

From the Emergent Drama of Interpretation to Enscreenment

Eugene Halton

University of Notre Dame

The sources of self and symbolizing as arising through what I am calling the emergent drama of interpretation.

How does that drama continue to animate human conduct today?

The rise of the symbol can be viewed in the context of social practices such as mother-infant interaction, tracking and group hunting, and ritual life, all of which arise in *dramatic interaction*.

Homo Sapiens Sapiens as The Degenerate Monkey

Charles Peirce's concept of *degenerate monkey* attempts to draw attention to our prolonged newborn-like nature, or neoteny. He means "degenerate" both in the mathematical sense of a genetic falling away from a pure form, in this case from more quickly matured genomes of other primates, but also in the more everyday sense in which the newer portion of the human brain, the prefrontal cortex, can also contribute to monkeying-around hubris. The degenerate monkey in this sense can get into some bad scrapes, falsely idealizing them as "civilized."

The Development of Symbolic Interaction

George Herbert Mead's interactive model of self:

“...It is just because the individual finds himself taking the attitudes of the others who are involved in his conduct that he becomes an object for himself...We appear as selves in our conduct in so far as we ourselves take the attitude that others take toward us, in these correlative activities...We take the role of what may be called the “generalized other.”

The Significant Symbol,

as Mead calls it, is the sign “which is addressed to the self when it is addressed to another individual, and is addressed to another, in form to all other individuals, when it is addressed to the self...through this sympathetic placing of themselves in each other’s roles, and finding thus in their own experiences the responses of the others, what would otherwise be an unintelligent gesture, acquires just the value which is connoted by signification.”

Communicative Cooperation Versus Imitation

Mead: “The probable beginning of human communication was in cooperation, not in imitation, where conduct differed and yet where the act of the one answered to and called out the act of the other. The conception of imitation as it has functioned in social psychology needs to be developed into a theory of social stimulation and response and of the social situations which these stimulations and responses create.”

Communicative cooperation is the starting point for Mead’s model of the interactive situation. Yet it begins even earlier than Mead imagined.

The Contractions of Mind

What is typically viewed as progress in human development, from the advent of civilization to the rise of the modern scientific worldview, the saga of historical development, can be taken as progress in precision embedded within a regression of consciousness.

History is the regression from the evolutionary conditions of human consciousness that I call *animate mind*. (Halton 2007).

The domestication of plants and animals through settlement , beginning about 10,000 years ago and eventuating in cities and civilization, represented a transformation and contraction to a very different outlook, to that of ***anthropocentric mind***, in which the human element became central.

The rise of the modern mechanical worldview, beginning with the invention of the mechanical clock in about the 1270s, represented a further transformation, which I term ***mechanico-centric mind***, characterized by the view that the universe is like a vast machine.

I view these transformations not as progress, but as contractions of mind (see Figure 1).

