

Narrative Self-Authorship

Narrative Self-Management versus the Leviathan, Cathexis, Assertion

Course document, Deicidus, Internet School of Magic

As always, please leave questions and comments in the document if you do not mind sharing them with other students (Ctrl-Alt-M). This makes it much faster and easier for me to answer the questions, in-context. These documents will be shared only privately with my students, so your comments will not be publicly viewable.

Narrative self-authorship is the idea of carefully examining the way one narrates one's own experience in the present moment, and of deciding how to narrate. This is an extension, prolongation, and application of the merkavah in a broader field of language that includes ways of talking about texts.

Existential Choice

Sartre said that we must choose: even not choosing is still a choice. Likewise we must narrate: unless we have self-immolated, our brain makes biased choices and adjustments on the selection and presentation of reality to the person (1). Even though we may perceive some observing awareness that does not change, closer examination (it is said) reveals that this awareness is ever-changing and illusory.

The way in which our reality is “slanted” in its telling is our narrative bubble, our microcosm or merkavah, and it exists both as a moment of real experience that surrounds us in the present moment including all of our experiences of mind, and as tendrils of memory and time-locking extending out from our nexus in the present moment (1) to the dark space around it (8). Our choices delineate different possible pathways we could take in the timestream, and these choices ripple out in a multitude of ways. Besides direct effects, our choices also have groove-forming or runaway snowball effects, which occur through both mundane cause-effect relationship and cryptic resonant-symbolic pathways (synchronicity).

This is about our subjectivity, our phenomenal or first-person experience. Choices affect our experience going forward, and the way we tell our story to ourselves (myself?) affects the choices we make.

Self-Talk

Most people talk to themselves in their head most of the time. Psychologists have studied self-talk extensively, and found that it creates and maintains habits of thought, behavior, and feeling. Cognitive-behavioral therapy developed out of this, a model of therapy that focuses on the antecedent situation, the thought (often written down as quoted self-talk), and the behavior that results and which is to be changed. The therapy proceeds by changing the situation, replacing thoughts with preferred thoughts, and changing consequences so that the desired behavior/thought/feeling complex will change and the patient can have a better experience.

This narrative voice in our heads has also been described by “dialogic self theory” as not just an internal monologue but an internal dialogue of many voices, a constant cacophony of inner discussion which directs

our behavior and our beliefs. Different self-aspects voice different parts of the conversation, so that our internal dialogue represents a kaleidoscopic cross-section of our many selves.

The Leviathan

Self-authorship, then, is the realization of the pervasive presence of this self-talk-driven persistent narrative, the “likely stories” and usual interpretations we tell ourselves. It is this vision of the sphere of experience and its tendrils of memory and trauma-imprint (karma) and future-intention, our typical narrative sphere of our typical moods, life situations, challenges and obstacles, that allows us to begin managing our narration.

This narrative sphere forms an image, an image of a tentacled self (8) centered on an observer (1) which does not necessarily exist within a linear timeline, but which produces an experience of a polarized (past-future) “moment” for the observer. Sorcery is the removal of tentacles from their anchor-points (trauma-imprint nuclei, or Freud’s term *cathexes*) and the reinvestment of that energy in other places along the timeline/Self.

This classic image of a “Leviathan”, a great seamonster with many tentacles, is an analogy for the ego (8) and its hierarchic, agglomerative, virulent growth pattern (5). We see it imaged on the dollar bill as the eye in the pyramid, with the rest of the pyramid representing the many tentacles which descend from the despotic root signifier (1, the eye/I). This image is fully explored and unpacked in the *Illuminatus!* trilogy by Robert Anton Wilson and Robert Shea.

This seamonster, which lurks below the surface, out of awareness, is enormous because we have spent our entire life feeding it (and ignoring it). This seamonster, with its many grasping tentacles, represents our grasping ego insofar as it is programmed by society in an un-self-aware manner. The leviathan is the social ego reigning from beneath our consciousness, ruling our thoughts, interpretations, and reactions through habitual responses that we do not notice as programmed.

Author-ity, Authorization, Authorship

The reason that individual magical practitioners have been persecuted throughout history is that real magic is about the authorship of one’s experience: who gets to say what happened when, and how. This is a fundamental issue of rights and self-ownership: if I believe someone else’s story instead of my own, how much can I still be said to be the author of my own experience? If I grant author-ity to an external figure (or text), then I give that figure power to rewrite me and my interpretations—and at the same time, I might forget that it is still myself who takes in and interprets this external information, even if I have tried to cede my own authority to another.

