

## Assignment 5

### What is reality?

Explore issues surrounding the real in contemporary society. Write an essay of about 2000 words. Analyse the boundaries between the real and the virtual in our contemporary culture.

Word count minus quotes and footnotes approximately 2250

Word count including quotes, footnotes, headings and image subtitles 5765

"Sometimes the most real things in the world are the things we can't see"

*The Polar Express, 2004*

Warning: (If you haven't already seen *Arrival* and plan to, I would suggest not reading this until afterwards, as I risk ruining it for you).

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## 1. Before I begin...

In November 2016 Will Self<sup>1</sup> gave a lecture as part of Scottish Book Week. Self argued there are significant signs human beings might have started to evolve beyond a 'need for storytelling'. This, he suggests, is down to the overwhelming use of technology in particular by the younger generation, which neuroscientist,<sup>2</sup> Susan Greenfield argues is "profoundly altering the structure of our brains" (Self, 2016). Self warns, "...it may be the case that our children are in the larval stage of a new form of human being, one which no longer depends on their ability to tell the others where the food is. Why? Because, of course, they know where it is already, due to the absolute fluidity and ubiquity of bi-directional digital media."<sup>3</sup> (Self, 2016)

In this essay I explore if there is a correlation between an apparent contemporary taste for non-linear narrative and Self's suggestion that we are losing our need to tell stories at all. Is 'the ubiquity of bi-directional digital media' negating a need for cohesive beginning, middle and end structures? And perhaps even destroying our reliance on storytelling, along with listening, entirely?

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*Arrival* is a Hollywood film released towards the end of 2016, which explores the story of a linguistics expert employed by the US government to communicate with aliens.<sup>4</sup> What counts for the purposes of this essay is the central theme whereby the protagonist, Louise Brooks, played by Amy Adams, learns the aliens' language as she teaches them ours, and in doing so her understanding of time's forward motion, arguably a construct<sup>5</sup>, is altered. As such, the forward motion narrative of the film is also changed although this does not become clear until the end.

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<sup>1</sup> Will Self is a well known writer and TV personality (branded as highly intellectual)

<sup>2</sup> See <http://www.susangreenfield.com/about-susan/>

<sup>3</sup> Self follows this sentence with "Indeed, there may not be any need to tell the others where the food is in the future, because in an important sense there are no others." While I think this is a fundamentally important statement, the concept of self and others in relation to this subject could not be covered even inadequately within 2000 words.

<sup>4</sup> For a fuller description of the plot of *Arrival* visit <http://www.vox.com/culture/2016/11/11/13587262/arrival-movie-review-amy-adams-denis-villeneuve>

<sup>5</sup> Sir Anthony Leggett discusses the paradox of time's forward motion - [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9r\\_1qmclwfk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9r_1qmclwfk)

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Figure 1. Still from *Arrival*, 2016, directed by Denis Villeneuve

*Anywhen* is an installation designed specifically for Tate Modern's Turbine Hall by mixed media Philippe Parreno, sponsored by Hyundai. The work changes throughout the day and will evolve over time as Parreno adds and adjusts elements. A dedicated page on the Tate website informs us, "The Turbine Hall is transformed into an immersive experience, challenging your perception of time and space" and "'the exhibition is a construction of situations or sequences in a non-linear narrative'. (Tate, 2016)

In August 2016 <sup>6</sup>David Lynch's *Mulholland Drive*, a film which rejects linear narrative when characters and relationships transform midway through as the camera zooms into a box (perhaps a sort of Schrödinger object?), was voted the best film made since the beginning of the century. (Buckmaster, 2016)

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<sup>6</sup> David Lynch is an award winning and prolific film and TV maker known for, amongst others, *Blue Velvet* 2001, *Twin Peaks* 1990/91, *The Elephant Man* 1980

## 2. The beginning ....

"1 In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. 2 And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. 3 And God said, Let there be light: and there was light. 4 And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness. 5 And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day." (Genesis, BibleGateway.com)

Genesis is at its core a description of a formless world becoming differentiated, where objects and ideas are given names and classifications. In other words, signs. "We live in a world of signs and we have no way of understanding anything except through signs and the codes into which they are organised." (Chandler, 2002; loc 425) Genesis is therefore a story that describes the construction of signs and codes.

