

## 8 THE DISCURSIVE SELF

Anyone familiar with both modern social science and literature will appreciate the extent to which these institutions share in common their understandings of the self. Both duplicate in idiosyncratic ways various transition points in the complicated discursive history of our modes of comprehending ourselves and others. Both draw upon the persistent and pervasive discourse of the alienated and inauthentic, for instance, and also just as frequently retreat to the romantic discourses of self-fulfilment, uniqueness and self-actualisation.

The novel, for its part, has gradually evolved from a plot- and character-centred world where people are their personalities with no remainder, to the acute and disintegrated consciousness of modern Dostoevskian Underground Men. We have seen the Dickensian character who simply manifests his or her disposition and who is best described as a configuration of determining traits rejected as a psychological fraud as the idea of a consistent character, personality or ego dissolves.

Psychology, in a similar fashion, seems to have shifted from the certainties of its narrative characters (the role-player in social psychology, the trait theory approach in personality research) to the divided self of a Laingian existentialist and to a separation of the social selves, the roles and theatrical masks of the me, from the mysterious residual I, the background manager and negotiator of identities who appears to be more than the sum of the roles.

In both social science and literature the traditional humanistic concepts of the solid unfragmented agent are under attack and often, it seems, for much the same reasons. In each case, it can be said that the practitioners and theorists are working out the implications of the transition from a conception of people 'as simply in society as objects are in boxes' (1) to a conception which sees the person in society as 'like a stone in a wall or a drop in a stream through which the energies of the whole pass'. (2)

In this chapter we will trace out and compare some of the conse-

quences of these changes. As in previous chapters the emphasis will be on sense-making in literature and in psychology; however a rather more synoptic approach to the subject will be taken. The intention is to examine some of the generalised representations of the self found in social psychology or deduced from novels rather than, for instance, present a fine-grain analysis of a particular piece of discourse concerning the self. We shall be concerned with the kinds of 'codes' available for characterising and representing the self and the presentation of these in social psychology and literature.

This 'archaeological' exegesis may well also reveal some of the subtle and complex layers in everyday, nontechnical, self analysis and description. (3) People wishing to publicly formulate their 'inner' experiences will be able to do so only by drawing upon the stock of linguistic resources available in contemporary culture. The meaning accorded to experience in this area, as in other areas, derives from the fluid and creative combination of conventional and collectively organised patterns for making sense. The patterns we identify here are perhaps more salient to the contemplative observer. None the less the general principle holds.

The conclusion this chapter works towards is, therefore, that the best analytic strategy for studying the self is not necessarily the attempt to specify its phenomenology or supposed essential nature, contents and structure but involves examining the language of self-reference whether it be of the highly formalised type presented here or the references contained in everyday parlance. Thus in the following discussion we will not be concerned with evaluating the best model of the self or trying to demonstrate that either psychology or literature has produced the most satisfactory explanations in this area. It is the structure rather than the quality of the models which is at stake. Our aim is to explicate the organisation of certain forms of self-accounting shared by both psychology and literature.

The analysis begins with the most basic of self-portraits - the solid narrative character - familiar to any fan of the realist tradition, and its psychological analogue - trait theory.

#### 'HONEST SOULS': THE NARRATIVE CHARACTER AND TRAIT THEORY

Mr. Podsnap was well to do, and stood very high in Mr. Podsnap's opinion. Beginning with a good inheritance, he had married a good inheritance, and had thriven exceedingly in the Marine Insurance way, and was quite satisfied. He could never make out why everybody was not quite satisfied, and he felt conscious that he set a brilliant social example in being particularly well satisfied with most things, and, above all other things, with himself.

Thus happily acquainted with his own merit and importance, Mr. Podsnap settled that whatever he put behind him he put out of existence. There was a dignified conclusiveness - not to add

a grand convenience - in this way of getting rid of disagreeables which had done much towards establishing Mr. Podsnap in his lofty place in Mr. Podsnap's satisfaction. 'I don't want to know about it; I don't choose to discuss it; I don't admit it!' Mr. Podsnap had even acquired a peculiar flourish of the right arm in often clearing the world of its most difficult problems, by sweeping them behind him (and consequently sheer away) with those words and a flushed face. For they affronted him.

Mr. Podsnap's world was not a very large world, morally; no, nor even geographically: seeing that although his business was sustained upon commerce with other countries, he considered other countries, with that important reservation, a mistake, and of their manners and customs would conclusively observe, 'Not English!' when, PRESTO! with a flourish of the arm, and a flush of the face, they were swept away [...]

These may be said to have been the articles of a faith and school which the present chapter takes the liberty of calling, after its representative man, Podsnappery. They were confined within close bounds, as Mr. Podsnap's own head was confined by his shirt-collar; and they were enunciated with a sounding pomp which smacked of the creaking of Mr. Podsnap's own boots. (4)

In these few brief paragraphs, Dickens has introduced the reader to a complete character, Mr Podsnap, a particularly unpleasant example of the Victorian commercial classes. Despite the brevity of the characterisation, it presents itself as unquestionably complete: for Mr Podsnap conforms precisely to a familiar theory of personality which verifies and sustains his reality. He is an honest soul; his embodiment suggests that people simply are their actions and qualities and can be read purely in terms of these dispositions.

The term honest soul is an invention of the critic Lionel Trilling. (5) It includes all the stock and stereotypical characters and many of the main characters in bourgeois realist novels: the squires, the husseys, the governesses, the rich benefactors, the miserable poor, the ever so humble, the martyred mothers and so on. Honest is used here not in its literal sense but because it conveys, what Trilling calls, the 'sentiment of being': the appropriate aura of solidity, unreflectiveness and identification with the contemporary ethos.

What are the features imputed to this type of consciousness? As we can see in the extract from Our Mutual Friend, the actions of a traditional type of narrative character like Mr Podsnap are depicted as following naturally and inevitably from their personality rather than from the demands of a particular situation. Mr Podsnap's personality also provides, in itself, sufficient cause and motive for his actions. The character in question may be represented as a complex mixture of traits or in terms of one or two dominant characteristics. But, whether simple or heterogeneous, he or she is completely summed up by the amalgam of usual habits and temperament.

