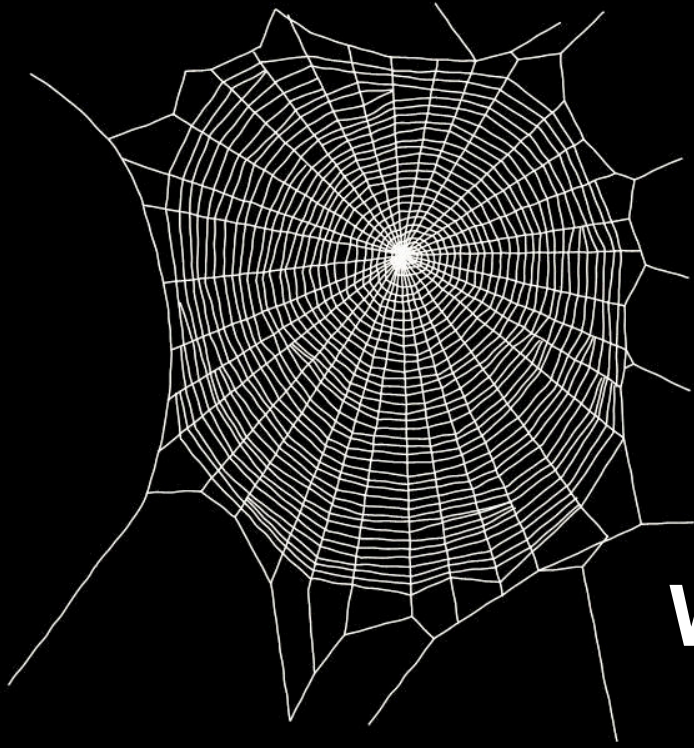




A white spider web is centered on a black background. The web is a classic orb-weaver design with a central hub and several concentric spiral turns. The text "Webs of Narrative" is overlaid on the web in a bright green, bold, sans-serif font. The text is positioned horizontally across the middle of the web, with "Webs" on the left, "of" in the center, and "Narrative" on the right.

Webs of Narrative

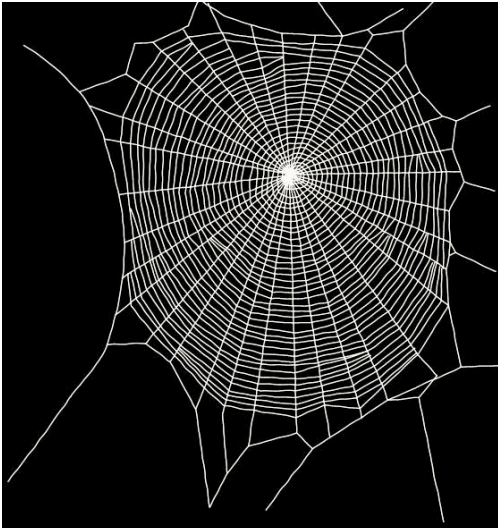
The Nature of Narrative



What is narrative?

From a technical viewpoint, narrative is a literary form with

- **sequential action**
- **plot, characters, and setting**
- **told by a narrator (1st or 3rd person; rarely, 2nd person)**



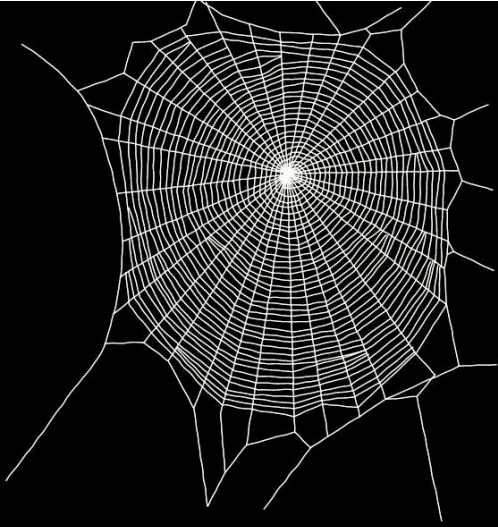
The Nature of Narrative

Example of 1st person narration

The first contact with Rio was different. For the first time in my life, I was on the other side of the Equator in the tropics, in the New World. By what major sign, I wondered, was I about to recognize this three-fold mutation? What voice would provide me with evidence of it, what note as yet unheard would be the first to strike my ear? My initial observation was a trivial one: I felt I was in a drawing-room.

(Tristes Tropiques, p. 85)

In this passage, the narrative voice is particularly evident, guiding the reader with an ironic perception of the events told and their effect on the narrator.



