

Against Narrative: A Preface to Lyrical Sociology*

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This article develops a concept of lyrical sociology, a sociology I oppose to narrative sociology, by which I mean standard quantitative inquiry with its “narratives” of variables as well as those parts of qualitative sociology that take a narrative and explanatory approach to social life. Lyrical sociology is characterized by an engaged, nonironic stance toward its object of analysis, by specific location of both its subject and its object in social space, and by a momentaneous conception of social time. Lyrical sociology typically uses strong figuration and personification, and aims to communicate its author’s emotional stance toward his or her object of study, rather than to “explain” that object. The analysis considers many examples and draws on literary criticism, the philosophy of time, and the theory of emotion. It also addresses contemporary debates in ethnography.

THE QUESTION OF LYRICAL SOCIOLOGY

The Chicago River, its waters stained by industry, flows back upon itself, branching to divide the city into the South Side, the North Side, and “the great West Side.” In the river’s southward bend lies the Loop, its skyline looming towards Lake Michigan. The Loop is the heart of Chicago, the knot in the steel arteries of elevated structure which pump in a ceaseless stream the three millions of population of the city into and out of its central business district. The canyon-like streets of the Loop rumble with the traffic of commerce. On its sidewalks throng people of every nation, pushing unseeingly past one another, into and out of office buildings, shops, theaters, hotels, and ultimately back to the north, south, and west “sides” from which they came. For miles over what once was prairie now sprawls in endless blocks the city. (Zorbaugh 1929:1)

During the 1970s and 1980s a word disappeared from the American vocabulary. It was not in the speeches of politicians decrying the multiple ills besetting American cities. It was not spoken by government officials responsible for administering the nation’s social programs. It was not mentioned by journalists reporting on the rising tide of homelessness, drugs, and violence in urban America. It was

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not discussed by foundation executives and think-tank experts proposing new programs for unemployed parents and unwed mothers. It was not articulated by civil rights leaders speaking out against the persistence of inequality; and it was nowhere to be found in the thousands of pages written by social scientists on the urban underclass. The word was segregation. (Massey and Denton 1993:1)

Although these two passages disprove the old canard that sociologists can't write, their versions of literary excellence are very different. Yet they have the same topic: Harvey Zorbaugh's paean to Chicago and Douglas Massey and Nancy Denton's jeremiad about segregation are both about the character and dynamics of cities. And they have similar politics; for if Massey and Denton flaunt their political message from the start, Zorbaugh's book soon reveals its roots in the progressive tradition. Moreover, both passages aim to evoke in the reader a certain frame of mind—for Zorbaugh a sense of excitement and intensity, for Massey and Denton a sense of surprise and outrage.

What differentiates these two passages is their language. Zorbaugh invokes not only simple metaphors like the "stained" river and the "looming" and "canyon-like" Loop, but also the Homeric simile of the el tracks as the blood system through which circulates the diurnal pulse of city life. Massey and Denton, by contrast, use no figures of speech beyond the dead metaphors "multiple ills" and "rising tide" and the equally tame synecdoche by which "speeches," "pages," and "word" concretize the American political consciousness from which the problem of segregation has disappeared.

The only strikingly figurative language on Massey and Denton's opening page is the chapter title: "The Missing Link." Having no obvious referent, this historic phrase propels the reader forward into the text: What link? Between what and what? Why is it missing? Yet we do not know, at the end of Massey and Denton's first paragraph, the answers to any of these questions nor indeed do we know whether the book concerns segregation itself or the manner in which discussion of it disappeared. By contrast, Zorbaugh's chapter title, "The Shadow of the Skyscraper," refers directly to the text that follows: literally because that text concerns the part of the city that is immediately north of—and hence literally shadowed by—the Loop skyscrapers, and figuratively because it concerns the social life that grows up because of, and hence "in the shadow of," the urban conditions whose most visible result is the Loop towers themselves. Indeed, the skyscraper synecdoche points to a puzzle even more focused than that of Massey and Denton: Is Zorbaugh the technological and ecological determinist that this shadow figure seems to imply?

The evident difference in figurative language presages a more subtle difference in subject matters. Zorbaugh writes of the city itself—its geography, its people, its places. Massey and Denton, by contrast, write of talk about the city—the talk of politicians, funders, social scientists, and others. One passage is about a thing, the other about ways of seeing (actually, not seeing) a thing. Indeed, this difference of subject partly drives the difference in figuration. It is because he finds the city fascinating and overwhelming that Zorbaugh can wax poetic, while Massey and Denton, who find nothing so romantic or vivid about the gradual forgetting of segregation, must simply hammer that forgetting into our consciousness with six repetitions of the same grammatical structure, taking their rhetorical cue from sermons and political speeches rather than from poetry.

Thus the passages differ in both figuration and concreteness. But finally—and perhaps most strikingly—they differ in temporality: one passage is about something

that *is* while the other is about something that *has happened*. Every one of Zorbaugh's main verbs is in the present tense. The river "flows," the streets "rumble," the arteries "pump," the people "throng." Zorbaugh's only past tenses are a past participle used as an adjective ("stained"), an imperfect indicating the transition from earlier forms of society ("what once was prairie"), and a simple past indicating the origins of the daily commute in the suburbs ("from which they came"). In short, Zorbaugh writes about a state of being, a moment. By contrast, Massey and Denton write about an event. Every main verb in their passage is in the past tense (most of them the indefinite "was"), and indeed the passage starts with not just the past but the perfect tense—in the phrase "a word disappeared." The only present tenses are the participles indicating ongoing action *in the past*—"decrying," "administering," "reporting," "proposing," and "speaking."

In summary, then, both paragraphs concern the city. Both take an activist and passionate view. But Zorbaugh writes figuratively about the city itself as a current state of affairs, while Massey and Denton write unfiguratively about urban discourse as an unfolding history. Of the three differences—in figuration, concreteness, and momentaneity—I want to focus here on the last: that between writing about a state of affairs and writing about a happening. After all, we have a simple name for what Massey and Denton are doing, for telling a story; we call it narrative.

The idea of narrative has a cyclical history in modern scholarship. In the great rout of teleological and Whig history by the social scientific and bottom-up histories of the 1960s and 1970s, the idea of narrative shared the exile of the older generation that had perfected it. In the insurgent generation, the social science historians thought narrative was mere talk rather than rigorous quantitative analysis, while the bottom-up historians identified story-telling with "master narratives" that aimed to hide from our sight the "peoples without history." As for the sociologists, the sociological mainstream thought it had left narrative behind in the 1930s with W. I. Thomas and life history methods. Indeed, in the 1960s and 1970s, narrative became a niche product in academia, written by only a few conservative historians and by a handful of social scientists rebelling against the causal orthodoxies of their disciplines (see Abbott 1991).

Then in the 1980s the fashion changed. Newly particularized, narrative reemerged as a major mode of academic writing, from oral histories of individuals to grand chronicles of classes and ethnic groups. Alongside the new narrative production came the equally new products of the cultural and linguistic turns, which indeed for many people were continuous with the narrative one. For such people, "narrative" meant all three things at once; following stories, investigating cultural symbols, and attending closely to language (see, e.g., the essays in McDonald 1996).

This narrative onslaught was not a return to the maligned teleologies of Whig history; rather, it self-consciously opposed a social science thought to be excessively analytic. In particular, it attacked the preoccupation of analytic social science with causal stories about relations between reified constructs like "bureaucracy" or "southern attitudes," which were opposed to (admired) narratives that recounted real actions of real actors, both social and individual. Indeed, the cultural turn followed logically from this opposition, via the argument that the very categories of causal analysis (bureaucracy, southern attitudes, etc.) were themselves the creations of real actions by real people.¹

¹I have written extensively on the opposition of narrative and analysis (see, e.g., Abbott 2001b), as well as on methodologies aiming to transcend it (see Abbott 1992a; Abbott and Tsay 2000).

But the contrast between Massey/Denton and Zorbaugh is not one between a story of reified variables and a story of concrete actors. Rather, it is a contrast between telling a story and not telling a story at all. There is no story in Zorbaugh. Compared to *The Gold Coast and the Slum*, analytic social science and the new narratives of the 1990s are simply different versions of the same thing: stories in the one case of variables and in the other of actors.² For telling a story is precisely what Zorbaugh does not do. He rather looks at a social situation, feels its overpowering excitement and its deeply affecting human complexity, and then writes a book trying to awaken those feelings in the minds—and even more the hearts—of his readers. This recreation of an experience of social discovery is what I shall here call *lyrical sociology*. That is, I am going to oppose narrative not to causal analysis, as we typically have in the past, but to lyric. And I am going to argue that sociology—indeed, social science—ought to have lyricism among its available genres and ought to think about lyricism as a general alternative to “story” thinking broadly understood.

The rest of this article will make the case for such a lyrical sociology. I begin with a brief review of the literary theory of lyric and derive from it a set of basic dimensions for the lyrical impulse. I then discuss these dimensions at length, illustrating them with examples. A final section digs more deeply into the theoretical foundations of the lyrical mode and positions lyrical sociology in recent methodological and theoretical debates.³

I aim this article at the general sociological audience. I am not preaching to the anti-positivist choir, although my earlier experience with such essays suggests that only that choir will listen.⁴ Nor, although it applies literary theory and concepts, is this article goring the equally familiar ox of “smoothed-over,” “monological,” “nonreflexive” ethnography (Clifford 1986:7). I am rather pointing to a theme or emphasis already strong in many types of sociological work and urging us to develop that theme more strongly. I am thus writing in the tradition of Brown’s *A Poetic for Sociology* (1977), a book that derives aesthetic canons for sociological thinking from the vocabularies of literary, dramatic, and artistic analysis.⁵

THE CONCEPT OF LYRIC

To oppose narrative to lyric is to invoke an older body of literary theory than did the narrative turn, with its opposition between narrative and analysis.⁶ The literary warrant for the concept of narrative came from the high structuralist tradition: Propp’s (1968) analysis of Babi Yaga, Todorov’s (1969) of the Decameron, Barthes’s (1974) of Balzac’s *Sarrasine*, and Genette’s ([1972] 1980) of Proust’s *A la recherche*. The urtext

²Thus the opposition of narrative and analysis is a fractal one, nesting narrower versions of itself (causal stories vs. “narrative analysis” of the historical sociology type) within broader ones (narrative vs. lyric). See Abbott (2001a:ch. 1). Note that Massey and Denton’s book involves both causal analysis and a historical story.

³The examples used in this article are somewhat arbitrary. I have made no attempt to find “best” examples, although I have chosen a wide *range* of examples in order to emphasize the breadth of lyric. I should note that Brown (1977:63–64) specifically uses Zorbaugh as an example of *bad* aesthetics because of his lack of distance on his subject.

⁴Of the 246 citations to my three theoretical pieces on sequence thinking and “narrative positivism” in the early 1990s, exactly two have appeared in the *American Sociological Review*. That 29 such citations have appeared in the *American Journal of Sociology* says more about my affiliation with that journal than about the impact of my work on the quantitative mainstream.

⁵Oddly, Brown speaks little of emotion and of lyric, which will be central concepts in my analysis.

⁶Actually, the narrative turn in social science seldom made formal use of literary theory. Most often, its invocation of narrative simply legitimated a general preference for the subjective, the symbolic, and the personal.

of this tradition was Barthes's *Analyse structurale du récit* ([1966] 1981), a detailed exposition of narrative as a branching succession of events and possibilities. Implicit in Aristotle's discussion of narrative in the *Poetics*, this concept of a branching sequence of events is at the heart *not only* of the narrative turn, but also—indeed, even more so—of the analytic social science against which the narrative turn defined itself. Both are in this sense utterly narrative in conception, treating reality as a story with a beginning, a middle, and an end, or as a model with independent, intervening, and dependent variables, as the case might be.

