

Writing and Imagination in the Age of Artificial Intelligence: Toward Narrative as Dialogic Abduction*

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Abstract: This paper aims to look into possibilities of future writing in the age of artificial intelligence. ‘Who writes’ matters in a technological culture of co-existence of humans and machines. I thus investigate the aligned questions of ‘why we write’ and ‘how we write’, exploring writing with imagination, namely, narrative writing, for communication and transmission. As for methodology, I examine three domains of narrative with imagination based on Peirce’s metaphysical semiotics and Paul Ricoeur’s imagination theory: esthetics with oneiric imagination, poetics with narrative/analogical imagination, and speculative rhetoric with social imagination. I argue that narrative communication with social imagination which comprises an explanatory narrative process of quality through fact to representation for dialogic abduction is geared toward discovering self’s identity by means of re-authoring conversation. This thus results in enhancing a communal narrative self to transmit virtues and values to the following generations.

Keywords: writing, social imagination, narrative communication, re-authoring, speculative rhetoric

1. Writing as a pharmakon in the age of Artificial Intelligence

When inventions such as a writing system or an Artificial Intelligence (AI) system emerge in lifeworld, they come as “remedy” (pharmakon) or semiotic remediation, representing the bivalence of the phenomenon. The concept of semiotic remediation from a historical standpoint raises the problem of reality, leading to reconceptualizing reality in accordance with time and space. We experience the effects resulting from the pharmakon in the phenomena of competing

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or opposing realities which are derived from narrative modeling of possible worlds. With narrative functioning to represent and construct reality, there are as many realities as narratives. We engage with narrative through imagination, action, and interpretation in lifeworld. Should we then anticipate that narrative will function to lead us to a unity as an order or law to overcome narrative relativism? How can we secure truthful representation of narrative or rescue a narrative form from its misuse or overuse? How can we use a narrative medium for a rhetorical method in an interlocutory act for interpersonal communication?

In his recent book *Semiotics with a conscience: Decoding dangerous discourses* (2024) Marcel Danesi emphasizes the importance of semiotic mediation in warning of dangers in the age of AI in which ethics is the center of attention in dangerous discourse. Especially, narratives are very powerful tools not only for communication but also for transmission as pharmakon with dual and opposite directions of goodness and wickedness. Narrative discourse can function not only to warn of the danger of climate change or nuclear power through SF films but also to mislead people by false narratives in media where no ethical implications can be found. False and misleading narratives are confined to the selfish and self-interested world and thus limited to the present reality, being disconnected from future generations. This results in attention to the functions of narratives on ethics from semiotics with a conscience. In this regard, writing with imagination will be fundamentally different from AI writing which is controversial as to whether it helps human writing or deteriorates the capacity of a human's creative thinking.

In this paper, I thus draw on the ethical implications in narrative process, focusing on writing and imagination based on the poetics of will by Paul Ricoeur and Peirce's metaphysical semiotics, drawing on the reality of firstness in iconicity. The paper argues that narrative writing with imagination contributes to discovering meaning-truth in two dimensions of space and time. One is narrative communication between the self and other on the spatial dimension and the other is narrative transmission from one generation to the next on the temporal dimension. The spatial dimension is characterized by interpersonal communication based on social reality and the temporal dimension is characterized by intergenerational transmission based on narrative reality. For this reason, narrative is a psychological and also logical tool for communication and transmission; it requires the concept of subjectivity as semiotic agent in relations to imagination and model. In this respect, narrative practice shows an abductive reasoning, rendering it a model for reality. Narrative is thus useful fiction as a model for environment in warning, taking a narrative form of myth and SF on the temporal dimension, and a model for lifeworld in morality in order to understand oneself and others.

In the following, first I describe the purpose of writing in the AI era. Second, narrative process in writing with imagination is discussed in the three dimensions: esthetic dimension of story with oneiric (dreamlike) imagination, poetic dimension of narrative with narrative imagination, and speculative rhetorical dimension of narration with social imagination. Third, narrative practice and its implications for ethics are explored by means of 're-authoring' as meaning-making activity through which making alternative stories is operative based on dialogic abductive reasoning between conversation partners. Consequently, narrative process of writing with imagination and re-authoring conversation with dialogic abduction allows one to discover one's identity by objectification of the inner world for knowing the world and the self.

