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Self-Narratives

BETWEEN THE SELF AND THE OTHER

A person tells of his or her existence. Or rather, a person is the tales he or she tells. Tales give form and substance to a person's existence. Tales come from the different eras of society and the individual. They can be in written, oral, visual, musical or dance form. Cultures and their meanings consist of narratives, but a person's self-image is also built piece by piece on the tales, supported by them. Remembering the past, handling the experiences of the present and preparing for the future alternate and overlap each other in interwoven narratives.

With the help of narratives a person aspires to instill coherence and continuity into his or her life. Nevertheless, the narratives that construct and integrate the self and personality involve fractures, inconsistencies and breaks in continuity. In research literature, these narratives are referred to, among other things, as autobiographies, self-stories, life stories, per-

sonal myths and personal narratives.[1] The narrative identity is preserved, develops, and is transformed along with narratives. Narratives can be big or small, domineering or submissive, official or unofficial. With them one can persuade, tempt, seduce, reject, repel, lead, unite, destroy, justify or explain. Narratives have innumerable tasks in varying situations.

Self-narratives do not invest only in the self, but in them echo the strange voices of others, which create cracks in the finished self-narratives. In the words and narratives of the self are heard the echoes of others' expressions, as Bakhtin (for instance, 1986) has noticed. Thinking is traditionally perceived as individual, solitary, atomistic and internal. For example, Rodin's statue *The Thinker* is naked and silent, a petrified man who has concentrated all his attention internally and is without any social and cultural ties (compare Billig 1998, 201). The perception of thinking as participation in a social function and argumentation and hence as dialogically empowering, demands the rejection of this sort of waterlogged thinking.

Narratives cannot live as self-satisfied, wholly separate in the self and the other. The significance of narratives is created between me and the other, in a discordant and ambiguous reciprocity:

> "Relation is mutual. My Thou affects me, as I affect it. We are
> moulded by our pupils and built up by our works. The 'bad' man,

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1   Usually "narrative" is an overarching term, which can include both "story" and "discourse". "Story" comprises the narrative's contents (that which is described) and "discourse" comprises the presentation method, the narrative's expression (the way of describing). These concepts are not, however, always used consistently. In this article I use "self-narrative" (sometimes called "self-story") as on overarching term. In places, I also use "life story" or "life narrative".

lightly touched by the holy primary word, becomes one who reveals. How we are educated by children and by animals! We live our lives inscrutably included within the streaming mutual life of the universe." Buber 1956, 48.)

In creative risk-taking the self-narrative does not shut itself into a defensive position. It is relative, although it appears to be separate and loose; it is openly unfinished, although it may pretend to be coherent. The more the narrative is individualized, the more complex and rich in nuances it becomes, and the more diverse links and interactions of meaning it has with other narratives. The self can be several different narratives at different times. Part of the narrative develops, overlaps with alternative narratives and changes, while part opposes the change, is forgotten and becomes numb.

"But I should very much like to know the sequel to our story"

To preserve mental wellbeing a person needs a feeling of some sort of continuity and meaning in his or her life. A coherent life story has been considered a continuous task of self-recovery (see e.g. Crites 1986). However, the unpredictability and incalculability of existence create uncertainties and experiences of dread. Narratives serve partly to control dread, but the violence, dejection and pressure of existence may also be expressed in them. Although life may seem a tale "told by an idiot", with the help of life stories one can try to obtain satisfaction by the imagined control of reality, from suitably positive illusions.

Retrospectively, one can give many interpretations to one's own action. Beside the world that reminds us of the losses,

the person can create alternative realities in narratives, experiments of experiences in imaginary worlds, in envisioned futures, in utopias. However, the actuality of the time, *Ananke*, has its price. Management of terror does not succeed fully; the losses pile up and griefs smoulder. When the narrator's fund of strength diminishes at the end of life's course s/he ends up assessing his or her actions, achievements and aims again. Fantasies about the influence of her or his own activities situate differently than in the narrator's days of power.

