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NARRATIVITY IN TEXT CONSTRUCTION
AND SELF CONSTRUCTION*

The paper tries to suggest parallels between the study of narrative organization in psychology and the philosophical trends towards a decomposed view of the human mind. It starts off from an analysis of narrative organization in modern memory research. The substantial message of this research from the point of view of narrative studies is threefold: it emphasizes the importance of schematization in memory, as opposed to mere associative structures; it shows that among the possible schemata narrative organization is the most available and most universal one; as to the content of narrative schemata it shows that they are closely tied to our naive theories of human action. In a psychological sense, the cohesion of narratives is tied to their use of intentional attribution. We apply our schemata of human action to understand the plot of narratives. The Hume-Mach style empiricists, and later on modern novelists have been struggling for a long time with the place of Subjects in a totally decomposed vision of the world and the mind. This modern emphasis on a lack of coherence is recently becoming connected to the issue of narrativity in non-trivial ways by philosophers like Daniel Dennett. This trend accepts the idea of decomposing the self and other unifying constructions. However, the human need for coherence is accepted by them, and rather than proposing cohesion based on solid Egos, they propose different varieties of narrative theories regarding the self. These proposals have a strong Humeian flavor with their emphasis on the constructed but useful nature of the self concept. Their intellectual novelty is, however, that they try to find the sources for constructed coherence in narrativity.

The paper argues that the philosophical and psychological narrative theories of the self have relevance to the study of literary narratives. Part of modern literature in this regard can be seen as a human experiment in facing the lability and soft construal of human integrity.

All novels, of every age, are concerned with the enigma of the self.
Milan Kundera: *The art of the novel,* p. 23

THE UBIQUITY OF NARRATIVE PATTERNS

Modern humanities and social sciences had come several times to the conclusion that narration is a very special feature of human nature, and therefore, it is somehow a key to understanding humans. At first, this train of thought was mainly psychological and concentrated or rather limited its attempts to the study of the relationships between memory organization and narrative patterns. Provocative ideas were developed *vis a vis* the dominant world view, regarding elementary associationism especially.

In classical psychology, the issue of narration first emerged in connection with a critic of association as an explanatory concept. The British experimentalist, Sir Frederick Bartlett (1932), the French clinician Pierre Janet (1928), and the Russian educational psychologist Pavel Blonskij (1935) have all advanced narration as a basic non-associative organizing principle of the human mind. For Bartlett, narratives were the key moments in *schematic memory* which was already characterized by Alfred Binet (Binet and Henry, 1894) as the mirror of thought. Blonskij (1935) also believed that narrative organization is the key to "logical memory". The French clinical theorist, Pierre Janet (1928) even claimed that logically organized text was a key to rationality, since the origin of rationality should be looked for in interpersonal coordination.

More distant intellectual antecedents can also be traced since this first narrative trend in psychology was part of a dissatisfaction with elementaristic experimental psychology at the turn of century. The dual memory system proposed by Bergson (1896) can be interpreted as a duality between the memories of the body (habits) and meaningful, personalized memories. The human brain is a storehouse of habits, but it only provides an access route to personal souvenirs, which themselves are not identical with any "memory traces". In order to interpret and personalize something, a royal way is to assimilate it to a schema, provide a story-like narrative structure to the random data of our memory system. (For an interpretation of Bergson along these lines see Pléh, 1989).

The French social school of psychology, partly reflecting on Bergson, went further. For them, the personally interpreted experiences of Bergson turned into socially constructed experiences. They moved to a position that denied the existence of "raw, uninterpreted experiences" altogether. In this process, narrative organization became a key element of human life. Maurice Halbwachs (1925, 1950, 1992, 1994) in his work on collective memory, that still is the standard reference point for studies on historical memory, presented narratives as being responsible for the social nature of our memory in two regards. Social groups build up their community life by inventing and sharing stories, thereby creating a common interpretation of experience. The "substance" of community life is inherent in stories. The social aspect, however, has a

structural side, as well. Narrative organization prevails even in our most private memories, in our dreams and daydreams as well. Structurally, all our experience is socially organized. There is no such thing as socially non-interpreted mental content. Whatever comes to our mind, becomes intelligible through the intervention of the "social moment", and this social moment is provided by narratives.

The social aspect for Halbwachs was an "intentional issue", and not that of the relationship between stable external and internal objects. In this way, with the rejection of the "objecthood" of memory, Halbwachs opened a road towards constructive theories, both regarding memory and in constructing the person (Pléh, 2000).

Their philosophical roots notwithstanding, these first narrative theories failed to become paradigm setting alternative approaches to psychology and in the humanities. They had relatively little affinity with the philosophies of their time, and while they had a clear conception about the role of schemata and their social origin, they did not succeed in winning the interest of epistemologists, and did not succeed in trying to propose a general theory on the origins of Self and personhood based on the notion of narrative schemata. Interestingly enough, the strong alternative paradigm at the time of the first narrative theories was articulated in the domain of the psychology of perception as *Gestalt* theory.