As this lineage suggests, the theorists of high structuralism were not concerned with the lyrical sensibility. The *récit* was focused on codes of heuristic and action; symbols and emotions were merely attached here and there to the flowing structure of the core narrative mystery. We must therefore look further afield for conceptual help.⁷ An emblematic source is the famous "Preface" to *Lyrical Ballads* by William Wordsworth, from which I have taken my subtitle. Wordsworth's text provides striking evidence of how appropriate and useful it is to invoke the concept of "lyrical" with respect to sociology. I quote here one of the most celebrated passages of that text, but with two very slight changes; I have changed "poems" into "studies" in the first sentence, and I have changed "humble and rustic" into "urban" a little later on. Other than that, this is a verbatim quote.

The principal object, then, proposed in these [studies] was to choose incidents and situations from common life, and to relate or describe them, throughout, as far as was possible, in a selection of language really used by men, and, at the same time, to throw over them a certain coloring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual aspect; and further, and above all, to make these incidents and situations interesting by tracing in them, truly though not ostentatiously, the primary laws of our nature. . . . [Urban] life was generally chosen, because in that condition the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity, are under less restraint, and speak a plainer and more emphatic language. (Wordsworth [1801] 1965:446–47, interpolations as noted in text)

This passage sounds exactly like Robert Park's essay on "The City."⁸ Yet changing "humble and rustic" into "primitive" instead of "urban" would have produced the credo that sent Malinowski to the Trobriands and Leach to highland Burma. Equally

⁷There is no general history of lyrical poetry in Western culture nor even in English literature, so far as I can tell. On the relative absence of theories of lyric poetry among the ancients, see W. R. Johnson (1982). On the theory of English lyrical poetry from Chaucer to Coleridge, see MacLean (1940). On French lyrics, see Levraut (1902), Huot (1987), and Maulpoix (2000). Lyric as a genre did not really exist for the Greeks. The Romans made lyric the lowest of genres, largely because it had the least claims as a vehicle of moral improvement and instruction. Following the classical tradition, the Renaissance, too, thought that lyric concerned nonserious topics (as opposed to gods and heroes) and hence should be seen as occasional and unimportant. Such early modern poets as Donne and Herbert wrote superb lyrics, but Herbert's greatness lay in bringing a lyrical stance to higher (in his case, sacred) topics, and Donne's progression from secular to sacred lyrics clearly bespoke the classical allegiance to higher things. A similar development took place in France. The history of genres in poetry is surprisingly like the history of genres within sociology itself. There is a hankering after work that is instructive, a suppression of the emotional (at least other than the moralistic), an insistence on high, important topics, and—when the old high topics get boring—the definition of a new set of supposedly low things (e.g., deviance in sociology, quotidian human affairs in poetry) as important.

⁸Cf. Park (1925:2–3). For an interesting reading of Chicago School sociology in particular as intensely literary in conception, see Capetti (1993). See also Lindner (1996), who elegantly documents the connection of Parkian sociology with journalism.

small changes could turn this into a manifesto for behavioral and experimental economics. Moreover, Wordsworth's criteria for lyricism have each their echo in modern polemics about sociology. Wordsworth wanted lyric to be about common life, its subjects to be simple folk rather than the heroes and gods of Augustan poetry. So, too, did C. Wright Mills (1959) condemn sociology for its preoccupation with grand social forces and causal abstraction. Wordsworth wanted lyric to be expressed in common language. So, too, do we now say sociology should be written in simple terms, not in jargon. Wordsworth wanted lyric to discern in simple things the "primary laws of our nature." So, too, do we want sociology to find the laws of social life. To be sure, Wordsworth believed these laws to be most visible in rural life, whereas sociologists as dissimilar as Max Weber and Robert Park have argued that the laws of human nature and society are nowhere more evident than in the city. But nonetheless they all agree that there are places in the social world where the laws of human behavior rise very near the surface.

Only in his recommendation that we "throw over [our investigations] a certain coloring of imagination" whereby ordinary things take on some "unusual aspect" does Wordsworth go beyond the familiar bounds of sociological polemics. The main imagination we consider in sociology is the *theoretical* imagination, whereas it is clear that Wordsworth has in mind here an emotional imagination that can juxtapose strong images and powerful feelings to awaken in a reader the emotion that the poet has himself felt, but that is now—in the famous phrase from later in the "Preface"—"recollected in tranquillity" (Wordsworth [1801] 1965:460) Yet even here, we sociologists are not necessarily agreed on how we differ from Wordsworth. For we do not always insist on the theoretical imagination. At work in the Massey and Denton passage above is not so much a theoretical or an emotional imagination as a moral one. Indeed, neither of my opening passages really believes in theory for theory's sake. But where Zorbaugh wanted to bring us the sheer excitement and "Pindaric" grandeur of the city, Massey and Denton want to engage our moral sense.⁹

And perhaps a want of Wordsworth's "coloring of imagination" is what has really led to the much-discussed decline in influential public sociology. Perhaps it is not so much our moral timidity and our obsession with professionalism, as Burawoy (2005) has argued, but rather our colorless imaginations and our plodding moralism that have driven sociology from the public stage. Perhaps the great sociological classics of the postwar years were popular less for their often deep moral passions than for their always powerful evocation of their writers' emotional reactions to topics as disparate as the organization man, the street corner, and the melting pot. It is striking indeed that of the 11 top titles on Gans's (1997) sociological bestseller list, seven telegraph emotional themes in their titles (*The Lonely Crowd* (Riesman 1950), *The Pursuit of Loneliness*, *Blaming the Victim*, *Habits of the Heart* (Bellah et al. 1985), *Worlds of Pain*, *Intimate Strangers*, and *The Hidden Injuries of Class*).

⁹"Pindaric" became a synonym for "heroic" or "excessive" in English lyrical theory following Cowley, who in the late 17th century rediscovered Pindar—the one explicitly lyrical voice in Greek poetry. Cowley and his contemporaries also rediscovered Longinus, who thought poetry was less for instruction than for simple communication of emotion from poet to reader. In the long history of lyric poetry, this lack of instructional content has always been seen as its chief fault. As Samuel Johnson famously wrote: "The end of writing is to instruct. The end of poetry is to instruct by pleasing" ([1765] 1958:245). Among the many current writers who believe with Johnson that narrative cannot be other than moralizing, see White (1987). Note that I have largely ignored the issue of the *audience* for lyrics, poetical or sociological. I thank David Wray and Jeff Morenoff for pointing this out.

In summary, it seems worthwhile to undertake a conceptualization of lyrical sociology. Perhaps there is a kind of emotional involvement with our topics that we can rediscover through detailed analysis. As my approach so far suggests, I shall derive the various parts of a conception of lyrical sociology from the critical literature on lyrical poetry. I must therefore make the usual disclaimer of the analogizer. My aim is to make old things look new and perhaps provide us with a new way of reading the work of some of our colleagues, if not a new way of writing our own. There may be some jarring moments, but one hopes they are worth the price.

I undertake a relatively formal translation of concepts in part to avoid facile equivalences (of the form “lyrical sociology is really x”) that could short circuit the inquiry and lead to mere recapitulation of earlier debates. For example, one could jump to the conclusion that lyrical sociology is the same as ethnographic sociology. But we should not accept that argument without having first tried to imagine—on the basis of theoretical argument—how a lyrical impulse might express itself in historical sociology or quantitative sociology as well. One could also jump to the conclusion that lyrical sociology is merely popular writing or merely descriptive. These, too, would short circuit a more serious consideration.

Our general guide must always be the aim to imagine a kind of sociology—really a kind of social science—that is in some profound sense *not narrative*. This does not mean that it cannot contain narrative elements—Zorbaugh’s book is full of little stories. But it means that its ultimate, framing structure should not be the telling of a story—recounting, explaining, comprehending—but rather the use of a single image to communicate a mood, an emotional sense of social reality.

Since explanation, which is almost inevitably narrative in character, has been so strong a theme in social science methodology, we shall find that few books are explicitly lyrical.¹⁰ I shall use a variety of examples below, but these examples were almost never conceived as wholly lyrical works. Rather, we have to look for whatever pieces of lyrical sociology we can find. And, of course, many analyses that are conceived narratively have strongly lyrical subsections. But lyrical sociology must be more than wonderful writing and literary bravura. We are looking for an assertion of lyricism against narrative, and in particular against its most familiar avatar in the social sciences—explanation.

LYRICAL SOCIOLOGY

I consider the concept of lyrical sociology under two headings. The first and more important is stance, by which I mean an author’s attitude toward what he or she writes and toward his or her audience. The second is mechanics, by which I mean the devices an author uses in constructing his or her text.¹¹

Stance

The heart of the lyrical impulse is a stance of the writer toward the studied object on the one hand and readers on the other. (Richards (1929) calls these “feeling” and

¹⁰Functionalism is a possible exception to my assumption that all explanation is inherently narrative in structure. Functional explanation presupposes maintenance of something in the present by an arrangement of forces that will “correct” any deviation from some functional goal (Stinchcombe 1968). Functionalism and related equilibrium arguments do not really require narrative explanations that move through real time; they exist in abstract, content-less time.

¹¹Referees of this piece have asked why I used terms like “stance” and “mechanics,” which are not “lyrical” themselves. But there is no more reason to write lyrically about lyric than to write absurdly about the absurd, pace Samuel Beckett. Lyrical writing is as disciplined and formalized—perhaps more so—than other kinds of writing.

“tone,” respectively.) That stance is engaged, rather than distant, and the engagement is an emotional one, an intense participation in the object studied, which the writer wants to recreate for the reader. Moreover, this engagement is not ironic; the lyrical writer does not place himself or herself outside the situation but in it. If there is an irony to the lyricism, it is an irony shared with the object and the reader, not an irony that positions the writer outside the experience of investigation and report.

There is a temptation here—in the word irony—to fall into a facile but misleading equivalence. Hayden White (1973), among others, has invoked the tropology of Northrop Frye (1966) to analyze social scientific writing (in his case, history). He notes Metaphor, Metonymy, Synecdoche, and Irony as four basic tropes, loosely associated with the four genres of Romance, Tragedy, Comedy, and Satire. At first blush, the lyrical seems to fit well under romance. But these are *all* narrative categories, straight from the Aristotelian canon; all concern the aims and outcomes of a plot. There is no necessary reason to think that the lyrical impulse is romantic and, indeed, in Japanese poetry, which is almost entirely lyrical in conception, it often is not so, however romantic that poetry may seem to narratively conditioned Western eyes.¹² We shall have occasion below to recall this confusion, for it is a commonplace of sociology today that engagement with one’s topic is not “scientific,” as if distance and irony were the only legitimate stance for sociological writing.

Returning to my two opening examples, we can see that Zorbaugh is indeed lyrical in his stance. He is engaged, and quite un-ironically engaged, with the city he describes. At the same time, however, he is rigorous and disciplined in his engagement. Indeed, it is to some extent the rigor of his book—its multiple roots in interviews, document search, and observation—that *allows* him to see what is so exciting about the new North Side. But this rigorous engagement remains immediate, almost apperceptive, unlike the moral engagement of Massey and Denton. The latter are distanced and judgmental. In their passage we see the social world only through the writing about it that makes them so angry. In Zorbaugh, we see both the city and the author’s astonishment at it. He is social with the Gold Coasters, lonely with the rooming-house dwellers, wistful with the Bohemians, cosmopolitan but listless with the slum-dwelling immigrants.

After engagement, the next quality of the lyrical stance is location. The lyrical impulse is located in a particular consciousness, that of a particular writer who is in a particular place. In discussing poetry, we often phrase this by simply saying that lyric involves the subjectivity of the writer. Indeed, the psychological criticism of the early 20th century attributed various aspects of lyric poetry to various personal (often Freudian) concerns. But more broadly, the lyrical writer is acutely conscious of his or her self not just as author but as the person whose emotional experience of a social world is at the heart of his or her writing.¹³

¹²Oddly, Frye himself (1966:41) saw Irony as an evolution from the “low mimetic,” believing that a direct logic led from writing about those of our own stature (low mimetic or basic realism) to writing about those “inferior in power or intelligence to ourselves” (1966:34), for Frye the very definition of Irony. At the same time, Frye believed in a direct connection of lyric and irony because, for him, “the [lyric] poet, like the ironic writer, turns his back on audience” (1966:271). This seems very implausible until one recalls Frye’s special definition of “irony” as writing about those below us. White’s analysis is found in White (1973). I invoke Japanese lyrical aesthetics in more detail below.

