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88

The Epistemology
of Narrative Knowledge

edited by

Erica Onnis

Sarah Worth

Rivista di estetica

DIRETTRICE

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Human beings have long been defined as social, political, rational, or economic beings. However, a more recent perspective identifies them as “storytelling animals”.

Storytelling is not merely a form of entertainment – it plays a crucial epistemological role by offering a unique way to understand the world. Stories help both children and adults make inferences, organize knowledge, and comprehend complex social dynamics.

This issue of *Rivista di Estetica* is devoted to the epistemology of narrative knowledge, which explores how knowledge is produced, structured, and evaluated through stories. Unlike objective knowledge, narrative knowledge reflects personal beliefs, assumptions, experiences, and desires. It is perspectival – shaped by individuals or communities – and participative, often influencing worldviews in subtle and sometimes oppressive ways.

Stories intertwine to form complex narrative clusters that shape human understanding of the world. By studying these dynamics, we can better grasp their influence on how we perceive and engage with reality.

Valeria Costanza D'Agata

THE AESTHETIC POTENTIAL OF NARRATIVE KNOWLEDGE
FOR SELF-AWARENESS AND FOR THE CREATION OF MORE
INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES

Abstract

The art of storytelling has an important biological function in the survival and development of the human species; in fact, it allows us to explore imaginary worlds, to predict and plan the future, to arrange and give sense to a chaotic present, to formulate hypotheses about the surrounding environment, to build a shared cultural heritage (Smorti 2022). Especially when reality appears incomprehensible and when intersubjective communication is hampered, stories come to the rescue in order to understand social dynamics in case they appear ambiguous, senseless, indecipherable, giving their contribution to building a deep sense of identity, enhancing the capability for empathic resonance, identification and the relational competences necessary for the creation of more inclusive communities.

We have always lived in an intricate plot where narrative knowledge intertwines to prepare, support and project forward the possibilities of our lives' development, to build our identity, consolidate our moral integrity. Such a process is never exclusively individual, but it significantly contributes to the creation of a shared cultural texture, it strengthens social bonds, it informs our system of values and beliefs and the way we act, it broadens the horizon of opportunities our evolving ability meets by means of a shared patrimony of common experience. Narrative knowledge is essential for the survival and development of the human species, defined "Homo narrans" by Alain Rabatel, it accompanies us from the beginning to the end of our lives, so much so that it is thought that in our last breath we recall the story of all our life. Our birth also is anticipated by a narrative knowledge about us, pregnancy is accompanied by an intense imaginative activity concerning the unborn child's looks, its character, the way it will face life, how it will choose its interests or how it will engage in acquiring competences in order to be professionally successful and capitalize its gifts;

the expectations, beliefs, fears, desires of those who have engendered us and of those who anxiously wait for our birth are projected on our lives since the moment of our conception.

Also our imagination is nourished with the spark lighting from the stories we have been accustomed to since our early age and that have a crucial role in the acquisition of social competences and in the development of the ability of imitation and identification. During dream activity or when we wander in day-dreaming we become co-composers, scriptwriters able to stage, give a body and a colour to what is being narrated or is being experienced, we can enrich the stories with detail, we can feel them on our skin, we evoke atmospheres, linking our lives with what we have seen or listened to, we inextricably mix reality and fiction, or even, we are induced to forget ourselves while being taken into the plot that ties together and gives sense to the flow of events.

Imagination does not only take a shape when one listens to storytelling, in fact it becomes a necessary pre-assumption in the child's development: children progressively acquire the tools that will enable them to tackle the problematic situations they will face by means of fictional play.¹ Already between the first and the second year of age, with a climax around three or four years of age, children acquire the ability to use their play activity in a symbolic form, they learn to "pretend that", staging possible scenarios, situations that generate anxiety, bewilderment, worry, fear (Sutton-Smith 1997) and in so doing they anticipate what they fear, they learn to face the chaos and unpredictability of life, they prepare for the odds that may occur, experimenting and anticipating the possible consequences of being lost, of bereavement, neglect, aggression, conditions of solitude or precariousness.² This way of preparing for life through fictional problem solving, of turning back like film directors in order to modify reality, virtually practising the overcoming of obstacles, allows children to equip themselves to face enigmatic situations, to increase their personal and social competences, to enhance the perception of self-effectiveness and self-esteem, the confidence in their own ability and obviously the ability of identification with others and the ability to empathize (Hakemulder 2000).³

¹ For the studies on fictional play see Bloom 2004; Boyd 2009; Gopnik 2009; Weisberg 2009.

