The Science of Stories

An Introduction to Narrative Psychology

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7 Identity and narrative

The idea that identity has a narrative organization goes back to Erikson's psychosocial theory of identity (Erikson 1959, 1968). According to Erikson, the past should be continuously reconstructed in the light of the present and the future. Even independently of the allure of postmodern narrative metatheories, this theory almost automatically entails the metaphor of narrative: essentially, identity is nothing else but a *continuously reconstructed biography* (Ricoeur 1991). Thus, a story that individuals construct about themselves will have a distinguished role from the point of view of the continuity, integrity and unity of their own self and from the aspect of other qualities of their identity. The intensive use of the narrative metaphor in self-psychology that began in the 1980s (Gergen and Gergen 1988; Mancuso and Sarbin 1983) raises several issues that have already been discussed in part in Chapter 3. These problems include, for example, the authorship of narrative, that is, the real identity of narrative substance and life story, the social construct of life story, the relationship between historical and psychological truth, the status of narrative structures in the autobiographical construct, the problem of who is the biography addressed to, the issue of monologicity and dialogicity in narrative, or the problem of how the story-like formulation of identity is related to other possible, for instance categorical formulations. Several of these questions have been discussed in Chapter 1 on the foundations of narrative psychology. Of course, the theory that self can be conceived of as a biography, a narrative is in accord with social constructionist metatheories which deny that self, or the things of the world are stable, secure starting points, so-called 'essences' (Bruner 1991). Ricoeur's (1965) interpretation of psychoanalysis is a classic example of the psychological use of postmodern narrative theories, which sees the patient's various manifestations not as symptoms of a biologically determined instinct dynamics but rather as a text that the analyst should interpret together with the patient. Joint text construction – therapy – results in a new, more coherent story.

Nevertheless, the narrative concept of identity as a psychological construct cannot be exhausted by mechanically translating the notions of narrative metatheories. Philosophy seeks an answer to the question as to how narrative creates the identity of the narrator (and the recipient of narrative). However, in psychology the main questions we need to answer are what conditions life stories originate from, what are the main functions and qualities of life stories and how they are related to various identity states, or how identity states manifested in life stories are related to problems of social adaptation. Philosophers, like Ricoeur (1991) or Dennett (1991), propose different solutions for the concept of self that is not based on essence. The former derives the identity of self that changes in space and time from the identical nature of autobiographical narrative, while the latter views self in a somewhat metaphorical sense as the narrative gravitational point of life stories that change in space and time (Pléh 2003a). However, in psychology we also need to answer questions that concern the relationship of life stories to other mental mechanisms and their function in social adaptation.

Research on life stories began in anthropology in the nineteenth century by using inductive generalizations for typical walks of life. The study of life stories in psychology also began by using inductive procedures in Vienna in the 1930s. Charlotte Bühler published her work, *Der menschliche Lebenslauf als psychologisches Problem* in 1933, and similar research was pursued by Else Frenkel-Brunswick (1936), who later published excellent research on authoritative personality. It was also in the 1930s that Henry Murray (1938) and then later Gordon Allport (1955) turned their attention to biographies. These works made it obvious that these scholars went beyond descriptive generalizations that can serve only as posterior explanations and made an effort to explore predictive regularities in psychological processes that make the formulation of hypotheses possible. In other words, they attributed a *symptomatic value* to autobiographical narratives from the point of view of the development and integrity of personality. They believed that an internally consistent, balanced life story is an important sign of mental health; as Butler (1963) suggested, a well-integrated life story is the desired outcome of psychological ageing. Csíkszentmihályi and Beattie (1979) extended the biographical approach not only to the past but also to the present and the future of the individual, pointing out the importance of the evolution of coherent life themes in lifelong personality development. Hunt and Hunt (1977) showed that the coherent biographical reconstruction of marriage and divorce was an indispensable precondition of enduring the emotional strains of getting a divorce. Rainer (1978) and Progoff (1975) analysed personal diaries and demonstrated the function of narratives in creating coherence and reducing emotional tension.

McAdams' model for analysing autobiographies

McAdams' (1985, 1993, 2001) theory of narrative identity, which combines Erikson's psychosocial theory of development with his own analysis based on the narrative typology of biographical narratives by Frye (1957) and Elsbree (1982), proposes several verifiable hypotheses concerning the normal and abnormal development of identity. This model does not wish to capture the complex personality but instead puts the emphasis on identity by treating it as identical with biographical narrative. It investigates constituents, variables and formal features on the basis of which conclusions can be drawn concerning the state, maturity and integrity of identity.

