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'Against Narrativity' Reconsidered

Galen Strawson's (2004) 'Against Narrativity' counts as possibly the most influential and thorough critique of narrative theorizing of self and identity in cultural studies that has been launched to date. Indeed, it is not difficult to agree with him in criticizing many overstated claims about the narrative character of self and identity. Personally, I have no trouble identifying with his idea of an Episodic person, who, quote, 'does not figure oneself, considered as a self, as something that was there in the (further) past and will be there in the (further) future' (Strawson 2004: 430). Insofar as this invitation of the Episodic personality and resistance to narrative continuity and 'form-finding' captivates us, Strawson, after all, fails in construing a convincing empirical case against narrativity. Rather, what he displays is a closed conceptual language game whose premises largely imply the results of the presumed analysis. After all, Strawson neither reveals anything like a distinct 'Episodic' style or personality, nor does he indicate any plausible limits of narrativity¹.

1. The concept of narrative

Strawson's own argumentational style endeavours to build two distinct traditions and styles of thought, a contradiction between the hegemonic narrative camp and the bravely dissenting non-narrative thinkers. 'Narrativity camp' is indeed Strawson's choice of term, without a further thought about the narrative connotations and conceptual implications (2004: 437). This style of argumentation typically builds homogeneous schools of thought by taking quotes from here and there, and then claiming covertly or overtly that thinkers belonging to a 'school' truly share all the key ideas. Strawson duly recognizes some relevant differences between various 'narrative' thinkers, but then assumes conceptual unities among them without properly qualified argument. This camp building style has been equally employed while creating the positive image of a unitary 'narrative school' of thought. In what follows, my objective is to denounce Strawson's proposed array of argumentative front lines, in a way to de-camp the field, and instead of defending the narrative camp against Strawson's attack, my intention is to use Strawson's ideas, where possible, to reformulate the ideas about narrative identity.

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Departing from a number of other discussions on Strawson's article, my focus is mostly fixed upon the concept of narrative and the subsequent concepts of narrative identity and narrative processing (cf. Battersby 2006; Eakin 2006; Schechtman 2007; Ritivoi 2009; Herman 2009a). The fall-out bearing upon such a focus is indeed to claim that Strawson effectively forecloses most of the pertinent questions he raises by way of his particularly narrow definition of narrative. While embarking boldly on criticizing 'narrativity' *in general*, he in fact subsequently assumes a very particular and limiting conception of narrativity by asserting that 'the paradigm of a narrative is a conventional story told in words. I take the term to attribute – at the very least – a certain sort of *developmental* and hence temporal *unity* or *coherence* to the things to which it is standardly applied – lives, parts of lives, pieces of writing' (Strawson 2004: 439; italics original). The definition is rather normative than structural or functional, thus allowing for very flexible interpretations about what is and what is not narrative.

Why indeed should we assume that narrative identities only or predominantly are built by using conventional and predominantly unity-seeking and coherence-seeking narratives? Has 'developmental unity' been a shared, key element in understanding narrative, and in which chapters? It is and should be a clear empirical question to register who among the criticized 'narrativists' might subscribe to this vision of conventional narrativity (e.g., Carr 1986; Schechtman 1996); but instead of posing this more limiting question and acknowledging the potential diversity of viewpoints, Strawson simply assumes that his straw-man theory of narrative and narrative identity is universally shared. It is noteworthy how the article *projects* conventionality and coherence-seeking upon narrativity, while the text itself construes extremely strong coherence and unity in terms of binary personalities, schools, and theories. Because narratives, within this frame, cannot be unconventional and unity-challenging, all truly creative and innovative individuals cannot be anything but Episodics.

Strawson's point of departure, in constructing and attacking the school of narrative identity, is the simplified image of nineteenth-century realism elevated to a universal norm of narrative and narrativity. His nearest source for this rigid conceptualization appears to be another philosopher, Marya Schechtman. In order to be socially competent persons, Schechtman (1996: 96) argues, we need to be able to present a chronology of the main events of our lives in a reliable and conventional way, which indicates 'that constituting an identity requires that an individual conceive of his life having the form and the logic of a story – more specifically, the story of a person's life – where "story" is understood as a conventional, linear narrative'. Schechtman is correct in recognizing this obviously increasing social pressure for chronological representations of the life course. She is, however, as obviously wrong in concluding that this social pressure could simply be translated into a theory of narrative self and identity. Narrative identity does not need a version of curriculum vitae as its representation. More to the point, it is an obvious misunderstanding even to equate 'narrative identity' with 'having a narrative' (Schechtman 2007). Does any other major theorist of narrative identity require or presume such conventionality of narrative? At least not Paul Ricoeur. In his short and

popularized article ‘Narrative Identity’ (Ricoeur 1991), Ricoeur explicitly discusses his need to take a ‘detour’ through modernist fiction in order to reflect upon narrative identity. He says:

The modern novel abounds in situations in which the lack of identity of a person is readily spoken of, exactly the opposite of the sort of fixity of the heroes found in folklore, fairy tales, etc. [...] With Robert Musil, ‘the man without qualities’ – or rather without properties – becomes at the limit unidentifiable. The anchorage of the proper name becomes so derisory it becomes superfluous. The unidentifiable becomes unnamable. (Ricoeur 1991: 195)

Ricoeur thinks that all these literary and artistic representations of challenged identities are vital for the ways modern individuals negotiate their identities. Narrative identifications, in other words, already take place in receiving fiction – and not only or predominantly in telling a conventional life story. My preliminary contention here is that narrative identity does not – at least exclusively or even predominantly – refer to an individual narrative representation, but is per definition more complex and process-related (Eakin 2006: 182). Ricoeur’s long-standing critique of structuralism was based on his systematic critique of formulaic and conventional narratives (Ricoeur 1981, 1984). Therefore, I am puzzled by how easily Schechtman and Strawson both incorporate Ricoeur into the narrative camp, and then argue for the conventionality of identity narratives. I have no intention here to elevate Ricoeur as the representative or even the most important theorist of narrative identity; instead, I simply use his work as an example of theorizing that does not fit the conceptual limits assumed by Strawson (2004) or Schechtman (1996). The camp, in other words, has never existed in the unitary form their arguments suggest.

2. Diachronic and Episodic selves

Let us now return to Strawson’s key distinction and argument before proceeding further with the conceptual dilemma. Strawson argues that there are two radically different perspectives to self-experience and two radically different categories of persons, the Diachronic and the Episodic. His definitions are clear cut:

[D] one naturally figures oneself, considered as a self, as something that was there in the (further) past and will be there in the (further) future [...].

[E] one does not figure oneself, considered as a self, as something that was there in the (further) past and will be there in the (further) future. (Strawson 2004: 430)

Removing this distinction from the rest of the article, and reading it affirmatively, I cannot but recognize an Episodic in myself. Phenomenologically speaking, there seems to be something deeply consoling in the thought of not needing to be the very same person as in the further past. Strawson himself says that, ‘as a human being’, he is able to recollect things that have happened to him and even his inside reflections, without still understanding that the things would have happened to him* (the asterisk referring to selfhood, not to the ‘human being’). In my own case, the limits of memory often radicalize this feeling of not being able to fully understand, represent or identify with this old me*.

Strawson’s distinction makes usefully visible what I would call two different perspectives of life narration. Over the last few decades, a plethora of studies have used life-story interviews to collect research materials on life experiences. For some interviewees, it seems to be characteristic and important to present the linear and causally arranged overview of their live occurrences, while some other narrators typically focus on particular moments, detailed and dense episodes, without necessarily presenting all the connections between these episodes. It would be tempting to argue that these episodic accounts are more easily used as tools of investigation into the narrated life than the often more petrified, linear and holistic stories, but there is, unfortunately, not much systematic study for the purpose of grounding this argument. What we probably know and can say is that contemporary literary explorations into one’s further past history more often takes the episodic rather than the linear approach. Personally, again, I do not recognize in myself any interest in writing a linear, causal and chronological presentation about my life and experiences. In contrast, I occasionally have an interest in exploring some distinct and perplexing moments of my life more thoroughly.