² "In the stories that are narrated by small children most typical action includes being lost, being stolen away, being bitten, dying, being trodden on, getting angry, calling the police, running away or falling over. In their stories the children portray an everchanging world, a world of anarchy and disaster" (Sutton-Smith 1997: 160-161).

³ Fictional identification plays and stories always have an ethical content and even when they stage violent, creepy or despicable action they never fail to remark what is right and what is wrong through a process of identification with the protagonists and the sharing of the outcomes (prize or punishment) the action is bound to, strongly contributing to the rooting of shared values and rules. In *The power of Play*, David Elkind highlights how the play of imagination in children has "evident moral connotation: the good guys against the bad guys" (Elkind 2007: 162).

Although the escape from reality provided by staged or filmed storytelling/narration prepares for life, in order to really give pleasure it should render those problematic and critical elements that are innate in it, even exasperating them, and so it should inspire fear, anguish, anxiety, in short it should produce that mixed delight reminiscent of Burke that only something terrifying and incommensurable can render, something that can potentially overwhelm the reader or listener. Such a feeling of finiteness, precariousness and deep vulnerability threatens but does not get to annul the spectator who maintains a safe distance because he is nevertheless aware of the fiction, in which he totally immerses, though temporarily, identifying with the protagonist without ever merging completely.

Tension builds up when the protagonist must tackle a variety of ups and downs that get in the way between himself and his personal satisfaction, pushing him away from his objectives and putting his life at risk: it is then that we identify with the hero so much that we for a moment forget it is a fiction, it is as we were in his place, so assuming a first-person perspective (Gallese calls it a theory of embodied and liberated simulation);⁴ an inter-corporeal attuning occurs such as our sensory-motor system responds congruently and pairs with the other in order to establish an affective correspondence and an emotional resonance. In this case we assume a second-person perspective, our body overcomes its individual limits and becomes an extended body forming a functional unit with the other's body (theory of interaction, Fuchs 2017), we feel what the other feels and we let us be overridden by the kaleidoscopic flow of emotions that enriches our being humans, allowing us to experiment our potential resources without risk.⁵ Furthermore, the inter-corporeal attunement makes the spectators vibrate together, it creates an absolute synchrony of sensations, emotion and thoughts, so that the multiplicity of singularities can merge in an emotional and physical unit, in one bundle of perception and movement.

As the theory of mirror neurons has it (Rizzolatti, Sinigaglia, Anderson 2008), either in the case we directly feel certain emotions or perform certain actions, or in the case they are purely an object of our imagination, or in the case we are observing and listening to others, we do experience the same physiological reaction we would experience under the circumstances, such as increased blood pressure, intensified heartbeat, diffused trembling, shivers down the spine, increase in salivation, alteration of perspiration, alteration in respiratory rate,

⁴ Stories affect us not only mentally but also physically. Our brain processes the narrative fiction as if it were true, giving way to all the corporeal manifestations that would occur during a real life event experienced in the first person.

⁵ "Literature provides sensations for which we do not have to pay a personal price. It allows us to love, condemn, forgive, hope, dream, or hate with none of the risks these emotions would normally imply" (Burroway 2003: 74).

or the sensation of being breathless.⁶ Thus it is as if we knew beforehand the effects of specific situations without the need of directly experiencing them,⁷ and so we practice responding to them in a fast, congruous, functional way,⁸ without having to run the risks, at least for the moment, and without having to face the consequences we would face in real life.

I don't need to actually experience something in order to approximately know whether it will be more or less a pleasant experience, to discern the best behaviour to adopt or to learn a useful trick: it will be enough to go through it narratively. This is one of the reasons why, among other things, evolution has led us to feel intense emotion while reading a novel. [...] Bodily experience is detached from the immediate perceptive environment, and is transplanted into a wider horizon where sensations can be activated even by linguistic evolution (Berta 2012: 193-194).

