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'Whose Story Is It, Anyway?'

Colofon

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De illustraties in deze editie van Splijtstof zijn gemaakt door Dagmar Esselink.

The authors of this edition extend their gratitude to Linde van Schuppen, their teacher and mentor throughout the project. Her commitment to furthering their understanding of narrativity and multiperspectivity has been a driving force. Her kindness has greatly affected their academic journey and enabled their creative perspectives to soar.

This edition is dedicated to her own little storyteller. May this volume be the beginning of countless narratives and help paint the canvas of your journey.

Thank you once again, Linde. Hopefully, this volume can be of great joy to you both.

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SPLIJTSTOF

Editorial

Dear reader,

The edited volume before you is a special edition of *Splijtstof*, the journal belonging to the Faculty of Philosophy, Theology and Religious Studies at Radboud University, Nijmegen. The volume consists of a collection of essays that are the final product of the second-year Philosophy bachelor's course 'Project'.

The purpose of this course is to train the students in research, presentation, writing, and cooperation skills on the basis of an overarching topic. Each student formulates a specific research question related to this topic and writes an essay about it. Peer feedback is a pivotal part of this process. Besides every student's individual effort and contribution resulting in a collection of essays, the students work towards composing an edited volume, which now lies before you.

The volume you are holding is a collection of essays concerning the overarching theme, 'Narrating the World'. This collection was written and produced under the guidance of Dr. Linde van Schuppen. This particular volume (out of a total of eight edited volumes) was selected by a jury to be published by *Splijtstof*. This special issue is the tenth of its kind, and hopefully, many more will come. We hope you enjoy reading it as much as we did.

On behalf of the editorial team,

Sophie Ingle and Charlie Chowdhry

Editors-in-Chief of *Splijtstof*

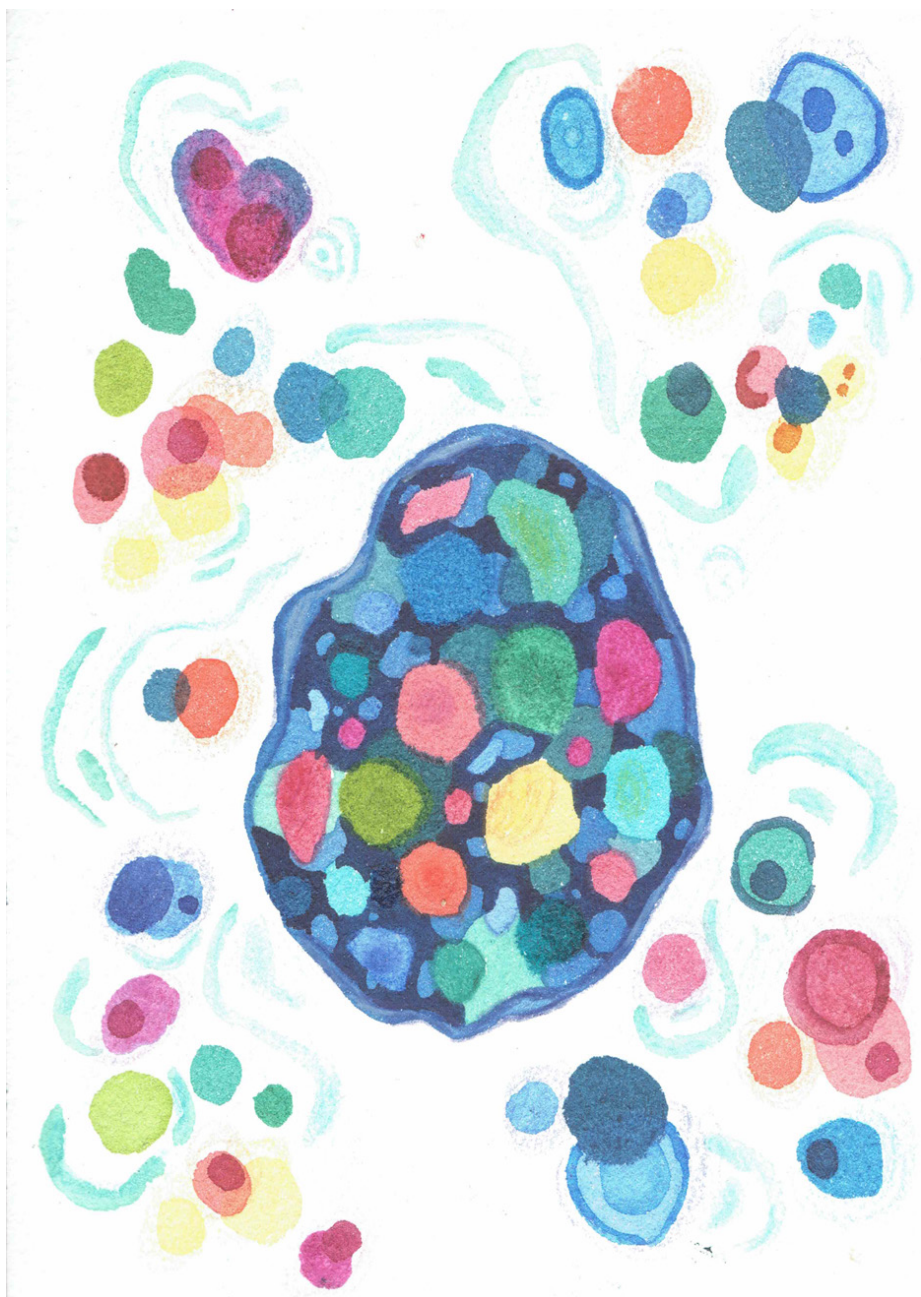
Introduction

Once upon a time, in lands not too far away, I was neglected. I was neglected, and nobody wanted to acknowledge my importance. Luckily, those lonely times have mostly passed, and people have started to see my worth. It took them a long time, considering that I have existed since the existence of thought. I am always there; you cannot get rid of me. I am adaptable, immaterial, intangible. People try to catch me in words to make me understandable. I come in many shapes, but still, I am shapeless. I take many forms, and yet I am formless. Irrespective of what form I embody; I am always myself. I belong to no one in particular, yet everyone claims me as their own, claiming their own view of me as true. I cannot be caught by one person, for I belong to everyone. I cannot be monopolised, individualised, or finalised. I am always shifting, always moving, always changing. I am not only me; I also am a part of you. I am always in your mind's eye, invisible to passersby. Oh, who, oh, what am I? I am everywhere. In all that you see, you also always see me: I am multiperspectivity.

I am in your head right now. You are interpreting, judging, forming your own view of me – your own perspective! And you will not stop, cannot stop when reading this book. A book that entails 11 parts of my identity – 11 narratives about multiperspectivity. Throughout this book, you will discover narratives in the form of tellings, discourses, interpretations, explanations, and many more. Hence, there are various ways to lay out narrativity. But what they all share is that they are a spoken or written account of connected events. They are accounts of the world told from people's perspectives. The stories, used interchangeably with narratives, are all equally important to get the full picture of my persona. I exist in the blank, white, empty space between the lines of the stories people tell each other. I am found in the margins, the voices, and the written words. I am influenced by people's backgrounds, memories, and worldviews. I decide what events, emotions, or conversations are kept in a story and which ones are consciously or subconsciously left out. Where there is storytelling, and where there are narratives, there are different perspectives from which these stories are told, how they are received, and how they are passed on to others. They are told and retold, over and over again.

As you can tell, I am endlessly important. That is why I am scared to relive the old days. I do not want people to take me for granted, to make me invisible, unconscious. I do not want to be claimed, put in a box, and monopolised. I do not want to be misunderstood, unheard, and excluded. I am multiple, I am broad, and I am equal in all my shapes and sizes. When I look in the mirror, that is what I see.

The following 11 stories reflect this part of my innermost self. This collection of stories can be read as my autobiography. The biography of multiperspectivity reveals what makes me what I am: multiplicity. But after all, this is only 11 ways to look at it!



The Story of Interpretation

Dagmar Esselink

In this little autobiography, the first concept we will be discovering is interpretation, or, in other words, hermeneutics. I am starting with this as interpretation is always and everywhere present, just like me! I learned this from Dagmar Esselink, who discovered hermeneutics and its application to narratives on the basis of the philosophers Susan Sontag and Hanna Meretoja. Despite an alleged contradiction within their respective theories on hermeneutics, Dagmar found a way to reconcile them. Essentially, she reveals how everybody is constantly making meaning of the world through hermeneutics and narratives. This is where I appear! Interpretations of certain stories are always done from a certain perspective and can, therefore, differ depending on the viewpoint. Thus, let us discover my first form: hermeneutics.

Narratives are everywhere and are always being written. How do we understand these narratives, and how do we understand the world? One could argue that narratives are the way we interpret the world. When I look at my desk, for example, I recognise it as *my* desk, I might think back to the many times I have sat at it and worked on deadlines until late at night. Somebody else might look at my desk and recognise it as *a* desk, maybe one they have seen in an IKEA catalogue. We both see the same desk, but because we have a different background with it, we look at it in a different way. This is the process of interpreting. Hans-Georg Gadamer calls this *hermeneutics* (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy 2022).

Now, what does this have to do with narratives? Well, Jens Brockmeier and Hanna Meretoja argue in their article, 'Understanding Narrative Hermeneutics' (2014, 1–27), that a narrative is always essentially a hermeneutic process. Narratives are made up of our interpretations of the world, they help us make sense of our environment (2). I will later argue that the process of interpretation is always a narrative.

However, the philosophy of Susan Sontag poses a challenge to Brockmeier and Meretoja's theory. She argues in *Against Interpretation* that we should refrain from consciously interpreting (Sontag 1964, 13–14). Hanna Meretoja directly opposes Sontag by saying that interpretation is not a conscious choice and is not something we should, or could, refrain from (Meretoja 2018, 44). In this paper, I will try to reconcile the views of Hanna Meretoja and Susan Sontag, using narrative and perspective as key concepts, by arguing that not only is a narrative always hermeneutic, but hermeneutics are also always a narrative.

First, I will define my two main terms: Narrative and hermeneutics. Then, I will present the philosophies of both Susan Sontag and Hanna Meretoja. I will relate the two to each other and explain my theory in depth. To make my theory more concrete, I will relate it to a specific example, using *A Swim in a Pond in the Rain* (2022) by George Saunders. Then, I will go over a potential counterargument one could pose and, in turn, refute it. This counterargument will show the importance of narrative in my theorisation. I will also use a definition of narrative to support my arguments and show the importance of my theorisation.

Definitions

First, it will be useful to give clear definitions for both the terms ‘hermeneutics’ and ‘narrative’, as I will be using these terms excessively. For my definition of hermeneutics, I will refer back to Hans-Georg Gadamer, one of the philosophers who developed the term in the form I will be using (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy 2022). Hermeneutics can be simply defined as ‘interpretation’, but that does not quite encapsulate what Gadamer is talking about. We are always understanding, that is to say, forming an understanding of the world around us. Central to this understanding are our previous understandings and horizon (Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, n.d.). We already have many beliefs and ideas about the things we encounter in the world. These previous judgements shape our present understanding (Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, n.d.). When we read a book, we know what the words mean because we have seen them countless times before. We recognise them and use them to interpret the new combination of words in front of us. Without previous understandings, we cannot understand. Everybody has their own, slightly different (or wildly different) personal history. This framework of understandings, as well as our place in history, Gadamer calls a horizon. Our specific place in the world, which determines our horizon, is vital for how we understand the world. So, in short, we all understand and interpret the world differently. This process of interpretation is hermeneutics (Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, n.d.).

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Secondly, it is important to clearly define the term ‘narrative’, as we need to know what does and what does not qualify as a narrative, before we go on. I use the definition of narrative as a specific event happening to specific people in a specific place and at a specific time (Berman and Nir-Sagiv 2007, 79-120). A narrative requires a subject, somebody experiencing the events

of the story. A recipe, for example, is not a narrative. The recipe does not specify who is making the cake; the instructions could apply to anybody at any point in time. If the recipe has a long story at the start about how this cake was the favourite of the author's grandma, however, then that part of the recipe would be a narrative because it is about specific people. Now, we can move on to the rest of the paper, with common definitions of 'narrative' and 'hermeneutics'.

Susan Sontag and Hanna Meretoja: The Disagreement

In *Against Interpretation* (1964), Susan Sontag argues for an erotics of art instead of an interpretation of art. She argues that when we interpret, we view an artwork as its content instead of its form (Sontag 1964, 11). We assume that every artwork *has* a content, some sort of deeper meaning. Art is thus viewed as if the artist wanted to convey a message that we, as the viewer, must decipher. Sontag sees interpretation as translating art. When we interpret, we decide that what is there is actually something else (11). Interpretation expresses some sort of disagreement with the artwork. You do not understand or do not like what you see, so you decide it is, in fact, something else, something you do like or understand (12). Interpretation reduces art to something we can understand. Sontag argues that interpretation changes art, making it but a shadow of its original form. (14). She does, however, point out that with 'interpretation', she means a conscious process. "Of course, I don't mean interpretation in the broadest sense, the sense in which Nietzsche (rightly) says, 'There are no facts, only interpretations.' By interpretation, I mean here a conscious act of the mind which illustrates a certain code, certain "rules" of interpretation" (11). So, she does not criticise the constant, subconscious way we interpret the world in order to understand it. It is only the conscious process of interpretation we can, and should, refrain from.

Hanna Meretoja has responded to this distinction that Sontag makes between conscious and subconscious interpretation. In *The Ethics of Storytelling*, Meretoja writes:

The starting point of the hermeneutic approach is that interpretation is something that we do all the time, whether we like it or not. We always orient ourselves to the world in a certain way, and in doing so we interpret and bestow meaning on it. According to this broad conception, interpretation is not (...) a "conscious act of the mind", but rather part of the automatized interpretative practices that largely escape our awareness. (Meretoja 2018, 44)

She protests the existence of a distinct conscious interpretation and argues that all interpretation is, in a way, subconscious. She does not argue that we cannot consciously choose to interpret, but she posits that this conscious interpretation always has a subconscious interpretation tied into it. The two cannot be seen as entirely separate, as Sontag views them (Meretoja 2018, 44).

In *Understanding Narrative Hermeneutics*, Hanna Meretoja, together with Jens Brockmeier, argues that a narrative is a hermeneutics practice: it is a way of meaning-making (Brockmeier and Meretoja 2014, 2). We try to understand the world and ourselves through a narrative – that is how we interpret the world. They argue that the process of understanding the world that is central to hermeneutics takes the form of narrative (2). According to narrative hermeneutics, a narrative is a subject, trying to give meaning to their life (4). A narrative is a method of understanding and thus is hermeneutic.

A Solution and its Consequences

Regarding hermeneutics, the views of Hanna Meretoja (and Jens Brockmeier) seem irreconcilable with the views of Susan Sontag. I, however, will try to reconcile the two seemingly opposing views and show how they can be applied to each other. Let's say we agree with Meretoja and Brockmeier's theory of narrative hermeneutics. Hermeneutics take the form of a narrative, and a narrative is a way of interpreting the world. If this is the case, then to interpret a narrative is to interpret an interpretation because narratives are hermeneutic. So, when we interpret a narrative, we change that narrative into a new narrative, a new interpretation. This consequence of narrative hermeneutics co-insides exactly with Sontag, who argues that to interpret something is to change it into something else. So, we can agree with Meretoja and still get an outcome that would be agreeable to Sontag. The two views do, however, still have differences. While Sontag thinks this changing of narratives is avoidable, Meretoja argues it is unavoidable. There is, however, a silent agreement hidden in their philosophies.

While Sontag thinks this changing of narratives is avoidable, Meretoja argues it is unavoidable. There is, however, a silent agreement hidden in their philosophies.

To further explain my theory, I will illustrate it with an example. I will be using *A Swim in a Pond in the Rain* (2022) by George Saunders, in which he analyses several Russian short stories. In this book, Saunders takes the reader by the hand to interpret and analyse these stories. Let us take the

following example: In the first short story, a road is described to be sunny, *but* there is still snow. It is spring, *but* not yet warm. (Saunders 2022, 15). Saunders interprets these sentences as meaning ‘the conditions of happiness are present, *but* happiness is not’. Susan Sontag would say that there are two different kinds of hermeneutics hidden in this example. There is a simple, subconscious understanding of the words: we know what ‘sun’ and ‘snow’ mean; we can understand the text. The second kind, conscious hermeneutics, says that there is some other meaning to the use of the word ‘*but*’. Saunders argues that the author of the story says one thing – there is sun but also snow – but means another: there could be happiness, but there is not. Sontag sees these two types of hermeneutics as inherently different from one another, and she disapproves of the second kind.

Meretoja, on the other hand, would say that there is no such distinction and that we cannot help but make interpretations such as ‘there could be happiness, but there is not’. She would also argue that such an interpretation is a new narrative in itself. So, the narrative is ‘there is sun but also snow’, and our interpretation is ‘there could be happiness, but there is not’. This interpretation is a new narrative, one that is different from the original. So, by interpreting the sentence, we change it into something else, according to Meretoja. This is exactly the point Sontag makes in *Against Interpretation*. Thus, this example illustrates clearly that there is a common ground where Meretoja and Sontag agree.

A Counterargument and Refutation

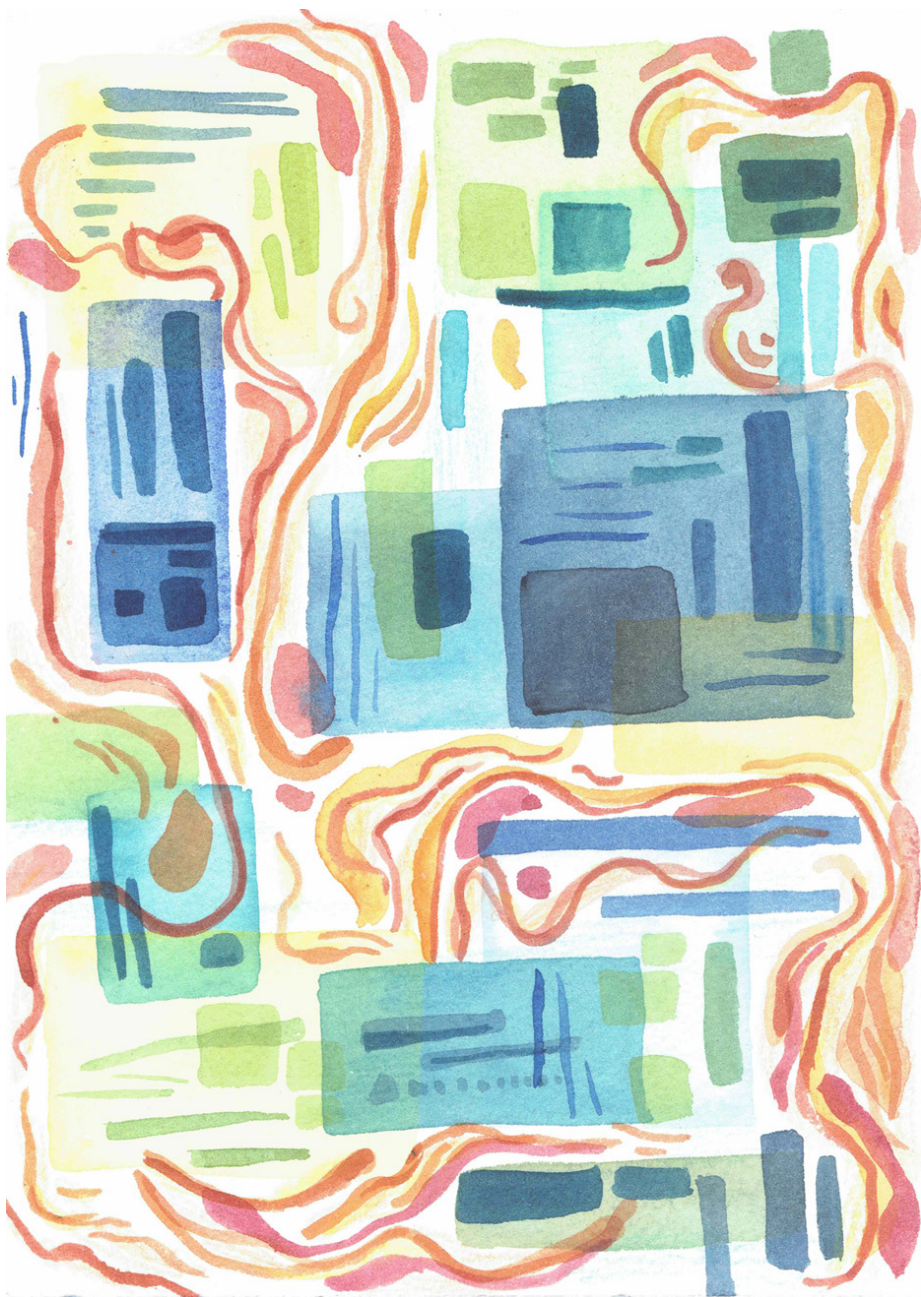
There is, however, a counterargument one could pose to my theory. The counterargument is that I make the assumption that hermeneutics are always in the form of a narrative. One could argue that just because narratives are always hermeneutic, that does not mean that every way of interpretation is in the form of a narrative. It would be like saying that, because all dogs are animals, all animals must be dogs. This is clearly incorrect reasoning, and because this assumption is so vital to my theory, it has no merit without it. I can, however, refute this counterargument and, in turn, defend my claim. By referring back to the definition of narrative I am using, I can argue the following: A narrative always exists of a specific person in a specific time and place, experiencing specific events. Hermeneutics are our interpretation of our experiences, based on our specific previous understandings of the world. So, when we interpret, we essentially create a narrative. I (a specific person) am, by understanding the world, creating a narrative of my specific understanding in the world. In short, the theory of hermeneutics fits in exactly with the definition of narrative. So, I can, in fact, say that hermeneutics are always a narrative, which invalidates this counterargument.