The identity (life story) of an individual consists of four main constituents: nuclear episodes, imagos, world view and generativity scripts. These four constituents are complemented by thematic lines and narrative complexity. Thematic lines are recurrent content units of a life story. According to McAdams (1985), the recurrent, crucial elements are related to motives of power and intimacy (see Figure 7.1).

McAdams views narrative complexity as the index of self-maturity. Emphasis is placed on story structure; stories are different from one another not only in content but in complexity as well. In relatively simple stories there are very few characters, the plot is linear and includes a small number of subplots. In contrast, complex stories are subtle and include many elements and distinctions. The narrator establishes several different relationships among the various elements and integrates all of them into a hierarchical pattern of structure. The degree of complexity can be regarded as a 'development index' because it shows to what extent and in what way personal experience is related to the integrative framework of meaning. At a 'more mature' level of development the individual framework of meaning is relatively simple and uses a holistic, all or none approach to the understanding of self and society. In the case of a 'mature' level the individual framework of meaning is subtle and hierarchically integrated in which paradoxes and contradictions can be tolerated and the individuality of others can be recognized and respected.

It is obvious that in McAdams' narrative model analysis targets psychological contents that can be captured at the semantic plane of narrative, whether it is the constituents of a life story or the thematic lines mentioned above that are taken into consideration. This sort of content analysis can be implemented with the categories (imagos, nuclear episodes, thematic lines, etc.) of an identity model that is constructed in advance. Although McAdams should no doubt be given credit for including biographical narrative as an empirically manageable source of data in the study of identity and for taking pains to test the hypotheses – that is, the validity – that follow from the model by using a projective test of personality, the identification of the model's categories and the content analysis using these categories – due to their abstract nature – involve several elements of uncertainty.

Barclay's model for analysing the coherence of autobiographical narrative

Barclay (1996) worked out a system of categories for the analysis of coherent biographical narratives (Figure 7.2) which can be identified much better at the level of the text. In this model analysis is carried out along an information structure and a narrative organization. The information structure is made up of elements like leading and supporting characters, scenes and activities that constitute the plot and their main features. The amount of information has a significant influence on the liveliness of a narrative, or conversely, the coherence of a narrative lacking sufficient information or crammed with information deteriorates significantly. The analysis of narrative structure takes place in accordance with three