As a consequence, I can to a substantial degree concur with Strawson, when he says that ‘I have absolutely no sense of my life as a narrative with form, or indeed as a narrative without form’ (Strawson 2004: 433). I share with Strawson the inconvenience of connecting my life with *a* definite narrative. I can, however, understand some narratives to be better proposals – for the time being – than others. Therefore, I am not entirely convinced of Marya Schechtman’s reply to Strawson’s article, while she ponders about ‘[w]hat counts as having a narrative’ (Schechtman 2007: 159). Even such a classical study as Jerome Bruner’s (1987) ‘Life as Narrative’ neither celebrates the narratives people have, nor does it exactly claim that the members of the ‘Goodhertz’ family see themselves or their lives as narratives. ‘Life as narrative’, at least in the form revealed in Bruner’s article, may as well be understood as a cultural critical term. In any case, the article does not recommend to anyone ‘to have a narrative’. It may be no coincidence that the most compelling empirical studies on ‘storied lives’ or ‘storied minds’ insist on

presenting rather critical, if not grim, and never celebratory cases (e.g., Harding 1992; Freeman 2000; Herman 2009b; or McEwan 2001). What I suggest is that there is a significant difference between being *able to tell* about one's life and *having* a sense of one's life as a narrative. I can be perfectly able to give a narrative account of my life to an interviewer (or, why not, to a friend) without experiencing my life as *a* narrative, or thinking that I *have* a narrative.

Can I now be content after finding my Episodic self, in a similar way as James Phelan does, and who then writes: 'I must confess that I am an Episodic; albeit an Episodic who is a recovering Diachronic' (Phelan 2005: 209)? Phelan's confession (again a narrative term) about his Episodic style already contains a diachronic element, a narrative of recovery from Diachronic thinking. Phelan's difficulty with remaining purely Episodic throughout his account is somehow telling and important. Strawson bluntly admits that he does not have 'any great or special interest in [his] past' (Strawson 2004: 433). He is very strict in not saying anything about his past, or rather anything but the programmatic claims that he is 'well aware that [his] past is [his] in so far as [he] is a human being' (2004: 434). He does not care about his past, does not relate anything about it, so he can simply claim that he remembers his past, but does not have narratives about it. Even psychotherapy can work without narrative, *says* Strawson. How all this happens in real life, nevertheless, remains entirely undocumented. Moreover, if a person is an Episodic (in keeping with the terms of the definition above), how can she give an account of her past at all? Even while following Strawson's definition, it is perfectly easy to identify narratives which include the idea of not being the same self as in the past. More or less, this is what narrative identity means in the first place.

In other words, as clear and inviting as the distinction Diachronic/Episodic at first appears, some vital elements, importantly, remain unaccounted for. For one thing, what after all is the exact temporal duration of an episode? Are we talking about ten minutes, or ten months or even ten years? The distinction above emphasizes the distance between 'me now' and 'me in the further past'. This might encourage thinking of 'episodes' that took place twenty or thirty years ago, including an obvious 'non-me*'. To remember, account for and process these Episodic memories from decades ago, however, still remains within the ambit of narrativity. The criteria suggested by Strawson reveal something about how differently individuals experience, express and enact *continuities* of their lives, but without further specification they do not have anything particular to say about narrativity or the distinctly diachronic organization of experience. Episodes, in my vocabulary, need narratives and narrativity as much as linear sequences do in order to be understood.

There is another question about the paradoxical stability of the divide. An Episodic person does not feel that, in the further past, things happened to himself*; he does not find himself* from the past, yet he rigidly continues his Episodic existence, genetically

determined, despite all possible upheavals. Scholars who have worked with autobiographical narration would probably take an entirely different path. To illustrate this difference of perspectives, I first quote Strawson when he introduces Henry James as an Episodic: ‘When Henry James says, of one of his early books, “I think of...the masterpiece in question...as the work of quite another person than myself”’ (Strawson 2004: 429). To me, James’ observation is not particularly exceptional as an autobiographical comment. James uses one resource that is available to creative people in order to mark and *construct* distance to their earlier life and thinking. Without further elaboration it hardly works as a solid document for a distinct Episodic mind-set. In the short quote, at least, James does not present his past as a series of entirely separate entity-selves, a series that only the mysterious instance ‘James-as-a-human-being’ could understand as being continuous.

