

AN INTELLECTUAL MANIFESTO

My Philosophy of History and Writing

FICTION / HISTORY / SCREENWRITING

ECONOMIC THEORY

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SIVE.BIO

THE STATEMENT

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Read alongside *Before Sive / After Sive*, the satirical companion to this statement.

THE INTELLECTUAL PROJECT

I am developing a school of thought through fiction, screenwriting, history, and economic theory. Its central concern is how people form purposes and act among others whose purposes they cannot fully know or determine. A work of art, a political movement, or an economic arrangement can make shared action possible. It can also assign someone a role that leaves her little authority over the life she must lead. I want to understand how those possibilities arise and to develop forms of writing and inquiry that allow the people involved to change the account.

This commits me to examining the power exercised through explanation. Understanding another person does not settle what I may do in her name. A persuasive interpretation must remain answerable to her words and actions; a historical argument must expose the evidence and assumptions on which it depends. In fiction, a character's response can require the story to take a direction its narrator resists. In formal inquiry, a model should make disagreement more exact and permit an assumption to be changed without concealing what follows from the change.

These commitments connect dialogic pragmatism, Taleatrics, my work on preference and utility, and Quantum Market Dynamics. They developed through questions I could not leave inside one discipline. The creative works participate in that development: an encounter written for a novel can reveal a problem in a theory, while a mathematical question can change the structure of a narrative. I intend to pursue these connections openly, with enough precision for others to examine and contest them. My own explanations and ambitions must remain subject to the scrutiny I bring to those of others.

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A life of inquiry

I am drawn to moments when people's understanding of their lives encounters the conditions under which they must live. A conviction can give someone the courage to act, sustain a relationship, or justify a sacrifice. It can also make another person's needs difficult to hear. My writing asks how people arrive at such convictions, what enables them to act on them, and what happens when others challenge the purposes they have come to regard as necessary. These questions connect my work in European intellectual and cultural history with economics, biography, and fiction.

My father and my teachers approached these problems through different disciplines and kinds of experience. Their influence survives in the questions I ask of a letter, a financial arrangement, a political argument, or a scene. I want to understand what an action meant to the person who undertook it and what it did to the people whose lives it touched. Those inquiries require attention both to the language in which a life becomes intelligible and to the circumstances that make some choices possible and others costly.

My father gave me an early standard for intellectual life. He taught me that intelligence showed itself in knowing how to find an answer and in the ability to think, write, and speak well. In his home office he kept a sign: "Put your brain into gear before your mouth into motion." I remember its wording as a practical instruction to think before speaking. In my research, that lesson means taking responsibility for how I arrive at an answer and how I express it.

ATTENTION AND THE HABIT OF INQUIRY

My father was board-certified in cardiovascular and thoracic surgery and maintained a general medical practice. He regarded surgery as a last resort when other treatments had failed. He supported my ambition to become a doctor. When we visited UC San Diego as a possible university for me, he took me to the medical school and questioned the professors closely before agreeing that I could attend. He also believed that I should become a writer. While I was still in high school, he arranged a meeting with the publisher of the Register in Santa Ana, who was one of his patients, and proposed that I write a newspaper column. The publisher declined. I remember my father's willingness to make the proposal as an early expression of his belief in my writing.

His medical practice supplied another lesson. I remember days when he saw only a handful of patients while his partner's patients lined up outside. He spent hours with his patients and gave them his private home telephone number. Understanding the patient mattered to him. Once he allowed me to sit in on a consultation and listen to how he practiced medicine. That encounter remains an example of the attention I want to give a historical life or a fictional character: taking time to understand the person whose experience I am trying to make intelligible.

In summer 1980, I studied number theory with Arnold E. Ross at Ohio State University in his Summer Studies in Mathematics Program for Gifted High School Students, now the Ross Program. His instruction was to "Think deeply of simple things." I can still picture him beginning with a simple mathematical idea at the center of a blackboard. By the end of the lecture, ideas had spiraled outward until they filled the board. The memory gives a visible form to a habit of inquiry I continue to value: staying with a question long enough to discover the further questions and consequences it contains.