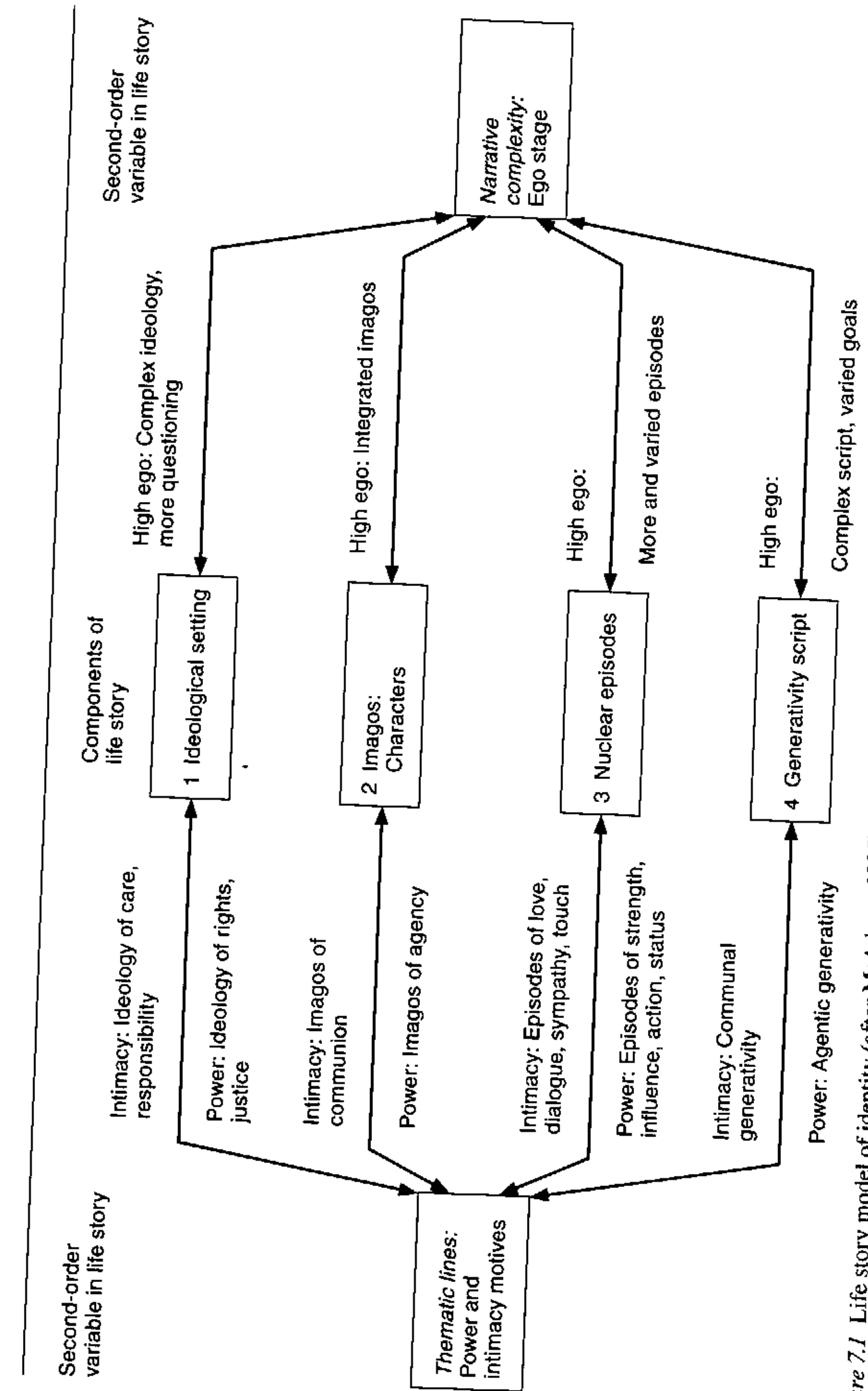

Figure 7.1 Life story model of identity (after McAdams 1985)

Source: McAdams, Dan P. (1985) *Power, Intimacy, and the Life Story.* New York: Guilford Press. Reprinted with permission of Guilford Press.

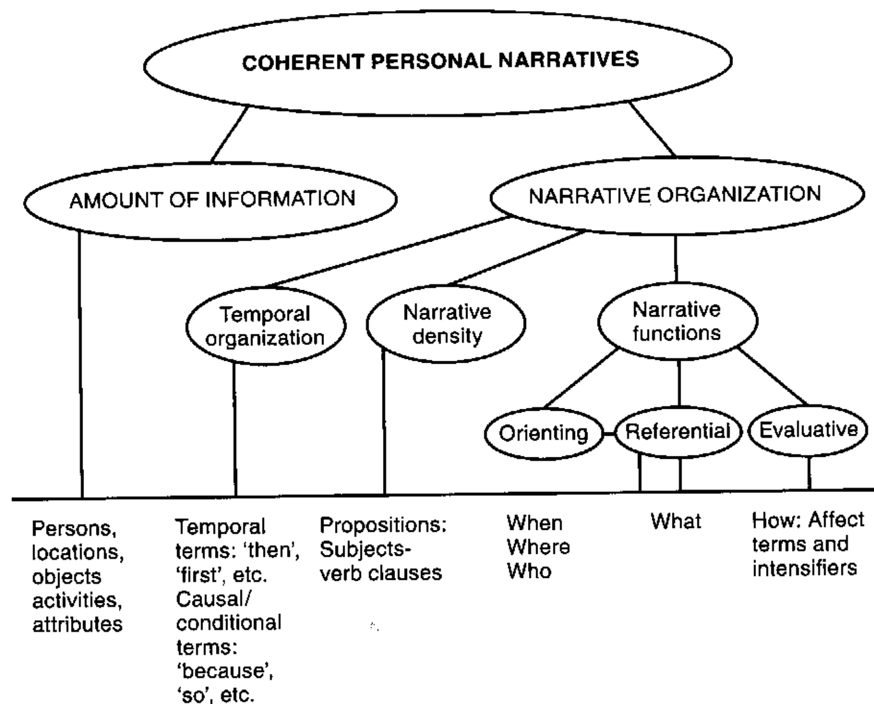

Figure 7.2 Autobiographical remembering: Narrative constraints (after Barclay 1996)

Source: Barclay, Craig R. (1996) 'Autobiographical remembering: narrative constraints on objectified selves', in David C. Rubin (ed.) *Remembering our Past*. Reprinted with permisson of Cambridge University Press.

criteria: temporal structure, narrative density and narrative function. Temporal structure is generated by two constituents: on the one hand by linguistic forms that refer to spatial and temporal relations (tenses, time and place adverbials) and on the other by expressions that carry causal-conditional relations (adverbs of cause, explanatory conjunctions, etc.)

