

# ISSA Proceedings 2002 - Bourdieuian Criticism Of The Narrative Paradigm: The Case Of Historical Texts



“How might all this be told or explained (since history is both a narrative and a quest for intelligibility)?”

(Pierre Vidal-Naquet, 1987/1992, p. 104)

## *1. Introduction*

The present paper [i] fashions a critical analysis of Walter R. Fisher’s narrative paradigm by applying it to the interpretation and assessment of historical texts. My primary purpose is to show that the paradigm, although useful in thinking about rhetorical aspects of communication, cannot serve as a moral standard for judging its validity. To this end, the paper begins with a review of Fisher’s works on the narrative paradigm from the beginning to the present. Since he first proposed the paradigm in 1984, Fisher has taken enormous pains to defend, clarify, and elaborate it. An extensive review of his prolific writings is worth undertaking in its own right, considering that “the presence of contradictory claims and equivocal statements in Fisher’s initial presentation of the paradigm are likely to cause difficulties for those who seek to apply it to the critical assessment of texts” (Warnick, 1987, 172). The paper then explores the usefulness and limitations of the narrative paradigm. In particular, it takes issue with Fisher’s conception of narration as moral action. Contrary to his belief, coherent and consistent stories can be used as means of social control as well. Fisher lacks adequate sensitivity to power and symbolic violence that operate in most, if not all, discourse. Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu, the paper argues that the manipulative function of narration can be uncovered only by means of critical and methodical research, not through one’s habitual act of testing its probability and fidelity. Lastly, the paper looks into a revisionist’s historical text as a litmus test of the paradigm’s utility. The case study aims to demonstrate that historical writing

cannot be assessed by reducing it to the author's narrative strategies. Instead, the appraisal of historical work demands careful consideration of various elements - notably, fair treatments of other studies, respect for the complexity of a historical event, and self-reflexivity) that could render its narrative less compelling.

## 2. *The Narrative Paradigm, Then and Now*

"If the narrative paradigm celebrates anything, it celebrates human beings, and it does this by reaffirming their nature as storytellers." (Walter R. Fisher, 1989, 56)

In his 1984 essay "Narration as a Human Communication Paradigm" Fisher proposes a new paradigm of communication based on the notion of humans as *homo narrans*. According to Fisher (1984), the narrative paradigm has five presuppositions:

1. humans are essentially storytellers;
2. the paradigmatic modes of human action and decision are "good reasons" which vary in form among situations, genres, and media of communication;
3. the logic of good reason is ruled by matters of history, culture, and character along with the specific temporal and spatial constraints of presentation;
4. rationality is grounded in the nature of persons as narrative beings; and
5. the world as we live in is a set of stories which must be chosen among to live a good life in a process of continual interaction (7-8). These theoretical assumptions remain largely unchanged to date.

Specifically, two features of the paradigm set Fisher's approach apart from numerous other studies of narratives over the past two decades - Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue*, Paul Ricoeur's *Time and Narrative*, and Stuart Hall's "The Narrative Construction of Reality," to name but a few(ii). Firstly, Fisher conceives of narration as an essential feature of any communication. As Rowland (1989) notes, narrative has been understood as an all-encompassing paradigm only in communication studies; elsewhere it has been seen as a particular form of discourse (39). For Fisher, narration is neither an individuated language form (narrtion1 in his scheme) nor a genre of discourse (narration2); rather it is a conceptual framework for understanding and guiding human discourse, decision, and action (narration3). Seen from this perspective, all forms of human communication can be meaningfully construed as stories. Fisher (1987) maintains that "works such as Charles Darwin's *Origin of the Species* and Albert Einstein's *Relativity: The Special and the General Theory* are as usefully interpreted and

assessed through the narrative paradigm as the United States President's last speech or the latest popular film" (96). The concept of the narrative paradigm as a universal model runs through his subsequent works. In his 1992 essay, to mention one example, Fisher reiterates this thesis: "No matter how strictly a case is argued - theologically, scientifically, philosophically, or legally - it will always be a story" (209).