As a young man, I was a dogmatic Marxist-Leninist, who spent years working toward the future revolution. This mode of existence truly was heavily diachronic, for example in the sense of positing one’s own story within the inevitable story of objective history. Within this frame, I also used to have diachronic anxieties, such as the fear of becoming a Revisionist myself. In a number of ways I can now confirm that my earlier self* is foreign territory to me, hardly recognizable any longer. Accepting the role of contingency in life and history was one central aspect underlying the change. However, I find Strawson’s model all too essentialist to be truly helpful in considering my own history. Rather than drawing from his stable characterology, I suggest that the expressed distance or identification with the earlier self is a *rhetorical-cum-discursive move*. To assert that the person acting in the past was not me* is an autobiographical *tool* to create distance and possibly enhance the change, as it is also a move as regards potential social relations and acceptance, a rejection of my earlier associations and proposal for other communities. I could also take another rhetorical strategy, used by one of the interviewee’s of my dissertation, and say that during the activism of the 1970s, I was not really able to be myself*. In other words, the interviewee understood her self* as being unchanged, but having been herself further away from the self. As she puts it:

[S]omehow you had to put on borrowed clothes.... I tried to do it for so many years, let’s say some three or four years at least, perhaps, [that] I rather actively tried to be different from what I am. And it seems to me that it was.... I mean, I suffered from it because I felt that it is alien to me. (Hyvärinen 1997: 31)

The activist negotiates the continuity and change in her life story in much more complex ways than Strawson’s binary model allows. Because Strawson withdraws so quickly into genetics and essentialist personality types, his model cannot cope with such mixed answers as ‘I am now an entirely different person, and cannot remember my old self, and yet I feel I’m somehow exactly the same old me’. As Paul John Eakin (2006: 181) remarks: ‘While Phelan and Strawson like to speak of *the* self, I prefer to stay away from the definite article. Instead [...] self is the name I’d give to reflexive awareness of

processes unfolding in many registers. Narrative identity, then, is only one, albeit extremely important, mode of self-experience’.

While thinking about my personal past in ethical terms, I find Strawson’s model again all too schematic. If I cover my life in the 1970s by declaring that it was not me* but that it was rather me as a human being, I find myself pulling off a rather cheap trick. ‘Can an Episodic be an ethical person?’ (Strawson 2007) is not the kind of question that can answer the trickiest ethical problem. ‘To what extent do I continue to act and think in ways similar to those of the 1970s?’ would be a much harder question, precisely by rejecting the *a priori* ‘genetic’ mind-set. Any binary answer that involves either being entirely different or the very same Self* seems only to offer solutions that manage to bypass serious thinking.

3. Literature divided

‘Diachronics and Episodics are likely to misunderstand one another badly’, Strawson claims (2004: 431), but obviously he only means that Diachronics are not able to understand Episodics. This interpretation becomes evident when Strawson, in order to illustrate his idea of two opposite ways of considering one’s past and future, offers a compelling list of Episodic novelists, including for example Stendhal, Virginia Woolf, Iris Murdoch and Marcel Proust. Tellingly, the list of Diachronics exhibits such less prominently literary figures as Plato, St. Augustine, Heidegger and Tom Nagel (Strawson 2004: 432). Narrative persons, after all, seem not to be very adept narrators.

Nevertheless, how is it possible, to begin with, that authors such as Stendhal, Murdoch and Woolf, despite being Episodics, have demonstrated such proficiency in writing compelling narratives, including characters who change diachronically? In this light, how was it possible that Gerárd Genette (1980) even used Proust as his primary material in drafting his theory of narrative discourse, not realizing that Proust’s novel was not at all narrative? True enough, both Proust and Woolf write on evanescent moments of being, but it should be immediately clear how quickly every separate moment opens up temporally backwards into the memories and past moments of the characters’ lives. Proust, Woolf and Stendhal would certainly disagree with Strawson in regard to their keen interest in the pasts of human beings and their attempts to come to terms with past experiences. No prominent novelist is mentioned by Strawson as being a Diachronic person with narrative interests.

One possible key to this rather peculiar list of non-narrative novelists is of course Strawson’s own concept of narrative. All the authors who have excelled in reforming the

genres of narrative literature are, by definition, Episodics for Strawson. If Strawson really wants to develop such a normative theory of narrative, using Proppian fairy tales and poor *Bildungsroman* as the prototypes of narrativity, he may arrive at a truly critical theory. But to use this idiosyncratic model as a template in evaluating all authors, who have discussed ‘narrative identity’, results inevitably in poorly argued intellectual history. To take this point further, I suggest a detour through ‘natural’ and ‘prototypical narrativity’ (Fludernik 1996; Herman 2009a). The purpose of this exercise is to visualize more concretely some of the choices Strawson has made. Indeed, I do not have an agenda to elevate natural narratology, as such, to an authoritative position, but simply wish to document that there are concepts of narrativity which radically differ from Strawson’s model and which lead to entirely different conclusions.

