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Embodied Narratives

Introduction

Is the self narratively constructed? There are many who would answer yes to the question. Dennett (1991) is, perhaps, the most famous proponent of the view that the self is narratively constructed, but there are others, such as Velleman (2006), who have followed his lead and developed the view much further. Indeed, the importance of narrative to understanding the mind and the self is currently being lavished with attention across the cognitive sciences (Dautenhahn, 2001; Hutto, 2007; Nelson, 2003). Emerging from this work, there appear to be a variety of ways in which we can think of the narrative construction of the self and the relationship between the narrative self and the embodied agent.

I wish to examine two such ways in this paper. The first I shall call the abstract narrative account, this is because its proponents take the narrative self to be an abstraction (Dennett, 1991; Velleman, 2006). Dennett, for example, refers to the self as a centre of narrative gravity (henceforth CNG), to be thought of as analogous to a mathematical conception of the centre of gravity of an object. The second I shall call the embodied narrative account and this is the view that the self is constituted both by an embodied consciousness whose experiences are available for narration and narratives themselves, which can play a variety of roles in the agent's psychological life. Kerby (1993, p. 42) describes our embodied experiences as having a pre-narrative quality that constitutes 'a demand for narrative'. Hutto speaks similarly of emotional experiences as being 'ripe for narrative' (2006, p. 237). We become fully fledged narrative selves by constructing a narrative point of view from which we can narrate our embodied experiences.

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I shall argue that this embodied narrative view makes more sense of ourselves as complex biological, historical and social beings whose experiences and actions are ready for narration. We are not, as Hutto puts it: ‘...to be confused with extensionless points, logical linchpins, substances (neither egos nor brains) nor postmodern fictions.’ (Hutto, 2006, p. 101)

In section one I shall examine some of the senses of narrative and the senses of self being used in the literature. In section two I shall outline the abstract narrative view and present some problems for it. In section three I shall outline the embodied narrative view and begin to show how embodied experiences have a pre-narrative structure that lends itself to narration. In the final section I shall begin the process of describing how the pre-narrative, or embodied, experiences and actions become narrated.

1. What is a Narrative?

Lamarque provides us with the most minimal of definitions: For something to be a narrative ‘at least two events must be depicted in a narrative and there must be some more or less loose, albeit non-logical relation between the events. Crucially, there is a temporal dimension in narrative’ (Lamarque, 2004, p. 394) A narrative in this exceptionally minimal sense requires just a sequence of events that are somehow related. Goldie provides a similarly minimal idea of a narrative, but as related to our lives: ‘our lives have a narrative structure — roughly speaking, they comprise an unfolding, structured sequence of actions, events, thoughts, and feelings, related from the individual’s point of view.’ (Goldie, 2000, p. 4)

By introducing the relation of a narrative to our lives Goldie opens up the possibility of autobiographical narratives. We tell narratives about our lives to others and to ourselves and they can be about the past, but they can also anticipate the future direction and unfolding of our lives. Autobiographical narratives have a strongly reflexive nature as Bruner puts it: ‘The story of one’s own life is, of course, a privileged but troubled narrative in the sense that it is reflexive: the narrator and the central figure in the narrative are the same.’ (Bruner 2004, p. 693) We are now thinking of narratives in strongly linguistic terms, an autobiographical narrative is much more like a story with a narrator who is also the protagonist in the story.

Finally there are also intersubjective narratives, ones I construct to understand the character and actions of others. Dan Hutto (2007) has recently dubbed these ‘folk psychological narratives’. Autobio-

graphical narratives are told from a first person point of view, they are my experiences and actions, and can be used to achieve greater self understanding, but they can also have an intersubjective function in 'telling' our life story to others.

Folk psychological narratives do not, generally, have this first person perspective, they have a second person perspective: 'why did X do Y?' We use them to gain understanding of the motivations that others might have for acting. A similarity between autobiographical and folk psychological narratives, I suggest, is their discursive nature. This is most clear in the intersubjective context in which narratives are told. Normally narratives are told to an audience, and, unless we are reading aloud to a hushed group, the audience is an interlocutor or discursive partner. Children's narrative capacity appears to be developed from their conversational (or discursive) capacities, as well as autobiographical memory and other cognitive capacities (Gallagher 2006). Indeed, parents and caregivers provide a narrative scaffolding in which conversations with children are conducted. Once children begin to be able to hold rudimentary conversations from age 2 onwards they quickly begin to engage in conversations which tell a narrative (Nelson 2003). But these narratives are primarily about the landscape of actions, rather than the landscape of consciousness (Bruner, 1986).¹ The latter requires as Gallagher puts it: '...a conceptual, objective, narrative self that is aware of itself as having a point of view that is different from others.' (Gallagher, 2006, p. 228)

This leads me to a crucial distinction for the ensuing argument of this paper. There are pre-narrative subjective and intersubjective abilities of a pre-narrative embodied self. A narrative is only properly a narrative if it is in linguistic form, hence I agree with Nelson when she stipulates that: 'Narrative is the vehicle of communicating representations of events between people by verbal means.' (Nelson, 2003, p. 32) Narration requires the capacity for language use and, therefore, the capacity to narrate is based on more fundamental linguistic capacities such as the capacity to converse. Lamarque reminds us that 'there can be no narrative without narration...' and also: 'A story must be told, it is not found.' (Lamarque, 2004, p. 394)²

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- [1] The landscape of consciousness involves the feelings, thoughts, and knowledge of the actors and the landscape of action involves the bodily actions and the contexts of those actions of the actors.
- [2] Following Lamarque, Goldie is wrong to think that our lives already have a narrative structure, rather they have a structure which lends them to the construction of narratives which are about them.