Narrative density refers to the number of elementary utterances contained in the text. This index is relevant for coherence in the sense that an overly low or an overly high number of elements should destroy the coherence of the story (however, here Barclay fails to provide a reference number!). In the case of narrative functions Barclay (1996) practically investigates the extent that the three functions defined by Labov and Waletzky (1967), orientation, referring and evaluation, are fulfilled. For instance, in the case of the orientation function what he considers is whether information concerning the place, time and circumstances of the action are present in the text and what the individual, social, cultural and historical context is in which these pieces of information appear. Evaluation involves the subjective experience of the narrator concerning the emotional value of the narrated event along a positive–negative continuum. Attributes that refer to emotions (e.g. 'I was happy') and verbs expressing a change of emotional state

('I felt relieved') carry the largest amount of evaluative information. Evaluation often follows canonical forms in autobiographical narratives. There are three basic narrative forms. A progressive narrative begins with some negative emotion (negative emotional evaluation of the events), and as the events proceed, evaluation gets more and more positive. A regressive narrative form also evolves in time; however, the direction of the changes in evaluation is just the opposite: the starting event is seen as positive, and this evaluation changes into a more negative view over time as the events unfold. Finally, the evaluation of stable narratives, whether positive or negative, does not change over time. Evaluative patterns are closely related to the schemas of genres. For instance, tragedy follows a regressive schema of evaluation, while in comedy or romance a progressive schema can be observed. According to Barclay (1996):

> through an analysis of a coherent personal history, it is possible to construct a theory of a person and the deep motivations that give him or her a sense of meaningful being and a sense of groundedness in the present time and space.
>
> (Barclay 1996: 109–110)

Empirical studies targeting the analysis of biographies were made extremely difficult before by the fact that there were no procedures for content analysis available that could be used relatively easily and securely for the analysis of relevant psychological contents. It was largely due to this fact that extremely time-consuming research on the content analysis of life stories had been relegated to the background for many decades. The rapid propagation of the narrative-autobiographical approach to individual identity in the past few years has largely been facilitated – in addition to a change in the rigid positivist climate and a boost in research on narrative, that is, narratology, mostly in literary theory but also in other disciplines – by the speedy development of information technology, which made it possible to conduct computer-assisted content analysis research. Chapter 9 will present a so-called *narrative psychological content analysis* model that aspires to explore the psychological meanings of narrative not only at the level of words or themes but also at the level of narrative, along the lines of narrative qualities like structure, organization, perspective, temporal relations and coherence.

The roots of knowledge about the self

Integrity, internal consistence, complexity and coherence are traits of life stories that make it possible to draw conclusions about the state and maturity of an individual's actual identity. However, these are obviously *cognitive* variables that do not reveal much about the emotional qualities of the identity of adults who have verbal memory and a mature self, about a healthy confidence in reality, or the lack thereof, about a readiness to change reality and about the complex process of self-development. When commenting on autobiographical memory, Barclay and Smith (1992) argue that the memories that we accumulate during our lives are deeply rooted in our early relationship with objects. Infants learn about their

own subjectivity in their relation to their caretaker. This is where infants experience their relation to their mother, their physical and emotional dependence on her. The self is created through detachment from the mother. One essential element of this process of separation is a potential space between mother and infant in which several symbols of unity with the mother might emerge and gradually escape from the almighty control of the infant. The infant can tolerate separation if the caretaker is a trustworthy mother who cares about the needs of her infant. In such cases, for instance, infants may safely shut their eyes, because they can be sure that their mother will be there when they open their eyes again. This is how confidence is created. If infants can trust the external reality, they have no reason to maintain the illusion that things are under their own control. Giving up the illusion of control may be facilitated by so-called transitory objects – like plush teddy bears or nappies for sleeping – that remind the infant of those properties of the caretaker over which the infant is believed to have almighty control. Plush teddy bears and nappies are later replaced by fantasies and stories; in fact Barclay and Smith (1992) suggest that autobiographical memories are such 'transitory objects' too:

> Memories, and autobiographical memories especially, are precisely such transitional phenomena – symbols of the deep templates of caregiving we come to rely upon, again and again, to serve our needs for emotional support and responsiveness. We release such constructions into the space between ourselves and significant others as a way of recapitulating and 'structure-building' that occurred in our pasts. No less than a child will change its story to suit its feelings, we also adapt our memories as our needs change or as the needs of our partners change. Indeed, reconstructed memories in this sense become a kind of currency of social life, especially for the purchase of intimacy. It is only in the presence of trusted others that we really surrender our illusions, and indeed bring them under another's control. Serving a significant other's needs, likewise, we adapt our memories in natural responsiveness to their emotional states.
>
> (Barclay and Smith 1992: 89)

Narrative ideas in the research on self-development

How does autobiographical narrative enter into self-development? According to Stern (1989) several different forms of a sense of self evolve during the first years of life. *Core self* emerges in the second or third month, which includes the sense of agency, coherence, continuity and affectivity. This self is not reflexive and not conscious.

Subjective sense of self begins to develop at around the ninth month. Subjective sense of self is not reflexive or conscious either. Infants become aware through experience that they have subjective states of consciousness which can be shared with others, with other people who also have their own subjective states. This new subjective self makes it possible to experience intersubjectivity and engage in interaction. Contents of consciousness like the focus of attention, intentions and emotional states become shareable.

Verbal sense of self begins to evolve at around the fifteenth to eighteenth months. This sense of self is already self-reflexive and makes it possible to objectify the self, as shown by the use of personal pronouns or by behaviour in front of a mirror.

The different senses of self all organize subjective perspectives that refer to the self. During the time of developmental leaps, when new cognitive, affective, motivational and motor abilities appear as a result of maturation, infants have to create a new subjective perspective of themselves that can organize the new abilities. It is in this sense that the various senses of the self can be regarded as the organizers of subjective perspective. Every new sense of the self opens up a new dimension of experiences without fully absorbing or eliminating the old ones. Different senses of the self live side by side. At around 2 years of age narrative sense of the self begins to emerge. This is also partly the outcome of new abilities like language or concept-formation. These new capacities enable and at the same time force children to reorganize their subjective perspective into a new form. The senses of agency, coherence, continuity, affectivity, intersubjectivity and self-reflection are now reorganized in a narrative form. The monologues that can be observed in the cot at around age 2 fulfil this function, the stabilization of narrative self. This is the self that children will build on in the rest of their lives when giving an account of their lives to others or to themselves.

With the evolution of narrative self the child crosses the border between the reconstructable and the unreconstructable past. However, the assertion of the subjective perspective, giving meaning to events of life, is not eliminated by narrative; quite the contrary, meaning is provided precisely by narrative. What happens to us becomes one of our own by the fact that it has some meaning for us. It makes a contribution to the organization of the self, our knowledge about ourselves. Bringing back the memory of some events of life and their narration in a particular situation show how an individual attributes significance to events, and what organizing principles and processes of meaning creation participate in the reconstruction of the events. The story of a slap in the face by a parent may be put in several different ways. It may involve something like 'Parents occasionally beat their children.' Or: 'I will never be able to forget or forgive that slap in the face. I felt myself humiliated to the dust.' Or in yet another way: 'I had never been hit before, and that slap in the face made me think. I would never have thought that I could make my parents so angry.' The first case is characterized by generalization, an impersonal way of putting the event into words, as if it did not involve any emotions, or as if it was not possible to remember what had happened. The second case may be thought of as a story that is organized along the lines of vulnerability, defencelessness and humiliation. The third one can be viewed as the story of dependence, responsibility, a strong relationship and realization. Note that the subjective perspective, meaning based on experience and the ability to reflect on it consciously are expressed by specific linguistic patterns in stories about the self. In Chapter 9 we will attempt to identify exactly these linguistic patterns (see also the Appendix).