It is surprising to consider as relatively recently as 1991 psychologist Jerome Bruner<sup>7</sup> wrote, "It was perhaps a decade ago that psychologists became alive to the possibility of narrative as a form not only of representing but of constituting reality" (5). When viewed this way, it is evident Genesis is not a record of events, rather a template for understanding a semiotic reality.

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Figure 2, *The Garden of Earthly Delights*, Hieronymus Bosch, 1500-1510, Museo del Prado, Madrid

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<sup>7</sup> Jerome Bruner, an American Psychologist b 1936, d 2016, amongst many other disciplines explored narrative and construction of reality.

### 3. Narrative as a template for reality...

"The central concern is not how narrative as text is constructed, but rather how it operates as an instrument of mind in the construction of reality" (Bruner, 1991; 6)

One of Will Self's arguments is based on the premise that language's original and foremost evolutionary function may have been about enabling people to tell each other clearly where food could be found. This does seem to be the received wisdom. However, a more complex understanding surrounding the development of language might be useful. For instance, social scientist, Sarah Blaffer Hrdy<sup>8</sup> argues language may be an evolutionary outcome of our ancestor's unusual (in primates) practise of shared infant duty, where allo-parents were regularly relied upon within groups, in opposition to John Bowlby's theory of continuous care<sup>9</sup> (Hrdy, 2009; 85). As such Hrdy makes the case for infant babbling and motherese as crucial for relationship building, providing reassurance between mother and child, and "maintaining and establishing relationships with parents *and* allo-parents"; *and a precursor for syntactical language.*

Although Hrdy certainly acknowledges destructive tendencies, she describes a Pleistocene where empathy was one of the key driving forces in the evolution of language. Melanie Klein<sup>10</sup> on the other hand delves into darker aspects of our psyches and is less concerned with empathy, and rather more about inner irrational pre-verbal selves. For her we each harbour primeval psychosis, and unconsciously or not, life is a continuous struggle between opposing tensions of our interior and exterior beings. Professor Robert Young<sup>11</sup> says she looked at the "primitive, distressed and destructive side of humanity which was so startling for her [Klein's] contemporaries and which strikes me [him] as her most original contribution."

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<sup>8</sup> Sarah Blaffer Hrdy is a primatologist and anthropologist, author of *Mothers & Others* 2009 , *Mother Nature* 1999 amongst others

<sup>9</sup> John Bowlby is the founder of Attachment Theory whose work underscored the importance of a secure base in the form of a primary carer for infants. Although he also acknowledged infants were better off with a 'good enough' mother as opposed to a perfect mother who might never put the baby down and fed on demand ad infinitum, Sarah Blaffer Hrdy argues in *Mothers and Others* that humans are not like other primates in that we have always relied on allo-parents in the forms of sisters, grannies and aunts and extended members of the group. Other monkeys who raise their young this way are macaques, marmosets and tamarins. However, no other apes have been known to. Co-operative breeding is fairly common in animals beyond the primate order, however, it's expensive in terms of energy and since human babies take a lot longer to grow up than most insects, birds and non-human animals, it requires a great deal of empathy on behalf of the non-parental carers to continue doing so. (176; 2009) Hrdy explores at great length what it might have been about humans as opposed to other apes and how this aspect of our past led to the evolution of intersubjectivity, and hence complex syntactical language. (231; 2009)

<sup>10</sup> Melanie Klein is a key figure in psychotherapy working at the same time as Anna Freud, b 1882 d 1960