We shouldn't expect to find narratives in our more basic embodied engagements with the world. Very young children have only a rudimentary sense of self as actor 'During this early developmental period language is being learned and used but it is not yet a vehicle for conveying the representation of narrative.' (Nelson, 2003, p. 245) Indeed 3 to 5 year old children typically produce narratives that miss out on, or only weakly exhibit three essential components of narrative: 'temporal perspective, the mental as well as physical perspective of self and of different others, and essential cultural knowledge of the unexperienced world.' (Nelson, 2003, p.28)

I do think that the claim that the self is a CNG or a fictional creation spun out of autobiographical narratives does not sit happily with the distinction between a pre-narrative embodied sense of the self (which children appear to have as actors and language users, prior to becoming narrators), and a later linguistically and culturally developed sense of self as narrator. I will argue that only the second sense of self could be allowed by the abstract narrative view. However, there is a clear sense of the self as an embodied consciousness and agent. The crucial question is how we should think of the emergence of the latter from the former? The answer is important, because the protagonist of the narratives is both narrator and embodied consciousness.

For the purposes of this paper there are two senses of self, one as an embodied experiencer of and actor in the world and the other as a narrator of those experiences and actions, as well as relevant motives, from a first-person point of view. The experiences related in the first person narratives are those of the embodied subject.

2. Abstract Narrative Conceptions of the Self

Velleman likens the capacity for self-constitution, a capacity to create oneself, to the magical trick of pulling a rabbit out of a hat except that there is no magician to pull the rabbit out (Velleman, 2006, p. 204). The emergence of the rabbit from the hat unaided would appear to be impossible, however: 'A rabbit can't pull himself out of a hat, but a hat can make it appear that a rabbit is pulling himself out of it.' (Velleman, 2006, p. 204) The analogy of the rabbit trick with the construction of the self is a way of understanding Dennett's abstract account of the self and how Velleman's own account differs from it. The Dennettian version of the analogy should be understood as follows: the self (or rabbit) is an illusion, a fiction, that is created by the human organism (the hat). Whilst it might appear that the human organism is governed by an autonomous person, this is simply a 'trick of the light' and

implies nothing more substantial than a fictional or illusory rabbit. Velleman, as we shall see, agrees with all of this except the unreality of the rabbit. 'In my view, the rabbit really does pull himself out of the hat, after all.' (Velleman, 2006, p. 204)

The analogy nicely illustrates Dennett's view of the relationship between the self and the human organism (or living body as I shall sometimes call it). The self is a fictional creation of the experiences and activities of the living body, including mental ones. It also introduces Velleman's point of contention with Dennett: that the self is indeed created that way, but it is a substantial causally active thing rather than a shadowy abstraction. I shall turn now to Dennett's and Velleman's respective accounts of the self.

Dennett is indeed clear and explicit about the abstract nature of the self:

A self, according to my theory, is not any old mathematical point, but an abstraction defined by the myriad of attributions and interpretations (including self-attributions and self-interpretations) that have composed the biography of the living body whose centre of narrative gravity it is. As such it plays a singularly important role in the ongoing cognitive economy of that living body, because, of all the things in the environment an active body must make mental models of, none is more crucial than the model the agent has of itself. (Dennett, 1991, p. 427)

The self is *not* the living body. Dennett makes this clear by denying that when you say 'this is *my* body' you are taken to be saying 'this body owns itself'. There is no minimal embodied self for Dennett. In his eagerness to escape the 'brain pearl' or 'Cartesian Theatre' conceptions of the self he has given up on a more minimal conception of the self as an embodied subject of experience. Whilst the human organism does have conscious experiences and is an agent (an initiator of actions at least), Dennett does not consider these capacities to be constitutive of the self (even in part). The self is simply a model, or representation of the embodied agent constituted by the collection of narratives concerning (self)attributions and (self)interpretations of the behaviour (both internal and external) of that body. This sounds like the right kind of move, but the move is a gesture. The self is a narrative fiction, not an embodied subject of experience. It is a representation, or in Velleman's terms a (narrative) self image, not something that has experiences and performs actions.

The CNG is to be understood by analogy with a physical object's centre of gravity which can play a role in scientific explanation, but is not to be identified with any part of the object (Dennett, 1991; Velleman, 2006, p. 205). It would be a category mistake (Dennett,

1991) to identify the self with the brain, or a part of the brain for example. The function of the self is straightforward:

An advanced agent must build up practices for keeping track of both its bodily and 'mental' circumstances. In human beings, as we have seen, those practices mainly involve incessant bouts of storytelling and story-checking, some of it factual and some of it fictional (Dennett, 1991, p. 428).