Also unique to Fisher's approach is the notion of narrative rationality. As Warnick (1987) explains, "Fisher has consistently pointed to narrative rationality as the concept that makes the narrative paradigm unique and affords an advance over prior theories" (173). Narrative rationality, in a nutshell, is "an essential property of rhetorical competence" (Fisher, 1980, 122); its function lies in the tests of stories' probability and fidelity, which in turn provide a desirable guide to thoughts and actions. Importantly, Fisher (1984) presumes that narrative rationality is the natural trait of "all normal persons":

[R]ationality is determined by the nature of persons as narrative beings - their inherent awareness of *narrative probability*, what constitutes a coherent story, and their constant habit of testing *narrative fidelity*, whether the stories they experience ring true with the stories they know to be true in their lives.(8)

He goes on to explain the strengths of the narrative paradigm by pitting it against what he calls "the traditional rational-world paradigm." He charges that traditional rationality is fundamentally flawed as it legitimates experts' control of society, closes off public discussions, and bars citizens from partaking of decision-making processes. Narrative rationality, by contrast, is purported to be democratic. Since all humans are storytellers, everyone is capable of judging stories without any special training (Fisher, 1984, 15). It follows that the public and experts can engage in a dialogue on equal grounds only if experts are willing to tell a story in public. Put differently, by pressuring experts to translate their technical findings into comprehensible stories, citizens will be able to deliberate technical issues, intervene in decision-making, and hold experts in check. Fisher (1987) argues:

Within the narrative paradigm's perspective... the experts' stories are not at all beyond analysis by the layperson. The lay audience can test the stories for coherence and fidelity. The lay audience is not perceived as a group of observers, but as active, irrepressible participants in the meaning-formation of the stories that any and all storytellers tell in discourses about nuclear weapons or any other

issue that impinges on how people are to be conceived and treated in their ordinary lives.(72)

Implicit in the narrative paradigm is the notion of narration as moral action. Positing that “ethical behavior is, by and large, habitual” (4), Fisher (2000) submits that “narration is the most appropriate construct for understanding communication ethics” (2). Indeed, he (1987) goes as far to claim that “the narrative paradigm offers ways of resolving problems of public moral argument” (69). Central to the ethical aspects of narratives is the logic of good reason. According to Fisher, it is not formal logic but the logic of good reason that allow us to interpret and assess stories which are not always in clear-cut inferential or implicative structures (Fisher,1984; Fisher, 1992). More specifically, the logic of good reasons, by combining the tests of traditional logic with the evaluation of values and characters, accounts for how stories induce us to behave and act in certain ways. Fisher (1985a) argues that the consideration of values and characters gives the narrative paradigm a competitive edge over so-called “social scientific theories”:

Where the narrative paradigm goes beyond these [social scientific] theories is in providing a “logic” for assessing stories, for determining whether or not one should adhere to the stories one is encouraged to endorse or to accept as the basis for decisions and actions. For the most part, social scientific theories ignore the role of values or they deny the possibility of developing rational schemes for their assessment. (348)

Although Fisher does not treat traditional rationality and narrative rationality as mutually exclusive, he calls for a sort of paradigm shift in which the former is to be subsumed under the latter. In view of this, Fisher (1987) projects the narrative paradigm not only as a healthy corrective to the traditional rational-world paradigm, but also as “a ground for resolving the dualisms of modernism: fact-value, intellect-imagination, reason-emotion, and so on” (68).

### *3. The Narrative Paradigm Revisited: Bourdieuan Perspectives*

“We have spoken too much about consciousness, too much in terms of representation.” (Pierre Bourdieu in a dialogue with Terry Eagleton, 1992, 113)

In “Clarifying the Narrative Paradigm” Fisher (1989) expounds the nature of the paradigm by stating that “the narrative paradigm is a philosophical statement that is meant to offer an approach to interpretation and assessment of human

communication” (57). His equivocal use of the term “assessment,” however, leaves it unclear if the paradigm is designed to assess the effectiveness of a story or its validity. In this respect Fisher has taken a notoriously ambivalent position. On the one hand, he (1989) claims that the aim of the paradigm is to evaluate the persuasiveness of a story: “The narrative paradigm concerns the interpretation and assessment of *rhetorical messages*” (56; italics added)(iii). Fisher, on the other, insists that the paradigm provide a desirable guide to human decisions and actions. As he (1985a) sees it, “[t]he only way to determine whether or not a story is a mask for ulterior motives is to test it against the principles of narrative probability and fidelity” (364). Understood this way, the narrative paradigm serves to equip one with critical means of judging the legitimacy of a story. Earlier in the essay Fisher (1985a) writes: “The primary function of the paradigm is to offer way of interpreting and assessing human communication that leads to critique, a determination of whether or not a given instance of discourse provides a reliable trustworthy, and desirable guide to thought and action in the world” (351). Taken together, we remain uncertain if the paradigm is intended to explain the persuasive effects of narration or to provide normative grounds for testing its legitimacy.