The first narrative models were also insensitive to the dramatic changes going on in their own time in the narrative patterns of modern European literature. On the other hand, it is true as well that early constructionist theories of selfhood in philosophy were also uninterested in the issues of narration. The recent affinity between these three areas indeed indicates a definite change in cultural climate. This is rather a present day development, as well as the search for parallels between changes in contemporary prose writing and our conception of identity and the Self.

NARRATIVES IN PRESENT DAY COGNITIVE STUDIES

The high time of narratives in psychology has come back from the late sixties on. Now, however, the narrative patterns were imported to psychology from folklore, anthropology and literary studies, and while they infiltrated psychology, they had soon reached a level of generality touching upon philosophical issues such as the relationships between story telling practices and our naive notions of personhood.

Through the rediscovery of the works of the Russian folklorist Vladimir Propp (1928/1958), anthropologists realized that strict rules or regularities are hidden behind the fantasy rich world of our tales. Tales are by far not the terrain of irregularity and unconstrained fantasy. Rather, they are characterized by a limited number of "roles" and "functions", they have a culturally constrained repetitive structure.

In this new trend, narratives started to carry two basic notions for social sciences and the humanities: *order and "surplus value". Order* implies that connected discourse is no more a mirror of the chaos of the world, but rather, follows a set of *constraints*. These constraints embody an underlying pattern that goes beyond the mere concatenation of propositions. In the new, linguistically minded trend this suggested

to look for a pattern that goes beyond individual sentences to find the real patterned meaning in discourse. In actual research, this would both mean an emphasis on the "surplus value" of discourse as compared to a set of individual sentences, and an ideology which sees a world view hidden in the organization of text (Greimas, 1966, Todorov, 1969). The new structural approach to stories had some resemblance to the previous starting from social schematization and constraints, but with a stronger linguistic emphasis. It also has similarities to earlier *Gestalt* approaches, but now, with the linguistic turn in full force, the "enemy" is not the idea of elementary sensation, but atomic sentences.

Psycholinguists have come in touch with this structural approach to narrative organization through revitalizing the concept of *schemata*. Narrative patterns turned into something crucial for the psychologists, because they promised to provide a substantial anchoring point for the otherwise elusive concept of schemata. Schemata interpreted in a narrative way are not simple products of the constructive powers of the individual mind, rather, they are interpreted as being anchored in an external social order. The patterning inherent in narration promised to give a really interpreted view of schematization, that had unexpected consequences for our conceptions about ourselves.

EMPIRICAL STORY RESEARCH IN PRESENT DAY COGNITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

> *Out of the mysterious and chaotic fabric of life, the old novelists tried to tease*
> *the thread of a limpid rationality;*
> *in their view, the rationally accessible motive gives birth to an act,*
> *and that act provokes another. An adventure is a luminously causal chain of acts.*
> Milan Kundera: *The Art of the Novel,* 58.

In modern psychological research on discourse memory usually two types of processes are highlighted: *integration and selection*. Whatever one remembers from a text is at the same time more and less than the text itself. Bridging informational gaps between the different propositions becomes part of the representation, which is a coherent causal chain (Schank, 1975). Complex and unclear texts, on the other hand are simplified and converted into a more logical version. In this process we act as if we had found the leading propositions underlying the text.

These general principles are valid for remembering all sorts of texts. Why are narrative texts so special, why are they for examples so much easier to understand and remember than other texts? (See a detailed argument for this ease in Zinchenko, 1961.) Present day psychological studies look for the explanation of this superiority in the general organization of narrative patterns. While the organizing moments are easy to mobilize, they can turn into overall mental models at the same time, keys to the understanding of other processes such as the interpretation of real events.

SOME RELEVANT FEATURES OF NARRATIVES

(A)   They represent a *temporal organization* where the order of some (the critical) propositions is assumed to be the order of events in real life. Due to this feature, narratives are apt to be used and treated as causal models of events and actions. Labov and Waletzky (1967) used a distributional analysis to formalize this in spontaneous narratives. Narrative clauses in spontaneous story-telling are partially ordered thus providing the basis for "narrative time". This has an interesting developmental aspect, as Bruner and Luciarello (1989, Bruner, 1996) highlighted it: temporal perspective in the child's mind is formed in the process of story telling. One can of course go further, and claim as Janet (1928) already did, and as Ricoeur (1965) and others do today, that the psychological time dimension comes from narration altogether (see about this Modell, 1993).