The biological function of narrative knowledge is given specifically by the repeated experience⁹ – however indirect but in which we partake even unconsciously with our bodily reactions – of coherent response to specific critical situations, which generates an actual learning and an automatization of functional ways to react to life's problems, significantly affecting our neural plasticity and consequently our behavioural attitude and the way we interact with the world and with others (Hebb). Learning through problem simulation does not occur consciously, but by means of our implicit memory, it is inscribed in the consolidation and strengthening of neural connections, it incarnates in our

⁶ For an introduction to the theory of mirror neurons see Iacoboni 2008; Rizzolatti, Sinigaglia, Anderson 2008; Ramachandran 2011. See also Goleman 2006: 41: "Simulating an act is, in the brain, the same as performing it, except that the actual execution is somehow blocked".

⁷ In *Imagination and Knowing: The Shape of Fiction* (2020), G. Currie reflects on the relationship between imagination, knowledge, and fiction. Stories possess undeniable epistemic value, and imagination plays a central role in understanding fiction and resonating with the characters and their experiences, which are perceived as if they were real, without necessarily requiring belief in what is being read. In fact, the cognitive value of narrative and the emotional engagement it evokes are directly proportional to the degree of accuracy and realism of the characters and the context in which they are placed. However, this understanding is often influenced by cultural prejudices and stereotypes.

⁸ "Problems are the strong *fil rouge* linking the fantasies of the children's identification game, narrative fiction and dreams- they therefore provide a possible hint about a function the three things share: they allow us to practice and to train for the great dilemmas of human existence" (Gottschall 2013: 67).

⁹ According to the principles of learning in Hebb's the repeated joint stimulation of two cells or groups of neural cells causes a permanent modification. These metabolic changes induce a strengthening of synaptic connections such as to determine an increase in the efficiency of neural and the consolidation of associative learning.

bodies.¹⁰ Furthermore, through narrative knowledge, we have the opportunity to experiment with the others' points of view, to reflect on the characters' states of mind, to understand their motivation, to infer their beliefs, the emotions and thoughts grounding their actions, even and especially when they appear inexplicable or are unexpected and ambiguous (extended empathy, Fuchs 2017). We can even imagine what we would have done had we been in their place and how we would have perceived the gaze of others on us or the way we would have appeared in their eyes (reiterated empathy). Not only, therefore, a training to respond to life's critical occurrences, but through narrative knowledge and daydreaming we are free to design further developments, draw a different outcome, give a new direction to the causal (or casual) chain of events and an order to the apparently chaotic jumble of situations.

This also happens when we narrate autobiographical episodes, giving a unity to events often split and unconnected which in the narration that we give *a posteriori*, find a coherent thread to give a sense, mending- especially in the case of painful or unexpected events – that lack of sense and coherence that makes us feel bewildered and helpless (Damasio 2010). The narrative dimension sides with and completes real life, we fantasize about how it would have been if we had acted differently, if we had not made a certain choice, if we had met that someone or simply if we had arrived earlier, or later, in a given situation. In short, we spend a great deal of our time, even unaware, especially when we are not concentrated in activities that demand alert and dedicated attention, in daydreaming, in re-living circumstances that are significant or inexplicable to us, in anticipating situations that worry us, in interpreting other people's behaviour when it appears dubious or inconsistent. In our autobiographical narration we recall our past enriching it with mostly erratic details, we tend to narrate circumstances in a way which is acceptable to us, rather than holding fast to how things really went. We build our identity creating a common thread in order to fill with sense all those instances in which we were not able to make decisions, in which we let ourselves go or acted under the urge of uncontrolled impulse with no regard for consequences. We tend to forget many details that hurt us or reveal our weakness, we fictionalize some aspects and embroider on some circumstances – which at a closer look are only pure chance – looking for hidden meanings that can account for certainly dubious and adventurous, or ponderously incongruous choices. The plasticity of memory, with its omis-

¹⁰The brain constantly modifies its models of explanation of reality, depending on whether its expectations are confirmed or not met. In particular, in 1985, neuroscientist Gazzaniga studied the functioning of a cerebral module in the left hemisphere, the *interpreter*, which is activated when events appear to be inconsistent with respect to the subject's expectations- solidly grounded on the repetitiveness and predictability to which the subject is normally exposed. Through a thorough analysis of the causes of the given events, the exception is traced back to normality and so the rules are inferred by which events can be explained and assimilated to patterns already known.