2. Why write?

Naomi Baron's remarks on the difference between AI writing and human writing are interesting in many ways, covering what human writing ought to be (Baron 2023). She describes the difference between writer and author: the former is functional and instrumental, whereas the latter is mediational and ontological in that the author has responsibility for one's writing and thus the writing is trustworthy. In that sense, the author is associated with authority. Hence the author and his/her writing are tied to each other. We end up with the problem between AI writing and authorship. On the surface level, it seems to be difficult to distinguish between AI writing and human writing. When we read the title of Baron's book *Who wrote this?: How AI and the Lure of Efficiency Threaten Human Writing* (2023), we are puzzled at the efficiency of AI writing, which is threatening human writing, as she describes. On the bright side, we can however objectify who we are as against AI, abstracting 'humanness' in terms of writing activity. This is why we have to ask ourselves why we write and what is the purpose of writing.

There are various ways to write according to different reasons and contexts. For practical purposes, we can write with AI writing assistance but there are also specific areas of human writing with imagination, dealing with the internal world to objectify and so discover who we are, and imagining the possible world to re-present the present world for transmission to following generations. The former is other-oriented and the latter is future-oriented through communication and transmission, respectively. In this case, writing takes the form of narrative as a means of mediation between minds and between generations, describing and narrating human actions and identity. The spatial dimension of writing is associated with the present self of interpersonal communication for the purpose of knowing oneself, and the temporal dimension of writing involves the future self of intergenerational transmission for the purpose of transmitting a story as a narrative model for the good life. Regarding transmission, a good narrative is represented in SF films dealing with environmental humanities with an ecopoetic approach. Hence, warning narratives on climate change, for instance, play a crucial role in shaping the world. As for communication, it is through re-authoring conversation that narrative practice toward others works for creating a new dimension of reality.

3. Writing with imagination: narrative as explanatory process

The writing instruments mentioned above may be AI, pictures, images, or languages. In this section I will discuss imagination as writing instrument inasmuch as the act of imagination is crucial in writing activity as a form of reading which is psychological and cognitive in nature. This means that while one is writing with imagination, the person is a writer in a technical sense but also an author who is responsible for his/her own writing based on the criteria of truth, which comprises not only factual truth but, more importantly, meaning-truth. In other words, the author is a bearer of truth. The concept of author with authority is endorsed by writing activity which is by nature dialogic between the past self and the present self or between the self and other. Put differently, in the act of reading, the present individual self, being objectified through the act of writing, allows the author to re-write (re-authoring) about the future self in

dialogic relation with other, reshaping the world and thus discovering meaning-truth. In this regard, the act of imagination is considered to be that of reading, that is, reading images, being coupled with writing activity to discover the self's identity and meaning-truth.

Narrative process of writing with imagination (reading) is investigated through the idea of the Universe as 'God's great poem' which is expressed in Peirce (CP 5.119) and described as follows:

...the Universe is a vast representamen, a great symbol of God's purpose, working out its conclusions in living realities. Now every symbol must have, organically attached to it, its Indices of Reactions and Icons of Qualities; and such parts as these reactions and qualities play in an argument, that they of course play in the Universe, that Universe being precisely an argument (Peirce, EP 2:193, 1998).

Therefore, narrative reading is like reading God's great poem as an argument of dialogic abduction with icons of possibility and indexes of actuality. In this sense, writing activity with narrative imagination is geared to figuring things out in themselves, being detected by way of the moral sentiments of empathy and sympathy. These sentiments comply with the concept of self-assertion as semiotic subject, being capable of experiencing otherness in actuality in dialogic and dialectic abduction for discovering truth and reality.

There are three dimensions of looking at the relationship between writing and imagination. It is a prerequisite to employ a 'method of methods' for the study. The method of methods is defined as a process in the dimension of Peirce esthetics (Kevelson 1987). That is, quality, fact, and representation are in a process to be explained according to Peirce's categories of being as phenomenon. In this sense, narrative is considered to be explanatory discourse (Liszka and Babb 2020, Chap. 7), with a composite of action, subject, intention, and agent, which is associated with the act of imagination in the dimension of esthetics. But for the idea of esthetic quality, fact, and representation to be enacted, it needs to be embodied in the poetic dimension. This poetic dimension concerns poetic language which is a form of embodiment of quality by sharing the quality of metaphysical Object. For this reason, poetic language works with double consciousness on material and abstract quality. The double consciousness functions as a source of thinking through imagination, which is called narrative imagination¹ in that the physical image is analogous to moving pictures of thought. Narrative imagination is thus operative, imagining others with empathy and sympathy in a narrative world. The esthetic quality of a story as an abstract idea with the sense of the self is objectified in relative quality in the poetic dimension of narrative with the sense of other, leading to the speculative rhetorical dimension² of narration for interpersonal communication.

Based on the three dimensions of interpersonal communication³ by means of writing with imagination, three dimensions of the interrelation of writing and imagination will be explored. The three dimensions are the esthetic dimension of a story with oneiric imagination, the poetic

¹ It is also called analogical imagination based on structural similarity.