(B)   Stories as a special type of narration require *a hero, who has a system of goals, as well as a perspective*. Perspective (who's vision of the world do we use) characterizes not only higher literary forms but all narratives. The hidden philosophy of stories is given by the problem solving path of the hero within a motivational field created by the goal system. The essence of this "philosophy" is the coherence in the actions of the hero. A further step is provided by the idea that heroes are intentional agents, and that human actions performed by these agents form causal chains based on reasons and causes (Schank, 1975, Graesser, 1996). From a developmental perspective this suggests that by distinguishing between outside ("real life") events, the inner life of the hero, and the reactions of the narrator, story telling practices foster the distinction between objective reality and mental reality. (See the volume edited by Bruner and Hastie,1987 on this process of differentiation.) This aspect of stories has the challenging implication that narration is somehow intimately tied to our models of personhood and Self. The world of narration would be making the connection between the real world and our inner world (our Ego?). Narratives provide us, rather than being mere reports, also perspectives, the help to *"give meaning"* to whatever happens to us (Bruner and Luciarello, 1989).

MEMORIAL SCHEMATIZATION OF NARRATIVE DISCOURSE

What sort of explanatory models do predict memorial schematization observed in real life and in the psychological laboratory? To make a long story short, several decades of experimentation basically came to the conclusion that our cognition is regulated here as well as in person perception, action interpretation, and many other areas of social psychology basically by *an anthropomorphic naive psychology about the causes of human action*. Complicated events of real life, and the stories narrating them are made coherent and understandable by relying on a system of expectations using a model of human action.

Recall of narratives in this view is a selective and integrative reconstruction based on our action schemata. Narrative schemata are easy and they appear early in life, because they do rely on an early model of human intentional action that is supplemented by a perspective providing pattern of narration. Contemporary research on memory and psycholinguistics of text attempted to provide a more explicit version of these schemata in several forms. The different models can be sorted into two types, *form based* and *content based models of narrative schematization*. Initially, due to the enthusiasm for the structural models discovered in Propp (1958) psychologists also looked for the sources of schemata in the text itself, following the "linguistic turn" of philosophy in psychology as well. Structural models proposed for a given corpus of texts by Propp (1958) were extended and rewritten as a generative system of rules able to produce an open and infinite set of stories. The most elaborate example was the grammar for Eskimo folktales proposed by Colby (1973). According to the processing application of this model by David Rumelhart (1975), recall would be directed by these rules. Basically, more embedded episodes would have a lesser chance to be recalled, and some types of grammatical nodes would have a higher chance to be recalled. Several models of story grammars were proposed following Rumelhart. Essentially, all of them treated stories as a series of embedded attempts trying to achieve a Goal, as the simplified higher level structural rules indicate.

(1)   Story → Setting + Episode
(2)   Episode → State + Attempt
(3)   Attempt → Plan + Action + Outcome

Two aspects are rather relevant for our concerns here. First, these seemingly formal (syntactic) rules are also based on the organizational principles of human action, as a careful reading of the "morphology" of Propp shows it. An action-based pragmatic-semantic model stands behind the apparent "syntax" of these models. What else does rule (3) represent than the fact that according to our folk psychology Actions are preceded by Intentions, and Actions are interpreted as successful or unsuccessful in relation to the Intentions or Plans?

Beside this category analysis, some content-based models were also formed that reconsidered the seemingly "grammatical" relationships between events and actions in a narrative as motivational relationships between "naive psychological categories". "Who Done What Why" is the organizing principle as it was phrased most clearly in the Causal Chain model of Roger Schank (1975, Schank and Abelson, 1977).

All of these models received empirical support from experimental studies. "All" implies here that both types of models had a half dozen varieties in the heyday of story grammars. Grammar-like models received their psychological relevance from higher recall of structurally higher nodes and a better recall of Attempts, than Plans or States. Regarding the content-based models, higher recall of the main causal chain was observed and also more recall of Causes in physical actions, and higher recall of reasons regarding interpersonal scripts (László, 1986). The real test came, however, when pre-

dictions of the different models were compared over the same experimental material. Black and Bower (1980) and Pléh (1987) showed using multiple regression models for recall patterns based on the different story structure proposals, that the models that relied on the action system of the hero in assigning structure to the stories had a higher predictive power than the ones relying on a purely formal model. The kind of narrative research based on this naive social psychology has been flourishing ever since. Graesser (1992, 1996, Graesser and Clark, 1986) even developed a special on line questioning model to analyze how immediate is the construction of causal chains during reading texts.

These results coming from cognitive psychology imply that the key for the simplicity of simple stories , the special schema we looked for (the schema that is so easy, appears so early in life, and is so much universal) should be looked for in the *naive psychology of human action.* In understanding stories, we mobilize our naive social psychology about the structure of human action and about the usual motives for action. Coherence is found by the hearer-reader through the projection of these motivated action schemata to the story. The specificity of traditional simple stories lies in the fact that due to the prototypical motivations in a given culture, and due to the simple transparent narrative point of view, this action organization can be revealed easily and unequivocally on the part of the understander (see about this László, 1986, Halász, László and Pléh, 1988).