Two more things need to be emphasized at this point. One of them is the effect of early experiences and early self-development on the evolution of adult personality, including the emergence of pathological forms as well. Early senses of the self, as Stern (1989) writes, do not get lost; however, access to them is possible, if at all, only indirectly. In her research on deviant and normal youngsters for example, Péley (2002) shows that the accounts of several events of their lives given by deviant youngsters include stories in which there are many threatening, frustrating and pressing psychological aspects and several instances of neglect on the part of the main characters, especially the parents, which – in regard to what was said concerning meaning creation in the actual situation – indicates some serious problems in early self-development in the case of these young people.

On the other hand, most of the experiences that emerge after the self is established do not necessarily become conscious and accessible to self-reflection. However, these experiences – and here we mean experiences with a traumatic effect in the first place – can disrupt the coherence and continuity of the self through their emotional content and shake the foundations of a sense of security, value, confidence in others, that is, everything that is needed for the integrated operation of an adult self.

Trauma and narrative

The life stories of people who have gone through a traumatic event show what sort of defence techniques and methods are used to elaborate the traumatic situation as well as what the state of the self is during the process of elaborating the traumatic event. Auerhan and Laub (1998) describe the characteristic forms of remembering a crucial trauma of the twentieth century, the Holocaust. There are several primitive defence mechanisms, processes of denial, splitting, de-realization and so on at work in *not knowing* or not remembering. In *tattered, fragmentary memory*, experiences are isolated from one another; they have no context and the narration of events lack coherence. Kaposi (2003), referring to the strange structure of Imre Kertész's novel, *Fateless* (1975) written about the Holocaust, that evokes a sense of present time, recognizes Kertész's greatness in venturing the impossible. What should be told is a story for which the survivor of the events does not have a tale, a narrative. There are some *cover-up memories* that often appear in connection with traumas. These are stories with fictitious or partly true elements, for example jolly, anecdotal details that cover up the experiences that are associated with the real events. When remembering traumatic events, we can observe the phenomenon of *reliving*, when the narrator switches off the reflexive self and recalls behaviours and emotions relating to the traumatic situation. There is an interesting observation concerning the trauma of the Holocaust which shows that similarly to early relationships with objects, this trauma that is suffered at a relatively early age can play a crucial role in the perception of interpersonal relations and meaning creation in interpersonal events in the future life of an individual. When going through a trauma, the individual *transfers*, as it were, his or her own experiences to actual life situations. The difficulties of coping with a trauma are

shown by *overgrowing narratives*. This type of memory is characterized by conscious self-reflection that controls the narration; memories break loose and are recalled with the intensity of the original experience, overflowing consciousness. Four further forms of recollection indicate the restoration of self-identity, or we might say, a more advanced state of mental health. An individual may make the traumatic experience *the topic of life* or *the topic of identity*; in a positive case for example, an individual may make sympathy and giving assistance to others the guiding principle of his or her life story. An individual may also take the position of *a person giving evidence*; from this position the narratives that recall details may lose their strongly emotional content. *Trauma as a metaphor* as a type of memory indicates that the traumatic experiences have been elaborated in a creative fashion. In this case an individual can use the experiences relating to traumatic events in a creative way in resolving the developmental, emotional and intellectual conflicts of his or her life and use certain aspects of the trauma as a metaphoric tool. Finally, the resolution of traumatic events may lead to *knowledge of action*, a state of identity in which the individual not only knows facts but also knows what to do with these facts. This means the restoration of the agency, the disposing capacity of the self.

These types of memory tied to traumatic events, which can be related to different states of identity, show again that the organization of events that create identity can be tracked in the linguistic expression of narrative. The question again is whether these linguistic forms are accessible only to a hermeneutic interpretation or whether they exhibit patterns whose identification can lead to information of diagnostic value.

Therapeutic narratives

It was Pennebaker (1993) who pursued pioneering research on the therapeutic function of narrative and the possibility of drawing conclusions and predictions concerning the state of mental health on the basis of the qualities of a narrative. He requested his subjects, suffering from different physical and mental problems, to periodically rewrite the story of a 'traumatic event' that meant a huge emotional burden to them. He analysed the narratives in terms of the categories of the words and the qualities of the story (coherence, organization, structure). His most interesting findings concerned temporal changes in the narratives. The positive emotional charge of the original story at the level of words and the completeness of it at the story level could predict the resolution of the emotional state much less than the change that occurred, in a positive direction in regard to positive emotional content and coherence, between the original story and the one that was the product of several attempts of rewriting. Similar results are reported by Stephenson et al. (1997), who analysed the therapeutic diaries of alcoholic patients and found that therapy was successful with those patients who had a negative relation both to themselves and to the therapeutic process at the outset, and this relation turned more positive as therapy or the writing of the diary progressed.