When Simone de Beauvoir got to hear of the deaths of her friends, the writer Richard Wright and the philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty, she wrote in her autobiography about the effect of the deaths to her time perspective:

> "This life I'm living isn't mine any more, I thought. Certainly I no longer imagined I could maneuver it the way I wanted, but I still believed I had some contribution to make toward its construction; in fact, I had no control over it at all. I was merely an impotent onlooker watching the play of alien forces: history, time and death. This inevitability did not even leave me the consolation of tears. I had exhausted all my capacities for revolt, for regret, I was vanquished, I let go. Hostile to the society to which I belonged, banished by my age from the future, stripped fiber by fiber of my past, I was reduced to facing each moment with nothing but my naked existence. Oh, the cold!" (de Beauvoir 1965, 587.)

The time perspective changes along with the recognition of inevitability when the aged person is surrounded by memories of lost friends and things. Personal objectives are limited, promises and hopes lose their charm. However, reminiscence can open from a reconstruction of the past to transferring the future to a new generation. The continuation of aims and tales can again

captivate, as they did de Beauvoir, when she recollected her life stages in the midst of eternally unfinished tasks:

> "I no longer have much desire to go traveling over this earth emptied of its marvels; there is nothing to expect if one does not expect everything. But I should very much like to know the sequel of our story. The young of today are simply future adults, but I am interested in them; the future is in their hands, and if in their schemes I recognize my own, then I feel that my life will be prolonged after I am in the grave. I enjoy being with them; and yet the comfort they bring me is equivocal: they perpetuate our world, and in doing so they steal it from me. Mycenae will be theirs, Provence and Rembrandt, and all the *piazze* of Rome. Oh, the superiority of being alive! (…) As I retrace the story of my past, it seems as though I was always just approaching or just beyond something that never actually was accomplished. Only my emotions seem to have given me the experience of fulfillment." (de Beauvoir 1965, 654–655.)

Autobiographical memory and remembering create memories which everyone evaluates in relation to their personal aims. In this evaluation one links positive or negative emotional charges to memories. Positive emotional charges are usually linked to those memories which are estimated to have furthered the achievement of some important aim. This is not always the case, but the evaluated positivity or negativity of memories can vary according to the goals of different spheres of life. (See Singer 1990.) Remembering is also a social function, in which remembered images are constructed and become speech in intersubjective and interactive situations.

In life stories there are especially important experienced scenes, "nuclear episodes" (McAdams 1989; 1993; 1996), and "self-defining memories" (Singer & Salovey 1993). Regrets impregnated by negative affects and memories that concern the

reaching of goals impregnated by positive affects alternate dynamically in a person's life story. The more memories that are self-defining and negatively interpreted nowadays are piled up in the life story, the harder people generally assess the achieving of their own goals (Moffit & Singer 1994).

"What might have been" or "what if" conjecture, "counterfactual thinking", constructs imaginary consequences of goals that remain unfulfilled and unachieved. Thus a person can deal with his disappointment, failure and regrets with the help of compensating ideas and images. Kahneman (1995) has distinguished "hot regrets" and "wistful regrets". The former originate from the regretting one's own action and are more short-lasting than the latter, which are connected to regretting one's own failure to act, even a long time after the loss was experienced. In some cases, wistful regret can shadow a person for the whole of his or her life.

Failures and longings, pleasures and passions, eddies of envy and jealousy, alternating loneliness and dependency, the goals of youth and intimations of mortality create narratives which are hide and reveal, fall suddenly silent and speak swiftly. From unexpected turns is born a knowledge of sense of proportion, which leaves decisions open in their mysteriousness. Narratives do not simply give doses of knowledge about 'something', but invite the reader to ongoing reciprocal and empathetic knowing, to the activities and 'workshops' of knowledge. Narratives equip us with "a map of possible roles and possible worlds in which action, thought, and self-definition are possible (or desirable)" (Bruner 1986, 66). Diverse narrative channels cross between people and create a multiverse of porous identities rather than a universe of permanent selves.

