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Narrative and embodiment – a scalar approach

Allan Køster. Published in Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences, 2016

Abstract

Recent work on the relation between narrative and selfhood has emphasized embodiment as an indispensable foundation for selfhood. This has occasioned an interesting debate on the relation between embodiment and narrative. In this paper, I attempt to mediate the range of conflicting intuitions within the debate by proposing a scalar approach to narrative and an accompanying concept of a split-self (Waldenfels, 2000). Drawing on theoretical developments from contemporary narratology, I argue that we need to move away from a binary understanding of narrative as something an entity (the self) strictly is or is not; rather, we need to see narrative as an attribute admitting of degrees. I suggest that the relation between narrative and embodiment should be seen along these lines, proposing three levels of the narrativity of embodied experiencing: 1) the unnarratable, 2) the narratable and 3) the narrative. Finally, I discuss the implications this framework has for the general question of the narrative constitution of selfhood.

Keywords: Narrativity; Embodied experience; Split-self; the Unnarratable; the Narratable; the Narrative

I. Narrative, selfhood and embodiment

Although the idea that the self has a narrative basis belongs to some of the most influential theories on selfhood in the contemporary debate, it has recently become a contested view where some commentators either tend to downscale the importance of narrative (e.g. Lamarque, 2004; Tammi, 2006) or outright reject it (e.g. Blattner, 2000; Strawson, 2004). A crucial point that a range of commentators have consistently put forth is the conspicuous absence of embodiment. From this point of view, a consensus is emerging that selfhood cannot be understood as a purely abstract narrative construction, but that narrative needs to be grounded in a more fundamental notion of an embodied self. Richard Menary (2008), for instance, argues against what he calls the “abstract narrative account”, pointing out that narrative presupposes the existence of a pre-narrative embodied self and that ‘*our embodied experiences, perceptions and actions are all prior to the narrative sense of self*’ (p. 75). Failure to be mindful of this embodied and feeling self takes the narrative position to the absurd consequence that I ascribe pain to a collection of narratives, which, according to Menary, simply ‘*sounds wrong*’ (p. 73). A similar conclusion is drawn by Dan Zahavi (2007), who argues that narrative selfhood presupposes an embodied level of pre-reflective selfhood as a condition for narrative to be attributed to a subject of experience in the first place. Responding to the same concern, Kim Atkins (2008) argues against what she sees as a tendency in the narrative approach to separate psychology from the body, arguing that selfhood needs to be seen as something that ‘*cut(s) across the psychological-bodily distinction*’ (p. 79).

This emphasis on selfhood as embodied, immediately prompts the indispensable question of how we are to understand the relation between narrative and embodiment. If selfhood is inherently embodied, how does narrative then relate to the embodied self?

In her attempt to answer this question, Catriona Mackenzie (2009, 2014) has persistently defended narrative by proposing that embodiment and narrative should be seen as more or less inseparable and that we should understand this relation through what she calls “the integrated bodily perspective”. In Mackenzie’s view, the fact that embodiment is temporally extended implies that it is equally in need of a narrative integration and, hence, that our lived bodily experiences are ‘*always already mediated via narrative self-interpretation*’ (2014, p. 162). Consequently, for Mackenzie, narrative is part of even our most basic embodied experiences. Priscilla Brandon (2014) agrees with this idea; however, believing Mackenzie’s account to be too unilateral, she emphasizes how the relation between narrative and embodiment is fundamentally bi-directional: narrative is not only shaped by embodiment – the reverse is also the case insofar as narrative also shapes my bodily traits, postures and attitudes (p. 77). Whether Brandon hereby actually adds anything to Mackenzie’s account is not clear.

In response to this suggestion, Diana Meyers (2014) has expressed concern that Mackenzie ‘*over-estimates the reach of narrative and under-estimates the cognitive and agentic powers of the body*’ (p. 142), arguing that there is an extensive domain of what she calls psycho-corporeal meaning that evades narrative structuring and is rather non-conceptual and practical in nature. Hence, any attempt to articulate this dimension in the medium of language inevitably falls short (p. 147). Mackenzie’s attempt to integrate narrative at this fundamentally embodied level of experiencing constitutes, according to Meyers, an unjustifiable Cartesianism that intellectualizes meaning-laden, practical intelligence and, thereby, succumbs to ‘*the siren song of mentalization*’ (p. 150). Menary (2008) is equally not convinced by Mackenzie’s claim that basic embodied activities are narratively scripted and that I have ‘*a barrage of narratives in virtue of which I act and in virtue of which my actions are constrained*’ (p. 69). Embodied actions are rather enacted without thinking and should be understood as ‘*primarily non-narrative embodied abilities*’ (p. 70). According to Menary, the direction of fit between narrative and experience is rather to be inverted: it is not narrative that organizes embodied experiences, but narratives that are structured by the sequence of embodied experiences (p. 75). In this respect, Menary differs from Meyer in so far as he proposes that embodied experiences and skilled behaviour quite easily lend themselves to narration. Embodied experiences are ‘*the pre-narrative fodder*’ for narratives (p. 70). A similar position can be found in Daniel Hutto (2006), who describes embodied experiences as being ‘*ripe for narrative*’ (p. 237).