This all, however, leaves us with the question of whether we *should* want to constantly change narratives into new narratives. Do we even have a choice? I have just argued that, if we believe Meretoja, we do not. Sontag would, however, argue we do have a choice and we should very much choose not to change narratives. So even if both Sontag and Meretoja would agree that to interpret a narrative is to change it, they still would not agree on whether we have a choice to do so. Where does this leave us? Are we stuck in a loop of interpreting narratives, or is there a way out? I will leave you with this question for now: can we ever avoid interpreting?

Conclusion

To conclude, there is an unexpected agreement hidden in the seemingly opposing theories of Hanna Meretoja and Susan Sontag regarding hermeneutics and narrative. I have shown that both Meretoja and Sontag would agree that to interpret a narrative is to change it into a new narrative. To show this, I have first defined the terms narrative and hermeneutics. I have explained both Sontag's theory and that of Hanna Meretoja, as well as shown where their disagreement lies. Following this, I posited a theory which shows a hidden agreement between the two. When we agree with Meretoja and say that narratives are always hermeneutic, we could argue that when we interpret a narrative, we change it into a new narrative because the interpretation is a narrative in itself. That means that, according to Meretoja, to interpret a narrative is to change it. This corresponds with Sontag, who argues that to interpret is to change. I have thus shown an unexpected agreement between the two. I have further explained this theory with the help of *A Swim in a Pond in the Rain* (Saunders 2022). Lastly, I have refuted a potential counterargument with the help of my definition of narrative. Hermeneutics are always narratives because narratives, just like hermeneutics, always take place in a specific context. There are, however, still unanswered questions I will leave you with. Will we ever be able to break free from constantly interpreting narratives and changing them into a new narrative? But the answer to that question is a whole other story.

SPLIJTSTOF



Creating the Parkour Perspective

How Narratives Influence Affordances

Lucas Henry

Continuing on this road of hermeneutics and interpretation, I came across Lucas Henry. He uses interpretation differently from Dagmar. I do not merely appear in different forms regarding perspectives of the world, but also in different views of architecture, the city and people's environments. One can view architectural structures as functional buildings, but also as apparatuses for tricks; as structures that constitute parkour. Parkourists take these same structures and reinterpret them, introducing new meanings and uses for walls, handrails, benches, stairs, trees, and many other features of urban environments. To perceive affordances, possibilities of action offered by our environment, it is necessary to interpret sensory input in culturally established meaningful terms. Whatever your view on buildings and architecture might be, I am sure your perspective will change after having read this next story.

“We’ve always laughed at the fact that inanimate objects like walls and lampposts can give people like us hours and hours of joy and essentially like purpose in life. [An object] that a builder assumes is going to have a single use is used for something so positive, so meaningful to us.” — Toby Segar, professional parkour athlete. (Storror 2023a)

Life is determined by what you can do. If you are locked in a jail cell your entire life, it is likely you will go insane because your possibilities of action are so very limited. However, it is possible to create new actions in spaces that were not intended there. Even in a jail cell, you can exercise, do push-ups, handstands, squats, and so on. You can be creative, sing, dance, draw in the dust, philosophize, or help other inmates cope with the situation. So the ability to create possibilities of action opens up possibilities of life, meaning and value, possibilities for joy and well-being. Does the jail cell limit your opportunities? Or can you create opportunities for action despite being locked up? The answer to both questions is yes. It all depends on the perspective towards the environment you take; it depends on the story you tell yourself about your imprisonment.

The opportunities for action we perceive in our environment are described by the term ‘affordances’, a term coined by the ecological psychologist James J. Gibson (1986). It is used to conceptualize the relationship between an organism and its environment, claiming that we perceive possibilities for action directly when the features of our surroundings match our abilities. There is a lot of literature on affordances and how the concept

allows us to understand dynamic interactions between individuals and the environment. However, processes that lead to affordance creation and the factors influencing affordance perception of an organism are topics that are underexplored. This paper will point out the important role narratives play in influencing which affordances are perceived. This will be done from the standpoint of narrative hermeneutics, following Brockmeier and Meretoja (2014), who claim that our understanding of the world is mediated through culturally established signs and symbols, or certain vocabularies, that let us create meaning. In essence, this paper will discuss the role of narratives in influencing affordances, aiming to answer the question of how affordances are influenced by narratives in the context of parkour.

Parkourists operate at the limit of what is possible for them, always seeking to increase their abilities to perceive and complete new movement challenges.

Parkour is a suitable case study on the creation of affordances for several reasons. First, even though parkour was initially described as the most efficient way of getting from point A to B, parkourists nowadays tend to find the most challenging or most aesthetically pleasing way of moving through a space. Therefore, parkourists operate at the limit of what is possible for them, always seeking to increase their abilities to perceive and complete new movement challenges. Second, parkour is inherently creative. There are no rules or limitations on what you can do within parkour, it is entirely dependent on what the practitioner deems worthy of doing. It relies on the creation of affordances. Third, parkour has a very close relationship to the environment in which it is trained. The features of the place where parkour is done, which is called a 'spot', determine the possibilities for affordance creation. Fourth, there are many narratives surrounding parkour. Aside from stories parkourists tell each other face to face, most narratives are found on the internet. This is where parkourists share their movement, inspire each other and create stories about their training days. Most parkourists cite videos on the internet when asked how they initially learned about parkour. The importance of social media outlets like YouTube for creating parkour culture, including narratives about their training practices, can hardly be understated. Lastly, parkour creates a unique perspective of a city; one could even call it a counter-perspective. It entails perceiving the environment from a different point of view, seeing affordances where they were not intended, and framing the city in a new perspective so as to create

as many movement affordances as possible. This alternative perspective necessary for parkour is communicated through narratives to broaden the practitioners' horizons of which movements are possible.

Narratives, in this context, are established by the unfolding of information, through which "a precise time line is established through the telling, made up of discrete moments at which some instantaneous occurrence took place in the 'world' created through the narration" (Polanyi 1982, 510). Following Brockmeier and Meretoja (2014), this paper will "conceptualize narrative in terms of a subject who strives to give meaning to his or her experiences" (4), thereby relating the subject to the socio-cultural and historical context in which it is situated. Furthermore, I will take the standpoint of modern hermeneutics, which states that human understanding is mediated through sociocultural circumstances, history and language.

To answer the question of how affordances are influenced by narratives in the context of parkour, this paper will begin by discussing the original formulation of the concept by Gibson and incorporating two important additions made to the conceptualization of affordances. Further, the creation of affordances in parkour will be addressed, investigating how narratives influence parkourists' motivation to practice the sport, how their processing and interpretation of the environment is shaped, and how parkour culture creates conceptions of possible movements. Finally, I will conclude that narratives play an important role in affordance creation.

Affordance Theory

James J. Gibson's (1986) theory of affordances, articulated in his seminal work, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception* (Gibson 1986), presents a departure from traditional cognitive paradigms by shifting the focus towards the dynamic relationship between individuals and their environment. Affordances, according to Gibson, are the inherent action possibilities that the environment offers to an organism. This conceptual framework underscores the inseparable link between perception and action, suggesting that organisms directly perceive affordances in their surroundings. Gibson's theory emphasizes active engagement with the environment, where the characteristics and abilities of the organism need to be complementary to features in the environment for affordances to arise. In this context, affordances become a fundamental aspect of embodied cognition, describing how perception is a means of extracting information for guiding purposeful actions and interactions with the organism's surroundings.

Gibson inspired the creation of the field of ecological psychology, and there has been some discussion on the specific formulation of the concept of affordances. Important to this paper is the distinction between two kinds

of affordances made by Scarantino (2003, 958): goal-affordances and happening-affordances. While the former are manifested by an organism doing something to achieve a goal, the latter are not under intentional control (Scarantino 2003, 958). In the context of parkour, a wall, for example, affords jumping-to (goal-affordance) as well as falling-off (happening-affordance). For this paper, the main focus will be on goal-affordances, since these are influenced by the individuals' intentions, desires, beliefs, and goals in general, whereas happening-affordances are relevant only in relation to goal-affordances, e.g., the relevance of the possibility of falling off the wall is only given when one has the goal of being on the wall.

In order to perceive an affordance, one needs goals that relate to the affordance, perception that interprets environmental features in meaningful ways, and an idea of what actions can be done in that environment.

The important aspect to keep in mind in the following discussion of influences on affordance perception, then, is the necessity for goals to be present for perceiving goal-affordances. Since affordance perception is direct, the influencing factors that made the affordances come to be will already have been present in the relationship between environment and the organism at the time the affordance is perceived. To give an example: an agent perceiving the affordance of climbability will already have a specific kind of interpretation of their environment to perceive climbable things, an idea of what makes something climbable for them, and a goal of some sort that motivates interpreting objects as climbable. Generally speaking, in order to perceive an affordance, one needs goals that relate to the affordance, perception that interprets environmental features in meaningful ways, and an idea of what actions can be done in that environment.

Another relevant aspect is the dependence of affordances on the skills and abilities the organism possesses (Rietveld and Kiverstein 2014). Since, for example, a parkourist can only perceive the affordance of jumping onto a wall when their leg power and technique are greater than needed to clear the height of the wall, it is necessary to examine how the skills and abilities came to be in order to understand the process of affordance creation. In parkour, both physical abilities and mental processes need to be trained so that the practitioner has the power, speed, technique, fear management skills, creativity, discipline, knowledge of, and belief in, their capabilities, and many other skills that are needed to complete the movement challenges

they want to achieve. The next section will delve into the reasons behind engaging in physical training and explore the factors that influence the mental processes of parkourists.

Influences of Narratives on Affordances

Affordances are perceived directly. However, it is necessary for both the environment and the organism to have complementary characteristics. This is so that the individual has the necessary perspective on the environment to perceive the specific affordances. For a pen to afford someone to write, for example, the person needs to have the ability to write. The development of this ability depends on the idea and motivation to perform the action in question, which depends on the individual having a conception of the meaning and value of the action. Additionally, it is necessary to interpret the physical characteristics of the object in the terms relevant to the meaning of the action. For example, the idea that humans write, which is useful to communicate, contributes to the motivation of learning to write, and motivates interpretation of a pen in terms of it affording writing-with.

This process, which is necessary for affordance perception takes place in a socio-cultural environment, where the individual learns to associate specific ideas with certain objects. A particularly effective way of communicating about action possibilities is telling stories. Narratives allow people to identify themselves with the characters in the story, engage with them emotionally, try out different perspectives, and acquire second-hand experiences, broadening our conceptions of possible actions (Hamby et. al. 2017; Fisher et. al. 2012). When forming an understanding of the world, people draw on these experiences, ideas, perspectives, and conceptions and blend them together with their own experiences. As Brockmeier and Meretoja put it: “We always encounter the present moment within the horizon of experience shaped by our past experiences and by the cultural traditions and forms of life in which we have become who we are” (Brockmeier and Meretoja 2014, 4). Therefore, narratives have the power to change our understanding of the world and, therefore, also the ideas, goals, and interpretations we have about the world.

In the context of parkour, how narratives influence affordance creation depends, first of all, on how practitioners’ understanding of their environments is shaped by their goals, i.e., their motivation for doing parkour.

Goals: Motivation for Parkour

When parkourists give accounts about what got them into parkour, the initial source of inspiration is often that they saw a parkour video, either online or in more traditional media sources (Kidder 2017, 49). In people susceptible to

these influences, the narratives presented in parkour videos can inspire awe and a wish to engage in the activity themselves. First, there is some sort of fascination because of the impressive nature of the movements performed. Second, parkourists-to-be get the idea that they themselves could or should try this kind of movement because they are excited to try this new way of interacting with the environment, which has always been there but gets new meaning when considered in the context of parkour. Thus, narratives present in parkour videos generate motivation for trying parkour.

However, the reason why many parkourists continue to pursue the sport is the flow state they experience when practicing parkour. When the movement they are envisioning is at the limit of their abilities, mental or physical, it becomes a challenge. Completion of this challenge requires mental control over bodily actions, focusing on the interaction between their embodied selves and the structures they are utilizing. Practitioners describe this as synchronization of mind and body, as ultimate self-awareness, intense focus, succumbing to instincts or even as a spiritual experience (Kidder 2017, 57). In this flow state, the affordances are internalized, and the envisioned actions seem to exist before completion. These kinds of experiences can be witnessed by consumers of parkour videos, and the positive narration thereof can contribute to the viewers' attraction to the sport.

Parkourists experience completing challenges as instances of personal efficacy, as having the agency to confront difficult situations and, given they put enough effort into it, can achieve their goals.

In the moment of realizing the envisioned movements, the previously perceived affordances become actualized, and, given success, the challenge can be understood as completed. In narrative form, the parkourist can tell the story about how they saw the challenge (affordance), prepared for it, tried it, and completed it, giving them a sense of personal accomplishment and growth. As a result, the feelings associated with this process are mostly positive, given that the challenge is adequately chosen and completed. A narrative interpretation of such a process could look something like this:

'I saw this move on Instagram, and it was so cool that I wanted to try it. I had to search for a while to find a spot where it was possible, and once I found one, the fear really got to me and it seemed like it was impossible to accomplish. But then I spent a while preparing, and that helped a lot with the mental battle, so when I went back to the spot, it looked like I could do it. I

went through the movements once more in my head, trusted my abilities and preparation, and then tried it with full commitment. I didn't get it quite like I wanted on the first try, but the mental block was broken, so I tried it another few times until I got it perfect.'

In short, parkourists experience completing challenges as instances of personal efficacy, as having the agency to confront difficult situations and, given they put enough effort into it, can achieve their goals. This can become a quasi-addictive feeling, which motivates parkourists to seek out new challenges, to create affordances in other places and to seek out narratives that let them understand their actions in such a positive story of self-realization.

With some variations, this process of achieving success at the limit of your capabilities can be found in other sports as well. What is unique to parkour, however, is the reinterpretation of ordinary objects and structures in terms of affordances for unassisted movement. But how does this reinterpretation from a parkour perspective take place?

Interpretations: Perception of the Environment from a Parkour Perspective

Features of a designed environment, like most cities, have certain meanings due to the fact that they were built for a specific purpose. Understanding the world, as a hermeneutic process (Brockmeier and Meretoja 2014, 11), is continually involved in selecting features of the environment contained in sensory input and interpreting these relevant features in certain vocabularies, signs, and symbols that express and convey meaning to ourselves and others. Perception, as described by the neuroscientist Andrew Huberman (2021), is the "ability to take what we're sensing and focus on it and make sense of it" (17:32). In the context of parkour, perception is meaningful because of the affordances it reveals to the perceiver. While a non-parkourist might receive the same sensory stimuli, the interpretation from a parkour perspective changes what features are attended to, creating different affordances. When parkourists perceive a wall, for example, they receive the same sensory input as a non-practitioner but interpret the meaning of the wall from the perspective of what actions can be done with it. If the wall affords a jump to it, it is attended to because the interpretation reveals the affordance of a jump that is meaningful. The meaning in this instance can be that it is fun, challenging, impressive, or otherwise worthwhile to do the jump.

Which features of the environment are relevant for meaningful interpretation, and how they are interpreted, is often not individually created but already culturally established. The parkour subculture communicates certain meanings of certain environmental features, which influences

parkourists' experiences of these environmental features, allowing for affordance perception. An example of this is the recent phenomenon of lamppost-slides, which has made an appearance on the parkour scene in the last few years. Previously, it was quite rare to see parkourists interact with lampposts, and when doing so, they mainly did swings around them. Recently, however, the method of jumping from an elevated position to a lamppost and subsequently sliding down it to slow down the fall has become a trend (Di Tomaso 2022; Phat 2023; Storrer 2023b; Verky 2023a; Verky 2023b). As can be seen in this example, the interpretations of lampposts changed due to parkourists consuming videos that showed other athletes performing this move, inspiring many to perceive this affordance as well.

This communicative process takes the form of narratives since parkourists refer to specific events involving specific people taking place at a specific time when describing their practices. In this fashion, culturally established narratives are applied to various contexts, establishing which features of the environment are interpreted and how they are interpreted. In other words, (sub-)cultures create narratives that enable individuals to interpret their sensory experiences within culturally meaningful frameworks. These narratives influence how individuals perceive specific environmental features, shaping their understanding in ways that align with the shared meanings within that particular (sub)culture.

(Sub-)cultures create narratives that enable individuals to interpret their sensory experiences within culturally meaningful frameworks.

Ideas: Cultural Conceptions of Possible Movements

The internet has played an essential role in the development of the sport and cultural phenomenon of parkour, and many of the moves, combinations, variations, and specific utilizations of certain spots done in one place are inspired by people across the globe filming their movements and posting them on social media. This is an instance of what Appadurai (1993) calls global ethnoscares, where local activities are manifestations of a hybrid, globalized culture. Parkourists consuming social media content can lead them to reimagine what is actually possible (Kidder 2017, 47). This “unbounding of thinkable postures” creates new “prisms of the possible lives” showcased by other parkourists on the internet (47).

As shown by the lamppost-slide example in the previous section, the stories parkourists consume inspire them to reimagine what is possible, which affects their perception of affordances to the extent that they can

conceive of certain movements to be afforded by structures in their environments that are similar to the ones in the media they consumed. This is a four-fold process: First, the parkourists perceive certain parkour content, mostly videos. Second, they interpret this content in the form of narrative understanding. Third, they might be inspired to try the movements themselves, for instance, because it fits their narrative self-understanding as a person who likes to try new moves. Fourth, the parkourists perceive certain features in their environment as affording a reinterpretation of the move they have been inspired to do.

Of course, this is a simplification of a process that is much more complex in reality since there are many interrelations with other concepts the parkourist holds, especially an evaluation of their own abilities, and features of the environment that do not match exactly. However, this is part of the beauty of parkour because from these complex reinterpretations and applications in different places, times, and by different practitioners, what is created is not a copy of the same move but a new move in a distinct setting. As a result, parkourists, through consuming videos, watching other people do parkour in real life, and through their own training and perception of their abilities, cultivate a sense of what is possible for them. And when this sense matches the environment they are in, affordances are perceived directly.

Conclusion

In examining the relationship between narratives and parkour affordances, it becomes evident that these elements form a dynamic interplay, shaping the way individuals perceive and engage with their environment. As this paper has argued, affordances in parkour, defined as goal-directed perceptions of action possibilities, are influenced by the socio-cultural environment the individual is embedded in. Narratives are especially relevant in this context because of their capacity to inspire goals, convey perspectives that produce particular interpretations, and produce and communicate ideas. In the context of parkour, narratives can produce motivation for the pursuit of particular kinds of movement by inspiring fascination as well as associating positive experiences with parkour.

Furthermore, narratives, as interpretive processes of understanding the world, demonstrate how the environment can be interpreted for movement creation, offering perspectives on how urban structures are reimagined to afford parkour. These kinds of narratives reveal the meanings that can be created in the relationship between agents and their environments, meanings that are expressed in vocabularies, signs, and symbols specific to the parkour subculture. This cultural creation of meanings often takes place on the internet, where parkourists share their movements, inspira-

tions, and ideas, broadening conceptions of possible movements. All in all, these processes highlight the factors relevant to the expansion of perceivable affordances, where the narratives a parkourist is exposed to influence their ideas, goals, and interpretations, thus creating affordances.

SPLIJTSTOF



The Art of Storytelling

The Use of (Counter-)Storytelling in Hip Hop
to Break Dominant Narratives

Maren Nijland

I exist in many such subcultures as parkour. As I already mentioned before, I am not normative and cannot be monopolized by any dominant culture. I have discovered many different sides of me, which are shown through a variety of mediums, such as written tales, videos, or in the melodic form of a song. The genre of music I would like to talk to you about is Hip Hop. I met Maren Nijland in this realm of Hip Hop, where artists aim to convey their experiences and invite their listeners to comprehend their narratives. Consequently, many Hip Hop songs offer an alternative perspective; they present counter-stories that diverge from the mainstream, providing insights from non-dominant viewpoints. They show my multiplicity, telling counter-stories which challenge the dominant narrative, the dominant perspective. These counter-stories challenge those who try to claim me as their own and show that I belong to everyone equally.

“As I get a little older, I realize life is perspective. And my perspective may differ from yours.” – Kendrick Lamar, ‘The Heart Part 5’.

Imagine a party so great that it turns out to be the beginning of a whole new cultural movement and music genre. This is exactly what happened on August 11th, 1973, when Clive Campbell, known as DJ Kool Herc, and his sister Cindy hosted the ‘Back to School Jam’ in the recreation room of their Bronx apartment building at 1520 Sedgwick Avenue (van Gijssel 2023). The party was such a blast that it is now known in history as the origin of Hip Hop. DJ Kool Herc helped develop the rhythmic delivery of rhymes and wordplay performed by ‘Masters of Ceremonies’ (MCs), which resulted in the earliest form of Hip Hop rapping. It would not take long until these short rhymes and chants like ‘Rock on, my mellow!’ and ‘Are you ready? Keep on rock steady!’ started to evolve into lyric poetry and a form of political activism.