Because magicians and mystics tend to follow individualistic paths which promote self-authorship, self-knowledge, and skepticism of external authorities, external authorities are frequently hostile towards magicians and the language of occultism, which questions mainstream belief systems. Being spoon-fed interpretations disguises the fact that interpretation is still occurring by the listener. Interpretation is active, and so even the people who are most passively accepting spoon-fed interpretations of reality are still playing a part in their own subjugation, actively handing over their puppet-strings to someone else.

Even with this knowledge, how does one wrest back narrative control from a system of external investments (cathexes —Freud) and reality feeding-tubes? This is where the visualization of the Leviathan begins to come in handy: this image can act as a focusing device, reminding us of a bird's-eye view of our narrative situation. We can begin to take inventory of the sources of narrative in our life situations, and take a more critical approach to accepting and interpreting information. This is not easy work, but it is vital work for someone who truly wants to know themselves and live a life free of malicious influence by others (because so much of the influence we are plied with is malicious).

Assertion—Building Narrative Muscles

Besides self-examination and extensive contemplation upon reality and interpretation, the other main tool in self-authorship is *assertion*. What is the difference between saying “the moon landing never happened” and saying it so that you fully believe it, so that it becomes a factitious part of your reality? This power is assertion, and far too often we allow our internal faculty of assertion to be hijacked by external actors who use it to modify our reality to suit them. These modifications often start first with restrictions upon us which further hogtie our ability to wield our assertion with an independent voice and authority. In other words, the first thing a hostile actor will do when it invades your authority-granting systems is to strengthen its hold upon those systems by rewriting you as a person who consumes reality instead of authoring it—i.e., brainwashing you into a passive listener that agrees to grant the invader full authoring privileges.

But, even if we would like to believe something different than we do now, it is hard to simply “will it so”. The reality we find ourselves in—the reality largely constructed by the Leviathan—a reality we have been weaned into accepting as our own narrative work, although it was constructed by social machines—this reality has an internal coherence, a logic, and deeply-formed habits which keep it in place.

When we gather ourselves into the present moment (0), we can make strong assertions which guide energy into new channels, new investments. We can also use the 0 to dissolve the cathexes we have already made, freeing up energy into a general pool (or rhizome —Deleuze & Guattari). The more cathexes we disinvest, the more free narrative energy we have to invest at any moment. This allows us to get better, over time, at fully being with the 0 and thus having access to at-will assertion, as we liberate more and more energy from its capture in hardened, rigid worldviews and belief-images.

Ultimately, it is simply a matter of saying something and having it “already” be so. However, this possibility is not visible or accessible unless one has first loosened up their complex of existing hardened assertions and programs that have been placed there by society (the leviathan) so that some distance can be gained to step back and rest, reorient, and heal. This distance, space, or slack is the “shamanic energy” or just energy (or libido in Freud's terms) which shamans talk about—this is “building power”.

Eating Your Own Tale

The ouroboros, the snake eating its own tail, is a symbol of many things—but one way that I like to use this symbol is as a symbol of self-examination and self-processing. I think many of our information systems, like

TV and news websites, are set up to make it very easy to be fed a huge amount of new information (and advertising), but very inconvenient to rebrowse, recollect, or reexplore our favorite material from the past. Making an effort to “go through your stuff” starting with the oldest is an exercise which can be very helpful in getting a broader view of one’s identity and investments.

For example, I keep a detailed dream journal which goes back, on and off, to dreams I remember from high school and childhood. I have been doing a project of rereading the dream journal from the beginning and noting down recurring symbols. This process has been hugely insightful and has provided me many lively symbols for use in other areas of my life. It also culls the dream journal by showing me which themes are more important and which dreams were more one-off in their import.

This method of rebrowsing can be applied to almost any personal collection. For example, it might be more interesting and productive to start at the oldest of 200 emails instead of the newest: many of those old emails are no longer relevant and can be quickly deleted, while the messages which are relevant may help us to reconnect with old friends or projects.

This culling and focusing (5::4) is an incredibly important part of the rebrowsing process, because it helps to transform a library of information which is overwhelmingly large into a smaller collection of information which can be surveyed, known, and imaged in a single glance. While going back through old journals may initially be overwhelming and take quite a bit of time, producing a small notebook or computer document containing a selection of the most important journal entries may be an exercise which highlights who we are when we feel most like ourself, and it makes future reviews of the journals quicker.