The Nature of Narrative

Narrative/narration can also be a feature of a text otherwise technically defined as non-narrative: e.g., drama
***Richard II*: narration of what King Henry said about Richard, from Exton's perspective:**

**Exton. Didst thou not mark the king, what words he spake?
'Have I no friend will rid me of this living fear?'
Was it not so?**

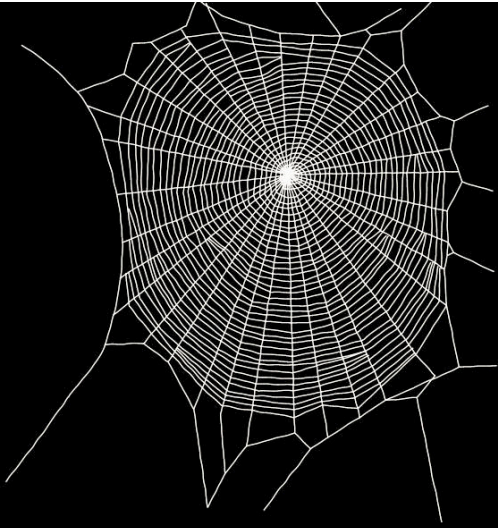
Servant. These were his very words.

**Exton. 'Have I no friend?' quoth he. He spake it twice,
And urged it twice together, did he not?**

Servant. He did.

**Exton. And speaking it, he wishly looked on me
As who should say, 'I would those wert the man
That would divorce this terror from my heart.'
Meaning the king at Pomfret. Come, let's go.
I am the king's friend, and will rid his foe.**

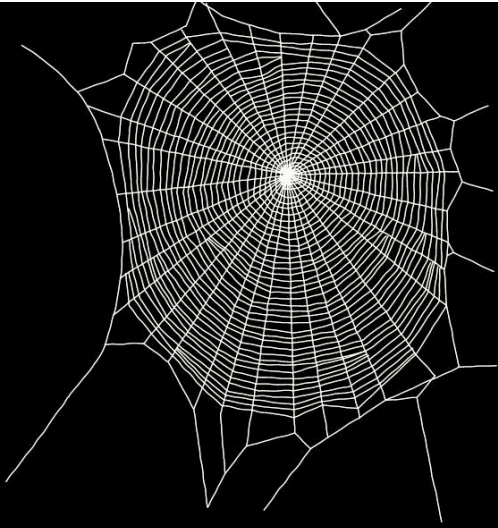
(5.4.1-11)



The Nature of Narrative

What can narration situated within a larger drama do?

- **tell rather than show (we hear about Henry's words, here, don't see him speaking them)**
- **add perspective/implicit interpretation of what's reported (what's important here is Exton's interpretation of Henry's words, powered by his own ambition to be the king's friend)**

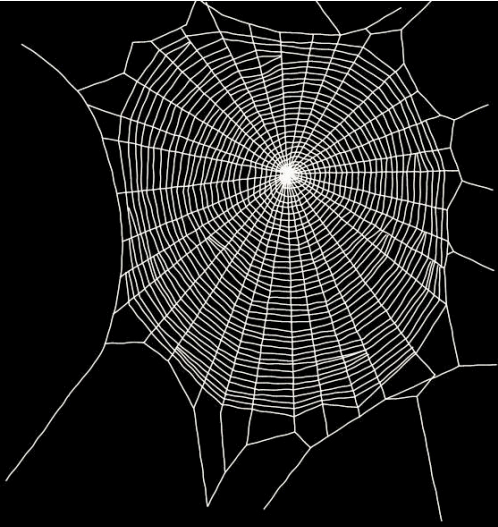


Alternatives to Narrated Stories

If narrators can do so many things, why might authors choose alternatives to narrated stories?

Shakespeare: the essence of drama is direct re-presentation of actions enacted in space: Richard II represents to us the tug-of-war between Richard and Bullingbroke, and doesn't have a narrator editorialize and tell us where to place our sympathies

Plato: dialogue engages the reader in the philosophical process of questioning, doesn't simply present us with a final truth



Narrative in a Broader Sense

Narrative in a more general sense is story-telling, ordering and making sense of the raw data of experience through relating events together in a meaningful sequence. Central to narrating is the act of ordering for a number of different purposes

Through narrative we

- configure space and time
- deploy cohesive devices
- reveal identity of actors
- relate actions across scenes
- make sense of social situations
- understand history
- remember
- argue
- convince
- engage and entertain

The background is a vibrant, multi-colored fractal pattern. It features a central, somewhat face-like shape with large, circular, multi-layered eyes or nostrils. The colors range from deep blues and purples to bright yellows and oranges. The overall texture is intricate and organic, with many small, star-like or floral motifs scattered throughout. The text is overlaid on this background.