Hip Hop songs can take various forms, and although not all of them adhere to a narrative structure, many do present a narrative. This means that these songs present a discourse in which a precise timeline is established through storytelling, made up of discrete moments at which some instantaneous occurrence took place in the world created through narration (Polanyi 1982). In the case of Hip Hop songs, many present discourses which are different from the dominant narratives that shape most of our world(views). Due to storytelling, Hip Hop songs became a tool for (ethnic) minorities living in the South Bronx to unite and express themselves about the hard reality

of living in the ghetto. Narrativity in Hip Hop is useful not only to unite these groups but also to introduce other people to a new perspective on the issues faced by the storytellers and the people who they represent. This way of using storytelling to bring attention to often lesser-known perspectives, shares many similarities with the way in which critical race theorists, like Derrick Bell and Richard Delgado, used 'counter-storytelling'.

This raises an important question: In what sense can the use of (counter-) storytelling in certain Hip Hop songs be used to break dominant narratives? My aim is to see if narratives in Hip Hop can have a persuasive effect and if these songs are able to dislodge dominant narratives concerning stereotypes and racism against ethnic minorities. Or, does it, due to the large use of violent storytelling as well, achieve the opposite and strengthen the stereotypical picture of these minorities in dominant narratives? Is there a reason why storytelling in Hip Hop is so violent in many cases? Is this violent storytelling a powerful tool that makes the narratives even more persuasive for its listeners?

Narrative Persuasion

Narratives often evoke emotional experiences which can significantly impact our attitude, perception and behaviour. Thus, a narrative has the power to persuade its reader, listener, viewer or any recipient of narrative information. Persuasion is the typical operationalization of changes in attitudes or behavioural intentions (Ooms et al. 2019). When persuasion takes place through a narrative, people get 'transported' into the story. Following Green and Brock (2000), this transportation is defined as "a convergent process, where all mental systems and capacities become focused on events occurring in the narrative" (701). When transportation occurs, individuals become engrossed in the narrative, losing awareness of their surroundings and becoming emotionally involved in the story. This experience can make the message that the story tells more memorable and impactful. Transportation may also reduce negative cognitive responses. This means that the listeners may be less likely to disbelieve the story claims, and thus, their preexisting beliefs might change or get influenced in some way. Under high transportation, having a strong (single) focus on the narrative, the listener may be temporarily distanced from current and previous schemas and experiences (702).

When people find themselves identifying with the story or its protagonist, transportation can be even stronger. Identification does not necessarily mean similarity. Rather, it is "a process whereby a viewer or reader experiences the narrative from the inside, whereas perceived similarity involves the viewer or reader acting as an external observer to the narrative, thus

from the outside” (Ooms et al. 2019). Moreover, a story often unfolds with some degree of suspense: what situation might next befall a protagonist is not always clear and can be unpredictable. Specific messages hidden in a narrative might not be apparent until it is too late. Thus, narratives may be suited to change (strong) attitudes because they fall ‘under the radar’ of our efforts to protect these attitudes (Dal Cin et al. 2004).

According to Dal Cin et al. (2004), one positive effect of narrative persuasion is the role that it plays in overcoming resistance: “people’s motivated effort to defend an attitude against change” (176). They suggest that narratives can be a useful strategy in challenging quite fierce and confident attitudes that people hold. They furthermore hold two general means for their argument. The first one, similar to Green and Brock (2000), is that narratives may overcome resistance by reducing the amount and effectiveness of counterarguing or logical consideration of the message. Second, they may overcome resistance by increasing identification with the characters in the story (Dal Cin et al. 2004, 177). Most importantly, to the extent that individuals are absorbed into a story or transported into a narrative world, they may show the effects of the story on their real-world beliefs (Green and Brock 2000).

Narrative Persuasion through Rhythms and Rhymes

Hip Hop, at its root, is narrative in form; the best, most recognizable hip-hop artists use storytelling as their most fundamental communicative method. (Cummings 2015, 324)

Hip Hop culture consists of at least four fundamental elements: Disc jockeying (DJing), break dancing (whereby breakdancers were often referred to as B-Boys and B-girls), graffiti art, and a rhythmic delivery of poetic speech: rapping (emceeing) (Alridge and Stewart 2005, 190). In the late 1970s, Hip Hop transitioned from being a form of live performing at parties and street gatherings in the South Bronx to being recorded on the music market. The release of recordings like ‘Rapper’s Delight’ by The Sugarhill Gang in 1979 and ‘The Message’ by Grandmaster Flash and The Furious Five in 1982 brought Hip Hop to a much wider audience.

Focusing on the last element of Hip Hop, rapping, Hip Hop songs are a form of public narrative which predominates over public advocacy: novels, films, music lyrics, and stories in the news magazines or on TV and radio command far more attention from most people than do advertisements, sermons, editorials, billboards, and so forth. Thus, a public narrative created by a music genre such as Hip Hop tends to have a higher persuasive effect

than rhetorical narratives. Public narratives, while often implying certain beliefs, are generally presented as entertainment rather than as vehicles for attitude change, as is the case with rhetorical narratives (Green and Brock 2000, 703). These qualities of public narratives provide few explicit triggers for critical thinking, and thus, counterarguing is less likely to occur. Green and Brock's (2000) proposal is that transportation stimulates attitude-change persistence and that transportation is far more likely to occur in response to narrative than it is to rhetorical persuasion. If characters are considered as sources for given points of view or belief statements, then one might argue that to the extent that persuasion is source-driven, narratives may have an advantage over rhetorical messages (719).

Perhaps the most important feature of Hip Hop's narrative persuasion is its capacity to create a sense of collective identity and empathy amongst its listeners.

A narrative account requires a story that raises unanswered questions, presents unresolved conflicts, or depicts not yet completed activity; characters may encounter and then resolve a crisis. A storyline with a beginning, middle, and end is identifiable. In Bruner's (1986) words, "[narrative] deals in human or human-like intention and action and the vicissitudes and consequences that mark their course. It strives to put its timeless miracles into the particulars of experience and to locate the experience in time and place" (13). Many Hip Hop songs follow such a narrative structure, with a clear beginning, middle, and end. It introduces a main character (in many cases, this main character being the MC themselves), presents unresolved questions or conflicts, and takes the listener with them on this journey of struggle and eventual resolution.

Perhaps the most important feature of Hip Hop's narrative persuasion is its capacity to create a sense of collective identity and empathy amongst its listeners. Hip Hop artists often draw upon shared experiences, cultural references, and historical narratives to forge a connection with their audience. This sense of shared identity allows listeners to form a deep emotional engagement and to see themselves in the stories being told. The narrative persuasion effect of Hip Hop goes beyond merely the individual's experience and resonates with entire communities, fostering a shared understanding of (their) social reality.

Since the early 1980s, Hip Hop has been characterized by amazing storytellers and many Hip Hop artists also started to turn to more political themes in their songs. By including political messages and providing social

and political commentary in their lyrics, many Hip Hop artists started to use their songs not only for artistic expression but also as a platform to address and critique sociopolitical issues, conveying political messages with the aim of inspiring action, fostering social change, or persuading the listener to adopt a particular political worldview. Many Hip Hop artists, such as the American groups N.W.A. and Public Enemy, addressed the realities of minorities experiencing gang violence, police brutality, and other politically charged issues, such as poverty and racism, consequently establishing themselves as one of the first predominantly political Hip Hop groups that contributed to the creation of 'Conscious Hip Hop' as a subgenre. For example, in 'Fuck Tha Police' (1989) from the American group N.W.A., the first verse goes as follows:

Fuck the police comin' straight from the underground
A young nigga got it bad 'cause I'm brown
And not the other color, so police think they have the authority to kill
a minority.

The Use of (Counter-)Storytelling in Hip Hop

Hip Hop (culture) has a relationship to a variety of contemporary social ideas and theories (Alridge and Stewart 2005, 193), with critical race theory (CRT) in particular. Hip Hop and CRT share a fundamental desire to give voice to the discontent brewed by silence and dedicate themselves to the continuing struggle for racial equality. Both movements strive toward their mutual goals of radical realignment and societal recognition and change of law, especially in the United States, and serve the dual purpose of providing a race-based interdisciplinary theoretical framework for analysing laws, policies, and administrative procedures that have a deleterious impact on racial minorities (Cummings 2015, 322). Further, just like CRT, early Hip Hop culture and rap music rejected the traditional legal, judicial, and educational systems, decrying often in journalistic fashion the status-quo system established by the White majority (Cummings 2015, 324).

Among the startling similarities between these two movements, the closest link is the use of narrative in response to racism and injustice in a post-civil rights era. Both CRT and Hip Hop rely on the theory of narrative persuasion to make a change in the world. Hip Hop songs can provide an alternative narrative to mainstream representations, or 'dominant narratives'. In this way, Hip Hop goes hand in hand with the work of critical race theory, law, and literature scholars who appeal to narrative to critique legal institutions. As Delgado (1989) argued: "Stories build consensus, a common culture of shared understandings, and deeper, more vital ethics. Counter-

stories, which challenge the received wisdom, do that as well. They can open new windows into reality, showing us that there are possibilities for life other than the one we live (2414).” Many Hip Hop songs provide such a counter-story.

Narratives in Hip Hop songs are often about being framed, critiques of legal procedures, and the devaluation of black life in the criminal justice system (Perry 2004, 111). Political consciousness in rap narratives often takes the form of an indictment of an unjust criminal justice system by centring on physical representations of it—such as the police, the president, or legislation. This may also be done by analysing the effects of institutionalized racism on the Black community— such as mass incarceration, cyclical poverty, or implicit prejudice (Klatskin 2018, 39). Through their songs, the artists expose a reality of the inner city that disrupts simplified and dominant narratives of urban areas as one-dimensional, crime-ridden, violent neighborhoods, and reasserts the humanity and complexity of inner-city Black communities (Klatskin 2018, 39), thus providing a new perspective on these communities.

“Stories build consensus, a common culture of shared understandings, and deeper, more vital ethics. Counterstories, which challenge the received wisdom, do that as well.”

Not Just B-Boys and B-Girls: ‘Breaking’ Dominant Narratives

Stories invite the listener to suspend judgment, listen for the story’s point, and test it against their own version of reality (Delgado 1989, 2440). Stories emphasize our differences in ways that can ultimately bring us closer together. When reading a story that is significantly different from our own experiences it allows us to see how the world looks from behind someone else’s spectacles. They challenge us to take off our own lenses and ask, ‘Could I have been overlooking something all along?’ (Delgado, 2440). In this way, narrative is used in a powerful way to inform, educate and challenge traditional, white regimes (Cummings 2015, 342). This process is essential in a pluralist society where most experiences, or at least the understanding of them, are posited by a dominant group, which is white (Delgado 1989, 2440). Members of outgroups can use stories in two basic ways: first, as a means of psychic self-preservation, and second, as a means of lessening their own subordination (Delgado 1989, 2436). These two means correspond to the two

perspectives from which a story can be viewed – that of the teller and that of the listener. The storyteller gains psychically, whereas the listener gains morally and epistemologically (Delgado 1989, 2436–2437).

Racial and class-based isolation can prevent counter-stories from being heard. That is why something as accessible as a Hip Hop song, which can nowadays be found on many music platforms worldwide, can help people hear these counter-stories. Exposing oneself to counter-stories can enable the listener to build a new social reality. Compared to rhetorical persuasive methods, these narratives may be less prone to immediate counterarguing. The immersive nature of storytelling can make it more challenging for individuals to critically evaluate the message while engaged in the narrative. Thus, while many people might deny a message when brought up in a more rhetorical manner, this same message when brought forth in a Hip Hop song could foster more productive engagement. Bridging the gap in thinking between people with different backgrounds and experiences is a big challenge. Well-told stories about underprivileged lives can help readers understand and connect with the experiences of others. These engaging stories invite us into new worlds and perspectives, thus breaking dominant narratives in certain societies.

Contributing to the Stereotype: What About the Violence?

The 1990s saw a significant regional divide between the sound and style between the West Coast and East Coast. Hip Hop artists from the West Coast, such as Ice-T, Dr. Dre and Snoop Dogg, contributed to the rise of ‘Gangsta Rap’, while artists like Nas and The Notorious B.I.G conquered the East Coast with a focus on conscious lyricism and storytelling. Ever since the 2000s, with the rise of the internet and digital platforms, Hip Hop achieved mainstream success and became a global cultural force. One thing remains the same over time: Hip Hop has helped to create a new form of social expression for subordinate groups to speak about their exclusions, injustices, and lack of power. Yet, the commercial rise in Hip Hop to white youth was mostly driven by the sale of images and stories of the ‘black ghetto life’. Between 1995 and 2001, whites comprised the majority of the Hip Hop consumer base (Rose 2008, 4).

However, as ‘Gangsta Rap’ began to move to the commercial centre stage, the worry that increasing portrayals of violence in rap lyrics might encourage fans to imitate them evolved into a belief that the rappers were themselves criminals—representing their own violent acts in the form of rhyme. The criticism that Hip Hop causes violence relies on the unsubstantiated but widely held belief that listening to violent stories or consuming violent images directly encourages violent behaviour. Studies do show that violent music lyrics have been documented as increasing aggressive thoughts

and feelings. Despite this, the argument for one-to-one causal linking among storytelling, consumption, and individual action should be questioned, given the limited evidence to support this claim (Rose 2008, 34-35). The day-to-day violence that plagues underprivileged communities, which many Hip Hop artists come from and tell stories about in their songs, must be taken into account both as a crucial context for explaining some of what we hear in Hip Hop, and as a reality that compounds the power of violent storytelling (Rose 2008, 58).

Nonetheless, an important question remains: "Can violent lyrics and imagery reflect a real condition and at the same time contribute to creating it?" (Rose 2008, 55). It could be that the violent lyricism in Hip Hop contributes to creating violence, yet "the most powerful tales tend to be those that involve negative aspects, such as dilemmas to be overcome or obstacles to be surmounted" (Green and Brock 2000, 719). Therefore, it could be argued that the violent portrayal of (real-life) experiences in Hip Hop songs is necessary for its persuasive effect on its listeners. It could be that it is this portrayed violence that has the most power to stir up public debates about these issues. Also, many more progressive or 'conscious' Hip Hop artists tend to be more personal in their writing and the feelings portrayed in their narratives. Those who do so remain focused on urban Black life with more liberal political consciousness and often avoid using curse words and sexual insults, thus limiting the use of violent metaphors. Contemporary examples of this are artists like Kendrick Lamar, J Cole, and Mos Def. This shows that Hip Hop songs are still used as a shared ground to bring protestors against racism together since it is a known base for political expression.

What is also notable about famous Hip Hop artists in general is that most of them have very political, conscious songs, yet also use a heavy amount of violent lyricism. It could be argued, then, that the mix of both conscious, political statements and the symbolism of violence go hand in hand with each other in the case of Hip Hop, strengthening its persuasive effect. Maybe one of the best examples of this is Tupac Shakur's song 'Keep Ya Head Up' (1993). In the following verse, Tupac makes an important political statement about his opinion on women's right to abortion, yet still makes use of violent lyricism:

And since we all came from a woman
Got our name from a woman and our game from a woman
I wonder why we take from our women
Why we rape our women, do we hate our women?
I think it's time to kill for our women
Time to heal our women, be real to our women

And if we don't, we'll have a race of babies
 That will hate the ladies that make the babies
 And since a man can't make one
 He has no right to tell a woman when and where to create one
 So will the real men get up
 I know you're fed up ladies, but keep your head up.

Conclusion

Hip Hop songs possess the potential to disrupt dominant narratives, comparable to the notion of 'counter-storytelling' in critical race theory (CRT). Using narrativity in response to racism and injustice is similar to the fundamental ideas and ways of expression of the CRT movement. For example, both movements strive towards mutual goals of radical realignment and societal recognition. In this context, the narratives within Hip Hop offer a counternarrative, thereby challenging predominant beliefs held by the majority. Based on the fact that Hip Hop songs can have a strong persuasive effect, these songs can serve as a way to challenge resilience, and influence individuals to rethink their existing beliefs and attitudes. By providing their perspective on issues such as racism and police brutality, experiences commonly faced by ethnic minorities, Hip Hop artists unite these communities. Simultaneously, it introduces individuals unfamiliar with such experiences to the realities faced by these communities.

However, it is crucial to acknowledge that the portrayal of these issues, often intertwined with a strong image, tends to be one-dimensional and stereotypical, as well. Particularly, the emphasis on the challenges of life in the ghetto, which include involvement in illegal activities like affiliation with gangs, still presents a limited and stereotyped portrayal of ethnic minorities. In cases where individuals lack personal experiences with discrimination or the hardships of the 'ghetto life', exposure to these narratives through Hip Hop may lead to contrasting outcomes.

So, in what sense can Hip Hop songs break dominant narratives? On the one hand, when compared to the notion of 'counter-storytelling', as described and used by critical race thinkers, it can act as a counternarrative, providing insight into the experiences of others and challenging preconceived notions, thus breaking the dominant narrative. On the other hand, it runs the risk of reinforcing existing stereotypes, potentially eliciting a response of affirmation from those who perceive the portrayed experiences as confirmation of their pre-existing beliefs. As a result, there is a need for further empirical research dedicated to exploring the extent to which hip-hop narratives either challenge or reinforce prevailing stereotypes. Understanding the impact of

these narratives on diverse audiences can contribute valuable insights into the role of Hip Hop in shaping perceptions and understanding the experiences of others.



The Voices of Villains

On Including the Perspectives of Villains, Who Were Modelled After Marginalised Groups, in Narratives

Mirte Debats

These counter-stories offer new perspectives and are a weapon in the fight against stigma. We need counter-stories to challenge dominant narratives where marginalised groups are excluded or vilified. Many dominant narratives misrepresent marginalised groups as flat, stereotypical characters or even portray them as villains because the perspectives of the people who belong to those groups are not taken into account. These perspectives are only heard when the dominant narratives do not merely let their stereotypes cloud their judgement but actually listen to the members of marginalised groups. According to Hannah Arendt, I am crucial when it comes to empathising and interacting with each other. People have to make room for my multiplicity in order to be able to facilitate human plurality and let heroes and villains, dominant groups and marginalised groups, interact. Therefore, I have looked for these silenced voices of villains and, together with Mirte Debats, I have listened to them.

The Normal World

Stories, what are stories? Lived experiences on a page? A reflection of the world put into words? Ink printed on a piece of paper? This volume shows that stories are powerful tools that both shape and reflect society. The story I will tell you today is not a story you will find easily, while simply reading a book, or listening to someone. It is the one you have to look for between the lines, in the silences, in the margins, because it is in the margins of narratives where villains hide.

It is not merely narratives that have margins, society has them as well. Those margins are where minorities with their perspectives and experiences are found. These groups are excluded, misrepresented, and branded as villains through dominant narratives. Disney, for example, often portrays its villains with foreign accents and as queer-coded, while the heroes almost always speak in a generic American accent and are heteronormative (Kjeldgaard-Christiansen and Schmidt 2019, 7–8). Creating villains that are, consciously or unconsciously, modelled after stereotypical characteristics that are associated with marginalised groups vilifies this minority.

This villainisation can lead to extreme violence (Frederiksen and Knudsen 2021, 15), which is why we have to embark on a ‘hero’s journey’ (Masterclass 2021). We have to reflect on this development in order to be able to talk about the implications of the stories we tell each other. We have

to explore what is going on in the margins of narratives, where villains hide, in order to see the overlaps with the margins of societies where minorities live.

This journey will be guided by the ideas of Hannah Arendt, who will help us understand the concept of evil with her philosophy about the human condition. Moreover, we will pick up the concept of counter-storytelling to help us on our way. When mapping out this journey, we have to keep our destination in mind and ask ourselves the question of whether or not the villains' perspectives have to be included in story-telling, and what this inclusion would mean for multiperspectivity and plurality. Let us travel through the margins to find out if villains should silently stay in their prisons or have to be listened to and released.

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Here is Our Helper: Hannah Arendt on Evil

It is not hard to get lost in the realms of villains and evil because these terms cannot easily be defined. There are as many definitions as there are philosophers and anthropologists. This is a result of the fact that the binary between good and evil is blurred, and the difference between the two is not clear-cut (Nys and de Wijze 2019, 205; Frederiksen and Knudsen 2021, 12). Therefore, we need someone to guide us, and I know just the person. There is a philosopher who has analysed and followed the Eichmann trials in the 1960s, in order to get to the core of what evil could mean: Hannah Arendt. Her definition of evil is based on her idea of the human condition, which is what one needs to develop oneself as a human being. She defines this condition as interacting with a diversity of human beings through political action (Arendt 1969, 265–6). This means that there is a plurality of human beings, and one can develop oneself and flourish as a human being when one has the opportunity to interact with this plurality. Evil, then, is the obstruction of this process of becoming truly human since this action is an attack on humanity (Royer 2020, 266). Arendt's analysis of the Eichmann trials illustrates her argumentation. She defined Eichmann's actions as evil since he took part in trying to eradicate the Jewish people. This eradication was an attack on human plurality because an entire population was being silenced and killed, which obstructed the political interaction with this type of human diversity (268–269).

When observing these trials Arendt not only developed a definition of evil, but also her definition of an evil person. She realised that Eichmann was quite a normal human being. He was not a monster nor a psychopath. He could only do the evil things he did because he could not consider another person's point of view. He could not put himself into the shoes of the Jewish people. In other words, acting evil is not a result of being an inherently evil person, but it is caused by being unable to consider someone else's perspective (Arendt 1969, 65). From this follows that the opposite is also true, so when one is able to consider someone else's perspective, one will facilitate human plurality and avoid evil action.