There is a further question regarding the origins of these interpretation patterns. The initial questions regarding what gives pattern to simple stories, find an answer in "naive social psychology". One has somehow to answer the upcoming next question: where do patterns of naive social psychology originate from? Through its intimate connection with the issue about the origin of a "theory of mind" in humans, there are rival solutions here. One of them would basically state that some kind of intentional and earlier even teleological attribution is a modular feature of the human mind developing very early on (Gergely, Nádasdy, Csibra, and Bíró, 1995, Csibra and Gergely, 1998), while others would claim in their similarly non-essentialist approach that this naive theory develops as a very result of experience with narrations (Bruner, 1985, 1990, 1996), I should add, also carrying a strong social emphasis about the origin of our attributing schemata. Thus, a search for coherence underlies our schematization of stories, and this coherence is basically found by "turning on" our machinery of intentional attributions, and thereby reconstructing a causal chain that consists of causes and reasons that lead to these events. This is the view of the classical writer, too, as the Kundera motto indicates.

The empirical research on remembering narratives that seemed to be originally a rather "down to earth" empiricist project, through the seemingly innocent notion of "connected discourse" and "schemata" did become tied to issues touching upon the "frame problem" of the entire enterprise of human cognition.

NARRATION AS CONSTRUCTING COHERENCE
AND THE CRISIS OF COHERENCE

That is the point where the narrative frame issue becomes intimately tied to the crisis
of modernity and to the problem of the relations between the changes of narrative pat-
terns and a crisis in our view of ourselves. In present day intellectual contexts
narrativity is entertained not only as a "low level, down to earth" theory about actual
narrations, but also as narrative metatheory. There is a remarkable basic similarity in
the way narratives become central in experimental psychology, in the study of devel-
opment and in the cultural and philosophical theorizing about the centrality of narra-
tion. At the same time, new patterns of narration take shape. The extended narrative
conceptions define themselves as contrasted to the *essentialism* of the classical view
of man (see about this opposition Bruner, 1985, 1990). Essentialism in this regard is
the belief in a postulated stable Ego as a starting point, and a stable world of objects.
This is replaced by a world that is socially constructed through our narratives, and
with a constructed Ego, rather than the Ego being a Cartesian starting point (Dennett,
1991).

   The narrative philosophical interpretations take a special look on the mind and
personhood. They attempt to construct a new vision of Consciousness and the Self on
this basis. This line of thought sets off from the concept of dissolution and distribu-
tion. When it looks for metaphors of the mind, it compares it to the issue of integrating
large empires like the British Empire where due to communication problems things
seem to be disintegrated, there is no real center. Human mind is likewise characterized
by spatial and temporal disintegration or distribution. The narrative metaphor in this
argumentation becomes an integrating tool. The disorganized events in our mind get
organized through the mediation of stories we tell to ourselves. The unity of con-
sciousness and self disappears as a first step and comes back through the back door as
narrative integration (Dennett, 1990, 1991, Dennett and Kinsbourne, 1992). This type
of metatheory is among the first ones to make a close connection between two sorts of
"crises" regarding coherence going on within European culture. One is the crisis of
narration, the other the crisis of the Self-concept.

   In the 20th century, there were several waves of feelings to the effect that not only
our outer world fell apart into pieces and became incoherent, but our internal world as
well. We could start from a "Once upon a time Order", the harmony between the
world of God, the stable Self and the stable patterns of Narration. This age is charac-
terized by *transparency*. In the good old days of early modernity, Cartesian unity and
transparency governed everywhere (Latour, 1993). The intentional stance (Dennett,
1987) could be taken regarding all the three realms that are of interest to us. The World
was created by an intentional God (the argument from design), our internal world of
experience was transparent to a self-conscious intentional agent, the Mind, Soul, Ego,
or Self, and the Stories we wrote were also about intentional Heroes who carried
clearly identifiable Plans. The whole world was to be characterized by stable inten-
tional agents. (See about this heritage and its multiple crises Toulmin,1990, and espe-
cially the volume edited by Dorothy Ross, 1994.)

The dissolution of this unity and the birth of a "distributed or deconstructed view" of the human mind was first proposed by the most courageous of the empiricists, David Hume.

> What we call a *mind*, is nothing but a heap or collection of different perceptions, united together by certain relations. ... The mind is a kind of theater, where several perceptions successively make their appearance.
>
> D. Hume: *A Treatise on Human Nature.* Vol. 1. 436, 438.

He clearly realized that this vision had dreadful consequences for the notion of personal identity:

> There are some philosophers who imagine we are every moment conscious of what we may call our self ... for my part, when I enter most intimately into what I call *myself,* I always stumble on some particular perception or other, ... I never can catch *myself* at any time without a perception. ... And were all my perfections removed by death, and could I neither think, nor feel, nor see, nor love, nor hate after the dissolution of my body, I should be entirely annihilated.
>
> D. Hume: *A Treatise on Human Nature.* Vol. 1. 436, 438.

This attitude was never trivial to take. Following Hume, the questioning of unity and its reassertion came usually from rival ideological camps and therefore from different sources. As a bold generalization one can claim that the proponents of disintegration were usually progressives who believed in the power of empiricist attitudes and science, by far not being pessimistic about their conclusions, and the trends reemphasizing unity were usually closer to church powers and to religious ideas about an immortal soul (Goldstein, 1994).