<sup>11</sup> Robert Young is a philosopher and Kleinian psychotherapist, b 1935

(Young, 1994; ch. 5) He describes how all forms of civility are a collectively agreed but nevertheless flimsy veneer, and we live in constant fear of our innermost selves erupting, along with the collapse of institutions which we have erected to keep our supposed 'inhumanity' at bay. Narrative can be seen a way of supporting civility, although art and some sciences, suggests Young, have sought to reveal and even embrace these usually repressed drives; acknowledging the primordial human self is, in his mind, more useful than denial. "Think of the 'Ship of Fools' and the depictions and expressions of the mad by Bosch, Breughel, Goya and van Gogh, Magritte and Man Ray, as well as the manifestos of the Surrealists and Dadaists. In their very different ways, they all celebrated illumination coming from the most primitive levels of the unconscious. Like the critiques of the categories of psychiatry written by Foucault (1967), Laing (1960) and Cooper (1972), these artists pointed to madness as offering a basis for making critiques of the repressions, sublimations and alienation of conventional society and put one in touch with something truer and in some senses better (see also Gordon, 1990)." (Young, 1994; ch 5) Language therefore separates us from our preverbal selves; from our basest instincts, from taboos such as incest, allowing us to create laws, structures and institutions that reign it all in but, as with most things, there is in Young's words, a cost. Again, complexity surrounding the existence of language and ergo narrative go far beyond the need to communicate about food, although of course, finding enough to eat and preventing other groups from impinging on your own group's foraging might be a key motivator.

Whichever of the two positions above holds most true, and it is more likely to be a multi-faceted combination of these and other ideas which instigated the development of our complex syntactical language, narrative we now understand, offers us a blueprint for comprehending reality, without which our pre-verbal selves are perhaps at risk of being no different from any other beasts as illustrated in Wes Anderson's<sup>12</sup> *Fantastic Mr, Fox*. "Why, Foxy, why?" asks his wife when they end up underground due to his rampant pilfering. "Because I'm a wild animal." "You're also a husband and father," she replies, pointing out the opposing tensions we all live with. (Anderson, 2009) Considering how confounding life can be nowadays from any position you might choose to look at it, it seems extremely unlikely we no longer require some way to navigate, support and understand our existence.

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<sup>12</sup> Wes Anderson is a film maker known for a quirky and unusual visual style, and who it might be argued, makes films which often serve to illuminate frailties about ourselves but always tenderly and with much humour

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Figure 3. Wes Anderson's *Fantastic Mr. Fox*, 2009, based on the book by Roald Dahl, 1970 ©WesAnderson



#### 4. If not about narrative dissolving as a form, why is non-linear narrative popular now?

Clement Greenberg<sup>13</sup> 'insists', the Modernists have 'never meant anything like a break with the past' (2003; 778); equally, an evolutionary change to the way in which narrative is represented is of course a continuation of what has come before. Narrative is always evolving, not in terms of this year (or last), or this decade or even this century. Taking a longer view, societal reactions to the Reformation, the Enlightenment and early days of the industrial revolution all inform current perception.

Considering the timing of Nietzsche's<sup>14</sup> recognition (rather than any declaration (Jones, 2016)) that God, the construct, was dead, it should come as no surprise in an increasingly secular world that the Surrealists and Dadaists would play with meaning and with our relationship to language. Dada embraced the chopping up of time and form across art forms. Often they attempted to throw meaning out of the window altogether. Hugo Ball<sup>15</sup> famously told a story at the Cabaret Voltaire consisting entirely of meaningless words, although saliently a recognisable narrative persisted. (Gale, 1997;32) Much of Dada's work in particular can be read in terms of challenging structural power. Those who traditionally maintained authority did so throughout the centuries, and still do, thanks to the structures disseminated through language, and therefore narrative<sup>16</sup>. Guy Debord<sup>17</sup> states the oldest social specialisation is that of power. (1967; loc 499) However, he also suggests that rather than replace religion with secularism we have simply transformed our relationship so that now we worship things instead. "The Spectacle is the material reconstruction of the religious illusion. Spectacular technology has not dispelled the religious clouds where men has placed their own powers detached from themselves; it has only tied them to an earthly base." (Debord, 1967; Loc 486) In other words we have handed power over to advertisers and manufacturers, whereas in the past we allowed priests and kings to manage it.