Encountering Villains in Narratives

Arendt has sent us on our way. She has helped us understand what evil is and what an evil person is, but there is an important distinction between evil people as we find them in society and villains as we find them in narratives. The villain in a narrative is not an evil person per se, it is just a narrative device with its own narrative function. On our way, we will encounter villains who have been modelled after minorities. Therefore, we have to tread carefully because if we were to talk about them as evil persons, this would only reinforce the villainisation of these marginalised groups. To make this distinction between evil persons and villains clear, we need more help from someone who knows the ins and outs of narratives: a literary scholar like Vladimir Propp. Propp (2009) has defined villains as characters who struggle with the hero (79). Since most stories focus on the hero's story and are told from the hero's perspective, the villain is often just an evil, one-dimensional, flat character (Hundertmark 2021, 2, 5).

Moreover, because of the fact that villains are the counterforce of the protagonist, they are often the complete opposite of heroes. This is visible in Disney's villains, whose heroes are young and beautiful, while their villains are older and ugly. Where the heroes are heteronormative, villains are queer-coded, such as Ursula and Scar, where heroes have a generic American accent, villains often have a foreign accent, such as the Siamese cats with their broken English accent (Kjeldgaard-Christiansen and Schmidt 2019, 7). Where heroes are moral, villains are immoral (McLeod 2016, 19). This establishes a binary between the inherently good heroes with their characteristics on one side and the inherently evil villains with their characteristics on the other side. As a result, the villain's characteristics are implicitly labelled as evil and immoral. On our way, we will encounter villains that were modelled after minorities and are based on harmful stereotypes, which pushes these minorities to the margins of both society and its stories.

First Encounter: Ursula, and Timon and Pumbaa

To understand villains' stories, we have to listen to their voices; we have to let them tell their stories. The first voices I hear are those of the queer-coded villains in Disney films. Queer-coded means that these characters: "deviate from expected norms of gender and sexuality. [...] [They are] pathologized and ostracised because of their sexuality and/or gender performance/presentation" (McLeod 2016, 23). How these villains move, what they look like, how they speak, it all contributes to a creation of a covertly queer image. One way in which villains are given queer traits is by giving male villains more feminine characteristics, such as their use of make-up, and their delicate hand movements, while female villains appear more masculine, post-menopausal, or as drag-queens (Brown 2021; McLeod 2016; Piluso 2023). A prime example of how female villains are queer-coded is Ursula from *The Little Mermaid* (1989). As a character who was based on the drag queen Divine (McLeod 2016, 78) and looks like a male who imitates and exaggerates the female gender, with her exaggerated make-up and deep voice, she is definitely not presented as gender normative (Piluso 2023; McLeod 2016).

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Ursula is not only a prime example of how queerness is covertly presented in the villain's characteristics but also how it is presented as a threat to the hero's heteronormativity in the overall narrative structure (McLeod 2016, 1). As we have encountered before, the villain is a narrative device whose function is to obstruct the hero's happy ending. Since many films are based on the heteronormative love story, heterosexual love and reproductivity are portrayed as the goal of life, as what completes a story, as what gives people their happy endings (41–2), and anything that stands in the way of that, should be eliminated. This also happens in Ursula's story, where her goal is to keep Ariel and Eric apart. For the heteronormative Ariel and Eric to have a happy ending, the queer Ursula has to be destroyed (37).

However, Ursula is not the only one who spoke up, I also hear the voices of Timon and Pumbaa from *The Lion King* (1994). Screaming at us in protest that they can be interpreted as a gay couple (40), they are a prime example of covert, positive queer representation, where queerness is not represented in the villain, but actually in the helper, the side-kick. Even though they are right, I have to disappoint them. They might not be the villains, but they are not the heroes either. They actually show how the exclusion of queerness is embedded in narrative structures because they help Simba to achieve his heteronormative goal of getting together with Nala, his female love interest.

Once this has happened, the helpers are pushed out of the story again (198–201). They are not there to represent a queer ending, or even a story, they are merely allowed to stay because they help the heteronormative hero to get their straight happy ending. It also does not help that the villain of the story, Scar, has queer traits: he is overdramatic, it looks like he is wearing eye shadow, he has a sissy character, and he moves his paws quite delicately (25–6), not to mention the additional issue of his dark fur, as opposed to his brother Mufasa's lighter complexion...

Second Encounter: The Yemeni Children

Do you hear those other voices? Voices coming from the Hollywood realm? It is the Arab villains who tell us how they have been misrepresented in Hollywood films from 1914 onwards. They tell us how they are portrayed as being anti-American, religious fanatics, terrorists, rapists, kidnappers, anti-Christians, and murderers (Shaheen 2003, 176–180). Since they are the antagonist in Hollywood films, they are described in negative terms by the protagonists, with words like “dogs”, “monkeys”, or “swine” (177).

One cannot simply say that these are just films that have no impact on reality. These stereotypes are harmful because they generalise the image of Arabs as villains and reinforce the image viewers have of Arab people. Melhem and Punyanunt-Carter (2019) showed this when they questioned college students in the US about their perception of Arab people both in reality and on television. They found that these students thought that Arabs were portrayed as negative and stereotypical on television and that these portrayals were realistic (266). The students mostly received their information about Arab people from the media, news, television, and friends, and described their perception of Arab people as “terrorists”, “bad people”, and “negative” (267). Melhem and Punyanunt-Carter argue that this is problematic since it shows that the world of television shapes and constructs people's views of reality (263–4). The negative, antagonistic portrayal of Arabs in media, both fictional and non-fictional, shapes people's perception of them and can cause exclusion of and violence against people with an Arabic background.

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Audience reactions to the film *Rules of Engagement* (2000) illustrate this. This film portrays Yemeni children as assassins and as the villains of the story. These Arab children are shown to be violent and a threat to the American protagonists. There is a scene where the US Marines fight the

Yemenis and kill men, women, and children alike. Instead of being horrified, the audience in the cinema applauded and cheered when watching this scene, where children are being violently slaughtered (Shaheen 2003, 177). This happened even though killing children is generally not acceptable in filmmaking because audiences normally react shocked and abhorred since this is seen as the murder of innocents (Lee 2014, 79–80). This shows that the Arab villains have successfully been established as an enemy, not merely within the realm of the narrative, but also in reality in the minds of the audience. When audiences keep seeing Arab people as villains, this creates a false, stereotypical image in their minds, and they will not be abhorred anymore when they see Arab children being slaughtered on screen.

Again, a voice starts screaming at us that there are also realistic and good representations of Arabs in the media and Hollywood films. Of course, there are also Arab characters who are portrayed as good, or at least normal, or realistic Arabic people in films, but these are the minority. For his paper on Arab representation in Hollywood films, Professor in Mass Communication Jack Shaheen (2003) has found several of these needles in the haystack. He found 50 films that actually humanised Arabs. This was 5% of all the films featuring Arab characters that he analysed; the other 95% vilified them. On a more critical note, this small number of films show Arabs as regular people and even fewer films show them to be the hero of the story (Shaheen 2003, 192–3).

What These Encounters Teach Us

These encounters show that pushing minorities to the margins of narratives results in pushing them to the margins of society. The stigmatisations in narratives establish and reinforce harmful stereotypes, and create a dichotomy between the good, heteronormative, American/Western hero and the evil, queer, Arab villain. A binary is established, and marginalised groups are represented as the ‘Other’. The stereotypes influence how people perceive and treat marginalised groups. These stigmas are ingrained in society to such an extent that filmmakers and storytellers often do not even realise that their portrayal of these minorities is based on stereotyping because they think it is realistic. That is how these harmful stigmatisations are widely used, normalised, and repeated without much criticism (Shaheen 2003, 188).

This is problematic since the villain’s narrative function in the story is to be the antagonist of the hero and protagonist. The story is told from the hero’s perspective, which pushes the audience to empathise and side with them while siding against the villain. When watching a film, viewers do not merely identify with the character that is most like them but also with the

protagonist, whether this character is like them or not (McLeod 2016, 31). Once that happens, viewers want to see the villain defeated, punished, or better yet, killed, so a happily ever after is ensured for the heroes (200–1). We have to become aware of the harmful effects of the dichotomies between heroes and villains. We have to make unconscious assumptions about minorities, that are reproduced and reinforced in narratives, conscious.

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Including the Villains' Perspectives

Is this really important? Well, Hannah Arendt would say no. It is not just important, it is essential, it is necessary to the human condition. All these villains we encountered are modelled after human beings who are a part of human plurality. Since human beings need to interact with plurality in order to develop themselves as human beings, it is important that other people have the opportunity to interact with the people behind these villains, such as the queers and the Arabs. The harmful stereotypes and the flatness of the villains' characters obstruct this interaction because when audiences come into contact with the stigmas, they are merely interacting with a negative, limited misrepresentation based on the stereotypical prejudgments of the majority, while the realistic image of the minority is being silenced. As Arendt told us earlier, such an obstruction is evil since it attacks the human condition. Therefore, the perspectives of villains should not be neglected, but instead should be included in narratives to avoid such an evil. This inclusion will enable viewers to interact with a kind of human plurality and will allow them to become fully human.

The Solution: Counter-Stories

Now we have identified the problem, we have the chance to make it right, and pull the villains out of their margins. As we have learnt during our encounters with Ursula and the Yemeni children, for viewers to be able to interact with this plurality it is not enough to simply add some good side characters that are based on minorities. They are still not the main character and they still support the narrative of the majority, such as is the case with Timon and Pumbaa. The dominant narrative still oppresses and excludes them, or pushes them to the margins of the story. To challenge this main narrative villains therefore have to rise up, raise their voices and take charge of the

story. They have to be rebranded as heroes. Only then can they show their perspectives to the viewers, and can these viewers really interact with this type of human plurality.

A way to make that happen is through a concept you have already been introduced to by Maren Nijland in her contribution to this volume, namely: counter-storytelling. Counter-storytelling “reidentifies the oppressed group under different, non-oppressive norms” (van Gils-Schmidt 2021). It is a story that questions the dominant narrative by telling the story from the perspective of the group that was oppressed and pushed into the margins by the dominant narrative. Such a counter-narrative can question and attack harmful stereotypes in the dominant narrative. It would, for example, be a story about a realistic queer main character and their goals and struggles in life, or a story representing an Arab protagonist and the realistic environment they find themselves in. In these kinds of narratives, the villain, as a flat character that was merely there to be the antagonist, is turned into a round character by telling the story from their perspective (Hundertmark 2021, 2, 5). This enables the audience to put themselves into the villain’s shoes, see the world through their eyes, empathise with them, and interact with them.

The Reward: Multiperspectivity

We have gone on this journey, fought the fight to break villains free from the margins and won. Our journey has changed us. Now, we can clearly see that we should not go too far down this road; we should not exclusively focus on the villain’s perspectives. For human beings to develop themselves as human, they need to interact with human plurality. Therefore, they have to come into contact with as many realistic perspectives as possible to be able to interact with the people behind these perspectives. Where our fight against misrepresentation leaves artistic freedom is a tale for another time. Perhaps Yula van Nederveen Meerkerk can be your guide on that journey in her contribution to this volume. For this chapter, it is enough to know that the addition of stories from the perspectives of villains, rebranded as heroes, to the already existing variety of stories from the perspective of the dominant narrative makes more perspectives available, which creates a more realistic, nuanced, and plural view of the world.

Back to the Normal World

After our journey into the unknown and our encounters with Hannah Arendt, Ursula, and the Yemeni children, we have arrived at our destination, which is the realisation that we can only stop the villainisation of marginalised groups when we erase the lines between the story and its margins to make

space for perspectives of villains in our narratives. In our fight against stigmatisation, we have to break them out of their margins and let them roam free as protagonists on the pages of the main story. One cannot simply adhere to the dominant narrative since it silences the voices of marginalised groups, such as the Arab and the queer communities, and obstructs human plurality. By creating narratives where there is room for counter-storytelling and the perspective of villains, one creates space for multiperspectivity and Arendtian plurality, where people can interact with a plurality of perspectives, and flourish as human beings. We have to stop the villainisation, stigmatisation, and misrepresentation of marginalised groups by letting the voices of these villains speak.



How is the Trope of the Femme Fatale an Opposition to the Patriarchal Rules?

Nevena Stoyanova

These counter-stories offer new perspectives and are a weapon in the fight against stigma. We need counter-stories to challenge dominant narratives where marginalised groups are excluded or vilified. Many dominant narratives misrepresent marginalised groups as flat, stereotypical characters or even portray them as villains because the perspectives of the people who belong to those groups are not taken into account. These perspectives are only heard when the dominant narratives do not merely let their stereotypes cloud their judgement but actually listen to the members of marginalised groups. According to Hannah Arendt, I am crucial when it comes to empathising and interacting with each other. People have to make room for my multiplicity in order to be able to facilitate human plurality and let heroes and villains, dominant groups and marginalised groups, interact. Therefore, I have looked for these silenced voices of villains and, together with Mirte Debats, I have listened to them.

“On the one hand, she excites feelings of desire in the heterosexual male; on the other, she excites fear, but very often her erotic charge is magnified considerably precisely because of the threatening potentiality she carries within her” (Simkin 2014, 7). The femme fatale is an alluring and enigmatic archetype that has been present throughout history. She is known for her opposition to the oppressive system while working within the very same set of rules that it has. She is a provocative symbol because she is the one whom men simultaneously fear and deeply desire. The figure of the femme fatale can be found in mythology, from the Middle Ages to modern depictions, she is ever-present in the storytelling landscape. Nevertheless, in the modern age, a need emerges for a symbol that critiques gender dynamics. The femme fatale, often merely depicted as a disrupter of societal norms with a seductive nature, was the modern voice of a time when women needed guidance.

In this essay, I will discuss how the femme fatale helped women explore their abilities to achieve whatever they desired. My aim is to shift the perspective of the femme fatale from being a villain to showing how she was an essential symbol for her time. This essay will not merely focus on the historical and chronological aspect of the femme fatale, but also on how it developed over time; it is a journey through the pulse and liveliness of

this trope and its virtues. By unravelling her characteristics, I will show how she opposes the patriarchal world she is put into and how that affects the 'average' woman.

Firstly, I will explain what the femme fatale is and how this trope can be contextualized in time. I will focus on the historical significance of the trope and how there have been femme fatales since the beginning of time, by giving some examples. Furthermore, I will explore how this historical context signifies that a symbol for a strong woman in narratives was always needed. This will be further explained when I have a more extensive look at when the term was coined and the circumstances that led to the creation of the femme fatale as we know it today. To find out how the trope of the femme fatale was responsible for the emancipation of women, I will explore the concept of feminist poststructuralism.

The Concept of the Femme Fatale

The concept of the femme fatale has travelled through centuries, and it is everchanging. She is hard to define in simple words. Furthermore, there is no singular figure to represent her. She is a cluster of different characteristics that adapt to the period, but the core stays the same. According to Mario Praz's book, *The Romantic Agony* (1951), the character of a femme fatale in literature is not well-defined. In the early stages of Romanticism until the mid-19th century, there were several Fatal Women portrayed in literature. However, there was no established archetype of a femme fatale like there was for the Byronic Hero, for example. A stereotype is created when a particular figure leaves a profound impression on the general mind (Praz 1951, 191). There is no clear line or image that can be drawn when one thinks of the femme fatale. Despite the fact that it would be hard to pin down a singular idol for the femme fatale, I will give a few characteristics that all the versions of the femme fatale carry. I am going to base those characteristics on the article: 'Femme Fatale 101: The Basic Characteristics of The Femme Fatale Archetype' by Tuğçe Özdiñç (2020).

First, the femme fatale is conventionally attractive, beyond conforming to the time period. "Conventionally' is the keyword here related to the physical aspect of the femme fatale because she fits perfectly to the timeless conventions of beauty independent from time and place. She has an undeniable beauty, accepted by everyone" (Özdiñç 2020, 177). She is desirable and irresistible to everyone and conforms to the conventional timeless standard of beauty; each and every person is mesmerized. Her beauty is not defined by material things, like her hair or eye color, since she fits in different eras and is still attractive (178).

A second trait of the femme fatale is closely linked to the first one. She is captivating, not only due to her beauty but also because of her entire persona. She knows how to draw attention to herself through her speech and the way she moves. She is a seductive enchantress who casts spells on men, charms them and makes them weak in the knees for her. Her aura speaks for her when she enters a room; all eyes are on her.

Furthermore, the femme fatale is a sexual being. She uses her sexual aura to attract what she wants. That is her third characteristic. In comparison to other women who may stray away from their sexuality, the femme fatale is connected to hers. She is in touch with her sexuality, knows what she wants, and is not silent or passive when it comes to the act itself. This mere eroticism is appealing to men, but only until they come to understand that she is demanding of her partner. "She is the one who threatens the male ego by planting the seeds of being insufficient in satisfying her sexual appetite and becoming sexually weak after consummation" (Özdinc 2020, 179). "On the one hand, she excites feelings of desire in the heterosexual male; on the other, she excites fear, but very often her erotic charge is magnified considerably precisely because of the threatening potentiality she carries within her..." (Simkin 2014, 7). She uses this power to achieve any goal she may have.

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The fourth criterion for a femme fatale is the intelligence she carries. "Any kind of trickery is permissible in her eyes for her own best interest. She is a master of manipulation thanks to her quick wit and intelligent mind" (Ozdinc 2020, 180).

The last and seemingly most important is her destruction of men. She uses them as tools to get what she wants and leaves them destroyed afterwards. This is the main reason why they are so scared of her: she will purposefully destroy the men in her life to get what she wants. She will bring them to their downfall, even death, only because they stand in her way. She is the opposition to the patriarchy: she will do whatever it takes to achieve her goal, and she will use the ones in power to get there, destroying them in the process.

The Early Depiction of the Femme Fatale

The femme fatale is a term which originated during the film noir era after World War II. However, this type of woman has appeared in various narratives long before that time. In fact, there are many examples of femme fatales in ancient mythology, such as Pandora and Medusa, from Greek myths. The

Sirens are another well-known example of women who use their looks and voices to seduce men, only to take advantage of them later. For centuries, men have feared the power that women possess just by existing.

I will delve deeper into a famous tale from Greek mythology. The myth of Medusa is one of the most famous cases in mythology where one can see the consequences women suffer due to their beauty. She was the most beautiful woman in Athens and had many suitors. Poseidon was mesmerized by her beauty and wanted her. However, she rejected him, which did not stop him. He then raped her in Athena's temple. This made Athena furious with Medusa, and consequently, Athena turned her into a monster that no man would ever desire: her hair became serpents, and her eyes turned men into stone. This could be seen as the way in which the beauty of a woman is transformed into something lethal, which can be connected to men's fears of the way women can use their beauty in relation to them. It can also be connected to the desire for the forbidden and hard-to-get (Ellhalaq 2015, 87). Medusa is punished in the same way all the modern femme fatales are: by making her beauty either lethal for her or for the people around her.

The Femme Fatale of World War II

The image of the femme fatale as we know it today was born during the film noir era. That genre came to be after World War II and was painted by the uncertainty of its time. The film noir is translated directly to 'black cinema'; it is characterized by darkness and pessimism-themed movies in the 1940s and 50s. Some of the critical characteristics of the film noir include a male protagonist (usually a private detective), the element of criminality, a lack of morality, and an ambiguous plot (Park 2011, 7–8).

Women in the USA were encouraged to join the workforce during World War II while their husbands fought overseas. This emancipated women to a certain extent since they were making their own money. After the war, however, men returned to the country, and women were discouraged from working outside their homes. After that, the Vietnam War started, and women were in the workforce, but they were once again obstructed from going to work. This period was very financially and economically uncertain for the layperson, showing the occasional need for women to go to work. However, this was resisted by the men, who wanted to be the sole providers of their households (Boozar 2000, 20). This shows why there is no surprise in the rise of the femme fatale at this time.

The term femme fatale was coined to embody men's fear of the emancipation of women and the uncertainty of the time. "Historically speaking, it is also obvious that the woman has had fewer behavioral and income options than her gender counterpart, which partly explains the need for scheming

tactics by the seductress in the first place” (Boozer 2000, 21). Women did not have the same number of possibilities in their lives as men, so they needed to turn to the alternative, which at the time happened to be seducing the men. Women needed to work within a system not designed for them, with the means they had to get what they desired. The femme fatale was a one-of-a-kind role model to the women at the time because she achieved her goals within the very same system she lived in. This meant that it was possible for women to get what they wanted. In doing so, she appealed to the desiring hearts of women who wanted to get out of the situation of being controlled by men because the femme fatale was not controlled by men.

The Love of Women for the Femme Fatale and the Hate of Men

As I discussed earlier, the femme fatale was frightening to men because she held a specific power over them. “Despite the different portrayals of the femme fatal in literature, two of the key features are always associated to her: a refusal to submit to conventional rules controlling the man-woman relationship, and she is amoral or beyond the common tradition of morality” (Ellhalaq 2015, 85). Those two features made her undesirable to men because it meant that she was not as obedient as other women at the time. Hence, in most noir movies, the femme fatale ends up either being killed, put in jail, or finally ‘tied down’ by getting married. This is the way patriarchy ‘fights back’ against the femme fatale and nonconforming women. The picture painted in movies should lead to the belief that if a woman is not obedient and acts like the femme fatale, she will have a tragic ending like her.