Narratives Constructing Selves
Building Worlds

Posthumanity—Volatile Bodies

First, the posthuman view privileges informational pattern over material instantiation, so that embodiment in a biological substrate is seen as an accident of history rather than an inevitability of life. Second, the posthuman view considers consciousness, regarded as the seat of human identity in the Western tradition long before Descartes thought he was a mind thinking, as an epiphenomenon, as an evolutionary upstart trying to claim that it is the whole show when in actuality it is only a minor sideshow. Third, the posthuman view thinks of the body as the original prosthesis we all learn to manipulate, so that extending or replacing the body with other prostheses becomes a continuation of a process that began before we were born.

Fourth, and most important, by these and other means, the posthuman view configures human being so that it can be seamlessly articulated with intelligent machines. In the posthuman, there are no essential differences or absolute demarcations between bodily existence and computer simulation, cybernetic mechanism and biological organism, robot teleology and human goals.

N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999, pp. 2-3.

Fast, Cheap, and Out of Control

Rodney Brooks discusses the future of this merger of (nanoscale) robotic technology with biotechnology:

We are on a path to changing our genome in profound ways. Not simple improvements toward ideal humans as is often feared. In reality, we will have the power to manipulate our own bodies in the way we currently manipulate the design of machines. We will have the keys to our own existence. There is no need to worry about mere robots taking over from us. We will be taking over from ourselves with manipulatable body plans and capabilities easily able to match that of any robot.

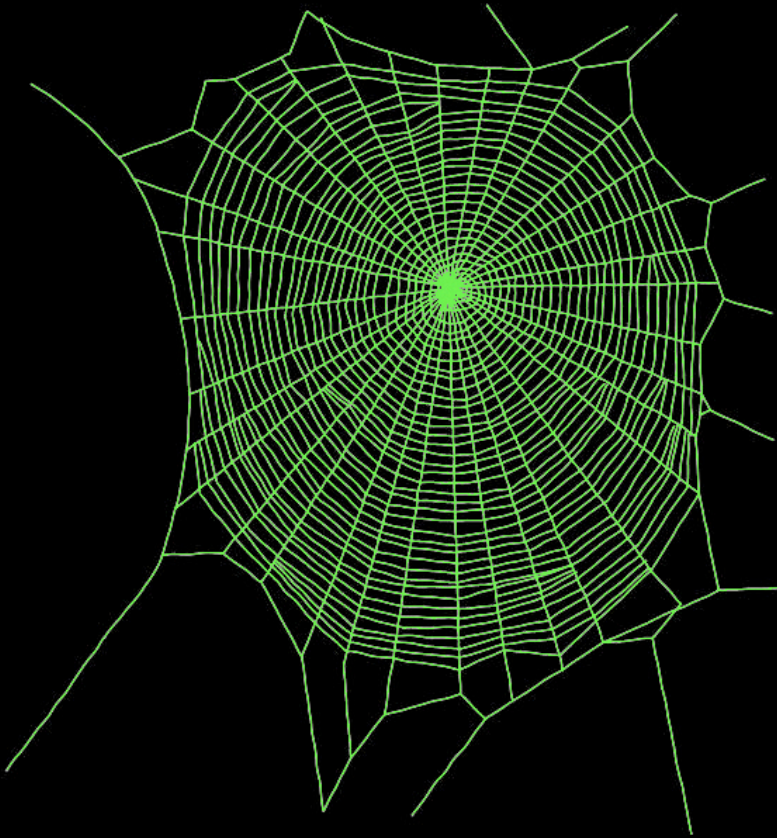
Rodney Brooks, *Flesh and Machines*, p. 236.

posthuman

- An object of technological determinism?

Or....

