"We Meet Reality Only in Our Prediction Errors"
On The Source of New Patterns in Art

Zofia Leśnik

Institute of Literary Research of the Polish Academy of Sciences, Poland

Abstract

The analysis of two novels by Joyce Carol Oates - *Blonde* and *The Gravedigger's Daughter* aims to consider a hypothesis concerning the relationship between aesthetic experience and the ability to switch master narrative framework (MNF) narracją alternatywną. Master narratives have (Friston 2024) many uses for members of a group (utility principle), such as providing relevant information to understanding the group's rules and characteristics (e.g., its history, values, social norms). Most members of a culture effectively accept and internalize master narratives without recognizing them explicitly as such (invisibility principle). The fact that master narratives are unconsciously internalized as ready-made guides for how to live a life and understand the lives of others facilitates adaptation by alleviating the necessity for effortful reflection on everyday choices, actions or events. The MNFs depicted in both Oates texts shape the cultural identity of Americans in the second half of the twentieth century and are the source of the unethical, destructive attitudes of members of society who accept racism, sexism, classism the ambiguous US policy towards Nazi Germany or the paranoid narratives associated with the mission of 'American Christian democracy to free the world from the antichrist that is the USSR'. Founded on religious and conservative imagery, the image of the Father is not only the central figure of the MNF, but the source of Americans' political vulnerability to ethically reprehensible propaganda. In her works, Oates portrays female protagonists who experience dramatic identity crises, seeking the source of their identification in an obsessive desire to find a 'father'. Each of Norma Jean Baker, the protagonist of Blonde, and Rebecca Schwartz, the protagonist of The Gravedigger's Daughter, not only suffer personal disillusionment by failing to find the mythologised father, but in the trauma of his loss find the strength to challenge the social narrative. Through the representation of her female characters' experiences, Oates creates a series of synecdoches in which the process of the mainstream narratives' loss of invisibility results in an attempt to construct a new identity based on alternative narratives. In the experiences, the narrative based on the father figure is not effective, is not adaptive as an unconscious predictive model and must be replaced by another predictive model. Norma Jean from Blonde projects her feelings towards her father.

Rebecca is obsessed with the 'voice' of her father, an immigrant German Jew and Holocaust survivor. A woman experiences audial hallucinations of her father's 'voice', many years after his suicidal death preceded by the killing of Rebecca's mother. The murderer father she longs to replace with another man capable of caring for her, but, as it turns out in the novel's finale, projects his image onto a serial killer of young women from the social lowlands.

The reason why master narratives are not explicitly recognized as such by the majority (invisibility principle) is clarified by active inference's basic assumption that elaborate and effortful information processing is not necessary when predictions are confirmed. In effect, one reason why master narratives are 'invisible' to the majority is simply that they are efficient as nonconscious or implicit predictive models, and as such do need to be extensively processed or made explicit.

The aim of the research presented here is to reveal that the invisibility principle is linked to Friston's recognised experience of being someone, which arises like for instance the experience of being someone – even if (or especially if) those conscious experiences are pre-reflective and non-conceptual. We feel like we are in immediate touch with the world, although our very experience arises through. This is because the corresponding mental representations are phenomenally transparent to us. Transparency is a concept with some tradition that can metaphorically be understood as looking through a window onto the world, instead of looking at the window itself: we only access the representation's intentional content (something in the world which it is about) without noticing its non-intentional carrier properties. Metzinger (2008) extends the traditional transparency notion by the claim that not (only) the carrier, but the 'construction process' of a phenomenally transparent mental representation is inaccessible to introspective attention – an inward-directed, sub-symbolic resource allocation within representational space (Metzinger, 2003). Conversely, if its construction process is accessible, this particular mental representation will be phenomenally opaque. I pose the thesis that the aesthetic experience evoked by complex narratives such as *The Gravedigger's Daughter* and Blonde requires a process of constructing phenomenal opaque representation that is accessible to introspective attention.