sions, poetic license, invention, has just the function of making life bearable making us feel better and of helping us build an identity that can take into account and give a reason to changing states of mind, often irreconcilable to each other, making us feel the hero, and not a passive spectator, even when we were helpless in front of the looming of events. Memory is “an unreliable historian, to the service of itself [...]. Recollections are often trimmed and remodelled by an ego-strengthening inclination blurring the boundaries of past events, dampening awareness, and distorting what really happened”.¹¹ By means of the narration memories can be communicated, episodic memory gives way to semantic memory allowing a condensation of the meaning of one’s life, making it generalizable and applicable to different contexts. The presence of the other becomes indispensable, it mediates between the Self and one’s own pain,¹² it sets one free from the isolation by establishing a narrative dialogue in which one is emotionally attuned with another, one’s voice takes into account the listener’s expression, in turn generating an impression that shapes itself in the mimics and in the participated listening. Autobiographical narration, then, has not only the function of giving an order to the past, because tracing back a sense in apparently disconnected events opens up to a future horizon of possibilities, it permits the planning of goals, it can boost an advancement towards personal fulfilment and self-expression (Schechtman 1996).¹³

The symbolic universe also creates an order in the story/ narration. It places all the collective events inside a coherent unit including past, present and future. With regards to the past, it establishes a “memory” which is shared by all the socialized individuals in the group; as far as the future is concerned, it establishes a common framework of reference for the projection of individual actions. Thus the symbolic universe binds men to their predecessors and to their successors in a significant totality that transcends the finiteness of human existence and gives meaning to the death of the individual. All the members of a society can now consider themselves as belonging to a system (universe) of values, that existed before they were born and will continue to exist after they are dead. The empirical community is so transposed on a cosmic level and is made majestically independent from the vicissitudes (ups and downs) (travails) of the individual existence (Berger, Luckmann 1966: 145-146).

¹¹ Tavris, Aronson 2007: 6.

¹² Haruf 2020: 156-157: “We talked for hours, I had never talked to anyone so much as with her, I told her things I had never told anybody, things I didn’t know I thought before hearing my voice telling her”.

¹³ In *The Constitution of Selves*, Marya Schechtman proposes a narrative approach to personal identity, identifying in the subject’s ability to tell a story that brings coherence to past events, the possibility of self-articulation. This allows the self, in a responsible manner, to justify and give meaning to its actions and values. In this way, even the changes encountered over time – while navigating seemingly irreconcilable and shifting states – can be responsibly and coherently traced back to a self that constructs its identity by integrating past, present, and future experiences.

In giving voice to thought we explicit and unravel the inner meaning of our life experience to make it comprehensible, the words follow in line, meanings are explicit and feed themselves on the need to be heard and shared, thoughts are no more condensed and blurred, they don't move in parallels anymore, but prepare a track in order for the listeners to build the sense together with us (Smorti 2022). In the act of evoking we make a choice, we decide what is relevant and what is not, jumbled memories take on a more rigorous, patterned and consistent form and they inevitably become available for the listener to assimilate them, to make them resound with his inner life, thus building a shared cultural heritage that not only enriches the background of experience of the interlocutor, but also brings our vision of the future onto a common horizon, that is the plan which our present time constantly feeds upon.

So the episodic memory – by analytically keeping track of the specific details of past scenarios that can be useful for the future – and the semantic memory – by allowing us to tackle new situations using our faculty to grasp common properties and general patterns indispensable for comprehension and application in heterogenous contexts¹⁴ – concur to the shaping of the future episodic thought, that is to the simulation and the imagination of possible situations likely to occur in the course of life. Narration is the indispensable tool through which we can bring order in our inner life, we can take hold of our own life, changing even painful events into opportunities to discover our own resources and potentialities, we can re-establish our role as protagonists even in those situations when we felt overwhelmed and a prey to events, we can communicate with others and we can create a common set of experience, share values, rules, meanings, build hypotheses and formulate theories about the surrounding environment in order to significantly plan a future in which the others' presence and the emotional resonance are necessary elements (Brison 2023).¹⁵