It is this intricate question of how narrative relates to embodiment and embodied experiences that I wish to examine in this paper. In line with the above authors, I accept the critique of the abstract notion of narrative selfhood and the conclusion that selfhood must be understood as, first and foremost, embodied subjectivity. Starting from this position, I will suggest a framework for understanding the relation between embodied experiencing and narrative. More specifically, I argue that we need a framework for understanding this relation that can cater to the variety of intuition displayed in the contemporary debate.

I believe that both Mackenzie and Brandon give a phenomenologically appropriate account when pointing to levels of embodied experiences that appear to display strong narrative features; however, I am equally persuaded by the critique put forth by Meyers that there are levels of psycho-corporeal meaning that remain beyond the reach of narrative. Similarly, I agree with Menary and Hutto in that there are many aspects of our embodied experiences that effortlessly offer themselves for narration; however, I would also emphasize that there are many experiences where this is not the case and where narrative configuration is a complicated and often strenuous achievement.

The solution to integrating these differing intuitions, I suggest, is to introduce a framework that views the relation between narrative and embodied experience as *scalar*. The decisive move in this suggestion is to refrain from the notion that narrative is something the self *is* and to rather see embodied selfhood as a more encompassing phenomenon and embodied experiences as something that *possesses narrativity* to varying degrees. While this way of looking at narrative is central to discussions within contemporary narratology (e.g. H. Porter Abbott, 2011; Ryan, 2007; Sternberg, 2001), it has not yet received much attention within the philosophical and psychological debate on narrative and selfhood.

Suggesting that embodied experiences is something that admits of degrees of narrativity is of course not compatible with the strong claims that selfhood is constituted through narrative integration but I take this as consistent with the general idea of embodied selfhood. This, however, prompts the question: how are we to understand embodied experiencing in so far as it admits of degrees of narrativity? In order to answer this, I will draw on Bernhard Waldenfels (2002a, 2004) and his notion of an embodied *split-self*. The advantage of Waldenfels' understanding of the self is that it explicitly makes room for dimensions of embodied experiences that exhibit strong narrative qualities, but also for dimensions that remain utterly alien to any such orders. Furthermore, the interplay between these orders should not be construed as binary, but as a *continuous scale* where all aspects belong equally to the phenomenon of embodied selfhood. This account of embodied selfhood underpins the understanding of the narrativity of embodied experiences as scalar.

In order to unpack this perspective, I will begin by introducing Waldenfels' notion of embodiment as a split-self and situate it within the debate. Drawing on this, I will then move on to an introduction of narrativity as a scalar phenomenon and show how this relates to the embodied split-self. I shall argue that we can broadly distinguish three levels within the scalar narrativity of embodied experiencing: 1) the unnarratable 2) the narratable and 3) the narrative. In the last section, I will turn to the issue of where this approach leaves the question of a narrative constitution of selfhood.

II. Embodiment and the split-self

As should be easily recognized, the above sketched debate is saturated with attempts to get past the Cartesian divide; Mackenzie proposes to bridge it through an embodied approach to narrative selfhood, while Meyers claims that, in doing so, Mackenzie offers an overly mentalizing and Cartesian account of the body. This struggle to find a balance between the structures of meaning that govern linguistically and

intellectually organized experience and what Meyers call non-conceptual, psycho-corporeal meaning seems to be at the very heart of any attempt to determine the relation between embodiment and narrative.

A similar problem also occupies Bernard Waldenfels' extensive work on embodiment and embodied selfhood. According to Waldenfels, there is a tendency in the contemporary debate to posit that *we are* our bodies but, nevertheless, '*still presupposed that there is somebody who is incorporated and embodied without being body through and through*' (2004, p. 236). This tendency should not be reduced to a mere trick of language or habit of the mind, but emerges from our experience of being embodied creatures. As embodied, I not only *am* my body but I also *have* my body, as Helmut Plessner (1976) argued. Hence, my self-experience is not exclusively one of pure habituated self-familiarity and self-acquaintance, but equally one of self-distance, where my own body may appear as object (Ingerslev, 2013). Therefore, although all experiences, in a fundamental way, are embodied and have embodiment as their prerequisite, the body may announce itself to varying degrees in experience; sometimes as an irritant and obtrusive, while other times completely absent. For Waldenfels, this analysis indicates that the only way to get past the Cartesian framework is to take its challenges seriously and not try to deny the intuitions that feed the perspective. What is needed is a translation of our traditional language of consciousness into a new language of embodied experience and in a way that integrates our Cartesian intuitions (p. 236)¹.