Yet, as Johannesen (1996) stresses, there lies a critical difference between “the nature and effectiveness of communication techniques, processes, and methods” and “the ethical use of such techniques” (3). The biggest problem with the narrative paradigm is that any story is deemed good insofar as it rings true with what particular audiences perceive as true in their daily lives. That is, by reducing the tests of *good* reasons to those of narrative probability and fidelity, Fisher overlooks the fact that coherent and consistent stories are often used as means of social control. As Warnick (1987) points out, “[a] rhetorical narrative may ‘ring true’ in the lives of particular audience members, may resonate with their own experience and that of those whom they admire, and nevertheless bad story” (179). True, “[t]he meaning and merit of a story are always a matter of how it stands with or against other stories” (Fisher, 1992, 207). But what if the choice of narratives is limited in the first place? As Bourdieu (1972/1977) lucidly shows, there usually exist tacitly accepted boundaries between what can and cannot be narrated. This is particularly noticeable in mass-mediated discourse. A fair number of media studies indicate that political elites and corporate giants, along with global media conglomerates, hold enormous authority to filter out adverse facts and arguments, shun competing stories, and narrate a “good” story as means of profit generation and political repression (e.g. Bagdikian, 2000; Grass

and Bourdieu, 2002; Herman and Chomsky, 1988; McChesney, 1999). This threat is real, given that discourses in and through the media are often distorted to the point that even storytellers themselves are unaware of the deceptive nature of their narratives. Herman and Chomsky (1988) deplore:

The elite domination of the media and marginalization of dissidents... occurs so naturally that media news people, frequently operating with complete integrity and goodwill, are able to convince themselves that they choose and interpret the news "objectively" and on the basis of professional news values. Within the limits of the filter constraints they often are objective; the constraints are so powerful, and are built into the system in such a fundamental way, that alternative bases of news choices are hardly imaginative.(2)

Fisher (1985a) acknowledges that narration can be employed as a strategy of social control, stating that "[n]o guarantee exists that one who uses narrative rationality will not adopt 'bad' stories" (349). Yet he proceeds to assert, rather optimistically, that the invocation of narrative rationality "engenders critical self-awareness and conscious choice" (349). For a narrative, in order to "hang together," must be both internally and externally consistent. Fisher (1985a) illustrates how a story is counterbalanced by other narratives:

Someone tries out for a track team or a play, or runs for office and is not successful. To restore balance, the person search for a story that will justify his or her effort. Such stories may be positive or negative... For the persons involved, these stories would satisfy the need for equilibrium and the demands of narrative probability and fidelity... It may be, however, that another observer would think otherwise, that the involved person was rationalizing. In any event, it is precisely in this sort of a situation that narrative rationality is relevant as a system for determining whether or not one should accept a story, whether or not a story is indeed trustworthy and reliable as a guide to belief and action. (349)

Fisher's example of power-free interpersonal interaction, however, does not hold good for "inter-social" **(iv)** situations in which "objective relations of power tend to reproduce themselves in relations of symbolic power" (Bourdieu, 1990a, 135). Under such circumstances it is naïve to conceive narratives as moral constructs because they may turn out to reinforce "symbolic domination." As Bourdieu (1992) told Eagleton, "[symbolic domination] is something you absorb like air, something you don't feel pressured by; it is everywhere and nowhere, and to escape from that is very difficult" (115). If that's the case, symbolic domination

cannot be exposed by one's habitual act of judging a story. Instead, we must look outside "the field of discourse" and attend to the social conditions which privilege certain narratives, while repressing others (Bourdieu, 1993a, 33).

*Narrative and Social Control* is a collection of essays which examine the ways narratives function as means of social control. For instance, Langellier and Peterson (1993) observe that "[s]tories and storytelling both generate and reproduce 'the family' by legitimating meanings and power relations that privilege, for example, parents over children, males over females, and the white, middle-class family over alternative family structures" (50). Along similar lines, van Dijk (1993) recounts how white group dominance is reinforced in and through stories. These essays attest that a story does not always empower people. On the contrary, it is a potentially alienating force, especially when it resonates with the dominant values and beliefs, or those which Bourdieu call *doxa*.