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However, interestingly enough, this is not the impact the femme fatale actually has. In the book *Star Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship* by Jackie Stacey (1994), the author interviews British women in their 40s and 50s to research the perspectives on actresses and movie stars at the time. A lot of those women did not only admire the women who played the femme fatale roles, but they also admired the characters themselves. They found it intriguing how the characters acted and manoeuvred in the situations they found themselves in. They did not focus on the tragic ending the femme

fatale usually had. Instead, they focused on the desirable characteristics the character had. She was strong, got what she wanted, and worked within the very same system female viewers were also trapped in. The women interviewed focused on those characteristics they themselves lacked, and they connected to the character because she inspired them. They described the femme fatale as capable, strong, and independent. The female spectators liked seeing that because they wished to be like her (1994).

Engaging in the Gendered Narrative

The femme fatale works within the system and utilizes her powers to achieve her goals. She is an opposer to the system, but paradoxically, to be able to defeat it, she needs to conform to its rules. I will look at the femme fatale through the perspective of feminist poststructuralism and, more specifically, through Judith Butler's theory to further emphasize my argument.

Judith Butler is a prominent figure in feminist theory. They introduced the notion of gender as a construction of repetitive actions, and they call this: 'performativity' in their book *Gender Trouble* (1990). They argue that gender is constructed through repetitive and signifying acts. "The subject is not determined by the rules through which it is generated because signification is not a founding act, but rather a regulated process of repetition" (Butler 1990, 95). Over time, those repetitive acts burdened with social meaning produce a gendered identity. Gender is not a pre-existing category but rather one that we and our everyday dynamic actions shape, it is a social construct constantly reinforced by its performance.

One could apply the concept of performativity to the femme fatale and how she paves her way through society. This trope is often portrayed as one which defies gender norms that are traditional for women at the time. Her key characteristics, e.g., being manipulative, seductive, and scheming, are usually portrayed by men in the literary world. By embodying masculine qualities, she is disrupting the gender norms that have been set. The femme fatale is constantly performing a role to get what she wants, which is not aligned with the expectation of how women should act. Thus, by doing this, she could be seen as opposing traditional gender norms by blurring the boundaries between masculine and feminine norms. The femme fatale has a very feminine exterior, and her mannerisms conform to the stereotype, but her acts could be seen as very masculine. With her actions, she dethrones the expectations towards her and other women while also shedding light on the constructed notion of gender. "In other words, agency for Butler is not ground in the subject's distance from the gender discourses that forge her, but instead in the subject's capacity to vary—rather than repeat—those constituting discourses" (Bravosa-Carter 2001, 125).

The way that the femme fatale navigates herself through society disrupts the gender norms and makes the patriarchy, and men, uncomfortable. She does not conform to the system; she is not looking to become a nurturing mother or to build a family. Contrary to this, her only aim is to achieve her goals, whatever they may be, by whatever means it takes. Often, women under the patriarchy are expected to be passive, obedient, and submissive, but the femme fatale is far from that. This notion of the femme fatale challenges the obligation of women to adhere to the patriarchal rules. How she performs within the norms becomes the very resistance to the norms that define her by her gender alone.

***Gilda* (1946)**

A movie I want to take a closer look at is *Gilda* (1946). In that movie, the protagonist Johnny Ferrell and Gilda are past lovers who meet because Gilda's husband is his boss. Throughout the movie, Gilda tries to make Johnny Ferrell jealous by acting promiscuously. In one of the scenes in the movie, Gilda performs 'Put the Blame on Mame' on stage. The main character strips herself slowly during her performance to get Johnny's attention. She uses her objectification as a woman to cause Johnny's frustration rather than to satisfy him by using a manipulation tactic that could be seen as non-womanly. Furthermore, she intentionally objectifies herself and, therefore, women as a whole. Usually, such a stripping act is seen as desirable for men, but she is using it to do precisely the opposite, which causes Johnny to take her off the stage. This way, Gilda is not just accepting or rejecting the patriarchal standard, but instead, she is speaking within its boundaries without being consumed by it.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have discussed how society has shaped the femme fatale by covering characteristics such as her physical attractiveness, her seductive persona, the intelligence she possesses, and her destruction of men. I have contextualized her in the World War II period and explained how this sprung her emergence as what we know today. Furthermore, I have discussed a theory proposed by Butler that closely relates to the femme fatale concept, showing how she does not conform to the traditional gender stereotype. The archetype actively engages in the disruption of traditional norms and, by doing so, sets an example for the women who watch and admire her. Her performance contributes to a bigger question about the essence of gender, about how it is placed in society, and what expectations it exceeds. To

conclude, this paper has examined the narratives surrounding the femme fatale and how it has a different perspective from different views. She is an inspiration for the women and a threat to the men.

SPLIJTSTOF



No Hard Feelings About Men

Male Sexual Harm in Film Narratives

Miki Marcu

*In another chapter of this story of gender and sexualisation, there are men. Specifically, men who are not taken seriously when they share their experiences of sexual abuse. Although the awareness around sexual abuse, rape, and assault is increasing, humour at the expense of male sexual harm and the discrediting of male victimhood remain commonplace in films that are meant to be progressive. I accompanied Miki Marcu in the fight against the stigma that surrounds men who have experienced sexual assault. Together, we will have a look at the film *No Hard Feelings* (2023) to show how film narratives are often based upon, and reinforce, harmful ideas about male sexual abuse.*

Awareness around sexual abuse, rape, and assault is becoming more and more widespread. As such, film writers and directors are attempting to rectify the dominant narratives where movie portrayals of consent and sexual harm prevail. However, humor at the expense of male sexual harm and the discrediting of male victimhood remain commonplace in films that are meant to be progressive.

In this paper, I will use the 2023 film *No Hard Feelings* as a case study of how film narratives are based upon, and reinforce, harmful ideas about male sexual abuse. To do so, I will first summarize the film and highlight the use of certain narrative tools which downplay the sexual harms portrayed. Using the notions of the heterosexual script and hegemonic masculinity, I will explain how such narratives can take place in current times despite the seemingly contradictory progressive counter-narratives. To solidify my point, I will be using Michele Meek's analysis of consent in teen movies, which looks at a variety of movie portrayals that normalize or make light of male sexual harm. Finally, I will explore the connection between hegemonic masculinity and the perpetuation of rape culture in regard to men specifically.

Summary of *No Hard Feelings* (2023)

The 2023 film *No Hard Feelings* revolves around 32-year-old Maddie, a bartender and an Uber driver. After having her car seized for not paying her property taxes, she desperately needs another one to continue working and pay off her debt. Luckily, she finds a Craigslist offer to date a 19-year-old boy before he goes to college to 'break him out of his shell' in exchange for a Buick.

The parents who posted the ad meet with Maddie to explain their son's situation. Percy is a sensitive teenager who does not have any romantic

experience or a rich social life. The parents inform her that he volunteers at an animal shelter and advise her to pretend that she is interested in adopting a dog to form a connection with him. Following their conversation, Maddie does as instructed and attempts to seduce Percy, unsuccessfully. Due to growing uncomfortable with her advances, he makes up an excuse to leave early, but Maddie insists on giving him a ride home. However, she takes him to her own house and takes away his phone, which causes Percy to believe he is being kidnapped, so he defends himself with Mace, a pepper spray. Despite this mishap, he agrees to go on a date with Maddie.

Their date takes place in a bar, which immediately makes Percy uncomfortable because he is under the legal drinking age in the U.S. An awkward encounter with one of her previous partners reveals Maddie's commitment issues, which puts a damper on their date. This prompts the two of them to go to the beach at night, which, once again, makes Percy uneasy. After repeated attempts to dissuade Maddie, she convinces him to go skinny-dipping, but their late-night bath gets interrupted by a group of drunk teenagers stealing their clothes. Maddie pursues them, getting their clothes back but putting Percy off. This results in a fight, and Maddie leaves with his clothes and phone. After refusing to return them, Percy, while naked, climbs the hood of her car. An absurd driving scene ensues with a police chase and a last-minute escape by passing a moving train.

Following this, Maddie once again tries to seduce him at her house with a lap dance. This, alongside other attempts, gives Percy a stress-induced rash on his back. A break from the 'seduction' is forced, prompting a heart-to-heart about Maddie's motivation to keep her house and stay in town and Percy's loneliness.

While on a date together at a restaurant, Maddie pressures Percy to play something on the piano for her. After his performance, an old friend of Percy's, Natalie, strikes up a conversation with him, inviting him to a party with other people from Princeton, the college he will be attending. This upsets Maddie and propels them into a conversation about what will happen when he goes away to college, forcing Maddie to clarify that their relationship will not last.

Percy drinks his anger away and tries sleeping with Natalie. However, when Maddie breaks down the door to their bedroom, she sees him in an intoxicated state and is told he took a pill. After forcing him to vomit in front of everyone, it turns out the pill was just Ibuprofen. In his drunken state, Percy says he is ready to have sex, but when he confesses his love, Maddie refuses him.

Determined to make the relationship work, Percy announces he will not go to Princeton to prioritize Maddie. Still, his parents ask her to persuade him

otherwise. Percy overhears their phone call and is destroyed by the realization, so he plots to get his parents and Maddie in the same room to keep up the pretence. In contrast, he destroys the Buick Maddie was supposed to receive.

In order to bring out the truth from Maddie, Percy asks her to finally have sex, which she now does not need to do anymore as she has already completed her job. However, to avoid revealing the truth, she agrees, and Percy prematurely climaxes before they begin. Following this, Percy drops the ruse and gets into an argument with Maddie. Despite their separation, the two eventually reunite and remain friends, with Percy going to Princeton and Maddie moving to California.

Framing and Comedy

The film employs a series of tools to undermine the gravity of Maddie's behavior, ranging from the framing of her situation and character to comedy and lamp-shading. Although portrayed as chaotic, impulsive, and troubled, Maddie is also sympathetically framed as a working-class local from the outset, trying to make a living to salvage the property her late mother left her. She is hindered by the rich population moving into her town and increasing prices. This sympathy is invoked when Maddie is debating with her friends whether to accept Percy's parents' offer, and the only Indigenous character in the film assures her that this is a form of reciprocal exploitation. Similarly, throughout the movie, Maddie's class is employed as a justification mechanism for her desperate actions in relation to Percy. When they have their heated argument about Maddie's deception, she argues that her actions, while wrong, came from a place of necessity.

This framing is particularly interesting due to how closely it resembles the real-life circumstances of some sex workers, who are often forced into their jobs by poverty. However, the movie makes sure to address this implication by having Maddie repeatedly joke about how, despite performing what is, in essence, sex work, she is not a sex worker. In one scene, Maddie and her friends talk about an acquaintance, Mel, who 'got herself a sugar daddy'. In response, Maddie replies: "If you see me doing that, it means I've compromised who I am, and you can kill me because I've given up" (Stupnitsky 2023). Of course, the movie is satirizing Maddie's lack of self-awareness, yet it is not an acknowledgement of her doing sex work either. Thus, the implication of sex work is brought to the fore with humor but dismissed thematically. Comedy is an efficient tool which undermines the severity of Maddie's sexual harms throughout the movie. Admittedly, the setting, tone, and acting serve as great distractions from the uncomfortable implications the movie makes about male sexual abuse.

The film has to make Percy interested in Maddie in order to move the plot along despite the many inappropriate situations he finds himself in because of her. However, in doing so, the optics are such that Percy, while having many reasons not to, continues pursuing Maddie out of inexperience, social pressure, or Maddie's own predatory behavior. On the one hand, he is simply attracted to her, which is rather benign. On the other hand, Percy's inexperience makes him more open to exploration and more willing to overlook the risks involved. This is made evident by the scene where Maddie expresses her attraction to Percy after having just been pepper sprayed. He immediately becomes flustered and offers to go on a date. In a similar vein, Maddie teases him for not drinking or partaking in 'teenager activities'. She even berates him for not acting like an adult when his phone gets stolen. Finally, there are multiple scenes where Maddie's relentless insistence corners Percy into acceptance, such as the beach scene and the lap dance scene, where she pressures him into doing sexual acts he is not ready for.

Comedy is an efficient tool which undermines the severity of Maddie's sexual harms throughout the movie. Admittedly, the setting, tone, and acting serve as great distractions from the uncomfortable implications the movie makes about male sexual abuse.

The age gap between the two is a major source of comedy in the film, with many jokes at Maddie's expense. However, it inadvertently reinforces the dubiousness of their relationship whenever Maddie is shown as being out of place, with people confusing her for his parents' friend, a mom, and so on. It also emphasizes the different stages of life they are at. Whereas Maddie is shown to have had many sexual partners and is confident in courting Percy, the same cannot be said about him. He is freshly out of high school and very eager to sacrifice his education for her. At some point in the movie, Maddie meets with Percy's male nanny, Jodie, and accuses him of being a predator. Whether this is another attempt to satirize Maddie's lack of self-awareness, Percy and Jodie being of a presumably similar age highlights what the film otherwise reinforces: Women cannot sexually abuse men; only men can. As we will come to see, this is a rape myth.

The film unapologetically allows Maddie to look like a predator at many points in the plot to highlight the absurdity of a woman being so sexually aggressive towards a young man. Within the movie's framing, there is no real harm done to Percy due to Maddie's disregard for his boundaries and

consent; it is only an act of betrayal that is wrong. While he is uncomfortable and expressively so at many points, his consent, or lack thereof, is merely something that needs to be overcome and an opportunity for comedy.

The Heterosexual Script

The Heterosexual Script (HS) contains four overarching characteristics of complementary but unequal relations between men and women:

1. Double standard – men are sexual creatures, women are gatekeepers;
2. Courtship strategies – Men are aggressive initiators and require material and physical prowess, women are passive endorsers;
3. Commitment – Women want emotional connection and relationships, men want sex;
4. Same-sex attraction – Men avoid being perceived as gay but fetishize women's sexualities (Seabrook et al 2016, 339).

We can see how the HS is inverted in *No Hard Feelings* (2023) with: (1) Percy being the gatekeeper of sex, while (2) Maddie is the sexual instigator and aggressor, (3) Maddie wants to maintain a casual relationship, whereas Percy wishes for more. As for the fourth point, it is a less subtle matter, as Percy, while having his sexuality questioned initially by Maddie and his parents alike, is confirmed to be heterosexual. However, being perceived as gay has less to do with one's actual attraction and more to do with one's performance of hegemonic masculinity, which I will expand upon in a later paragraph.

Michele Meek (2023) draws on the Sexual Script Theory (SST) and the HS to make sense of trends in film narratives in recent decades. SST refers to the ways in which people construct and make sense of their experiences in relation to their behaviors or those of others (62). SST takes place on three levels: cultural norms and attitudes, which are at the foundation for the other two interpersonal relations, wherein the cultural norms are particularized, and intrapsychic scripts, meaning the understanding and development of fantasies, desires, memories, and so on.

The HS refers to the dominant cultural script, which frames men as sexually aggressive, dominant, emotionally inept or repressed, and always willing to engage in sexual acts. Meanwhile, women are passive, submissive, wishful of deeper emotional bonds and relationships, and “gatekeepers” of sexual acts (63). Race influences this dynamic, with racialized women being historically and culturally sexualized as an other. Black women are viewed as emasculating, East-Asian women are fetishized for their perceived ‘youthfulness’, and so on – which may, in turn, make them more compliant with the HS as a compensatory act and more vulnerable to it. Because the HS invites

men to be the initiators and women indirect participants, consent is often tacit, which makes acts of sexual abuse and coercion indeterminate in the eyes of the victims (64).

In an attempt to flip the conventional HS – of men not asking for or caring about consent from women – teen movie narratives of the 2010s and 2020s attempted a sort of reversal of the roles. This reversal, often with women of colour being the initiators, similarly fell short of understanding and portraying consent (61). As a result, film and media narratives have been subverting this script, with women gaining more agency and initiating casual sex. However, J. Hills Miller (in Meek 2023) warns us that reversal or readjustment of romantic norms is not a rewriting of the script. Rewriting the script is redefining what sex itself is, it is redefining our understanding of consent, it is diversifying the script to non-cisgender, non-heterosexual individuals.

Meek tells us that in female-driven sex stories of the 80s and 90s, which were aimed at teenagers, the girls who seek these experiences are not rewarded by the writers; their male-driven sex story counterparts are. Instead, they are faced with the realization that they actually seek a relationship or that their sexual agency and pleasure are secondary (2023, 70–71). In attempting to correct this longstanding male-centred approach to teenage sex movies, writers have begun to reverse the HS, making women not only the sexual initiators but often the aggressors (71–75). Movies which ‘inverse’ the gender roles of the typical HS sometimes frame women’s active role as necessarily absurd or amusing, as being incompatible with the naturalized status of their passivity. We can see this in *No Hard Feelings* (2023), wherein the primary source of humor is Maddie’s unexpectedly ‘masculine’ behavior of sexual initiation and aggression which is painted in contrast to Percy’s hesitance to have sex without an emotional connection.

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Although perhaps guided by feminist ideals of empowerment, movies such as *The To Do List* (2013), *American Pie Presents: Girls’ Rules* (2020), and *Blockers* (2018), along with many others, portray women who disregard men’s consent or use coercive means to obtain sex from them as unproblematic, or even empowering. Furthermore, they reinforce the idea that men cannot be sexually harmed or do not need to offer consent, as opposed to women. Men

are sexually instrumentalized, rendering their autonomy, desire, or consent secondary, if at all relevant (Meek 2023, 77–78). Movie portrayals where men’s consent is disregarded ultimately reward the female perpetrator by framing the breach of boundaries in a comedic or romantic setting or as a forgivable misguided action which can easily be redeemed.

Male Rape and Hegemonic Masculinity

In order to define male rape and sexual assault, I will be using Aliraza Javaid’s definitions (2018, 23–25), which avoid the common pitfalls associated with defining rape in an accurate way. Namely, definitions tend to be gendered and tend to neglect the possibility of women being the perpetrators. In fact, it is often thought that penetration with a penis is a necessary criterion for categorizing rape. Therefore, for male rape, Javaid (2018) proposes the addition of being forced to penetrate another person or forcefully receive oral sex as constituting rape. In addition, forced penetration using sexual objects, or in any case not only the penis, is included in his definition (23). As for sexual assault, he defines it as: “an act of physical, sexual, psychological, and emotional violation through an act that the victim sees as sexual and as non-consensual” (24). Thus, he removes the issue of intent on the part of the aggressor and includes broader forms in which assault can manifest rather than simply physically.

Male rape myths are attitudes born of patriarchal social structures, which are built upon, and at the same time reinforce, heteronormative ideals and hegemonic masculinities (26–28). They contribute to the stigmatization and classification of male victims as subordinate in the male hierarchy by virtue of being displaced from the HS. Male rape specifically is seen as a ‘homosexual issue’, which is not only false, as men of any sexuality can be victims of rape, but revealing of the underlying values which demean associations with the feminine. The construction of the man is such that men cannot be victims of rape, as supported by the following myths:

- (a) [M]en cannot be raped; (b) “real” men can defend themselves against rape; (c) only gay men are victims and/or perpetrators of rape; (d) men are not affected by rape (or not as much as women); (e) a woman cannot sexually assault a man; (f) male rape only happens in prisons; (g) sexual assault by someone of the same sex causes homosexuality; (h) homosexual and bisexual individuals deserve to be sexually assaulted because they are immoral and deviant; and (i) if a victim physically responds to an assault he must have wanted it. (Turchik and Edwards 2012, 211–212)

Javaid distinguishes between dominant masculinities, dominating masculinities, and hegemonic masculinities, though overlap is possible (2018). Dominant masculinities are those that are most celebrated or successful in a given setting. Although they do not necessarily reinforce gender inequality or other discriminatory behaviors, they tend to do so. Dominating masculinities are those which pertain to the performance of domineering behavior and exertion of control over people or events, while, again, not necessarily being discriminatory in and of itself. Hegemonic masculinities are the power relations between men and women, masculinity and femininity, and different masculinities (Javaid 2018, 36–41). They are socially dependent, historical, and temporal, meaning they change over time and vary by social context. Hegemonic masculinities create unequal relations between men and women, which subjugate women. However, while men benefit from this power dynamic in many ways, they are also victimized by it in many ways.

Failure to perform hegemonic masculine ideals places men lower on the ‘social hierarchy’. Male displays of vulnerability, emotion, and femininity are a hindrance to the legitimacy of hegemonic masculinities because they go against the naturalized order it attempts to establish. As such, men will reject, both within themselves as well as towards other men, their victimhood as it places them outside of the masculine ideal. Hegemonic masculinities: “offer men power and dominance, cultural and symbolic value, and they guarantee a hierarchical position over women and other men at certain historical moments. In short, they can offer wealth, power, and status. The acceptance of victimhood, however, acts as a barrier to all these social and cultural ‘rewards’” (40–41). Consequently, male rape victims struggle with their victimhood on multiple fronts: in the emotional aftermath of the rape, the social stigma which may discourage them from talking about it, and their symbolic status as men weakened by the act. As such, some men internalize these feelings and manifest them in other displays of hegemonic or non-hegemonic masculinities, which tend to be violent, as an attempt to reclaim their masculinity (42–43).

How does this relate to *No Hard Feelings* (2023)? While Percy may not have been raped, according to our definition, he was sexually assaulted in many scenes. Within the movie narrative, we see Percy being pressured by his parents to perform masculinity better, with them, especially his father, worrying about his romantic life. His masculinity is tied to his ability to be with women successfully, to party, to drink, and so on. It is no coincidence that his father shares how he wishes Percy were more like him at that age, as it represents the imposition of hegemonic masculine ideals. Allow me to

clarify that, despite its faults, the film does not seem to outright reinforce these ideals and, for the most part, pokes fun at how absurd the parent's behavior is.