In terms of embodied selfhood, Waldenfels argues that this implies that we need to opt for a notion of a split-self [gespaltenes Selbst]. In claiming that the embodied self is 'split', Waldenfels is not attempting to reproduce the Cartesian divide and separate selfhood into two independent ontologies; rather, what is split originally belongs together (Waldenfels, 2000, p. 258). That selfhood is split reflects the basic experiential structure that we always given to ourselves through a simultaneous presence and withdrawal [Entzug] – our bodies are simultaneously both covered and discovered. This manifests in a variety of ways: on the most basic level, it is illustrated in the fact that our bodies are given as both object and subject; as both *seen* and *seeing*, as *touched* and *touching*, as *movable* and *moving* etc. An example of this duality is perhaps most vivid in the experience of waking up during the night only to find one's left arm completely lacking sensitivity and responsivity due to lack of blood supply. First when manually moving the left arm with the right arm downwards, in order to reinstate blood circulation does the arm "regain consciousness", so to speak. In such experiences, we are unequivocally confronted with the object-character of our own body. This implies both an inherently internal and external perspective of myself, which can be the basis for a range of experiences of alienness and unfamiliarity: of what belongs to the familiar order of my self-acquaintance and what evades that order. Examples could, for instance, be the state of surprise when confronted with ourselves in e.g. hearing our own voice played back to us, feeling alienated by our own reflection when looking in the mirror (Waldenfels, 2000, 2004), or, perhaps, the experience of extreme bodily changes during pregnancy or realizing how age has changed one's physical appearance. While these experiences, to varying degrees, are commonplace in everyday life,

¹ Waldenfels takes up this ambitious project in his book *Das leibliche Selbst* (Waldenfels, 2000).

they can also increase in intensity in pathological states such as hearing voices, feeling cut off from one's own thoughts (e.g. in cases of schizophrenia), or in states of depersonalization and dissociation, where a person does not recognize a certain body part as belonging to himself (Waldenfels, 2004, p. 241). This dual aspect of embodied selfhood as having both an internal and an external perspective, and as given both as object and as subject, is, as such, not new to phenomenological analysis; Edmund Husserl spoke of the body as a "Leibkörper", and with him also Max Scheler, Helmut Plessner and Merleau-Ponty. Following this more comprehensive notion of embodied selfhood, it no longer makes sense to distinguish sharply between the physical and the psychological: rather, what we have to see is the embodied self as a complex being:

This complex being includes not only the lived body by and through which we perceive and manipulate things, by which and through which we express ourselves and collaborate with each other, rather it includes as well all the physiological apparatus, including neurological and genetic processes, by which our own behaviour is not only realised but to some extent shaped. *All this belongs to us, but in terms of a decreasing nearness and an increasing remoteness.* So I am justified in speaking of my brain. *We must only take into consideration that belonging to me does not eo ipso mean being at my disposal, as if I were the owner of my body.* (p. 243 my italics).

Importantly, the point Waldenfels makes here is that what constitutes embodied selfhood is *anything* that belongs to my bodily being; it also 'includes all that that really has to do with me but without being done by me' (p. 239). In this sense, it differs fundamentally from those narrative accounts that tie selfhood closely to the concept of personal autonomy (e.g. Korsgaard, 2009; Schechtman, 1996). Selfhood, by Waldenfels account, is a *facticity*, not an achievement, and what belongs to me, to myself, is not only that which I can rationally articulate and appropriate, but also any bodily process that affects who I am and how I experience myself. Hence, it also includes what Gallagher (2005) specifies as 'the body as it operates outside the subject's conscious awareness, though still having an effect on the subject's experience' (p. 32). Within the existing debate, Mackenzie and Poltera (2010) have already indicated a somewhat similar need to move in this direction when analysing Eleanor Sacks experiences of appropriating schizophrenia as an integral part of who she is, concluding that we need to distinguish more clearly between identity and autonomy.

According to Waldenfels, this means that selfhood is constituted along a 'continuous scale of nearness and remoteness' (Waldenfels, 2004, p. 243), where some experiences immediately appear as meaningful, in so far as they fit with established experiential orders, while others present themselves as rather strange, unfamiliar, or even as alien and meaningless. The term "Split self" might therefore seem a bit misleading, in so far as it suggests a binary separation. This is, however, not Waldenfels' intention: the experience of alienness admits of various degrees, intensities and styles (Waldenfels, 1997, pp. 37-42). Examples of such degrees of alienness could be states of muscular based twitches (such as a random

repetitive eye twitch) to obtrusive fidgeting, excessive nail biting (like whilst watching an exciting movie) or existential experiences of feeling anxious, sad, angry or unsettled without knowing why.

Furthermore, the alienness of embodied selfhood is not restricted by that which is contained by my own skin, but as soon as we adopt the perspective of a split-self, the other person arises as co-original with myself (p. 244). Waldenfels captures this notion through Merleau-Ponty's notion of inter-corporeity. We are touched by the other long before we can reflectively question them as persons. My body is in an important sense always a social body, one in which the habits, norms, rhythms and voices of others are inscribed. Likewise, my social body only belong to me to changing degrees of nearness and remoteness (p. 246). Following Husserl, Waldenfels therefore specifies the body as a "transfer-point" [Umschlagsstelle] – it is the site where meaning and causality, nature and culture, meet and intertwine (Waldenfels, 2000, 2004).