Bourdieu's concept of *doxa*, or self-evident, unconscious adherence to the social world, further underscores the limits of the narrative paradigm. As noted above, Fisher's narrative approach is heavily influenced by the Aristotelian traditions of rhetoric. Fisher makes it clear as early as 1980 that the *telos* of the narrative paradigm is to reconfigure Aristotle's notion of *phronesis* under the rubric of narrative rationality (see also Fisher, 1985a, 350; Fisher, 2000, 1). In addition, he also shares the Aristotelian view that rhetoric "must engage premises credible to the audience as a condition of persuasion" (Bitzer, 1981, 235-6). As Fisher (1987) puts it:

Under the narrative paradigm all are seen as possessing equally the logic of narration - a sense of coherence and fidelity. This is what is implied by the commonplace that everyone has "common sense," and this is what makes it reasonable to have juries of laypersons and to have popular elections, as Bennett and Feldman have well demonstrated.(68)

The common sense-based assessment of a story may be ethical if "ethical behavior is, by and large, habitual" (Fisher, 2000, 4). This assumption is, however, ungrounded. On the contrary, appealing to the common sense of audiences, storytellers may degenerate into what Bourdieu calls doxsophers who do little more than reinforce the *doxic* submission to the social world, "or the most secure foundation of conservatism" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, 247).

Bourdieu (1990b) sees *doxa* as a primordial political belief "inherent in all 'sensible' action" (36). Put more starkly, *doxa* is a shared norm which "goes

*without saying because it comes without saying*" (Bourdieu, 1972/1977, 167). Since *doxa* operates below consciousness, "normal persons," to use Fisher's terms, lack either methods or knowledge of critiquing it. What's worse, *doxa* predisposes the dominated groups to *voluntarily* accept their suffering by instilling "a sense of limits" (or "a sense of one's one place") into them. Bourdieu (1992) told Eagleton about the deep-seated effects of *doxa*:

[T]he fact is that when we see with our own eyes people living in poor conditions – such as existed, when I was a young scholar, among the local proletariat, the workers in factories – it is clear that they are prepared to accept much more than we would have believed. That was a very strong experience for me: they put up with a great deal, and this is what I mean by *doxa* – that there are many things people accept without knowing.

(114)

Since *doxa* is a preverbal belief, analysis of narration, no matter how critical it is, is not enough for critiquing it; for one accepts one's *doxa* as the starting-point for analysis in that case. As Bourdieu (1999) argues, those who are not self-critical of their common sense have no effective means of either knowing or understanding what is going on in a social world (Bourdieu et al., 628). Thus Bourdieu (1999) maintains that "[o]nly active denunciation of the tacit presuppositions of common sense can counter the effects of all the representations of reality" (Bourdieu et al., 620). More importantly, the presuppositions of common sense can be unmasked only by objectifying experiences and thoughts long kept unsaid or repressed (Bourdieu, 1972/1977; Bourdieu, et al., 1999).

Fisher (1989) explicitly counters the charge that the narrative paradigm neglects the roles of power and ideology (*doxa* in Bourdieu's term) in the production of narration:

[T]he narrative paradigm does not deny that power, ideology, distortion, or totalitarian forces are or can be significant features of communicative practices. Regardless of their presence, however, decision and action are inevitable, and their appearance is always in the context of ongoing stories. If they were the only features of communicative practices, decision and action would only and always be: whose domination shall we submit to and live by? I continue to believe that some stories are more truthful and humane than others.(57)

Yet Fisher's response is far from satisfactory. For one thing, his critics nowhere state that power and ideology are the only features of communicative practices.



Rather, they simply point out that power and ideology play a vital role in the (re)production of narratives. For another, although Fisher is right in saying that some stories are more truthful than others, he does not account for how the narrative paradigm serves to ascertain the truth qualities of stories. Instead, Fisher (2000) simply presumes that humans are essentially truth-tellers (which is evidently reminiscent of Aristotle):

For the most part, people are truth-telling, respectful of others, honest and loyal to friends and family, and act in ways that are conducive to community - however fragile or local. If this were not so, there would be no lasting friendships, no stable families, no ongoing public, institutional practices; there would be chaos, total disorder.(4)

However, Fisher's trust in a speaker's good will is obviously wishful thinking. Needless to say, we have repeatedly witnessed throughout the history that storytellers have not always favored the true and just. As Farrell (1989) nicely puts it, "narrative can never substitute for a conscientious vision of human nature; instead, narrative must presuppose such a vision" (310).