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<sup>13</sup> Clement Greenberg, influential art critic, b 1909, d 1994

<sup>14</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, philosopher, writer, b 1844, d 1900

<sup>15</sup> Hugo Ball, poet, artist, leading figure in Dada movement, b 1866, d 1927

<sup>16</sup> I would suggest you can have language without narrative but you might struggle to have narrative without language of some description

<sup>17</sup> Guy DeBord, key figure in Situationist movement, b 1931, d 1994



Figure 4. Hugo Ball, Cabaret Dada, 1916, photographer unknown

## 5. Cinema's contribution

We have established narrative provides us with representation, which helps to contain the real<sup>18</sup>; a way to comprehend our roles as human beings in a civil society as opposed to wild animals, possibly with anal fixations and awkward desires, primitive anxieties and aggressive impulses. Narrative also provides our brains with recognisable patterns by which it learns to function. Bruner explores diachronic sequencing and suggests that, even taking flashbacks and imagined fantasies about the future into account, "What underlies all these forms for representing narrative is a "mental model" whose defining property is its unique pattern of events over time" (Bruner, 1991; 3) (And as well as acting as a container for the real, some narratives ask us to face it, by deliberately probing pre-verbal phantasies<sup>19</sup> that might be seen as a threat to the norm.)

This essay focused at the beginning on film-based cultural texts from the end of 2016 which explored non-linear narrative, but as discussed editing 'time', or creating episodic texts, has been emerging for decades across the arts and especially in film due to the relative ease with which it can be done. *Intolerance* (D. W. Griffith, 1916) is an early example and described as 'groundbreaking' in its rejection of a linear time-frame; *Citizen Kane* (Orson Welles, 1941); *Pulp Fiction* (Quentin Tarantino, 1994); *Un chien andalou* (Luis Buñuel, 1929); *Weekend* (Jean-Luc Godard, 1967); *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (Michel Gondry, 2004); and *Memento* (Christopher Nolan, 2000) are just a few from a list of top 20 non-linear narrative films easily Googled. (Lara, 2015). In fact, ever since people realised it was possible to create montage, artists have been playing with time lines and the trope comes in and out of fashion.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> See comment in my reflection at end of essay relating to illusion of self and consequences for the real via a materialist point of view

<sup>19</sup> Phantasies, as opposed to fantasies, is a term coined by Freud but developed extensively by Melanie Klein and refers to the inner pre-verbal and often unpalatable desires which underlie human drives.

<sup>20</sup> We might also argue people have been playing with long edits, and film makers such as Béla Tarr don't edit at all, instead opting for unbroken action, no overlaid score, and banal scenes – More or less dictatorial than highly complex montage, one wonders?



Figure 5. Orson Welles, producer, co-writer, director and star of *Citizen Kane*, 1941

The rejection of linear narrative is a function of modern storytelling, which perhaps in the end only confirms forward motion as a state of mind for human understanding. As Bruner in his paper on narrative says, "The events themselves need to be constituted in the light of the overall narrative-in Propp's terms, to be made "functions" of the story." (Bruner, 1991; 8) Editing forward motion so it appears out of order usually helps to tell the story more effectively. Time in these cases might even be seen as one of the protagonists. Bruner goes on to say 'for a tale to be worth telling' it must 'breach, deviate, or violate' the 'canonical script'. Such stories may not be that unconventional in the first instance but the breach allows for the possibility to move away from 'readerly'<sup>21</sup> texts, towards more 'writerly' fare. He adds breaches can have profound consequences. "And this is, perhaps, what makes the innovative storyteller such a powerful figure in a culture. He may go beyond the conventional scripts, leading people to see human happenings in a fresh way, indeed, in a way they had never before "noticed" or even dreamed. The shift from Hesiod to Homer, the advent of "inner adventure" in Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, the advent of Flaubert's perspectivalism, or Joyce's epiphanizing of banalities-these are all innovations that *probably shaped our narrative versions of everyday reality as well as changed the course of literary history, the two perhaps being not that different.*" (Emphasis mine) (Bruner, 1991; 12)

