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Narratology beyond Literary Criticism

Mediality, Disciplinarity

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The Eye of the Beholder

Narratology as Seen by Social Psychology

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1. Introduction

At first sight, a fundamental difference between social science and narratology meets the eye: social science concerns people. It concerns the *homo narrans*, a very special animal that produces narratives. Narratology, on the other hand, concerns narratives, the stories produced by this story-telling animal. Social science takes individuals (positioned in a social context) as its starting point; narratology provides a way to deal with stories, something produced by (and for) the *homo narrans* through the practice of storytelling. Both fields have undergone fundamental changes, and many links have developed between them, but the differences between their underlying conceptions can still be felt today.

Thus, there is good reason to examine the relationship between these two distinct fields of enquiry. Interest in narrative approaches has grown steadily in the increasingly diverse field of social science in recent decades. Hevern's analysis (2003) of the PsycINFO citation index illustrates this: he found that the number of citations in which the terms 'narrative' or 'narration' are used grew by a surprising 2569 percent between 1960 and 2001. The last ten years, in particular, have seen a massive growth in interest in narrative. Successful as narrative may have been in securing a place in the social sciences, it is not immediately obvious what social psychologists are trying to achieve when they incorporate narrative concepts into their work. Indeed, there may even be some suspicion among narratologists that their concepts could be misused in such a way that much of their work on refining models and terms would be undone. Certainly, the number of citations alone says nothing about the state of narrative concepts when they are used in social psychology. Nor does it provide any indication of whether social psychologists follow the guidelines provided by narratology for the use of such concepts.

From the perspective of social psychology, the importing discipline, the success of the narrative approach is quite remarkable and calls for explanation: ‘Why, at this particular juncture, is there so much interest in narrative?’ (Freeman 1998:45). Freeman seeks to identify more than causes; he is concerned with the historical place of this development, with understanding the current state of society. It is easy to see that use of narratological tools in the social sciences is increasing; in the following article, I hope to follow Freeman’s example by considering this development in a critical light and putting it in a historical perspective.

2. Positioning the Inquirer: Social Psychology’s View of Narratology

In my search for an answer to Freeman’s question, I shall restrict my argument to the field of identity theory. This may seem to mean adopting a very narrow perspective, but it is justified by the fact that identity theory is a particularly dynamic area of social psychology. Furthermore, the rise of the concepts of narrative identity and self-narrative means that it is a field in which the narrative approach is well and undeniably established today. Thus, identity research is a prominent contributor to the rise of narrative reflected in the PsychINFO database.

Classical approaches to identity in social psychology take as their starting point the idea that it is in adolescence that people develop an idea of who they are and who they want to become in their social worlds. So, identity is about the self as a continuous self in time (the relatively stable part) as well as about developing a personal project (the dynamic part). Ricœur (1990:140) has distinguished between these aspects of identity as *idem* as sameness and *ipse* as selfhood. Classical identity theory has been questioned recently because of findings which suggest fundamental changes in this identity system. The question is how to conceive of identity in a rapidly changing world and how to develop a model of the individual that does not presuppose some solid inner core but conceives of the development of the individual as a construct unfolding in the world in—and through—its symbolic representations.

The current situation in identity theory provides a way to help us distinguish the various perspectives that can be adopted towards narratology and the various positions on which they are based. We find a general consensus among identity theorists that identity should be modelled as a process. This process has an agent and is realized in one way or another, which means that there is an outcome, a product of the process, fragile and provisional as it may be. And the process clearly takes place in a social world. If we juxtapose this with narratology, we can say that the latter

focuses on narrativity. Narrativity becomes recognizable—apparent—as a result of the act of narrating performed by a narrator, who thereby creates a fictional world in which his or her narrative is situated.

Social psychology focuses on		Narratology focuses on
identity , which is a		narrativity , which is perceptible in
process associated with an		telling performed by a
agent taking place in a		narrator , creating a
social world , and analyses its		story world , and leading to
constructs		narratives

Table 1: Identity Theory and Narratology: A Superficial Affinity

In my arrangement of table 1, I have established an affinity, justifiable at first sight at least, between conceptual levels. It relates similar levels of investigation. On a general level, for instance, we may ask: what is the formal relationship between the two disciplines—social psychology and narratology—or between basic concepts—such as processes, agents, and so on—within them? When looking closer at the various levels, however, we are confronted with many questions. Are we suggesting that identity is replaced by narrativity, that common ground exists, that hierarchical relationships are involved? Are some relationships more important than others; is there more affinity on the level of narrativity than, for instance, on that of agency? There are many ways to approach such questions; I shall adopt a functional perspective. The functionality of any given narrative approach in social psychology, however, depends on the theoretical position in identity theory from which we analyse it.