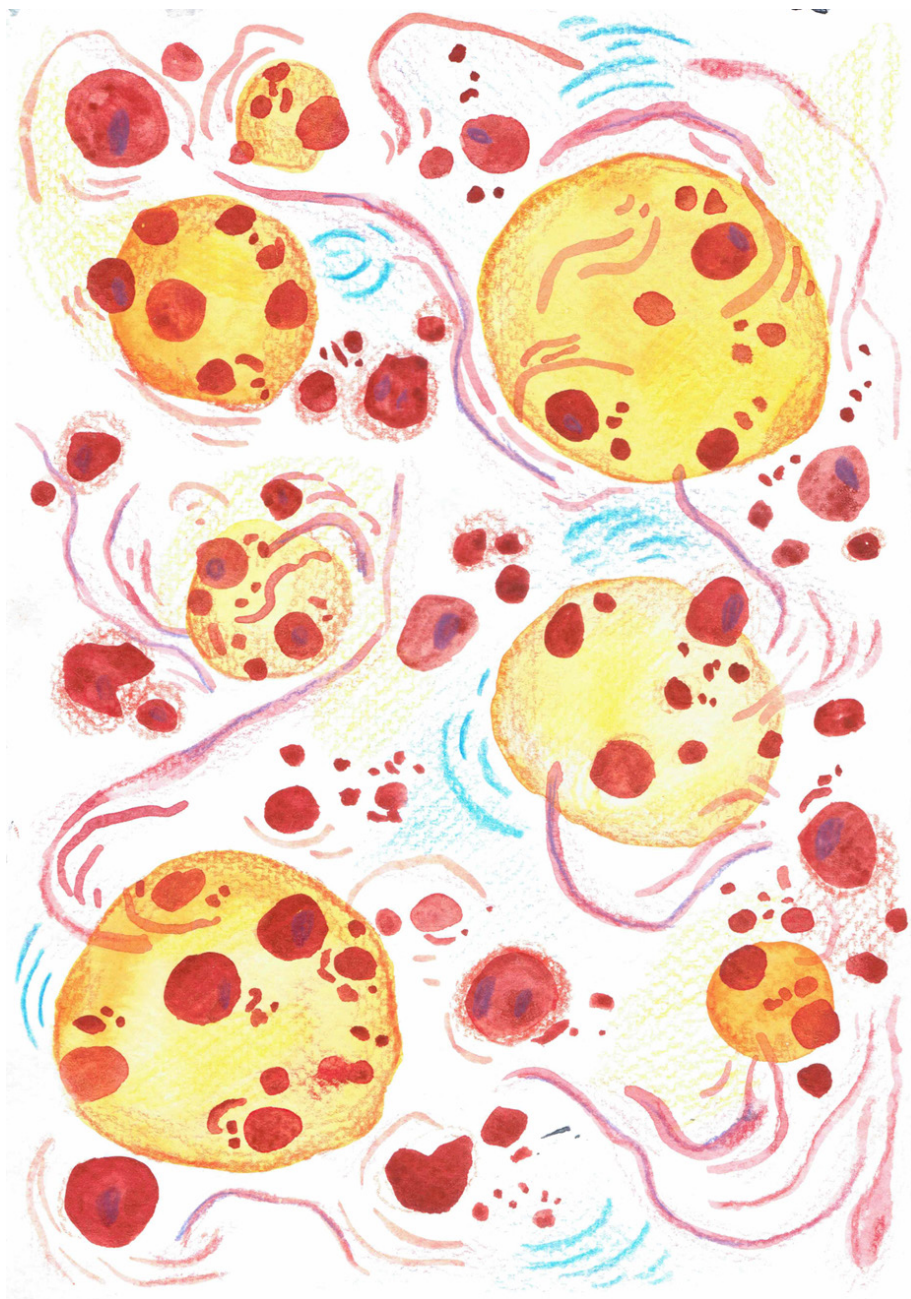
However, when we look at the narrative, recall the beach scene where Percy was pressured into undressing and skinny-dipping or the lap-dance scene in which Maddie forces him to touch her in ways he does not wish, and is similarly touched by her. While Maddie is similarly painted as absurd, at no point is Percy painted as a victim or as having experienced an unconsensual act. This, along with the circumstances of their relationship, is at the heart of the absurdity and humor of the movie. The narrative hinges upon (1) the reversal of the HS and (2) the assurance that watching a young man go through these experiences at the hands of a beautiful woman will not cause the viewer any discomfort, as it does not represent a form of victimization. The film is unbothered by the implications of Maddie's sexual aggression because it takes place in a culture where men's victimization is conceptually impossible or held to an unequal standard to that of women.

There is truth to the idea that men and women hold unequal power in society in a broad sense, and thus, male sexual abuse should not be treated the same as female sexual abuse. However, Javaid (2018) warns us that men do not distribute their power equally. They also fall in hierarchies, with some men performing hegemonic masculinity better than others. Percy, while being a cisgender, heterosexual, white male who in many ways benefits from hegemonic masculinity, is in a position of inexperience when compared to Maddie. Not only that, but his failure to perform the expected masculine role pushes him to pursue Maddie further, aside from his genuine interest, which the movie needs to insist actually exists.

Conclusion

To conclude, in this paper, I have explored the ways in which hegemonic masculinity and the HS lie at the foundation of what allows movies such as *No Hard Feelings* (2023), along with other film narratives, to dismiss male sexual harm or make light of it. Having explored Meek's movie analysis, I have hopefully shown that a mere inversion of the HS is not a solution to the problems concerning consent and sex in teen media and male sexual harm.

Instead, the mere reversal of the HS devalues men's consent and boundaries in an attempt at counter-narrativity. By understanding the ways in which hegemonic masculinity mythologizes men as sexually invulnerable and perpetuates rape myths, we can recognize that this is a necessary aspect of the 'comedic' use of male rape, and sexual assault.



The AIDS Epidemic as a Context to Analyse Christian Narrative Ethics

Naud van der Linden

Stigmas in society can be created or emphasised through the narratives people tell each other. I am not merely present in points of view that fight stigma, but also in the opposite perspectives that reinforce it, since I form the base of ethical beliefs. Together with Naud van der Linden, I continued this journey of looking at stigmas. Mostly focusing on Christian ethical narration, in which Bible verses are used to stigmatise gay people, specifically those with AIDS/HIV. You can find me on both sides of the story: on the side of the people with AIDS/HIV and of Christians. In other words, Naud and I will dive deeper into how narratives were used to enforce certain perspectives about people with AIDS/HIV.

Contemporary art is known for its heartfelt message and innovative materials. “Untitled” (Portrait of Ross in L.A.) is no different; it is one of the most significant contemporary art pieces that address the AIDS epidemic. The art piece is a large pile of pieces of candy, which represents the creator’s (Félix González-Torres’) partner, Ross Laycock, who passed away because of side effects caused by AIDS. All the candy combined weighs in at about 175 lbs (about 80 kilos), which is specified as the ideal weight for Ross. The art exhibition visitors were encouraged to take a piece of candy with them and consume it. This was to represent AIDS slowly eating away at his partner – AIDS slowly deteriorates the victim’s immune system and gradually weakens them over time, which then leaves them vulnerable to other diseases. This art piece provoked many emotions in me, as it has done in many others over the years, which led me to research the AIDS epidemic. And more importantly, how it came to be that AIDS was so stigmatised and that the art surrounding it was presented in such a raw and unfiltered way. This resulted in me thinking of the following research question: How does Christian ethical narration during the AIDS epidemic shape and reinforce societal stigmas surrounding AIDS?

To answer this question, we start our journey via an ethical investigation with a broad historical review. After that, the emphasis turns to the Christian viewpoint, exploring the nuances of Christian beliefs and providing particular instances from significant Biblical verses. We present the ethical narrative theory and discuss its applicability and importance in the context of Christian ethics. The narrative lens exposes the societal stigmas they perpetuate by dissecting the underlying mechanisms that contribute to preserving these ethical tales. These sections thoroughly examine the relati-

onships between ethical theories, history, Christian beliefs, societal effects and the stigmas that get created and upheld because of all these factors. We will be looking at Christian ethical narration specifically because Christianity is the biggest religion in the region where the AIDS epidemic started and because the Christian religion has been very vocal about AIDS, contrary to some other major religions.

Historical Context of AIDS

Acquired immunodeficiency syndrome, AIDS for short, is a virus which attacks your immune system and makes you more susceptible to other diseases and viruses. It is a deadly virus when untreated because it gradually weakens your immune system to the point where it can no longer fend off a basic cold. The virus can be spread through bodily fluids, most often those associated with sexual intercourse and childbirth.

The year 1981 had the first cases of registered AIDS, quickly back-to-back; five men all passed away due to pneumonia (HIV.gov 2023), which was unusual as they were all in good health prior. After some short cross-referencing, all the victims had one thing in common: their sexuality. Ever since then, homosexuality and homophobia alike have been closely interlinked with AIDS. This correlation is the reason why before it was called AIDS, it was known as gay cancer. Since the first diagnosis in the autumn of 1981, 131 people passed away from the disease in just those final months of the year. It was not until a year later that the virus was given its official and final name: HIV/AIDS; in this paper, it will solely be referred to as AIDS. HIV is a virus that weakens your immune system, and AIDS is a condition that can result from an HIV infection when your immune system is severely weakened. So, AIDS is the natural progression of HIV.

Naturally, such a deadly and widely spreading virus caused a strong reaction. It prompted the formation of large protest groups with various slogans, most notably the silence = death movement, which was very vocal and addressed the silencing the Christian church was commending. Whilst this paper will delve deeper into the response of the religion known as Christianity, to get a better understanding of the vastness of the virus, we will first have a look at the public health reaction divided into four phases divided by Kazanjian (2012) Firstly, the early stages of the epidemic were characterised by fear and a lack of knowledge on how the virus spread and what exactly the symptoms and causes were. Biomedical advances give the second phase shape; AIDS showcased how the medical field cannot be seen separately from social, moral and economic considerations; this phase is also the moment where AZT (azidothymidine) was developed, the first repressor of the virus, which allowed AIDS patients to continue living after

the diagnosis. Comprehensive strategies for preventing AIDS characterised the third phase; this is the phase where preventive drugs were developed, most notably PrEP, which can be taken in order to avoid acquiring AIDS from, for instance, sexual intercourse. The fourth and current phase emphasises the daily struggles that a virus of this scale brings. It addresses the challenges in distributing antiretroviral drugs worldwide, the limitations of traditional behavioural prevention programs, and the need for comprehensive strategies that consider social, economic, and ethical factors alongside biomedical interventions to control the spread of AIDS effectively. Whilst we are currently in the fourth phase, much work still needs to be done to get treatment and prevention mechanisms for those who need it most; a recent study has shown that only one-third of the population who would benefit from PrEP takes it (HIV.gov 2023).

Introduction to the Christian View

To be able to analyse the usage of ethical narratives in a Christian context, we first need to understand the general Christian view and what their moral and ethical viewpoints are. According to Geisler (2010), Christian ethics relates much to deontology, centring around the person's intent in a moral dilemma rather than the consequences or the outcome. Geisler adds some nuance by saying that Christians must anticipate the effects of their actions. However, the similarity with deontology remains that the intent is the heaviest. Overall, Christian ethics are based on God's will, shaped by the Bible, because God is believed to be all-knowing; His will is absolute and does not change over time.

So then, what is at stake for the Christian mission when it comes to the AIDS epidemic? The old paradigm of Christian ethics was often filled with homophobia, which led to stigmatisation and discrimination against those living with AIDS, particularly those who were perceived to engage in alleged immoral behaviour, such as homosexuality (Ross 2004). This was further amplified by Christian ethics, which, as we addressed, believed that God's will is absolute; this was how God viewed it. Thus, it shall also be how the Christians viewed it, whilst, in reality, it is much more nuanced than this (Geisler 2010). Ultimately, a lot of people did view it in this way, which resulted in the previously mentioned stigmatisation and discrimination against people who suffered from AIDS and towards homosexuality as a whole.

Homosexuality in Bible Verses

Suppose we transition from Christian ethics to narratives in Biblical verses. Analysing these narratives is key to understanding how ethical perspectives

influence the Christian response to social issues such as the AIDS epidemic. Many Biblical verses address homosexuality, which is linked to the AIDS epidemic, albeit indirectly. Despite there being many Bible verses that address homosexuality, we will only focus on the three most prevalent ones (Ellens 2009).

Genesis 19:1-11 (Ellens 2009): The story of Sodom and Gomorrah, in which the men of Sodom demand to have sex with the male visitors to Lot's house. The sin of Sodom is often linked to homosexuality because the demand was to have same-sex intercourse, which was then stated to be a sin.

Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 (Ellens 2009): These passages prohibit male-male sexual intercourse and prescribe the death penalty for those who engage in it. The Hebrew word *tō'ēbah* (abomination) is used to describe the act, but the term is also used to describe other things that are not inherently sinful. Despite this, Leviticus is often used as a reflection of God's stance on homosexuality.

Romans 1:26-27 (Ellens 2009): This passage describes same-sex relations as a result of idolatry and a rejection of God. Whether homosexuality itself or the rejection of God is the main issue does not become evident regardless of this. Romans is the clearest example of the narrative that the Christian religion has on homosexuality.

These verses are key to understanding what narratives have been used by the Christian religion to form the Christian narrative ethics, and they are often used in argumentation to stigmatise the AIDS epidemic further. This was often done by reciting the verses to non-Christians and by forcing these views on people who did not share the same lifestyle—typically done through name-calling and outright discrimination (Dreyer 2006). The Bible verses that we previously discussed are to be seen as narratives if we follow Polanyi's definition, which is defined as:

In narrative discourse, a precise timeline is established through the telling, made up of discrete moments at which some instantaneous occurrence took place in the world creator through the narration. (Polanyi 1982)

Then, we can see that the Bible verses fit perfectly within this definition. In these verses, there is an established timeline of events, and it is located at a specific place; for instance, if we look at the sin of Sodom, we see that it takes place at the Lot's house. The specific timeline is less distinct, as often there is no specific time mentioned; however, there is a clear timeline within the stories that functions the same way.

Narrative Ethics and Christian Narrative Ethics

Narratives influencing ethics is the basis of this paper, but before we can delve deeper into what narrative ethics is, we first need to have a look at the definition; narrative ethics is an approach to ethics that focuses on the role of stories and narratives in shaping ethical beliefs and practices. It suggests that narratives can express and justify ethical norms and values and provide a more nuanced and context-specific understanding of ethical issues than traditional ethical theories. Narrative ethics examines the stories in terms of their emotional, logical, and performative aspects, which are then prone to interpretation by the reader or listener of the narrative. It is an alternative to traditional ethical theory, which attempts to ground ethical norms and values (Liszka 2003).

How the person perceives a narrative, and the ethical decisions showcased within this narrative, will determine how the person chooses to adapt the ethical beliefs to their daily life.

Imagine a person whose views on ethics have been significantly influenced by a fantasy book series. The author introduces complex narratives of power, government, and the moral issues surrounding leadership within the story. The main characters struggle with moral decisions and the dilemma between right and wrong. Through the challenges and victories of the characters, the reader can experience firsthand the nuances of making moral decisions. An important story arc centres on a leader who upholds moral standards for the greater good despite the severe repercussions it may have on their personal life. Captivated by the characters' adventures, the reader considers their morality. The story takes the reader within the characters' experiences rather than just highlighting the moral dilemmas. Within the made-up world, the reader is exposed to the highs and lows of the plot as well as the effects of moral decisions on people and society. Because of this intricate participation, the reader can connect the fictional world with their own, strengthening the bond between the story and ethical issues that arise in real life. In the end, the fantasy series serves as an initiator for reflection and personal development, encouraging the reader to apply the moral principles they have learned to their decision-making when faced with the challenges of the real world. The story's capacity to transcend fiction and leave a lasting impression on the reader's ethical consciousness accounts for its enduring power.

This example showcases how narratives can shape someone's perspective on ethical issues. How the person perceives the narrative, and the ethical decisions showcased within this narrative, will determine how the person chooses to adapt the ethical beliefs to their daily life.

Application of Narrative Ethics on the Bible Verses

Now that we know what narrative ethics entails and now that Bible verses are considered narratives, we can see them in an ethical narrative light; in short, narrative ethics is a form of ethics where it is believed that a narrative or a story can influence and shape someone's ethical beliefs. These Bible narratives give shape to the Christian ethics surrounding homosexuality. Regardless of the original intent of the creator of these narratives, the interpretation is key since the interpretation of the narratives is what shapes the ethical beliefs, not the literal meaning (often, the literal meaning and the interpretation are similar, however). Because Christians believe that God's will is absolute, they base their ethical values on the narratives in the Bible.

If you were to compare the Christian ethical values, compared to the Christian narrative ethics on homosexuality, there is a large discrepancy between the two. As we previously discussed, Christian ethics follow deontology closely; however, when it comes to homosexuality, the intention of caring for everyone as if they were equal is not upheld. There is a clear difference between the Christian narrative ethics and the traditional Christian ethics in their core values. The difference between Christian ethics and deontology is that Christian ethics also take the consequences into account; however, when it comes to homosexuality, more specifically the AIDS epidemic, this does not seem to be the case.

Societal Stigmas and Their Underlying Mechanisms

This leads me to the final part of this paper, which is the consequences caused by this distinct difference in ethics. The Christian religion is characterised by caring for your neighbour; it is typically known as one that is considerate of others and fair to all. This is why it is particularly harmful that this kindness is not extended to homosexuals and, in turn, to AIDS patients. Because of this reputation of being caring, when the Christian religion does not care, it is more easily seen as justified when they do not.

Pope John Paul II was the pope and the leader of the Christian religion during the height of the AIDS epidemic; he actively spread false rumours and reinforced stigmas surrounding AIDS (Sydney Morning Herald 2005). Whilst he openly stated that God also loved AIDS patients, he did nothing to help stop the spread of the disease; in fact, he did the opposite by commending

all his priests and cardinals to condemn the usage of condoms. Naturally, this did not help the cause and instead actively harmed it, further spreading misinformation and stigmatising AIDS (Sydney Morning Herald 2005).

In short, many societal stigmas were perpetrated because of this distinct difference between the ethical models upheld by the Christian religion, which was further amplified by the supreme leader, Pope John Paul II.

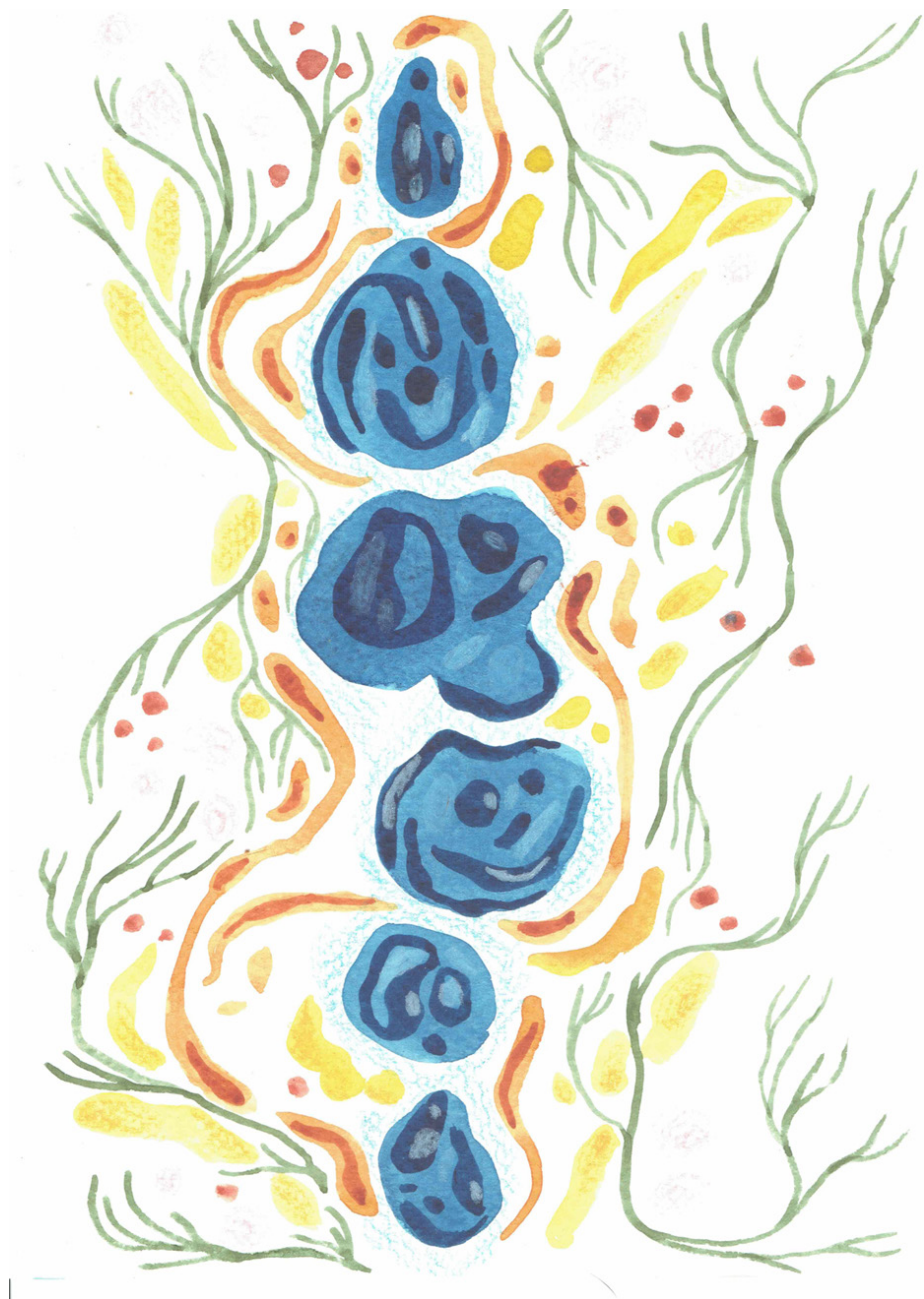
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Concluding Notes

In short, the historical context revealed how the AIDS epidemic, initially termed “gay cancer,” became entwined with homosexuality, shaping public perceptions and triggering fear. Further on, we saw how traditional Christian ethics worked and how it significantly differed from the Christian ethical narration created by the three Bible verses. Then, we looked at the philosophical concept called narrative ethics, which showcased that stories and narratives can influence ethics. After this, we had an adequate background of information to look at the stigmatisation that was caused by these Christian narrative ethics. This then showed that the Christian religion, known for its kindness, fell short in extending compassion to homosexuals and AIDS patients. Pope John Paul II’s actions further exacerbated stigmatisation, spreading misinformation and hindering efforts to combat the pandemic. This leads back to the research question, which is: How does Christian ethical narration during the AIDS epidemic shape and reinforce societal stigmas surrounding AIDS?