The self is built up out of these incessant bouts of story-telling:

Thus do we build up a defining story about ourselves, organized around a sort of basic blip of self-representation. The blip isn't a self of course; it's a representation of a self... What makes one blip the *me*-blip and another blip just a he- or she- or *it*-blip is not what it looks like, but what it is used for. It gathers and organizes information on the topic of *me* in the same way other structures in my brain keep track of information on Boston, or Reagan, or ice-cream.

And where is the thing your self-representation is about? It is wherever you are. *And what is this thing? It's nothing more than, and nothing less than, your centre of narrative gravity* (Dennett, 1991, p. 429, my emphasis).

Therefore the self is an abstract entity, a collection of narratives that come together in a centre of gravity. This is the abstract account of the narrative self according to Dennett. It has proved influential, having spawned other abstract accounts of the narrative self. Its primary claim is that we are self-creating or constituting creatures. The spontaneous narratives create a self-image or representation; we create our own characters by telling stories. We are our own authors, being the central character of the autobiographical narrative, we create ourselves: 'We invent ourselves, I shall argue, but we really are the characters whom we invent.' (Velleman, 2006, p. 206) The rabbit positively levitates above the hat.

Velleman's disagreement with Dennett is not in the characterisation of the self as a collection, or confluence of narratives more or less unified into a coherent story; it is simply about the status of the bundle as a real object with causal powers, rather than a fictional, or illusory object. Velleman believes that his more substantial way of thinking of the self does not commit him to the category mistake of which Dennett is so wary. Whilst Velleman disagrees with Dennett on this point, his is still an abstract account of the self.

Velleman argues that the self is a self-conception, a reflexive representation. However, the reflexive self is also a controller of action because its reflective representations (narratives) feed back into the behaviour of the human organism. According to Velleman, the self as

a narrative construct can play a causal role in the cognitive economy of an agent; to be able to play a causal role it follows that the self must be real. Since Dennett agrees that the centre of narrative gravity plays an important role in the cognitive economy of a human organism, then it is puzzling why he concludes that the self is a fiction.

As Mackenzie puts it for Velleman '[n]arratives do not simply report sequences of events or actions. By explaining the causal connections between the events or actions they recount, they give shape and coherence to our lives, or at least to the various sequences that make up our lives...' (Mackenzie, 2007, p. 268–9) The narrative self involves the capacity for reflexive self-awareness, 'the capacity as a subject to make oneself an object of reflection...' (Mackenzie, 2007, p. 268) Mackenzie makes clear the senses in which narratives give shape and coherence to our lives: they do so by providing an explanatory framework for understanding the rationale for acting; they constrain the choice of actions available to us and narratives arrange and order temporal experience. This last, is one of the functions of narrative that Mackenzie does not think Velleman gives due attention to.

A narrative may suggest to me a series of actions, if these actions are enacted then they correspond to the narrative. Mackenzie provides the example of the narrative of writing a paper:

Representing to myself what I am doing under the guidance of the narrative of writing a paper, for example, renders intelligible the actions required to enact this narrative – reading, expressing puzzlement, becoming absorbed in, or trying to articulate a thought.... (Mackenzie, 2007, p. 269)

Velleman and Mackenzie appear to be advocating the view that actions are suggested and structured by a narrative, of what that sequence of actions should look like. Consequently, I am to become puzzled, be absorbed in thought, articulate thoughts *because* there is a narrative of paper writing to which my actions will conform. The implication is that I have a barrage of such narratives in virtue of which I act and in virtue of which my actions are constrained. There is an even stronger claim that my sense of agency is reflected in whether or not my actions conform to the narrative. So my surfing the net for news about the latest football scores does not fit happily with the narrative of writing a paper and as such constitutes a failure of agency on my part (Mackenzie, 2007, p. 269).

I find this hard to accept. It seems quite plausible to me that the series of actions, experiences and cogitations involved in writing a paper unfold quite naturally without having to conform to a narrative

schema of the sequence or even kind of actions required to write a paper. If I am not used to writing papers, or trying to master the process of writing, it might be that I try to make my actions conform to a fairly detailed description of a sequence of actions that I should perform. This sounds right, I do just that when I am learning a new skill (or set of skills) such as learning to drive. But I don't try to make my actions conform to a detailed description of a sequence of actions I should perform now as an expert driver. I enact the skills without thinking about them, the fluid and flexible sequence of perceptions, actions and manipulations of steering wheel, gear stick, pedals, etc. is open ended and not easily captured as a narrative sequence. Therefore, I'm not even sure how such narratives could be unconsciously guiding me in these cases. I would suggest that these are primarily non-narrative embodied abilities. I might, in broad outline tell you the narrative of my car journey in to work this morning, but the purpose of such a narrative would soon become pointless if I were to narrate in detail the sequence of events such as, 'and then I depressed the clutch with my foot.'

Narratives are supposed to constrain the choice of actions available to us; they are supposed to indicate to us what to do. I can think of occasions where this will work especially in cases of practical reasoning, ones where some deliberation about how to best proceed in some course of action is required. However, narratives play a role here for the fully fledged linguistic and culturally mediated narrator, not for the embodied agent who initiates fluent, real-time, skilled behaviour. It may be that the notion of narrative is being asked to do too much here. Strawson has suggested as much:

What do I mean by non-trivial? 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 (Strawson, 2004, p. 439).

