

# Poetry, Postcritique, and the Consistence of Story

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**Outline, slides, and other materials  
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# Outline

- Background on *Here at the end of all things*
- Four definitions: story, consistence, postcritique, poetry
- Two examples of consistence: *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Way of Thorn and Thunder*
- Fantasy, history, story

# *Here at the end of all things*

- Part 1: Fantasy and its Others
  - How fantasy, science fiction, and horror each react to modernity and the advent of historical consciousness
- Part 2: A Genealogy of Story: From the Tolkien Event to the Alien Past
  - How the publication of *LotR* in 1954 shaped the genre's future and past, making the subsumption of fantasy possible
- Part 3: Manifold Story
  - How contemporary fantasy rethinks the genre and its relation to history and identity

# Four Definitions

- Story
- Consistence
- Postcritique
- Poetry

# Story

- Definition 1
  - John Clute: “Any narrative which tells or implies a sequence of events, in any order which can be followed by hearers or readers, and which generates a sense that its meaning is conveyed through the actual telling, may be called a Story.”
  - opposed to narrative and historicist thought

# Story

- Definition 2
  - the grammar/structure of the ideal fantasy text
  - moves from **wrongness**, to **thinning**, to **recognition**, to **return**
  - science fiction and horror have their own grammars, paradigm and disappointment, respectively

# Story

- Clute: “Fantasy texts [...] can be characterized as always moving towards the unveiling of an irreducible substratum of Story, an essence sometimes obscure but ultimately omnipresent; the key events of a fantasy text are bound to each other, to the narrative world, and ideally to the tale’s theme in a way that permits endless retellings [...], endless permutations of the narrative’s unbound Motifs, and a sense of ending.”

# Consistence

- Adapted from Bernard Stiegler
- Consistence: absolute congruence of being and meaning
- opposed to both existence and subsistence (associated with science fiction and horror, respectively)

# Key Questions/Stakes

- How do we produce meaning via existence, via historical processes, in a neoliberal era in which these processes have been so thoroughly undermined?
- How do we combat TINA, the claim that There Is No Alternative, when our capacity to imagine difference is conditioned by a compromised historicism?

# Postcritique

- Marjorie Levinson on the limits of critique
  - When a “paradigm of knowing,” such as critique, “starts feeling like the form of the real [...] we must ‘work harder *not* to understand.”
  - “Through no fault of their own, our stories of cultural production have become episodes in capitalism’s masterplot: the transformation of matter into value, suffering into meaning, givenness into necessity, nature into culture.”

# Postcritique

- Rita Felski
  - working outside of the “hermeneutics of suspicion” (Ricoeur)
- Bruno Latour (and Yves Citton)
  - [FIC]: the mode of existence proper to fiction
  - understood this way, fiction interacts with the world rather than representing it

# Postcritique

- Mitchum Huehls
  - *After Critique*, “The Post-Theory Theory Novel”
  - How does fiction build worlds rather than deconstruct them?
- Rachel Greenwald Smith
  - Impersonal feelings and tonal intensity
  - the latter “indicates the amplification of a general affectivity that relies on externalization rather than internalization”

# Summary

- The consistence of story has to do with how story entangles subject and object, character and world
- Story requires postcritique because critique is built for and appropriate to narrative and other historicist forms

# Poetry

- Franco “Bifo” Berardi

Desire is monstrous, it is cruel, and noncompliance and nonrecombinability are at the inmost nature of singularity. Singularity cannot be compliant with a finite order of interpretation, but it can be compassionate with the infinite ambiguity of meaning as sensuous understanding. Compassion is sensibility open to the perception of uncountable sensuous beings, the condition for an autonomous becoming-other, beyond the financial freeze, beyond the techno-linguistic conformism that is making social life a desert of meaning.

Poetic language is the insolvency in the field of enunciation: it refuses the exaction of semiotic debt.

# Two Examples of Consistency

- JRR Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring*
- Daniel Heath Justice, *The Way of Thorn and Thunder: Dreyd*

# Consistence in *LotR*

Frodo began to listen.

At first the beauty of the melodies and of the interwoven words in elven-tongues, even though he understood them little, held him in a spell, as soon as he began to attend to them. Almost it seemed that the words took shape, and visions of far lands and bright things that he had never yet imagined opened out before him, and the firelit hall became like a golden mist above the seas of foam that sighed upon the margins of the world. Then the enchantment became more and more dreamlike, until he felt that an endless river of welling gold and silver was flowing over him, too multitudinous for its patterns to be comprehended; it became part of the throbbing air about him, and it drenched and drowned him. Swiftly he sank under its shining weight into a deep realm of sleep.

# Consistence in WoTaT

*He reaches out with a gnarled grey hand and I pull away, but he keeps singing, and the fire rises in my blood. In life he was one of the Eaters of Old, and he's still dangerous in the Spirit World, but not to me, not now. His blood is my own. The song endures from the ancient days through the lives and deaths of those who hear it, and I'm just one more thread in a woven cord that travels through the Deep Green to the first days of the People. It will endure long after my own flesh has joined the rich soil and stars, but only if I survive now. If I'm lost in this place, I'll be lost forever. That's why he returned. He's come to keep me a part of the wyr-woven pattern. I'm no more special than all those who came before and those who will come after me, but each is needed in its time and place for the pattern to endure. And my time is now.*

# Justice on kinship

Kinship is thus “potentially ever-expansive and inclusive” as well as being “attentive to a broad constituency” that includes human life, non-human life, and that which has never been alive in relationships that are difficult if not impossible to standardize: “As such, kinship is very much embedded in both a local and localized matrix of relationship, one that isn’t much suited to distance, large scale, or national policy. Recognition in this context is thus a context—and a community specific response to adaptive and dynamic action—it is behavior and relationship that are that interwoven measure of acknowledgment, not simply a fixed state of being.”