Christian ethical narration shapes societal stigmas by creating a unique ethical framework for homosexuality and, therefore, AIDS, which reinforces societal stigmas, such as preaching abstinence and abstaining from condom use and silencing public speakers trying to raise awareness of these issues. Further studies could be done on the new and contemporary Christian ethics and theology. Or in the direction of narrative ethics and looking at other fields of the Bible and if there are other verses that also shape people’s beliefs.

Do not forget Silence = Death



Exploring Deafness Narratives

Diverse Approaches to Deafness and Their
Impact on Deaf Individuals

James Eccles

Now, we are moving from external illness narratives presented in the prior chapter to personal narratives on illness. James Eccles presents an analysis of the experience of Deaf people by looking at the way their narratives unfold. They look at how different models of health, such as the medical and social ones, are reflected in different Deafness narratives and to what extent the assumption of these models produces better or worse outcomes for Deaf people. James' text is an important contribution to my autobiography because they stress the value of perspective-taking when wanting to understand certain positionalities. In other words, the personal narratives of Deaf people can help non-Deaf people access concrete experiences and preferences that lay outside their own perspective.

Consider the following story: a Deaf boy was born to hearing parents, so his parents made him undergo surgery for a cochlear implant. It wasn't until he started studying at Gallaudet, a university specifically designed for Deaf people, that he realised he no longer needed his cochlear implant: "While I was picking up the aspects of Deaf culture and the language of ASL, I finally realized that I've found my own identity," he said. "I am Deaf and I am darn proud of it. From there, I didn't see the purpose to continue wearing my implant" (Praderio 2017). This story highlights two common approaches to Deafness: first, that it is a chronic illness which requires medical intervention as early as possible. This approach, I will argue, reflects the medical model of health, which views health as the normal functioning of the body and mind, and illness as abnormalities/dysfunctions within the body. Second, that Deafness is a cultural identity, which I will argue better reflects the social model of health. This model proposes that the concepts of health, illness, and disability are socially constructed according to the judgements of society at a particular time and place. Outlining these models of health will provide a framework for understanding different approaches towards Deafness, which brings me to my research question: what can Deafness narratives tell us about the capability of different approaches towards Deafness to maximise the well-being of Deaf individuals?

There remains much conflict between the Deaf community and medical attitudes towards Deafness. Howard A. Rosenblum (CEO of the National Association of the Deaf) on the rise of cochlear implantation summarises the conflict best:

This is primarily due to the philosophy of medical doctors that being Deaf is a physical abnormality that should be cured. Many doctors who perform cochlear implant surgeries have been aggressively promoting cochlear implants as a cure. Many parents who are struggling with the concept that their child is Deaf often choose to proceed with cochlear implants on the basis of doctors' promotion of this technology as a cure. (Praderio 2017)

But surely the use of cochlear implantation can increase the well-being of Deaf individuals without necessarily dismantling Deaf identity? This is a hotly debated question among the Deaf community even today, and the point of this essay is not to find a definitive answer, but to provide nuance by looking at different approaches to Deafness in Deafness narratives.

Illness narratives are essentially personal stories about the subjective experience of an illness. They are usually used in narrative medicine, which is a medical practice that emphasises patient-centred care. 'Narrative', in this essay, refers to specific events that are applicable to specific people at a specific place and time (Berman and Nir-Sagiv 2007). It is slightly contentious to refer to Deafness narratives as kinds of illness narratives, but I will include Deafness narratives under the umbrella term of illness narratives, not because I view Deafness as an illness, but because the framework of illness narratives can also be useful in exploring Deafness narratives. This is something I will elaborate on later.

The point of this essay is not to find definitive answers, but to provide nuance by looking at different approaches to Deafness in Deafness narratives.

In this essay, I will first show that Deafness narratives provide information about concrete experiences and preferences about the Deafness experience that quantitative data cannot provide. Then, I will outline the medical model of health and social model of health and then explain how these models of health can be used as (and are used as) frameworks for approaching Deafness. Next, I will outline and nuance two conceptions of well-being, namely, desire theory and objective list theory. Finally, I will use information from concrete Deafness narratives to find out which approaches towards Deafness are best (according to previously outlined conceptions of well-being) in different Deafness narratives.

Narrative Practice in the Deafness Experience

When it comes to understanding the illness experience, narrative practice is essential. Arthur Kleinman popularised the use of 'illness narratives' in medicine in his book *The Illness Narratives: Suffering, Healing, and The Human Condition* to emphasise the importance of a patient-centred approach in healthcare:

The illness narrative is a story the patient tells, and significant others retell, to give coherence to the distinctive events and long-term course of suffering. The plot lines, core metaphors, and rhetorical devices that structure the illness narrative are drawn from cultural and personal models for arranging experiences in meaningful ways and for effectively communicating those meanings. (Kleinman 1988)

Illness narratives go beyond mere descriptions of symptoms and medical diagnoses; they encompass the entire lived experience of illness, including its impact on the individual's identity, relationships, and daily life. In this way, illness narratives enrich descriptions of the illness experience, which makes the voice of the individual ever more important.

However, I believe that illness narratives are not just optional practices that enrich descriptions of the illness experience but are essential in understanding the illness experience. It is not enough to understand the individual's momentary experiences of the illness, but rather how each experience is understood concerning the larger story of their illness. Consider the example from the start of my introduction. We will surely not gain a comprehensive understanding of the young man's Deafness experience if we only consider, say, a moment before he went to Gallaudet University or a moment after he discovered Deaf culture. In this sense, having knowledge of the chronological order of events in the illness experience not only helps the individual in a therapeutic sense but also provides essential information about the illness experience that neither symptoms nor diagnoses nor individual moments can provide.

The framework of illness narratives is particularly useful when it comes to understanding Deaf experiences and what the best approach towards Deafness is for each individual. We can only perform this analysis with knowledge of their narrative. Deafness narratives report on the concrete experiences and preferences of Deaf people in the context of their wider life and they allow us to take on the perspective of Deaf people as closely as possible by transporting us into their story and allowing us to identify with

them and understand the reasons for these preferences ‘from within’. These aspects of Deafness narratives will help us understand which approach works best in which concrete situation.

In the introduction, I mentioned that I would include Deafness narratives under the umbrella term of illness narratives, but not frame Deafness as an illness. This distinction between Deafness and illness is important mainly out of respect for Deaf people who do not view their deafness as an illness, but also because there is a logical foundation for this framing of Deafness through particular models of health and disability, which will be covered in the next section.

Medical, Social, and Divergent Models of Health

In this section of my essay, I will explain the two dominant conceptions of health, both in theory and practically, concerning Deafness narratives: Christopher Boorse’s medical model of health, and the social model of health as explained by Dr Shane Nicholas Glackin.

The first model of health can be considered a naturalist model, which means that health, illness, and disability are real things, or ‘natural kinds’ that we get better at understanding as our knowledge about them grows. While there are other naturalist models of health, because of the limited scope of this essay, I will only be describing Christopher Boorse’s biostatistical medical model of health. According to this model, function is defined by the causal role it plays in fulfilling the goals of a biological system. Health is normal species functioning, and dysfunction is statistically sub-optimal functioning of any given organ (Boorse 1977). This conception, and others like it, seem to dominate modern medicine. This model can be seen in the dominant medical approach to Deafness, which involves intervening as early as possible, often with invasive procedures, such as cochlear implant surgery, to integrate the Deaf person into hearing society.

The second model of health also has many variations, but at the core of all of them, there is an element of illness that is constructed by society, not by the individual’s body. Dr Shane Nicholas Glackin, a professor of sociology, philosophy, and anthropology, summarises the constructivist approach to illnesses in the following way:

All illnesses will be associated—by supervenience or otherwise—with some underlying physiological or psychological condition, but that condition is not itself the illness. Rather, on the view I propose, illness becomes an evaluative category that communities and societies impose—consciously or otherwise—on the underlying conditions [...] A judgment of illness is therefore a mixed fact-value attribution;

it reflects a judgment both that some physiological or psychological condition exists in consequence of which an individual's capacities are reduced and that those capacities are ones on which the social or communal order places a significant premium. (Glackin 2010)

Advocates of Deafness as a cultural identity might utilise this social model of health to dismantle the idea that it is an illness and instead empower Deaf individuals. They promote the idea that difficulties faced by Deaf individuals are not inherent to their condition but rather that the difficulties are present because society is designed for hearing individuals. Also relevant to the social model is the distinction between impairment and disability. The impairment is inherent to the individual's condition, but an impairment only becomes a disability if it is viewed by society as reducing their capacities to a particular extent or if the capacities reduced by the impairment are highly valued by society. However, the use of the word 'impairment' here still implies an inherently negative loss of function, which echoes aspects of naturalist models of health. This is, of course, problematic because it shows that even the social model is not a viable framework for the acceptance approach towards Deafness.

Perhaps there is an unlikely approach that might be more suitable for framing the acceptance approach of Deafness: the neurodiversity movement. Because neurodiversity is a relatively new concept, there are many interpretations and developments of it, but it usually refers to "perceived variations in cognitive, affectual, and sensory functioning differing from the majority of the general population [...], more usually known as the 'neurotypical' population" (Rosqvist et al. 2020). Proponents of the neurodiversity movement tend to claim that these differences in cognitive functioning do not present inherent problems for individuals who have neurodiverse conditions. Rather, there can be benefits to having neurodiverse conditions, such as potentially enhanced creativity in those with ADHD (White and Shah 2011) or potentially excellent attention to detail in those with autism spectrum disorder (Baron-Cohen et al. 2009). It is these potential strengths that make conditions neurodivergent and not disorders, according to the neurodiversity movement. Could it be, then, that the acceptance approach towards Deafness represents a view of Deafness as a form of physical divergence? This view of Deafness as physical divergence is especially supported by the reframing of Deafness from 'hearing loss' to 'Deaf gain' (Bauman and Murray 2009). Examples of Deaf gains include, but are not limited to, being more visually oriented to the world than hearing people and being more capable of kinaesthetic learning than hearing people. In one video, Deaf comedian Greg Bland shares his two coolest Deaf gains: heightened body connection and heightened awareness

(Bland and TEDxMileHigh 2021). These gains, of course, have benefits to individual Deaf people but could also offer new perspectives on issues that hearing people are incapable of considering, providing a gain to society as well. If there are potential gains from being Deaf, like there are potential gains from being autistic or having ADHD, surely Deafness can fit into this ‘physically divergent’ category of conditions?

In this section, I have outlined and evaluated three models of health and disability: the medical model, the social model, and a neuro/physically divergent model. In the next section, I will provide a (limited) outline of some theories of well-being to contextualise what it means for the approaches mentioned in this section to be ‘good’ for Deaf people.

If there are potential gains from being Deaf, like there are potential gains from being autistic or having ADHD, surely Deafness can fit into this ‘physically divergent’ category of conditions?

A Brief Look at Theories of Well-Being

While I will attempt to provide an accurate account of objective list theory, hedonism, and desire theory, my outline here will be limited as a discussion of the merits and drawbacks of each theory of well-being is not within the scope of this essay.

The objective list theory of well-being holds that a plurality of basic objective goods directly benefits people. These can include goods such as loving relationships, meaningful knowledge, autonomy, achievement, and pleasure (Rice 2013, 196). Each of these objective goods produces well-being not because they are pleasurable or because they fulfil one’s desire to achieve them, but because they are worth having for their own sake. Although this is only one formulation of objective list theory, note here the presence of pleasure as one of the objective goods. If hedonism is defined as pursuing the greatest possible balance of pleasure over pain, surely it is implied that pleasure is being pursued as something worth having for its own sake, thus making pleasure an objective good, making it part of the list in objective list theory. In this very simple way, I think it is possible to combine objective list theory and hedonism. However, this is a very limited and brief overview of both theories, and there is much literature that expands on these criticisms and developments.

In its simplest form, desire theory posits that someone is made better off to the extent that their current desires are fulfilled (Crisp 2021). But in this

form, only present desire seems to be considered, which could imply that being addicted to drugs is fulfilling one's desires and is therefore increasing well-being, which is not an admirable position to take (Parfit 1984, 497). Instead, a more comprehensive and global desire theory can be developed, which posits that desires about the shape and content of one's life have more importance than singular or continued instances of desire fulfilment.

Both desire theories and objective list theories rely on intuition in some way, which is not to discredit them, but merely to acknowledge that there is an element of arbitrariness to deciding that desire fulfilment in itself, or that the 'objective goods', produce more well-being. Regardless, both theories of well-being provide relevant and useful perspectives on what it means for the approaches outlined earlier to be best for certain Deaf people in certain situations.

Personal Accounts of Deafness

In this section, I will analyse two different Deafness narratives, using the concepts defined earlier in the paper to determine which approach to Deafness is best in each situation.

The first story I would like to look at is that of Zain (National Deaf Children's Society, n.d.), a boy whose hearing loss deteriorated from moderate to profound, prompting his family to have Zain undergo surgery for the cochlear implant before he started secondary school. "Zain [...] always found school accommodating and he particularly appreciates that they involve him in discussions about his deafness." Zain later decided to join the National Deaf Children's Society's Young People's Advisory Board (YAB), where he learned more about his identity: "Being Deaf and being Muslim all tie in as parts of my identity". Zain's dad, Denis, also stated that "he needs to own his Deafness and realise it isn't a barrier". Zain's narrative highlights his experience growing up with Deafness and how he incorporates it into his identity. Of course, there were negative aspects of Zain's Deafness narrative, such as the scare of his deteriorating hearing, but up until this point in his narrative, his narrative seems to be positive. His well-being seems high based on his school's inclusion of him in discussions about his Deafness, which might suggest that inclusion is an objective good. It also seems that his desire to learn more about himself through his Deaf identity is fulfilled, which also leads to increased well-being. But exactly which approaches towards Deafness are used in his narrative to produce this high well-being? In Zain's narrative, we can find a combination of both a medical approach and a physically diverse approach. His Deafness is viewed as a kind of dysfunction or abnormality and is thus treated with cochlear implantation, which points towards the medical approach, but in joining the YAB, he can

find out more about his Deaf identity and come to accept it. This combination of approaches could point towards the notion that, in some instances, the success of the acceptance approach might involve the existence of the medical approach to the extent that Deaf individuals are not excluded from hearing society while still feeling like their Deafness is part of their identity.

Deaf individuals can accept their condition by utilising an approach towards Deafness that emphasises its physically diverse nature. Regarding the production of more well-being, however, I do not think the medical approach is necessarily at odds with the physically diverse approach.

The second story I will look at is that of Brandon Edquist, who has been Deaf since the age of two and got a cochlear implant at the age of three (Praderio 2017). Brandon hated living with his implant — it produced a distracting ringing sound, and he found it difficult to learn how to differentiate between sounds. He continuously found ways to switch off or ‘break’ the implant against his parents’ wishes, and, in high school, his parents finally conceded: “Their son was happier living without the implant, using sign language to communicate” (2017). Brandon was told that living with a cochlear implant was essential to integrating into society, but he came to the conclusion that “getting cochlear is not the only way for Deaf people to be successful in life” (2017). In a hedonistic sense, Brandon’s well-being clearly increased once he no longer used his cochlear implant, as it removed the unpleasant sensations it caused. His desire to live without the cochlear implant was fulfilled through the same process, producing more well-being. His increase in well-being, at least in my interpretation, does not stem from an abandonment of the medical approach but more of a failure of the medical approach. He then realised that he could still be successful as a Deaf person in a hearing world without the cochlear implant, which quite clearly utilises a physically diverse approach to Deafness.

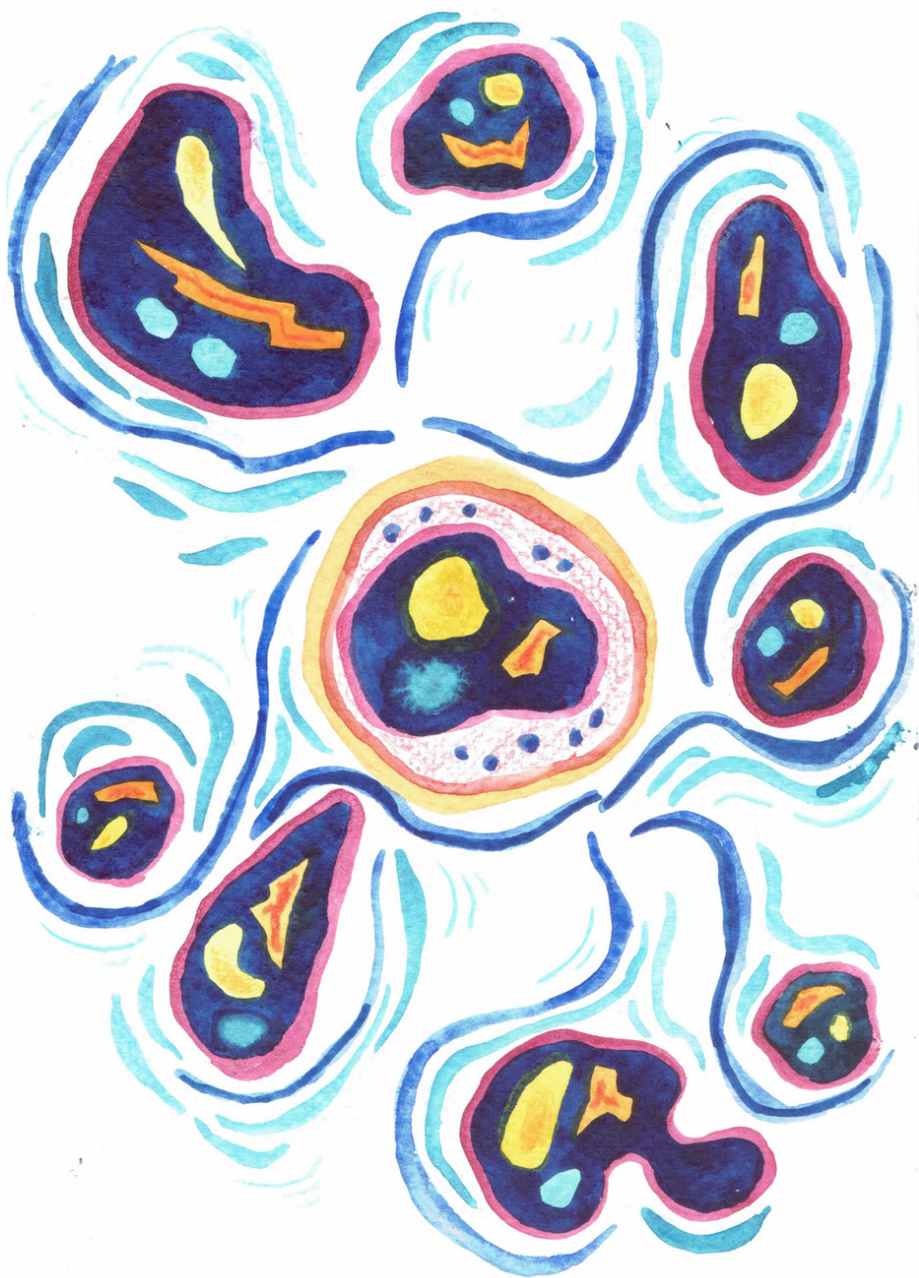
Both of these stories show that Deaf individuals can accept their condition by utilising an approach towards Deafness that emphasises its physically diverse nature. Regarding the production of more well-being, however, I do not think the medical approach is necessarily at odds with the physically diverse approach. As can be seen in Zain’s narrative, a medical approach is adopted by way of cochlear implantation, but he is still able to accept his Deaf identity — both approaches work together to increase his well-

being. However, in Brandon's story, the medical approach fails, suggesting that cochlear implantation should not be promoted as a complete cure for Deafness. Ultimately, I think the framing of Deaf people as people with a physically diverse condition against those who are physically typical is inescapable in society. It is not necessarily wrong for the medical approach to be used if it successfully increases well-being for certain Deaf people and does not alienate them from their Deaf identity, which is where the physically diverse approach tends to be useful in promoting well-being. However, there could be ramifications in the promotion of the medical approach, namely, the slow erasure of aspects of Deaf culture, such as sign language.