3. The Quest of Identity Theory

In order to understand what identity theory seeks in its approach to narratology, it is important to identify the underlying conceptual needs involved. Interest in narratology results from a search for ways to answer certain questions—identity theory employs narratology not for its own sake but

as a source of assistance in dealing with fundamental changes in the construction of identity in modern societies. There may be general agreement on the basic facts, but the same can hardly be said of the way in which these changes are understood and conceptualized. Identity theory displays a general tendency, fuelled by historical sociology and contemporary social analysis, to criticize cognitivist models (cf. Bruner 1990). They are held to be ahistorical, ideological, and focused on coherence, and, it is argued, they fail to give proper consideration to historical changes and personal meaning-making. Historical development is no more than a content matter for such theories; it does not enter into their formal structure. Contrary to such models, current theories highlight the relevance and historical specificity of formal aspects and the importance of personal meaning-making processes (Keupp et al. 2002).

Identity construction today, critics insist, is marked by fragmentation and diffusion, the lack—or at least decline—of coherence, the disappearance, as Lyotard has observed, of grand narratives. This is closely connected with individualization and changes in society that have been discussed under the rubrics of late modernity (Wagner 1994) and post-modernity (Gergen 1991). At the present time, identity theory is, generally speaking, concerned with the *constructability* of identities. The expanding scope of identity construction has characterized the transitions from one social configuration of modernity to another. ‘These transitions entail social processes of disembedding and provoke transformations of social identities, in the course of which not only other identities are acquired but the possibility of construction is also more widely perceived’ (Wagner 1994:157). Individualization processes are marked by the fact that the construction of coherence is no longer guaranteed by membership of large social groups (e.g. the Church, trade unions, social milieus or classes). The task of creating coherence is very much the responsibility of the individual person. The development of identity thus becomes a process, a never-ending story, always open for change. It is no longer a matter of constructing and realizing one’s personal project. Instead, it implies constantly rearranging and reframing oneself, testing and negotiating one’s limits. As illustrated by the main character in Martin Amis’s *Rachel Papers*, these acts of construction are performed in a situational context.

What clothes would I wear? Blue madras suit, black boots, or the old black cord suit with those touching leather elbow-patches. What persona would I wear? On the two occasions I had seen her last August I underwent several complete identity-reorganisations, settling finally somewhere between the pained, laconic, inscrutable type and the knowing, garrulous, cynical, laugh a minute, yet something demonic about him, something nihilistic, muted death-wish type. Revamp those, or start again? (Amis 1973:45)

Although the importance of individual requirements for a model can be debated, table 2 is a reasonable general portrayal of some of the more important questions being explored in current research. Individual theoretical decisions notwithstanding, any identity theory will be required to provide answers to this set of questions. What is needed, then, is a model of identity construction dealing with identity as a process. It must also allow for the possibility of a self open to multivoicedness. Such a self presupposes many selves and is not to be understood as a single closed unity. Its multiplicity demands a special exploration of agency and the self-other relationship. Furthermore, the approaches of identity politics have made it clear that the self-other relationship should be considered in terms of the construction of difference and power. As Sampson (1993) has shown, such strategies consist of the devaluation of the other and the construction of serviceable others to sustain power relationships. Identity thus becomes a reflexive project, open to self-analysis and self-scrutiny, as Montaigne demonstrated long ago. Identity theory is concerned with the individual's way of creating meaning, of giving form and reason to a life.

<i>Identity theory must answer questions regarding</i>
– process-orientation
– multivoicedness
– how individuals create meaning
– the self-other-relationship
– power/positioning
– community narratives
– cultural difference
– reflexivity

Table 2: Identity Theory in Late Modernity: Model Requirements

4. The Narratological Option

The starting point for a deconstructive identity theory of this kind lies primarily not in narratives as closed units but in narrativity as a multifaceted resource for the understanding of self-construction. There is an obvious similarity with certain changes in narratology which have been described as manifestations of deconstructivism and post-structuralism and have led to an extraordinary diversification that has produced a multitude of narratologies (cf. Nünning/Nünning 2002). Social psychologists talk about a narrative turn when describing the reorientation they witnessed in the 1980s and 1990s, but narratologists use more dramatic metaphors to

describe the resurgence of their field of study. Currie, for instance, writes of a narratological ‘phoenix coming out of the ashes’. He lists three features of this resurrection: a progression from discovery to invention, from coherence to complexity, and from poetics to politics.

According to Currie, the first change (that from discovery to invention) reflects a general move away from the assumption that narratology is an objective science that uncovers inherent formal and structural properties in the narratives it studies. In short,

poststructuralists moved away from the treatment of narratives (and the language system in general) as buildings, as solid objects in the world, towards the view that narratives were narratological inventions construable in an almost infinite number of ways. Structure came to be seen as a metaphor used by readers of a structuralist bent to give the impression of stability in the object-narrative meaning (Currie 1998:2).

This view was accompanied by a post-structuralist preference for terms which highlight the active role of the reader in the construction of meaning and terms ‘which challenge the idea that a narrative is a stable structure by borrowing their metaphors from the semantic field of movement, like process, becoming, play, difference, slippage and dissemination’ (Currie 1998:3). The similarity with the concerns of identity theory is obvious. Terms like ‘openness’ and ‘movement’ indicate the presence of common ground between the two projects.