MATHEMATICS, ART, AND HISTORY

Ross's teaching helps explain why I am drawn to a small detail whose implications extend beyond its apparent scale. A qualification in a letter, a term of payment, or a change in the speaker of a sentence can open a larger inquiry. I want to follow those implications carefully, making each step available for examination. My father's emphasis on finding an answer and Ross's example of sustained exploration belong together in that practice.

My interest in Franz Marc also began before university. In an art-history survey at Santa Ana College, I chose him for an artist's biography. After graduating from high school in 1981, I spent three months in Munich to deepen my German and saw his work in person for the first time. That early attachment eventually entered both my Schattendorf novels and the biography. The paintings gave me a subject to which the questions of my later education could return.

I entered UC San Diego as a physics major. My path to history was gradual: I moved to a double major in physics and chemistry, then to a double major in chemistry and history, and finally to history alone. Two courses during my first year helped convince me to make that change.

One early and lasting influence was James K. Lyon, with whom I took the third-quarter course in Revelle College's required three-course Humanities sequence at UC San Diego. He introduced me to Brecht and to Jewish Holocaust survivors who went on to become prominent psychoanalysts in New York. I remember the force of encountering these subjects together. Literature and psychological thought belonged to lives marked by historical catastrophe and the effort to understand it. Looking back, I recognize there an early source of my interest in the relationship between a person's experience and the forms through which that experience can be expressed. Brecht also belongs to my continuing concern with what a dramatic work asks its audience to notice and judge.

THE INNER LIFE AND ITS POSSIBILITIES

In the third quarter of that first year, I took my first upper-division history course, Steven Hahn's "From Slavery to Freedom." Hahn later won the 2004 Pulitzer Prize in History for *A Nation Under Our Feet*. His teaching introduced me to American slavery and emancipation through a Marxist historical perspective.

Studying these distinct histories of genocide and slavery alongside one another made the study of history feel personally urgent. The connection I now recognize is a concern with how organized power enters individual lives and how people struggle to preserve or recover the ability to act. That concern continues in my questions about institutional arrangements and human experience.

David S. Luft was my most sustained teacher in history. His teaching helped me attend to the inner life as a historical problem: how people experience obligation, understand themselves, and struggle with the language available to them. His engagement with literature, especially Musil, encouraged a kind of reading in which ambiguity deserves close examination. Luft supervised my undergraduate research on Austria's crisis of 1927, the inquiry from which my Schattendorf work eventually grew. That connection remains fundamental to my practice. A political crisis enters households and changes how people recognize one another; its history includes those changes alongside public events.

H. Stuart Hughes and Judith M. Hughes contributed different ways of approaching the relationship between thought and experience. With H. Stuart Hughes, I studied European thinkers in historical context. I carry forward a concern with the problems to which ideas offered answers and with the circumstances in which those answers became persuasive. Judith Hughes's engagement with psychological explanation sharpened a related question: what might a person have invested emotionally in an interpretation of the world? Revising a belief can alter the meaning of an earlier sacrifice or disturb a relationship on which someone depends. I want to investigate those possibilities through the sequence and wording of the surviving evidence, keeping alternative explanations in view.

INSTITUTIONS AND HUMAN EXPERIENCE

I also understand this education within the wider UC San Diego intellectual environment associated with Herbert Marcuse. The philosophical question I carry into my own work concerns the possibilities an established order encourages people to treat as natural, necessary, or unavailable. I ask that question of political institutions, but also of artistic vocation and intimate relationships. Who can imagine a different arrangement? What would permit that person to bring it about? Such questions direct attention to possibilities that the eventual outcome can make difficult to see.

Allan Mitchell gave me an enduring example of how institutions can become visible through ordinary experience. I will never forget his account of Parisians naming their refuse containers after Eugène Poubelle in derision. The episode appeared in his teaching about France after the Franco-Prussian War and the development of the Third Republic. What stayed with me was the movement between a political order and an everyday object. I now see in that remembered example a connection among administrative purpose, material inconvenience, resistance, and language. An official could prescribe a practice; the people affected could give it a name of their own.