Whilst it is clear that my embodied experiences and skilled behaviours can be narrated, they are in fact the pre-narrative fodder for narratives. There will be occasions when some conscious linguistic interventions are required to break the stream of embodied experience and skilled behaviour, where we remind ourselves of what we should be doing, or how we could do things differently³ and there looks to be a role for narratives here.

[3] Thanks to Jordan Zlatev for pointing this out to me.

Schechtman (1996) goes a step further by suggesting that there are implicit narratives which are not available to conscious awareness but nevertheless inform and guide our behaviour. For example, if I am hostile to my brother then my emotions and actions are guided by an implicit narrative of hostility (1996, pp. 115–16). I think this move begins to push narratives into a deeper and darker location.

The notion that our knowledge of the world might be stored as schemas or scripts will be familiar to those who know of work in artificial intelligence by Schank and Abelson (1977). Indeed Velleman endorses such work (2007, p. 289), but Schank and Abelson's scripts are designed to tell a computer how to respond when prompted about various stereotypical situations, such as going to a restaurant for a meal. But to think of human knowledge of stereotypical situations as thus scripted is grossly artificial. A computer runs by commands, a person does not. Certainly it would seem that the kind of person that Velleman, Schechtman and Mackenzie are interested in does not. This is a serious point, because we might well conceive of narratives as biological or cultural programs in the brain that initiate various behaviours. Mackenzie says that narratives can constrain our choice of actions and presumably she does not mean by this that we are culturally or biologically programmed. I assume she means that by telling a narrative about what we ought to do and the ways in which we might achieve it we will be offering ourselves a choice between different actions and this is a linguistic process of which I am consciously aware. However Schechtman's move is to push narratives down into the unconscious, they are motivators of our actions of which we are unaware.

This makes narratives play a role analogous to the more traditional notion of representation in cognitive processing, such that what were before discrete symbols, now become extended narratives.⁴ But this is to ignore the fundamentally public role of narratives, they are not things hidden away in the brain to be processed by computational processes. We find narratives in the first instance told by people to other people. To deny that would be to endorse the view that narratives are primarily mental entities that escape into the world in spoken and written form. Analogously representations or intentional states are primarily mental entities that escape into the world via language or other representational media.

[4] I do not here propose to argue that Velleman, Schechtman and Mackenzie endorse this view, only that if narratives are made into distinctively unconscious mental entities then the problems indicated will arise.

Abstract narrativists have a deep sense of the mind, experience and the self as being structured by narratives. Without them our experiences, thoughts and actions would not have the coherence that they do and we would not have the capacity for self-reflection. A non-narrative subject is an inchoate subject, both to itself and others. This goes beyond Strawson's trivial sense of narrative, where there is a sequence of thoughts and actions. I don't doubt that narratives are important tools for self-reflection — for making sense of ourselves — and even, in some cases, for guiding our actions.⁵ They are tools of the self for reflection, for seeking patterns in experience and action.

It is clear from the foregoing, that Velleman's abstract narrative account of the self has more depth to it than Dennett's, as Mackenzie's analysis makes clear. However, I think that abstract narrative accounts of the self are open to several objections.

When we tell stories about ourselves, what are we telling stories about? On the abstract narrative account, we construct and tell stories about ourselves but who is it that is the subject of the experiences that make up the story? Who is it that has the pain, or sees the rosy dawn? Who had the lousy job interview, in which they felt nervous? Dennett's answer, as we have seen, is the CNG. But how are we to interpret this? Presumably the subject of the experiences that the story is about is not itself the story that relates the experiences? Such a claim would be close to incoherent. The problem is that it is unclear what the narratives are about, unless they are about some pre-existing self, or subject of experience.

Affective experiences such as pains and perceptual experiences such as sounds are ascribed to selves as subjects of experience, not to narratives, narrative centres of gravity or narrative modules, nor simply to living bodies. As Campbell puts it:

All ascriptions of pain...are conceptually dependent upon a level of thought at which there is reference to person (Campbell, 1994, p. 169; see also Thornton, 2003).

As Tim Thornton has pointed out (Thornton, 2003) on the abstract narrative account the thoughts and perceptions that are taken up in narratives should not be construed as making implicit reference to a subject that is independent of the narrative. However

[5] As I argued above, novices tend to consciously rehearse a narrative of the sequence of actions they must perform, in driving a car say, but they soon get over them when they become experts. Indeed such reliance on narratives becomes a hindrance.

When ascribed from a first-person perspective, psychological states are applied to the same thing. They implicitly make reference to the same person (Thornton, 2003, p. 363).

The abstract narrativist is left with a dilemma: Either the narratives are about the experiences of a bundle of narratives or they are about the experiences of an independent subject of experience.