4. Strawson and prototypical narrativity

Monika Fludernik (1996: 13), in her proposal for a ‘natural’ narratology, endeavours to redefine ‘narrativity *qua* experientiality *without* the necessity of any actantial groundwork. In [her] model there can therefore be narratives without plot, but there cannot be any narratives without a human (or anthropomorphic) experiencer of some sort at some narrative level’ (italics original). Fludernik thus explicitly rejects the necessity of a teleological and developmental perspective in understanding narrativity. She also challenges the previous centrality of both Proppian fairy tales and other strictly sequential stories as models of narrativity. Experientiality, instead, is the path by which Modernist writers are invited into the ambit of prototypical narrativity: ‘On the contrary, chronological reshuffling of the kind we have come to appreciate so much in Modernist fiction increases a narrative’s static quality since all stages of the development have to be viewed simultaneously as a kind of mosaic or puzzle before one can start to establish the vital (relative) chronology of the *fabula*’. And to come full circle back to Strawson: ‘It is not temporality per se that “makes” narrative; or if so, that temporality relates more to the reading process than to the context of the story’ (Fludernik 1996: 21).

Fludernik emphasizes a number of times and in a number of contexts how she reckons strictly chronological and conventional narratives – which for Strawson represent the paradigm of narrative – only to represent ‘zero-degree narrativity’ (Fludernik 1996: 311). The very same Modernist literature that Strawson characterized as ‘episodic’ is prototypically narrative for Fludernik due to its dense experientiality. While Fludernik construes *continuity* between everyday oral narratives and high literature, Strawson builds on the *opposition* between narrative conventionality and high episodic creativity. For Fludernik, experientiality is the crucial element of narrativity, for Strawson it resides more or less within the episodic sphere. Telling about one’s experiences, Strawson suggests, even exposes them to the risk of Revision (2004: 443–445).

David Herman, like Fludernik, is a cognitively oriented narratologist who has worked vigorously to create a unifying theory of narrative, able to equally explain and theorize phenomena within literature and everyday narration. Herman (2009a, 2009b) was of course published subsequent to Strawson's contribution; however, most of the elements Herman foregrounds have been widely discussed over the last decade (e.g., Herman 1999, 2002). In what follows, my intention is not to introduce Herman (2009a) as a new normative model, but rather as a resource for making the conceptual choices explicit and consequential.

Herman begins his list of 'basics elements' of narrativity with the notion of narratives as 'situated representations' (Herman 2009a: 37–74). This notion is profoundly significant for the problem of this article. It more or less introduces the element of episode into the very situation of telling, and most dramatically in the case of naturally occurring narratives. 'Narratives are both structured by and lend structure to the communicative contexts in which they are told', as Herman summarizes (2009a: 37). Strawson does not recognize this elusive and episodic moment of narration at all but theorizes instead about *a* narrative, which characteristically remains a static entity: 'The person whose [narrative] life it is must see or feel it as *a* narrative, construe it as *a* narrative, live it as *a* narrative' (Strawson 2004: 440, italics added). If this is narrativity, I volunteer to be against it. By contrast, the situational approach to narrative theorizes the ways everyday narration produces episodic and quickly changing identifications, instead of building *a* narrative. Recent study into this everyday storytelling has quite compellingly challenged the Strawsonian assumption of narrative conventionality (Capps & Ochs 2001; Georgakopoulou 2007). Situatedness suggests that narratives of the self are plural, often fragmentary, and much more changeable and volatile than narratives in Strawson's model. In resisting the idea of a single identity narrative, this perspective of situated narrative also foregrounds the adjectival 'narrative' as an element of ongoing processes instead of the noun 'narrative' as a stable identity monument.