Life story as a social construct

While scientists involved in research on narrative identity take life story and its occasional reconstruction to be a natural means of maintaining identity in which individual modes of adjusting to the world are formulated, according to Gergen and Gergen (1988: 87) 'narratives of the self are not fundamentally possessions of the self'. They view life stories as social constructs, linguistic tools that are worked out and used by people in their interrelationships to maintain, intensify or prevent various actions. The personal past is constructed in conversations (Harré 1983b; Pasupathi 2001), and the methodology suggested to study life stories is *collaborative narration* instead of mere recollection of one's autobiography (McLean and Pasupathi 2006; McLean and Pratt 2006). The task, the objective or the subject matter of psychology in their view is not to explore the process in which individuals attain some sort of an understanding or behavioural response as a result of some consultation with an inner narrative. Narrative about the self works much like history in societies. It is a symbolic system which can be used for social purposes like verification, judgement or the consolidation of society. It can also be used to predict future events, but in itself it does not constitute the basis for any such action.

The analyses of life stories discussed before that seek universal symptomatic values characteristic of individuals in the text do not exclude the possibility to tie the genesis of these texts to social groups or cultural processes outside the individuals, as shown in several studies (e.g., Erős and Ehmann 1997; Erős et al. 1998; Joffe 1996; Jovchelovitch 1996; Péley 2002). In fact, the social representational concept of identity represented through life stories can make a significant contribution to providing more precise predictions concerning individuals and groups of individuals.

Life stories or stories from life: significant life events

The social conventions of constructing life stories on the other hand may even make it more difficult to reach deep layers of identity that are organized in terms of meanings based on experience. In Eco's witty words (1994: 117–118) 'life is certainly more like Ulysses than like The Three Musketeers – yet we are all the more inclined to think of it in terms of The Three Musketeers than in terms of Ulysses'.

According to Barthes' (1977) typology discussed before, life stories are closed 'readable' text with a limited repertoire. It is a basic condition, accidents, mistakes and misunderstandings notwithstanding, that a story in the conventional sense should be rational, uniform and intentional (Baumeister 1987; McAdams 2001). The closed inventory of genres provides assistance in making conventional sense. As far as the construction of the plot in the autobiographical narratives of non-professional authors is concerned, we still live in the world of romantic stories, comic books and soap operas, despite the many innovations of modern and postmodern novels. We have a well-defined narrative repertoire at our disposal, and we select from an inventory of biographical patterns.

Brockmeier (2001) draws attention to the fact that a retrospective teleology manifests itself in biographies. A life story, similarly to biological life, sets out from somewhere, from birth, and is headed for somewhere, for death. The need for a meaningful and good life presses us for straightening out our wrinkles, and we can do it at the level of interpretation, conscious reflection. This is true even if, as has been seen before, we cannot always perform this interpreting-rationalizing job perfectly in the case of serious traumas. Because of its 'roundedness', conventionality and conscious reflexivity, a complete life story is thus not suitable under any circumstances for an analysis that is meant to draw conclusions for the development of the self, the organization of identity and a particular state of identity. Integration and coherence are only one aspect of identity that appear, if you like, at the *plane of the plot*. The development, the states and the qualities of identity, however, can in the first place be studied at the *plane of experience*. This plane of experience emerges with much more probability in the narration of events that relate to strongly positive or strongly negative emotions. The technique of narrating significant events of life was introduced by Fitzgerald (1988, 1996) to the study of autobiographical memory. Fitzgerald gave the following instructions to his subjects when he requested them to tell a story:

> Tell us three stories from your own life. We'd like you to select events that are important to you. Often these are vivid memories but they don't have to be. Think of these as three stories that belong in a book about your life.
>
> (Fitzgerald 1988: 263)

The results of an empirical, descriptive study using another technique similar to the above show that significant events of life can be grouped into four categories (Pataki 2001). The most frequent events were those related to some sort of an achievement, followed by stories related to archetypal experiences (birth, death, etc.), stories of personal relations (friendship, love) and stories of failure. Pataki (2001) analysed the material from the point of view of accepting or rejecting categories of identity. However, these types of stories also have a message for the creation of identity concerning the organization of personal meanings on the basis of experiences. This is because these stories obviously imply emotions, indeed, very strong ones. Through the identification of the emotions and feelings involved in them we can get to much deeper layers of self-organization.