As an embodied self, I am intimately connected with myself, but at the same time cut off from myself. I am, as Waldenfels cryptically remarks: *'neither simply one nor simply two, but two in one and one in two. The inner tension between both poles leaves room for extreme forms of fusion as well as dismemberment.'* (Waldenfels, 2011, p. 51). Consequently, experiential life cannot be seen as inherently meaningful; it is both comprised of that which has already achieved a familiar (narrative) order and that which has not yet come to (narrative) order. As Waldenfels states: *'After all, our bodily experience is not comfortable. We will never completely be settled in our own body as if we were the owner of ourselves. But maybe it is just this inquietude which keeps us alive'* (Waldenfels, 2004, p. 247).

III. The narrativity of embodied selfhood: A scalar framework

A returning issue for theories of narrative selfhood has been the difficulty of providing an adequate definition of narrative; one that is neither *trivial* nor too *demanding*. The well-rehearsed problem in the debate is this: either the definition of what it takes to be a narrative is so minimal that the thesis becomes trivial or the definition of narrative is so demanding that it becomes too exclusive. If we, on the one hand, follow a definition of narrative which stipulates that narrative requires no more than for two events to be connected, as is the case in, for instance, Porter Abbott's (2008a) authoritative work, then stating that selfhood is narrative adds nothing to the fact that experience is temporal². As Strawson (2004) remarks, if the act of making coffee involves narrative because I have to think ahead, then the claim is trivial (p. 439) and, one should add, indistinguishable from any other manifestation of human thought (Ryan, 2007). If, on the other hand, we opt for a stronger notion of narrative, one that involves actual emplotment or even dramatic development, then the claim becomes too exclusive.

I believe the root of this dilemma resides in a tendency within the philosophical debate to understand narrative in a very binary fashion as something *x* either is or is not. Such a binary understanding of narrative is, of course, essential if one wishes to claim that selfhood *is* a narrative or a

² A proponent of narrative such as Anthony Rudd (2012) straightforwardly concedes to this (p. 199)

collection of narratives. However, in so far as one takes an embodied approach to selfhood, one is relinquished from this requirement and can start looking for a less rigid understanding.

Within the field of narratology, a similar discussion has occasioned a dismissal of narrative as involving strictly binary oppositions; that is, narrative as something a text either is or is not (Ryan, 2007, p. 28). Instead, a scalar conceptualization of narrative is proposed: one in which narrative is a *variable quality* and subject to degrees. It is, in Porter Abbott's (2011) phrasing, an "adjectival noun"; an attribute that can be more or less intense in a phenomena. Hence, narrativity is the property qualifying something as narrative; namely, if something is considered narrative it means that it has a certain degree of narrativity.

As Ryan (2006) points out, this shift in focus towards narrativity as a scalar predicate implies that we should no longer speak of something as "being a narrative", but rather as "possessing narrativity". In this way, narrativity does not differ greatly from any other attribute. This sofa may show the quality of blueness but that does not make the sofa as such "a blue". In terms of our current focus on embodied experiences, this implies that these may exhibit narrativity to varying degrees; further, to say that an experience is narrative means that the quality of narrativity is dominant in our experience of the phenomenon. To what extent an embodied experience has narrativity depends on the intensity with which it exhibits the type of relations between the elements that we characterize as narrative. What this specifically amounts to is, of course, itself a thorny issue which has catalysed complicated discussions within narratology³. For the present purpose, it is neither realistic nor necessary to give a full account of this discussion; however, in order to pursue my argument, I will stipulate that the bare minimum for generating the impression of narrativity is through temporal sequentiality, where the connected events must be identified under descriptions that indicate their meaningful connection (Köppe, 2014, p. 106)⁴. From this minimal condition, a variety of more advanced criteria can be added in order to increase the impression of narrativity (e.g. narrative closure, intelligent agents, peripeteia, etc.)⁵.

It is my contention that this scalar approach to narrative can be easily aligned with Waldenfels' notion of embodied selfhood as a split-self, where narrativity, as a matter of degree, underpins the *continuous scale of nearness and remoteness* of the split-self. This framework, I submit, can help us integrate the multitude of intuitions proposed in the debate on the relation between embodiment and narrative. More specifically, I want to suggest three levels on a gradient scale of the narrativity of embodied experiences: a) *the unnarratable*, b) *the narratable* and c) *the narrative*.

a) *The unnarratable*

With the term unnarratable, I would like to specify a level of embodied experiencing that evades any narrative order. This being said, it is important to be mindful of the fact that this designates an extreme

³ For a contemporary overview, see Baroni and Revaz (2016)

⁴ Though a contested topic in narratology, I believe that this definition will be in line with most of the intentions and foci of philosophical theories of narrative selfhood.

⁵ Ryan (2007) gives a lucid account of what she calls a "fuzzy-set definition" to help pinpoint this gradual transition.

pole within a scalar conception of narrativity, and not a sharply delimited category. Whereas it is certainly debateable whether there is such a thing as completely unnarratable bodily experience, I do believe that there are embodied experiences that can never be *adequately* understood or communicated through narrative.