In the debates of nineteenth century on the issue of a substantial Self there was a constant give and take between the "religious" and the "empiricist" critical theories (Carrithers, Collins, and Lukes 1985). The idea of a disunited Self came along several times during these debates. It showed up in the French empiricist epistemology of Condillac and others, and in the radical positivist views of people like Mach (1897, 1910). There was always a strong counter reaction. In French intellectual life, the radical deconstruction proposed by the body image theories of Condillac were opposed by the mid-century school philosophy of Cousin that reinstated "Moi" as a starting point (see Goldstein, 1993). Seen in this context, the psychopathological ideas of Charcot and Janet about the dissolution of personality, as well as those of Freud at the other end of the continent were less radical proposals than seen at first sight: the contemporary and earlier empiricist deconstructions were much more radical in their intent.

THE NEED FOR COHERENCE

Our present intellectual world can be characterized by two types of dissolutions (or, if you prefer, crises). The first one is the dissolution of the stable Ego that was already characteristic of the late 19th century philosophy and psychology that became with the

words of the Hungarian philosopher Kristóf Nyíri (1992) "impressionistic" in its search for stable reference points. The same goes on in the most up-to-date *connectionist* approaches to the mind (McClelland and Rumelhart, 1986). Their emphasis is laid on a "nothing but" approach to the mind (knowledge is nothing but a pattern of activation in a neural network), and on overwhelming parallel processing and distributed representation all question the conventional Cartesian unity of the mind. It is still the best introduction to this radical connectionism. There is not too much space left in this for the Ego: it is in a way dissolved in the multiplicity of the parallel and in themselves meaningless multiplicity of computations and connections. Churchland (1995) gives a comprehensive radical interpretation for all of this by stating that all aspects and issues of human inner mental life would on the long run be simply identified with neural models.

The other, parallel dissolution or disintegration went on in the realm of culture. One dominant aspect of this in 19th century had been a dissolution of traditional patterns of narration. There are interesting parallels here between artistic practice and philosophy. Kristóf Nyíri (1992) analyzed the affinities between the elementaristic theory of mind proposed by Ernst Mach (1897), and the school of impressionistic painting. The strong drive to liberate yourself from anything secondary, knowledge based (top-down), anything schematic and a search for undeniable, original certainty lead to pictorial and epistemological impressionism: the real raw stuff of both would consist of patch-like pieces of experience. There was, however, a similar trend in questioning the validity of traditional narrative schemata and the underlying naive application of the intentional stance as well. There are interesting parallels between giving up the idea of a causal chain in the outside social world of the novel, and questioning the presence of an integrative Ego in the inner world of the novel. (Kundera, 1986 gives an interesting survey along these lines.)

In the new types of narrations taking shape in 20th century the God-like image of an author with all encompassing knowledge is replaced by either a direct presentation of the inner world, or with a description of external behavior with no preassigned perspectives. Narration dominated by the intentional stance is replaced by a presentation of internal mosaics like already in Proust or Joyce, or in the French Nouveau Roman, or in the theoreticians and practitioners of postmodern literatures. Among the later ones, Hassan (1987, 1990) tries to make a connection between new writing and the "deviations of the self". He lists the slogans about the dissolution of the Self that have a tragic connotation (divided Self, downgraded Self, dissolved Self, and so on), but after this exercise, he makes a postmodern turn. He arrives to the conclusion that by questioning the selves of the hero and the writer, and hereby by playing with the narrative point of view, new playful narrative structures may emerge.

With the birth of the modern novel in Proust, Joyce, and Musil, writers show that Kundera is right: they were experimenting with knowledge structures, and prefigured a narrative concept of identity (including with all of its crises) well before it was formulated as a theory of mind by philosophers.

The relationships between the issue of Self and narrative structures was already realized by some of the classics of narrative research in psychology, without relating them to the issue of literature. Frederic Bartlett (1935, p. 311) himself said:

> There may be a substantial Self, but this cannot be established by experiments on individual and social recall, or by any amount of reflection on the results of such experiments.

Samuel Beckett (1987) gives a similar interpretation for the importance of the multiple and non-conscious construction of the Self in Proust:

> But here, in that 'goufre interdit a nos sondes' is stored the essence of ourself, the best of our many selves and their concretions that simplists call the world.
>
> <div align="right">S. Beckett: Proust. 31.</div>

There are tragic, and ambiguous, ironical overtones as well in the literature regarding the dissolution of the Self. Both do leave one central issue open, however. When we dissect the Self into elementary experiences and their relationships, and narration into narrative morsels, do we make them disappear by this very act? Did the Self really disappear, or do we only claim that compared to the primary stuff of experiences it is only secondary? (That is the way, for example, Beckett interprets Proust.) Did narration disappear, or is it only a secondary organization compared to the primary thread of discourse? Did we manage to radically eliminate coherence, that is usually accounted for by the Self and by narration, or we only made it secondary rather than using it as a starting point?