Take Mr Podsnap's comic pomposity, chauvinism and self-righteous-

ness, for instance. These traits are identified as enduring and consistent, belonging to him as surely as any material possession. They are most definitely not passing reactions occasioned by specific scenes and events of Victorian business life. In this sense, it is a highly decontextualised portrait reliant on an abstract notion of, for example, the 'Marine Insurance way' or of the likely reference of his 'I don't want to know about it' phrase. The appearance of coherence and harmony this characterisation suggests to the reader depends upon the impression that Mr Podsnap's traits are internalised and are the sum, the all, of Mr Podsnap.

Honest souls like the one before us are essential to plot development. Their personalities provide the narrative linkage and predictability which will bind a story together. The two-dimensionality required for this function is achieved through the reader's sense that the text makes Mr Podsnap transparent, laying him bare before our eyes. Indeed, an interesting opposition emerges as the contrast develops between the honest Podsnap soul and the narrator who exposes the objects of the Podsnap self for our amusement and scrutiny. Dickens's text is organised to give the impression that we are being confided in by one who, unlike the Podsnaps, is capable of irony, conscious self-evaluation and criticism. The linguistically created tension which results only serves to sharpen and flatten the reader's image of the honest soul character.

Honest souls are the type of personalities which are regularly described in traditional (and not so traditional) psychological terms. (6) The parallels between this version of personhood and even relatively current psychological models are indeed unmistakable. Without too much difficulty, we can see that the honest soul has featured throughout the history of psychology as well as the novel. However, among the psychologists who have organised their thinking on these lines, it is the trait theorists in particular who have most conspicuously assumed that other people are best viewed as solid narrative characters embedded in a plot.

Trait theorists maintain that human behaviour is lawful and in the main part caused by the structure and dynamics of personality. (7) Like the text of Our Mutual Friend, they assert that people not events cause the regularity in human affairs. People are constituted from bundles of traits and attitudes: so much intelligence, gregariousness, introversion, self-esteem etc. The particular combination of traits will determine a person's behaviour just as Mr Podsnap's pride and snobbery seem to determine his place in the plot of Dickens's novel.

The study of personality must start, therefore, with taxonomy. The psychologist must be able to describe the basic structures which make up an individual's nature, identify the interaction of various traits and comment on the normality of particular trait profiles, the spread of traits through sample populations and so on. Inspired by the chemist, the trait theorist draws up the periodic table of the elements of personality. (8)

Fortunately, according to one of the most eminent trait theorists, R.B. Cattell, the central source traits which constitute a personality appear to fall into three neat categories (ability, temperament and dynamics). Part of a person's psychological makeup will be defined by his or her cognitive style (ability traits), another part by persistent emotional or affective reactions (stylistic or temperament traits) and the remainder will consist of habitual reactions to incentive situations (the motivational or dynamic traits). Each constitutive source trait may result in several surface traits, emotional lability, for instance, may manifest itself in many different individual forms and this complexity of source and surface interaction accounts for the variety of individual personalities.

Measurement techniques, psychometrics, are thus indispensable to the trait theorist. Many people's interaction with psychologists will in fact most likely take place through a questionnaire or personality inventory designed on trait theory lines. Someone filling in Eysenck's famous personality inventory, for example, may be asked 'Do you suddenly feel shy when you want to talk to an attractive stranger?' or 'Do you daydream a lot?' or 'Do you often do things on the spur of the moment?'. (9)

The results produced by these psychometric tests are a bit like a respectable version of the astrological horoscope. A person completing the more extensive 16 P.F. inventory might discover, for example, that they have a sten (score out of ten) of 2 on a submissiveness-dominance personality factor where 2 is close to the pole described as humble, mild, obedient, conforming and might note that only 4.4 per cent of adults obtain this score (the average scores are in the 5-6 range). (10) The profile they build up over all the sixteen personality factors will reveal to them their self in all its constituent parts with the predominant traits highlighted and the moderate, normal, amounts of other traits also noted.

Both the trait theorist and the excerpt from Dickens thus assume that people are their dispositions and the unity inherent in these dispositions with no core outside this personality. The novelist sets these characters in motion to work out the consequences of their particular configurations of traits but it is the psychologist who can freeze them and dissect the predictable structuring of these characteristics. As Amelie Rorty has pointed out, it is difficult to imagine either a literary honest soul type or for that matter the people studied by trait theory having an identity crisis. (11) The conception is simply not included in this type of discourse about what selves are like. One can imagine a tragic flaw caused by a disharmony of traits but not, she says, an innervating collapse into fragmentation.

The main criticisms directed against trait theory parallel the points made by modern novelists, such as Virginia Woolf, concerning traditional novelistic modes of characterisation. (12) People are simply not that consistent and solid. Their behaviour is more frag-

mented, more responsive to the momentary demands of the situation and more dynamic. The psychologist would note that trait theory fails the empirical test, it cannot reliably predict behaviour in actual situations. (13) Given enough test data, trait theorists can comment extensively on the traits individuals possess and to a high level of sophistication in spite of disputes over the statistical techniques used. However, in their own terms, this effort is wasted if these traits bear little relation to how people perform in non-test situations.

In addition, as Mischel has noted, the type of traits identified for a particular individual undoubtedly tell us more about the organisation of the trait theorist's own interpretative schemas than the individual's actual behaviour. In fact the real value of trait theory may lie in the thoroughness with which it has investigated the structure of everyday descriptive concepts for personality. (14) It has a familiar aura, it captures a common-sense model of what people are like and thus provides yet another example to add to those in Chapters 4 and 5 of how a psychological researcher may mistake people's own proto-psychologies and occasioned descriptions of themselves and others for literal accounts.

Both trait theory and the honest soul models of the self are extremely asocial: paying little attention to the situations in which self-presentation occurs. According to Trilling, the novelistic honest soul is engaged in the 'heroism of dumb service' since self-realisation is achieved in harmony with the definitions provided by the external power of society. (15) The service the honest soul renders is necessarily 'dumb' because there is no framework for perceiving the relationship between self and society as in any way problematic. Mr Podsnap, for instance, can be said to be unaware of social forces as they have not yet been articulated for him as an external presence. As we have seen, there is no textual concept of a true or real self behind the facade to give sense to the notion of playing a part in society. Thus, throughout the novel, Mr Podsnap will be depicted as more or less identifying with his performance without ever appreciating that it is a performance. Indeed such flashes of insight would start to undermine the function of this character in the text.