Currie’s second shift (that from coherence to complexity) intersects with identity theory’s interest in the question of coherence. Post-structuralist narratology acknowledges the contradictory aspects of narratives, preserves their complexity, and resists the temptation to reduce them to stable meanings or coherent projects. According to traditional critics, the most profound hidden design in a narrative was its unity. They believed that exposing that unity revealed the formal, thematic, or even polemical coherence of a work. This critical quest for unity can be read as a desire to present narrative as a coherent and stable project. In the view of the post-structuralist critic, however, this is no more than a way of reducing the complex heterogeneity of a narrative. Deconstructed narratology, then, aims at a less reductive way of reading, one that is not guided by notions such as the coherence of the authorial project. This deconstruction of narratology is closely connected with the diversification of narratology, since deconstruction ‘is no respecter of boundaries, least of all the boundary between literature and the real world’ (Currie 1998:3f.).

Currie’s third change, finally, captures the transition from poetics to politics. It can also be seen as part of the deconstructive legacy, for deconstruction introduced new ways of exposing ideology. Concentration on

binary oppositions, for example, was a key part of the apolitical tradition of structuralism, but became more political in the hands of some post-structuralists. The post-structuralist critic often retains the old obsession with binary oppositions, but tends to view them as an unstable basis for meaning and as a place where the values and hidden ideologies of a text are inscribed. Even if this approach to aporetic oppositions has not always been presented in political terms, part of the legacy of deconstruction consists of providing new approaches to finding ideology in narrative.

Today, we find overtly political narratologies being articulated using demonstrably deconstructive vocabulary. They bring distinctly deconstructive approaches to bear on issues in the politics and ideology of narrative. A typical deconstructive reading, for example, will treat a certain binary opposition as a hierarchy in which one term of the opposition enjoys superiority over the other, often proceeding to demonstrate that the text contains counter-suggestions which upturn the hierarchy.

For Currie, then, diversification, deconstruction, and politicization are the three mutually implicative characteristics of the transitions taking place in contemporary narratology. This diversification in theoretical assumptions and methodological approaches opens much common ground with identity theory, but it raises the question of whether narratology can still be seen as a coherent field. Currie's answer is—still—a positive one.

Roman Jakobson's structuralist dream of a global science of literature has yielded to an uncontrolled fracturing of narratological method. Yet paradoxically, the particularity of texts or readers only becomes recognisable through a shared descriptive vocabulary which in itself constantly threatens to homogenise the heterogeneity it advances. It is this paradoxical model of change, the simultaneity of standardisation and diversification, which makes it still possible ... to talk of narratology, if only provisionally, as if it were a unified entity (Currie 1998:14).

From the point of view of social psychology, then, narratology can be provisionally seen as a unity held together by a common descriptive vocabulary. Given the diversity of the narratological family, it is all the more important to identify the specific members (theoretical positions) that social psychologists are courting. Only then can the relationship between social psychology and narratology be seen as something more than one of superficial references. Fortunately, the discussion has, in social psychology at least, reached what Freeman has called a 'post-polemical phase': 'By this I mean that most of those who have been working in the area of narrative for some time, are generally less concerned to indict the status quo than was once the case. ... Many have come to find in narrative inquiry a remarkably fertile arena for reflection and exploration' (Freeman 2001:283).

5. Narrative Identity: The Call for a Postclassical Perspective

It turns out, therefore, that social psychology and narratology present us not so much with a division between them as one cutting through both of them alike. It can be identified as that between post-modern/post-structuralist and structuralist approaches, or, more generally between a plurality of postclassical narratologies and classical, structuralist narratology (Nünning/Nünning 2002:3). Post-structuralist narratology and post-modern identity theory both developed out of the same critical endeavour, one encompassing literary criticism and architecture, cultural studies and philosophy. Deconstruction has left its mark on all theories concerning the individual and the social world. Sometimes, of course, its programme is questioned or emphatically rejected, but this only demonstrates how successfully it has made itself felt. So, while it would be wrong to subsume all recent approaches to identity theory under the deconstructive paradigm, it is clear that they must all position themselves in relation to its theses in one way or another.

Given this shared deconstructive basis, it does not take much effort to grant narrativity an important role in the construction of identity. The foundation for such a move, however, is the 'homogeneity' of the deconstructive project rather than an easily accepted consensus regarding narrativity. From this perspective, introducing narrativity into identity theory does not solve theoretical problems but presents us with another problem: that of narrativity itself. Thus, post-modern identity theory will benefit only if it engages in a critical evaluation of the concept. One of the central problems here is the coherence trap of stories: the inherent tendency of self-narratives to present themselves as superficially coherent and stable projects. Post-structuralist narratology criticizes homogenization and coherence in the analysis of stories; similarly, post-modern identity theory takes opposition to classical concepts of identity on the same grounds. The affinity between the two fields of theoretical enquiry results from a critical attitude towards unity and the use of power in narratives. It is here that post-structuralist narratology and identity theory find common ground.