# Jameson's Horizons of Interpretation



Individual text as symbolic resolution of social contradiction



Individual text as ideologeme, a participant in a long term conversation with other ideologemes



Individual text as instance of form manifesting contradictions across modes of production, i.e. history proper

# Jameson on the third horizon

I will suggest that within this final horizon the individual text or cultural artifact [...] is here restructured as a field of force in which the dynamics of sign systems of several distinct modes of production can be registered and apprehended. These dynamics—the newly constituted “text” of our third horizon—make up what can be termed the ideology of form, that is, the determinate contradictions of the specific messages emitted by the varied sign systems, which coexist in a given artistic process as well as in its general social formation.

# Jameson's Horizons of Interpretation



Individual text as symbolic resolution of social contradiction

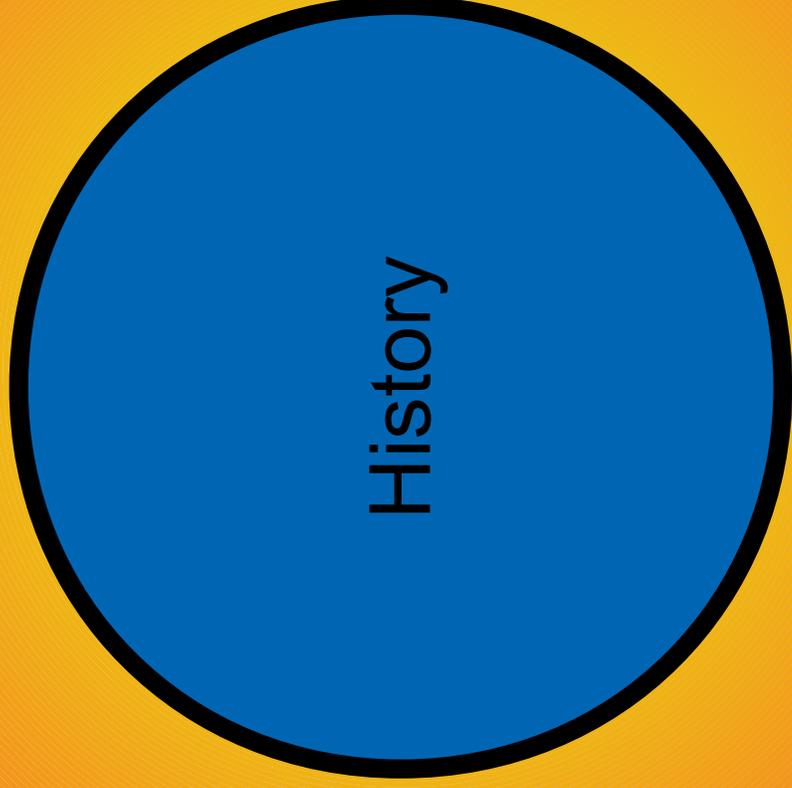


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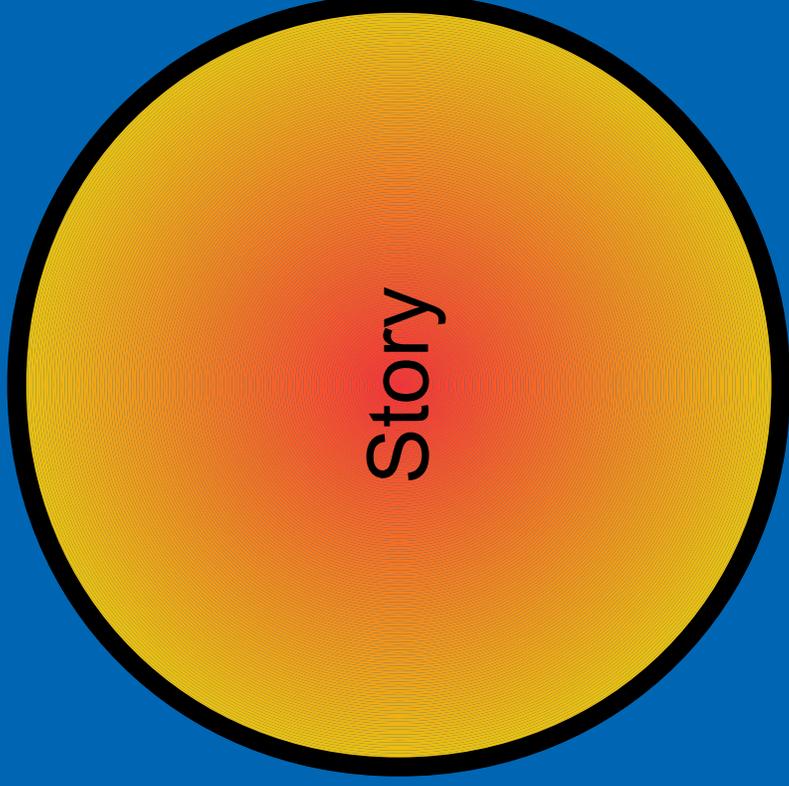
# History and Story



Nature  
Ideology  
Irrationality  
Story

History

# Story and history



Modernity  
Difference  
Narrative  
History

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