¹³Of course, subjectivity is explicitly invoked in much contemporary writing about social life; for a time in the 1990s we wondered whether our colleagues’ books were about their purported topics or about themselves. But while we may differ about whether this shift was desirable or lamentable, seeing it as right or wrong, scientific or unscientific, is a mistake. The proper question is whether it is aesthetically successful. The problem with the new subjectivity may be less that it is bad social science than that it is bad poetry.

For an example of these aspects of stance, consider a classical sociological text with an explicit lyrical emphasis, Malinowski's *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* ([1922] 1961). With its extraordinary descriptive passages (e.g., Malinowski 1961:33ff) and its elaborately choreographed digressions (e.g., the long catalogue of villages in Chapter 2, the entire chapters on canoe building (Ch. 5), and on words in magic (Ch. 18)), this book openly mimics the Greek epics from which it takes its title. Larded as it is with information and careful investigation, it is nonetheless an overwhelmingly personal book, dominated by the personality Malinowski has chosen to project. To be sure, the Malinowski of *Argonauts* is no more the Malinowski of the diaries (1989) than the Wordsworth of *The Prelude* was the Wordsworth of the Annette Vallon affair. But for all Malinowski's rhetoric about the "science of man," the book is extraordinarily lyrical in conception. Malinowski wants us to see the Trobrianders as he saw and felt them. He falls out of his scientific pose again and again, not because he is a Westerner or a colonialist or a Pole or a man, but because he is too good a lyricist not to.¹⁴

There is no necessity that a highly subjective book be lyrical. *The Lonely Crowd* (Riesman 1950), for example, is a highly subjective book. One comes away from it with a very strong sense indeed of David Riesman as a person: a reflective moralizer located somewhere between bemused geniality, conservative reaction, and visionary critique. But if Riesman never ascends to jeremiad, seldom does he relax into lyricism. His emotions never overmaster him nor create in him a stabbing sense of the humane. Nor is he intent on reproducing in us his emotion about modern, other-directed society. Indeed, we never quite know whether that emotion is amazement or disgust or hesitancy or delight. Rather, Riesman is the model other-directed social critic: careful, detached, a little ironic, vigilant of others' views and potential critiques.

After engagement and personal location, the third element of the lyrical stance is location in time. The lyrical is momentary. This above all is what makes it non-narrative. It is not about something happening. It is not about an outcome. It is about something that is, a state of being. This is true even of *Argonauts*, which is not really about a particular kula trip (although it tells stories of several of them), but rather an evocation of the Trobrianders at a moment in time, in which the kula is cyclical and endless. Malinowski knew perfectly well that the world he studied was passing—witness his continuous remarks about war, cannibalism, and other precolonial practices, and his portentous closing line: "Alas, the time is short for Ethnology, and will this truth of its real meaning and importance dawn before it is too late?" (1961:518). But he consciously created the image of a world in a moment, a snapshot of another world in being, even as that world changed.

A contemporary book that well illustrates all three aspects of the lyrical stance is Michael Bell's ethnography of the "natural conscience" of an English village, *Childerly* (Bell 1994). Bell is engaged throughout, a distinct subjectivity. Unlike Riesman, he is not unwilling to be seen wrestling with his data, to be seen confused and hesitant. He wants us to know the complexity of his own reaction to the residents' debates about fox hunting, scenic views, and "country people." He captures his village at a particular moment of transition, after the beginning of rural gentrification but before the genetic modification and mad cow affairs. He gives us a sense of residents' aching search for a "natural morality" that can be a legitimate alternative to the shifting

¹⁴That Malinowski aimed to emulate his countryman Joseph Conrad is well known. Ginzburg, however, thinks that the key literary influence on *Argonauts* was Robert Louis Stevenson (Ginzburg 2000).

and increasingly illegitimate class system, a search that is at once partly successful and partly doomed. In short, *Childerly* is a deeply lyrical book, filled with an almost Japanese sense of the transitory. It helps, of course, that it is about beautiful things, about farms, aviaries, and gardens, about thatched houses, honest labor, and homey pubs. But the book's lyricism lies in its approach to these things, not in the things themselves.

Mechanics

The chief mechanical differences between a lyrical and a narrative sociology stem from the differing intent of the writers. A narrative writer seeks to tell us what happened and perhaps to explain it. A lyrical writer aims to tell us of his or her intense reaction to some portion of the social process seen in a moment. This means that the first will tell us about sequences of events while the second will give us congeries of images. It means that the first will try to show reality by abstract mimesis while the second will try to make us feel reality through concrete emotions. It means that the first will emphasize the artifice through which his or her mimetic model is made while the second will emphasize the vividness of his or her passion toward the world the writer studies. These larger differences will be reflected in the details of writing. The lyricist will use more figurative language and more personification.

The most important of these differences is the first, that between story and image. Narrative writing centers on a sequence of events, or in the quantitative version, a sequence of variables. This sequence of events or variables explains the phenomenon of interest. By contrast, lyrical writing centers on an image or images. These are viewed in different ways, through different lenses, to evoke the sources of the writer's emotional reaction.¹⁵

For example, Nicholas Christakis's *Death Foretold* (1999) considers medical prognostication in serious illness. An MD-Ph.D., Christakis did several large-scale surveys of physicians' prognostic responses to medical vignettes as well as several questionnaire-based surveys on doctors' attitudes about prognosis. He also did dozens of interviews and gathered hundreds of documents.¹⁶ In the narrative framework, one would expect such a book to be organized around a sequence of variables that determine which kind of physicians prognosticated when and to whom about what. One would expect a narrative of chapters starting with patients and their illnesses, then turning to doctors and their qualities, and finally to the flow of prognostic information throughout the disease course: what do doctors tell patients at the start, how does this change as cases unfold, and how does it end up when death or survival ends the story. But in fact the book simply circles around the image of the doctors telling (more often, not telling) patients about the future. There are chapters on error in prognostication, on norms about it, on how it is done, on rituals about it, and on prognosis as self-fulfilling prophecy, but there is no simple narrative of prognosis.

¹⁵We cannot require that lyrical images always be unique and subtle, just as we cannot require that all scientific models be elegant and parsimonious. Lyrical traditions often rely on stock, standard metaphors, despite our usual belief in the importance of new and arresting images. (I thus differ from Bachelard (1957, see, especially, the introductory chapter), who insists on the radical individuality of lyrical images.) So we should not be surprised that lyrical sociology like lyrical poetry may be full of hackneyed images: individual images like "the city-dweller," "the worker," and "the delinquent," and abstract images like "father-son social mobility" and "urban poverty."

¹⁶Interestingly, Christakis's book, like Massey and Denton's, concerns an act of forgetting: the forgetting of prognosis in modern medicine. Despite the topical similarity, however, the books' structures are strikingly different.

The reader in narrative mode finds this organization of the argument repetitive and undirected: Where is the causal story? Moreover, the author seems preoccupied and hard to pin down. He is not an abstracted sociologist outside the situation, nor is he a consistent advocate for one or another position within the ranks of medicine itself.

But if we read the book as a lyric, it makes much more sense. There is no real narrative at all. There is only the image of a situation—the doctor, the unknown and unknowable future of illness, and the patient; the corpus of general medical knowledge on the one hand and the individual peculiarities of *this* disease and *this* patient on the other, and always the imponderability of an outcome that will be probabilistic for the doctor, but deterministic for the patient, who will either live or die. Seen this way, as an asymmetric situation that opposes probability and determination, the prognostic situation far transcends medicine. It is the same as advising a friend about marriage, assessing a dissertation topic for a student, proposing a legal strategy to a client charged with a felony. The medical setting merely makes it more universal, more penetrating, precisely as a strong lyrical image should.

On this line of argument, Christakis's real aim is to make us feel the damnable ambivalence doctors face about prognosis; indeed, the damnable ambivalence he himself feels as a practicing physician. He has chosen to do this not by writing in the familiar "let me tell you a few of my perplexing cases and what they teach us about life" genre that has produced so many facile medical bestsellers. There we would have again the Riesman persona: the careful, detached, somewhat ironic expert telling us a few delectably ironic stories, admitting us behind the veil. Rather, Christakis has written real sociology—hard-core quantitative analysis combined with endless, almost obsessed interviewing—to try to bring this one terrifyingly important situation to life for us, to show us how it makes him and other physicians feel: confused, tentative, threatened, but also curiously and almost magically powerful. This overarching lyrical stance is struck on the dedication page, where we read that Christakis was six years old when his mother was given a 10 percent chance of living as much as three more weeks.¹⁷

Christakis's book shows that lyrical writing in my sense—writing whose chief intent is to convey a particular author's emotional relation to a certain kind of social moment—is quite possible even in predominantly quantitative work. The book thus illustrates not only the anti-narrative character of lyrical sociology, but also its insistence on the communication of passion, even at the possible expense of abstract representation of reality. We can see the importance of the latter choice by considering a book that from exactly the same starting position makes the reverse choice; Scott Snook's *Friendly Fire* (2000), a book we expect to be passionate and naturalistic, but that is in fact relentlessly mimetic and artificial. *Friendly Fire* is a riveting account of how American warplanes at 1030 hours on April 14, 1994 shot down two American helicopters in Iraq carrying 26 officers and civilians—American, Kurdish, Turkish, British, and French. We expect an impassioned analysis, for like Christakis, not only is Snook both a (military) professional and a sociologist, he is also personally touched by his topic, having himself been wounded by friendly fire in the Grenada engagement in 1983.

¹⁷As Christakis happily notes, this prognosis was incorrect: in fact his mother died many years later. Note that despite its generally lyrical stance, the book ends on a tone of moralism—the last chapter is titled "A Duty to Prognosticate."

Snook's theory is distilled into an unforgettable full-page diagram of all the forces, issues, and events leading to the shutdown, here reproduced as Figure 1 (Snook 2000:21).

The diagram is precisely dimensional: narrative time goes to the right and proximity to the accident goes down the page. So in the upper-left-hand corner we have things like "fall of the Soviet Union" and "long history of interservice rivalry," and through the middle we have things like "aging airframes," and "USAF and US Army units live apart," down to more proximate things like "Adhoc seating configuration in AWACS," "Helicopter MSNS not on ATO," on to "ambiguous radio calls" and "IFF failed," and, finally, about 50 balloons and 80 or 90 connecting arrows later, in the lower-right-hand corner, the shutdown.

But even this extraordinary representation of narrative flow is not enough for Snook, who spent years poring through safety reports, military documents, court-martial trial documents, and even video records. He does give a simple text version of the story, in the book's second chapter, "The Shutdown: A Thin Description." It is exactly that: a careful, detailed, and, in a restrained, military way, somewhat passionate story. But the next three chapters are retellings of the entire story from the points of view of three of the four principal actors: the fighter pilots, the flying combat airspace control crew (AWACS), and the command organizations that should have integrated the Army service helicopters (shot down) into the interservice theater organization (which did the shooting). The fourth set of actors—the dead helicopter crews—left only faint traces, a few conversations and SOPs discussed in the thin description. Unlike Kurosawa in "Rashomon," Snook has no medium to bring them back to life.

But while Snook gives a virtuosic, multilevel and multistranded organizational narrative in the tradition of Perrow's *Normal Accidents* (1984), that analysis is almost without emotion. One senses Snook as narrator. One senses his military personality (by its obsession with a level of organizational detail unthinkable elsewhere). But beyond his remark that he himself had been shot 10 years before, there is little hint of his emotional reaction to or even judgment of the various actors. The agonizing side of this event—the remorse of the pilots, the shamefacedness of the Air Force, the "what happened to everyone after the fact"—none of this analyzed nor, beyond a few adjectives ("a visibly shaken TIGER 01") (Snook 2000:71), even mentioned. We never even find out how the shutdown was identified as a friendly shutdown, how the news spread within a day to the Secretary of Defense, or what the initial reactions were. Only the story of how the rare event occurred is of interest because of Snook's remorselessly narrative (i.e., theoretical) focus on the causal question at hand: How did this happen? In a setting that is an invitation to lyricism, this author with every right to wax lyrical about how humans experience chance and intention and meaning simply refuses to deviate from his narrative path.