Again, the major shortcoming of the narrative paradigm is that any narrative is considered to be rational insofar as it meets the expectations of particular audiences. As Kirkwood (1992) argues:

Fisher's account of rhetoric and moral argument might prove useful in predicting how specific audiences will evaluate stories... However, it is also troubling, for it implies that 'good stories' cannot and perhaps should not exceed people's values and beliefs, whether or not these are admirable or accurate.(30)

If so, the narrative paradigm should be understood as a useful framework for interpreting how a story effects persuasion in a particular rhetorical situation. Insofar as the tests of narrative rationality are grounded in one's "constant habit" of judging a story for its probability and fidelity, it is devoid of critical leverage to assess its truth qualities. What's worse, as Bourdieu insists, critique without methodical backing may well yield to doxic injunctions of the world by relapsing into "a kind of narcissistic luxury" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, 253)(v).

Alternatively, Bourdieu submits that one should methodologically distrust doxa with rigorous knowledge of the social. In his view, only empirical research based on a firm grasp of the social mechanisms and conditions enables one to bring to light the deepest and most unconscious adherences to the world. Bourdieu's

following defense of social scientific work is worth quoting at length:

There is no risk of overestimating difficulty and dangers when it comes to thinking the social world. The force of the preconstructed resides in the fact that, being inscribed both in things and in minds, it presents itself under the cloak of the self-evident which goes unnoticed because it is by definition taken for granted. Rupture in fact demands a *conversion of one's gaze*... What is called "epistemological rupture," that is, the bracketing of ordinary preconstructions and of the principles ordinarily at work in the elaboration of these constructions, often presuppose a rupture with modes of thinking, concepts, and methods that have every appearance of *common sense*, of ordinary sense, and of good scientific sense (everything that the dominant positivist tradition honors and hallows) going for them. You will certainly understand that... the most vital task of social science and thus of the teaching of research in the social sciences is to establish as a fundamental norm of scientific practice the conversion of thought, the revolution of the gaze, the rupture with the preconstructed and with everything that buttresses it in the social order (Bourdieu and Waquant, 1992, 251-2).

To recapitulate the main points, despite Fisher's scathing attacks on social scientific theories, Bourdieu's "reflexive sociology" has distinctive advantages. While criticism of Bourdieu's faith in scientific methods is worth undertaking all its own, it at least illuminates the limits of Fisher's narrative paradigm. That is, seen as the natural trait of humans, narrative rationality falls short of serving as a moral standard for testing and, if necessary, challenging the legitimacy of a story; instead, such a task requires one to acquire proper investigative methods and rigorous knowledge thereof. At this point Bourdieu's analogy of the Hippocratic tradition is suggestive:

According to the Hippocratic tradition, true medicine begins with the knowledge of invisible illness, with the facts patients do not give, either because they are not aware of them or because they forget to mention them. The same holds true for social science, which is concerned with figuring out and understanding *the true causes of the malaise that is expressed only through social signs that are difficult to interpret precisely because they seem so obvious*. (Bourdieu et al., 1999, 628; italics added)

#### 4. *Historical Narrative as a Test Case of the Narrative Paradigm*

"The moment that the analytic perspective of the observer mingles with the perspective assumed by participants in a discourse of collective self-

understanding, historiographical science degenerates into the politics of history. The union of historicism and nationalism once arose from just this confusion” (Jurgen Habermas, 2001, 30).

In his 1988 essay Fisher explores the relationship between narration and argument in historical writing. Against the view that narrating and arguing are two discrete forms of communication, he (1988) submits:

[H]istorians’ evaluations will necessarily take into account the two essential principles of narrative rationality - coherence and fidelity. And if their assessments are thorough, they will attend to the total weight of reason in the text, including all sorts of “warrants” which are not expressed in clear-cut inferential or implicative structures. (52)

The goal of this section is to demonstrate that the interpretation and assessment of historical texts cannot be based solely on their narrative aspects. As Vidal-Naquet (1987/1992) puts it, “[w]hen a fictitious account is well prepared, it does not contain elements allowing one to destroy it on strictly internal grounds” (51). Alternatively, the truths of historical work and the truthfulness of an author can be best ascertained when one takes into account various *non-narrative* factors, including relevant facts and arguments *outside* the work, its methodology, and the author’s motives and interests at stake.

The paper specifically looks into a revisionist group’s historical text in Japan. Since 1995, the writers calling themselves advocates of a “liberalist view of history” have unleashed trenchant attacks on the prevailing view of Japan’s modern history (especially, its imperialism and wartime fascism) and called for the revision (in their view, “reform”) of public-school textbooks. Paradoxically, these jingoistic conservatives pass themselves off as liberal, progressive, and rational by pitting it against the conventional “masochistic,” “distorted,” and “Comintern-influenced” views.