Mitchell also guided my graduate research on Germany's white-collar class. That work deepened my interest in the relation between social position and the identities through which people interpreted political change. His railway history extends the inquiry into the infrastructure that makes movement and exchange possible. In writing about an artist, it prompts me to ask how a seemingly secluded life remains dependent on transport, markets, and institutions. His study of revolution in Bavaria opens another question: how does a claim to speak for others become an authority capable of making decisions? Kurt Eisner and the competing sources of legitimacy in revolutionary Bavaria offer a historical setting in which to examine that problem. Each comparison must preserve the dates and circumstances that give it meaning.

THE SCALE OF HISTORY

John Marino introduced me to the *Annales* tradition and to Braudel's *Mediterranean*. That teaching widened the scale of the questions I brought to individual lives. Habits, distances, and patterns of exchange can outlast the immediate controversy through which a person encounters them. Marino also taught me to read a historian's acknowledgments for evidence of a work's intellectual formation. My account of my own teachers follows that lesson. It makes visible the education from which my questions emerged, while leaving the interpretations and their consequences to my responsibility.

At Caltech, economics and game theory gave these questions a further discipline. An explanation should specify the alternatives available to the people involved, the information they possessed, and the constraints under which they acted. A choice that appears straightforward in retrospect may have carried costs that a participant could neither ignore nor transfer to someone else. I therefore ask who could afford to wait, who could withdraw, and how an arrangement distributed the consequences of failure. Those questions belong as readily to an artistic household as to an explicitly economic transaction.

Lance E. Davis matters to this formation in his own right. His example as an economic historian joins explanatory ambition to the work of investigating historical records. His work with Douglass C. North directs attention to how institutional arrangements alter what people can undertake together. In my biography of Franz Marc, an advance, a promised payment, or access to a manuscript can change the range of actions open to someone. The historical task is to establish the terms and consequences of that arrangement. Economic reasoning helps me formulate the inquiry; the documents determine how far the explanation can go.

EVIDENCE, LANGUAGE, AND RESPONSIBILITY

Philip T. Hoffman's later work on tournament competition and learning supplies another set of questions. What encourages people to persist in costly experimentation? How do they learn from the efforts of others, and who sustains the work before its value is established? These questions interest me in relation to artistic production, where the criteria of achievement can themselves be contested. Applying them requires an account of what participants sought and how success was judged. The attraction of a model lies in the assumptions it makes available for inspection and in the consequences that can be checked against evidence.

My work with Sally Wolff King at Emory taught me a closely related responsibility toward language. Helping to transcribe and edit Jimmy Faulkner's recorded recollections required attention to the turns of remembered speech and to the voice that carried them. The acknowledgments to *Talking About William Faulkner* credit my research assistance. My lasting lesson from the work concerns the power exercised in making another person intelligible. An editor selects, arranges, and clarifies. Each of those acts can affect what a reader is able to hear. I bring that concern to historical testimony and to the voices of fictional characters.

My return to these questions followed years of family responsibility and professional work. After my father's death, I had to learn the tax law surrounding his estate and assume increasing responsibility for the family trust. Business and tax practice entered a life I had expected to devote to study. I returned to education at Caltech and Emory, but family responsibilities repeatedly drew me away; I did not complete a doctorate. Years later, caring for my mother gave me time to return to writing, history, and economics.

From Schattendorf to dialogic pragmatism

The immediate path toward my own theories began while I was writing the original version of *The Schattendorf Echoes*. Questions arising within the novel drew me toward Wittgenstein's language games. I became interested in how the same words could carry different force within different practices, and in what happened when people tried to act together without sharing the same understanding of what they were doing. These were problems of writing as well as philosophy. A conversation could change a relationship even when its participants believed that they had merely explained their positions.

From those questions I developed dialogic pragmatism, which became the philosophical basis of Hermann's political movement in the novel. I use the term for an inquiry into how understandings acquire enough stability through dialogue and practice to support shared action, and how that stability remains open to challenge. Agreement raises a further question about authority: can those affected alter the terms on which they participate? A political movement that invites people to speak must still answer for what happens when their answers become inconvenient. Hermann's movement gave me a setting in which to pursue that difficulty through decisions and consequences.