Snook's book illustrates not only the dominance of mimesis over emotion in narrative social science, but also the dominance of narrative *artificiality*, which has its origins in narrative's Aristotelian imperative to instruct the reader. (Indeed, the book ends with an appendix on "Friendly Fire Applied: Lessons for Your Organization?") Narrative artifice is in the first instance evident in the very intention of explaining what is, after all, an extremely rare event, one that we would have referred immediately to simple chance had it not been for its human consequence of 26 unexpected deaths. (Equally rare but less freighted events go undiscussed every day.)

Also undiscussed are the many results other than the shutdown of the various causes in Snook's master diagram. Those results are of course important reasons

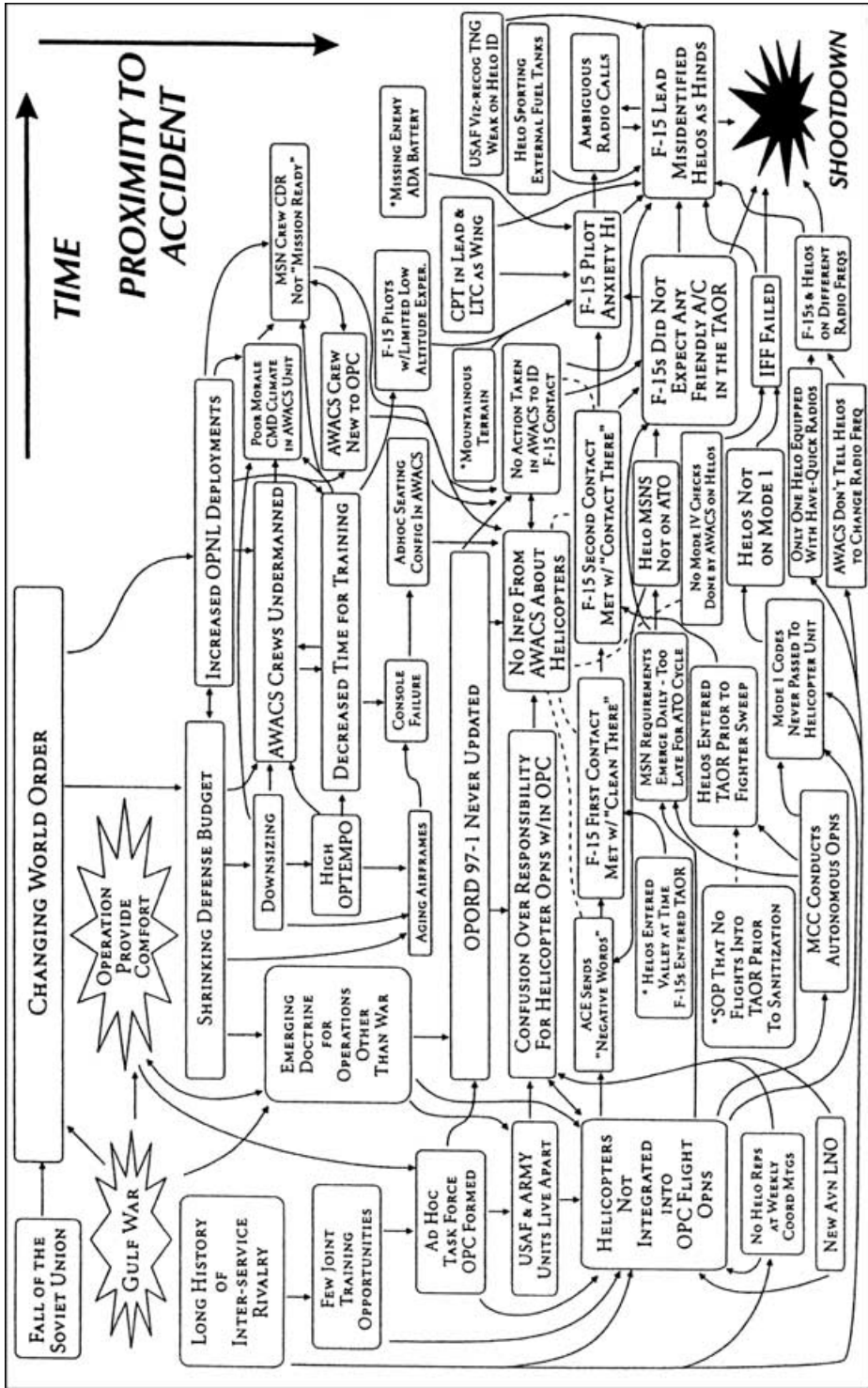


Figure 1.

why the causes were lined up in the way that led to the shutdown. Interservice rivalry not only leads to the shutdown, for example; it is often thought to provide competition that leads the services to self-improvement. That is, it is believed to have important positive outcomes, which may be what keeps it in existence despite such occasionally disastrous results as the shutdown. But in Snook's explicitly didactic narrative form, we focus only on certain results of a set of causes, an approach slightly different from the Barthesian ([1966] 1981) succession of "kernels" and "links," but nonetheless standard in narrative social science. (Cf. Vaughan's (1996) structurally equivalent although more flowery analysis of the Challenger disaster.) This form leads to a hierarchically structured story flow, what I have elsewhere (Abbott 1992b, 2005:396ff) called the "ancestors plot," which looks at all the causes of a particular event from the most immediate to the most general. It is an extremely artificial story form. Not only does it select out of the inchoate social process a funnel of things focusing in to one particular result, ignoring the other "descendants" of those "ancestor" events, it also puts abstractions like "New World Order" and "Emerging Doctrine for Operations Other than War" into the same story with empirical details like "Helicopters not on mode I" and "F-15 Pilot Anxiety High." (I shall later return to this problem of mixing "large" and "small" things.) Narrative stylization is thus quite extreme, although one should repeat that Snook is by no means unusual in this stylization. It is the standard form for all narrative social science, quantitative and qualitative.¹⁸

So far we have considered the major emphases of lyrical versus narrative "mechanics," image rather than story, concrete emotion rather than abstracting mimesis, and naturalism rather than artificiality. Let me turn briefly to two more focused aspects of lyrical technique—personification and figurative language.

Personification is in fact common throughout sociology and indeed social science more generally. Treating collectivities as persons is a commonplace of social analysis, as it is of common language and of both Roman and common law. But when we think of personification in lyric poetry we mean rather the personification of things not normally personified: nonhuman animals, inanimate objects, even concepts. Wordsworth's celebrated "Ode: Intimations of Immortality" begins with four full stanzas personifying the earth, the moon, flowers, animals, and so on. Classical Japanese lyrics personify mountains and trees, cloaks and sleeves, even houses and gates, often using longstanding symbolic conventions to do so. Oddly enough, this extreme personification is quite characteristic of *narrative* sociology, and in particular of its quantitative version. The personification of variables like "bureaucracy" and "gender" is customary usage in quantitative sociology, as it is throughout the narrative analysis of organizations and communities exemplified by Snook's *Friendly Fire*. Indeed, many would argue (q.v. Abbott 1992b) that the *refusal* to apply personification and even figurative language to abstractions is one mark that distinguishes narrative sociology proper from the variables-based sociology that it seeks to replace.

But we are here concerned with the *lyrical* use of these devices as opposed to the use characteristic of narrative in the broad sense (i.e., the sense that includes

¹⁸The "funnel of causation" model was set forth in Campbell et al.'s ([1960] 1980) celebrated book on the 1952 and 1956 elections, *The American Voter*. For an analysis, see Abbott (2005). Note that it is possible to write in a strongly narrative mode without such a funnel design. Fleck's celebrated book on syphilis ([1935] 1979) takes a largely narrative form, but insists on a network of narrative forces. Oddly, this results in a book that presents science as always momentary, always in transit; that is, it presents science as being in the lyrical mode. But Fleck does not aim mainly to convey his emotional reaction to science, so his book cannot be considered lyrical in my sense.

both mainstream, variables sociology and narrative sociology proper). In lyrical social science, these devices are used deliberately to achieve that “certain coloring of imagination,” of which Wordsworth spoke, “whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual aspect.” To see this we require an emphatically lyrical text, and I shall take as example E. P. Thompson’s *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963), a book as explicitly lyrical as exists in social science. Completely unreadable as a story, *The Making* is a narrative in name only. The “emergence” plot promised in the title exists only as a loose framework holding together disparate images of the working class that merge into a ghostly vision of a class whose coming-into-being was at the same time its passing-away. This intensely lyrical tone is set in the much-quoted opening passage and never falters.

I am seeking to rescue the poor stockinger, the Luddite cropper, the “obsolete” hand-loom weaver, the “utopian” artisan, and even the deluded follower of Joanna Southcott, from the enormous condescension of posterity. Their crafts and traditions may have been dying. Their hostility to the new industrialism may have been backward-looking. Their communitarian ideals may have been fantasies. Their insurrectionary conspiracies may have been foolhardy. But they lived through these times of acute social disturbance, and we did not. Their aspirations were valid in terms of their own experience, and, if they were casualties of history, they remain, condemned in their own lives, as casualties. (Thompson 1963:13)

What this passage does, with its almost biblical phraseology (cf. Revelations vii:14–17), is promise to bring to life those who are ignored, to give them that “coloring of imagination” heretofore reserved for “great” figures like William Pitt and Arthur Wellesley. It promises the “personification” of people not before seen as persons. And indeed, the book that follows does precisely that in language powerful indeed. Here is a typical passage from the opening of the chapter entitled “The Liberty Tree.”

We must now return to Thomas Hardy and his companions who met in “The Bell” in Exeter Street in January 1792. We have gone round this long way in order to break down the Chinese walls which divide the 18th from the 19th century, and the history of working-class agitation from the cultural and intellectual history of the rest of the nation. Too often events in England in the 1790s are seen only as a reflected glow from the storming of the Bastille. But the elements precipitated by the French example—the Dissenting and libertarian traditions—reach far back into English history.

...

Constitutionalism was the flood-gate which the French example broke down. But the year was 1792, not 1789, and the waters which flowed through were those of Tom Paine. (Thompson 1963:102)

Here we have extremely metaphorical language. And while those metaphors do involve abstractions (e.g., Chinese walls for historiographical barriers) as in variables-based narrativism, this is done only as part of the framing for the much more closely wrought lyrical text. Here, for example, 30 pages later, is the description of the same Thomas Hardy’s trial for high treason.

On the final day—as the jury retired for three hours—the streets around the Old Bailey were packed with excited crowds: a verdict of “Guilty” would undoubtedly have provoked a riot. A delegate from the Norwich patriotic society, named Davey, was in London to watch the trials. On the news of the acquittal, he posted back to Norwich, travelling all night, and arriving on the Sunday morning in the hours of divine service. He went directly to the Baptist meeting-house in St. Paul’s, whose minister was an ardent reformer, Mark Wilks—one of the old style Baptist ministers who combined an occupation (as a farmer) with his unpaid ministry. Wilks was in the pulpit when Davey entered, and he broke off to enquire: “What news, brother?” “Not Guilty!” “Then let us sing, ‘Praise God from whom all blessings flow.’” (Thompson 1963:135–36)

Here are Davey and Wilks, who make no other appearance in this 800-page book, whose entire discursive purpose is to replace with an unforgettable image what would have been in another writer the simple narrative summary sentence: “News of the acquittal traveled rapidly and caused much happiness among reformers.” But Thompson’s rendition is not really a narrative passage, although it tells a story. It exists to give us a striking image and to convey to us both the emotional tenor of working-class radicalism itself and Thompson’s powerful reaction to it.

This personal intensity is often strong indeed. Bell’s *Childerly*, discussed earlier, ends with a chapter using the village’s peal of bells—and Bell’s own participation as a ringer—to develop a metaphor of resonance that captures how the various aspects of village life resound upon each other. In such a chapter personification and figuration ring out indeed.