Porter Abbott (2008b) specifies the unnarratable as that which: '*specifically defies the formal structure of narrative for its representation.*' (p. 234). Recognizing the importance of narrative, Waldenfels (2002b) similarly refers to the unnarratable as '*that which remains unnarratable within the narrated*' (p. 21). That certain experiences are unnarratable is a strong and contestable proposal, in so far as it states the impossibility of giving a narrative account of the phenomenon in question. As such, this use of the term should be separated from those who designate the unnarratable as merely that which is simply not worth telling (lacks tellability), or that which is taboo and hence "unspeakable" (Warhol, 2005).

In his analysis of the unnarratable, Porter Abbott (2008b) refers to emergent phenomena as examples of unnarratable processes; e.g. the functioning of the immune system, the movements of flocks of birds, certain neurological processes etc., where a pattern comes into being through a complexity not predictable from antecedent conditions (p. 228). Importantly, the claim is not that emergent processes evade narrative form altogether; we may, for instance, be able to give a narrative account of the emergent process from a micro or a macro perspective. What is unnarratable, according to Porter Abbott, is the causal transition between these levels which is characterizable as emergent exactly because of the lack of a narratable thread where the two events can be connected in a meaningful way (p. 233). As I will return to shortly, this resonates with a range of processes on the level of embodied experiencing.

Waldenfels, on the other hand, locates the unnarratable within narrative itself as something that exceeds and surpasses this order (Waldenfels, 2002b, p. 21)⁶. Apart from the well-traversed problems of the unnarratable beginning and end of an individual's life⁷, Waldenfels emphasizes that what is unnarratable is the passive and affective dimension of embodied experiencing. This is not to say that one cannot narrate the affective dimension – surely certain poets show proclivity in this area – but narrative is first and foremost the language of *actio*, whereas the dimension of *passio* always leaves a penetrating surplus of meaning that evades narrative configuration. Examples of this could be experiences of paralyzing trauma, giving birth to children or, perhaps, the feeling of losing control when falling in love. While we may express fragments of these experience through narrative, the experience as such remains ineffable and surpasses any possible, exhaustive narrative configuration and articulation.

These explorations into the unnarratable dimensions of embodied experiences resonate well with Meyer's (2014) claim that a significant spectrum of our embodied experiences do not admit of narration and that, to a large extent, the '*attempts to articulate psychocorporeal meaning in the medium of*

⁶ '*Das Unerzählbare wohnt der Erzählung inne, indem es diese zugleich übersteigt und sprengt*'.

⁷ This problem has particularly been discussed in relation to Martin Heidegger's philosophy: e.g. (Bertram, 2013; Carman, 2003; Fisher, 2010). Waldenfels (2000) goes beyond this focus on narrative closure in this discussion in emphasizing the vast *pre-history* of selfhood: i.e. the dimensions of my becoming that remain beyond any recollection.

narrative inevitably falls short’ (p. 147). Much of what we might characterize as embodied experiences simply is non-propositional and non-conceptual in nature. I agree with Meyer’s analysis, which I also believe is consistent with both Waldenfels’ notion of a split-self and Porter Abbott’s account of the unnarratability of emergent processes. Firstly, when we take Waldenfels’ inclusive notion of an embodied split-self as our point of departure, a range of bodily processes that enter the experiential level seem to fall below the threshold of narratability; an example of this could be experiences of undergoing an epileptic seizure or perhaps the state of being profoundly lethargic during a depressive episode. Whereas such states might be named and conceptualized in an objectifying (diagnostic) manner, the actual subjective, embodied experience escapes narration.

Within our more familiar, non-pathological experiences, one might also refer to the functioning and formation of basic body schemes. Gallagher’s (2005) distinction between “body scheme” and “body image” might be helpful in this context. Whereas body image refers to a self-representation comprising of attitudes and beliefs about one’s body, and hence admitting of propositional articulation and of narrativity, body scheme refers to a system of sensory-motor capacities that operates below the level of self-referential intentionality (p. 25). Body schemes are, as Gallagher points out, holistic in nature, which can ‘*be seen in the fact that various proprioceptive inputs originating in different parts of the body do not function in an isolated manner but add together, in a non-linear fashion, to modulate postural control*’ (p. 36). The very functioning of a body scheme is, of course, sub-personal and not experienced, but we do experience the result of that functioning – e.g. the experience of body schemes functioning while trying to balance on a tight-rope. Arguably, the functioning of such body schemes could be considered as analogous to the category Porter Abbot describes as emergent processes and, hence, to some extent, lack narrativity⁸. However, the fact that aspects of the functioning of our body schemes fall below the threshold of narratability does not imply a lack of organisation; rather, the mode of organisation just takes a different form. Picking up on a suggestion from Strawson, Meyer (2014) points towards *osmotic* or *systemic* modes of organization as possible frameworks.

b) The narratable

By the term ‘narratable’, I refer to a vast spectrum of embodied experiences that possess narrativity in so far as they are eligible for being brought to narrative integration through various degrees of effort. I suspect that this notion might raise a few eyebrows within the debate on narrative and selfhood; however, I believe that this dimension is indispensable, not only for the field of psychology, but also for any adequate understanding of the relation between narrative and embodiment. In order to get a preliminary view of this phenomena, it might be helpful to take experiences that linger just above the threshold of narrativity as a reference point.