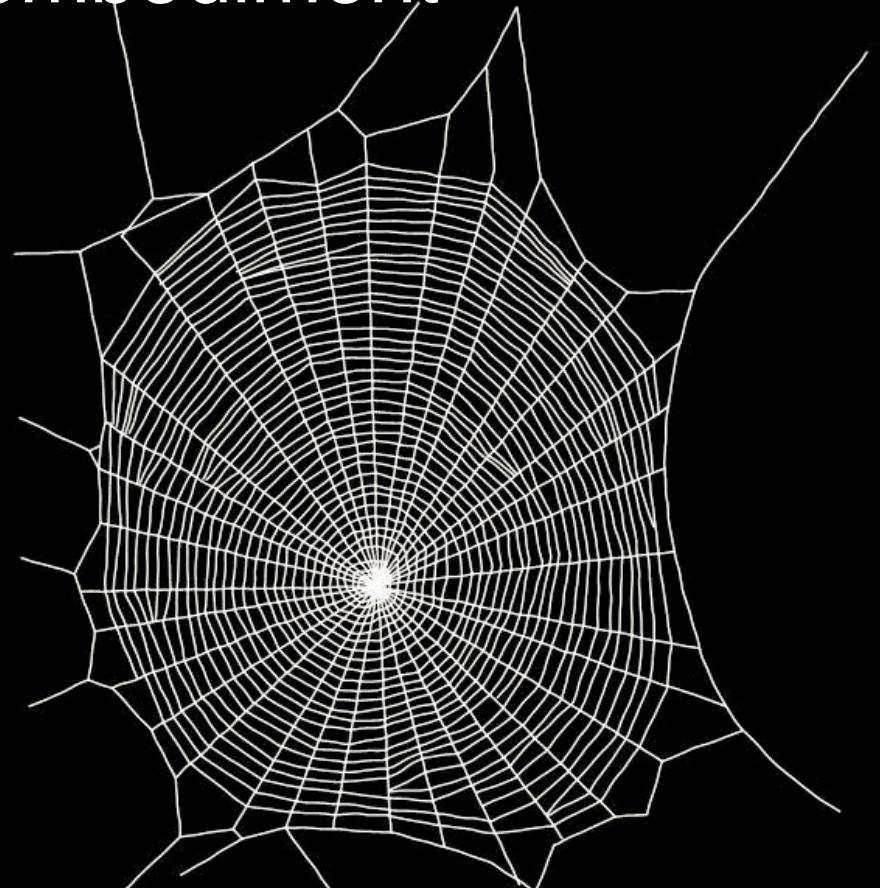
- Hybrid entity constructed through networks materially real, socially regulated, and discursively constructed?
- Body an interpretive frame, historically, contingently constructed along with our machines and the world they inhabit



Escape Narrative?

- How can we get the “body” back in?
- Discursive bodies vs embodiment

“The body” is an abstraction, implied by heterogeneous, overlapping systems of discourse and material practices; it is produced by medical, legal, political, and economic regulations, norms, and conceptualizations applied to actual physical bodies as objects to be ordered, organized and interpreted. On the other side of these concepts and schemas for action are the individual material body and its experiences, which though interpreted by the individual him- or herself and society in terms of “the body” are never fully captured and assimilated into discourse. The two poles stand in tension and are constantly interacting with one another. Discursive constructions of the body are constantly applied to embodied action, while inadequacies of fit among abstraction, intention, and individual experience open fissures motivating efforts to modify or build different discursive regimes.



Frog, Where Are You?

Ability to tell stories:

Frog, Where Are You—24 page picture book

Children and adults are asked to represent the (pictorially presented) characters linguistically, and relate them in terms of their actions across time and space in the form of a cohesive/coherent narrative.

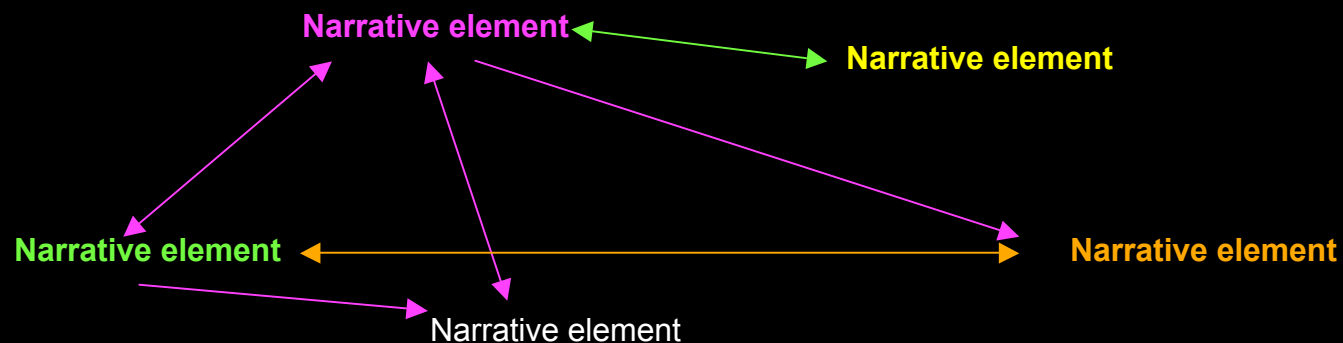
References did not necessarily "originate" from the pictures:
Narrators of the picture story - often - chose to override a pictorially presented facial expression of one of the characters with a reference to the "opposite" emotion. For instance, a boy, whose face was obviously expressing anger, and who was linguistically referred to as *angry* when the picture was presented as a single, isolated picture, was referred to as *happy* (by the same subject three minutes later) when referring to this picture in the narrating activity of establishing the *Frog, Where Are You?* story