The revisionist group under consideration here is named the Association for the Advancement of Liberalist View of History. The Association, spearheaded by Nobukatsu Fujioka, Professor of Education at the University of Tokyo and Kanji Nishio, Professor at Electro-Communications University, is one of the most active and vocal revisionist groups in Japan. Importantly, the notion of history as a story lends theoretical support to the Association’ activities. The group’s “manifesto” carried on its web site (<http://www.jiyuu-shikan.org/e/>) is illustrative of this point: “History is not just a chronological sequencing of events, but the story of a people

or peoples, from their origins, their adventures, their successes and failures.” Similarly, they attempt to give radical airs to their view by portraying it as a product of “the pursuit of truth through open and vigorous debate, free of taboos or ideology” (Sand, 1999, 121).

Yet analysis of the group’s actual texts reveals that its alleged commitment to open and free debate is only a mask for its deep-seated nationalistic agenda. The paper specifically examines Fujioka’s speech on the subjects of textbook “reforms” and wartime sex slaves (commonly referred to as “military comfort women”) at the Foreign Correspondents’ Club of Japan on February 25, 1999. His arguments in this English-language speech largely coincide with those in his Japanese publications.

Fujioka, acutely false depiction of comfort women.” Countering the official account that the Japanese army coerced “comfort women” into practicing prostitution during World War II, he contends that they were not sex slaves but simply prostitutes administered by private brokers. Fujioka attributes this “absolute distortion of historical fact” to Seiji Yoshida’s 1993 book *My War Crimes: Forcible Transport of Korean Nationals* in which he confessed having “kidnapped” Korean women on the orders of the Japanese army. Fujioka refutes his testimony by citing Professor Ikuhiko Hata of Nihon University who allegedly took a “fact-finding” tour to Korea. According to Fujioka:

The results were shocking. Professor Hata visited the village where the women were supposedly kidnapped. All the villagers he interviewed denied that there had been such acts by the Japanese military. They told him they couldn’t understand why someone would tell such a story... Furthermore, Professor Hata discovered that a local Korean newspaper had carried out research like his, and had concluded that this story was false and fabricated.

From Hata’s findings Fujioka draws a conclusion: “Prostitution in itself is a tragedy, but there is no evidence to indicate that the women were forced into it by the Japanese military.” In the following question-and-answer session he reiterates the same point: “There is absolutely no public document, or any other evidence, that even hints at the possibility that the military took away Korean, and forced them into prostitution.”

Contrary to Fujioka’s accounts, there are public records that documented the practice of forced sexual labor in wartime Japan. For instance, in January 1992 historian Yoshiaki Yoshimi found documents in the Self-Defense Ministry archives

confirming that the Imperial Army had systematically monitored, if not directly managed, the comfort stations (Sand, 1999, 119).

Despite the fact that “Yoshimi’s findings were followed by a spate of publications on the issue” (Sand, 1999, 119), Fujioka was silent about them throughout his speech.

Moreover, in response to the concern that Japan’s persistent denial of its wartime atrocities would damage its national interests, Fujioka boldly claims that “the opposite is true.” As evidence of this he cites an *Economist* article on diplomatic tension between Japan and China:

End of last year [*sic*], President Ziang [*sic*] Zemin of China visited Japan. He demanded written apologies from the Japanese government, which Japan refused. Afterwards, the London Economist [*sic*] commented that the Japanese government did a good thing for the world. Why? Because the London Economist said the boss of a communist party, which has killed tens of millions of its own people, is not qualified to attack something that happened more than 50 years ago.

Fujioka then takes this article as a sign that other countries no longer see Japan’s apologies as necessary: “[The] time has come to stop endless apologies, but rather distinguish between right and wrong, and deal with issues in a well-balanced manner. I believe that today’s world appreciates more a Japanese [*sic*] who can deal with matters rationally and resolutely.”