MOMENT, LOCATION, AND EMOTION

I have so far examined the lyrical stance and the mechanics by which it shapes texts. But to show that lyric is not simply an elegant style that we throw over narrative and explanatory sociology to make them more attractive and pleasing, I shall now explore more deeply the three crucial theoretical properties that I have assigned to lyric: momentaneity, location, and the expression of nonmoral emotion. I can best do this by digging deeper into the literary and philosophical foundations of lyric and by clarifying the relation of the lyrical to other modes of comprehension that might be thought to subsume it.

Lyric and Narrative in Contemporary Literary Theory

I need first of all to defend our ability actually to separate lyrical from narrative writing. If we cannot separate the two, then the lyric focus on moments is just part of the larger enterprise of telling a story, whether of causes or of actions. As it happens, the problem of separating lyric and narrative has arisen in the theory of poetry itself, where the debate parallels the debate over lyrical sociology; the same skepticism arises for the same reasons. The literary debate will lead us to the philosophical one, from which we return to the main theoretical analysis.

An important strand of modern criticism denies the distinction between narrative and lyric altogether, implicitly claiming that all lyric is historical—narrative in intent as well as by the accident of having been written at a particular moment. Thus, we hear of Wordsworth’s “symbolic narratives” in “The Prelude” (De Man 1984:57). We hear how “objective historical forces rouse themselves in the [lyric] poem” (Adorno 1989:160). We hear of “models of historical change” in Shelley’s “Ode to the Western

Wind” (Chandler 1998:545). Indeed, one could take Chandler’s attempt to understand 50 years of England’s history through the literature of one year as precisely an attempt to assert the identity of narrative and lyric, of historical time and particular moment.

But while Chandler correctly reads the “Ode” to say that prophetic poetry can shape the future by uttering statements in the present, this reading does not make the “Ode” a narrative nor give it a “model of historical change” other than its implicit assertion that action is possible in a radically free present.¹⁹ And while Shelley certainly wrote poetry that was explicitly narrative and prophetic (e.g., “Queen Mab” and “The Mask of Anarchy”), and was obviously obsessed with the passing of time (as in the widely anthologized “Ozymandias”), most of his narrative and prophetic poetry is allegorical and didactic rather than lyrical in any sense other than the lay one of using a great deal of figurative language.

De Man’s work on Wordsworth is a test case here, since I have taken my concept of lyric from Wordsworth’s early prose. In the vast majority of his many readings of Wordsworth, de Man explicitly separates narrative and lyric, a separation he makes by insisting on the roots of Wordsworthian lyric in the moment. Past and future—the very stuff of narrative—are brought into the present by imagination. Indeed, they are seen only from that imaginative present, *defined* by the poet’s present concerns and self. Because imagination is always interpretative, it necessarily breaks the continuity of action (and thus of narrative), making a new, “commentative” (Weinrich 1973) present in which the lyrical stance has its being, off to the side, as it were, of the story.

The moment of active projection into the future (which is also the moment of the loss of self in the intoxication of the instant) lies for the imagination in a past from which it is separated by the experience of a failure [i.e., failure to understand one’s action without reflection]. (1984:58)

The future is present in history only as the remembering of a failed project that has become a menace. For Wordsworth, there is no historical eschatology, but rather only a never-ending reflection upon an eschatological moment that has failed through the excess of its own interiority. (1984:59)

Narrative, in de Man’s Wordsworth, dissolves into lyric (rather than the other way around, as happens in the eyes of some sociologists). De Man repeatedly underscores the metaphors Wordsworth uses (in “The Prelude”) for this intense and disturbing sense of the passage of time in the present: “the immeasurable height/Of woods decaying, never to be decay’d,/The stationary blasts of waterfalls” (de Man 1984:56, quoting “The Prelude” VI, 556–58). Indeed, he argues that narrative itself is transcended in Wordsworth.

¹⁹Chandler also ignores the paradoxical yoking of circular, seasonal time in the first three stanzas of the “Ode” to linear, historical time in the last two, as well as the more important fact that circularity is where Shelley ends (“If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?” ll. 69–70). As we shall see below, circular time is linked to the lyrical stance. A definitional problem needs to be underscored here. Several readers of this article have insisted that the word “lyric” denotes, in effect, all types of poetry. This is probably true in modern, nontechnical usage, but not in serious literary theory. It reflects the fact that contemporary poets have largely stopped writing epics, odes, and the other formal subgenres of poetry. But while “The Mask of Anarchy” may have “impressive lyricism” for Chandler, he knows he is using the word metaphorically and that the poem is actually an allegory with lyrical elements, just as Wordsworth’s “The Prelude” is an autobiographical narrative impregnated with long lyrical sections.

The narrative order, in the short as well as in the longer poems, is no longer linear; the natural movement of his rivers has to be reversed as well as transcended if they are to remain usable as metaphors. (de Man 1993:92)

Moreover, de Man explicitly distinguishes lyric (“the instance of represented voice”) (1984:261) from “the materiality of actual history” (1984:262). Indeed, in the essay “Literary History and Literary Modernity,” he makes the radical claim that all literature is fundamentally anti-historical and notes that Baudelaire—the very paradigm of modern lyric poetry in the standard account—is completely focused on the present, to the exclusion of other times.

In each case, however, the “subject” Baudelaire chose for a theme is preferred because it exists in the facticity, in the modernity, of a present that is ruled by experiences that lie outside language and escape from the successive temporality, the duration involved in writing. (1993:159)

The entire process [of writing] tries to outrun time, to achieve a swiftness that would transcend the latent opposition between action and form. (1983:158)

In de Man’s view, Baudelaire—and, indeed, all lyricists or even all literature—is always caught in the movement between act and interpretation.

The ambivalence of writing is such that it can be considered both an act and an interpretative process that follows an act with which it cannot coincide. (1983:152)

Interestingly, this separation of act and comment on act, of narration and interpretation, echoes the linguistic analysis of tenses, which has shown fairly clearly the existence in most European languages of two different sets of tenses, one of which is used to tell ordered stories (narrative) and the other of which is used to provide personal commentary on things (discourse).²⁰

To see a moment as complete in itself yet absolutely transitory is thus the foundation of the lyric sensibility. This view is seen at its most extreme in Japanese literary aesthetics, which derives from a tradition whose major extended works—the imperial poetry collections and even the enormous *Tale of Genji*—are lyrical rather than narrative in overall conception. Indeed, the single most debated term in classical Japanese criticism is the term for the transitory quality of things, *mono no aware*.

²⁰I am indebted to Susan Gal for insisting on this point. The classic source on the two systems of tenses is Benveniste (1971). See also the monumental Weinrich (1973). Barthes ([1953] 1972:25ff) differs slightly, arguing for the separation of the two systems, but emphasizing the temporal precision of the narrative tenses rather than their impersonality. (And note that the act/interpretation distinction is more or less Mead’s I/me distinction.) I have concentrated on de Man here both because he wrote extensively about Wordsworth and because he is an important enough figure to serve as paradigmatic contemporary critic. It is notable that Eliot’s *Four Quartets*, one of the great monuments of 20th-century lyric poetry, is explicitly concerned with the infolding of past and future into a nonnarrative present, from the opening section of “Burnt Norton” (“Time past and time future/What might have been and what has been/Point to one end, which is always present” (ll. 44–46)) to the last lines of “Little Gidding” (“A people without history/Is not redeemed from time, for history is a pattern/Of timeless moments” (ll. 233–35)). Wordsworth’s “stationary blasts of waterfalls” find their exact counterpart in Eliot’s “still point of the turning world” (“Burnt Norton” l. 62). The structuralists, not surprisingly, had much less to say about lyric than the deconstructionists like de Man; their criticism (e.g., Barthes’s tour de force on Balzac and Genette’s on Proust) focused largely on narrative.

Nor is such a concept absent from Western aesthetics. As de Man notes in his analysis of Wordsworth's concepts of time and history, the acute sense of time's passage in Romantic poetry ultimately arrives at that notion of perpetual dissolution that is known in the Western poetic tradition as "mutability," a subject that has exercised English poets from Chaucer to Spenser and on to Wordsworth and Shelley.²¹

Literary theory thus seems in the last analysis to accept a fairly strong separation between narrative and lyric as modes of comprehension. Insistence on the moment is the heart of the lyrical impulse, while narrative involves the actual passing of time, marked by events. To be sure, the lyrical moment need not be literally instantaneous. To take my own earlier examples, both Zorbaugh and Malinowski describe "presents" that last for months if not years. Moreover, this present often exists within clear bookends of historical transition; Zorbaugh reaches from time to time into the historical past of Chicago, for example, as does Malinowski into the past of the Trobriand and D'Entrecasteaux islanders. Indeed, this framing of the moment with transitions on both sides *intensifies* our sense of it as a moment, precisely because it is embedded in a continuous and inevitable flow of time and change.

Once we acknowledge the separation between narrative and lyric it becomes possible to see why historical sociology, which is sometimes beautifully written and hence "lyrical" in the lay sense, is not lyrical in the technical sense but rather the reverse. Most of historical sociology is concerned with causes and typical sequences of events, matters that are inherently narrative. More important, the rhetorical form of narrative is so powerful that we have grave difficulty not automatically formatting any selected period of history into a narrative structure with a beginning, a middle, and an end. Even catastrophic, final events like the Armistice of November 11, 1918 or the dropping of the atomic bombs in 1945 can be made the middles of stories with a mere modicum of narrative ingenuity.²²

There is a more formal reason for this problem of the multiple narrativity of human experience, one that has to do with the nature of temporality itself. A long

²¹I am following here the argument of Miner et al., especially the section "Development of Poetics" (1985:3–17):

Yet in China, in Korea, and especially in Japan, prose narrative was not soon enough encountered by great critical minds as the normative genre for it to provide the basis for a systematic poetics. That honor went to lyricism. (Miner et al. 1985:5)

The locus classicus of Japanese writing on *mono no aware* is the analysis of the *Genji* by Motoori Norinaga (1730–1801). I have found inspiration also in the detailed analysis of the theories of Fujiwara no Teika (1162–1241), Japan's first systematic critic and also one of her greatest poets, provided by Vieillard-Baron (2001). For an introduction to the tradition itself, see the *Kokinshu* (ca. 905), whose introduction by Ki no Tsurayuki is the most famous single statement of the Japanese lyrical aesthetic. *Kokinshu* also shows how compilers managed to develop short (31-syllable) lyrical poetry into a larger comprehensive form. It is striking that Adorno explicitly ruled out the Japanese lyrical tradition as irrelevant to modern lyric poetry because it was not produced by the same social formation (1989:158). On dissolution and mutability, see de Man (1993:94). The classic treatment is Williamson (1935). Shelley's poem on mutability ends: "For, be it joy or sorrow./The path of its departure still is free:/Man's yesterday may ne'er be like his morrow;/Nought may endure but Mutability" (ll. 13–16). That is an explicit denial of the possibility of coherent narrative or even history.