INDIVIDUAL AND SOCIAL SELF-NARRATIVES

People create self-narratives in order to interpret their own experiences, but also to share their experiences with others, to influence them in the way that they want. Motives that aim at the narrator's self-interpretation and interpersonal motives directed at social influence have been distinguished (Baumeister & Newman 1994). Motives that emphasize self-interpretation are strongly tied to the search for personal meaning in life. Basic meanings often concern goals, values, justifying and a sense of competence (compare Baumeister 1991). Yet people tell stories, although the achievement of meaning of life and self-respect have not been realized. Narratives of supernatural powers, heavenly guidance, the strikes of fate or irrational chance events can serve one's own life interpretation and the seeking of attention and sympathy from others. Personal truth is a "composition", a present construction that concerns the past, actually a "reconstruction" of memory, which strives to follow the internalized logic of the person.

The traits of personality form a totality of a person's general dispositions, a bundle of traits unrelated to time and place, constructed on the basis of linear and rigid polarities. Personality trait theories provide little more than a "psychology of the stranger" (McAdams 1994). When we strive to get to know each other better we shift beyond trait theory, to such individually unique matters as tasks, goals, plans, appraisals, schemes, skills, coping strategies, attachment styles, and other developmental, motivational and strategic dimensions, with which the person's life is situated in time, place and social roles. (See McAdams 1992; 1996.) Only self-narratives or life stories create a coherent private personal past, present and

future and define a person's relationship with others and different environments.

Self-narratives or life stories include unique personal details, a person's developmental history and environments, as well as discreet conditions of action. Self-narratives can be researched by structure, function, development, individual qualities, and relationship to known notable aspects of life, for example mental health (McAdams 1996). In the self-narratives of different individuals there are often structural and substantial similarities. McAdams (1996, 308–309) observes that a narrative emotional tone, imagery, themes, ideological settings, nuclear episodes, imagoes and endings are essential to adult life stories. Among other things, emotional tones show what the narrator considers possible at the level of emotional evaluation concerning people and situations (optimistic hopefulness or pessimistic hopelessness, growth or inhibition of growth, approach or avoidance). Imagery (metaphorical and symbolical) conveys the narrative's subjective tuning, its distinctive "feel". Themes illustrate the motives and central dynamic relationships of the narrative's actors (dominance, closeness, love, separation, hate, dependencies). Thematically, narratives are generally governed by the tension between individual and collective actions. Ideological settings are linked to those values, norms and beliefs that accompany self-narratives. Nuclear episodes are recollections of transforming events or notable events that affirm change or continuity for the individual. Imagoes represent the various alternatives of the individual's personality, possibilities, roles, ideals and voices (on the dialogical self and the polyphonic voicing of the self, see Hermans 1996a, 1996b). They are, in a way, imaginary versions or offshoots of the identity, some of which get a central place in the narrative. The endings

of a self-narrative create temporary entities of the Me, generating new "scripts" of self and in this way securing the experience of continuity, symbolic immortality, while transferring a positive legacy of the self to later generations.

Edward Bruner (1986, 17) has noted that in culture there is a question of narrating again: "The next telling reactivates prior experience, which is then rediscovered and relived as the story is re-related in a new situation. Stories may have endings, but stories are never over." Stories acquire transformations only when they are re-created, re-lived and re-told. Culture in itself is no reservoir of silent texts, but culture consists of changing performances of different life-narratives, becomes active and alive with every performance of a human expression (compare E. M. Bruner 1986, 11–12). Retelling is a basis for transformative learning and sensitive autobiographical relating, tuning and reflecting (compare Randall 1996; Kenyon & Randall 1997).

Self-narratives also have their own developmental trajectories. The handling of changes in a narrative presupposes a sense of drama. Gergen and Gergen (1987; 1988) state that self-narratives often follow one of three basic patterns: the self-narrative plot is static, progressive or regressive. The static narrative emphasizes the sameness of the narrator's positivity or negativity. The self of the progressive narrative constantly develops in a positive direction, whereas the self of a regressive narrative has to fail to achieve his/her aims ("I can no longer do the things that I could do before"). The person can also form combinations of basic storylines (for instance, tragicomic narratives, ironic "happy ending" narratives or romantic hero tales). Symbols and metaphors of changing or staying the same must be made to fit together into a socially functioning self-narrative.