⁸ Interestingly, Gallagher (2005) describes the case of Ian Waterman who loses the functioning of his body schemes and is able to partially compensate through substituting a virtual body scheme rooted in a body image. This could indicate some overlap between narrativity and body schemes. However, as Gallagher repeatedly emphasizes, this substitution is only partial and has clear limitations. Arguably, this is due to the fact that the two modes of embodiment are fundamentally different in kind.

To illustrate such an experience, let us start with the activity of rock climbing. Apart from being an activity that demands a high degree of strength and integrated body schemes, climbing is also a highly intellectual sport. Climbers typically refer to the routes they are ascending as “problems” that needs to be solved; i.e. you need to find a way through the moves of the climb that fits with your individual bodily predilections. This process, however, is a good example of an activity that pulls bodily experiences smoothly across increasing degrees of narrativity. For instance, it is not an uncommon phenomenon that a climber simply enacts a problem in what should be characterized as a completely intuitive manner. She simply responds to the affordance the problem raises and when prompted: how did you do that? The climber might report that she is utterly unable to narrate what she did; the body simply solved the problem in an intuitive adaptation to the affordances of the route. Contrary to this intuitive type, there are also the more “planning” type of climbers who rehearse the problem before engaging with the climb. You will often see such climbers looking intensely at the problem and coding the expected movements of the climb, i.e. putting the *sequence* of movements together as a whole before engaging. Whereas the first scenario exhibits an embodied process that illustrates how body schemes intuitively adapt to the requirements and affordances of a performance, the second scenario shows how this process is anticipated through what could be characterised as narration. This indicates that, despite claims to the contrary, the intuitive climber should *eo ipso* also be able to narrate her climb, though this would be an achievement and might require a process of slowing down the movements and taking them step by step to secure a narrative integration of the embodied performance. Hence, whereas the intuitive climber did not experience her climb as exhibiting narrativity, but rather responded in an intuitive and immediate manner to the affordances of the climb, it is possible to integrate the sequence of the climb to a meaningful whole that, in turn, makes narrativity more pronounced and dominant in the experience. Arguably this would significantly alter the experience for the climber, away from an intuitive flow towards a more mediated experience.

A second example to illustrate this could be taken from psychotherapeutic practice⁹. Peter, a man in his mid-thirties, seeks counselling, since he does not understand his way of responding and the overwhelming feelings he had immediately before, throughout, and after a significant breakup from his girlfriend. These modes of responding and what he characterized as overpowering feelings included severe aggression, feelings of hopelessness, depression and anxiety. Though this repertoire of feelings might not be unusual to this type of situation, it was the particular intensity and quality with which he reacted that completely exceeded anything familiar to Peter. He repeatedly reported that he felt like he no longer recognized himself and the responses the situation had called forth in him.

This description unmistakably resonates with Waldenfels’ analyses of the self as split between the familiar, and the unfamiliar and alien in my self-experience. Through the process of therapy, Peter gradually attained a narrative understanding of what had happened to him. He contextualized his particular mode of responding within the backdrop of a significant childhood event where his mother had left him and his father when he was 7 years old and was, thereby, able to integrate sequences of events in

⁹ The following case example is taken from my own therapeutic practice as a narrative therapist. I use it merely as a basis for illustrating a theoretical point.

a meaningful way. The anger and anxiety called forth in the breakup were seen as conditioned by and residual from this earlier childhood experience. Though this narrative contextualization was fashioned on a well-traversed cultural script, it placed the events within a meaningful context that resonated with Peter, and, thereby, brought narrative order to that which was otherwise alien in his self-experience.

What is significant to notice in this example is that Peter's mode of responding during the breakup was experienced as alien, as dislodged and without precedence in his experience. It was in an important sense non-narrative, since his embodied mode of responding stood out as singular and without narrative context. Narrative integration was only achieved *post hoc* in therapy. As such, it was a narratable experience that had not yet achieved narrative integration.

From the perspective of a narrative theory of the self, it might be objected that it is examples such as these that the notion of implicit narratives is supposed to account for. In response to this objection, we might reply with the following: adopting the concept of implicit narrative, in this case, would be to return to the understanding of narrative as a binary feature; it would amount to saying that there "is" a narrative underneath that structures Peter's experiences and not simply embodied experiences admitting of degrees of narrativity. The problem with an interpretation that relies on a notion of implicit narration is that it comes suspiciously close to a structuralist account and assumes the existence of a true and given story that Peter possesses. This, however, overlooks how intricate the process of narrating is and how dependent narration is on the *story-telling context* (in this case the therapeutic setting and the scripts typically employed therein), as has often been shown in empirical research (e.g. De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2011).