Thus, post-modern approaches take as a basic idea the concept of narrative identity as developed by psychologists like Sarbin (1986) or Gergen and Gergen (1988). These authors have proposed an understanding of identity as narrative identity. Although the term 'narrative identity' has since become established, few authors venture to suggest a concise definition of it. Widdershoven (1993:7) has taken up the challenge, defining it as 'the unity of a person's life as it is experienced and articulated in stories that express this experience'. As Gergen and Gergen (1988) have emphasized, these self-stories are highly variable, but only within a specific social and

cultural frame. Each society has its own set of stories and rules for their construction. The storytellers therefore are not free in the stories they tell. Their stories find acceptance only if they follow these patterns in their self-stories and obtain the consent of other individuals with them.

From a post-modern perspective, the most interesting part of Widdershoven's definition is the idea of experiencing unity. This can serve as a starting point for a discussion of Freeman's enquiry into the reasons for interest in narrative at this particular juncture. Wagner's analysis of late modernity (1994) suggests that the reason may lie in the unifying properties of self-narrative. The telling of a self-narrative means constructing a coherent life, a task no longer made possible by society. Self-narratives do what stories are good at doing: they create coherence and fill a void whose presence is felt all the more intensely in late modernity. According to Levi-Strauss (1977:11), individual self-experience is always fragmented. The difference from earlier periods and other cultures lies in the fact that our societies at this moment in time no longer offer models of coherence for our fragmented experiences. More than ever before, this task is left to individuals to handle. When there is no (historical) agent capable of providing the content of life with meaning, there seems to be no (coherent) story to be told and understood by others. White (1981:7) takes a similar line in his analysis of medieval annals, which offer only a minimum of information and no story at all. According to White, these annals locate us immediately 'in a culture hovering on the brink of dissolution'. The level of dissociation in subjects, then, is intricately connected with society and its readability. Can we link this argument with narratology? Indeed we can: in narratological terms, making meaning needs emplotment. This holds true for individuals as well as for societies. A plot, as E.M. Forster (2000:87) has stated, answers the question 'why?'

Consider the death of the queen. If it is a story we say: 'And then?' If it is a plot we ask: 'Why?' That is the fundamental difference between these two aspects of the novel. A plot cannot be told to a gaping audience or to a tyrannical sultan or to their modern descendant, the movie-public. They can only be kept awake by 'And then—and then—' they can only supply curiosity. But a plot demands intelligence and memory also (Forster 2000:87).

From my point of view, emplotment requires not only individual capabilities, but also social intelligence and social memory, the social intelligibility of a historical period and the lives within it. Experiencing personal unity, then, not only requires a subject capable of producing it, but also a society that its members can read. The question of unity is not only a personal one; it is intricately connected with society. For identity theory, the discussion turns not on the death of the subject but on the interplay between

self and other, between the subject and society, between individual strategies and social resources for making meaning. Storytelling is suspiciously like an ideologically based cure for dissociated subjects and dissociative social tendencies. Narratives help to create ready-made coherence, which must, as de Certeau argues, be critically deconstructed: 'From politics to advertising, the story makes believe and by that it makes do, it takes up this and neglects that, it classifies. On the other hand it produces oblivion, it institutes silence on the things it does not talk about. And because it is always 'full' and closed, it makes even forget that it is withholding something' (cit. in Adam/Revaz 1996:91, my trans.).

So, there are two positions regarding the function of narrative in identity theory. Both accept the importance of narratives for the development of identity. One position is content because it has discovered narrativity as flexible means of constructing identity. It accepts the structuralist project of reading narratives as solid objects with specific meanings. The other position criticizes the ideological note in the idea of closure and coherence behind this understanding, insisting instead on the multiplicity of meanings, on their interactive construction. It demands that social psychology take into account the critical steps taken by post-structuralist narratology: the heterogeneity of self-experience should be analysed and narrative closure deconstructed.

6. Who Speaks? Who Sees? Who Holds Power?

The diminished readability of a society characterized by subjects no longer embedded in it is seldom employed as an argument in identity theory, which usually focuses more prominently, if not exclusively, on the individual. Discussion in this area has been stimulated by the deconstructive study of the death of the subject; the result is a long and varied controversy about abandoning the concepts of identity and the self altogether. Genette's famous question 'who speaks?', although posed with narratives in mind, finds open ears among social psychologists, who have battled over the concept of the self for a long time. Fortunately, what Freeman (2001) would call a postpolemical stage has been reached in this area. Although social psychology has expended a considerable amount of energy in analysing the subject, it is generally accepted that there is an empirical self, not in any philosophical sense but in the sense of a social, corporeal being. In a sense, we have come to accept again (or at last) what the psychiatrist Morton Prince proposed a century ago. After discussing at length the therapy of a psychiatric patient called Sally Beauchamp, a famous case of multiple personality disorder at the time, he concluded: 'Philosophise as

you will, there is an empirical self which may be designated the real self' (Prince 1905:233).