¹⁴ According to the “frame” theory by Marvin Minski, the body of our knowledge is not based on single concepts, stored in independent compartments, but is based on connections of “concept clusters” held together by significant connections. This allows us to make sound decisions rapidly when we are confronted with any one of the elements in the framework of reference. “That is what the frame theory consists of: when we are confronted with a new situation we select from our memory a structure we can call frame. It is an acquired framework of reference that has to be adapted to reality, by changing details as needed. A frame is a data structure representing a stereotype situation, such as finding oneself in a certain kind of living room, or going to a children birthday party” (Minski 1987: 81).

¹⁵ However much traumatic events impose a rupture between past and present, often inhibiting the ability to authentically envision a future, the act of bearing witness—restoring meaning to what would otherwise remain inexplicable and incommunicable—makes it possible to process trauma and comprehend the reality that emerges from it. Specifically, in *Aftermath: Violence and Remaking of a Self*, Susan Brison highlights the role of narration in reintegrating painful events into one's personal history. Through autobiographical storytelling, the pain of what has been endured can be transformed into something that can be shared and reworked, allowing

By means of the narrative knowledge the equilibrium with the environment that has been interrupted by traumatic events can be re-established, or a new equilibrium can be built and one's way of being into the world, the way to approach things and to establish significant bonds with others can be reconfigured. The autobiographical Self and the narrative Self, through a retrospective and an introspective reflection, create their own identity, reconciling the need for coherence and recognizability with the dynamic and metamorphic change of the states that the subject goes through at various stages in life, during which he meets everything that is new, different, sometimes bewildering. This allows to always redirect one's actions and planning with the aim of keeping the equilibrium and of fully expressing oneself, which is possible only if we start from the intersubjective link that precedes us and that makes our life significant. The subject, though, is not always able to perform complex cognitive tasks, to communicate and maintain simple interaction, to reflect upon himself and to project into the future, to identify with others, to give a name to the multifarious flow of emotions, to achieve a sensory-motor attunement with the interlocutor, to transform experience into habit so as not to have to start things over all the time. That is the case of people with autism spectrum disorder who, rather than experiencing *about* the world, experience *with* the world being overwhelmed by it, taken into a whirlwind of sensory stimuli without any filter that can keep the effects at bay and dampen the inner bewilderment caused by the ever-continuing input. Any small detail might question the difficult equilibrium, again and again reconfiguring the connections between the self and the environment until a sudden movement, a cry, an over-reaction become necessary to discharge the unbearable tension and re-establish mastery of one's own body. The perception of the self is in fact merged with what is outside the self, subject and object are engaged in a co-compositional dance with the environment, preceding the moment of differentiation, from time to time designing new relations.

Autistic people experience the texture of the world (Manning, Massumi 2013), rather than picking the insurgence of objects functional to the satisfaction of precise needs; the dynamic form fuelling the proto-plasmatic mutability of the experiential field wins over the emerging of affordance.¹⁶ Not to mention the difficulty of grasping the intentions hidden behind the moves, expressions, attitudes of other people, of interpreting their behaviour, their gaze, of decoding all those implicit and embodied elements that make social exchange precious,

individuals to accept their vulnerabilities and reconfigure them as opportunities to rebuild their identity within a social context.

¹⁶ "I have vague recollections of being able to sense the surfaces around me. I have a sketchy sense of having been able to sense the wall and changes in its structure where some parts were more solid than others. I recall sensing this without looking or using touch, changes such as where a door or window broke up or changed the continuity. I recall a sort of 'resonance' with matter, a kind of non-physical body-mapping" (Williams 1998: 37).

all that humorous, sarcastic, metaphorical language, the jokes, the faces, the body language. Also the way autistic people think is extremely concrete, bound to sensory perception (Temple Grandin speaks of visual thought,¹⁷ but according to Acanfora there are also tactile, auditory or synaesthetic forms) and as a consequence their language often maintains the vividness of the bodily sensations it arouses, rather than linearly setting itself to express coherence and make hypotheses about reality. The immediate enjoyment of sensory experience forbids the layering of habits and the consolidation of a functional response to environmental demands; there lacks the introspective attitude that looks back in order to make sense of one's experience of life, and instead we have a persistent excitement in which the Self as body-world¹⁸ constantly perceives everything that comes across; attention dances with/in/towards the organic and inorganic elements surrounding and pervading the person.