The Contractions of Mind

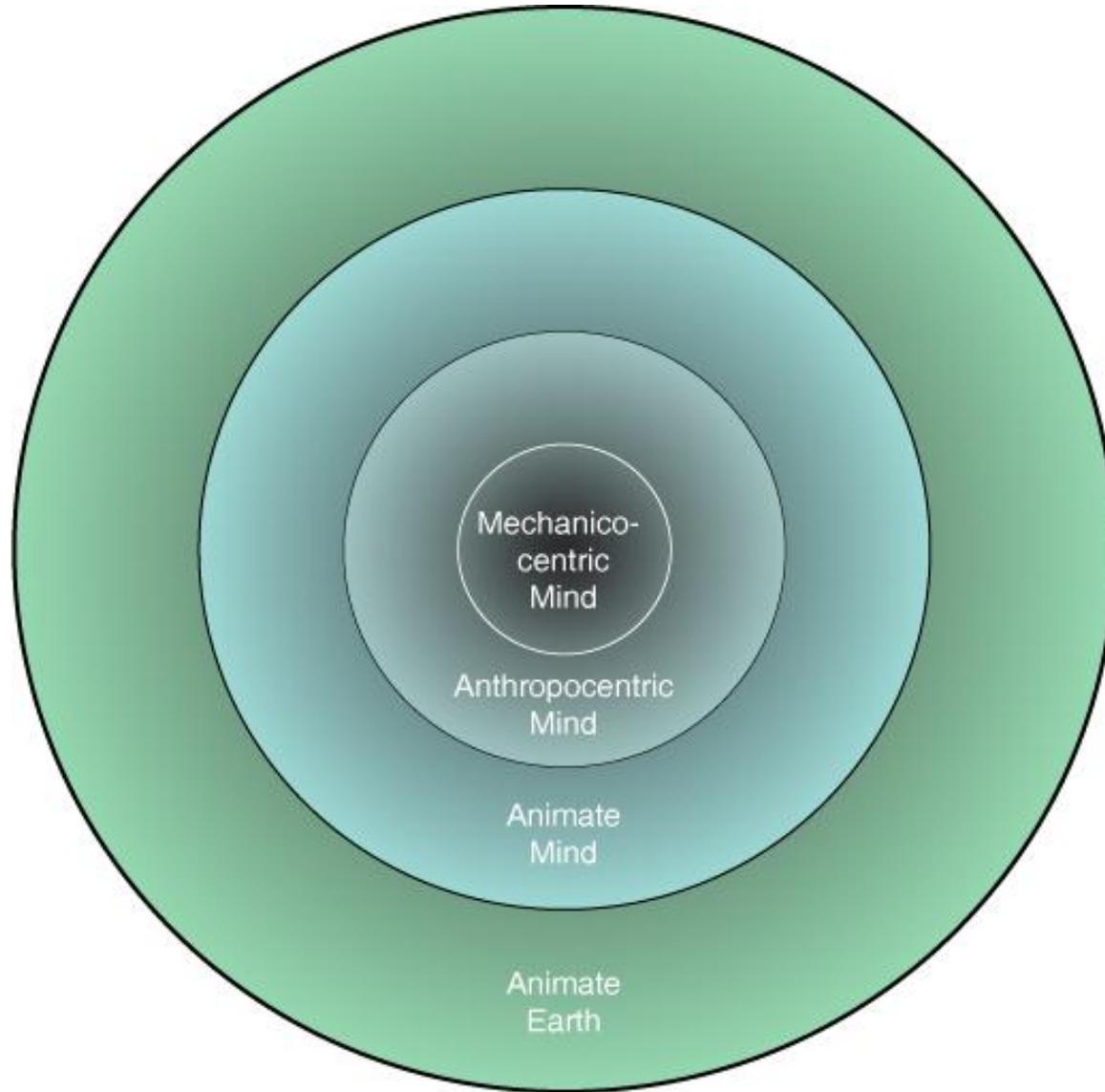


Figure 1

On Evolutionary Religion and the Contraction from Dramatic Participation to Spectatorship

Religion arose in our evolutionary past primarily as a way to connect to the intelligible and edible habitat, through ritual, dance, song, and foraging arts and sciences such as tracking.

Talking, Dancing, and Tracking with God

!Nqate Xqamxebe, a !Xo San hunter of the Kalahari Desert Bushmen, featured persistence hunter in *The Great Dance: A Hunter's Story* (2000):

“When you track an animal—you must become the animal. Tracking is like dancing, because your body is happy—you can feel it in the dance and then you know that the hunting will be good. When you are doing these things you are talking with God.”

Tracker Tom Brown Jr. on Lobular Pressure Releases:

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“...the condition of the small intestine, the large intestine, the bladder, and the colon. We can see the rhythm of the breathing, whether the animal is taking a breath in or out in any given track. We can read mild afflictions, such as a common cold, a slight injury, arthritic conditions, congestion, sniffing, as well as growling, grunting, and other vocal callings. Here too we can read countless other normal body functions, conditions, and internal movements. Yet here in the lobulars we are also connected to the finest outer body movements. Movements that cannot be picked up by the human eye, even as it physically watches the animal or human.

Soft external movements, they are called. Shivering, panting, degree of ear cocking, tongue position, hesitations, twitches, minute balance compensations, snarling, nose twitching, slight tail movements, and so many others are the soft external movements. But to identify, and understand, these deep internal and soft external movements, there is a price to pay. A price that is measured in countless hours of dirt time and intense, impassioned, almost obsessive experimentation”

(The Science and Art of Tracking 1998: 118-119).

Homo Percussionis

Homo percussionis as a real missing link in the evolution of humans into symbol-using creatures, ignored by evolutionary biologists and archaeologists because cooperative drumming, dancing, and rhythmically attuning don't fit neatly into the predominant functionalist outlook of what mattered in human evolution, the *homo faber* view.