This does not mean falling back to a position in which the self is seen as a simple unity, let alone having an essentialist understanding of the self. On the contrary, the question concerns the situation behind the scenes, the interplay between the speaking subject and the multiplicity of selves constituting any single person. It makes more sense to talk about the coherence of the subject not as a harmonious state but as a 'complex coherence' (Camilleri 1991:89), which implies the constant (re-)establishment of equilibrium between the various pieces of feedback an individual obtains from his or her situational context. Thus, identity is not present in us but 'structured by, or constituted by difference' (Currie 1998:17). When we look at a person more closely, we must decompose him or her into a complex set of relations which we can describe as a unity in no more than a very superficial manner. The discussion of the self in psychology often has a somewhat monadic tone, for it tends to focus on the subject isolated from its dynamic relationship with the world and with others. Bruner is thus perfectly correct when he states that the self is a 'surprisingly quirky idea—intuitively obvious to common sense, yet notoriously evasive to definition' (2002:63).

The self must therefore be understood as processed, socially embedded, and readable through the self-stories in which it manifests itself discursively. Narratology steps in at this point with analytic tools for examining the relationship with the other. 'Telling oneself about oneself' (Bruner 2002: 64), as well as telling oneself to others, is the basic principle of self-construction. To understand this process, we need to analyse the processes (the telling), the relationships (between teller and listener), and the form and content of such self-stories. If we accept that this relationship with the self and the other is realized in the process of communication, then we can conclude that that is where the self exposes itself and becomes readable. As an individual, the author of a self-story is seen—metaphorically speaking—as a split personality, a person with many selves, constantly trying to rearrange him- or herself into a provisional unity. These moves must be reflected in the process—and product—of telling. Benveniste proposes a tripartite division into three subjects in the structure of discourse: the speaking subject or material agent of the discourse; the subject of speech or purely linguistic subject of the discourse, designated by personal pronouns; and the spoken subject or subject produced through or by the discourse as a result of its effect on a listener/receiver (cf. Kerby 1997:132). These subjects can be understood as different communicative addressers addressing different addressees on their respective levels of communication (Jahn 2000:N2.1).

This example alone is enough to indicate the potential uses of narratological terminology in analysing the discursive production of self-stories. Narratology offers a wide array of categories and analytic tools ‘to analyse stylistic choices that determine the form or shape of a narrative text ..., and also the pragmatic features that put this text into context within the social and structural framework of a narrative act’ (Jahn 2000:N1.4). What social psychology does with the self, then, narratology does with the relationship between the participants in a discourse on the various levels of communication. Seen from a post-modern perspective, it is not surprising that the concepts of Bakhtin have gained particular prominence in work on identity and the self in social psychology. His analysis of polyphony in narrative (i.e. a diversity of voices on different levels of communication) and his introduction of the concept of heteroglossia (highlighting linguistic elements inherited or learned from others), are employed in current theories of the self—an example is the concept of a dialogical self (Hermans 2001).

Genette’s second question, ‘who sees?’, involves the focalization of narratives. ‘Functionally, focalisation is a means of selecting and restricting narrative information, of seeing events and states of affairs from somebody’s point of view’ (Jahn 2000:N3.7). In the view of social psychology, the concept of focalization is highly relevant to our understanding of the structure of power in narrative discourses. Whose gaze is the privileged one, which focus is preferred, which is suppressed? Approaches based on identity politics are particularly interested in questions of power and privilege as they appear in self-stories. Recent developments in psychology such as positioning theory (Langenhove/Harré 1999) show a considerable affinity with narratology’s idea of focalization, which can be external (a narrator) or internal (a character). According to Langenhove and Harré, it is necessary to analyse power structures not only within a narrative but also in the performance of narrating (i.e. the communicative process). On the level of interaction, at least, this brings us closer to answering the question of whether individuals are the authors of their stories or simply their protagonists. This question is highly important for individual lives. When we analyse practices of social exclusion, we help to empower people in their individual lives. As the privileged medium of self-construction, narratives are a prominent battleground in the fight against exclusion and suppression. The practical question here is whether it is possible to create what we might call counter-stories in addition to simply analysing the mechanisms involved. According to Nelson, ‘because identities are narratively constituted and narratively damaged, they can be narratively repaired. The morally pernicious stories that construct the identity according to the requirements of an abusive power system can be at least partially dislodged and replaced by identity-constituting counterstories that

portray group members as fully developed moral agents' (2001:xii). This focus on the suppression of and attack on identity accompanies Sampson's critique of the rational modern self as 'a most peculiar self' in world history, characterized by implicit structures of dominance with regard to 'serviceable others' (1993:4).

