on the structure, genres or forms of narratives, despite the intention of biographical researchers, tends towards the components of the story and plot rather than the experiences of the teller. What is denuded is the phenomenological or existential elements and gestalt in biographical meaning: questions of emotion, perceptions of time, and motive - the intersubjective life view formed in the making of life connections and life lines by individuals

Motives are important part of life accounts, and can be rather neglected in narrative or other analyses. At the simplest, motives are before or after justifications and rationalisations (see classic accounts of motive: as a 'grammar', Burke, 1945; 'techniques of neutralisation', Matza, 1964; 'vocabularies' Gerth and Mills, 1953, Mills, 1970; 'in-order-to motives' and 'because motives' Schutz, 1972: 86-96; and 'accounts', Scott and Lyman 1968).⁽²⁾ Gerth and Mills' idea of 'vocabularies of motive' is particularly suggestive for the study of biographical accounts. Instead of the usual approach

to conceptualising motives as arising from the psychological basis in the individual, they see motives as within interaction (Martindale, 1961: 373).

Conceived in this way, motives are acceptable justifications for present, future, or past programs of conduct ... When a person confesses or imputes motives, he (sic) is not usually trying to describe his social conduct, he is ... usually trying to influence others. (Gerth and Mills quoted in Martindale, 1961: 373)

Gerth and Mills' injunction that symbolic interactionism requires and adequate discussion of motivation can be extended to narrative and some other modes of biographical analysis. Vocabularies of motive for Gerth and Mills have an institutional history as circumstances alter. On the other hand, they argue that vocabularies of motive are related to various psychological levels. But, as Martindale argues, for Gerth and Mills vocabularies of motive are fundamentally 'social strategies' used by individuals to support an integration of action with others (Martindale, 1961: 373-4). For biographical research, the identification of motives individuals give for past, present and future action, as part of life connections and life lines, are very important for our understanding lives.

Mills in his discussion of 'Situated actions and vocabularies of motive' argues that motives: 'actually used in justifying or criticising an act definitely link it to situations, integrate one man's action with another's, and line up conduct with norms'. He adds that 'typical vocabularies of motives for different situations are significant determinants of conduct'; 'motives orient actions by enabling discrimination between their objects' for instance, adjectives 'such as "good", "pleasant", and "bad" promote action or deter it'. We influence others by naming acts or imputing motives while, at the same time 'working vocabularies of motive have careers that are woven through changing institutional fabrics' (Mills, 1970: 475-6). Mills argues against the view that 'motives are in some way biological' as 'real motives' below 'mere rationalization'. Also, he questions the phrase 'unconscious motive' since it supported 'by persistence of the unnecessary and unsubstantiated notion that "all action has a motive"' and by seeing 'gaps in the relatively frequent verbalization in everyday situations'. Importantly, Mills says instead that motives are not always explicitly articulated and that *all* actions do not pivot around language' - or we might add, story and plot in narrative analysis (Mills, 1970: 476-7).

Following, Thomas and Znaniecki (1958) we should examine life accounts according to the beliefs and attitudes expressed, and the development of attitudes and values that people form as 'lines of genesis' - or, as here, as life connections and lines (Madge, 1970: 78-80; Martindale, 1961: 350-1; Roberts, 2002: 42-5).

Life Connections and Motives - Case Study: Fantasy

Fact or fantasy, the image becomes the thing. Its very purpose is to overshadow reality. American life becomes a showcase for images. For frozen pseudo-events.
(Boorstin, 1963: 201)

Only by considering the act as accomplished can we judge whether the contemplated means of bringing it about are appropriate or not, or whether the end to be realised accommodates to the plan of our life. (Schutz, 1972: 12-13)

The world of fantasies has a vocabulary and grammar as certainly as the world of material objects and events. (Cohen and Taylor, 1978: 77)

How life connections and motives operate in living can be usefully explored by considering the part played by 'fantasy' in shaping action and recollection. Here fantasy is not fancy or whimsy - but an essential part of being and action. for instance as 'thinking in the future perfect tense':