In the narrative the self is Janus-faced: both private and public. The way and content of the narration depend on where, for whom, when and for what purpose the self-narrative is presented. The intrapsychic self-narrative does not go together with the socially shared, other-directed self-narrative (Polkinghorne 1996; see also 1988; 1991). Besides, this internal narrative, also remains partly unconscious for the person him- or herself and is transformed again to another narrative when presented to others in association with defensive moves (among others, repressions, rationalizations, splittings, idealizations, devaluations, projections). The life story has its cracks, and the autobiographical truth has no permanence. (Compare McAdams 1998; 2003; Hunt 1998.) Language is not simply expressive; with language, rhetoric and their routine use one can repress wishes that would lead to the crossing of boundaries and established codes of conduct (Billig 1998). "The dialogic unconscious" (Billig 1997) hints at the reverse side of dialogue, the closing of a conversation. At the same time repression itself can be dialogical and open itself to be discussed through different turns of phrase.

The meanings of narratives are not exclusively left to the self (the narrator) or to the other (the listener), but are co-constructed between them or in their common negotiation. The self as narrator is always potentially also the listening other and the other is potentially the listening "I". Alongside the main narrative, numerous smaller narratives can run, from which the story of the self is shaped, partly automatically, partly by intentional design with the help of the "acts of meaning" (compare Bruner 1990).

NOT KNOWING AND THE INVENTION OF THE SELF

Narratives form a complex and wide-time communication network, an information technology from multimedia applications to everyday conversations. Narratives, whether the rhetoric of experts or social diversion, are everywhere, wherever we negotiate among ourselves and build various meaning-worlds from different experiences and interpretations of reality. Narratives are invested in a textual process, in which the text comprises other texts.

The main narrative has side paths, branching subtexts. Micro-narratives are limited to a brief period, whereas macro-narratives extend for a longer term trajectory (Gergen & Gergen 1987; 1988). The whole macro-narrative of human society can be considered a narrative of evolution whose phylogenic time curves extend beyond the individual's lifetime.

Narratives develop from cognitive-emotional evaluations, choices and interpretations. Narratives also become intertwined with each other and separate from each other, approach one another and distance themselves from one another, combine with each other and clash with each other. In particular, literary narratives open up vistas of strange possibilities that are not self-evident, not readily visible. Knowledge of (in and through) literature is not a depressing "we already know this" certainty but a captivating not knowing, a suspenseful guessing what is to come: "Not yet, but perhaps already". In literary texts, the self does not know with any certainty and consequently exists in several forms – in the webs of memory, dream, fantasy, intuition, and logical reasoning.

In narrating, knowledge can be the sort of thing that has not been thought of. Our "own" utterance is mixed with "dia-

logic overtones" and openings into others' utterances. In fact, one's "own" thought "is born and shaped in the process of interaction and struggle with others' thought" (Bakhtin 1986, 92). The self in relationships knows relatively, is a self-reflection and a reflection of others. The invention of "the self" and "the other" activates again and again the definition, development and direction of the expressive subject. "The basic human task of imaginative self-invention" (Kermode 1967, 146) is verified in the narration of selfing and self-relating. The presence of the subject and the other is at the same time both actual and potential. "I" and "Thou" speak to each other, redefine themselves and may exchange places, meanings and truths in different situations of expression.

Fictions and facts, storying and theorizing overlap one another. With stories you make theories and with theories you make stories. Realities cannot be settled or explained comprehensively with didactic theory narratives. The structures of narratives outline experiences, but leading narratives (or perhaps especially these) also lack something: desire hints at something that is absent, a lack of something, a yearning for experience. Our theory stories are often anchors which alleviate terrors and anxieties, make our existence more bearable and push to the side our helplessness.

THE POLYPHONIC DISCUSION RELATIONSHIP

Textually constructed selves or identities tell the "own" and the "other's" existential and cultural story. In different contexts, different people favor different self-representations. The rhetoric of the self signifies, among other things, sexualities, the

ideologies of masculinity and femininity, morals, and ethnic, political and religious commitments. Martin White (1991, 14) has noted that people often seek therapy when some dominating narratives prevent them from living by their self-preferred and desired stories. On the other hand, some people may compulsively strive to realise unsatisfactory, tiresome and depressing life narratives, which do not correspond to the qualities of their experience, or are entirely opposite to them.