In biting the bullet, abstract narrativists would need to deny that the self-ascriptions of sensations and mental states are ascriptions to the embodied self that is not narratively structured, and would need to endorse the claim that they are ascribed to the narratives themselves (or to the CNG, or the fictional narrator). So when I tell the story of how the cricket ball that hit me on the left fore-arm last Saturday ‘bloody well hurt!’ I am ascribing the pain in the forearm to a collection of narratives. This sounds wrong. *I feel pain after being struck on the arm by a hard cricket ball propelled at me at 85 miles per hour. That is what the narrative is about, the narrative is about a subject who feels pain, and that subject who feels is me.*

The abstract narrativist may respond by claiming that the organism which is struck and feels pain is not the same thing as the narrative self. This would be to make the bodily subject and narrative subject distinct. I think it is a mistake to do this. Whilst we want to distinguish between a *sense* of the self as an embodied agent and a *sense* of the self as a narrator, in practice we do not want to distinguish between them, because the embodied self is also the narrator. The pain I still feel after being hit on the arm is the pre-narrative fodder for the narrator who wishes to discursively tell an interlocutor about the previous Saturday’s events on the cricket ground.

This indicates the central problem with the abstract accounts of the self. The self is not simply a narrative construct; it perceives, thinks and acts. The self is the entire human organism including its narratives and this should be the starting point for any account of the self.

Dennett worries about this, because he thinks that it leads us either to Cartesianism — the self is a substance — or to a kind of physicalist reductionism — the self is the body or bit of the brain — neither of which he thinks are tenable. And the narrative account is offered as a way of avoiding either of these unpalatable alternatives.

However, these fears aside, I think there is something to this critique of the abstract narrative position. There is a more fundamental sense of self than the narrative self and that is the embodied, or feeling self; something which feels and perceives and is happy or sad, before it ever narrates. Dennettians may wish to avoid this more minimal, feeling self because they wish to avoid the kind of subjectivity that, in

their view, prevents the scientific study of consciousness — especially if it invokes the dreaded qualia. I think it is possible to have an embodied sense of self as the subject of experiences without sliding into either of the alternative positions, or by invoking ‘ghostly’ qualia as Dennett might put it. I shall spend the next section outlining how we might try to do this.

A further problem with abstract narrativity is that there is nothing that anchors the narratives in situated bodily experiences. Not only does abstract narrativity lack a subject of experience, but it makes the self as agent a peculiarly disembodied thing. Narratives are primarily representations of the embodied agent, but, according to Velleman and Mackenzie, they can also suggest courses of action to be followed. This is not much by way of agency; the embodied agent that decides, deliberates, chooses and acts has far more right to be called the self as agent. The embodied agent that uses narratives to decide and deliberate and to understand itself is a much clearer conception of the self than the CNG, or conglomeration of narratives conception.

A narrative assumes an audience, indeed narratives are primarily inter-subjective devices that are used to tell stories to others; they are not internal representational states inaccessible to consciousness. We should avoid the tendency to take public representations and make them hidden entities in the mind or brain. Narratives are important tools that provide us with a means for self reflection and analysis. However, the inter-subjective nature of narratives indicates that the self should not be thought of as a private, inner entity. Narrative accounts of the self have the virtue of considering the self to be relational, structured in an intersubjective fashion, rather than thinking of the self as an independent substance with intrinsic properties⁶.

However, before we learn how to tell stories, we learn to converse and we interiorize speech. The intersubjective structuring of the self can be ontogenetically understood through the interiorization of exterior linguistic communication. On this model, children learn to communicate in dialogue with others first and then only secondly to interiorize this dialogue. The egocentric speech of children has a dialogical flavour, children are talking to themselves. This then becomes inner speech (Vygotsky 1934/1962). Narratives are part of this ongoing dialogue.

In the next section I outline how we ought to think of the self as an embodied subject of experience and how narratives arise out of sequences of embodied experience.

[6] This is why it is important not to think of narratives as private, inner, representations.

3. Narratives and the Embodied Self

The unity of the self is anchored in our embodiment – our experiences are embodied ones. There is a minimal sense of self as a subject of experience and this minimal self is an embodied subject. Our embodied experiences, perceptions and actions are all prior to the narrative sense of self, indeed our narratives are structured by the sequence of embodied experiences.

Minimal self: Phenomenologically, that is, in terms of how one experiences it, a consciousness of oneself as an immediate subject of experience, unextended in time. The minimal self almost certainly depends on brain processes and an ecologically embedded body, but one does not have to know or be aware of this to have an experience that still counts as a self-experience (Gallagher, 2000, p. 15).

The minimal self is, of course, too minimal. It does not yet have any sense of continuity from past experiences to present ones and expectations about future ones⁷. The issue I wish to address is how the thoughts, feelings and perceptions of the minimal embodied and ecologically embedded self give rise to narratives. Mark Slors has shown how we might think of the feeling, or minimal self becoming a narrative self:

Individual sense perceptions acquire their full sense only as part of a sequence of perceptions portraying a body's movements through space, individual feelings acquire their full sense only in connection with what evoked them and what they produce, etc. (Slors, 1998, p. 70).