As a matter of fact, the *Economist* article nowhere suggests that Japan should stop endless apologies. The article approves of Japan’s refusal to apologize to China because it suspects that the Communist Party of China is politicizing the war-guilt issue to isolate Taiwan. In short, Fujioka deliberately distorts the context of the article in efforts to make his story ring true for his audience. If the article is read in its entirety, it is evident that it is highly critical of the Japanese government’s evasive attitudes towards its wartime crimes. The article, for instance, reads:

For sure, Japan has plenty to feel sorry about concerning its actions in Manchuria and elsewhere in China during the 1930s and 1940s; the only sensible debate about the period turns on how many millions of Chinese citizens were slaughtered, not the reality or morality of the actions, and it would be best if Japan... were to come to terms with this past.(18)

Fujioka's out-of-context quotation exemplifies that the truth qualities of a historical text cannot be judged without attending to relevant facts and arguments outside of the text. As McCullagh (1987) suggests, historians are obliged to project, above all, a fair representation of a subject at issue. Specifically, a fair representation of a historical subject demands careful consideration of related themes, exhaustive readings of primary and secondary documents thereof, extensive treatment of opposing viewpoints, and recognition of the study's limitations. Even if the incorporation of these elements renders the author's narrative less convincing, a fair depiction of a historical issue is far more important than a coherent and consistent narrative of the author's version of past reality. Likewise, Megil (1987) maintains that the narration of a convincing story *in the eyes of particular audiences* constitutes only a small part of historical work: Far from being a simple representation of past reality, a work of history has manifold relations: to a posited historical reality; to the "source" materials out of which that reality is constructed; to previous writing and speaking... and to an implied audience or audiences. This multiplicity is obscured by such a work as *The Guns of August*, where the aim is to create the illusion that the work shows reality as it really was. (p. 560)

The same criticism leveled against the *Guns of August* applies to Fujioka's speech as it erases the multiplicity of relations for the sake of a coherent and consistent narrative. Missing from his narrative is respect for the complexity of a historical issue, rejection of either-or, and self-critique. Thus, when stripped of the cloak of open-mindedness, his narrative is but a self-contained myth which rings true within his own text at best. As Vidal-Naquet (1987/1992) puts it, "[o]n this level, we are still dealing with history only to the extent that the raw material has been borrowed from reality. The structure is not that of a historical process, composed of advances and setbacks, of chance and of necessity; it is that of the self-enclosed structure of myth" (p. 105).

After all, historical writing cannot be evaluated by reducing it to the author's narrative strategies. For the goal of historical research is not simply to narrate a believable story, but to contribute to wider arguments on an issue under consideration. The rich traditions of prior historical writings should not be neglected. Nor should the complex and contingent nature of a historical event be oversimplified for the sake of consistent and coherent story-telling. As Bourdieu (1984/1988) insists, "we may well have some chance of contributing to the science of power if we renounce the attempt to turn science into an instrument of

power, above all in the world of science” (16).

Furthermore, the interpretation and assessment of historical narratives require thorough knowledge of the realities concerned and training in analytical skills. Put differently, those who possess either little or one-sided knowledge of a historical event cannot adequately understand any stories pertaining to it. Contrary to Fisher’s belief, people are unable to judge historical narratives only in light of their daily experiences because “historical narratives encompass more events than people normally experience as temporal wholes in everyday life” (McCullagh, 1987, 44). As McCullagh (1987) contends, “if an historian’s knowledge of a subject is scrappy, not at all comprehensive, then he or she is not in a position to say whether any particular narrative account of it fairly represents it or not” (34). By saying this, I don’t mean to claim that only experts are eligible to participate in historical discourse. My point is that the critical assessments of historical texts demand relentless efforts on the part of readers to develop “a new gaze,” to borrow Bourdieu’s words. Given that serious research “leads one to unite what is ordinarily separated or to distinguish what is ordinarily confused” (Bourdieu et al., 1991, 15), there is a good reason for separating the logic of ordinary knowledge from the logic of scientific knowledge. To be sure, the extension of “public reason” to scientific fields is useful in holding scientific work in check through democratic means. But the extension of scientific, more broadly intellectual, logic to public life contributes as much, if not more, to the democratization of society. As Bourdieu (1998) states:

I would like writers, artists, philosophers and scientists to be able [to] make their voice heard directly in all the areas of public life in which they are competent. I think that everyone would have a lot to gain if the logic of intellectual life, that of argument and refutation, were extended to public life. At present, it is often the logic of political life, that of denunciation and slander, ‘slogozation’ and falsification of the adversary’s thought, which extends into intellectual life. It would be a good thing if the ‘creators’ could fulfil their function of public service and sometimes of public salvation.(8)

## *5. Conclusion*

“My aim is to help to make it harder to speak glibly about the social world.”  
(Pierre Bourdieu, 1984/1993, 6)