Furthermore, the notion of implicit narrative is itself contested in the literature and it is not very clear what an unconscious narrative would even amount to in this case. The issue is particularly thorny when it comes to embodied experiences. As Meyer's (2014) pointed out, claiming that the body encodes implicit narrative scripts of this sort is to impose a very mentalistic understanding on embodied experiences. This conclusion is also found in Menary (2008), who sees the notion of implicit narrative as pushing narratives into '*a deeper and darker location*' (p. 71), and Hutto (2014), who persuasively shows how proponents of implicit narration fail to offer a positive account of what it actually is.

I believe a far more parsimonious account of these experiences can be given if we borrow a term used both in the field of enactivism (Fuchs & De Jaegher, 2009) and certain branches within contemporary attachment research (BCPSG, 2007). From these perspectives, such modes of responding should be seen as expressing a "process form" rather than "content form". Peter's reaction was rooted in an embodied procedural level that announced itself through being enacted rather than as an expression of an underlying narrative representation. Nevertheless, in terms of Peter's narrative self-understanding, he was left with what Porter Abbot (2013) has recently suggested we call an "egregious gap" – a gap in Peter's self-narrative so pronounced and arresting that it required a 'filling' to re-establish a narrative sense of self. Peter did not understand himself, prompting him to seek counselling. The narrative self-understanding achieved in therapy was hard-won; it was a narrative integration of a narratable experience.

c) *The narrative*

Whereas the first two levels addressed the lower and middle ends of the scale, I shall reserve the term *narrative* for embodied experiences where narrativity is dominant and there is no longer any substantial disagreement as to whether it is appropriate to understand them as possessing a strong narrative order. Mackenzie (2014), a strong advocate for the idea that embodied experiences are narratively structured, gives us the example of a young woman who has come to understand herself as clumsy and uncoordinated, which Mackenzie believes can be traced back to the fact that she was overweight as a child and consistently excluded from ball games for (echoing Iris Young's famous article) "throwing like a girl". In Mackenzie's wording, these experiences '*[infuse] her bodily style and her lived experience*' (p. 163). Picking up the same line of thought, Brandon (2014) offers the example of a woman with a poor impression of herself, who consequently enters a public space in a particular manner – e.g. '*shoulders folded inward, avoiding eye contact*' etc. (p. 77).

I believe that these examples illustrate how deeply entangled our bodily comportment is in the broader socio-cultural context we are embedded in, and also how easily these experiences offer themselves to a narrative understanding. Not surprisingly, however, I am more hesitant to agree with the strong claims of Mackenzie and Brandon that our bodily postures, habits and experiences *are* narratives. They may possess intense degrees of narrativity, but to say that a mode of bodily comportment is, as such, constituted by a narrative form, is a disproportionate reduction and intellectualization of the vibrant complexity and nuances of our embodied experience. This being said, some bodily habits and postures do exhibit intense degree of narrativity, and may even be partially moulded on or *enact* specific discursive norms, making narrativity dominant in the experience. Examples of this could be the active self-shaping of the body according to aesthetic ideals as seen in fitness culture (Markula-Denison & Pringle, 2007), or in eating disorders such as anorexia and bulimia (Bordo, 2004). The fact that the body is susceptible to these and even more minute cultural shaping is a phenomenon that is well described within the phenomenological literature (e.g. Fuchs, 2008; Merleau-Ponty, 2012; Waldenfels, 2000). However, to reduce embodied selfhood to this relatively confined subset within the broad spectrum of embodied experiences, as Mackenzie does when she claims that bodily experiences are '*always already mediated via narrative self-interpretation*', is both unwarranted and unnecessary.

Once more, I would emphasize the merits of a scalar account, where embodied experiences exhibit varying intensities of narrativity. From a psychopathological perspective, one might underline this spectrum ranging from the intense narrative form certain eating disorders might take and arguably borderline personality disorder (Stanghellini & Rosfort, 2013), to the much less narratable mixed affective states in bipolar disorder, or predominantly unnarratable states of seizure in epilepsy.

IV. Narrative self-appropriation

Where does this leave us in respect to the ongoing debate on the constitution of selfhood? Both the notion of a split-self and the scalar understanding of narrativity are incompatible with a strong understanding of selfhood as constituted through narrative. The concept of a split-self relies on an understanding of

selfhood as a facticity and is inherently more inclusive than that which the selective logic of a narrative theory of selfhood allows. This should be particularly evident when contrasted with, for instance, Marya Schechtman's "articulation constraint" that specifies that any self-constituting narrative must be able to be brought to articulation (Schechtman, 1996, 2011). Contrary to the strong emphasis these narrative accounts place on autonomy, Waldenfels' split-self makes no such claim and, furthermore, stresses that that which belongs to me – to my self-experience need not be at my disposal. Rather, it is integral to selfhood embracing both elements that are familiar and available to me, as well as those that are alien, perplexing and even incomprehensible and, hence, escape narrative order altogether. The scalar approach to narrativity is equally incompatible with the claim that selfhood is constituted through narrative, in so far as narrativity is explicitly defined as a particular property of something and not something this entity is. This resonates with Peter Goldie's (2003) perspective on narrative when he insists that we must distinguish between a narrative and '*what it is a narrative of*' (p. 303).