Narrative metatheory as a non-essentialist view of coherence takes the second option. Rather than postulating a substantial Self, the coherence of our internal world comes around by milder means, by story telling.

The issue of coherence in communicative terms implies that the partners, A and B have to follow a mutual, joint model. They have to allow each other to reconstruct similar relationships between the individual propositions. This is referred to as the maxim of relevance by the communication model of Paul Grice (1975), and as the issue of higher order models of intentionality by Dennett (1987).

Seen from this perspective, traditional *narrative schemata* with their mobilization of intentional action interpreting moduls are rather powerful coherence-building devices. One of the clearest aspects of the transformation of these in modern "high literature" concerns the changes in the comprehensive Plans of action from the point of view of the Hero and/or the Narrator. Its presence gives coherence to classical narratives, be it fairy tales – he wants to marry a king's daughter, sets out into the world, and through many obstacles gets her, or bourgeois novels – he comes to the big city, wants to make a career, relying on relatives and women, reaches his goals. The comprehensive message of the literary work is tied to the intentional system of the hero. The final meaning (the life philosophy embedded in classical narration) of the work is the idea that there is a continuous, intelligible life, with initiatives of human Agents, who are full of Plans. These Plans give coherence of the man and of narration, as Kundera (1986) shows.

Of course, classical narration had many varieties, but they were sharing these underlying assumptions. Classical detective stories hide the plan that makes the events coherent, and it is the task of the reader, or Mr. Holmes to reveal them. But it is possible to reveal them because they do exist. Something different is happening in modern literature. It spoils this "super plan", this goal system encompassing the entire novel. Kundera (1986) sensitively presents how this type of goal coherence is ruined in the novels and realities of Franz Kafka. The hero is subjected to non-transparent Plans of others, and these Plans do not become clear even till the end of the story. The continuous goal system disappeared before Kafka as well. It is replaced by the world of inner experience in Joyce, and in Proust, as analyzed by Beckett the action based logic of narration and the actions of the hero are replaced by an undifferentiated network of experience, imagery, and souvenirs.

> The identification of immediate with past experience, the recurrence of past action or reaction in the present, amounts to a participation between the ideal and the real, imagination and direct apprehension, symbol and substance. Such participation frees the essential reality that is denied to the contemplative as to the active life. What is common to present and past is more essential than either taken separately.
>
> <div align="right">S. Beckett: Proust. 74.</div>

The whole work of Proust is not merely an essay on memory, but a practice in the relationship between unconstrained unintentional memory, and "voluntary memory", the "uniform memory of intelligence". " … his entire book is a monument to involuntary memory and the epic of its action" (ibid., 34).

The comprehensive Plan disappears not only in the impressionistic presentation of the internal world but also on the level of behavior. In this third type of modern writing the external behavior is not characterized by clear Plans. Rather, things just happen to the hero, and he acts reactively, and tries to give meaning to the actions only afterwards. The continuous world of intentions is replaced not by an inner world of experience, but by the world of behavior. Think of some of the acts of Mersault in *The Stranger,* or to the beginning acts of Belmondo in *Au Bout de Souffle*. The reader and the viewer are immediately presented by pieces of behavior, without enough preparation for the setting, and without a possible intentional interpretation. The individual experiences and acts are not presented as parts of an encompassing Plan. They can only be given a local interpretation. He shot the cop asking for his papers, but this happened so fast that neither he (the hero, Belmondo), nor we, the viewers had any chance to build up a plan to motivate the deed (*Au Bout de Souffle*). In a secondary way, we give interpretation to something that already happened. We make a story out of it like psychoanalysts, but the unique uninterpreted act preceded the story, while in classical narrative patterns the starting point is the story with its intentional layout, and unique events fill the slots in a secondary way. Classical narration, while it certainly uses a narrative pattern, treats the pattern in an essentialist way, with a belief in the integrative Self, the events being only manifestations of this. This is in accordance with the top-down style of writing, and with the ideal of an omnipotent and omniscient writer.

The key scene from *The stranger* illustrates this lack of narrative buildup relying on intentions:

> Then everything began to reel before my eyes, a fiery gust came from the sea, while the sky cracked in two, from end to end, and a great sheet of flame poured down through the rift. Every nerve in my body was a still spring, and my grip closed on the revolver. The trigger gave, and the smooth underbelly of the butt jogged my palm. And so, with that crisp, whipcrack sound, it all began.
>
> Albert Camus: *The Stranger*. 76.

The murder by Meursault is rather different from that of Lafcadio in the *Caves of the Vatican* by Gide. His act is quoted as the classical example of *action gratuite.* This is an act of "no motive" however, only in the sense of bringing no utility to the actor. Otherwise, Gide makes it sure that we see it as planned, intentional, premeditated action. Lafcadio even laughs in advance how much trouble will the police have in dealing with a *crime sans motive*, with an unmotivated crime.