² This speculative rhetorical dimension is also called general rhetorical dimension in that interpersonal communication concerns the iconic moment of generality in feeling as general idea for metaphoric reasoning in abduction to create a possible world.

³ The three-dimensional interpersonal communication is described as iconic communication with the three dimensions of iconicity of narrative writing.

dimension of narrative with narrative imagination, and the speculative rhetorical dimension of narration with social imagination. Consequently, narratives are fiction with the act of imagination. Narrative writing is oriented toward possible worlds as utopia by means of dialogic, dialectic, and the scientific method of abductive reasoning in interrelation with ideology and tradition in social imagery (imagination)⁴ of community.

I shall describe the features of each dimension, looking into the interrelation between writing and imagination. As mentioned earlier, imagination is considered to be the act of reading, thus being related to psychological and cognitive aspects. Therefore, writing activity with imagination is described as narrative semiosis through which the triadic relation of the three subjects of sign-object-interpretant demonstrates semiotic action toward truth and reality. In esthetic dimension, an intent of a story is considered as an abstract idea which is associated with an unanalyzable feeling toward the quality of a story. It is like an abstract image as a form of mental imagery. You can imagine something that is an invisible and imaginary object in the mind. This can be called *primisense*, that is, the first state of consciousness or the consciousness of firstness (Peirce CP 7.551), which is a feeling of strangers, others, or God as a whole (cf. Kearney 2003). Making an image in the mind is not restricted to anything; it is free from fact or law. It is thus a possible world that the imagination creates. This type of imagination is described as oneiric (dreamlike) imagination (Kearney 1988, 10-13), which is interwoven with a quality of a story. The dreamlike imagination makes an image of a fanciful and dreamy world, and yet the world is to be considered as reality, being connected by way of the body of the dreamer even though it is unanalyzable as a whole for it is a quality.

Reading a story in esthetic dimension is geared to focusing on the phenomenological and hermeneutical aspects of a story as an abstract image as a sign. In this regard, both making a story and reading a story are focused on a quality, which is manifested in the qualities of feeling in the mind of the writer and the reader, which are mediated by way of the story as qualisign. Considering this way of thinking of a story, the intent of the story is considered to be an Object of inquiry to be determined by the act of telling or describing so as to know what it is like, being realized in the actual world. Thus, we are moving to the second dimension: poetics of narrative.

A quality of a story to be explained requires the dimension of embodiment of the quality. I call this the poetic dimension of narrative in which the interpreting mind is actively engaged with the explanatory process. The narrative structure or path allows the reader to experience poetic language as a medium for materializing a quality of a story. Hence, rather than a static image in an imaginary state of the storyworld in the esthetic dimension of a story, a narrative path coupling with moving pictures of thought is analogous structure, entailing the landscape of action and identity which makes the reader react to narrative process with narrative imagination.⁵ Thus, configuration is operative between the narrative path in writing and the moving pictures of thought in reading.

⁴ The concept of social imagination comes from Ricoeur's theory of imagination with which he connects the works of metaphor with narrative discourse with social imagery to discuss the tension between ideology as existing reality and utopia as a new dimension of reality by way of iconic augmentation of reality (Kearney 1988; Ricoeur 2024). Following Ricoeur's ideas on social imagination, I appropriate the concept to discuss in the speculative rhetorical dimension of narration for dialogic and dialectic abduction in my argument for a possible world as a good narrative.

⁵ It can also be called diagrammatic imagination in terms of the logical aspect of the relation between two parts of the whole. Put differently, the diagrammatic imagination is characterized by a logical Ground-Consequent relation of two events in narrative context.

A story concerns a quality in a possible world, whereas narrative concerns a relation in a narrative world. In this sense, story and narrative work in the individual mind; on the one hand, the interpreting mind is involved with immersing in a possible world by imagining the dreamlike world and, on the other hand, the interpreting mind is engaging with explanatory process of the analogous structure between the narrative world and the actual world, so as to re-present the world. Following Ricoeur (2024), this process is described as iconic augmentation of reality through which we can understand the interrelation between narrative writing with imagination based on ‘operational iconicity’ (Stjernfelt 2007, 49; Chap. 4) and the cognitive aspects of feeling and thinking. Put differently, a story mediates the interpreting mind with a possible world based on qualitative similarity. Narrative mediates a narrative world with a real world based on structural similarity. The poetic dimension of narrative is characterized by *altersense*, that is, “the consciousness of a directly present other or second, withstanding us”; “consciousness of otherness or secondness” (Peirce CP 7.551), which means that narrative is destined toward otherness with the sense of other, so as to recognize the self in relation to other. *Altersense* has both psychological and logical aspects of feeling in two modes of sensation and will.