Men stop and think only when the sequence of doing is interrupted, and the disjunction in the form of a problem forces them to stop and rehearse alternative ways - over, around or through - which their past experience in collision with this problem suggest. The image of a dramatic rehearsal of future action ... we cannot find out which alternatives will lead to the desired end without imagining this act as already accomplished. So we have to place ourselves mentally in a future state of affairs which we consider as already realised I like to call this technique of deliberation 'thinking in the future perfect tense' ... Like all other anticipations, the rehearsed future action also has gaps which only the performance of the act will fill in. Therefore the actor will only retrospectively see whether his project has stood the test or proved a failure. (Schutz, 1972: 102-3)

Therefore, fantasy is not merely about some unrealisable future goal, or what may happen but is also linked to the present and past - what can be, what could have been. Rather, as Laing argues, it is 'a mode of experience' which is 'essential part of the meaning or sense ... implicit in action' (Laing, 1971: 2-3).

We can provisionally identify three types of fantasy: as mundane, hypnotic, and as spectacle or demonstrating three aspects, in turn, the trivial, the romantic, the voyeuristic.

Fantasy as Mundane

Following Laing, if fantasy is a 'mode of experience' and part of the essential meaning of action - it is a routine part of relations with the world, it is a 'ubiquitous' and 'salient feature of everyday life' (see Cohen and Taylor, 1978: 71). Something of fantasy as 'mundane' can be seen in our interest in the

triviality contained in written works - a concern that we can say is found in other aspects of daily living. As Barthes asks:

Why do some people, including myself, enjoy in certain novels, biographies, and historical works the representation of the 'daily life' of an epoch, of a character? Why this curiosity about petty details: schedules, habits, meals, lodging, clothing, etc.? Is it the hallucinatory relish of 'reality' (the very materiality of *'that once existed'*)? And it is not the fantasy itself which invokes the 'detail,' the tiny private scene, in which I can easily take my place? Are there, in short, 'minor hysterics' (these very readers) who receive bliss from a singular theater: not one of grandeur but one of mediocrity (might there not be dreams, fantasies of mediocrity)?

(Sontag, 1983: 408)

Fantasy as Hypnosis

Many ordinary circumstances, despite what be often perceived, can be declared alluring, beguiling, engrossing, sublime or transcendent. An ordinary event, a person, emotion or thought may have a kind of 'fantasy'. For example 'love' while ubiquitous in thought and discussion, as a pervasive subject in both 'popular' and 'higher' arts, is a relatively neglected topic for academic concern. - and is a part of fantasy. In Barthes' interesting discussion of love as a hypnosis - he describes love at first sight as being 'stunned', 'shaken' 'paralyzed' fascination by and image and then 'held fast, immobilized, nose stuck to the image (the mirror)' (Sontag, 1983: 434-8; cf. Sartre, in Danto, 1975; 121-3). It is 'distinct, abrupt, framed, it is already (again, always) a memory ...'. In this sense then, fantasy as hypnosis provides a pause and a framing - which like the photograph 'is not to represent but to memorialize' (Sontag, 1983: 439), and yet, as O'Malley argues, there is in love an 'actualization of emotivity - the motivating of intentionality - brought to the pitch of its effective awareness'. For, as he adds, 'the being of man (sic) is radically a promise to be ratified by him in its achieving' (O'Malley, 1972: 103).

Fantasy as Celebrity

Fantasy as celebrity is the quest for realisation - to identify with a 'famed' Other, even to become (if only by imitation) the idealisation that we conspire to project (see Klapp, 1969). But,

Wherever we turn we see the mirror, and in it (though we like to pretend we are seeing somebody else) we see ourselves ... (Boorstin, 1963: 185)

The attempts to 'debunk celebrities' in popular magazines and elsewhere as unfit for our 'admiration are like efforts to get 'behind the scenes' in the making of other pseudo-events. They are self-defeating. They increase our interest in the fabrication' (Boorstin, 1963: 83-4). Further:

The same quest for spontaneity helps to explain, too, our morbid interest in private lives, in personal gossip, and in the sexual indiscretions of public figures. In a world where the public acts of politicians and celebrities become more and more contrived, we look ever more eagerly for happenings not brought into being especially for our benefit. We search for those areas of life which may have remained immune to the cancer of pseudo-eventfulness. (Boorstin, 1963: 256)

Thus the search for fantasy outside experience has the opposite effect - the celebrity quest is increasingly becomes a circle of imagery and expectation which ultimately is both contrived by us as fantasy but resides in our own reflection. The quest for celebrity is a 'voyage of identity' that returns to our own port - although 'largely compensatory and vicarious' there is something almost heroic in the attempt (Klapp, 1969: 255).