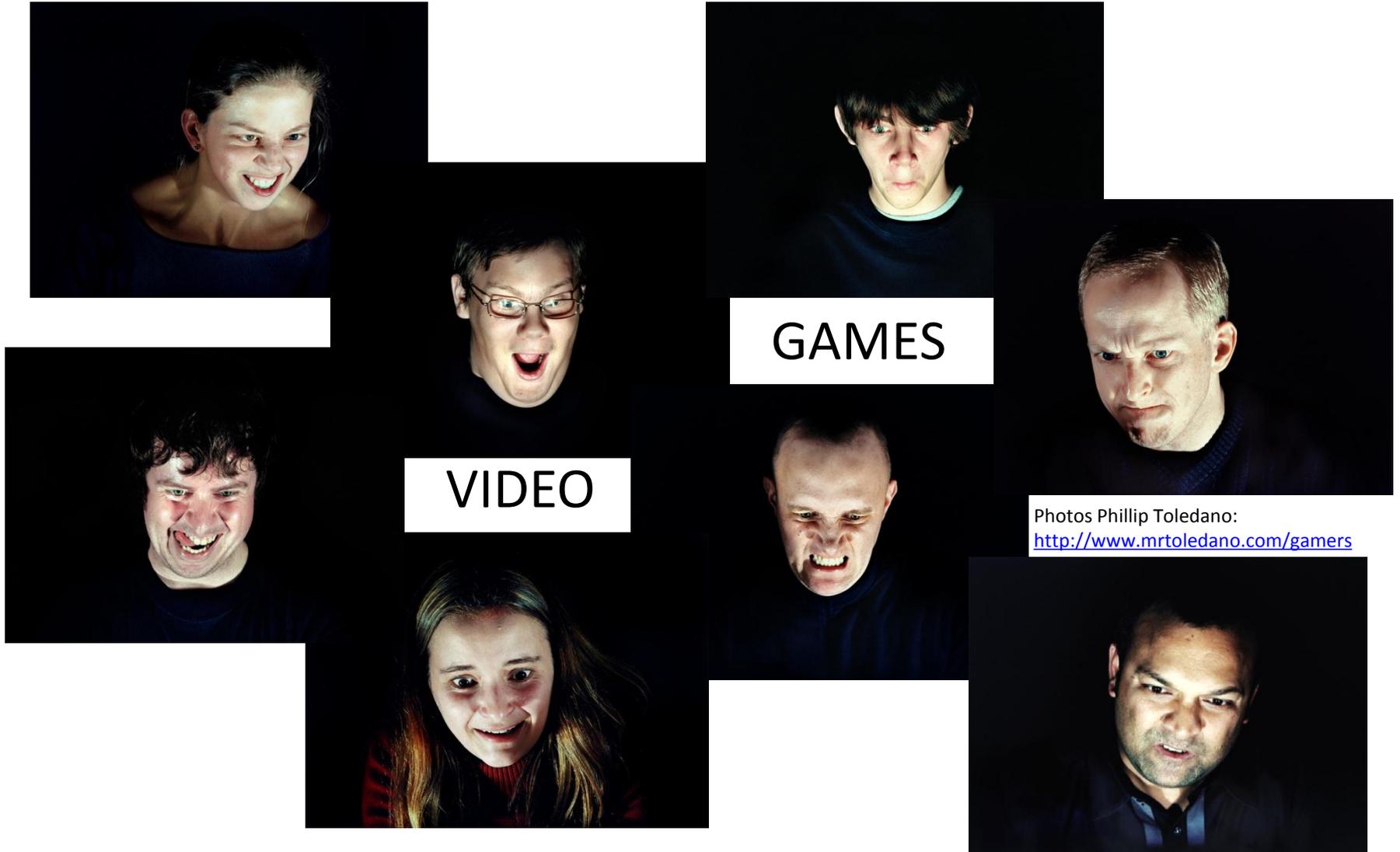
From Wild Entrancement to Enscreenment



Infant Conditioning and Narco-Hypnosis

Aldous Huxley, Oct. 21, 1949 letter to his former student George Orwell, after congratulating him on his new book *1984*:

“Within the next generation I believe that the world’s leaders will discover that infant conditioning and narco-hypnosis are more efficient, as instruments of government, than clubs and prisons, and that the lust for power can be just as completely satisfied by suggesting people into loving their servitude as by flogging them and kicking them into obedience.”



Infant Conditioning and Narco-Hypnosis

61 % of babies one year or younger view TV or videos every day for at least an hour.

83% of children under the age of six watch about two hours of combined screen media per day, including TV, videos/DVDs, video games, and computers.
(Rideout et al. 2006).

8-18 year olds spend 7:38 minutes of media time per day,
7 days per week

For Tweens between 11 and 14 it is higher:
8 hours 40 minutes.
(Rideout et al. 2009).

The Virtue of Virtuality

Symbolic Communication and Virtuality

How did the virtuality that transformed us into healthy humans has now become the virtuality that may be virtually extinguishing our humanity?

The answer is suggested by D. H. Lawrence: “That which is lovely to the automatic process is hateful to the spontaneous soul. The wakeful living soul fears automatism as it fears death: death being automatic.”

The alternative is neither to create a Brave New Technology, a virtual Deus-ex-Machina that can save us from overdependence on machined enscreened existence, nor to sound a Luddite retreat from technology. Rather it is to consider how virtuality can be made to again be the servant of “wakeful living souls,” of spontaneous, self-originated conduct as central to the practice of everyday life.

Bodying Forth from the Bodies We Already Inhabit

The conditions through which the symbol originally arose, in progressively cooperative parenting and habitat relations, can be selectively recalled here and now, from the very bodies we inhabit.