Esthetic and poetic dimensions of a story and narrative with imagination are investigated by a method of methods, looking at a process of discovering meaning-truth on an individual level. Now let us look into narrative with imagination on a social and historical level, which is related to history of representation in the dimension of speculative rhetoric of narration.

According to Colapietro (2000), the term ‘speculative’ is intertwined with demonstration of the dialogic and dialectic process in making alternative histories. He examines speculative philosophy in terms of history in this way:

But of greater moment, a sense of possibility can be intertwined with a sense of history. The task of critical philosophy demands continual engagement with historical actualities, but can open an imaginative space for alternative histories. This task is thus central to JSP [Journal of Speculative Philosophy] at this juncture in its history (Colapietro 2000, 15).

His remarks on the term ‘speculative’ involve historical consciousness in both actuality and possibility, implying a form of dialogic and dialectic abduction between ideology and utopia or between tradition and reason in social imagery. Colapietro (2000) also mentions the etymology of the term “speculative”, which is related to ‘observation’ and ‘spirit’. In this regard, Colapietro’s observation of the speculative is oriented toward the critical and scientific, which are intertwined with the possibility of history in alternative stories. This idea demonstrates that historical passivity stands against human agency as social actors. A history is regarded as a story of communal self with social imagination (social imagery) to be transmitted to following generations in the form of myth or narrative. Social imagery is formed by a myth or a story, thus shaping the worldview based on common understanding or common sense (Taylor 2007, 171).

In this regard, narrating identity on both the individual and the communal level is continuous by way of dialogical process of one’s life story and history. But in the process of representation of one’s story and history, narrative as means for discovering self’s identity and for meaning-making activity should be reliable and trustworthy. The dual functions of good and

evil in narration due to the human intention involved in a narrative path draw attention to narrative inquiry on ethics.

The third dimension of narrative inquiry is thus related to the problem of representation. In other words, speculative rhetoric⁶ of narration is the main subject matter in continuation of and drawing on the esthetic dimension with dreamlike imagination and the poetic dimension with narrative imagination. Unlike the two dimensions of a story and narrative where the role of imagination is not active, when responding to writing, the speculative rhetorical dimension of narration shows the participation of the interpreting human agency in the process of narrative communication and this takes a crucial role in representing the esthetic quality of a story as the reality of a possible world. At this point, a narrator and a narratee are the disinterested inquirers of narrative, functioning as a poetic moral self to transmit a good narrative to following generations for the purpose of making a better life. This is a good model for the real world and social reality.

The writing activity of representing the world is, rather, re-presenting it while the narrator takes the responsibility of his/her action, re-presenting the world with social imagery (imagination) based on morality or moral sentiment. This narrational activity goes back to making a story with esthetic quality which enables the reader to figure the sacred otherness based on iconicity of narrativity. A narrative world is characterized by a possible world because narrativity is operative with iconicity on the basis of the principle of similarity between the actual world and the possible world in quality, relation, and representation. That is why narrative representation is speculative and hypothetical in nature to connect the physical world and the mental world in parallelism with hermeneutic imagination. This state of feeling is called *medisense*, that is, the consciousness of means or thirdness (Peirce CP 7.551). The role of hermeneutic imagination in speculative rhetoric of narration is to connect two different, dialectic, opposing elements by means of narrative logic, that is, analogical imagination, thus leading to dialogic abduction as a form of argument based on iconicity. The hypothetical conclusion demonstrates re-presenting the actual world by way of the possibility of a possible world. In the following section, I shall explore further the idea of narrative as dialogic abduction in the form of narrative interpretation from the semiotic-pragmatic perspective, focusing on therapeutic effects on identifying the self's identity.

4. Re-authoring conversation: narrative with social imagination for dialogic abduction

The process of narrative communication presupposes a dialogic situation where the narrator and the narratee exchange their roles. It is sufficient that narrative as means of communication invites two conversation partners in narrative practice. According to Tracy, conversation itself is a game “where we learn to give in to the movement required by questions worth questioning” (Tracy 1987, 18). The game has some tough rules:

⁶ Peirce's third branch of semiotics is called speculative rhetoric or methodetic. But this area was less developed than the other two areas of semiotics, namely, semiotic grammar and critical logic. Speculative rhetoric concerns the relation between sign and interpretant, so that it deals with a process of dialogic inquiry of object by way of communication in order to discover truth (see Kvelson 1987, Chap. 3; Liszka 1996, Chap. 4).