By discussing and narrating we bring to the fore and compare socially different parallel narratives of reality. Narratives develop as alternative life possibilities: could I, should I, do I have the courage to? For example, in narrative therapies, active listening, passionate discussion and being in enthusiastic relationships can induce new risk-taking in developmental steps and narratives. Openness to words and dialogues creates space for the fruitful meeting between life's enigma and our unknown desires. We negotiate meanings, memories, feelings, and hopes. They are not ready-"(ear)marked". Our discussions are "authors"; meaningfulness or transforming power does not become realized in individual authorities but in the enthusiasm of discussion.

Success-inviting conversations, symbols and images can also change conceptions of therapy. Analysis and interpretation of "problems", those "negative phenomena", perhaps do not help in therapy. Helpers and helped have to admit that something is lacking, something is wanted, and this has to be found in a rhythm between desire and rationality, in a practical and polyphonic discussion relationship. (Compare Riikonen & Smith 1997.) In this narrative polylogicality, the "patients" turn out to be frozen ways of talking, restrictive or categorically rigid commands, blunt interactive forms and vacuous monologues,

not any problem cases or people diagnosed as ill. The will to diagnosing can change into an arena for free discussion.

Our words and narratives are also vulnerable self-objects, not just exterior and impersonal word objects. In the story-teller, they activate narcissistic transferences and projections. To the narcissistically wounded self, closely spoken words and narratives may include threats so that the self, with the illusion of omnipotence, tries to regulate and control the information he/she gives to others. The others are then objects of quick manipulation and exploitation. They can be rejected when they no longer bring satisfaction to the self. However, words and narratives can also lead the self to expanding courage and affection when the self stretches for more creative tension and sensual contacts than before.

Self-narratives are both individual histories and social-historical collages. They are present in social relationships, comparisons and interactive situations. Narratives contain societal and cultural expectations which originate from important people in the nearby environment, the family, other groups or organizations, institutions and ideologies. The individual does not entirely own his or her narrative. A small child already grows in a matrix of preceding narratives and gropes for more mature identifying points and ideals, which develop later into promises of fullness, into guideposts for the transition to later identities. In the self-narrative, the individual is, however, unavoidably in contact with others, because self-narratives cannot develop in a vacuum. A self-narrative has to come out in one way or another. It has to get authorization from the others.

The hold of the social order and the hold of the others in a person's self-narratives are of different strengths in different environments and in different times. Collective self-narratives

can dogmatically and ideologically limit a person's space to move, but self-narratives that emphasize individuality can protect themselves from the demands of the community. The bases of self-narratives are shifting continuously. The narratives have to be changed, and from time to time the narrator has to form an alliance with other narrators, draw away from them, and perhaps make contact again under changed conditions. Meetings between narratives are not always harmonious. They can drift into collisions, throwing one from safe positions and conventional truths into an understanding of conflicting assessments and choices.

Meanings, knowledge, values and interpretations change when self-narratives are overlapping each other on various cultural stages. The pure, totally independent self-narrative may be a self-delusion or -deception. We do not even know what sort of stories we belong in and how pre- and part-narratives of the past and serial narratives of the future are building the story of our current psyche. Our narratives expand, condense, edit, move and dramatize history, goal-oriented activity, significant and insignificant aspects of culture (science, art) and media.

THE SELF-NARRATIVE NET

Following the "discursive turn" in cultural, linguistic and literary research, it has become general to allude to texts, narratives, narrative thinking, linguistic strategies and rhetorical devices and staging in different areas of knowledge. In addition, in psychology and the therapy field dissatisfaction with such metaphors as "structure", "system", "information processing" and "problem solving" has surfaced. Talk of "narrative thera-

pies" and "network therapies" has proliferated, while narratives, social constructs, networks and new metaphors justify certain methods of helping. (See e.g. White & Epston 1990; De Shazer 1994; Freedman & Combs 1996; Riikonen & Smith 1997; Roberts 8c Holmes 1999; Lieblich, McAdams & Josselson 2004.) Every therapy and counseling form and scientific theory has its own justificatory story