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<sup>21</sup> Bruner describes readerly and writerly narratives: "These constitute what Roland Barthes called "readerly" texts, in contrast to "writerly" ones that challenge the listener or reader into unrehearsed interpretive activity.<sup>18</sup>" (Bruner, 1991; 9)

If we look at just one version of structural film theory and apply, for instance, <sup>22</sup>Tzvetan Todorov's ideas surrounding narrative to the film *Arrival*, we might say equilibrium was disrupted in Louise Brook's world when aliens arrived on earth and the government asked her to learn to communicate with them. In doing so she discovers along with the audience she no longer perceives time in forward motion, but sees the past, future and present together. At the end equilibrium is restored, even though forward motion time isn't - the breach. We accept that time works differently for Louise as it makes sense of her visions and clarifies questions we have about the narrative. *Arrival* is deemed a successful and original film in many ways<sup>23</sup>, but a basic and well-worn structure is nevertheless adhered to, although it might seem reductive to view it this way.

*Anywhen* at the Turbine Hall evidently successfully taps into the zeitgeist. It is large and spectacular. A yeast element means it lives and breathes at the same time as being mechanical and digital, much in the way we might be heading, as argued by Self amongst others. At times visitors might feel like they are right inside a video game. Its size and the intention to evolve during its run are ambitious and it has had excellent reviews. The fact it is sponsored by a large corporation has to affect its place in the world. Perhaps sponsorship makes it as much a part of Debord's spectacle as *Eastenders* might be, or *The Polar Express* or the *BBC News*. The most relevant aspect about *Anywhen* may relate to Will Self's point regarding "absolute fluidity and ubiquity of bi-directional digital media", which Parenno seems to have emulated and competed with in the Turbine Hall, for a crowd used to having their senses bombarded with intense flickering computer screens that potentially take us, digitally speaking, anywhere.

Both texts seem more meaningful than the story of Genesis, which describes a paradigm that has long been outgrown by a society which largely no longer believes in an all-mighty God who tells us how to think and be. At a point in history where sub-atomic particles behave like waves, stop when observed, remain entangled when separated, defy laws of gravity, space and time, and are described by scientists as 'fuzzy' and 'spooky'; and while we don't really understand why, we are probably better placed with narratives that question, subvert, challenge and provoke rather than dictate our understanding of reality, as well as help to internalize a more relevant mental model by which to live.

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<sup>22</sup> Tzvetan Todorov's narrative theory suggests that all narratives follow a three-part structure where they begin with equilibrium where everything is balanced, progress as something comes along to disrupt that equilibrium, and finally reach a resolution, when equilibrium is restored. (Maphoza, 2013)

<sup>23</sup> See reasons for *Arrival*'s success by Sam Allard, 2016 <http://www.clevescene.com/scene-and-heard/archives/2016/11/11/11-reasons-why-arrival-is-the-best-film-of-the-year>

## 6. This isn't the end...

In *Society of the Spectacle*, Guy Debord tells us "the world we see is not the real world but the world we are conditioned to see". (Vague, 2011; loc 35)

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Figure 6. Still from *Society of the Spectacle*, 1973, based on Guy Debord's book of 1967

The *Polar Express* line quoted on page 1, "Sometimes the most real things in the world are the things we can't see" comes from a film made in Hollywood (the epicenter of western film history), about a cultural, fantasy figure, Father Christmas, who we all know is fake but have agreed to maintain in our collective imaginations for tradition's sake. A bit like we relate to religion. The film is animated but relies on a process that includes real people called Mo-Cap where an "actor's live performance is digitally captured by computerized cameras, and becomes a human blueprint for creating virtual characters." (Phillips, 2004) This all seems like a topsy-turvy sleight of hand, in a world with a nebulous and uncertain relationship with reality, told to us by contributing manipulators and advantage-takers of that paradigm. The makers of films, which have such an impact on our perception of reality, can at times seem more than a little disingenuous.