7. Self-Narratives: Examining the Process

What is the analytic unity we have in mind in models of the narrative construction of identity? Clearly we are looking at self-narratives, but we have still to determine their properties as stories. One central feature should be stressed: self-stories are rarely written down. More often than not, they are unavailable as texts, being orally constructed and communicated instead. Thus, unless they are recorded in some medium or other, which is certainly not the norm, they tend to elude analysts. There is a not inconsiderable distance between this situation and a narratology stemming from the analysis of literary production and presupposing a text consciously constructed by a reflective author/subject. One solution may be to focus on autobiographical self-(re)construction. Autobiographical research readily presents itself as a potential source of common ground between narratology and social psychology. It has inspired very interesting work on self-theory and self-construction. In the paradigm of ongoing, never-ending identity construction, however, its use is limited because of its focus on rather complete self-stories. The stories with which we are dealing in identity theory, however, are usually orally produced, and they lack the qualities of elaborate literary constructions, are volatile, and have a presentation that changes continually according to audience and circumstances. The narratological movement makes no secret of its belief that stories are everywhere; it is less widely recognized that such stories can be very different from those originating in literary production. Well-formed self-stories, as Gergen and Gergen, following Labov, conceive of them, do not seem to appear all that often. What about fragmentation, about people who have too many stories to tell, who get lost in their manifold social relationships and rarely, if ever, provide the well-formed stories Gergen and Gergen are looking for? After all, as Kerby remarks, 'we are at most only part-time Montaignes. We tend to narrate ourselves only when the situation calls for it', continuing, 'at the level of everyday reality our narratives most certainly have little of the consistency or coherence of full-blown autobiographies or stories. In fact, I am not even sure, that the majority of people have too great a desire or need to know who they are' (1997:129).

This situation calls for thorough reflection. First, we turn to narratology for help in translating and adapting its concepts for use with oral storytelling. Second, as oral storytelling produces a different kind of story with different form and content (Bauman 1986), oral self-stories must be analysed in terms of these properties and as performances (Langellier/Peterson 2004). My third point is that, once more, it is of paramount importance to integrate situational context into the analysis of narrative: 'Narrative performance thus refers to a site of struggle over personal and social identity rather than to the acts of a self with a fixed, unified, stable, or final essence which serves as the origin or accomplishment of experience' (Langellier 2001:151).

The concept of narrative most frequently referred to in social psychology is based on the work of Labov and Waletzky. It has the advantage of a high level of refinement and a long history in social science (Bamberg 1997). Even when a narrative does not meet all the standards of this concept, the deviations can be interpreted with respect to what they say about the construction of identity (Kraus 2002). When analysing everyday communication, however, it may be helpful to choose a concept which is closer to Prince's idea of the minimal narrative (1989). Another proposal, also originating in Prince, is the idea of distinguishing different levels of narrativity (1999:43f.). Thus, a text can be more or less narrative, and certainly more or less elaborate. Boje (2001) has proposed yet another strategy. While retaining a high standard for classifying texts as narratives, he has introduced the concept of antenarrative to refer to storytelling of a 'lower' kind, in which the question of causality is not addressed. Essentially, then, his proposal is based on Forster's distinction between story and plot. More often than not, stories in organizations, Boje's principal area of interest, fall short of providing answers to the causal question. It is here that he sees the need for the notion of antenarrative.

When printed, stories in literature have reached the end of their production process, but the status of stories in real life (whatever that may be) is unclear. They may lie at the beginning of a process of individual definition—or at the end of one. They may already have been integrated into the self or may still be undergoing evaluation as candidates for further integration. They may or may not still be being tested before various audiences. The evaluation of these narrative qualities can lead to plausible conclusions only if the subject as narrator is included in the analytic process. Thus, focusing on self-stories which have become fundamental for an individual's understanding of him- or herself involves time and stories—communication in time through and about stories. Those stories can never be closed in any final sense.

8. Constructing the Social: Community Narratives

Self-narratives are about constructing an identity in a social world. This world comes into being as a personally narrated one characterized by personal relationships with the other. The narrator positions the main character in his or her story in relation to other characters. On the level of discursive presentation the characters are listeners and joint presenters of the story. Telling thus becomes an act of negotiating meaning in which the narrator is not free in his or her telling. Instead, he or she needs the confirmation of others. The telling of self-stories becomes an act of negotiation and joint construction. Narratives, however, refer not only to relationships between individuals but to whole communities as institutionalized contexts for creating meaning. When social psychologists look at organizations, for instance, they are interested in how these communities create integration and differentiation, how they produce coherence, stability, and change. Narratives enter the frame on the level of individual narratives (in the sense that they jointly construct and relate to this communal picture) as well as on that of organizations (where community narratives represent a more or less official narrative). Here again, as with self-stories, we are dealing not only with one narrative for each community but with a set, a stream of community narratives. The individual (re)construction of this social world is a process which is constantly mediated by other agents and the process of experiencing community. As with agency, here too we must focus on the self-other relationship. This leads to an issue which is undeniably the concern of social psychology: why is it that stories in and about a community change, are created, told, retold, and live on in a web of stories? It is not so much the single story itself that is of interest here but rather the process of creating, sharing, and remaking stories. If we are to understand groups and organizations as story-telling structures, the question is how these stories develop, how they attain validity, and how we should analyse the processes of their change.

Over the last fifteen years, social psychology has investigated the narrative construction of organizations. The question that arises is whether organizations are not what we see on organizational charts or in buildings but rather something constructed by people in the organizations in a communal—often controversial—effort to give meaning to their actions. The ‘micro-processes of talk thus become the macro-structure of organisation’ (Cerulo 1997:401). Analysing organizations thus means analysing storytelling in them. Deconstruction here involves ‘ways of reading that decanter or otherwise unmask narratives that posit authoritative centres’ (Boje 2001:19).

