

### iii[c] Narratives: Lines and Circles

In English to write is to “scratch” and is derived from the Latin “scribere”. Scratching and tearing share a common stem. One could say that writing or scratching is the tearing up of images (Flusser, *Does Writing*). It could therefore be interpreted as an act of violence and helps to explain the complex relation between the representations made up of light and dark (pigments) and written or scrapings via an incisor of symbols into matter. This incisive tool revolts against the images we take and create out of the objective world, antagonistic towards the imaginary-magical-ritual. This tearing rips the world of representations and sews them together in denotative linear patterns transforming them into what is countable and accountable. Into concepts that can be criticized. This process illuminates why writing is in fact the *death of magic* (Flusser, *Does Writing*). The death of circular, cyclic replaced by the causal tracks of the linear realm of historical thinking <sup>1</sup>.

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Alphabetic writing was both an important factor in the emergence of abstract, homogeneous "space," and of abstract, linear "time." Oral cultures, perceive temporality of time as cyclical, senses attuned to the surrounding land, conversant with an intrinsic understanding of winds voices and the articulations of birds, joined particles in *cosmos*. A perception of such a time, changes the way we perceive *World* <sup>2</sup>, conjoined with the circular real of the sun and the moon and cycling of the seasons, death and birth (re-composition) and the eternal (re)turn of the green. In *Prairie and Plains Indians - Iconography of Religions Section 10 - North America* (1997) anthropologist Ake Hultkrantz tells us,

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<sup>1</sup> "We might imagine re-turning as a multiplicity of processes, such as the kinds earthworms revel in while helping to make compost or otherwise being busy at work and at play: turning the soil over and over – ingesting and excreting it, tunnelling through it, burrowing, all means of aerating the soil, allowing oxygen in, opening it up and breathing new life into it. " (Barad, *Diffracting Diffraction* 2014)

<sup>2</sup> Old English w(e)oruld, from a Germanic compound meaning 'age of man'; related to Dutch wereld and German Welt.

that Western time concepts include a beginning and an end as opposed to the American Indians, who's oral temporal perception of time is as an eternally recurring *cycle* of events and years ... their languages often do not articulate terms for past and future as the *whole* rests in the present. In a conversation related to this thesis, entrepreneur Floris van Luin explains his experiences regarding the way people of Ghana - most outside major cities - rely on orality in defining social questions within the realm of cultural protocols - witnesses are required for most understandings allowing space for fluidity and grace in individual situations as opposed to the rigidity of the linear of our legal system (in line with the law) imported during colonisation, which stills parallels the traditional pyramid hierarchy of the Ashanti monarchy<sup>3</sup> of vassal kings and subjects. Lying and displays of disrespect in public of those in higher ranks considered morally wrong. The oral tradition of orchestrating four rhetorical modes of discourse: exposition, argumentation, description, and narration evoke a sense of pride. Being eloquent and honest means being *present* as part of the circle of understanding.

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The circular does not seem much respected in Western civilization as common metaphors reveal. Told you are “caught in a circle” implies you are off track (the journey a metaphorical road). A strong preference for lines and angles is encouraged. The Bible dictates we must travel in a straight line for our life is a journey and we are required to *think straight* in order to grow - in spiritual sense. Stories going in circles are *going nowhere* and lack any kind of path. They are experienced as frustrating as they conflict with our expectations for SOURCE-PATH-GOAL structure in narrative development, and in action in general. Circle could be defined as *geometries praia*.

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<sup>3</sup> Ghana is a unitary presidential democratic republic. As such, the government is headed by a president, and not a king. There are however several vassal kings, or chiefs as they are typically called in Ghana. ... The most famous and most powerful of these kings is the king of the Ashanti Kingdom, the Asantehene. [www.quora.com/Does-Ghana-have-a-king](http://www.quora.com/Does-Ghana-have-a-king)

In *Moral Imagination: Implications of Cognitive Science for Ethics* Mark Johnson explores the hypothesis that a person's identity as a moral agent "...is inextricably tied up with her quest for synthetic unity in her life, the most comprehensive form of which is narrative" (163). He argues first that narrative characterizes the synthetic character of daily experiences, prefigured in all common activities from which refigured stories emerge out of the narrative structure. Consequently, understanding, expressing, and communicating experiences is wholly dependent on that prior structure of life and this trait can also be used to configure our lives in innovative ways. Secondly, he states that - particular - descriptions we give of actions often do not involve narrative explicitly using various imaginative resources such as (e.g.) image schemas, conceptual metaphor, and metonymy in order to develop coherence and synthetic unity "...through a temporal sequence of events " (163). Nevertheless, understanding action sequences and situations presupposes a mostly tacit narrative background as there is a proto-narrative structure to experience, to our identity and to action that serves as a base for our interest with verbal narratives constituting the most pervasive mode of rational explanation we have. "Only within a narrative context can we fully understand moral personality (the self) and its actions. The unity of the self and its acts is, in the broadest context, a narrative unity " (164).

Narrativity. Cause and effect is inherent to linear thinking. Forged into Western thought and sense of temporality through the transformation of babble into structured scripting. According to Flusser (*Does Writing*), history is simply not possible without writing: when writing started, history was born. This is not for reason that writing dictates, articulates processes, but because it "...transforms scenes into processes" by generating "historical consciousness" (44). Practices of writing and reading *induce a linear sense of time* and give prominence to *diachronicity* in general as compared with *synchronicity* (15). For Flusser, modern society's break with the general human sense of time as cyclical (an obvious extrapolation from nature's rhythms), owes a deep debt to the

increasing salience of writing over the past several centuries.<sup>4</sup> Time as a linear progression did not emerge with the simple discovery of writing but in correspondence with cultural changes in modern society such as the printing press (wide-spread of writings), compulsory education, upcoming of urban commercial cultures, the emergence of the modern state with its bureaucratic form.

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<sup>4</sup> Flusser's analysed relation between writing and history takes media practice as the central player in culture: as the awareness of time as linear movement (*Does Writing*). The function of changing scenes into processes is inherent to the performative act of writing. This is where Flusser invites us to gaze at a contrast between culture based on writing and culture based on images thus placing himself in opposition to Derrida as Flusser relates the institution of writing itself with resistance to images: "Greek philosophy and Jewish prophecy are battle cries against images on behalf of texts." and so, removing himself from the notion that writing is a change in the form of memory (as *Différance*).