CHOICE AND ITS ASSUMPTIONS

Those problems returned me to game theory and to the assumptions through which economic models represent choice. My concern became particularly focused on the Arrow–Debreu framework of general equilibrium and on related approaches that rely on convexity and quasi-concavity. Convexity allows combinations of feasible alternatives to remain feasible; the corresponding preference conditions constrain how such combinations are ranked. Quasi-concavity, the relevant condition on utility in this setting, is weaker than concavity. These assumptions perform identifiable work in an existence proof. I wanted to investigate what an account of interaction could retain, and what it would have to rebuild, when it no longer depended on them.

That ambition required more than changing the shape of a utility function. I also wanted to investigate encounters in which people revise the purposes by which they judge an outcome. A person may begin by seeking acceptance, discover what acceptance demands, and come to prefer refusal. The alternatives themselves can change when someone learns to name an experience or discovers that others share it. Such changes made me ask how a model could represent the formation of preferences within interaction. This became a second, related problem alongside my effort to relax the mathematical assumptions of the equilibrium framework.

Taleatrics and changing preferences

The search led me toward Taleatrics, my developing theory of narrative, performance, and the recursive formation of identity and preference. By “recursive,” I mean that a response returns to affect the conditions that produced it. Someone anticipates how an audience will judge her, acts in response to that expectation, observes the audience’s reaction, and changes what she expects or wants. Taleatrics follows that process across characters, spectators, and the authority that arranges what they can see. It asks how performing a role can change the person who performs it and how an audience becomes implicated in the action it judges.

The panopticon supplied an important way of thinking about this process. The possibility of observation can shape conduct even when no observer intervenes. In my writing, that question extends to the position of the narrator and the reader. Who appears able to see the whole? What does that apparent knowledge permit? A narrator’s interpretation can become part of the pressure under which a character must act. I began exploring forms in which observation and response could alter the telling itself. This work drew me further into psychology and into the relation between the roles people inhabit and the preferences they come to experience as their own.

My Holistic Preference and Utility Theory pursues the related question of how to understand value across the interconnected circumstances of a life. A choice may affect someone’s security, relationships, and sense of who she can become. The importance of each can change through experience, and a gain in one respect may be inseparable from a loss in another. I am developing this framework to examine those relationships and changes, including the difficulty of comparing values that do not readily substitute for one another. It helps state the human problem that a formal account of choice must represent.

Quantum Market Dynamics

These inquiries led me to explore the introduction of quantum formalism into economic theory. Quantum Market Dynamics, or QMD, investigates how to represent possibilities, preferences, and economic value when context and the sequence of interactions matter. It draws on mathematical ideas used in quantum mechanics, including states, operators, superposition, and interference. I am interested, for example, in representing an interaction that changes the state from which a subsequent choice is made. The question is whether such a formalism can express dependencies that the assumptions I began by questioning make difficult to represent.

Using quantum mathematics in this way requires an explicit account of what the mathematical objects mean economically and of how their consequences can be examined. A model of a choice does not by itself establish a physical quantum mechanism in the person choosing. Nor does adopting a quantum formalism automatically remove every convexity assumption or guarantee equilibrium. The work lies in specifying which assumptions change, developing the resulting mathematics, and determining what the construction can explain. My aim is to make those questions answerable within the theory.

The project subsequently developed into what I call Toposic Quantum Market Dynamics. “Toposic” identifies a further mathematical direction involving topos theory and related methods for relating structures defined in different contexts. In developing this extension, I ask under what conditions accounts that make sense within their own settings can be brought together consistently, and what prevents them from fitting together. This connects with my longstanding interest in people who inhabit overlapping institutions or relationships while understanding them differently. The mathematical extension belongs to the continuing development of the theory and requires its own definitions and arguments.

