

THE NEVER ENDING STORY

*The Cultural Evolution
of Narratives*



Part I...

THE NEVER ENDING STORY

*The Cultural Evolution
of Narratives*




By

Joe Stubbersfield

Jamie Tehrani

IT WAS A DARK AND
STORMY NIGHT...



No one knows when the first story was told

Who told it

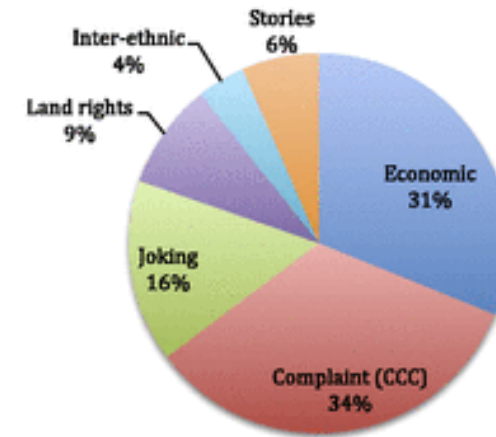
Or what it was

It could have been around a fire

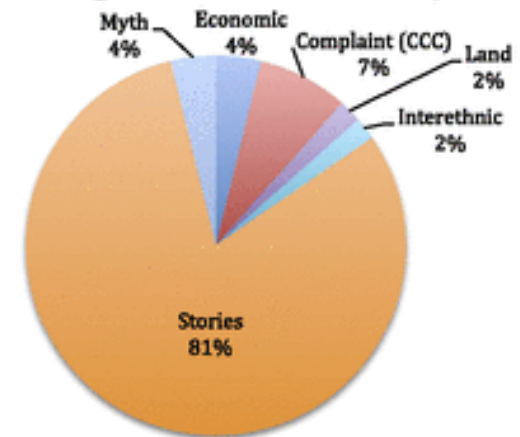
“The nitty-gritty of egalitarianism, food sharing, kinship dues, and land tenure were thus regulated by day...

night talk was critical for transmitting the big picture of the workings of marriage, kinship,... exchange, and cosmology”
Weissner (2014)

Topics of day conversations (n=122)



Topics of night conversations (n=52)



On the origin of stories

Indirect evidence from stone tools, beads and ochre suggest symbolic expression dates back around 100K years



images from Henshilwood & d'Errico (2011)



Lion-man of the Hohlenstein-Stadel
Image by Dagmar Hollmann, License: CC BY-SA 4.0

On the origin of stories



Australian
Dreamtime
accounts
probably date
back 10,000 years

On the origin of stories

The oldest recorded story, the Epic of Gilgamesh, dates from ~5000 years ago



Addiction to Fiction

- Whenever it started, since then we never stopped
- Narratives are a human universal
- No known society lives without stories