This, however, is no easy task in an increasingly globalized world in which the very notion of community is clearly open to debate. Understanding the construction of community narratives is not only a theoretical question but also a political one, as communitarian discourse has amply shown. It aims at making clear how ideologies are upheld and how they can be changed. It also asks, following research on late modernity, whether a lack of social cohesion, an acceleration of social change, a heightened mobility will lead to the loss of stories and thereby to the loss of community. 'Man is in his actions and practice essentially a story-telling animal. ... By neglecting the question 'of what story or stories do I find myself a part?' leaves us as individuals unscripted and hence powerless to detect the disorders of moral thought and practice' (McIntyre cit. in Abbott 1997:281). How, for instance, can a sense of community be developed when there are no shared stories because of the immense cultural and biographical diversity in areas inhabited by immigrants? Where is cohesion going to come from in an individualized society if the reserve of shared stories is constantly growing smaller? Many narratologists, no doubt, would agree that culturally shared stories are being progressively undermined and overthrown by empirical science and critical rationalism. Some of these thinkers, moreover, fear that the decline of narrative will make it more difficult to maintain any kind of social cohesion at all given that the latter has relied so much on common stories in the past. In times of rapid social change, the 'guiding myths developed by previous generations fail to fit the territory' (Hinchman/Hinchman 1997:236). Thus, not only is loss registered; a need to fight against it, to become involved in the construction of community, is also expressed: 'What matters at this stage of the late twentieth century is the construction of local forms of community within which civility and intellectual and moral life can be sustained through the dark ages which are already upon us' (McIntyre cit. in Fisher 1997:307). Even if we are sceptical of communitarian analysis, we cannot deny that the construction of a sense of belonging is changing. Narratives thus have a central role to play because they are a means of constructing social bonds.

9. Social Psychology and Narratology: The Old and New Question of Virtuality

We should not fail to see that narratology is also about people and that social psychology has many stories to tell. The question of the epistemological status of narrativity draws together many different aspects of the individual. To date, this discussion has been extensively (but not exclusively) shaped by philosophical contributions. Impressive as these findings

are, it is not easy to work out their consequences for social psychology and its organization.

What is meant by 'narrative psychology'? Is it a subfield of psychology in the ways developmental or cognitive or biological psychology are? Probably not. Rather, many theorists would claim that 'narrative psychology' refers to a viewpoint or a stance within psychology which is interested in the 'storied nature of human conduct' (Sarbin 1986)—how human beings deal with experience by constructing stories and listening to the stories of others. Psychologists studying narrative are challenged by the notion that human activity and experience are filled with 'meaning' and that stories, rather than logical arguments or lawful formulations, are the vehicle by which that meaning is communicated. This dichotomy is expressed by Jerome Bruner as the distinction between 'paradigmatic' and 'narrative' forms of thought ... Sarbin (1986) proposes that narrative becomes a root metaphor for psychology (Hevern 2003).

The relative importance of a narratological approach to psychology is heavily dependent on the epistemological place we are prepared to give narrativity in our concept of human being. Hinchman and Hinchman (1997:xix f.) distinguish strong narrativists from weak ones. The groups disagree over whether there is such a thing as pre-reflective, pre-narrative, unemplotted experience (the weak school), or whether all human experience possesses at least an implicit narrative structure (the strong school). While this dichotomous picture may highlight the difference between the two positions, in the long run, it may be more helpful to investigate the ground between them. This is what Eakin, for example, does on the level of self-theory when he proposes distinguishing different registers of the self. He develops a model of ecological and interpersonal selves that precede other selves in child development. This concept suggests 'that it is time to discard restrictive notions of the self and the subject that make of them little more than metaphysical or narrative puppets, opening the way for a much broader, experientialist approach to the nature and origin of subjectivity' (Eakin 1999:25). Eakin is interested not in identifying himself as a strong or weak narratologist but in covering findings from, for example, child psychology and thus helping to establish narratology as a basic metaphor by tying it together with other basic findings of the social sciences. Others, like Sartwell, criticize a restrictive focus on language in current theoretical thinking. According to Sartwell, 'alongside the hermeneutic tradition that affirmed the absolute hegemony of language as if it were a liberation, there developed a narratology that developed everything into stories and that made stories definable in terms of *telos*' (2000:3). Sartwell provides not only criticism but also a detailed effort 'to sketch the limits of narrative as a category, and some of its political sources and implications' (2003: 10). He thereby makes an undeniable contribution to the development of the narratological project.