To a social psychologist it seems self-evident that people's activities are moulded by the norms and conventions present in any social situation and also by the roles they are playing within that situation. It is this dimension - the capacity for flexible reaction to social demands - which trait theory and traditional characterisation neglect, although Cattell, at least, does include the concept of role in his category of transient situational states or 'conditions of the moment' which he sees as affecting behaviour. These social variables are viewed, however, as only an adjunct to the expression of traits. Thus Cattell does not concede the possibility that the particular mixture of traits a person demonstrates may be determined by the playing out of a temporary social role. As the roles change the internal traits might as well, belying their supposed consistency and enduring nature. People may be able to assume

various different personae or personality profiles as the situational demands force the playing out of different parts.

Literary honest souls and trait theory people differ in subtle ways and it would take a sophisticated analysis to pinpoint the core incongruities between these models of the self. None the less on superficial examination, at least, these potential conceptualisations of oneself and others share certain central features. To summarise, the frame of reference demands one thinks in terms of characteristics and dispositions consistently manifested across different situations and throughout a lifetime. These traits are seen as whole and unified and expressive of one's true nature. Society, if thought about at all, appears as separate from the self, as an external environment rather than as a contaminating force which could determine the form of personality.

In the next section we will turn to a model of the self, based on the notion of role-playing, which tries to supersede the old-fashioned individualism of the honest soul or trait theory person by seeking to incorporate society within the self. This recognition of social pressures allows some new elements to enter the discourse of self-experience. However, as we shall see, there is a tension, particularly in the practical application of role theory, between the innovative elements and the still compelling image of the honest soul. To some extent, traits are merely replaced in this model with internalised roles.

#### THE PERFORMING SELF

The concept of human life as a play where individuals learn to act out several roles in the span allotted to them is an old and yet still radical notion. To indicate its venerable history, we can take an example that Trilling discusses and quotes in some detail - Diderot's Rameau's Nephew written some time between 1761 and 1774. In the following passage Trilling and then Diderot describe the revolutionary self-image vouchsafed by the Nephew.

The social being, he tells us, is a mere histrionic representation - every man takes one or another 'position' as the choreography of society directs. With the mimetic skill which is the essence of his being, the Nephew demonstrates how he performs the dance upon which his survival depends. 'Thereupon he begins to smile, to ape a man admiring, a man imploring, a man complying. His right foot forward, the left foot behind, his back arched, head erect, his glance riveted as if on someone's face, open-mouthed, his arms are stretched out towards some object. He waits for a command, receives it, flies like an arrow, returns. The order has been carried out; he is giving his report. He is all attention, nothing escapes him. He picks up what is dropped, places pillow or stool under feet, holds a salver, brings a chair, opens a door, shuts a window, draws curtains, keeps his eye on master and mistress. He is motionless, arms at his sides, legs parallel; he listens and tries to read faces. Then he

says, "there you have my pantomime; it's about the same as the flatterer's, the courtier's, the footman's and the beggar's".'  
(16)

This extract can be read as proclaiming a self-evident fact - that people can 'perform' in social interaction, 'managing' the impressions they give of themselves to others. The Nephew's mimesis is depicted as a creative social skill even though, through participating in society, he must become deceptive and insincere as he scripts and puts on the facades and shows which his livelihood demands. This route is not only open to the sycophant nephew either. For others as well, the possibility of 'acting out' the usual activities of social intercourse, politeness, demonstrating competence, interest, and control, can equally well become self-conscious.

In contrast to the honest soul mode of self, acts in this extract no longer appear to flow naturally from the character or traits, indeed the essentially sincere, honest man can be made temporarily insincere without necessarily changing his basic character traits. The social situation not the character is seen as channelling behaviour. A person's actions are, as a result, no longer truly expressive of his or her particular unique personality since most individuals are interchangeable when it comes to playing roles. Roles can be readily assumed on the surface, so to speak, irrespective of the 'real' personality underneath; clearly, an image which differs sharply from the one which emanates from a traditional narrative character such as Mr Podsnap.

The modern role theories of sociology and social psychology which attempt to give some substance to these notions of a performing self can be seen as the scientific and analytically precise development of a way of interpreting personality already implicit in literature and ordinary discourse. Social psychology has taken over the concept of role as a means of accommodating what appear as two basic facts: the fact of individual personality and the fact of society. (17) It is argued that the reconciliation of these two constancies can be achieved through the elaboration of a set of analytic categories such as social roles which describe the site of the interaction between self and society and fix the person in entirety. (18)

To achieve this integration of the individual into the social the analyst obviously needs to go further than the mere recognition evident in Diderot's text of our performing abilities. The nature and content of the performance needs to be specified. The description of social roles serves this function and if one assumes that the roles are internalised or learnt, becoming 'second nature' to the individual, then we can explain why the individual's behaviour seems to be patterned and determined by social forces, while remaining also, apparently, a series of personal, freely engaged in, acts.

Roles are generally defined as sets of activities, qualities and styles of behaviour that are associated with social positions. (19) Social positions are constructed and exist independently of any



particular individual; they include occupational, national, religious, recreational, kin categories: husbands, wives, truck drivers, dental nurses, football hooligans, Hindus, etc. People in one of these positions are expected to act out the behaviours, the roles, that go with being a dental nurse or a husband, for example. Only if they do so will they be credited with that occupation or position and be able to reap its rights and rewards.

According to role theorists, people conform to these social expectations not merely because of obvious sanctions and rewards (prison sentences and decorations are Dahrendorf's examples) but because of the more subtle mechanisms of the socialisation and interactive process. The society which directs the play, exerts the pressures and assigns the roles is not an idealist construction or a faceless, conspiring authority, but a set of social groups and classes with particular vested interests. The individual learns to 'refer' to these groups and through the process of gaining an identity and participating in the duties and benefits of membership, the codes of behaviour associated with particular roles are learnt, enforced and maintained.