The present paper has shown that Fisher’s narrative paradigm can be best appreciated when it is understood as a useful way of thinking about rhetorical

aspects of communication. Even if any historical work can be construed as a story, it is not always useful but often problematic to interpret the work as such. As Rowland (1989) argues, it is often more appropriate to evaluate an argument by removing it from the context of a story. Especially when the world is filled with “noise about the social world that sounds like music” (Bourdieu, 1984/1993, 6), it is often necessary to disrupt one from telling a coherent and consistent story even in the absence of any alternatives. It is far more healthy to create anxieties in people’s minds than to encourage them to turn their eyes from an “unbearable truth” and content themselves with a “reassuring lie,” to borrow Vidal-Naquet’s words (18).

In particular, Fisher made a wrong turn in conceiving narratives as a moral constructs. It cannot be emphasized too much that stories can be used to deceive and oppress others. As long as the narrative paradigm presumes commonplaces as a ground of persuasion, it is unable to supply us with critical methods of uncovering the repressive force of a story. The brief examination of the revisionist’s text has illustrated that historical work cannot be judged according to the principles of narrative rationality alone. Rather, the understanding of an event, historical or otherwise, demands through knowledge thereof, a mastery of analytical methods, and laborious empirical work. Considering that “the visible,” or that which is immediately given, often “hides the invisible which determines it” (Bourdieu, 1990a, 126), the separation of ordinary knowledge from scientific knowledge is justified.

True, “[t]he norms are intersubjectively created and maintained through symbolic transactions over time” (Fisher, 2000, 4). At the same time, we must keep in mind that symbolic violence often goes unnoticed precisely because it is tacitly accepted as “norms.” Since doxa is a “fundamental acceptance of the established order situated outside the reach of critique,” it tends to induce symbolic violence *with the complicity of* those who are susceptible to it (Bourdieu & Waquant, 1992, 167; 247). To illustrate this *voluntary* submission, Bourdieu (1992) gives an example of male domination:

[T]he best illustration of the political import of doxa is arguably the symbolic violence exercised upon women. I think in particular of the sort of socially constituted agoraphobia that leads women to exclude themselves from a whole range of public activities and ceremonies from which they are structurally excluded (in accordance with the dichotomies public/male versus private/female), especially in the realm of formal politics. Or which explains that they can confront these situations, at the cost of an extreme tension, only in proportion to the effort



necessary for them to overcome the recognition of their exclusion inscribed deep in their own bodies (Bourdieu & Waquant, 74).

Under such circumstances, we cannot simply trust a narrator's good faith. For she may well subscribe to a *doxic* view of the world without knowing it. To break this "immediate fit between subjective and objective structures," a critique of the dominant narrative is not sufficient. In addition, it is necessary to uncover their social conditions of (re)production. In this regard, social scientific work as Bourdieu lays it out has unique strengths as it is the most effective, if not the sole, "means of submitting to scientific scrutiny *everything that makes the doxic experience of the world possible*, that is, not only the preconstructed representation of this world but also the cognitive schemata that underline the construction of this image" (Bourdieu and Waquant, 1992, 247).

## NOTES

**[i]** This essay has greatly benefited from suggestions made by John Lyne and Carol Stabile.

**[ii]** The founding of the Society for the Study of Narrative Literature in 1984 probably epitomizes growing academic interests in narratives across disciplines in the early 1980s.

**[iii]** Fisher (1992) even suggests that all forms of communication can be deemed rhetorical insofar as they "function to influence the hearts and minds of others" (206).

**[iv]** The term "inter-social" is borrowed from Durkheim. In reference to "two sorts of social sentiments" Durkheim (1972) writes: "The first bind each individual to the person of his fellow-citizens: these are manifest within the community, in the day-to-day relationships of life... The second are those which bind me to the social entity as a whole; these manifest themselves primarily in the relationships of the society with other societies, and could be called 'inter-social'. The first leave my autonomy and personality almost intact... When I act under the influence of the second, by contrast, I am simply a part of a whole, whose actions I follow, and whose influence I am subject to. This is why the latter alone can give rise to the idea of obligation" (219-20).

**[v]** Bourdieu (1999) refers to David Lodge's novel *Small World* as a prime example of "a mystifying demystification, which presents all the commonplaces of the self-satisfied representation, falsely lucid and truly narcissistic, which university teachers love to present of themselves and their world" (Bourdieu et al., 1999, 617).

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