Narratology proper has witnessed other attempts to explore narrativity. They adopt a wider view than social psychology, positioning narrativity in the long epistemological history of mimesis. At the same time, however, they seek to liberate it from its confinement to literary criticism and view it in the light of a new debate on virtuality in our culture. Thus, Schaeffer (1999) traces the development of fiction in humankind, basing it on anthropological functionality. His reflection on mimesis and analysis of anti-mimetic positions brings the discussion to a point where it is in a good position to consider new developments in fiction that are based on the computer revolution and have led to new presentations of virtuality such as video games. Ryan (2001) ventures deep into the labyrinth of principles behind the construction of computer games. Her journey is an exploration of the construction of virtuality—it is human beings that do the programming and they that fall for the supposed reality of the virtual world (or don't they?). Thus, again we find ourselves facing fundamental reflection on mimesis and perception beyond the confinements of disciplinary boundaries. And, because the users of such games are intended to become characters in their narratives, narrative is being analysed as a form of participation and performance as well. This presents identity theory with a most useful discussion of coherence, performance, and immersion in narrative.

Bal's project, finally, investigates the role of narrativity in the context of a larger cultural theory. She advocates 'a narrative theory that enables the differentiation of the place of narrative in any cultural expression without privileging any medium, mode, or use; that differentiates its relative importance and the effect of the narrative (segments) on the remainder of the object as well as on the reader, listener, viewer' (1999:21). For Bal, narratology should be understood as part of a cultural theory. When this perspective is adopted, cultural artefacts, events, or domains can be analysed in detail.

Cultural analysis should not be taken literally—or analytically—as meaning the 'taking apart' of culture. Rather, cultural analysts interpret the way in which cultures take things, people, and themselves apart. Narratology is of great relevance for such a reorientation of, simultaneously, close reading and cultural studies into cultural analysis (Bal 1999:21).

10. Conclusion: Narratology as a Resource for Social Psychology

It is wrong to see social psychology as something beyond, foreign, external to narratology. The narrative turn in social science is about twenty years old now, and there has been an extensive discussion of the concept of narrativity in social science. Narratology itself has developed into such a plurality of distinct narratologies that viewing the two as binary opposites is far too simple to do justice to the situation. Refined as the discussion has become, the shared search for resources is shaped primarily by the theoretical focus adopted in each particular instance. From the point of view of a theory of narrative identity open to post-modern concerns, interest in narratologies is primarily directed at contributions to be made by the post-structuralist debate. This, however, is only part of the story. The more the narrative approaches in psychology become concerned with empirical research, the greater their interest in the methodological possibilities provided by narratology. Here, I suspect, mutual acceptance is only beginning. Another productive point of exchange lies in the discussion of mimesis and virtuality. Some narratological contributions move convincingly beyond the limits of literary criticism and thereby provide potential benefits for the theory of the subject that are yet to be recognized by those working in other fields. To conclude, therefore, when we consider the benefits of looking beyond social psychology into the multifaceted world of narratologies, we find a mixture of close affinity and surprising strangeness.

- Common grounds. Even if the concepts of a narrative identity theory do not commit themselves unreservedly to a deconstructive position, the questions arising from the latter's critique have initiated an intensive, sometimes even impassioned debate. Post-structuralist and deconstructivist narratologies make welcome contributions to this discussion. They offer a view of narrativity that makes it compatible with the post-modernist discussion of identity.
- Analytical resources. The critical project of deconstructivism was easily established as a source of common ground on the level of theory, but the 'shared descriptive vocabulary' (Currie) of current narratologies has not yet been exploited by narrative identity theory. Although some narratologists seem hesitant to accept the very idea that their concepts might migrate to other fields of enquiry, recent discussions show that many narratological concepts (e.g. the concept of metalepsis) may be of use in the analysis of non-fictional autodiegetic narratives.
- Narrative as performance and immersion. In the technological world of computer games, performance becomes important in two ways, first through the developer, who designs the active role of the player/par-

- ticipant, and second by the player, who takes on that role. Ryan's investigation of the design and use of computer games has shown that there is much more to be discovered from such analysis. It is also an exploration of the relationship between reality, virtuality, and authenticity, and as such is a useful contribution to the theory of the subject.
- Art as an illustration of theory. Literary production, the home of narratology, provides fruitful material for social psychology too. Many authors are working and thinking about narrativity as a theoretical concept. When reading the works of Salman Rushdi, Julian Barnes, and many others, for instance, we find ourselves participating in a theoretical discourse expressed in literary work. Thus, literary productions such as these are also theoretical reflections on humanity and reality and the place of narrativity in the latter.
 - 'Literature is a wilderness, psychology is a garden' (Albright 1994:19). What about literature as the wilderness, films and paintings as the other of theoretical production? Even without what we might call theoretically informed literary production, literary narratives offer valuable—and irreplaceable—insights into human subjectivity and imagination, because, as E. M. Forster has said, art, through the *homo fictus*, tells us something about ourselves:

We cannot understand each other, except in a rough and ready way; we cannot reveal ourselves, even when we want to; what we call intimacy is only a makeshift; perfect knowledge is an illusion. But in the novel we can know people perfectly, and, apart from the general pleasure of reading, we can find here a compensation for their dimness in life. In this direction fiction is truer than history, because it goes beyond evidence, and each of us knows from his own experience that there is something beyond the evidence (Forster 2000:70).

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