We worry about our eventual, possibly inevitable, merging with technology, and our sense of being human. What should probably be of greater concern for the time being is most of our narratives stem from advertisers<sup>24</sup> <sup>25</sup>. Regardless, until we are communicating in pure maths alone, it is likely we will continue to rely on narrative in some form, even if it looks quite different to the narrative we have been used to. It is difficult to agree with Will Self about no longer needing stories even though the case made by Greenfield and others about epigenetic<sup>26</sup> modifications to our biology seems robust. It is not narrative that is dissolving; rather it is our comprehension of everything we have held for so long to be the 'truth'. As such, perhaps indeed *because of digital media's influence*, I would argue our need for alternative and challenging narrative to provide us with models and templates for understanding reality remains existentially critical.

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<sup>24</sup> The LEGO Movie (2014) is perhaps the one of the most extreme examples of a commercial film being consumerist propaganda

<sup>25</sup> See George Monbiot: *Celebrity isn't just harmless fun – it's the smiling face of the corporate machine*, 2016

<sup>26</sup> "Epigenetics is the study of potentially heritable changes in gene expression (active versus inactive genes) that does not involve changes to the underlying DNA sequence" (nd) See <http://www.whatisepigenetics.com/fundamentals/>

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## Reflection

### Demonstration of subject based knowledge

When I read *Family Frames* by Marianne Hirsh in 2015 I was quite frustrated by not being able to really get to grips with what she said about Lacan more fully, although some of the ideas she explored helped enormously when we looked at image-screens (even though the language Lacan uses makes it still fairly impenetrable at times). Tackling the 'real', was something I really looked forward to, despite the assignment question, "What is Reality" being ludicrously vast. The issue for me was to make sure I honed in on a manageable element, which I'm not certain I succeeded with. Adhering to Slavoj Žižek's interpretation of *virtual imaginary*, *virtual symbolic* and the *real*, I argued that language and therefore narrative act as building material in the shape of the former two in order to contain the latter<sup>27</sup>. (Žižek, 2003)

I wanted very much to look at language and the way it shapes our reality – and how, if at all, we access the real. Understanding that there are several ways to think about the real has been key – i.e. the pre-verbal, primordial, unsigned pool we draw from, or the matter of factness of things minus their symbolic and imaginary attachments. (Žižek, 2003)

Of course, I thought I might head down the path of the female gaze and voice. The way we are required to write, the debates about writing in the subjective or objective, passive or active voice are all so interesting. And I wonder about this in terms of separating us from the real, and how some activities don't seem to be quite so contained by a symbolic order, such as breastfeeding an infant for instance.

I did have some concerns that we were sort of being directed towards looking at reality TV. I know that might have been something to consider; programmes are often referred to nowadays as *constructed* reality TV – i.e. it's been scripted. I think something about that is quite funny and brimming with societal insanity, except where children are concerned, which I think is deeply irresponsible and wrong. Looking at why our society makes or watches a programme such as *Naked Attraction* (Channel 4, 2016) would have been interesting to explore, but I'm not sure I could have avoided my blogging voice.

In the end I went with narrative as a container for the real and provider of a mental model for existence. But I had to leave out aspects that seemed fairly important. The use of emoticons might indicate a retreat from complex language and would have been worth looking at. Film structure shows us how the same stories repeat and repeat. There is quite a lot about trauma and repetition in *Return of the Real* by Hal Foster, but there is also much to say about ritual and repeated learning being

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<sup>27</sup> See *The Reality of the Real*, directed by Ben Right  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KdpudWL5i68>

important for us, as discussed by Alain de Botton and I wanted to cover that in some way too (2016).