By actively curating personal libraries and collections starting with the most distant or old items, old identity fragments are brought up and can be freshly processed or released. This converts these collections from graveyards of staid and foreclosed emotional investments into active gardens where it is easy to actively cultivate and rework our invested attachments. (The downside of this process is that it produces libraries which require ongoing active curation—but these libraries can be further refined over time to reduce upkeep, and even if curation lapses, the foregoing work was beneficial.)

Closing the loop between the narrative artifacts we produce and those we consume produces a feedback loop of self-relevant information that allows us to review, resort, and reinterpret the decisions and investments we made in the past. Unfortunately, the world is generally set up to support the opposite behavior of consuming new information unconsciously, so conducting a life (or rather, personality) review is an ongoing uphill battle.

True Will

Much has been made by Crowley’s Thelema religion of one’s “True Will”, and I do basically agree with that model. However, I hope this class has made it clear that asserting will is not a simple matter of deciding something *no matter what!!!* but rather of investigating and engaging with the patterns of emotional investment and decision which are already there in our lives and minds. By making careful investigations and flicking a few small “switches”, invested energy could be skillfully rerouted—whereas simply trying to

force a change in one's life ignores the complexity and strength of the relevant decision-investments one has made in the past. Accessing one's "True Will" over time, including its power of being able to quickly reorient and reassert entire worldviews around oneself, is a gradual process of freeing up our most hardened investments, until enough energy is freed up into the "general pool" (or Body without Organs —Deleuze & Guattari) that the form of the entire self begins to reveal itself.

It is at this point that self-realization of oneself *as* the Leviathan can occur. When we realize that everything that makes us the specific individuals we are is the 8, and that this force seems to work as a shadowy, external agent upon our pure and unconditioned consciousness (1), many people become hostile to the 8 and attempt to reject all social programs. However, this is a path to madness (a left-hand-path confrontation with the Dweller in the Abyss, to be specific).

We cannot erase the Leviathan from our history or our present—we cannot ignore that we are social creatures and that our lives are, in many ways, completely produced and determined by the world and society around us. We cannot simply throw away who we are and what we have been through. So, a peace must be forged between the programmatic, social part of us—and the unconditioned, godlike part of us.

The more we work with our personal self and our social conditioning (8) the more we come to know ourselves as individuals, and the more we can face and process past decisions and traumas. This is an alchemical process of turning lead (dead, ignored, hardened investments or habits) into gold (active, living, fluid consciousness). By accepting ourselves and the lives we have led so far, it becomes possible to work with that material and move forward, rather than trying to "jump ahead" by denying our past and attempting to assert a complete life change.

These big changes can be made, but smaller changes must usually be made first until enough free energy is available and enough understanding of ritual comprehended to design and enact larger changes in existential stance and memory-interpretation. Likewise, a complete removal of the Leviathan *might* be possible, and it would look exactly like Buddhahood (*tathagata*)—but to try and eject one's social programming all at once, without understanding the process and without awareness of the programming one already has—that is an exercise in denial which, if pursued strongly enough, can lead to madness¹. It is through working with ourselves, rather than trying to abandon oneself, that health and wholeness are reached, and by which magic becomes intelligible. Our "true" will, then, cannot be accessed through sheer force-of-will, but can only be known by accepting ourselves as we are and by working with the micro-flow of decisionmaking power (will) in the way I tell my story to myself.

Success in self-authorship looks like a lively, active individual: poised in the moment, the self-author has plenty of space in which to decide how to react to life's events, and how to interpret the events which life throws at us. A self-author moves through life actively, moving generally towards things rather than away from them. There is plenty of energy to handle life's struggles without getting caught up in the drama, so involvement can be intentional rather than forced by thoughtless habit or addiction.

¹ With enough preparation, training, and external support by a skilled shaman, this path could also be a safe and valid approach to enlightenment. However, this left-hand-path method of initiation is essentially ego-vomiting, and it is volatile and unpleasant. Finding a shaman who could prepare you and support you for such a ritual is a rare thing.

Further Reading

- [Books on dialogic self theory](#)
- [Books by Carlos Castaneda](#), which explore a shamanic model that includes ideas of invested energy and the releasing of these investments to build one's power
- My essay [When Worlds Collide: Multiple Reality and Education](#), which explores the idea of multiple reality and reality-navigation in education
- [Listen, Little Man!](#) by Wilhelm Reich (the orgonomist), which may help to shock you into a higher, cleaner, simpler perspective on the self.