...say only what you mean; say it as accurately as you can; listen to and respect what the other says, however different or other; be willing to correct or defend your opinions if challenged by the conversation partner; be willing to argue if necessary, to confront if demanded, to endure necessary conflict, to change your mind if the evidence suggests it (Tracy 1987, 19).

In short, “be attentive, be intelligent, be responsible, be loving, and if necessary, change (Lonergan 1972, 231 cited in Tracy 1987, 19).

Tracy’s remarks on the definition of conversation provide my argument on narrative as dialogic abduction with crucial points in terms of narrative writing with social imagination in the speculative rhetorical dimension of narration. Conversation itself covers the concepts of ‘dia-logue’ and dialectic in the process of interpretation of narrative text or discourse. The role of a conversation partner facilitates determination of the quality of an intended story by externalizing conversation topically and formally. Thus, the dialogic and dialectic conversation for determining the intent of a story demonstrates the act of argument as persuading the partner by way of explanation of narrative. In this regard, conversation is not confrontation or debate but is questioning itself with tough rules in an inquiry with truth and meaning-making activity (see Tracy 1987, 18).

By exchanging stories, the narrator and the narratee are engaged with real life as utterer and interpreter of narrative discourse and text. As an interpreting agency between the narrative world and the actual world, an utterer and an interpreter render the narrator and the narratee authors who are responsible and accountable for their stories with pragmatic effects in real life. In this regard, the narrator-author makes his or her own stories toward his/her conversation partner in the process of conversation into a form of dialogic and dialectic narration. Adapting Michael White’s idea of narrative practice, narrative communication is described as ‘re-authoring conversation’, which is characterized as the following: “The therapist facilitates the development of these alternative storylines by *introducing questions* that encourage people to recruit their lived experience, to stretch their minds, to *exercise their imagination*, and to employ *their meaning-making resources*.” (White 2007, 61-62, emphasis added)

The concept of re-authoring conversation is interwoven with re-figuration and re-writing with social and hermeneutic imagination, resulting in re-presenting the world for meaning-making activity. This interpretative practice of re-authoring involves three components in a triadic relation for narrative communication and transmission: narrative emotion with oneiric imagination, narrative cognition with poetic imagination, and narrative interpretation with social imagination. The three components are aligned with the three dimensions of narrative which I have discussed: speculative rhetoric of narration, which rests on poetics of narrative, which in turn rests on esthetics of a story.

Narrative inquiry on dialogic abduction through re-authoring conversation employs a method of methods in the process of quality through fact to representation (interpretation). The semiotic method of narrative as sign in iconicity allows one to create a possible world, provided that the narrative context of landscape of action and landscape of identity is encouraged to build up in order to give meaning and to discover neglected or overlooked events or stories. Semiotic activity of writing as dialogic abduction allows one to make alternative stories, drawing new

conclusions on one's life, or to make stories that are resistant to dominant narrative discourse (cf. White 2007, 82-83).

Narration is not psychological and subjective in that co-authoring, re-authoring, and collaborative activity operate toward a dialogic and dialectic narrative, which is modeling for truth and reality, whose effects assist in discovering one's identity and identifying selfhood. Based on this good narrative modeling, we can be sure of narrative communication as a medium of interpersonal communication for loving and learning the truth and also for transmission of cultural values to following generations to guard and protect them from any threatening dangers by means of narrative warning.

5. Conclusion: possibilities for future writing

Writing as describing, inscribing, and telling toward others is a quest for meaning and truth. In this sense, writing activity is social and thus logical for communication and transmission. Writing is not making a copy or shadow of reality; rather, it creates reality using poetic language, that is constitutive language with productive imagination based on iconicity. Thus, poetic image is sign, representing object by way of expressing the object's quality in itself, sharing the quality of object. Put differently, poetic language is self-referential.

In this paper I describe writing with imagination as a narrative form to discuss dialogic relation between the actual world and a possible world. The motivation for this topic comes from the comparison of AI writing versus human writing. Human writing involves figuration in a two-fold image of the physical and the mental to create the world and reality.

The narrative path runs from visual (concrete) image to mental (abstract) image and vice versa. Thus, a story as an abstract image is unraveled in the narrative structure of configuration toward refiguration of the abstract image or re-authoring of the story as an argument for a new dimension of reality, that is a possible world as an alternative story. In this sense, narrative writing is fiction but is not fictive; rather, it is genuine narrative toward others, nature, and God as possibilities for knowing myself as another. This is a radical difference between AI writing with big data and human writing with imagination. Recognizing this difference, humans are able to cooperate with AI without fear of losing creativity and self-control, and thus to write conscientiously by means of semiotic activity of narrative practice.

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