Thus Donna Williams describes her (aesthetic) experience of objects:

Most people perceive objects beyond their grainy, sheeny, reflective, flowing, coloured or opaque appearances, beyond their smooth, raspy, cold, textured tactile experience, beyond the sounds of their chinking, thud-thud, tap-tap surfaces when impacted upon, their sweet, or savoury or chemical tastes or smells, their flexibility, solidness or bounce when bitten into or impacted upon. Most people experience the object before the art of it (Williams 1998: 14).

The immediacy of the experiential field with which an intensive relation is established does not allow the distancing which is necessary to condense experience into useful rules to face future situations. Rather than deducing common patterns from heterogeneous experience people with neurodiversity tend to make photorealistic images of their experience overlap, without being able to generalize or to transfer into different contexts the information they acquire. And yet autistic people show a remarkable attitude to classification and systematization, by means of which they get their bearings in the chaotic multiplicity of daily experience and direct their thought and action more functionally, precisely by deducting the repetitiveness of general patterns (if-and-then) that can detect deviation from a norm, looking for some coherence that will allow the construction of an orderly image of the world (Baron-Cohen 2020). Also the ability to recognize emotions (cognitive empathy) and to adequately

¹⁷ Grandin 1995.

¹⁸ "Perhaps the feeling comes from a time before words, before thought, before interpretation, before competition, before reliance on the conscious mind and before identity, in a time when all new experiences are equal in their worth and there is, as yet, no discrimination and no established sense of boundaries or hierarchy. This is a time when, without boundaries or restriction, one *is* "the whole world" and everything experienced of that world *is* an indistinguishable and resonant part of one's self with no need to explore it as a separate entity" (Williams 1998: 12).

respond, to formulate a moral concept and to express social evaluation appears to be hampered when there is a deficit in the theory of mind and in the mirror neurons, while the affective dimension of empathy remains unaffected but essentially devoted to environmental elements and to animals, that are simpler to decode especially in the essentially physical dimension of their perception. Autistic subjects appear to show mostly background feelings such as tension/relaxation, stability/instability, energy/fatigue, fundamentally tuning with the atmosphere they perceive in the surrounding environment, while, as regards other people, they can recognize primary and universal emotions, being very difficult for them to decipher secondary or social emotions. The difficulty lies in the inability to feel emotions as mental private experience (feelings), to consciously elaborate them and to refer them to themselves. In order to do so, in fact, consciousness should become extended, auto-noetic, and not remain nuclear (based on background emotions such as ease/unease, wellbeing/awkwardness), it should be able to enter a relation with others based on the maturity of the autobiographical Self, it should reflect on one's own life both introspectively and retrospectively, it should be conscious of one's emotions and elevate them from mere chemical and neural response to consciously self-referred feelings,¹⁹ it should specify emotional shades, letting them come to the fore as distinct, conscious feeling in contrast with the undefined emotional background.

An altered functioning of the Default Mode Network – the wide area of reciprocal interaction among various brain structures (medial prefrontal cortex, posterior cingulate and inferior-parietal cortex, and hippocampus) – in subjects with ASD²⁰ appears to hamper not only the ability to reflect on one's own autobiographical experience, on one's emotions and feelings, on the ability to distinctly remember one's past and to plan the future (episodic memory and narration comprehension) by projecting the image of the self and finalizing its fulfilment, but it also hampers narrative production, inventiveness, imagination, fictional play, identification and empathic abilities, creativity, in short all of those faculties that underlie the activity of storytelling. The narrating mind, as we have seen, can give explanations for facts and can formulate hypotheses about reality, it can give an order to experience, and is mostly activated when the mind is at rest, free to wander because not engaged in complex tasks (excluding those regarding social memory or self-narration), we might say when we daydream and recall past experiences in order to acquire greater awareness and relational competences. But people with ASD struggle to make a physical or existential description of themselves, to imagine themselves in the future,

¹⁹ “In order to have knowledge and consciousness, we must “connect” and “refer” objects and processes to our organism – to ourselves. We must establish our organism as the supervisor of the objects of processes” (Damasio 2021: 141).