Positioning and Identity

Two views on Subject/identity:

1. Subjects as grounds for discourse
2. positions as grounded in *discourses* (also variably called 'master narratives', 'plot lines', 'master plots', 'dominant discourses', or simply 'cultural texts') which are viewed as providing the meanings and values within which subjects are 'positioned'

The 'problem of agency' is addressed by giving the subject a semi-agentive status inasmuch as *discourses* are construed as inherently contradictory and in competition with one another, so that subjects are forced to choose: They 'agentively' pick a position among those available. Thus, positions are resources that subjects can choose and when practiced for a while they become repertoires that can be drawn on.



“identity”

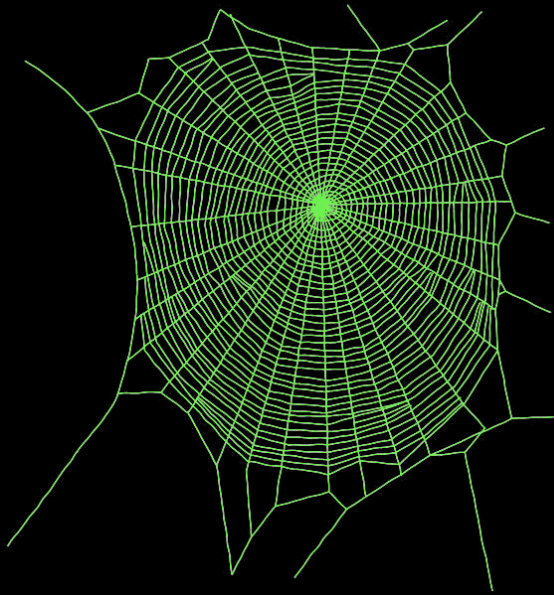
‘who-am-I?’

no longer start from a notion of a unitary subject as the ground for its investigation. Rather, the agentic subject is the ‘point of departure’ for its own empirical instantiation...

the subject is constantly seeking to legitimate itself, situated in language practices interactively accomplished, where “world- and person-making take place simultaneously.” Thus, the pluralization of identities “disrupts the social ontology of the subject itself ... as the internal impossibility of the subject as a discrete and unitary kind of being”

(Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 1995, p. 446);

and simultaneously, this pluralization opens a new empirical territory for where and how subjects come to existence, i.e., sites where positions are actively and interactively taken (and explored) for the purpose of self and world construction.



Neurophilosophy

- The normal mind is *not* beautifully unified, but rather a problematically yoked-together bundle of partly autonomous systems. All parts of the mind are not equally accessible to each other at all times. These modules or systems sometimes have internal communication problems which they solve by various ingenious and devious routes. If this is true (and I think it is), it may provide us with an answer to a most puzzling question about conscious thought: what good is it?
- No one has ever seen a self.
- "For my part, when I enter most intimately into what I call *myself*, I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never can catch *myself* at any time without a perception, and never can observe anything but the perception.... If anyone, upon serious and unprejudiced reflection, thinks he has a different notion of *himself*, I must confess I can reason no longer with him. All I can allow him is, that he may be in the right as well as I, and that we are essentially different in this particular. He may, perhaps, perceive something simple and continued, which he calls *himself*; though I am certain there is no such principle in me."