With the development of this theoretical perspective the social scientist can make sense of the notion of self-consciously playing a part or managing an impression. The substance, the performance being acted out is a set of social expectations which can be investigated and described. Furthermore, if we take the theory to its logical conclusion most elements of an individual's public behaviour can be accounted for, not just the self-conscious machiavellian aspects Diderot describes in the Nephew. People become seen as the sum of their roles. Most life events and unthinking habitual reactions can be classified in this way, the most pervasive being the masculine and feminine roles. Individuality, the differences between people, arise because everybody has a different mixture of present characters and precipitates of past roles as well as possessing idiosyncratic biological characteristics and psychological reactions to role conflict. (20)

The new elements this talk of roles and acting performances introduces are clearcut. The possibility of individual fragmentation is suggested, a crisis of identity, and division and conflict between the various assumed characters. In contrast to the honest soul, the role-player has a set of possibly discordant identities relevant to different situations rather than one unvarying identity. More interestingly, the capacity for symbolisation proposed by role theorists working in the symbolic interactionist tradition, paves the way for an internal concept of society as a sort of theatrical agent and director of the play, scheduling the performance of the roles, supplying and cueing the scripts. Both these new self-concepts are beyond the ken of the trait theory person or the conception of self based on the traditional narrative character.

With the development of an internal notion of social process or the belief that one is consciously filling the requirements set by an external agency, a double self begins to emerge. On the one hand

there is the social self, the role-player, the Nephew's courtier personality, and separate from this there is a mysterious 'real' self or personality which chooses to act out the roles, and which can also survey the success or failure of the performance. It is this possibility of self-division which has generated the most intractable problems for role theory.

Two solutions are possible to this dilemma. One denies any doubling of consciousness and harks back to the honest soul, the other accepts the implications of a divided self. Practical, empirical, investigative role theorists have mainly favoured the first solution. (21) Their formulations generally seem to work simply as socialised versions of trait theory with roles replacing the dispositions or traits studied by Cattell or Eysenck.

Empirical investigations tend to centre on the specification of roles or role combinations and, as in trait theory, the individual is considered to be these role combinations with no remainder. The role-playing honest soul may verge on awareness of society and the potential fragmentation of self but tends, in practice, to continue just the same to fulfil and unify, in semi-automatic mode, his or her disparate characteristics. Role theorists of this persuasion desire the omniscience of the narrator, detached and all-seeing; their portraits claim to offer a complete explanation of the individuals studied.

The other solution, which deliberately builds on the possibilities inherent in a divided and doubled self, and which rejects the maxim that man is the sum of his roles will be considered in the next section. To the social scientist struggling against the over-socialised model of self apparent in the role-playing honest soul, the answer seems to lie in the distinction found in certain kinds of ordinary discourse between a real self and a social or inauthentic self. This distinction is, again, a familiar one in literary self-conceptualisation as we shall demonstrate with the work of the novelist Robert Musil.

#### SELF-ALIENATION, ESTRANGEMENT AND THE I VERSUS THE ME

So far we have considered two central representations of the self. Trait theory has it that people are simply like the narrative characters one can read about in books. They react to situations on the basis of their enduring character traits. As we have seen, this way of representing the self comes into conflict with the notion that people, chameleon-like, can play act out any number of characters on demand. It comes into conflict with socio-psychological role theory which makes sense of human behaviour by referring to the internalisation of the structured expectations of society as roles. But this self-representation has itself become a victim of its own innovation.

In introducing self and society as part, to some unspecified extent, of the same dimension, role theory opens up the possibility of two

selves, a social self and a background real self which controls the role-player. The existence of another, real self, however, undermines role theory's claim to be a complete explanation. One solution is to deny any division: the real self is the social self and nothing more. In this case the role theory person comes to resemble the solid narrative character of trait theory. The other alternative is to postulate self-division as an active self principle; working out the implications of a real, private, authentic self behind the roles.

For the social scientist, this alternative has been most authoritatively defined by William James using the famous stream of consciousness metaphor. (22) James, elaborating on the Kantian philosophical tradition, distinguished between two kinds of self which can be discriminated in the stream of consciousness. On the one hand, there is the I, on the other, there is the me. The total self is, he says, 'duplex, partly known and partly knower, partly object and partly subject'. (23) The I is the knower, the thinker, the unifying principle of the stream of consciousness and the me is the known, the empirical ego and the contents of the stream of consciousness.

When introspecting one becomes aware, according to James, of a flood or successive series of thoughts, images and feelings. This content is intimately recognisable as the substance of oneself. However, there is also a being which is aware of this series of images and thoughts and can independently survey its nature. If the me is the flow of the stream of consciousness, then, continuing the metaphor, the I, or watching self, is the banks of the stream, the container for the flow.

Within the me aspect of the self we can include the social aspects of the individual: roles, professional identities and so on. In fact, the me can be fragmented into any number of compartments which could be studied separately. James, for instance, partitions the social self or the role-playing facets from the material me which involves, among other things, the body image, the individual's sense of his or her possessions etc., and from the spiritual me which might include the person's feelings and emotions about themselves.

The I aspect is more difficult to classify. James argued that it should not be regarded as a transcendental soul or in mystical terms as pure agency but seen merely as the functional, connective, unifying identity of the stream of consciousness. Little progress has been made since on its definition for the social sciences. James's I/me formulation, however, has proved to be extremely convenient for the role theorist.

The main criticism directed against traditional role theory is that it turns the person into a social dope, into a puppet or victim of social circumstances. (24) How, says Dahrendorf, can we recognise in man the role-player the person we know ourselves and our friends to be? The role-player is but a pale imitation. Admittedly we often do perform as though social life were a stage and we were

actors playing out parts. However, even if all these roles could be satisfactorily classified and described, there would still be more to the person. How can social science account for the rest?