²⁰ See Murdaugh, Shinkareva *et al.* (2012), and Washington, Gordon *et al.* (2013).

to recall memories of the past, to grasp what is socially maintained right or wrong, desirable or despicable, convenient or inconvenient in relation to diverse contexts. It is just when one has to face the procedural and dynamic situations of daily life that stories acquire fundamental value: the aesthetic experience of the narration allows a safe-distance identification with characters involved in ambiguous, unpredictable, obscure, nonsensical situations. Through the narration of other people's stories in verbal or iconic form, people with ASD can experience storytelling, by means of scripts in a linear and sequential cause-and-effect format, improving the management of everyday situations and the identification, almost algorithmic, of the meaning of the emotions and intentions underlying thoughts, beliefs, actions.

Social stories, comic stripes, computer-based or CAA stories (i.e. Emotiplay) offer an archive of stories and operational solutions that free the bodily experience from the immediately perceptive aspect, transferring it onto a wider horizon where perception is activated by linguistic experience. Narrative Knowledge has a great impact on self-awareness and improves relational and social competences; social stories (Gray 2010), in particular, clarify the semantic meanings of diverse interpersonal contexts that may prove difficult, and explicit the most relevant expressions in different contexts, so that the subject can feel more confident during interaction.

In the script of social stories there is no finding fault, giving punishment or reward, but, using an impersonal language, the different types of utterance are balanced: a prescriptive utterance (what the child must say or do), or a check (strategies to understand situations and self-monitor one's answers) occurs every 2-5 descriptive (objective description of the situation) and/or perspective utterances (these are used to explicit the other person's point of view, what he feels, how he will react); this will improve comprehension, contextualization, abstraction, and generalization onto wider contexts.

Approaching a conclusion, we may say that on one hand narrative knowledge helps to increase self-awareness, on the other hand it directly impacts on implicit memory creating the conditions for improved performance through verbal or iconic narration of the stories of others. By means of the stories they regain possession of their lives and recognize their peculiarities, as it happens in the autobiographical narration of autistic people like Grandin, Williams and Acanfora²¹ we have already referred to, in which we gain access to the subjective

²¹ "In some instances, thanks to the use of augmented alternative communication (CAA) or smartphones and tablets, even people who were thought to be unable to communicate have started narrating themselves. We have so discovered how the inner life of an autistic person is rich and varied, and that an autistic person can think just like others can, though perceiving the world in a different way. Being finally able to communicate their thoughts, these people tell us about a new world moving at supersonic speed, about smashing sensory stimuli and about the difficulty of following everything without being overwhelmed, [...] I have left the order of my

point of view of those who live a condition of neurodiversity, and we can take a phenomenological perspective that really accounts for the specifications with which they perceive themselves, the others and the world, so as to create the conditions for a really inclusive community, in which everyone may gradually advance towards a complete fulfilment of their potentialities so giving a contribution to everyone's wellbeing, offering alternative ways to experiment life, relations, sensations, encounters.

Quite a different way of conceiving of the Self starts from the fact that self-comprehension and self-knowledge, far from being something you are given once and for all, are something that you must make your own and that you successfully achieve at different degrees. As long as life continues there is no final self-comprehension. And the same can be said of what it means to be a Self. The Self is not a thing, it is not something fixed and immutable, on the contrary, it is something that evolves. It is a result and not a datum. It is something that is achieved through one's plans and actions and cannot therefore be understood independently from self-interpretation. In short, you are not a Self, in the same way you are a living organism, and you haven't got a Self just like you have a heart or a nose (Gallagher, Zahavi 2009, 3rd ed. 2021: 306).

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thoughts so as they arose, on purpose. I didn't bother to try and sort them out or give them an excessively literary form, because they are in fact odd thoughts and recollections. Some chapters will probably appear chaotic, and even this I decided to leave it the way it sprung from my mind, because it may hopefully help to get an idea, however faint of the way of thinking of a person like me, in the same condition as me" (Acanfora 2023: 18-19).

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