²²This is as good a place as any to note that there is little lyricism in the first great historical sociologist, Karl Marx. Even the long passages of *Capital* that are about poverty—the "Illustrations of the General Law of Capitalist Accumulation" late in Volume 1, for example—exist to support the intellectual and moral argument of the book, not to tell us Marx's feelings toward the poor. "The Irish famine of 1846 killed more than 1,000,000 people," he tells us, "but it killed poor devils only. To the wealth of the country it did not the slightest damage" (Marx [1887] 1967:vol. 1:704). The importance of famine dead is for Marx's argument, not for themselves as human beings; the contrast with Thompson could not be stronger. The same attitude shows in the magnificently figurative *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (Marx [1852] 1963). Although Marx is at considerable pains to give us his emotions, they comprise a seething anger and a thoroughgoing contempt. These are moralizing emotions, not lyrical ones.

philosophical tradition has argued that there is an inherent inconsistency between the view that time is tensed (time as past, present, and future) and the view that time is an ordered sequence (of dates).²³ The first view captures the idea of temporal direction but has no account for why particular events change their quality from future to present to past in the order that they do. The second view captures the idea of the sequence of events, but has no account of direction. Historical narrative, as customarily understood, is a version of the second view, tracing events from beginning to end via the succession of events in the middle. What such narrative loses, of course, is the fact that each one of the intermediate events was a present at one point, and hence open to all sorts of realizations, not just the one that obtained in actuality. This intermediate present disappears in narrative history because we know ahead of time where the historical story ends: that Elizabeth I does not marry Robert Dudley, that the South lost the Civil War, that Truman defeated Dewey, and so on. To be sure, the middling events may lead us further off the “main road” of narrative than we thought. To make us feel this extra deviation is the highest art of the narrative historian—to make us somehow think for a moment that Amy Robsart’s suspicious death *was* overlooked, that Dick Ewell *did* take Culp’s Hill on the first day at Gettysburg, that the *Tribune* (for once) *did* get the election right. But historical narratives do ultimately lead to “what did happen in the end.” The longer the narrative we tell, the heavier is this weight of teleology, the less our story can be an unfolding of unknowns, and the more we feel ahead of time the inevitable emergence of whatever end did in fact close that particular narrative. By implication, then, the indeterminate character of historical passage moment to moment is actually clearest in the shortest possible narratives: that is, in purely momentary “stories,” or—in another word—in lyrics.

Moment and Narrative in Ethnography

The literary and philosophical traditions are thus united in making distinctions that justify the separation of lyric and narrative as modes of comprehension. For both, the focus of the lyrical mode is the moment of the present. Moreover, they both imply that—paradoxically—the best representations of historical passage as a phenomenon are not plots, not sequences of events, but rather the momentary Bergsonian durations of tensed time, which are always centered on a particular, indexical present. This conclusion suggests that perhaps lyrical sociology is linked directly to ethnography, which has such a momentary quality. Indeed, ethnography has several characteristics in common with lyric. It is written by a particular person. Since it involves being somewhere, it is usually about a moment. And it often embodies intense personal engagement. So it meets the three basic requisites of the lyrical stance by its very nature. We have seen some clear examples of lyrical ethnographies—Bell and Malinowski, for example—and could add many more, from Young and Willmott’s (1957) famous examination of families in east London to the extraordinary *Tristes Tropiques* of Levi-Strauss (1955).

There are qualifications to this argument. The engagement of an ethnographer need not be a direct and emotional one. Leach’s *Political Systems of Highland Burma*

²³The classical citation for this argument is McTaggart (1908), although a similar argument is implicit in Bergson (1910). See also the independent rediscovery of this problem by Shackle (1961), who worked out its implications for economics. I have discussed this problem at some length in Abbott (2005). I should note that the philosopher Galen Strawson’s (2004) paper “Against Narrativity,” despite its similar title, actually concerns a different topic than mine: whether people actually do or ought to live their lives as narratives.

(1954) synthesizes an enormous amount of published material and ethnographic experience, after all, but lacks any authorial emotion other than a withering sarcasm directed at structural-functional colleagues.²⁴ But more important, modern ethnography is not necessarily about moments or places. It often deliberately embeds field work in a larger historical flow, as does Katherine Verdery's *Transylvanian Villagers* (1983), for example, or in a larger regional or social structure, as does Michael Burawoy's *Manufacturing Consent* (1979).

This embedding of a local present in "larger" things (larger temporally or socially) echoes the similar argument we saw in the Chandlerian strand of literary criticism: that the lyrical moment is ultimately in the service of (larger) narrative. In his essay on lyrical poetry, for example, Adorno (1989) argued explicitly that even in this most individual of forms, social forces are clearly evident. (Indeed, he argued that the individualism of the form is precisely what is socially formed about it.) This position—that the apparently individual or isolated moment is the *best* place to see *larger* social forces (rather than the best place to see transition and particularity)—is much the same as that implicit in the works just cited by Verdery and Burawoy. And, indeed, Burawoy (1998) makes such an argument explicitly in his call for an "extended case method" that aims to descry large forces in particular spatial and temporal localities. Discussion of that method can thus further specify lyrical sociology by locating it with relation to existing sociological genres.

The extended case method (or, as Van Velsen (1967) preferred to call it, "situational analysis") was elaborated after 1935 by Max Gluckman and colleague Africanists who became identified as the Manchester School of Anthropology. It was an attack on Radcliffe-Brownian structuralism for theoretical abstraction and ahistoricism. In rereading this tradition, Burawoy took up the second of these criticisms by reversing the first: his solution for ahistoricism was the (quite abstract) Marxist theory of history.

The extended case method applies reflexive science to ethnography in order to extract the general from the unique, to move from the "micro" to the "macro," and to connect the present to the past in anticipation of the future, all by building on preexisting theory. (1998:5)²⁵

Yet although he shared Burawoy's commitment to theory, Gluckman was in practice an inductivist whose theories emerged from an eclectic mix of field-work, document examination, historical analysis, and theoretical argument. He

²⁴Examples of both lyrical and nonlyrical ethnographies are legion. Even when the topic of an ethnography is transition and change, it is possible to be lyrical or nonlyrical about it. Gans (1962, 1967) wrote about the planned destruction of an old slum and the de novo creation of a complete suburb without much lyricism, yet Rieder (1985) describes the racial transition of Canarsie in Brooklyn with an intensive emotional involvement. In *Manufacturing Consent* (1979), Michael Burawoy utters hardly a word of lyricism. He shows his some strong emotional cards in the preface, but they concern his advisors more than his field situation.

²⁵Burawoy's restatement of the Manchester credo (Burawoy was a student of Jaap Van Velsen at the University of Zambia) emphasizes some aspects of it at the expense of others. His advocacy of active intervention reverses Gluckman's (1947a) castigation of Malinowski for late-career do-goodism, although his insistence on processualism exactly echoes Gluckman's position. His omission of the tradition's obsession with reporting actual events misses an essential part of Gluckman's ([1940] 1958) original work, but his insistence on the importance of historical contextualization follows Gluckman exactly. The data-heavy ethnographies of the Manchester School look quite different from the sometimes slender ethnographies of today's extended case practitioners. Indeed, the critique of Van Velsen (1964) (as of Richards 1939) was that they gave too much data (see Gluckman 1967:xvi). Oddly enough, given Burawoy's remarks about his own Ph.D. department (e.g., Burawoy 1979:xvii), the Manchester School ethnographies remind one very much of the Chicago School work of the 1920s, crammed full of data and maps and cases.

lamented (1947a:121) that—unlike Marxism—anthropology lacked a cohesive theoretical framework, giving as his own candidate for a general theory the idea of a dominant cleavage in society (1955). This idea seems quite timid beside the sweeping succession of modes of production in Burawoy's Marxism, and Gluckman's inductive shuttling between historical understanding and ethnography seems equally pale beside the almost deductive derivation of ethnographic interpretation from preexisting theory in Burawoy.²⁶ For not only does Burawoy think that the larger theory drives ethnographic interpretation, he also believes, and far more strongly than did Gluckman, that larger forces in fact *determine* ethnographic situations. It is in fact precisely the presumption of this determination that allows Burawoy to claim that ethnography can sustain inferences about larger forces.

Such a belief in the determination of the present (both spatial and temporal) by "larger forces" is completely absent from lyrical sociology as I am proposing it. This dis-attention is to some extent simply willful. The determination of a present situation by something outside it is no reason not to celebrate or investigate or understand it in and of itself. As one writer comments, "imagine what anthropology would look like today . . . if Radcliffe-Brown had written *Three Tribes in Western Australia's Concentration Camps* (i.e., instead of *The Social Organization of Australian Tribes* (1931). The quote is from Sanjek (1991:613).) That Radcliffe-Brown tried to imagine from his data the tribes as they would have been outside the larger, controlling enterprise of colonialism is a good thing, not a bad one, even though it should not blind us to the fact that the barbed wire no doubt transformed tribal life in dozens of ways.

But the willful dis-attention of lyrical sociology to larger forces also rests on a deeper argument, one that rejects the whole micro/macro ontology implicit in Burawoy's understanding of the extended case method, for that ontology falls apart when we get serious about temporality, as became clear during the original debates on the extended case method.

Gluckman and his followers argued that Radcliffe-Brownian structuralism had turned ethnography into a description of society not as it actually was, but as it "ought" to be if it were a perfectly realized version of itself. Similarly, they felt, although Malinowski's ethnographies were data grounded to a fault, those data were often interpreted within a functional framework that seemed outside real time (e.g., Malinowski 1935). This critique reflected different conceptions of the present: Was it a simple tensed interval, as in the first theory of time given above, or was it a point in a larger ordered sequence of events, as in the second? Structuralist and functionalist accounts of societies created an "ethnographic present"²⁷ in which relationships and activities ramified in what seemed an endless (because timeless) present tense: "Nuer tribes are split into segments" (Evans-Pritchard 1940:139); "[Magic] aims at forestalling unaccountable mishaps and procuring undeserved good luck" (Malinowski 1935:77). By contrast, Gluckman's famous *Analysis of a Social Situation in Modern Zululand* began with the story of a bridge opening told as a simple past narrative:

²⁶The theory of those larger forces is in Burawoy's case a theory of domination and, in particular, a Marxist theory. Although it happens that this is a draconian specification of Gluckman's extended case method, that fact is not important in the sequel. Although it is clear that Burawoy's brilliant paper conflates the extended case method, reflexive inquiry, and Marxist politics, the tradition flowing *from* the paper has mainly focused on only one part of his argument, the move from the ethnographic foreground to contextual forces on the largely deductive assumption of the determination of "small" by "large." This line of reasoning dates from Burawoy's earliest work (1979:xiv–xv).

²⁷The term dates from the early 1940s. For a history, see Burton (1988). Two important sources on it are Fabian (1983), which argues on linguistic grounds that the ethnographic present is inevitably "othering," and Sanjek (1991), who provides a sophisticated argument against Fabian.

“On January 7th I awoke at sunrise” ([1940] 1958:2). Thus in the one case, the present was an indefinite duration in which many kinds of things occurred in a routine manner, while in the other it was a specific instant in which a specific person did one particular thing. The two views thus capture exactly the classical philosophical dichotomy of tense versus order.

But they also invoked very different *sizes* of time units, and thereby invoked different *layers* of temporality. In Braudelian terms, the first present is that of *structure*, the deep (and supposedly unchanging) givens of a society, while the second is that of *événement*, the little events that float on that sea of structural stability. It was by their implicit assertion that “the present” was big (long in duration, i.e., “structural” in Braudel’s sense) that the structural/functional anthropologists came to seem opposed to the idea of social change.²⁸

But if one parses time into layers, as the extended case method must because of its belief in larger forces, what pieces of social life are to be put at what level? More important, which layer drives the others? Even though Malinowski and Gluckman shared the “circular” concept of repetitive equilibria (Gluckman [1940] 1958:46ff; Malinowski 1938), Malinowski’s ideas attributed those equilibria to synchronic mechanisms observable in short intervals. By contrast, Gluckman’s writings often centered quite specifically on what we would today call “larger mechanisms” of division and cohesion (e.g., 1955) and “extraneous forces” (1947a:111), which impinged on—indeed, more or less determined—the local situation. The bridge opening just mentioned was employed by Gluckman to illustrate and articulate a social organizational analysis whose data and conclusions actually derived far more from the historical analysis of past events than from ethnography. In rejecting this approach, Malinowski argued (1938) that such moves to historical antecedents involved an attempt to reconstruct a “zero-point” of culture before contact with the West. Culture was better understood synchronically, he thought; the past was utterly gone.²⁹

Behind this debate, the unanswered question is how “large” historical forces can act “at a distance” or, more generally, how historical forces of different periodicities and purviews interact causally during a sequence of successive presents. (This is the most pointed way of posing in sociological terms the contradiction between the two temporalities discussed above.)³⁰ There is no generally accepted ontology of social life that addresses these questions.³¹ Because we lack such an accepted account, analyses inevitably choose a level of temporality whose duration is their “present.” More

²⁸The Braudelian model is laid out in *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* (Braudel 1972:vol. II, 892–903). It has three kinds of layers: unchanging structure, varying conjuncture, and events, the “ephemera of history” that “pass across its stage like fireflies, hardly glimpsed before they settle back into darkness” (1972:vol. II, 901).