Some authors working in the life narrative area ask for *self-defining memories*. They define this type of memories as vivid, highly memorable, personally important, at least one year old, and convey powerfully how one has become the person one currently is (McLean and Pasupathi 2006; Singer and Salovey 1993). A similar technique is to elicit *turning point* narratives when subjects are asked to write about an important transition or change with respect to their understanding of themselves (McAdams 1993; McLean and Pratt 2006).

A further advantage to an episode of life story – as compared to a complete life story – is that although it appears in a story format, it can take into account the fragmented nature of the self and emphasize particular aspects of the self.

It is less reflexive than lifelike in its nature; it is less tied to conventions, and is governed, at best, by narrative conventions. Any deviation from these conventions can be interpreted in terms of the emotional meaning of the event. Thus a complete life story is not necessary for self-development and for drawing meaningful conclusions about identity states and qualities. The qualities of self-representation and intra-psychic states are expressed in the narration of significant autobiographical episodes. However, it requires the narration of potentially significant events of life that affect some fundamental dimensions of emotional meaning creation. In Péley's (2002) research on normal and deviant young people, the self-representational qualities of *defence* and *security* were 'triggered' by recalling a successfully resolved threatening situation and another one that the subject could not overcome. The need for *separation* and *detachedness* and the experiences related to them were expressed in the episode relating the events of straying away for the first time, and *self-evaluation* and the internal efforts and representations of support related to it were mobilized by an achievement story that the individual was proud of.

Stories about the self are analysed by sophisticated coding schemes (McAdams et al. 1996) or by ratings (Pennebaker 1993), if not qualitatively. These stories, however, all have *composition*, which, in turn, can be analysed at a linguistic level. If we can uncover correspondences between the compositional characteristics of life stories and the identity of the narrating person, we make a significant step ahead towards transforming narrative psychology to real science.

Summary

This chapter outlined psychological approaches to the relation between various forms of life narratives and various forms of self and identity. Theories which have also developed empirical methodologies in order to infer to different qualities of identity from narratives or to trace the process of identity construction through narratives are presented more extensively. The overall characteristic of these approaches is that they deal exclusively with narrative content. When they draw inferences to identity, they consider only content configurations, at most. The chapter also discussed the social constraints on life narratives and the role of narrative in psychotherapy, particularly in trauma elaboration.

8 Language and soul

The title of this chapter refers to the fact that language is in intimate contact no only with cognition and consciousness, as has been analysed in Chapter 2 whe discussing the epistemology of psychology, but also with the entirety of huma mental life. The categories of the relationship to reality are formulated in lan-guage and through language, but in the same way it is language that mediate emotions and motivations that produce the patterns of these relations characteristic of individuals and groups of individuals.

Language and world view

The recognition that reality is mediated to people by language and their world view is determined by language goes back to Wilhelm von Humboldt. According to Humboldt, people live in a world that their language defines for them. The first book of Wundt's ten-volume *Elements of Folk Psychology* (1916) also deals with language, and when dissecting the above idea, it draws conclusions concerning the mentality of different peoples with language as well as their mental frame on the basis of linguistic features, vocabulary and grammatical structure. This trend takes language to be a cultural object form which psychology can be unfolded through interpretation, and there is no way to empirically verify the relationship between linguistic data and psychological phenomena. Similarly, there is no way to explore relationships between collective identity and the mental processes of individual people that constitute collective identity. The theory of linguistic determinisms (discussed in Chapter 2), which was motivated not by the preliminaries of folk psychology but rather by the linguistic observations of cultural anthropology initiated by Franz Boas, also tries to capture the relationship between language and culture.

The fallibility of the folk psychological approach is clearly illustrated by Sándor Karácsony's (1976) analyses of the relationship between the Hungarian language and the Hungarian frame of mind. From the observation that 'Hungarians do in fact prefer to use coordinative sentence structures using "and", "but", "or", "thus" and "therefore" to using so-called clauses; therefore it is a coordinative language', Karácsony (1976: 26) derives traits of the Hungarians such as a special conception of authority relations or a disposition to passive resistance. In Karácsony's