A narrative is a map, which spreads over different eras. Life has contracted, and we no longer have time to grieve for long or endlessly bury disappointments. For example, in a psychiatric narrative, called the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders DSM-II, which came into use in 1968, it was stated that the "normal" period for grieving after the death of a loved one or any other severe loss was 13 months. In the manual that came into use in 1994, DSM-IV, the corresponding "normal" grieving period had shrunk to 2 months.[2] According to DSM-IV, if grieving lasts longer than that it has become a question of depression. In twenty-six years, 11 months of grieving have been lost. To top it all, the latest psychiatric system, DSM-5 (2013), eliminated altogether the so-called bereavement exclusion in the diagnosis of major depressive disorder (MDD) and made it possible to start antidepressant medication even after 2 weeks of grieving. Andy Warhol's predicted 15-minute period of fame may already have begun. We can change channel quickly, we can reject an unpleasant web contact and throw ourselves into another arena. We can also change our self-presentation, create another type of self-narrative and self-transmission. The "I" is nevertheless suffering and

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2   I am grateful to Professor Arthur Kleinman for this example, which he presented in Helsinki in December 1997 during a guest lecture.

mortal, although cloning might perhaps offer the promise of immortality. The first person who writes on the net can seek the company of other "avatars" (net personae) or withdraw and escape.

In "virtual community" (Rheingold 1993) there is also a question of the net self's contacts, or really contact fantasies, and their durability and quality, however far we have moved away from the traditional "face-to-face" meeting to interface, from transference to interference. Although the "core self" might have broken up into a multimediated internet self that acquires different identity enactments, the net self still consists of messages, mental representations, circulating narratives and the rendezvous of narrative personae (masks). And although interpersonal, social interaction and dialogue may have changed to become "hyperpersonal" (Walther 1996) polylogue or hypopersonal monologue (dating only with one's selfie), cultural narratives influence the self-narrative and how we interpret our experiences, just as our choices and actions influence the sort of narratives that circulate in our culture.

The self does not really tell us *about* the world, but the self-narrative *is* the self and the world, the self tells (of) itself and the world many times and in many ways. Meanings may be rewritten and the self's narratives can be revised and updated anew. Meanings can be edited, produced and distributed in different places and on different levels. Withdrawn and self-absorbed ideas of reality have perhaps in virtual reality and virtual mentality ended up in new forms of negotiating situations.

Grand metanarratives (like humanism, communism, capitalism, democracy) and theoretical structures have shifted position and become mixed into a new type of sense-innovation, play space (cyberspace), teleperformance and enticing net-re-

lationship. The authoritarian "essential" truth has evaporated into a stream of textuality. The virtual "flow experience" (compare Csíkszentmihályi 1990) is pleasure without the promise of material reward. It is enjoyment of skills which take one into transitional spaces, to the threshold, into the stimulation of the strange and the unknown.

One could say that narratives construct realities, but they also destroy and transform. Narratives change themselves when they are presented, retold and re-related to. Narratives are not museums in which things saved from chaos and randomness, culturally institutionalized meanings, are deposited. There are no pre-established or readymade meanings. There is no external (or internal, for that matter) judge of texts who could dictate meanings. Meaning and language are products of textuality, writing in which a "natural" presence fades into a whirl of alternatives. In the life text there are no hidden themes (or symptoms) – they are realized only as speech and writing.

On net-writing platforms, discussions are writers, not individual authors, therapists or master interpreters. They too are fragmentarily involved in the net of discontinuous and split narratives. Their existence is realized in changing and temporary interpretative situations. It is no wonder that the openness of play space can frighten the net-self: there is no longer existential anxiety but a techno-ecstatic existence, vertigo of representations, an audio-visual-verbal spiral. "Techno-personal systems" (Gergen 1991) shower into the net several hybrids of the self, imaginary and immaterial identities. The cosmos is not ready written with reality, but full of spirals of narratives side by side; one could write and rewrite the self into the slipstream and thunder of many worlds.