The answer is simply that it need not account for it. By dividing the self into two realms, it is possible to carve up the theoretical and explanatory responsibility. Social science is responsible for the me aspect, its tools are well-suited to the analysis of this part of the self. The I, however, is the province of philosophy or religion. All the social scientist needs to do is note its unifying, executive function and leave its delineation to those better qualified to speculate on such matters. Man is both a free moral agent and a determinate being. These two facets of the self need not contradict one another because, according to Dahrendorf, they relate to fundamentally different spheres of knowledge. Role theory is thus rescued as a viable approach to the self without necessarily committing social psychology to a social dope, anti-humanistic model of the person. (25)

This concept of a divided and many-faceted self has also, of course, appealed to the novelist, consistently recurring as a theme throughout the modern novel. The equanimity of the old solid narrative character seems inappropriate in a modern context and also, it is claimed, no longer true to experience. The honest soul continues to feature but as a stereotype reserved for the minor characters, frequently providing an example of an inauthentic self to contrast with the hero or heroine's struggles with self-estrangement and alienation.

Among the novelists who have attempted to present what they see to be a new phenomenal experience of the self using the concepts of discourses of alienation, disintegration and self-estrangement, Robert Musil's novel series A Man Without Qualities is pre-eminent. (26) It is interesting to note that Musil had a short-lived career as an experimental psychologist before turning wholeheartedly to literature. He was a pupil of Stumpf's in Berlin, completing his dissertation on Ernst Mach in 1908, and inventing a chromatometer for the study of perception. According to his biographers, Musil continued to take an interest in human experimental work throughout his life much preferring it to the depth psychologies of the psycho-analytic writers. (27)

Despite his early interests Musil argued that both philosophy and psychology were ultimately unsatisfactory means for conveying the machinations of the human mind. And he characterised his short stories, novels and essays as a more successful means of embodying his theories and psychological investigations. The rational understanding of the self would, in his view, be achieved through the subtle spinning of metaphor and simile which constitute reflective analysis of conscious experience.

As befits a devotee of Mach's, Musil strongly endorsed scientific positivism. Opposed to the romantic reaction against science he desired a science or mathematics of the psyche, a similarly precise

and complete account of feelings and emotions. Yet this would be an artistic rather than a laboratory-based account. This goal is also attributed to the hero of his Man Without Qualities, Ulrich, who develops the new prototype of the cerebral man, 'monsieur le vivisecteur', systematically and objectively analysing human activity and attempting to act only on the basis of this rational analysis. (28)

Early in the novel, the following account of the general principles of selfhood is presented in the form of one of Ulrich's insights.

the inhabitant of a country has at least nine characters: a professional one, a national one, a civic one, a class one, a geographical one, a sex one, a conscious, an unconscious and perhaps even too a private one; he combines them all in himself, but they dissolve him, and he is really nothing but a little channel washed out by all these trickling streams, which flow into it and drain out of it again in order to join other little streams filling another channel. Hence every dweller on earth also has a tenth character, which is nothing more or less than the passive illusion of spaces unfilled; it permits a man everything, with one exception: he may not take seriously what his at least nine other characters do and what happens to them, in other words, the very thing that ought to be the filling of him. This interior space - which is, it must be admitted, difficult to describe - is of a different shade and shape in Italy from what it is in England, because everything that stands out in relief against it is of a different shade and shape; and yet both here and there it is the same, merely an empty invisible space with reality standing in the middle of it like a little toy brick town, abandoned by the imagination. (29)

In this often quoted extract, the concept of self is organised around two basic metaphors: stream and structure. The contents of conscious experience and hence the contents of the person are, just as for William James, seen as the substance of the stream or the objects which partially fill the space. These characteristics again could correspond to the roles of role theory and the traits of trait theory; they include entities which are both social and personological. However the metaphor also demands a container for the stream, a space around the objects and thus as well as the impersonal self which belongs to society there is a hidden, other, self. Two kinds of phenomenal entities are therefore proposed. There is the I, the subject, of little substance which contemplates the me, the object, of solid brick-like proportions.

The hero, Ulrich, is in fact the Man Without Qualities of the title. The following extract explains this nomenclature.

he could with little exaggeration say of his life that everything in it had fulfilled itself as if it all belonged together more than it belonged to him. He had always been 'in for a penny, in for a pound', whether in contest or in love. And so he more or less had to believe that the personal qualities he had gained in

this way belonged more to each other than to him, indeed that every one of them, when he examined it closely, was no more intimately bound up with him than with other people who might also happen to possess it.

But undoubtedly one was nevertheless conditioned by them and consisted of them, even if one was not identical with them, and so sometimes when at rest one seemed to oneself precisely as much a stranger as when in motion. (30)

the belief that the most important thing about experience is the experiencing of it, and about deeds the doing of them, is beginning to strike most people as naive. Doubtless there are still people who experience things quite personally, saying 'we were at So-and-So's yesterday' or 'we'll do this or that today' and enjoying it without its needing to have any further content or significance [...] Perhaps they are very happy; but this kind of people now usually appears absurd to the others, although it is as yet by no means established why. (31)

Ulrich thus earns his title not because he is unskilled or featureless but because his qualities, like the characters which make up the inhabitant of a country in the previous extract, are divorced from his sense of real self. Any unity in these qualities which might prevent them from being a mere random collection occurs independently and probabilistically. A man in such and such a profession is likely over time to develop such and such attributes as the roles and habits of the profession are taken over. Qualities developed in this way, the only way possible, appear to Ulrich as fraudulent and impersonal, not to be taken seriously as a basis for the self.

He is presented as being unable to unify his character traits as he would if they were naturally expressive of his being, their unity is correlational, statistical or social rather than organic and vital. They have nothing to do with him; rather they are contingent, supra-personal and accidental. In another context he notes that people are of different inner sizes. However, they can wear the most various clothes in that size if they are laid out for them, just as there are different categories of roles and within those categories many diverse options. (32)

It is not that Ulrich is depicted as pathological in his self-experience, a particularly estranged member of an otherwise coherent species. On the contrary, Ulrich is portrayed as an especially acute member who perceives the general human condition when others close their eyes to it.