The challenge is, however, to give an account of how narrative and narration interact with my self-understanding from this perspective in a way that remains sensitive to the fact that my narrative self-understanding matters. Although I cannot do full justice to this question here, I would like to indicate two paths or ideas that can shed light on this subject: what Hutto (2014) calls '*narrative self-shaping*' and what I suggest we term *narrative self-appropriation*.

Hutto presents his hypothesis of a narrative self-shaping as a '*softer and more credible way of thinking*' (p. 39) about the roles narratives play in shaping our self-understanding. The strength of this approach is, according to Hutto, that it only invokes uncontroversial capacities for explicit narration and '*does not make any strong claims about the existence of a narrative self*' (p. 40). For Hutto, this more moderate approach is closely related to the question of autonomy and the game of giving reasons for acting. Narratives are invoked when attempting to come to an understanding of myself, my bodily impulses, dispositions, character etc. (p. 25). In this sense, narratives shape my self-understanding in so far as we try to take responsibility for certain aspect of who we are. Importantly, on Hutto's account, my narrative self-understanding is in no way different in kind from the way we understand others (e.g. Hutto, 2008) – self-knowledge: '*is not gained by looking inward but by being able to give a story or account of oneself in narrative*' (p. 26).

In a similar line, but perhaps proposing a broader role for narrative and allowing for differences in how we understand ourselves and others, I would like to suggest that narration plays indispensable roles in processes of what one might call *self-appropriation*. The concept of a split-self and the accompanying scalar conception of narrative implies that my self-understanding is one of increasing and decreasing degrees of familiarity and order. In this sense, there is an indispensable role for narratives to play in increasing my self-understanding through a process of *narrating the narratable*. This can, as we have already seen, be a hard-won achievement; one that may require systematic assistance from professionals such as therapists. This is not to feed the illusion that selfhood is simply there waiting to be articulated, otherwise untainted by the process of narration, as Bruner (2003) warns us against. Rather, the process of narrating the narratable can be a highly creative process; one that brings context and narrative order to that which otherwise governs us, exerting its effects from beyond our understanding. As such, the process

of giving narrative birth to narratable aspects of selfhood is probably not that different from what a skilled poet is doing when bringing lived experiences to a particular clear and lucid articulation. However creative this narrative process may be, what it does help with is to impose fixity of meaning to fragments of life that will otherwise remain indeterminate, as Andrea Westlund (2011) has emphasized.

This relation between the *narratable* aspects of embodied selfhood and a *narrative* appropriation hereof is vital to a proper understanding of what happens in many psychotherapeutic processes. The capability to bring the narratable landscapes of experiences to articulation is, however, an ability that varies on an individual level. For some, explicit narrative articulation of experiences is a cultivated skill; for others, it is a very unfamiliar activity¹⁰. However, bringing narratable experiences to articulation *can* provide an increased level of agency and, consequently, autonomy to the person. It may afford an ability to control impulses, as well as remould the dispositions and character traits that would otherwise control me from ‘beyond’. This dynamic is consistent with basic understandings governing the broad field of psychotherapy and psychopathology, where it is widely recognized that a range of psychological problems can be traced back to a lack of understanding of my own psychological states (e.g. Bateman & Fonagy, 2012). Narration can help in this respect insofar as it can provide context, coherence and continuity to affects and responses that would otherwise remain alien and incomprehensible from the personal perspective. This relevance should be clear in processes of psycho-education where patients need to learn how to identify and track patterns of impending symptoms; such as the early signs of mania in bipolar disorder. Narrative has a significant role to play in this endeavour in so far as it can emplot a seemingly meaningless state of being jittery or feeling bodily unease within the broader context of symptoms that together indicate an onset of mania. Narrative could also be used as a more general mode of self-appropriation in psychotherapy where a client wants to come to an understanding of her particular individual registers of affects and responses. As Peter Goldie (2012) has recently argued, narrative is particularly apt for such a process of self-examination through the mode of “free indirect style” in self-narration. Free indirect style infuses a gap between oneself as a *character* that is internal to the narrative and oneself as a *narrator* external to that narrative (p. 37): this makes it possible to engage in acts of self-distancing where I can reflectively examine my dispositional affects and responses and contextualize them within a coherent narrative order¹¹. This is not to claim that all alterity is appropriable. Quite the contrary: the notion of a split-self is defined by the inappropriable in all of us, but through narrative we can cultivate the configuration of alienness and familiarity in our favour. Hence, assisting people in appropriating themselves through a narrative self-understanding is a cornerstone in psychotherapeutic efforts.

This is also not to suggest that self-narrative is restricted to these functions – narrative can, for instance, be used as a means of creating a “better self” outside of professional contexts – or that self-narrative cannot have negative effects on our psychological lives as well; i.e. when our self-narratives are

¹⁰ This point echoes Strawson (2004) claim of a deep individual variable between “episodics” and “diachronics”.

¹¹ An approach to psychotherapy that specifically works within a narrative framework can be found in Michael White (2007).

predominantly negative in character. All this and more needs to be considered when explicitly applying narrative to our self-understanding. However, in the endeavour of assisting persons in achieving a better self-understanding, narrative remains an indispensable tool.

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