> It's not so much about events that I'm curious, as about myself. There's many a man thinks he is capable of anything, who draws back when it comes to the point... What a gulf between the imagination and the deed !... And no more right to take back one's move than at chess. Pooh! if one could foresee all the risk, there'd be no interest in the game!
>
> A. Gide: *Lafcadio's Adventures.* 186.

Of course, there are plenty of more recent examples for the dissolution of intentional coherence. In this respect, Christine Brooke-Rose (1986) presented a rather interesting outline for the changes in writing so typical of modern (and of course postmodern) literature. First came the defocalization of the hero. That was already present in the 19th century. Think of the well known comparisons regarding the Waterloo battlefield descriptions by Victor Hugo in *Les Misérables* where you have an epic enumeration combined with a panoramic view and a clear presentation of the scenery, with the scene of Fabricio del Dongo being part of the great battle in Stendhal's *Chartreuse de Parme* without really knowing it. The entire scene is defocussed: we see the hero as being entirely out of the intentional plans of the agents, unaware of their plans, and even of them being agents. He does not even realize he is seeing the great man he came for. He is part of the battle without knowing he was there.

This is defocussing of the intentional plans, indeed. But this was further combined with a defocussing of the "survival value" of the hero. Present day heroes are no more close friends of ours as Madame Bovary or Anna Karenina, or Rastignac, to that effect.

In the vision presented by Brooke-Rose (1986), the postmodern riot against character and stability actually eliminated anything that would contribute to the coherence i.e., anaphoric and referential signs, and only the egocentric or deictic signs would work. There are, however, signs of hope (if you like) according to her. Character shall come back through the back door, through science fiction and stabilization of the postmodern play with fiction.

COHERENCE WITHOUT SUBJECTS

The concept of communicative coherence allows us to look for inner coherence in a non-essentialist way and to avoid the usual pendulum-like shifts between disintegrated and essentialist views of the Self. The notion of coherence might be a help in finding some peace in the chaos of the world without necessarily committing ourselves to another round of essentialism. The philosophical system proposed by Daniel Dennett (1987, 1991, 1994, 1996) has some intellectual promise here, especially since he consciously connects the two types of dissolutions, that of the Self, and of the narrative patterns. For postulating coherence, he does not need a hypothesized subject. The coherence of inner life (the Self, if you like) will be a "soft notion" for him, a "gravitational point" of all the stories we tell ourselves.

For classical empiricist theories like Condillac and Mach, body image was the central source of coherence. Beside emphasizing our general tendency to attribute continuity to things we name, the other anchoring point is found by Mach in the concept of the body. Here Mach reiterates and modernizes an idea already apparent in the work of Condillac, and later on taken up by several theories both in comparative and in clinical psychology (Henry Head, Frederick Bartlett) that take the body schema, the representation of our body as central to the Self concept. "As relatively permanent, is exhibited, further, that complex of memories, moods, and feelings, joined to a particular body (the human body), which is denominated the 'I' or 'Ego'" (Mach, 1897. p. 3).

This centrality of the notion of body image did not disappear in present day discussions. It is certainly textbook material in psychology and it is seen in new neuropsychological theories as well. Antonio Damasio (1994) in his work on the representation of emotions and their role in the shaping of our goal system claims that the emotionally laden representation of our body is the central core to our Self concept. Dennett (1991) is his view on consciousness also gives a central role to the body image in the reduction of our notion of the Self. However, his new original point is the use of the narrative metatheory.

Dennett basically claims for a soft and constructed theory of Self that is even softer then the body image notion.

> A self, according to my theory, is not any old mathematical point, but an abstraction defined by the myriads of attributions and interpretations (including self-attributions and self-interpretations) that have composed the biography of the living body whose Center of Narrative Gravity is.
>
> Daniel Dennett: *Consciousness explained.* 426–427.

Without a narrative excursion this very metaphor was already present in the philosophy of arithmetic proposed by Frege (1884) who already uses the metaphor of soft notion, and the very image of gravitational points.

> I distinguish what I call objective from what is handleable or spatial or real. The axis of the earth is objective, so is the center of gravity of the solar system, but I should not call them real in the way the earth is real.
>
> G. Frege: *The Foundations of Arithmetic.* 35.

Dennett is clearly aware of the ethical implications of a system based on soft notions. This issue was raised many times since the time of Hume, and it was indeed one of the main resources of the essentialist moralistic arguments (see Perry, 1985).

> The task of constructing a self that can take responsibility is a major social and educational project... The only hope … is to come to understand, naturalistically, the ways in which brains grow self-representation. ...

> If you think of yourself as a center of narrative gravity, on the other hand, your existence depends on the persistence of that narrative (rather like the Thousand and One Arabian Nights, but all a single tale), which could theoretically survive infinitely many switches of medium … and stored indefinitely as sheer information.

> Dennett, ibid., 429–430.

[Exegi monumentum aere perennius...]
Horatius, Carm III. 30, 1.