For all this Klementine and Leo, like everyone in the world who is talked into it by prevailing morality and literature, laboured under the delusion that they were dependent on each other through their passions, characters, destinies and actions. In fact, of course, life is more than half made up not of actions but of harangues, the gist of which one absorbs, and of opinions and corresponding counter-opinions, and of the accumulated non-

personality of all one has heard and knows. The destiny of these two spouses to a great extent depended on a dreary, tough, un-ordered stratification of thoughts that were not even their own but were part of public opinion and had changed with it, without their being able to protect themselves against the process. (33)

The division in experience between the part of the self constructed out of common socio-cultural elements and the sense of an active perceiving agent which is in some way beyond conventional pressures applies not only to accustomed habits and character traits but to the actual process of thought as well. According to Musil, one can make a phenomenological distinction between the shape of a thought as it is experienced and the shape of the thing thought. There is, he says, a fleeting moment between the two. But, the experience of the thought immediately becomes cloaked in language; at which point it adopts a public, non-personal, collective appearance, and becomes an object.

Similarly, in this way of making sense of subjectivity, intuition, inspiration or insight are not seen as transcendent moments or events of high personal, creative, and subjective significance; they are 'only something non-personal, namely the affinity and kinship of things themselves that meet inside one's head'. (34)

Inevitably, a different concept of society emerges in association with this representation of self. Society becomes a material, complex mechanism with its own laws, grinding on slowly in directions which are opaque to the inhabitants. Emotions and reactions become collectively experienced, hatred and hostility or love flow through the air penetrating people in turn as they act as unwitting radio receivers tuning into the Zeitgeist. (35) The generation, the ebbs and surges of these collective emotions, illustrated in the novel by the public feeling spawned by the trial of a mass murderer or the genesis of a patriotic sentiment, remain mysterious and supra-personal. The hidden laws of a larger mechanism are at work.

One obvious consequence of this perceived alienation and over-socialisation is that the basis for personal decision-making or moral evaluation, in Musil's text, is cut from under the hero's feet. Without an authentic self there is no foundation, no first causes, no reasons for particular commitments or moral stances. What does it mean, asks Ulrich, to choose a career, to become a man of importance, to participate in a movement? Certainly the motives and justifications suggested by the determinate being, the non-personal, social, part of consciousness will not suffice, and what other motives and qualities are there? The result is inertia, failure to become committed and a sense of individual impotence. All that is possible is to participate in some collective 'ant-like heroism' working unconsciously with millions of others in the production of a new social formation or, alternatively, there is the non-committal detached analysis, the science or true record of the self, which Ulrich engages in as his first attempt at self-salvation.

One can, therefore, document in Musil's novels a systematic way of making sense of the self which explores some of the possibilities evident in formulations of role theory. The self-aware individual attentive to his or her experience of self learns to perceive the substance of the stream of consciousness as a collectively constructed, trans-individual, social product. Ulrich discovers that 'there is no longer a whole man confronting a whole world but a human something floating about in a universal culture-medium'. (36) Individual uniqueness, as a consequence, appears to lie only in the new combination of characters which are also part of other individuals. Even intellectual activity, the forms of thought, are determined and limited by the cultural possibilities and the conventions of language.

But, in spite of this indoctrination, Musil's text seems to maintain that careful phenomenological investigation also reveals another self experience best conveyed, as we have seen, metaphorically as the container around the social self, the consciousness of being conscious, 'the passive illusion of spaces unfilled', the being which can reflexively focus on the social self. The nature of this 'human something' is shown to elude Ulrich, at times it appears as merely the sense of agency at other times as a more substantial private core to consciousness. The tension within the double consciousness forms the basis for the particular experiences of alienation and estrangement since the elusive I, the real self, cannot be expressed through the acts, social gestures and rhetorics of the social self which must appear foreign to it.

In seeming to embody this model of self-experience Musil's text follows, of course, a well-established philosophical tradition. Neither his perspective nor that developed by William James is a new one. Both Kant and Hegel based their systems around the possible compartmentalisation of the self. Hegel, for instance, postulated this kind of divided or disintegrated self as a specific stage - skepticism - in the movement of what he understood as geist, spirit or universal truth, while Kant used the division of self as a device to protect human agency. (37) Existential phenomenology has since claimed that there is some experiential substance to this logical argument.

The divided self remains, however, only one possible discourse among many other discourses. It is a carefully manufactured linguistic construct. We shall argue that it is much more profitable to study the organisation and development of this interpretative framework and the contexts in which it appears as the most appropriate self-characterisation than dispute its logical or empirical validity. We shall turn to this argument in the concluding section. First, however, one last central and pervasive self portrait will be very briefly considered - the romantic images of actualisation and authenticity.



## ROMANTIC SELF-FULFILMENT

Without any difficulty one can easily identify a representation of the self which circumvents, while partly agreeing with, the negative picture painted by the discourses of self-division. It gives the impression that there is a route to a whole, unified, authentic self which by-passes alienation and disintegration. It is a set of discourse which gives a particular meaning to phrases such as 'I want to be me' and 'to thine own self be true'.

There appear to be at least two main, intertwined, versions of this romantic vision: first, one can identify a natural, authentic, impulsive self and, second, there is the willed self that one deliberately creates out of the wreckage of the cultural debris which clutters up the psyche. The natural authentic self depends upon a mystic, harmonious union with nature or, alternatively, emphasises the letting go of culturally fostered inhibitions and the full experiencing of instinctual and unconscious urges.

The essential difference between the natural self and the willed self lies in the degree of work and control deemed necessary. The natural, romantic self stresses spontaneity and simply being. Authenticity, here, vitally depends upon the courage to let civilised control lapse. The other self, in contrast, demands hard work and creative concentration on the new psychical elements which will combine to form the promised self-actualised future. In the majority of literary and psychological guides to self-fulfilment these two apparently contradictory notions are to some extent fused together but, generally, the emphasis is more on one than the other.

The natural self model assumes that the conventions of social and public life form a veneer over an older, deeper, more basic self which we all share in common. Socialisation, the assumption of a civilised style, alienates the person from their true human nature. In Freudian models this alienation, supported and encouraged by the super-ego, is seen as beneficial and even benevolent; none the less the feeling remains that the truly authentic integrated human being should be aware of these other impulses from the hidden parts of the psyche. The therapist's task is to present this other self in a palatable form so that the new insights gained can be assimilated into ordinary everyday experience thereby strengthening the individual.