Our embodied experiences are ready to be exploited in a narrative of those experiences. Narrative arises from a sequence of bodily experiences, perceptions and actions in a quite natural manner:

[T]he logic of perceptual continuity is our understanding of the whereabouts of our bodies (sense organs). The whereabouts of our bodies (as we understand them) change according to the laws governing movements of physical bodies through space. We cannot be here one moment and a hundred miles from here the next. If we go from a to b, we will pass through all intermediate places separating a and b according to the route we take, thus producing a sequence of perceptions narrating the story of

[7] Galen Strawson has tried to show how such a minimal self is the only self we need (Strawson, 2004) but I shall not address that issue here.

this route (the position of our bodies at different places, the position of our eyes, etc.) (Slors, 1998, p. 73).⁸

This minimal embodied narrative allows for a subject of experiences (the minimal, embodied, feeling and perceiving self) and, therefore, anchors narratives in the unfolding sequence of embodied and embedded perceptions of an individual. This is quite different from the self as an abstract narrator. Narratives arise directly from the lived experience of the embodied subject and these narratives can be embellished and reflected upon if we need to find a meaningful form or structure in that sequence of experiences. In reflecting upon the sequence of events which culminated in me being hit on the arm by a hard cricket ball, I might construct a narrative around the sequence of perceptions and bodily actions that led to me being struck on the arm. I might think, narratively, about how I got into a position that allowed me to be so struck and how I might avoid it in future.

Consequently, the narrator, or protagonist of the narrative, should be understood in terms of embodied consciousness and selfhood (Atkins, 2004, p. 343) and we should avoid the view either that the narrator is itself a narrative, or that there is a distinction between the narrator as a person and the self as a CNG or conglomeration of narratives. It follows that we need to take seriously the nature of embodied experiences, and we need to understand consciousness and self-awareness in terms of embodied experiences.

One way we can begin to do this is by using Gallagher's (2005) rich account of the concepts of body image and body schema respectively.⁹ A body image 'consists of a system of perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs pertaining to one's own body' (2005, p. 24). A body schema is 'a system of sensory-motor capacities that function without awareness or the necessity of perceptual monitoring' (2005, p. 24).

The body schema directs our primary embodied engagements with the world and it is because of this that we feel ourselves to be both in and part of the world. Furthermore, it is constitutive (in part) of our first cognitive engagements with the world, our perceptual navigation, our imitation of others and our manipulation of the environment (Menary, 2007). The embodied sense of self arises from these initial embodied engagements and is retained in the fluent performance of skilled activities, which can be understood in terms of the motor

[8] Slors makes the mistake of supposing that our perceptions are narratively structured as opposed to lending themselves to narration (cf. Goldie's remarks on page 64 and Lamarque's on page 65).

[9] Although I can't do it justice here, see Menary (2007), chapter 4 for a more detailed account.

programmes of the body schema and give us that sense of ‘flow’ or fluent real time coping.

Atkins (2004, p. 345), following Merleau-Ponty, reminds us that we take both a first-person stance as the originator of embodied engagements and a third person perspective on our bodies as objects in the world. I am an embodied subject, but I am also aware of my body and my actions as part of the world, as part of a world shared with others. How can we understand a person simultaneously, in Ricoeur’s words: ‘as both a person of whom we speak and a subject who designates herself in the first person whilst addressing a second person.’ (Ricoeur, 1992, pp. 34–5) The answer is as an embodied conscious subject who is also a narrator. The self is primarily an embodied consciousness that engages with the world, only later does it attempt to weave together the subjective embodied experiences, intersubjective communication with others and the objective public and shared world in which this all takes place, via narratives (Atkins, 2004).

Mackenzie¹⁰ (forthcoming) clearly shows that embodiment needs to be taken seriously by narrativists. She complains that narrativists such as Schechtman do not take embodied experiences seriously when considering the constitution of the self. Schechtman takes a third personal approach to the body as something that allows for public identification and re-identification (Schechtman, 1996). Mackenzie forcefully reminds us of the importance of the ‘bodily perspective’:

It is with our bodies that we perceive, act, experience and engage with the world and with others. If narrative is the ‘lens through which we filter our experience and plan for actions’ and develop an integrated conception of ourselves as persisting, temporally extended subjects, then a condition of possibility of this narrative is that we have an integrated, if not necessarily explicit, conception of ourselves as embodied agents. I call this conception a person’s bodily perspective (Mackenzie, forthcoming).

Another rich perspective on the notion of a lived bodily experience can be drawn from the classical pragmatists. Dewey in particular conceives of experience in terms of biological embodiment. Where there is a living organism there will be experience and where there is such an organism there will also be a complex environment in which that organism lives and develops. Dewey’s conception of experience is a naturalistic one, experience is a natural phenomenon. However, experience is not the product of a passive organism, receiving information

[10] Although I have disagreed with Mackenzie’s more abstract narrative approach above, I heartily endorse her more embodied approach in Mackenzie (forthcoming).

through its senses about its environment. The organism is active, it is constantly interacting with its environment and coping with changes in the environment from moment to moment. Experiences are these interactions of organism and environment.

The classical pragmatists also held that experience is continuous rather than particular. This was most famously argued for by William James in his *Principles of Psychology* (1890). James denies that sensations, images and ideas are discrete atoms of experience. He replaces them with a continuous stream of consciousness. As such, experiences are temporally extended, not frozen snapshots.