Once we abandon the Carlylean perspective [on the hero], the celebrities of today stop being merely disappointing and become interesting in a new way - as persons who become famous as beatniks, folk singers, hippies, playboys, playgirls, sexpots, good Joes, smart operators, charmers, personality kids, splendid performers, jacket boys, surfers, hipsters, pundits, mystics, dandies, characters, daredevils, rebels, super athletes, disk jockeys, and comedians - as experiments in identity, some pathetic, some brave. Like all fads, they are efforts to find an exciting and victorious way of living under modern conditions of bureaucracy, impersonality, and pushbutton comfort, which work so powerfully to defeat the heroic spirit.

(Klapp, 1969: 255)

Celebrities offer fantasy 'life lines' as possible or vicarious futures while they are also a reflection of our own condition and mirroring our own selves. We strive relentlessly for the 'unexpected' but 'we end by finding the only the unexpectedness we planned for ourselves' and meet ourselves 'coming back'

resulting in our experience becoming ‘invention rather than discovery’ (see Boorstin, 1963: 83-4).

Biographical Traces/Forms and Biographical Reproduction

Would it not be an eligible plan ... to employ the Camera Obscura ... to take a view of what is passing in the streets of the town and communicate the result, if necessary to the Police Office, or the Jail, by means of a telegraph ... every thing would then take place, as it where, under the eye of the Police ... if any impropriety or misconduct were observed it would only be necessary to send a posse to the particular spot ...

(The Glasgow Mechanics Magazine, 1824, in Jennings, 1985: 164)

Simulacrum ... Image of something; shadowy likeness, deceptive substitute, mere pretence.

(Fowler and Fowler, 1964: 1189)

Biographical reproduction, of course, has two original forms: via sexual reproduction the physical characteristics of the parents are passed on as part of a generational sequence, and by social transmission the cultural attitudes and values of the carers are carried (but not merely accepted) through socialisation, and by wider social orality (stories, myths). The ‘biographical’ was also later carried by portraiture, usually of the wealthy, and by the written word in writings on leaders, saints, philosophers and others, carrying the ‘trace’ (deeds, character, appearance) of the individual. The later invention of the camera and the moving image transformed the ‘mirror’ provided permanence and facilitated the reproduction of the image. In a comparable manner, the printing press had provided a record and endless replication of biographical actions, albeit not immune from mythologising and addition. Eventually, the rise of the modern novel and biography created new genres for the representation of the life.

The past two centuries have brought a series of major changes in means and techniques of visual and other representation: from the portrait to the photograph, cine-film, tv, video and video phone, computer graphics and so on. These have brought many effects but as fundamental as any has been a shift in the relations of time - the uses of the tenses of past-present-future - as in the recording of present time for future time. These changes in representation not only provide new means of expression, as in the construction and replication of the biography, but also new means of internal and external biographical surveillance.⁽³⁾ The origins of means of mechanical/optical surveillance obviously have a long history, the telescope being a prime example. It is sometimes overlooked that ideas and practices of surveillance we see as novel have a longer genesis, for example, CCTV is not a recent idea although newer technology is able to make it more feasible. The ‘surveillance society’ is not

new; for example, in modern times the compilation of statistics on the population and incarceration and observation of 'problematic' groups was part of the growth of the modern state in the late 18c and early 19c. The crucial shift today is the acceleration of scanning, recording and correlation - and hence, the increasing possibilities of intervention.

In the 'scanning society', biographical presences and profiles are skimmed, swiped and recorded in innumerable ways: for example, swipe cards, phone-records, genealogical data; ID cards, licences, passports, brain and body scans, personal computer records, debt and credit records, CCTV, satellite location, and medical, education, police, court, tax, welfare, court, police, educational, and work records. More specifically, stem-cell research, egg and sperm-banks, DNA data and other biological advances are raising profound issues for biographical reproduction and identity. But, we are also becoming increasingly interested in our own biographical origins - as witnessed by the extraordinary growth of genealogical research, as on the internet, and gene inheritance as knowledge expands (see Cavalli-Sforza, 2001). Additionally, cosmetic surgery on body and face, the effects of diet and drugs are affecting the 'reality' and perceptions of the assumptions of the life course or stages. As lives lengthen 'youthfulness' as merely a feature of youth becomes questioned and as our other assumptions regarding age-related behaviour. In short, what is emerging is the combination of external (place and time) and forensic-internal observation of individuals and groups: technological advances enable new means of recording the volume and the correlation of instances of biographical action and the biographical mapping of the mind and body. These 'advances' come at moment of biographical disruptions in the biological, occupational, familial-relational patterns of 'life courses' - new uncertainties concerning age-behaviour, career, civil and sexual behaviour, competencies in the face of changing technology and health and longevity.