More radical psychological therapies recommend total, though perhaps temporary, absorption in the unconscious or the non-social primeval aspects of the self. Through Janov's primal scream techniques, Gestalt acting out or Laingian dwelling in psychotic regression, health, wholeness and a more authentic self are guaranteed to emerge. (38) As in psychoanalytic therapy, the trick is to permit the self to be sufficiently open to these experiences to allow their full power to become evident.

Literary analogues of this psychological perspective abound. The example Trilling uses to make a similar point concerns Conrad's

novel Heart of Darkness recently played out in a new form in the film Apocalypse Now. In this novel an archetypal civilised Englishman, Marlow, encounters and learns to respect, albeit ambivalently, Kurtz, a man who has renounced society in favour of giving free rein to the bestial side of his personality. Marlow respects Kurtz because through acting out the horror of power, sadism and cruelty to others Kurtz has the courage to explore a side of human nature common to all. He attains a kind of authenticity through dwelling in the darkness underlying the civilised veneer.

Other versions of the natural self conceptualise the casting off of social constraints in much more positive, less instinctual terms. Mystical models, for instance, base their route to authenticity on peak experiences which overwhelm the individual under special conditions of heightened awareness brought about by fatigue, drugs or meditative contemplation. (39) The experience is usually beyond words; indescribable, it connects the individual with a 'cosmic pulse' or harmony running through all things while, paradoxically, reaffirming the particularity, uniqueness and wholeness of the individual endowed with these experiences. The unfortunate prosaic individual who is unable to get in touch with these deeper facets of experience is, unfortunately, condemned to the mundane world of everyday non-events and trivialities. It is the authentic individual's duty, almost a moral imperative, to get 'in touch' with his or her impulses.

In the novels of Virginia Woolf and D.H. Lawrence the grandiose cosmic harmony experience also tinges the more ordinary experience of the natural world. Particularly in Lawrence's work, the union felt is organic as well as spiritual or mystical. A rustic picture develops involving the simple, sensual man or woman at home in their environment, and whose activities cohere with that environment. This ideal can clearly be read into the following comments by one of Musil's characters. (Incidentally, Musil's text scorns this romantic ideology while at the same time endorsing other of the mystic 'islands of consciousness'.)

Look, Clarisse, there is nothing that everybody needs so urgently today as simplicity, nearness to the earth, health - and, yes, definitely, you can say whatever you like - a child too, because a child is what ties one firmly to the ground. All the things Ulo tells you are inhuman. I assure you, I have got the courage, when I come home, simply to have my cup of coffee with you, and listen to the birds, go for a bit of a walk, have a little chat with the neighbours, and let the day fade out quietly. That is human life! (40)

In these natural self models the appreciation of sunsets, country lanes or the spontaneous thrashing about in the throes of subterranean forces suffice to let the individual's true, real, self arise and develop. Volitional romantic self-discourses, on the other hand, require a much more controlled process of patient self-investigation and self-assertion. The psychological classics here are found among neo-Freudian texts, Karen Horney's work for in-

stance, or among humanist psychologists such as Carl Rogers. (41) While the literary presentation generally involves, say, the story of an English lad from a Northern town or a young subdued housewife, working through the garbage of parental pressures and cultural stereotypes to discover finally, after many painful experiences, their own unique identity.

Common to all these different frameworks is the notion that each individual possesses a distinctive real self: a set of qualities, traits and aspirations which are 'right' for them. (42) Normally people express this self freely in their daily lives; however, if the growing child is subjected to distorting inter-personal pressures, or to too many of the wrong kind of cultural constraints, the real self becomes hidden behind a neurotic, inauthentic self. (43) The person must learn to discard the imperfect self and discover through therapy, politics, social movements or just through the 'hard school of life' itself, the real 'me'. This process is not depicted as an easy one; moreover, there are many snares and delusions along the way. It is a life-long struggle; the real self is encountered, only to be lost again and perhaps individuals never discover their real selves but only a series of closer and closer approximations.

It must have occurred to the reader that the romantic selves which are aspired to closely resemble the original honest soul or traditional narrative character. They have the same solidity, aura of 'rightness', and sense of harmony with the natural and social world. As Trilling points out, the modern alienated self model of self includes the desire to be an honest soul and envies the solid narrative character type of self perceived in the oppressed, the poor, the primitive, and the violent. There is, however, an essential difference. The romantic self is not only a glossier version of the honest soul with any potentially negative traits removed but also both the volitional and natural selves possess the concept of authenticity, a goal which would never occur to the narrative character or the trait theory person. The latter type of self can be sincere, without effort they can obey the maxim 'to thine own self be true', they will appear authentic to the modern observer, but, crucially, they cannot strive for authenticity. This quest seems to require the prior elucidation of the discourse of self-division.

#### THE SELFISH TEXT

In a recent paper, a social psychologist well known for his research on the self concept, proposed yet another version of selfhood: one which could easily be added to the collection gathered here. Again he is not proposing an especially original notion. Gergen suggests, basing his arguments on several different lines of empirical evidence, that the contents of the self are so much 'undifferentiated murk'. 'When people reflect on their experience during most interaction sequences, they would appear', he says, to be 'faced with what might be described as undifferentiated rousing. That is, they

are aware of changes in momentary intensity - qualitative shifts across time - but states without clear boundary lines'. (44) The self is, in other words, a site for chaos. Its substance lies in a jumble of passing states rather than in a coherent flow. The individual who pays close attention to internal experience and who thus penetrates the self will confirm, according to Gergen, its contradictory and nebulous nature.

By implication, a person's description of the feelings, hopes and fears of the moment, or of the thought processes required to solve a problem can scarcely derive from the actual inner experiences. Invariably, these inner experiences are too ambiguous, fleeting and formless to allow definitive categorisation in terms of the labels we conventionally use to express emotion, intellectual activity and so on. Inner experience is not sufficiently differentiated or reliable to guide self-analysis.