... experience is *of* as well as *in* nature. It is not experience which is experienced, but nature — stones, plants, animals, diseases, health, temperature, electricity, and so on. Things interacting in certain ways *are* experience; they are what is experienced. Linked in certain other ways with another natural object — the human organism — they are *how* things are experienced, as well (Dewey, 1925, p. 4a).

Dewey argues against ‘intellectualism’ about experience, by which he means

...the theory that all experiencing is a mode of knowing, and that all subject-matter, all nature, is, in principle, to be reduced and transformed till it is defined in terms identical with the characteristics presented by refined objects of science as such (Dewey, 1925, p. 21).

But what is primarily experienced for Dewey are objects that we treat, use, act upon, or that we enjoy or dislike, rather than simply things that we know. They are things *had* before they are things cognized.

The pragmatist rejects the traditional picture of the conscious subject as having indubitable direct knowledge of the mind and conscious experience, and of knowledge as an otiose transcript of experiences. Conscious subjects are primarily biological organisms. Their experiences are both of the world and in the world, i.e. continuous with nature. They are embodied and embedded in their environment. The transactions between the organism and its environment are ‘experiences’ and experiences are not, solely, a knowledge affair. Embracing these embodied approaches to experience and being in the world leads us away from qualia type approaches to experience and should hold no fears for Dennettians.

On the model I am sketching the embodied self is prior to any narrative. First there are the experiences of a living body and then we turn those experiences into a narrative. So I tell the story of how I was hit on the arm by a hard ball and it hurt and left a large bruise. In the story there is a subject of experience — someone to whom the pain is

ascribed. It seems more reasonable to say that the subject of experiences is an embodied subject, rather than a fictional narrative object. The self is, at least in part, a body. Minimally, to be a self, a person, is to be a subject of bodily experiences.

It is not narratives that shape experiences but, rather, experiences that structure narratives. Experiences are the sequence of events that give structure and content to narratives. There may be additions and elaborations to this embodied sequence at a later time, after reflection, but the temporal ordering, the structure is already there in our lived, bodily experience. The mistake is again to suppose that a narrative conceived in abstraction could be brought to bear on a sequence of experiences, ordering them and giving them meaning.

I now need to say something about the dialogical structuring of the self. So far I have been concerned with anchoring the narratives of the self in embodied and lived experiences, in such a way that we can begin to see how the narrative self might emerge from the embodied experiences of the feeling, or minimal self.

4. Inner and Outer Dialogue as the Construction of the Narrative Point of View

I have argued that the self is an embodied consciousness and agent, as well as a narrator and have begun the process of explaining how the latter emerges from the former in terms of narratives as anchored in the pre-narrative sequence of experiences of an embodied subject. However, another component of this process is the discursive role of narratives and the construction of a narrative point of view (a narrator). The idea here is that the embodied narratives that structure the minimal self are often taken up into inner dialogue. This inner dialogue is often about the situation the embodied self is in. These dialogues allow for problem-solving and other cognitive acts (Vygotsky, 1932/1964; Mead, 1934; Menary, 2007) and self-controlled action (Peirce 1931-60). It seems evident that all narrative theories must consider the self to be relational, structured in an intersubjective fashion, rather than thinking of the self as an independent substance with intrinsic properties or a fictional object. I shall focus on the role of inner speech in generating self-awareness, the capacity to become the object of one's own attention (Caruthers, 1996; Morin, 2005; Mackenzie, 2007).

Before we construct a narrative self image we talk to ourselves and others (Nelson, 2003). We talk to others about our experiences, we have conversations about them, and then when we interiorize this

dialogue we learn how to talk to ourselves. Eventually we may talk to ourselves and others in the form of a story and some of these stories may constitute our self image. But the narrator comes into being through conversational and discursive practices. One way in which this intersubjective structuring of the self can be ontogenetically understood is through the interiorization of exterior linguistic communication. On this model, children learn to communicate in dialogue with others first and then only secondly to interiorize this dialogue. The egocentric speech of children has a dialogical flavour, children are talking to themselves. This then becomes inner speech.

I shall proceed by showing how the ontogenesis of self-awareness might take place through the role of inner speech in the child. Verbal self-guidance or self-controlled action (Menary, 2007) has an important cognitive function as is clearly set out in the work of Vygotsky (1934/1962). Children learn to respond to the verbal commands of adults in controlling and directing their actions (Morin, 2005). They are able to perform actions with the verbal and physical support of adult care-givers. The internalization of the regulatory function of language is the important move together with the self-generation of inner speech for this role. Kendall and Hollon (1981) give us four categories of the regulatory use of speech for problem solving: (1) the precise definition of the problem; (2) the effective approach to the problem; (3) the focus on the problem; (4) the progress evaluation that includes praise or strategy readjustment (Morin, 2005). Vygotsky has an account of the interiorization of egocentric speech and the kind of cognitive functions such speech has. I shall use a core example from his work to illustrate the kind of function that inner speech has as outlined by Kendall and Hollon.

From the developmental point of view higher cognition, for example reasoning and memory, appears first on the 'intermental' plane, in other words, in social interaction. Obvious examples would be language learning and joint adult-child problem solving activities. Cognition, then, is primarily a social phenomenon. However, Vygotsky did claim that higher cognition appears on the 'intramental' plane (individual), but only as it is shaped by and derived from intermental cognition. It is crucial, then, to understand how intermental cognition works, or we will be at a loss to understand cognition at the level of the individual. One typical example of this phenomenon is the internalisation of speech.