For Herman, secondly, narrative representations cue 'interpreters to draw inferences about a structured time-course of particularized events' (2009a: 14). At this point, the perspectives taken by Strawson and Herman seem to converge. However, Herman remains systematically neutral with regard to the issue of conventionality. He neither suggests an automatically developmental course of events, nor suggests a guaranteed degree of unity and coherence of the representation. For Herman, also, representations 'cue', to the extent that the final work of shaping the time-courses is left to the interpreter. Note also the consequential idiom 'particularized events' above. I consider this idiom to be dangerously critical towards many theories of 'living narratives', and certain ways of criticizing them. Prototypical narratives tell about 'particularized events' whereas proactive 'life as narrative' necessarily works with generalized events and generalized attitudes towards such events, locating them necessarily further away from prototypical narrativity.

Perhaps the most dramatic difference between Herman's and Strawson's conceptions of narrative concerns what Herman, thirdly, discusses in terms of 'disruption' or 'disequilibrium' in the storyworld (Herman 2009a, 105–136). This idea of the disruption of the normal course of events is of course very old, and inscribed for example in the Proppian model of wonder tales (Propp 1968). That narratives are in some vital ways about disruptions, surprises and even chaos, is entirely absent in Strawson's model. For him, narrativity one-sidedly includes 'relatively large-scale coherence-seeking, unity-seeking, pattern-seeking, or most generally [some] [F] *form-finding* tendency' (Strawson 2004: 441, italics original). Disruptions and surprises only belong, in his model, to the rich and varied life of the Episodics.

Strawson asserts that his life is not narrative in any 'non-trivial' sense, and continues: 'Well, if someone says, as some do, that making coffee is a narrative that involves Narrativity, because you have to think ahead, do things in the right order, and so on, and that everyday life involves many such narratives, then I take it the claim is trivial' (2004: 439). True enough, coping with coffee-making does not indeed turn our lives into narratives. Jerome Bruner (1990, 1991) has, however, suggested an entirely different interpretation of the expected sequences of events. Bruner and Lucariello (2006[1989]) originally studied narratives told by 'Baby Emily' in her crib. They were impressed by the realization of how Emily, from her second to third year, first learned to tell about how things usually, normally and hopefully are. Emily expressed herself more and more competently about the everyday course of her days. Children begin to relate deviations from this normal course of events and cultural scripts only around the age of five and six (Nelson 2003: 28).

Bruner's idea about 'canonicity and breach' maintains that stories are told only when the 'folk psychological', canonical expectations of everyday life are broken (Bruner 1990: 39–40). Herman, in his *Story Logic* (2002: 85–92), adds that prototypical stories invite and cue plenitudes of cultural scripts and stereotypical plans – but in order to be tellable these stories need to incorporate relevant *deviations* of such expectations. As is well known, we share cultural expectations about how things normally happen in a scholarly seminar, in defending a dissertation in a particular culture, or in having a romantic affair. Strawson seems to accept the fact that even Episodics realize the existence and relevance of cultural canonicity by being able to plan ahead. The consequence of this thesis, of course, is not that our lives would become narratives – and I do not yet entirely understand what it could even signify – but that the cognitive process of cultural form-finding *precedes* the events themselves, as well as the narratives we possibly later tell. The paradox embedded in this idea is exciting and relevant. As Herman (2002) argues, following scripts would provide us with a maximum of form and a minimum of reasons for storytelling. As a consequence, narratives are not one-sidedly about 'form-finding'; indeed, they are often and functionally about *form-breaking*, *form-testing*, and *form-challenging*. This suggests that after discrediting the narrowly normative concept of narrative that Strawson promotes, we are possibly able to see a much richer and entirely different dialectic between chaos, disruption, rules, and narrativity.

Strawson's conventional, linear and form-oriented narrative seems equally to have problems with the final, fourth, element that Herman portrays: the experientiality or '*qualia*'; that is, how the disruptions are felt and experienced within some consciousness (Herman 2009a: 137–160). It is obvious that Strawson highly appreciates this element and sphere of experientiality, but that he rather sees it as a characteristic feature of one's being Episodic. Many of the authors Strawson sees as Episodics seem indeed to focus on what Halliday's functional grammar refers to as 'mental processes' (Halliday & Matthiesson 1994: 197–210). To dramatize this aspect, I suggest a distinction (constituting a continuum instead of a binary opposition) between 'agency' and 'reception'. Of course even perception is at least partly intentional and never a sheer matter of passive reception; yet the increasing emphasis on mental, receptive processes breaks down the strict course of events, and creates the experience of a moment, an episode of life. These moments of reception easily slow down, break down, or deter the scripted courses of events, and thus might often be understood as a diversion from narrativity.