But, if our commentaries on the self are not anchored by an actual experience to which they correspond, what determines their form? Gergen considers the behaviourist hypothesis that we find out about our natures and learn to describe ourselves by observing our own behaviour much as any observer might find out about a person; but rejects it as inadequate. He is left with the vague conclusion that 'in effect, one's identifying characteristics are not a given but a mythological creation' (45) without being able to precisely specify the process behind this mythological construction except that it is in some way social.

What is interesting about Gergen's thesis is not the model itself, which is simply another attempt at pre-emptive phenomenology but the fact it should not occur to him that the forms of language might determine and give meaning to self commentary. Evidently the expressive-realist model of language as a neutral, blank transmitter of experience is so predominant in social psychology that the role of discourse is effectively obscured. Behaviour and internal experience occur to Gergen, but not socio-linguistics.

We would suggest that in all areas, when accounting for subjective experience, we are dependent on the available linguistic resources. The individual's ability, for example, to divide himself into several different characters arises because of linguistic concepts such as the I and the me and the way these are marked in the rules of syntax and used in everyday accounting for action. The meaning attributed to the self in the case of the I vs the me or romantic authenticity or trait theory reflect our system for making sense of the world not a basic inner experience or an observation of physical action. Moreover, accounts of the self are given in the course of social interactions in which certain goals and norms are deemed appropriate and we must therefore attempt to explore the ways in which they are constructed to fit the specifications.

In a famous extract from *S/Z*, Barthes comments that ultimately our subjectivity has the generality of stereotypes; it is merely the 'wash of all the codes which make up the I'. (46) These codes are

linguistic ones, infinitely more subtle, varied and fragmented than the static roles of role theory, they can be seen to form the basis for intersubjectivity and open the possibility for any kind of self-analysis.

In this chapter we have considered a number of, admittedly rarified, representations of the nature of self. Each version, the romantic model, the honest soul, the alienated self, etc. claims to be the only valid portrait (hence the title of this concluding section); either because it supposedly encapsulates some phenomenological or experiential truth, is supported by psychometric research, or appears to be the most appropriate analytic tool. Each representation also shares in common the assumption that people are indeed defined by substantial entities, their selves, which sit within and, queen bee like, direct or unify operations. The meaning of actions and experiences derives from the person. It is taken for granted that through patient investigation whether it be the phenomenological stripping away of layers or the observation of large numbers of people in action, the true nature and substance of the self will be made manifest.

By lining up together some of these potential codes for self-analysis and treating them as shifting and interchangeable discourses rather than as competing claims to the truth, we were asserting our opposition to this kind of picture. It is not necessary to attribute a determinate, perhaps ultimately private, self to the individual in order to study subjectivity. (47) What we have, readily available, is socio-linguistic discourse of all kinds - ordinary speech, literature, the media, scientific accounts, conversations, participant observer's accounts, etc. This quick trip through several academic and literary models alone has illustrated some of the dominant cultural possibilities for constructing the contemplative observation of the self. A more general, less holistic, analysis is thus called for, examining the contexts and accounts (attributions, justifications and explanations) where certain pieces of self-talk are deemed most appropriate and enumerating through careful fine-grain analysis, the many different methods of situational self-characterisation.

A specific example might make this point clearer. As we have seen, the I and the me or the subject and object of consciousness have been put forward as definitive aspects of the self. They are said to have a concrete ontological existence as part of the flow of consciousness. Our alternative would be to see this kind of philosophical approach to the self as 'nothing but fanciful expressions of the rules of grammar of personal pronouns as used in the giving and constructing of accounts'. (48) It is a distinction which emerges through the conventions for explaining and justifying one's actions, a conceptual possibility which is then extended until it becomes a complete self-diagram. It is also, on a more global level, a literary convention best suited to and found in a certain kind of literary genre. What is a purely textual tradition becomes, in an author such as Musil, and as we have seen in Doris Lessing, attributed to an experiential reality. (49)

According to Harré, an interesting everyday case of the establishment of the I versus the me, one of its many linguistic manifestations, is that of self-deception. Following Finagrette's analysis, Harré takes the fundamental accounting statement 'You are deceiving yourself' and notes that the competent decoding of this very common utterance depends upon splitting the person into two components: an I, the first you, and an out of control me, the second yourself.

(50) There are good interactional reasons why at times we may want to portray a friend as both the integrated centre and originator of their actions and as a character who is unwittingly contradicting the real self; for instance, to justify a friend's negatively viewed actions, while not taking them to be typical of behaviour. It is a linguistic distinction, however, a mode of speech. We do not need to make any reference to an essential experience of a split ego which determines this contradiction. In Harré's words,

In this way the problem that loomed so threateningly as a problem in the ontology of persons is resolved by referring it to a mode of speech whose social role is readily available to commonsense understanding. It is primarily an imposed scenario, a 'you' - 'yourself' separation in the speech of another, leading to the adoption of an 'I' - 'me' separation in the speech of the one concerned. (51)

The identification of some of the possible modes of self-characterisation carried out in this chapter can be seen as an essential first stage in a much longer process of empirical investigation. We not only need to describe the interpretative models and social representations which are available and explicate their structure in 'abstract'; we also must be able to offer a more functional analysis delineating the contexts in which these accounts are used. Character descriptions are often third person in style. They are told to others and therefore open to considerable flexibility. One would expect them to be contingent upon the interpersonal and group interests of the moment and these connections need to be made explicit. And so, although literature is an interesting place to start, eventually the social psychologist's attention must shift to everyday uses.

The self is indeed a complex area. The reader of novels and the social scientist alike are seemingly faced with a bewildering variety of potential descriptions. In this chapter, the aim was to demonstrate the cultural overlap and the connections, normally repressed, between literary and socio-psychological modes of understanding. In the end, the number of self descriptions turns out to be remarkably finite with a few common themes predominating to be repeated over and over again as each new observer of the self twists and turns the available categories hoping to hit upon a definitive version which will capture the elusive nature of self-experience. Our conclusion was that this search for the ultimate definition is a sterile one, and, finally, we argued that it is much more interesting to study the construction and organisation of self discourses, perhaps discovering in this manner, all there 'is' to the self.