²⁹The Malinowski-Gluckman debate started with Malinowski’s introduction to a volume of seven studies of change by young Africanists (Malinowski 1938), to which Gluckman’s response was his work on “a social situation in modern Zululand” ([1940] 1958). Malinowski’s next response, at least as Gluckman saw it, was the posthumous collection on social change (1945), which in fact included much of the earlier material. Gluckman’s savage review (1947a) was mitigated by a more fair appraisal of Malinowski’s overall contribution (1947b). Gluckman perhaps thought he had the last laugh when his student Uberoi reanalyzed Malinowski’s data using a Gluckmanian approach (Uberoi 1962, with a foreword by Gluckman). On the other hand, Malinowski’s classic was cited more times in 2005 alone—84 years after its publication—than Uberoi’s book has been cited in its 44-year lifetime.

³⁰The various substantive philosophies of history have various answers to these questions. In the Marxist model, for example, large forces drive lesser events, which become mere workings out of an inevitable larger pattern. In Braudel’s layered model, by contrast, epochal changes in “big” structure (i.e., the long duration present) come from the chance alignment of smaller duration changes at shorter temporal levels.

³¹I have written about this problem at great length elsewhere (see, e.g., Abbott (2001b:chs. 7, 8, and epilogue).

important, they also make a choice whether to view that present narratively or instantaneously: whether it is to be a step in a longer story or a moment in itself. Neither step absolutely denies the other, and each has its own pathology, as McTaggart's (1908) century-old paper predicts. Those who believe in "larger forces" have their "structure and agency" problem (which in effect is about the present's independence to be for itself and not simply an instantiation of some larger process) while the "presentists" have the problem of explaining social change in a world they have deliberately conceived as merely instantaneous.³² Ernest Gellner (1988) argues that Malinowski chose the second of these paths deliberately so as to attack the unthinking evolutionism of his time (as well as "the so-called materialist conception of history") (1961:516). Just as the move to narrative contextualization was for Gluckman a response to the structural/functional school's inherent tendency to ahistoricism, structural/functionalism itself emerged to attack the diachronic inevitabilism of a previous generation of evolutionists and historicists.³³

This historical discussion makes the lyrical position much clearer. Lyrical sociology embodies one of the two possible approaches to temporality in social analysis. It tends to arise as a deliberate response to the pathologies of the other approach but, of course, has its own pathologies. At its best, it provides a far more effective sense of passing time than does the inevitable tramp of narrative analysis. In lyric, we hear the whisper of possibility and the sigh of passage.³⁴

Location

This analysis of how lyric embodies passage in time can be transferred with only slight modification to lyric's embodiment of location in social space. Just as the transitory, mutable quality of a particular present moment is made most vivid by a lyrical approach, so, too, is the peculiarly local quality of a particular place. But since social space lacks the unidimensionality of time, we must adapt the argument somewhat.

Recall the distinction between two types of time: tensed time and mere order. Tensed time is what we live; ordered time what we narrate. The one is subjective and indexical; the other is objective and iconic. A similar distinction can be made in social space.³⁵ On the one hand, there is clearly an indexical notion of social space,

³²The difference parallels exactly the two conceptions of time in Bergson (1910), who emphasized the subjective quality of experienced time (along with its tensed-ness), as opposed to the objective, external character of Cartesian, dated time. In the one case, the pathology is solipsistic reverie; in the other, the mechanical clank of causality.

³³The whole debate is thus an example of the fractal return of a supposedly rejected argument (see Abbott 2001a:21ff).

³⁴A lyrical approach is, however, not the only way to attack teleology. Leach's *Highland Burma* was clearly an attack on both structural/functionalism and historical analysis of the Gluckman type. While Leach remarks in the introductory note to the 1964 reprint of his quite unclassifiable book (1964:x) that "[i]t is the thesis of this book that this appearance [of equilibrium] is an illusion," three pages later he says, with equal candor, "I do not believe in historical determinism in any shape or form." Indeed, Leach takes Gluckman as his principal theoretical antagonist, seeing him as a kind of watered-down functionalist (1964:ix-x). Leach's own position on temporality was an odd one. Although his book demonstrates the incoherence of then-traditional anthropology as practiced by either the structural/functionalists or the historicists, it does so by moving the whole debate to the *language* (more broadly, culture) through which social structure is experienced and modified. But it then gives us no account of the historicity of symbol systems themselves, which is, after all, subject to the same "two-times" problem as is the traditional analysis of social structure against which Leach inveighed so noisily.

³⁵I am here explicitly rejecting the Bergsonian analysis of space. Bergson (1910) founded his analysis of the two-times problem on an explicit contrast between space, which is ordered in a Cartesian (i.e., objective) fashion, and time, which is inevitably indexical, and so cannot be analogized to space. McTaggart did not consider space at all.

a notion founded on what social space “looks like” from the point of view of the actors at any particular location in it: which parts of it are close or far, which are invisible or visible, which are reachable or unreachable. There is no necessary reason why these various “views” of social space, each from a particular point, should be reconcilable into some single system with universal dimensions that can itself contain all the information contained in the constitutive local views, for there is no reason why Actor A should agree with Actor B about whether they are close or connected or visible to one another, and if relations are not symmetric, it is by definition impossible to embody their information in a metric space of any kind. So we are stuck, on this first view, with an idea of social space as having a strong quality of indexical locality that cannot be merged into a general topology.

We can—on the other hand—create a best possible “objective” model of the social space given all of this indexical information. We do that whenever we reason about the social forces behind elections and other events, and we have methodologies like multidimensional scaling to construct such models for us in a formal manner. Indeed, a long literature argues that we routinely act “as if” there were an objective social structure of this kind.

There are thus two different relations between Point A and Point B in social space, one of them the indexical relation that is composed of the interactional coming together (or confrontation) of the view of A from B and of B from A, the other the “objective” relation that is produced by symmetrizing these views subject to a larger set of structures (the analogue of narratives in the temporal case) that we take to govern social space as a whole. We can think of these as the “positioned” (cf. “tensed”) view and the “dimensioned” (cf. ordered) view, respectively. The former emphasizes the “disposition” of a given location—that is, its emplacement relative to its own view of its own contexts—while the latter locates each social “place” in a set of larger-scale and “unplaced” dimensions or structures, just as a narrative locates each event in a larger chain of events linked by an overarching logic.³⁶

Just as the lyric stance rests on the indexical concept of the present moment, so, too, does it rest on the indexical concept—the disposition—of the present location. Just as it avoids the narrative temptation to embed particular moments in a teleological string of events, the lyrical stance also avoids the descriptive temptation to embed its subject in larger social formations that will define it. Lyrical sociology’s sense of disposition is its spatial analogue of temporal passage. To the evanescent quality of “nowness” in time it adds an equivalent sense of the changing quality of “hereness” as we move in social space, of what we might call not evanescence but “intervanescence.”

This interest in disposition marks lyrical sociology as different not only from the extended case method with its larger emplacements, but also from the new ethnography that arose out of the analysis of textuality and subject position that was inaugurated by Clifford and Marcus’s (1986) celebrated collection in the mid 1980s. That collection aimed to contextualize both anthropological work and its objects. Authors were concerned with how anthropology’s location in the colonial project affected the knowledge it produced at the same time as they were concerned with how colonialism had modified the cultures anthropologists observed. Both these lines of questioning

³⁶Note that I am not arguing that the dimensional view, the “view from nowhere” of an abstracted social structure, is the creation only of a foolishly objective social science. Quite the contrary, views from nowhere are produced in the life-world itself routinely, as I have suggested. Vernacular views of social structure are more commonly dimensional than indexical.

led authors to define local realities (the ethnographies and the things reported in them) by their location within “larger” social phenomena (the narratives and social structures of colonialism). That is, although this literature aimed to abolish the “view from nowhere” (by which term it understood the social scientific canon of objectivity), it did so by “emplacing” both viewer and viewed in specific places in a larger narrative and in a larger structural map, which narrative and map were themselves viewed *dimensionally*, rather than indexically. Paradoxically, then, this literature itself produced a view from nowhere, just a different one from that of the objectivists. From a lyrical point of view, embedding a present in a narrative (objective or colonialist) replaces its quality of passage with a quality of teleology, and embedding a place in a larger social structure replaces its quality of disposition—locational indexicality—with a quality of dimensional fixedness in “larger” social entities. Lyrical sociology should rather be concerned with maintaining the dispositional quality of the object of analysis, its position in the social world as it—the object—sees that world.³⁷

Lyric and Emotion

Having now specified the nature of temporal and (social) spatial location—the two types of “presentness”—in lyrical sociology, let me turn in closing to the third aspect of the lyrical stance, that of emotional engagement. I have argued that lyrical sociology is passionately engaged in its topic, that its authors take up emotional stances both toward topic (feeling) and audience (tone). Here, lyrical sociology seems to come closer to the new ethnography, with its concern for the subjectivity of authors. But while the new ethnography is open to a wide variety of subjectivities—being mainly concerned with the acknowledgment of subjectivity rather than its content—I shall argue that the lyrical feeling and tone embody a specific emotional relation toward both audience and material.

Authorial emotion is by no means foreign to sociological writing. Quite the contrary. Consider the most famous basic list of emotions, that of Ekman (1972): anger, sadness, surprise, fear, disgust, and happiness.³⁸ Fear and disgust are rare in sociology, as is happiness (perhaps it seems insufficiently professional). But surprise is common, being a stock in trade of literatures so disparate as ethnography of exotic groups on the one hand and game theory and simulation modeling on the other. Both these literatures aim to some degree to rub the readers’ noses in unexpected things. But the reader, not the writer, is meant to feel the surprise, and this sometimes considerable hostility makes it clear that such work is not lyrical sociology by my definition.

³⁷Indexicality of location (i.e., disposition) thus is more important here to lyrical sociology than is location per se. It is possible to stress the latter without stressing the former. For an example discussing location without indexicality, see my discussion of the importance of location in the writings of the Chicago School (Abbott 1997). One way of maintaining indexicality of disposition is to enlist those who are studied as privileged reporters of their own world. Certainly, this *has* been characteristic of the new ethnography, as it often was of the old. In sociology, enlisting informants as investigators is a long tradition from Nels Anderson the hobo and Stanley the jackroller to Ralph Orlandella the corner boy and Tamotsu Shibutani and Richard Nishimoto the interned Japanese-American students. We have seen it in lyrical sociology in the (quantitative) case of Christakis, a doctor writing about his own profession.

³⁸Another celebrated psychologist, Lazarus (1991), lists anger, fright, guilt, sadness, envy, and disgust for negative emotions and joy, pride, love, relief, hope, compassion, and aesthetic emotions for positive. The philosopher Solomon’s famous (and long) list (1976) is anger, anxiety, contempt, contentment, depression, despair, dread, duty, embarrassment, envy, faith, fear, friendship, frustration, gratitude, guilt, hate, hope, indifference, indignation, innocence, jealousy, joy, love, pity, pride, regret, resentment, respect, sadness, shame, vanity, and worship.

The remaining two emotions on Ekman's list seem very common in sociology and are perhaps better candidates for producing lyrical sociology: sadness in the guise of nostalgia and anger in the guise of moral outrage. Nostalgia has pervaded writing about society for at least a hundred years. The "eclipse of community" literature is steeped in nostalgia, from *Middletown* (Lynd and Lynd 1929) to *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (Jacobs 1961) to *Habits of the Heart* (Bellah et al. 1985). Indeed, the whole modernization paradigm, from Maine to Toennies to Durkheim, has a strong element of nostalgia in it. The same emotion inhabits much of the mass society literature of the postwar period—such books as *The Organization Man* (Whyte 1957) and *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (Bell 1976)—as it does such elite studies as *The Protestant Establishment* (Baltzell 1964). Most of these works were not explicitly lyrical in intent, but a strongly elegiac mood pervades them. Nor is nostalgia the sole province of the communitarians and the elitists. The new labor history evinces a nostalgia almost cloying at times, and the various literatures on the decline of the "public sphere" embody a left nostalgia quite equivalent to that of the mass society literature.