PLAY SPACE

Writing on the net or stepping into cyberspace begins a new type of language research journey, not walking "my way", but in the wake of cruising self-routes and along their light trails. Visual space, sensual space, embodies how something appears. Body images and imaginations can change according to situations and spaces. "Artificial reality", "fake reality", "hyperreality" and "virtual reality" are really oxymorons (like "air without oxygen"), and it would be easier to talk about cyberspace (Rheingold 1992, 184). Cyberspace offers programmed power and a feeling of domination. Cyberspace makes it possible that people are not simply observing reality but immersing themselves into it and experiencing it just as if it is real. The virtual is neither social nor mental. Every virtual reality traveler can create the next event every hectic moment. Everyone is a performer, in a virtual body and role (compare Rheingold 1992, 192), a ruler of his or her own miniature world and at the same time divorced from his or her senses, scattered into the worldwide web, at one time here and there.

Sometimes even this "net-self" metaphor should perhaps be rejected. Centre, margin, hierarchy and linearity are in continuous movement. One needs to untie knots, tie websites, make links, but, perhaps above all one has to remember to remember even in the future the ambiguity and polyphony of the play. As Bettelheim (1987, 40) states:

> "A child, as well as an adult, needs plenty of what in German is called *Spielraum*. Now, *Spielraum* is not primarily 'a room to play in.' While the word also means that, its primary meaning is 'free scope, plenty of room' – to move not only one's elbows but also

one's mind, to experiment with things and ideas at one's leisure, or, to put it colloquially, to toy with ideas."

This touchable (digital) play space also opens behind the virtual shoulders and elbows. "Relationships" between texts are ever more variable, more open, self-organizing, non-linear, emergent, non-causal, non-dialectic (compare Miller 1990; see Landow 1992, 27; also Landow 1997). The same thing is true of relationships between writer and reader, teacher and student, therapist and therapy patient. Many of our cherished ideas about literature (and archives), pedagogy and therapy have been a consequence of our fixed conceptions of knowledge and the technology (archiving) of cultural memory and history. With technology and with the choices that link to it we archive a certain type of past, but the seal of reason securing our files was broken long ago (see Ihanus 2007). The saved files of the past, those historical body images, will be suitably cut and framed again into hot or cool longing for consciousness.

The electronic hypertext is not a static object, but an invitation to a play, a door (or a portal) to optional adventures: you can choose, take steps, create meanings with your intentions. In the winding streams of text, changing thought-feeling-runs, there is no last word. Even the most frozen text cannot ultimately retire into itself, into the illusion of autonomy. Yet it does not need to drown or leak like a sieve, because the articulation, expression, can always become recognized and pull devotion to its side. (Compare Derrida 1981, 130; see also Landow 1992, 60.)

In all communication, in an information flux, there is an accompanying noise. Messages have no clear sender or clearly defined receiver. Yet it is possible to select attentively (or freely

floating) exceptional, personally valued meanings, differing from a rush. (See also Paulson 1988; Landow 1992, 72.) All texts are virtual on the net: anonymous and public. Nor is the self sprinkled on the flow space necessarily without demons, inspiration, humor, moods, dreams and dreams of the future – the stuff of the narrative, which pushes the letter of the law to the edge.

By modifying Nietzsche's "perspectivism", we can say that the subject is the process, which has many interpretations.[3] Perhaps the subject's "existence" is just coming into meaning: personality has changing interpretations. Self-narratives create selves and uncountable meanings. The meanings of self-stories do not exist before narration; they are not hidden in spheres beyond interpretations. Only narration, textualization and contextualization, the performance of narrative thought and expression give birth to "personal" meanings at any given time.

We can talk, write and devise meanings and form plots sometimes together, sometimes separately. The question of a narrative's "psyche" is also a question of the cultural and the human psyche: to send a message or to vanish into a noise? Or are they one and the same? Narratives combine and separate. The individual narrative has a beginning and an end, but storytelling and retelling will not end until culture and the psyche disappear.

Translated by **Philip Line**, in collaboration with author.

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3   Nietzsche's (1968, 267) "perspectivism" clashed with the core narrative of positivism with its exclusive existence of facts by presenting an alternative narrative of a dissident thinker: "It is precisely facts that do not exist, only interpretations." In addition, to Nietzsche (passim, 269–270) the narrative of the subject was a "fiction" of unity: "The subject is the fiction that many similar states in us are the effect of one substratum: but it is we who first created the 'similarity' of these states [...]" "*My hypothesis*: The Subject as multiplicity."

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