This is similar conception though with some ironical twist to the one proposed by Sir Karl Popper (1972) about World III, namely that culture can in principle survive the destruction of its objective carriers. Here, the similar view is claimed for the relationships between bodies, programs, selves, and narrative constructions. (See about this Pléh, 1999.)

Dennett has his own ironies, of course, what would you expect from a constructionist theory. He quotes a novel mocking deconstructionism by David Lodge.

> According to Robyn [she is the postmodern theorist] (*or, more precisely, according to the writers who have influenced her thinking on these matters)* there is no such thing as the "Self" on which capitalism and the classic novel are founded – that is to say, a finite, unique soul or essence that constitutes a person's identity; there is only a subject position in an infinite web of discourses – the discourses of power, sex, family, religion, poetry, etc. And by the same token, there is no such thing as an author, that is to say one who originates a work of fiction ex nihilo. ... As in the famous words of Jacques Derrida ... "il n'y a pas de hors – texte", there is nothing outside the text. There are no origins, there is only production, and we produce our "selves" in language. Not "you are what you eat", but "you are what you speak", **or rather "you are what speaks you"**, is the axiomatic basis of Robyn's philosophy, which she would call, if required to give it a name, "semiotic materialism".

> David Lodge: *Nice Work*, 22.

In the view of Dennett, there is no internal agent in a Cartesian Theater who would make things coherent. Coherence comes as a relaxation point in forging intentional sequences out of the events coming to us. The use of the intentional stance is the macroscopic side of the constructing work of our brain. There is microscopic one, too, that is valid over shorter periods. Dennett and Kinsbourne (1992) apply the narrative metatheory to the order of milliseconds as well to create a theory of consciousness. Essentially they claim that there are no central moments of consciousness. In our brain we are making Multiple Drafts of every incoming event (another narrative metaphor),

and there is one of these that under normal circumstances is treated as being a conscious stage in information processing. But that delimitation is also a constructive and slightly artificial notion.

For the same sequence of events several "stories" are created. There is none being more basic than the others.

How can you reconcile this fragility with a theory that otherwise claims taking the intentional stance as basic? Dennett protects himself against this challenge by allowing two different levels. You are entitled to use the intentional stance for the entire system, but not to its individual operations. But always remember, the application of the intentional stance is an evolutionary and economic hypothesis, that does not allow or require to postulate real agents in the brain.

This is a two level theory, like the one proposed by Bergson (1896) a century ago. The novelty of Dennett is twofold. For him, the second level, the level providing us with meaning and coherence, does not require a disembodied mind. This level is set into a narrative and intentional model that in principle will have an evolutionary story to it (see Dennett, 1994, 1996).

But if Self and all these things are soft notions, why can we talk about their crisis? The evolutionary argumentation might argue for simplification. We have essentialized our stances for thousands of years using notions such as soul, Self, mind, etc. When we are replacing them with narrative constructions, we do not have to be so passionate as the traditional empiricists were. The skeptical seriousness of finding the emperor naked should or could be replaced by a lighter and more narrative attitude to this newest questioning of the Self as a starting point.

Dennett of course, has his own critics. One of the most telling examples from the "neuro essentialist camp" is Paul Churchland (1995, p. 266) who criticizes him sharply for reintroducing in his narrative model a linguistic type of model for human consciousness. Dennett in his view pulls back the wrong prototype for cognition namely language, then "(2) makes it the model for human consciousness, (3) gives parallel distributed processing a cursory pat on the back for being able to simulate a 'virtual instance' of the old linguistic prototype, and (4) deals with his theory's inability to account for consciousness in nonlinguistic creatures by denying that they have anything like human consciousness at all". This criticism is rather misfired. Dennett (1987, 1994) always stands for continuity in his speculations about the origins of human cognition. While he has a slight linguistic bias, this is not necessarily a disadvantage, if you consider us a speaking, and even story telling species.

Psychoanalytic theory also phrased an interesting criticism, not directed specifically against Dennett, but more generally against exclusively narrative approaches to the Self. Narrative metatheory of course is a driving force in some reinterpretations of psychoanalysis as well. Starting from Ricoeur (1965) an approach has taken shape that sees in the psychoanalytic discourse not an unfolding of an internal essence, not a symptom of some natural sequence of libidinal development, but a series of constructed narratives, and psychoanalysis is a joint reconstruction of a new narrative between the analysts and their clients. As appealing as this approach is with all of its hermeneutic overtones, it is interesting to consider what Arnold Modell (1993), himself a

research oriented psychoanalyst, thinks of it. In his view, the narrative approach can only reveal and touch upon the temporal aspect of the Self, the other aspect remains tied to the representation of the body itself. "The literary analogy cannot be followed very far, *because the coherence of the psychoanalytic narrative is ultimately derived form the bodily Self and its affectionate memories*" (Modell, 1993, p. 182).

Dennett himself is not entirely exclusive in his narrative metatheory. At least as far as the concept of Self goes, he is happy with the representation of the body but wants to supplement it with the narrative metaphor.

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