In the light of these uncertainties we seek guidance and are sold help in shaping our lives. The 'biography business' has grown into a massive economic sector - 'to be able to live requires a manual and a video' or so it seems - with any number of entrepreneurs, gurus and specialists willing to offer 'recipes' on living. Writers (ghost writers, columnists and biographers), style gurus (make-over specialists for clothes and looks), life coaches (organisers and advisors), physical health trainers (how to be fitter, stronger, younger) are there ready to change your life. Success formulators, career assessors, management technicians and the rest tell us how to achieve, win, and be confident, while for the less fortunate the victim/survivalist/literature - how to overcome abuse, poverty, serious illness - has become a literary genre. If you need to write your cv, have a job interview; lost the habit of dating and mating there are shelves of guidance just for you. In books, magazines and newspapers therapists and habit-busters (how to deal with your 'personal problem') are poised to help aided and abetted by cosmeticians prepared to

mask, insert, suction, refigure and reconstruct the face and body; and tv producers offering make-overs, life swaps, rat-race escapes, fame and fortunes - served up for the vicarious enjoyment and experience of the many.

It is difficult not to surmise that the 'biographical turn' across the disciplines - following succession of other such 'phases', 'moments' (linguistic, cultural) and so on is really part of a grander socio-historical landscape (see Chamberlayne et al., 2000; Denzin, 2001; Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). As has been frequently argued in post-modern or post-traditional discussion the disruption of traditional rituals and biographical paths has spurred the need to construct identity - or even several co-existing, interrelated, overlapping identities. On the one hand, these changes bring the possibility of new individual freedoms in making him/herself but, on the other, there is also a danger that an anomic condition arises where the guides to action become contradictory or cease to exist. The latter is constrained by the scanning and monitoring of individuals and groups by the State and other institutions coupled with the intense demand to self-monitor through the continuous evaluation our private and institutional lives (eg. through the cv, the 'professional development review' with the 'line manager' and so on). The outcome is often a tension between our sense of the personal fulfilment and intended life line(s) and the prescribed career path for the employee (see Morgan and Mann, 1993; Fischer-Rosenthal, 2002).

Looking further ahead we can speculate that biological reproduction will be joined (if allowed) by other human or quasi-human biographical forms produced by assisted, artificial means of production and reproduction, for example: simulcra, cyborgs, androids, clones, holograms, the reshaped cosmetic bodies. The expectation of the rise of such forms give rise to fears:

Cyborg ... The term cyborg was first coined in 1960 by Manfred Clynes, a research space scientist. A combination of 'cybernetic' and 'organism', it is used to describe a hybrid being who is half-human, half-machine. Cyborgs have been a staple motif in science fiction since the 1920s ... In its iconic role, therefore, the cyborg acts as a symbol of the fear that humanity itself is in danger of becoming entirely absorbed into a wholly technological future within which the machine becomes the paradigm by which the organic itself functions. (Sim, 1998: 219-20)

Perhaps at least there are some grounds for apprehension. Stem cells, plastic and organic body replacements, DNA mapping, gene research, open up new biographical avenues: increased longevity - not merely by the replacement of parts for the renewal of the body, or in its dramatic cosmetic reshaping of particular individuals but by a further step. New forms of 'procreation' and new 'species' - human-animal; human-mechanical; human-organic/plant - are becoming possible. These and even more complex combinations, if permitted, will incorporate new kinds of communication both within such beings and between beings. The modification and 'upgrading' of the senses (eg. by nano-

sight/sound implants, infra-red connections and other means), the 'downloading' of the brain (emotions, knowledge, projected actions, etc.) and linking with other forms of 'intelligence' (organic and molecular-atomic based intelligence systems raise new biographical issues. These developments will raise old biographical questions in intensified ways: 'Who am I?' and 'Who are you?' - and also, 'What am I?' Even, further brain and computer storage and retrieval (eg. as holograms, or brain transfer) and cloning (if permitted) will raise questions of 'When am I?' 'Where am I?' and 'How am I?'. As The Frankfurt School argued (in 1956) the societal shifts in the construction of the individual have profound implications:

And society, which produced the development of the individual, now is developing by alienating and fragmenting this individual. At the same time, the individual, for his part, misconstrues the world, on which he is dependent down to his innermost being, mistaking it for his own.