Herman's discussion on *qualia*, how things are truly felt in individual minds, raises a new problem for Strawson's model. The whole distinction between Diachronic and Episodic mind-sets was established as follows: '[E] one does not figure oneself, considered as a self, as something that was there in the (further) past and will be there in the (further) future' (Strawson 2004: 430). How is this figured? Which kinds of experience of difference or distance constitute the realization of being a different 'Self'? Can I somehow assume that my neighbour has similar experiences to ground her episodic nature? For that matter, how can I feel or experience that my 'Self' is the same? What is there to experience or compare, if I want to know whether I had the same self just a week ago? I repeat John Paul Eakin's (2006: 181) position, maintaining that 'self is a name [he'd] give to reflexive awareness of processes unfolding in many registers'. 'The' Self is not there, available for comparative studies, neither for Diachronics nor Episodics, not for those who would like to compare them.

5. Towards a conclusion

Despite the numerous problems in his line of argumentation, Strawson undoubtedly succeeds in foregrounding some relevant differences of personality with regard to narrative identity and narrative processing. His criticism of exaggerated ideas regarding identity as *a narrative*, and for that matter, as a *conventional narrative*, is warmly welcomed.

For years I have resisted the popular idea that all people would have, in some unproblematically similar way, a life-long and at the same time continuously emerging, covering, and linear narrative of their life in mind, even without ever telling anyone about it. Inspired by Strawson, I consider that there are significant differences in the ways people process their memories and histories into narratives and otherwise. I find it more interesting, both in personal and scholarly terms, to invite, tell, and analyze what might verge on the occasional or incongruous episodes than to construe overall, continuous and linear life stories. Even more radically than Strawson, I would argue that I do not have any reliable access to the mind of my former self as a young, militant Marxist-Leninist of the 1970s. Therefore, I welcome Strawson's reluctance to assume the idea that, indeed, it was not exactly me* in the 'further past'. I am convinced that there are people around who have much more trust in their own personal continuity and sense of an unbroken linearity of their complete life story than either I or Strawson seem to have.

Unfortunately, Strawson's conceptual strategy, a summary attack on 'narrativity' sidetracks his criticism. Drawing from more recent and more refined narrative theories, he certainly could rephrase and reframe his criticism in more felicitous terms. This re-thinking should, for example, include the shift of emphasis from *a* narrative to plural narratives, from the narrative to storytelling, and from the static noun 'narrative' to the adjectival 'narrative', characterizing a number of cognitive, discursive and communicative processes.

Even though Strawson's critical contribution is welcomed, the project outlined in Strawson's recent articles does not yet convince. Philosophically thinking, I find Strawson too categorical, metaphysical and even simplistic. Within a more pronouncedly discursive or phenomenological frame, one could easily accept the experience of not being oneself* in the past; and yet, in some other ways, being exactly the same self* as currently, and to see identification as an ongoing process. Terming this differently, Strawson takes one single autobiographical process – *constructing* the past self as a totally different, almost alien self beyond my complete understanding – and makes it absolute as a particular disposition of particular personalities. This 'being and not being' oneself is a more or less permanent theme in modernist autobiography, and a more or less commonly shared cultural resource among competent adults. We certainly have more grounds for discussing different individual *preferences* in using these resources than in construing different categories of personality.

As much as Strawson opposes the form-finding and coherence-seeking proclivities of Narrative people, he lets – probably as a human being – the linearity and causal linkage in through the backdoor. He says, in arguing against narrative understanding of the self: 'The way I am now is profoundly shaped by my past, but it is only the present shaping consequences of the past that matter, not the past as such' (Strawson 2004: 438). Except that this statement invites a truly causal, linear and developmental narrative of the past, in

attending to all the things that form my present being, this statement seems to totally betray the previous episodic rhetoric. A conscious narrative processing of episodes, instead, would be able to recognize elements which do not continue in the present, elements and potentialities which have been forgotten and marginalized over the years following these episodes. Using a term suggested by Gary Saul Morson (1994, 2003) and André Bernstein (1994), the episodes, understood narratively, could rather prompt side-shadowing; that is, thinking in reference to *options not taken*, the world and self(s) as contingent entities, not only in the form they now occupy.

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