There is a great deal in Will Self's article which I did not have the space to explore. He makes intriguing statements such as "Indeed, there may not be any need to tell the others where the food is in the future, because in an important sense *there are no others.*" (My emphasis) (2016) It might have been very interesting for me to explore the notion of self and other through language and the reported trend towards narcissism and sociopathy in society, which interests me a great deal.

I would also like to have explored the plasticity of the mind, the concept of having a mind at all as opposed to a collection of neurons that make us all think we have a central core self, at which point even the real is possibly an illusion.

And then Self also mentions the 'tyranny of film', which would have been highly relevant. In the conclusion I leap from suggesting film makers are key manipulators of reality to the notion that films can in fact be viewed as long adverts, certainly Hollywood ones and much of TV. I also allude to this by mentioning Parenno's sponsorship. People must eat – I don't value judge but it worth thinking about and could have been my essay subject.

Finally, it would have been timely to think about how an illusive and nebulous narrative relates to society discovering that perhaps not everything we are told by the press is accurate, along with the fact social media allows anyone to join in with dubious news creation. This feels deeply related to the themes I covered but seemed too big a subject to discuss here.

At any rate, I think my subject-based knowledge is probably relatively good for the level. And it has certainly developed further due to the course.

### **Demonstration of research skills**

I read constantly but maybe too many articles and not enough books. I'm hoping having ended the course, moving forward I will have time to return to some of the books I'd like to finish and also start some I haven't got round to. Saying that I do come across some really relevant material by reading extracts posted by social science sites and they are often more digestible than the heavy tomes they come from. Remembering where I've read things is most challenging, so I created a page to simply record links that may prove useful as I came across them.

<https://uvcsjf.wordpress.com/2016/10/03/assignment-5-research-links/> Even so, I read something the other day with a quote by Oscar Wilde that was so perfect and for some reason I didn't save it and now I have no idea where it is, which is really annoying.

I do tend to return to the same passages and even sentences, I know, but I am a little obsessive and so these will be about things that I really want to get to the bottom of. The Hugo Ball poem for instance has stayed with me since first seeing it

performed in 1994. There is something so powerful about it and the weird costume he wore.

### **Demonstration of critical evaluation skills**

I have developed in this respect, I know. It's not that I believed everything I read before, but now I am able to pull things apart in a more robust way and investigate the way ideas are constructed. I have been moving that way anyway but perhaps I didn't question things I identified with as much as I might have done. (Saying that I never fell hook, line and sinker for attachment parenting even though I identified with quite a lot of aspects that stemmed from it. I always questioned the blind romanticising that some go in for.) I suspect in some ways it was my writing skills rather than my critical evaluation skills that needed more work. And that related to the way I organise my thoughts. I can see my thinking is more ordered than it was. I hope it continues in the same vein. The writing is still polemic but that might be what I'm stuck with, being me.

### **Communication**

I write far too much probably and it is generally a struggle to edit. I may have been able to fit more in if I were tighter with sentence structures. I really struggled with the sort of writing that is required here during the course and probably always would do but I have worked hard to overcome some of this. I am desperate to go and find out about feminine writing and look forward to reading H el ene Cisoux. I am also keen to find out more from the women who I am working with on a portrait, Mandy Thatcher, about her dissertation. She wrote in an email to me about it: "The starting point for our Masters is that the dominant, masculine way of viewing and understanding the world via logical, rational, empiricist study - which encourages detachment and abstraction - is connected to our failure to finding new ways of understanding our world in a deepening social and ecological crisis."(2016) As such Mandy was encouraged to write in first person from day one of her masters. This interests me so much. I feel like some of the writing issues I have had here are related to these differing styles and ways of approaching study. That's not to say I didn't have much to learn, and am pleased I have moved some way towards being able to construct work as required. I think I am beginning to choose my words far more carefully than I did 12 months ago. I really hope I have begun to express my thoughts more fluently.