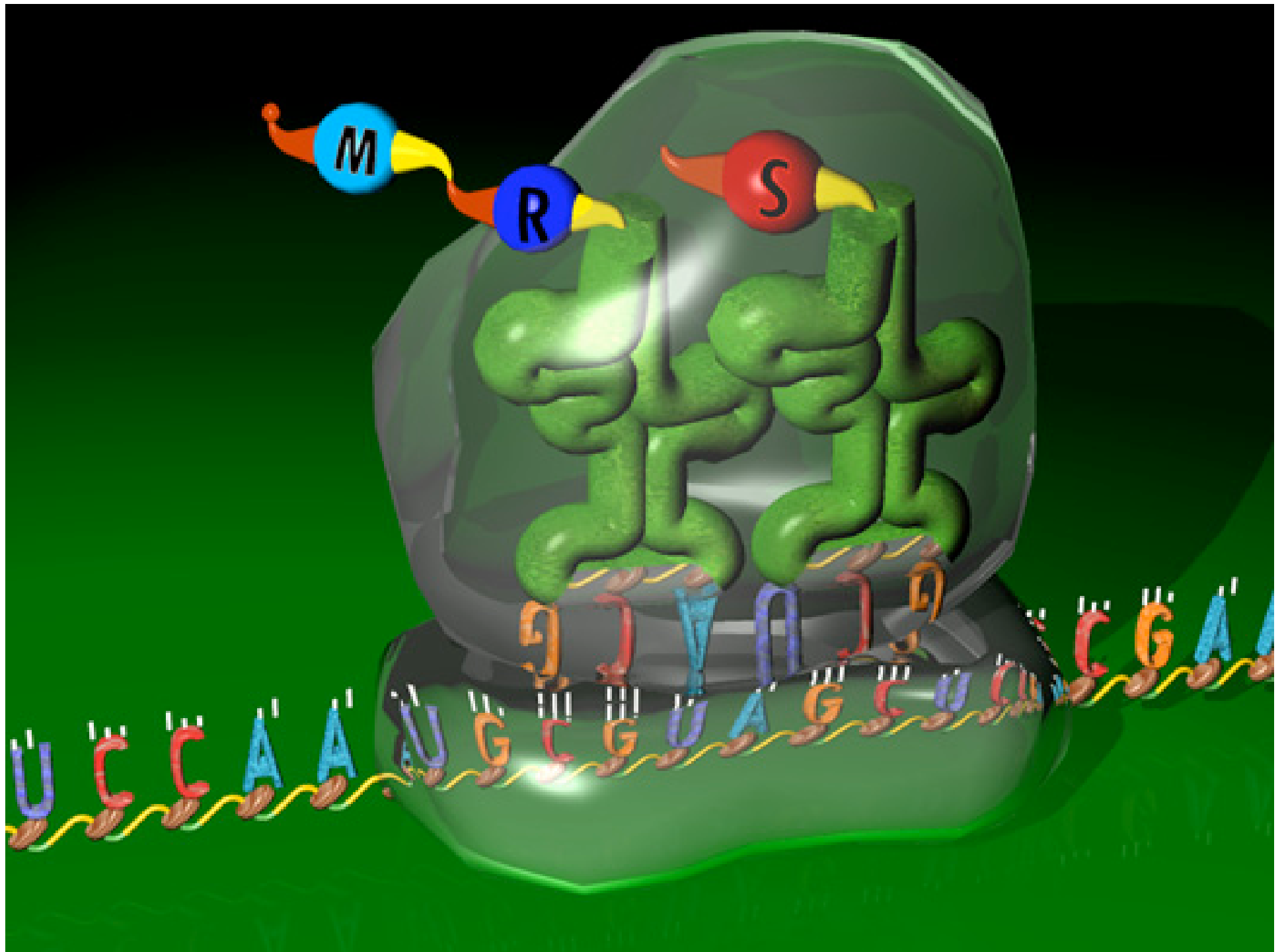
David Hume, *Treatise on Human Nature*, I, IV, sec. 6.

Rhetorical Software

Genotype  **Ribosome**  **Phenotype**

As you play SimLife, the different plants and animals will visually appear in a few different ways. None of these ways truly and accurately shows the way these organisms look. These electronic organisms exist as ones and zeros—energy states in transistor switches in the memory chips of your computer. Assuming that most of the beings that play SimLife are human, and that none of the humans we know can see energy states in transistor switches, we figured we'd better find some way to visually represent SimLife-forms in a way that humans can see and understand.

SimLife Manual



Rhetorical Software

Genotype  **Ribosome**  **Phenotype**

Alife organisms and humans form an extended interactive phenotype of each other, with rhetorical softwares serving as the ribotypic translation apparatus that enables this operation of alife code on human bodies and vice versa, the becoming-silicon of flesh, the becoming-flesh of silicon.

Narrative Power

Can we re-appropriate the human by understanding the rhetorics of DNA bodies, examining the semiotic practices and narrative strategies by which constructions of desire and fictions of a posthuman imaginary get under the skin?