Addiction to Fiction

They are consumed around the world as

Oral tales



Addiction to Fiction

Music and Drama



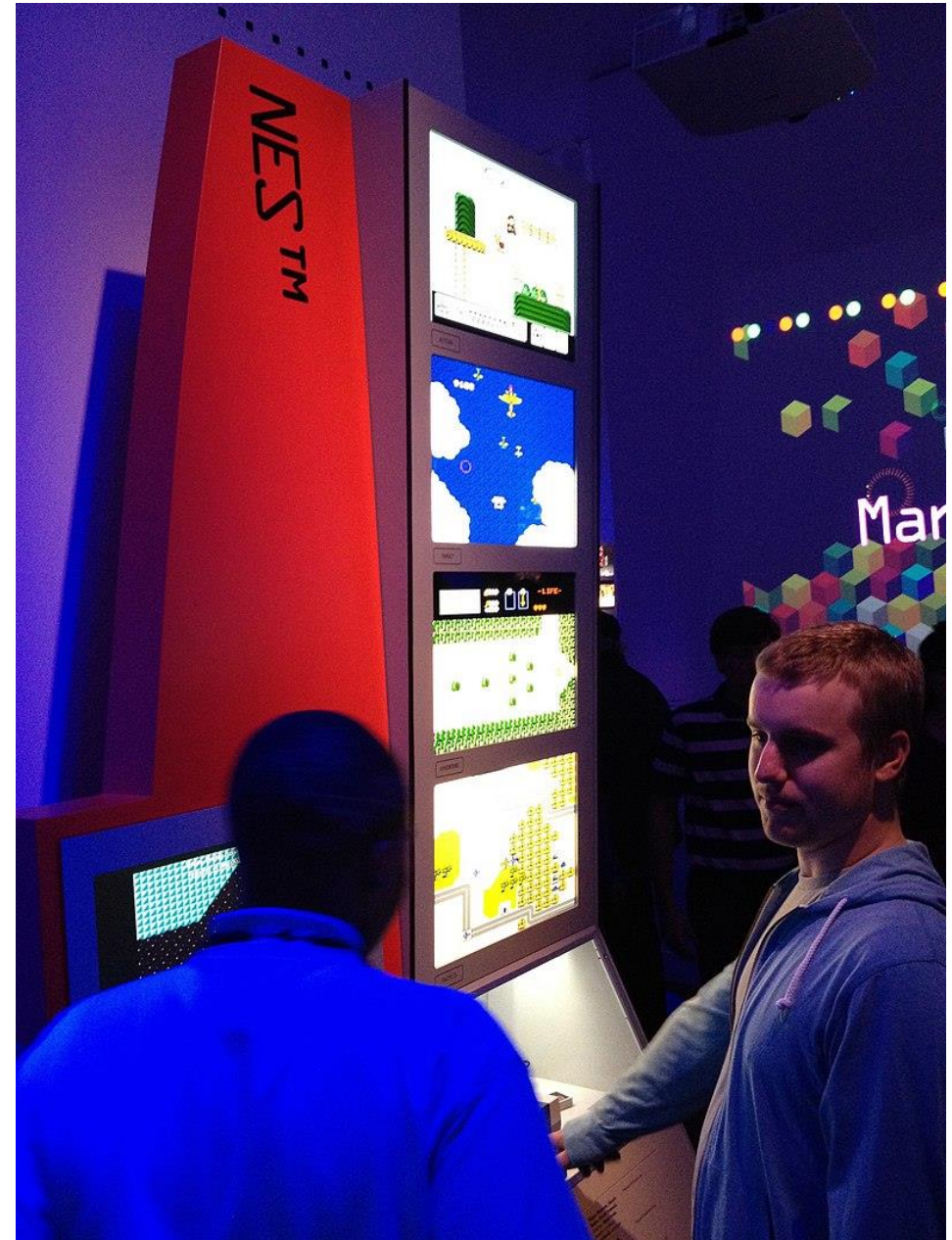
Addiction to Fiction

Literature

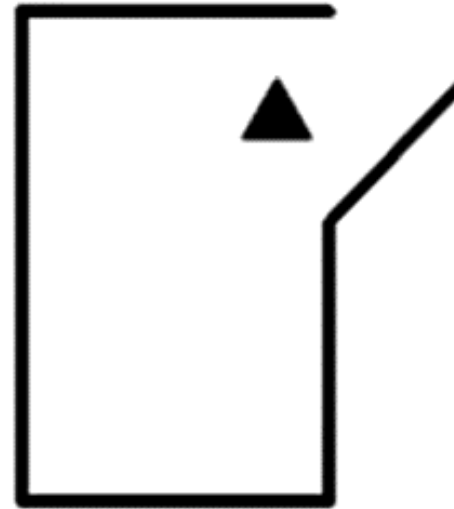


Addiction to Fiction

Video games



Storytelling (and attending) is
automatic and requires very little
input



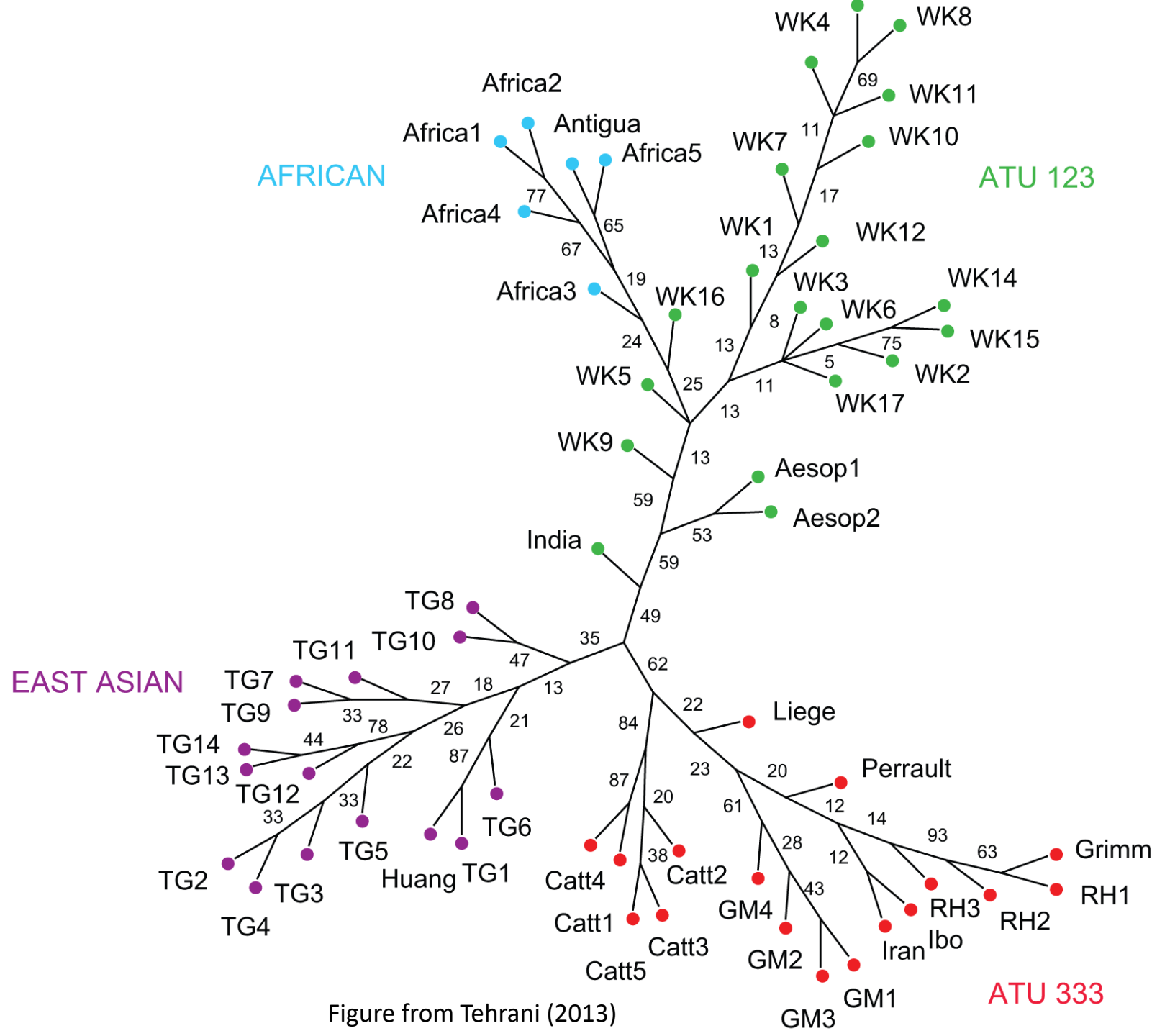
This suggests storytelling is a natural
cognitive function: “narrativity”

Narrativity = organising
experiences and events into a
pattern of meaningful relations –
things happen for a reason (usually,
goals and motivations of agents)

Narrative aids comprehension and
memory, but also excludes and distorts
information

Stories Evolve

- We know that narratives evolve
- Shaped by the selection pressures of human minds and societies
- Some stories are products of incredible lineages



Cultural Evolution of Narratives

- Cultural evolution proposes – culture evolves in a Darwinian sense
 - Variation
 - Heredity
 - Selection
- Guide through genres of Romance, Soap Opera, Fantasy, Horror, Crime, Conspiracy theories and Fake news
- How they reflect processes of cultural evolution

Cultural Evolution of Narratives

- Each session will consist of a short video lecture like this one
- And an exercise to complete yourself which will give greater insight into research techniques and theories

Cultural Evolution of Narratives

- Show how researchers use techniques to examine and understand these processes
- What can we learn about the evolution of stories?
- What does their evolution tell us about us?



To be continued...