Outrage is the other familiar emotion in social science writing. Massey and Denton's *American Apartheid* is an example, as I have argued, but the reader can no doubt supply dozens more; outrage is inevitably a dominant emotion in a discipline that has made inequality its most important single topic for many decades. Unlike nostalgia, outrage is seldom allied to lyrical writing in the lay sense, but sociological pieces animated by outrage certainly aim to communicate authorial feelings (condemnation of some life-world situation) and authorial tone (the reader is expected to join the author in his or her outrage). They thus clearly fit the engagement part of my definition of the lyrical stance. Yet while such work often makes use of strong images and figurative language, and while its aim is often to communicate its outrage from author to reader, it aims not to awaken in the reader an emotional state but rather a desire for action. The literature of outrage is thus a weaker candidate for lyricism than is that of nostalgia.

There is a more important quality, characteristic of both nostalgia and outrage, that militates against lyricism in the formal sense I am developing here. As the lyric stance requires, both nostalgia and outrage are rooted in a location that is defined indexically, that is seen from the inside. Nostalgia is anchored in the now and outrage is anchored in the here. So they begin with the proper "locational" quality of lyrical writing. But each evaluates that position by comparison with an external point that is not now or here. For nostalgia, the point of comparison is the golden imagined past; for outrage the point of comparison is the equally idealized (and equally elsewhere) state of equality. Each of these emotions, at least as communicated by sociologists, thus involves not one location, but two. One of these locations is real and identified indexically as "here," while the other is unreal and not located other than as "elsewhere." Both nostalgia and outrage, far from finding something magical and special in the indexical here and now, judge the here and now to be wanting by comparison with this other idealized state. In nostalgia, the judgment is temporal—it embodies a narrative of decline—and so we can call it a narrative emotion. In outrage, the judgment is synchronic (although, of course, there will be a narrative about its origins), and so we can call it a comparative emotion.

Nostalgia and outrage thus exemplify larger families of narrative and comparative emotions. On the narrative side is not only nostalgia but also its reverse—progressivism. The early years of the *American Journal of Sociology* are filled with

a complacent reformism that is strongly emotional in its hopeful view of the world. But there are also *negatively* anticipatory narrative emotions, as when futurologists aim to panic their readers over coming changes from now to later (e.g., the technomessiahs predicting the end of books and libraries). All these “narrative emotions” move us out of the lyrical mode and into the flow of story and event.³⁹ A similar analysis could be made of comparative emotions, whose positive versions pervade the worship of markets in economics (although often with a fairly hostile tone toward the audience, which does not sufficiently understand the “truth” of markets) and of functional adaptations in certain schools of sociology.

But if we rule out narrative and comparative emotions, what is left for lyrical sociology? What would we mean by an “indexical emotion,” an emotion rooted completely in the here and now about which the author is writing? Consider the examples of lyrical sociology given above, which show a variety of emotions: a kind of “oh brave new world” excitement in Zorbaugh, a profound amazement and even admiration in Malinowski (far indeed from the exasperation and rage of his diaries), a sense of agonized confusion in Christakis, a boundless but often exasperated sympathy in Thompson. Despite this variety, what these works have in common is the intense engagement of their authors, and by extension their readers, in precisely their *indexical*, located quality, the transitory and particular nature of their present here(s) and now(s). At its best, this feeling is curious without exoticism, sympathetic without presumption, and thoughtful without judgment. It is always aware that confusion can come as easily from authorial misunderstanding as from subjects’ experience. In fact, in seeking to see the world from the indexical time and place of their subjects, these authors become all the more self-conscious about their own. Indeed, the effect of their work is precisely to make us aware of our own mutability and particularity by presenting to us in careful detail that of others, at a different time and place.⁴⁰

It is striking that with few exceptions, this emotion—let me call it humane sympathy—is not on the lists of psychologists and philosophers who write about emotion. (See footnote 38.) Compassion and pity are as close as they get, but both of these lack the reciprocal quality of humane sympathy as I envision it. They have a directional quality—from the emotionally secure self to the emotionally troubled other. But the nature of humane sympathy reads both ways; it heightens our awareness of our own limitation in time and pace by showing us, in all its intensity, that of others. In their mutability and particularity, we see our own.

To be sure, this is a function of audience participation. If one reads only to find the narrative or structural account of a temporal and social present, the lyrical text will read as a disappointment, as I have noted above. This is clear in reviews of

³⁹I am here making a parallel with Arthur Danto’s formal definition of “narrative sentences” as sentences that inherently involve two points in time (Danto 1985:ch. 8). Note that I am not following the account of all emotions as inherently narrative (or as being necessarily embodied in narratives) that is given in the “narrative emotions” essay of Nussbaum, whose core argument (1988:234–35) strikes me as specious.

⁴⁰I should note that none of the lyrical works mentioned overtly tells us the emotions of its author. Indeed, the shift from telling these emotions (as writings in the social reform tradition usually did) to merely showing them is probably one of the key ingredients of “science” as early 20th-century sociologists understood it. Like so many other things, this transition evinces a close parallel to lyric poetry, which moved sharply against “telling” emotion in the modern period. Eliot’s famous “objective correlative” essay ([1919] 1975) is the classic citation on this topic (but see Miles 1942 for an interesting quantitative study). In “The Perfect Critic” ([1920] 1975:57), Eliot went further, arguing that “[t]he end of the enjoyment of poetry is a pure contemplation from which all accidents of personal emotion are removed; thus we aim to see the object as it really is.” Such a statement could as easily have come from Robert Park in exactly the same year, with the word “poetry” switched with “sociology.”

lyrical works.⁴¹ Reviewers of *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* were to some extent bewildered by Malinowski's unwillingness to make causal arguments or to provide an origination narrative for the kula, although they were overwhelmed by his detail and impressed by his vividness. Reviewers of *The Making of the English Working Class* divided into those who saw it as biased, ideologically nostalgic, and lacking in causal or even narrative argument (Semmel and Smelser) and those who appreciated its extraordinary passion and vividness but thought they saw an insufficiently coherent narrative or argument. Of the latter, Bendix (1965:605) says: "The reader may in the end complain of a lack of guidance . . . For all the hazards of conceptualization, without it history is trackless—and very long." Best (1965:276–77) at least admires Thompson's attempt at lyricism: "Now it can be said that he does his advocate's work very well and that some of his most memorable passages occur when he is doing it. He delights in making that seem sensible which has usually been accounted idiotic and in conjuring swans out of conventional geese." But, ultimately, Best dis-sents from Thompson's interpretation. Far more hostile, Smelser (1966) reads what I am calling Thompson's lyricism as "radical historical specificity" and condemns it as unsatisfactory historiographically because it is not oriented to explanation and narrative causality. Zorbaugh's reviewers were more sympathetic, all commending the book for its vivid, literary quality and, in one case at least, strongly praising it for what Smelser would no doubt have called its atheoreticity: "It has benefited from the fact that its author has not compressed too harshly his human materials, alive and often untractable, into predetermined categories" (Vance 1929:321).

Readers are thus often unwilling to read the lyrical text as anything but a failed narrative. But for the reader who is open to it, the lyrical text provides a representation of human mutability and particularity in their most vivid form. This encounter forces us to face two things: first, that we, too, are mutable and particular, and second, that our here and now are radically different from those of which we read. To be sure, these are things that we can know cognitively, but we usually forget them. As these reviews show, while we commonly read texts in the nonindexical mode, looking for narratives or structural accounts that explain other people's lives by contextualizing them in various ways, we tend quietly to reserve to ourselves the privilege of living in the (only) "real" here and now, in the inexplicable, indexical present. But of course if the meaning of other people's lives can be explained not in terms of how they experience it but in terms of some larger narrative or social structure in which they are embedded, so, too, can the meaning of our own. It is the merit of the lyrical text to avoid this trap by avoiding the move to narrative or structural embedding altogether. The lyrical text directly confronts us with the radical chasm between our own here and now and that of its subjects. Yet while the lyrical text shows us this chasm clearly, the chasm itself is crossed by our moral recognition of the common humanity we share with those we read about. The central emotion aroused by lyrical sociology is precisely this tense yoking of the vertigo of indexical difference with the comfort of human sympathy.

⁴¹To save space, I simply list here all the reviews considered, reserving formal citation for those quoted in text. Malinowski reviews: E. W. Gifford (*American Anthropologist* 25:101–02, 1923), M. Ginsberg (*Economica* 11:239–41, 1924), E. Schweidland (*Economic Journal* 33:558–60, 1923), F. R. Barton (*Man* 29:189–90, 1922). Thompson reviews: B. Semmel (*American Historical Review* 70:123–24, 1964), R. Bendix (*American Sociological Review* 30:605–06, 1965), N. J. Smelser (*History and Theory* 5:213–17, 1966), G. Best (*History Journal* 8:271–81, 1965). Zorbaugh reviews: R. D. McKenzie (*American Journal of Sociology* 35:486–87, 1929), J. W. Withers (*Journal of Educational Sociology* 3:313, 1930), R. P. Vance (*Social Forces* 8:320–21, 1929).

The idea that aesthetic emotion arises in a confrontation between cognition and morality is longstanding in our aesthetic canon. Kant ([1790] 1951) and Schiller ([1793] 2005) wrote specifically of the situation in which something that we know to be potentially uncontrollable and frightening is tamed by the recognition that human morality remains unthreatened by it. They called this feeling the sublime and saw it as one of the cornerstones of aesthetics. It seems to me that the fundamental emotion of the lyricism I have here analyzed is just such a “sublime.” On the one hand, it confronts us with the disturbing fact of human difference; on the other, it reminds us of the moral (and paradoxical) fact that difference—in the guises of mutability and particularity—is something we share.

With that conclusion I come less to the end of the present argument than the beginning of another, one that concerns the role of difference in social life and the meaning of its study. Human life is about the positing and exploration of differences. Our ability to see and enact so many and such variegated differences is what makes us unique among life forms, even though those differences reify and ramify and trap us in our own nets. But while I have no time to advance into the theory of difference, I do think it is established that the heart of lyrical sociology is precisely the evocation of this tension about difference: it confronts us with our temporal and social spatial particularities in the very process of showing us those of others. In doing so, it produces the unique emotion that I have called humane sympathy.

Other genres have sustained this feeling in other times. Rolf Lindner finds it in “the unprejudiced and yet passionate interest in ‘real life’” of the journalists of a century ago (Lindner 1996:202). George Levine finds it in the attempt of the 19th-century realists “to rediscover moral order after their primary energies have been devoted to disrupting conventions of moral judgment” (Levine 1981:20). Humane sympathy is always under threat. Its favored genres can easily degenerate into voyeurism or exoticism or routinism or disillusionment, as many have noted. But that there are pathologies is no reason not to try here and now to cherish and develop the lyrical voice. It is our best hope for a humanist sociology, one that can be profoundly moral without being political.⁴²

CONCLUSION

I hope in this article to have established the existence of a lyrical impulse in sociological and social scientific writing. There is a place in social science for writing that conveys an author’s emotional apprehension of social moments, that does this within the framework of rigor and investigative detachment that we all consider the precondition of our work as social scientists. As researchers, we find the social world not only complicated and interesting, not only functional or disturbing, but also amazing and overwhelming and joyous in its very variety and passage. Our readers should know not only society’s causes and consequences, not only its merits and demerits, but also, in the words of Yasunari Kawabata (1975), its beauty and sadness.

⁴²For my definition of humanist sociology, see Abbott (forthcoming). In the interests of space, I have cut from this article a long analysis of the various accusations against lyrical sociology that are analogous to the accusation of “vulgarity” against lyrical poetry for its low topics and anti-pedagogical stance. Typically, these are arguments that such sociology is “just description,” “mere journalism,” “not causal,” “not really sociological,” and so on.

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