The works and the inquiry

I understand these frameworks as parts of an emerging school of thought. Dialogic pragmatism examines the conditions of shared understanding and action. Taleatrics follows the effects of performance and observation on those who participate. My work on preference and utility asks how purposes change, while QMD and its toposic extension seek formal ways to represent the resulting relationships. Their connection gives my research a direction; their differences keep it open to questions that one discipline alone may fail to pose.

My literary works have grown out of this inquiry and continue to change it. Fiction lets an encounter unfold long enough for a character's reasons to become inadequate, or for another person's response to redirect the story. Screenwriting makes the arrangement of attention particularly concrete: what the audience sees, when it sees it, and what an actor can convey without explanation all affect judgment. Historical nonfiction brings these questions to surviving evidence and requires me to distinguish what a record establishes from what an interpretation proposes. Each form can reveal a weakness in the questions I bring to the others. The works therefore participate in developing the theories as well as giving them expression.

This continuing inquiry leads me to examine the relationship between understanding and authority. Someone may understand another person's criticism, even accept its force, while retaining control over the decisions that matter. I want to know when recognition changes that distribution of power. Does the other person acquire a meaningful ability to refuse, redirect the work, or determine what may be done in her name? The answer has to be sought in conduct and arrangements as well as in declarations. This is one reason correspondence, household finances, and the custody of writings belong together in my account of Franz and Maria Marc.

EVIDENCE AND INTERPRETATION

The Schattendorf histories and novels pursue related questions through different forms of inquiry. Historical research must establish what happened, how accounts were produced, and which explanations the surviving record can sustain. Fiction gives me room to construct encounters in which a character's response changes the direction of an undertaking. In the independent German and English cycles, differences in narration alter who can know, speak, and judge. Alistair's account makes the narrator's authority especially visible. These literary experiments sharpen questions that I can return to historical evidence; the invented encounters retain their status as fiction.

Ross's example continues to shape the place of mathematics in my work. A formal construction can expose the consequences of assumptions that prose leaves difficult to compare. In the Marc biography, the consistency model tests which proposed readings can coexist under stated rules. Its usefulness depends on showing how those rules were chosen and what changes when they are altered. I remain responsible for deciding whether the construction represents a worthwhile historical question and whether its distinctions fit the documents. I value the model because it makes part of an argument open to exact disagreement.

The mathematical construction in the Marc biography addresses a specific problem of interpretive consistency. Its relationship to my broader theoretical work lies in the questions and methods that led me to it; its results must be assessed within its own stated scope. Likewise, a fictional encounter can disclose a possibility or expose an assumption without proving a historical claim or an economic theorem. I want each work to make its contribution clearly enough that readers can challenge both the argument within it and the connections I draw across my work.

I want my writing to let readers follow the movement from evidence to explanation and to identify where they would make a different judgment. That requires preserving the wording on which an interpretation depends, confronting evidence that resists it, and allowing a person's conduct to complicate the role assigned to her in a narrative. The freedom I seek to understand historically also places an obligation on my writing: the people who enter an account must remain capable of changing the questions asked about them. A successful inquiry leaves us with a more precise understanding of how they lived, what they could do, and why their choices mattered to others.

06 / THE MANIFESTO

A satirical counterpoint

Before Sive / After Sive belongs beside this statement. Its fictional Academy turns literary recognition into a machinery of authority, while the author's ambition supplies some of its fuel. The satire includes my tendency to explain, arrange, and build systems. It must remain capable of identifying a weakness in the project described here. Declaring an openness to criticism cannot decide in advance that every criticism has already been answered. The manifesto states what I am trying to build; the satire asks what happens when that undertaking begins to claim too much.

07 / A CONTINUING INQUIRY

Work still to be done

The next work is to develop the theories with clearer definitions, examine the assumptions on which their results depend, and let further writing expose what those definitions miss. I welcome criticism that identifies a historical reading the evidence resists, a mathematical step that fails, or a scene whose life has been constrained by its explanation. Such criticism can change the undertaking. That possibility belongs to the school of thought I am trying to develop.

CONTINUE THE CONVERSATION

Before Sive / After Sive

READ THE SATIRICAL COMPANION →