Piaget labelled the speech that young children engage in when problem solving or engaging in pretend play 'egocentric speech'. Vygotsky does not view this form of speech as a manifestation of a

child's egocentricity, rather, Vygotsky argues (based on empirical studies of infants' speech) that this form of speech is merely the internalisation of speech. It does not disappear with age, it becomes an internal monologue.

The intermental development of cognition is understood in terms of 'the zone of proximal development.' The Zone of Proximal Development is the distance between the actual level of development of an individual, what the individual can *actually* do, and the potential level of development, which is what the individual can *potentially do*, with guidance and collaboration from a tutor. It follows that the individual level of development should not be the exclusive focus of interest. Intermental cognition as mediated through language allows us to understand the intramental capabilities of an individual.

In cases where the child must act in such a way as to bring about a goal, the activity is accompanied by egocentric speech. As the child gains mastery of egocentric and then inner speech, she gains access to self-controlled behaviour, which helps her to complete cognitive tasks such as problem solving.

As an example of this development, Vygotsky cites an experiment (by a colleague Levina) where a child's speech arises spontaneously in a problem-solving situation. The speech is continuous throughout the experiment as observed.

Levina's experiments posed problems to four and five year olds, such as obtaining candy/sweets from a cupboard. The candy was placed out of reach so that the child could not reach it directly. Vygotsky describes the concurrent roles of speech and action (including tool use) in the child in the following way:

As the child got more and more involved in trying to obtain the candy, 'egocentric' speech began to manifest itself as part of her active striving. At first this speech consisted of a description and analysis of the situation, but it gradually took on the 'planful' character, reflecting possible paths to a solution of the problem. Finally it was included as part of the solution (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 25).

A four and a half year old girl was asked to get candy from a cupboard with a stool and a stick as tools. The experiment was described by Levina in the following way (his descriptions are in parentheses, the girls speech is in quotation marks):

(Stands on a stool, quietly looking, feeling along a shelf with stick). 'On the stool.' (Glances at experimenter. Puts stick in other hand) 'Is that really the candy?' (Hesitates) 'I can get it from that other stool, stand and get it.' (Gets second stool) 'No that doesn't get it. I could use the stick.' (Takes stick, knocks at the candy) 'It will move now.' (knocks

candy) 'It moved, I couldn't get it with the stool, but the, but the stick worked.'

Vygotsky claims that activity is not just accompanied by speech in children, but that speech plays a specific role in such activity. He claims that the experiments show two important facts:

1. A child's speech is as important as the role of action in attaining the goal. Children not only speak about what they are doing; their speech and action are part of *one and the same complex psychological function*, directed toward the solution of the problem at hand.
2. The more complex the action demanded by the situation and the less direct its solution, the greater the importance played by speech in the operation as a whole. Sometimes speech becomes of such vital importance that, if not permitted to use it, young children cannot accomplish the given task (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 26).

We should note that the child's speech is a representation of the embodied perceptions and sensations that the embodied subject is having. The dialogue gives a cognitive structuring to the embodied perceptions and there is a clear sense of the self as agent. The girl has a clear sense of a narrative sequence of events and actions (or the landscape of actions [Bruner, 1986]). The narrative does not yet function in such a way that the child is becoming self-aware. But, it is a relatively straightforward move from this to see how such techniques could be applied to becoming self-aware. Morin (2005) adapts the four questions of Kendall and Hollon (1981) in the service of increasing self-awareness:

To illustrate, a person might engage in the following soliloquy: 'How did I react [in a given situation] [clear definition of the problem]? I should try to remember exactly what happened and everything I did [effective approach to the problem]. The first thing I did was Z. Then X happened, and I reacted by saying W. Good! I'm getting somewhere! [reinforcing self-verbalization] I don't need to take G [a given event] into consideration because it's not important. What's important is how I reacted [focus of attention on the problem]. OK. So I said W. What did H [another person] say? No! That's not pertinent—I need to take my time and think more [readjustment of one's strategy].' (Morin, 2005, p. 125)

Children gradually gain mastery over narratives in discursive contexts, and in doing so they begin the process of developing a narrative point of view and, hence, a narrative sense of self. This is, I suggest, a more profitable line of thought for considering the construction of the self as a narrator, rather than the abstract narrative approach.

Conclusion

I hope to have shown that abstract narrative accounts of the self fail to explain what their narratives are about and imply that there is a minimal subject of experience about whom the narratives are constructed. I have argued that we require a minimal notion of the self as a subject of experience. This subject is embodied and narratives are constructed out of a sequence of embodied experiences and perceptions. Now the narratives are anchored in something real and not something fictional (pace Dennett and Velleman). The reflexive, or narrative self, has an inter-subjective, or dialogical structure. It is structured by the interiorization of speech. It comes into being in lived practices such as self-controlled action and problem solving. The unity of the reflexive self is pragmatic, it is anchored in the experiences of an embodied self which is embedded in an environment.

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