(The Frankfurt School of Social Research, 1974: 48)

Epilogue - Biographical slums?

The language of images, then, is not circumlocution after all. It is the only simple way of describing what dominates our experience. (Boorstin, 1963: 208)

In the late 1960s Gordon Rattray Taylor pointed to the possibility of biological slums unless the rapid development of biotechnology was closely regulated. He pointed to the results of the mechanical revolution of the eighteenth century and the resulting appalling social conditions of the slums, which have taken a great effort to replace by a civilised living. He pointed to the possibility of what we can call 'biographical slums':

In some countries, no doubt, the state will decide who is to be promoted to the privileged class, and there may be degrees of privilege. Manual workers will have exoskeletons, athletes will have spare hearts, and computer programmers spare heads. Only the head of state will have all the advantages. Outstanding workers may be rewarded by a licence to acquire an additional prosthesis and laggards punished by removal and down-grading. In other countries, costly prosthetic devices may be leased, so that one can enjoy a wider range of experience for a time ... These speculations should not be dismissed too quickly as merely fanciful.

(Taylor, 1969: 97)

This new bio-stratification is part of wider disruptions in life lines created by the lengthening of the life span (due to changing work patterns and conditions, educational expansion, shifts in social habits and diet, and improvements in health care). The 'biographical' is therefore facing a range of crucial reformations as its social construction, longevity and activities are

reshaped, and its appearance, organs and senses are renewed, replace and enhanced. Even its very form becomes diversified, possibly, into 'new species' which intermingling of organic, mechanical, informational, perceptual and sensual components and types of communication. For biographical research we need to place the 'stories' people provide in to this developing situation, place them in their contexts - as we all will need to strive to understand the world around us. In this view we will 'need to move from life stories to life histories, from narratives to genealogies of context, towards a modality that embraces *stories of action within theories of context*' (Goodson, 1995: 98). In this way, as Goodson argues, stories can be "'located', see as the social constructions they are, fully impregnated by their location within power structures and social milieu' (Goodson, 1995: 98). As he implores:

Only if we deal with stories as the *starting point* for collaboration, as the *beginning* of a process of coming to know, will we come to understand their meaning; to see them as social constructions which allow us to locate and interrogate the social world in which they are embedded. (Goodson, 1995: 98)

Notes

1. 'The human perspective' is taken from the title of Bruyn's (1966) classic, but much neglected, text.
2. Scott and Lyman's (1968) well known discussion of motivation is also very insightful and could be further developed in biographical research. They describe an as a 'statement made by a social actor to explain unanticipated or untoward behavior - whether that behavior is his (sic) own or that of others, and whether the proximate cause for the statement arises from the actor himself or someone else'. They give two types of accounts; excuses - socially approved vocabularies for mitigating or relieving responsibility when conduct is questioned (appeal to accidents, defeasibility, biological drives and scapegoating) and justifications - 'accounts in which one accepts responsibility for the act in question, but denies the pejorative quality associated with it justifications - ('techniques of neutralisation' from Sykes and Matza, 1957, see also Matza, 1964, 'sad tales' and 'self-fulfilment'. They add also 'strategies for avoiding accounts' - some people are relatively invulnerable to questions regarding their conduct due to their authority, status and position - there are others which are strategies of avoidance - mystification, referral and identity-switching'. Accounts they argue 'presuppose an identifiable speaker and audience' and 'Every account is a manifestation of the underlying negotiation of identities'. Finally, they describe five 'linguistic styles that frame the manner in which an account will be given and often indicate the

social circle in which it will be most appropriately employed': intimate, casual, consultative, formal and frozen styles'.

3. There is a very large literature on the 'surveillance society', see, for example: Norris and Armstrong, 2001; Lyon, 1994, Lyon ed., 2002; Whitaker, 2000.

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