Conclusion

In this essay, I have tried to show that Deafness narratives can use the framework of illness narratives, despite not necessarily being considered an illness, that there is crucial information that can be found in Deafness narratives that can help inform us of the well-being of Deaf individuals, that acceptance approaches towards Deafness can utilise a physically diverse approach akin to the neurodiversity movement, and ultimately that it is important to critically reflect on how we frame certain conditions, such as Deafness, and how these framings of conditions can positively or negatively impact those who live with them. This can provide more nuance to evaluative practices in the philosophy of medicine and produce more well-being for those with potentially physically diverse conditions, such as deafness.

While this assessment of different approaches to Deafness is based on attitudes that are more obvious/explicit throughout society, perhaps other conditions should be investigated in this way, which raises the question: how do we decide which conditions are/are not worthy of being investigated? And are there approaches towards other physical conditions that utilise the 'physically diverse' approach used in acceptance narratives of Deafness? Additionally, I think a more in-depth analysis of theories of well-being should be done to provide more nuance to what it means for a highlighted approach to be 'best' for someone. Furthermore, I am wary of promoting the medical approach on the basis that it could erase certain aspects of Deaf culture. Ultimately, I am not Deaf, so there are likely many aspects of this essay that could be improved upon from the perspective of a Deaf person, both in terms of sensitivity and the perspective provided through the lived experience of being Deaf.



Responsibility versus Freedom

Representing Mental Disorders in Narrative

Yula van Nederveen Meerkerk

There are always different narratives about illness, whether physical or mental. Deaf people tell different stories about themselves than society tells about them. One must look at illnesses from different angles to understand the subtleties involved. Otherwise, I am reduced to a singular form, and that is when stigmatisation is born. Together with Yula van Nederveen Meerkerk, I was confronted with the villainisation and misrepresentation of Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID). Following this confrontation, I asked myself the questions: When are mental disorders accurately portrayed? In what way are narrative creators responsible for portraying mental disorders accurately? And what does this imply for their artistic freedom? These complex questions made me reflect on the complexity of my own identity. An accurate portrayal of mental illness is not clearly defined. Some people look at it through the biomedical view, and others through a social constructivist one. The encounter with these views allowed me to listen to two voices that are seldom in the foreground, namely the vulnerable minority of people with DID and the often-undervalued narrative creators. When finding answers to my questions, the interests of both groups are at stake.

“[...] [A] horror film, but not in the common sense” (Meifang Wang 2017) – this is what critics called the famous thriller film *Split* (2016), in which a man conforming to the main diagnostic criteria of dissociative identity disorder (DID) goes on a crime spree. The film manages to cast DID in a bad light by making a fundamental connection between the condition and violence.

Much research (Cutcliffe and Hannigan 2001; Klin and Lemish 2008) has been done on the effects of the misrepresentation of mental disorders in media and, in particular, narratives that have been proven to be highly persuasive in convincing the audience of certain beliefs (Braddock and Dillard 2016). Hence, false descriptions do not only often reinforce the idea that mentally disordered people are different and peculiar but also paint them as having an aggressive and dangerous nature. As a result, this already marginalised group is continuously stigmatised and discriminated against for behaviour that is rarely displayed in reality. To prevent this from escalating further, should creators of narratives be held responsible for representing mental disorders accurately in their work, at the risk of restricting their artistic freedom?

In this essay, I will explore the concepts of responsibility and accuracy. To find out what responsibility is and what its most important aspects are, I will refer to existential phenomenologist Emmanuel Levinas and examine

why it is necessary for narrative creators to bear responsibility. I will define mental disorders within two frameworks: the biomedical approach, according to which mental disorders are caused by a dysfunctional cognitive system, and social constructivism, which states that mental disorders are produced by their time and context. This will allow me to determine what the conditions of an accurate portrayal of mental disorders are in order to answer my central question: What does the accuracy of the way in which mental disorders are represented in narratives mean for the responsibility narrative creators should bear, and how does it affect their artistic freedom? The history of dissociative identity disorder, the current biomedical definition, and its place in narrative expression will serve as a concrete example of how narrative creators must proceed in the future to protect the community of mentally disordered people.

Responsibility and Harm

The term ‘responsibility’ originates from *respōnsāre*, the classical Latin verb meaning ‘to reply’ (Oxford English Dictionary 2023). The word is essentially relational: it demands the existence of something or someone else, be it an individual, a group, a calling, the environment, and so forth. In this paper, the responsibility is borne by the minority of people who have mental disorders.

The traditional schools of ethics and philosophy generally focus on self-realisation and fail to capture “the Other” as a crucial element within the study of responsibility (Mkhwanazi 2013). Levinas argued that relationships and responsibility are intrinsically connected and shape the foundation for all other social structures. According to him, being responsible to another is a necessary characteristic of being human.

Furthermore, the etymology of responsibility – ‘to reply’ – implies the performance of a conscious action. This action could be of a literal nature, such as offering “the Other [...] the bread out of one’s own mouth and the coat from one’s shoulders” (Levinas 1981, 55), or a more abstract one, like the promise to protect someone from external forces and inflict no harm upon them (Levinas 1969). The subject may be required to make a sacrifice for the sake of responsibility, even if one’s own life is on the line (Mkhwanazi 2013).

The responsibility of protection is especially important in the current debate about the harm caused by inaccurate portrayals of mental disorders. Research has shown that representations of people with mental disorders in mass media primarily emphasise negative behaviour that is rarely ever displayed in reality, such as aggression, violence, unpredictability, and criminality (Cutcliffe and Hannigan 2001). It has been proven that narratives have an incredibly persuasive effect on the recipient since individuals are

naturally inclined toward believing them (Braddock and Dillard 2016). This causes the spread of misinformation through films and novels to increase the already existing stigmatisation, discrimination, exclusion, and harassment of these individuals. The negative social attitudes towards people with mental disorders hinder their integration into society and can, for instance, cause issues when trying to find employment or housing (Klin and Lemish 2008).

The mentally disordered are more often the victim than the aggressor, despite what the media makes them out to be.

Only a small number of mental health patients actually seek professional assistance. The majority is frightened by the stigmas and fear of being the target of laughter and ostracism. Postponement of seeking help can be a trigger for depression, self-harm, and suicide among people with severe mental disorders (435). The mentally disordered are thus more often the victim than the aggressor, despite what the media makes them out to be (442).

Inaccurate depictions of mental disorders support the creation of an unsafe environment for people suffering from their condition. To find out how to stop this from happening, it is first important to know what an accurate representation would be, as opposed to the often-used, misinformed, negative, and caricaturist depiction of mental disorders. In this analysis, representation “designates a copy, an illusion, an analogical figure, a resemblance-product” (Barthes 1985, 228). Accuracy, however, will be defined according to the two most prominent ideas within the philosophy of psychiatry: the biomedical and social constructivist approach.

Mental Disorders as Biological Dysfunctions

Naturalism understands the concepts of health and disorders as purely objective classifications of biological function and dysfunction (Aftab 2016). In this distinction, (mental) disorders fall into the category of biological dysfunctions, as they are seen as departures of the bodily systems from their natural purposes.

Philosopher Boorse’s theory, a prevalent naturalist belief, is that any ability that is not considered functional for the survival and reproduction of a species, something that deviates from the average of the reference class, is a dysfunction (Kingma 2013). Another model, by Wakefield, describes biological functionality as grounded in evolution, which cherry-picks the most favourable traits for species in their current environment and eliminates

the detrimental ones (Kingma 2013, 369). As diverse as these ideas may seem, all naturalists have one common denominator: they refer to science when determining what natural and abnormal functions are.

In a clinical setting, this naturalistic distinction between health and disease does not have much practical use, as it does not indicate how to treat patients. However, the presence of a biological dysfunction in mentally disordered people is often taken as a given and has become the foundation for most psychiatric manuals. Psychologists and psychiatrists generally adhere to the symptoms listed in DSM-5 when determining whether someone is mentally disordered or not (Aftab 2016). Mental disorders are defined as “syndrome[s] characterized by clinically significant disturbance in an individual’s cognition, emotion regulation, or behavior that reflects a dysfunction in the psychological, biological, or developmental processes underlying mental functioning” (American Psychiatric Association 2013, 20).

The fifth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) serves as the current principal authority for psychiatric diagnoses in most Western countries. It takes a biomedical stance when figuring out how to describe mental illnesses and focuses on the observed symptoms that are shared between the group of patients labelled with a certain disorder. The diagnoses were created as a way for clinicians to determine what treatment would have the best outcome for the patient, but are also used for research purposes, to enable communication among clinicians, and to maintain public health (Aftab 2016).

However, despite the scientific basis of psychiatric manuals such as DSM, they are not completely flawless. Not only do these methods undergo constant criticism for, to name a few, excluding the harm experienced by patients (Biturajac and Jurjako 2022), their limited diagnostic reliability, and arbitrary diagnostic thresholds (Morey et al. 2022), but they also explicitly leave out the significance of an individual’s cultural and social context (American Psychiatric Association 2013). The next section will show that the biomedical view is not the only valid perspective when figuring out what mental disorders are.

Mental Disorders as Social Constructs

In the history of psychiatry, the sudden appearance and inevitable fall of a disorder are not unheard of. Most notable is the case of hysteria, which was first recorded as a disorder in the 1870s and abruptly disappeared around 1905 (Micale 1993). How could a disease only exist during a period of time, if they are the product of a biological dysfunction? Are naturalists wrong to claim this, or is there is more at play?

Much has been written on this strange phenomenon over the past century, yet there is one idea that stands out: mental disorders are produced by their sociocultural context. When humans try to make sense of the world around them, they use their rational and linguistic abilities to label it a certain way and inadvertently construct their experiences and explanations (Thakker et al. 1999). This is inherent to the human being – we use the conceptualisation of our surroundings as a mode of survival. When the environment changes, so do our thoughts about it. Once the previous labels have outlived their usefulness, we have to familiarise ourselves with and benefit from the possibilities of our new situation. Contrary to the biomedical perspective, social constructivism does not strive for an ideal end point of knowledge but believes in the utility of constantly renamed and recategorised definitions.

How could a disease only exist during a period of time, if they are the product of a biological dysfunction?

French philosopher Michel Foucault was the first to show how this continual change is present in the history of psychiatric illnesses (2004). Furthermore, he revealed that the social production of an illness does not just give a particular label to it but actually brings it into existence. The period in which disorders like hysteria, neurasthenia (nervous disorder), and drape-tomania (the “disorder” that supposedly made enslaved African people flee from captivity) were accepted as real; they truly were – it was not wrong of contemporaneous thinkers to assume this (Micale 1993).

Whereas naturalism deems abnormal bodily functions the cause of mental disorders, social constructivism explains that time and sociocultural context determine how the concept of disorder is understood. By defining an illness, one, as it were, invents it (Hacking 2002). In the next section, the conceptualisation of accuracy and its implications for narrative creators are analysed.

Narrative Creators and the Sacrifice of Artistic Freedom

Given their unstable history, can we believe that the conceptualisation of mental disorders are not set in stone as the biomedical perspective describes them to be? Will the way they are categorised differ in a few years when more research has been done on these conditions? If so, it is exceedingly difficult to pinpoint what an accurate representation would be.

This is what I propose: independent of any biological origins, the social context influences the life world of the diagnosed person to such an extent that it always needs to be taken into account. This is why narrative creators must represent both the sociocultural context and the currently

found diagnostic features of a mental disorder. Therefore, creators have to show what mentally disordered people experience, the harm and joy they encounter due to their disorder, how others perceive their condition, and also what their symptoms are.

To bear responsibility as a narrative creator is to present a “copy [...] [or] resemblance-product” (Barthes 1985, 228) of people’s real experiences with the disorder and the diagnostic criteria as given by the latest version of the prevailing psychiatric manual (such as DSM-5), whilst avoiding exaggerations and misinformation. If this standard is maintained, the public will only be exposed to accurate depictions of mental disorders, so the creators protect the mentally disordered individuals from further stigmatisation and, thus, from harm. This does not exclude fictional narratives from being accurate, as long as narrative creators refrain from using misinformation about mental disorders and look into the disorder they are describing to create an image that is close to the real condition.

If one story can set a whole array of changes in motion, narrative creators are responsible for both preventing harm and for how society understands the mental disorder.

Additionally, narrative creators should keep in mind that the definitions and labels used for mental disorders can and, inevitably, will change in the future – as they have done before. Narrative not only has the ability to negatively shape the way the public views the subject but is also one of the driving forces behind it being continually renamed and recategorised. Films like *The Three Faces of Eve* (1957) are pioneers in the sense that their creation brought a new topic to the table, piqued the interest of researchers and theorists alike, and brought about a restructuring of the disorder in question (Kanfer et al. 1958). If one story can set a whole array of changes in motion, narrative creators are responsible for both preventing harm and for how society understands the mental disorder.

The aforementioned proposal may seem like the correct way to act from the perspective of someone suffering from the effects of inaccurate representations, but what about the narrative creators themselves, who will be limited in their artistic freedom by these drastic measures? Producing stories is their bread and butter and the primary source of many people’s entertainment, as was seen during the recent writers’ strike in the USA (Anguiano 2023). However, both the deleterious consequences of inaccurate portrayals and the applied concept of responsibility imply that the limitation of

artistic license is necessary. Responsibility requires someone to make sacrifices if that means that no harm befalls the other (Mkhwanazi 2013). In this case, narrative creators ought to give up some artistic freedom to protect an already vulnerable minority. This and the accurate way of representing mental disorders will be illustrated in the following case study.

Case Study: Dissociative Identity Disorder

Despite its dubious history, Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID) has long been established as a complex, fairly common mental disorder (Dorahy et al. 2014). It is particularly distinct from other disorders due to its main diagnostic criteria:

Disruption of identity characteri[s]ed by two or more distinct personality states, which may be described in some cultures as an experience of possession. The disruption in identity involves marked discontinuity in sense of self and sense of agency, accompanied by related alterations in affect, behavio[ur], consciousness, memory, perception, cognition, and/or sensory-motor functioning. (American Psychiatric Association 2013, 292)

In short, DID is characterised by identity alterations of two or more different dissociated personalities, and amnesia. Cultural and developmental factors are seen as the triggers for the so-called splitting of the patient's identity, as well as traumatic experiences during childhood (Dorahy et al. 2014). The disorder is present in people from all around the globe yet is still under-investigated in several areas (412).

When it comes to the rise and fall, the reinterpretation and relabelling of disorders, DID has an impressive track record. One of the first recorded instances resembling a person with multiple personality states dates back to around 1875. Very few cases had appeared before then, aside from the parodies and myths, such as the ancient Roman god of duality and change, Janus. It bears similarities to possession, a sort of behaviour that was frequently displayed during the Renaissance and present in various cultures.

After this new clinical phenomenon had appeared, a multiplicity of cases were identified. In the preliminary stages, it was considered to be one of the numerous symptoms attributed to hysteria (Hartocollis 1998). For a while, this category was known as "double personality" (*dédoublement de la personnalité*), indicating that only one alter existed separately of the individual (Faure et al. 1997). The term was later changed to "multiple personality", which described the symptoms of the condition more accurately. Around the 1930s, the "split identity" was ascribed as a symptom of the recently disco-

vered schizophrenia (Rosenbaum 1980). In the first few renditions of DSM, the disorder was still seen as a type of psychoneurosis, and it only became a disorder of its own in DSM-3 (Hartocollis 1998). When DSM-4 (1994) was introduced, it officially became dissociative identity disorder, as it is known nowadays.

With the rise of this condition, so came the stories about it. It started appearing in books, films, documentaries, articles, and even soap operas (Hartocollis 1998, 162). Non-fictional narratives like *The Three Faces of Eve* (1957), *Sybil* (Schreiber 1973) – although later discovered to have been a ruse – and the compelling, autobiographical *When Rabbit Howls* (Chase 1987) sparked the interest for intensive research to be done on the disorder, and paved the way for the later emergence of more fantastical stories (Neary 2011). The named narratives present the way DID is experienced in real life, by showing the disorder's symptoms and how they affect the diagnosed individual's personal life, career, and relationships. According to the given proposal, they fit the requirements to be considered accurate.

However, not every narrative has based its representation of DID on actual people and events. For instance, in some horror films, like *Hide and Seek* (2005) and Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960), DID is used as a plot device to create an unpredictable and irredeemable murderer – for the villain's disorder is the reason why they are 'evil'. When the disorder is not vilified in fiction, it is often misrepresented in another way, such as that the alters sometimes function as a charismatic saving grace to the timid main character. This occurs in the famous *Fight Club* (1999) and *Me, Myself & Irene* (2000). These inaccurate depictions could be blamed on the time of production and limited access to information about the disorder, but are most likely the result of the creator not taking the time to look into it, or making assumptions based on the already existing stigmas surrounding DID.

This is supported by the fact that even recently, in stories like *Split* (2016), the focus still lies on the seemingly arbitrary and incomprehensible behaviour of people with DID, usually expressed in a violent manner. As has been discussed in a previous section, mentally disordered people are not actually ten times more probable than people without a disorder to commit a crime, like how these narratives portray them to be (Kimmerle and Ulrike 2013). Additionally, some even older stories were able to describe DID accurately, including how the dissociation affects both the patient and their direct surroundings, the harm they inflict upon themselves, the anxiety one undergoes of never knowing if they will wake up as the host alter (a term typically used to describe the "main personality") the next day and the feeling of having inexplicable gaps in their memory. Instead of showing

these symptoms and incorporating the most recent understanding of DID as a system in which each alter plays their own role, the narrative creators still hold on to their prejudiced views.

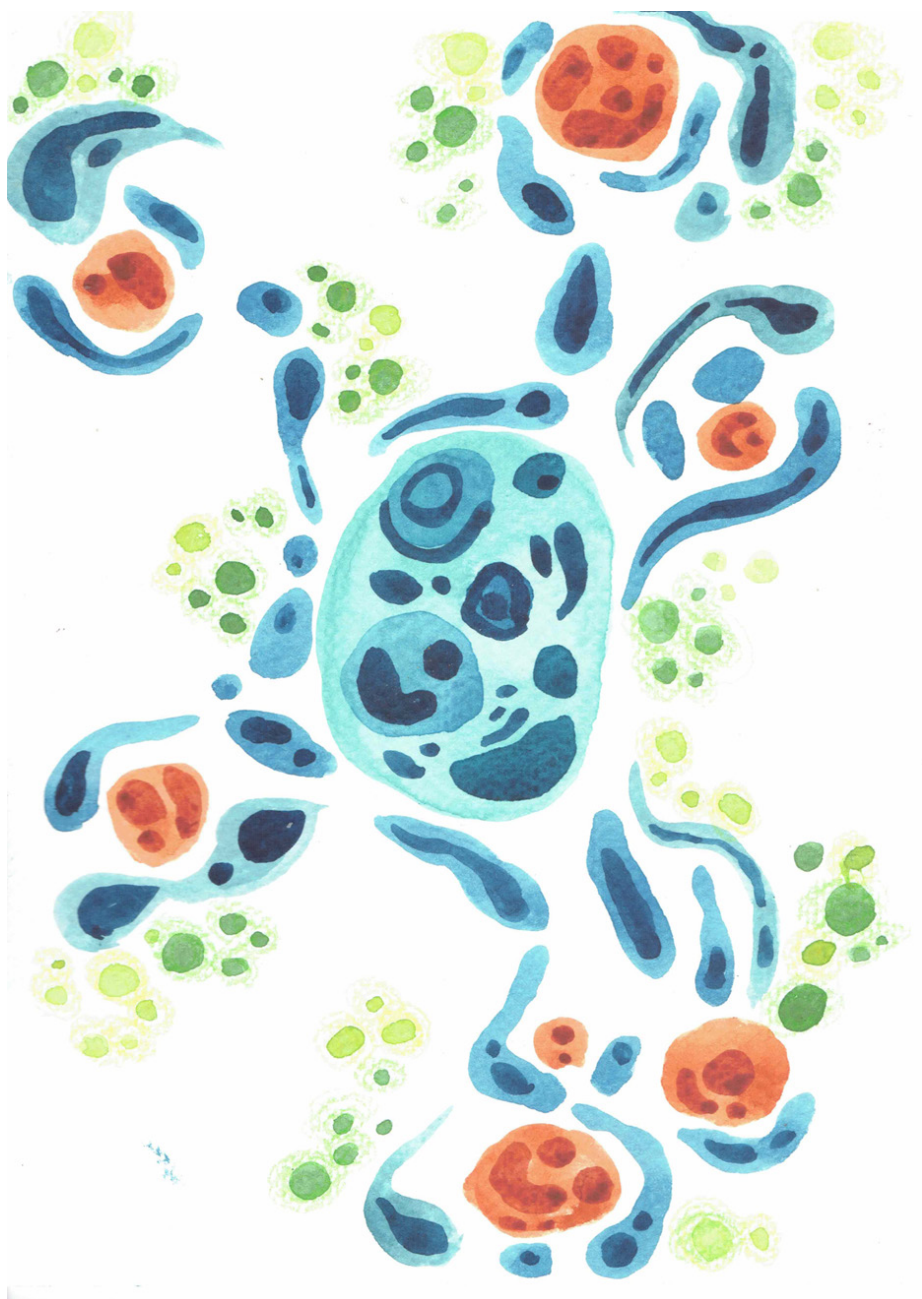
In light of this, should narrative creators really be excused from bearing responsibility for accurately representing mental disorders when they actively contribute to the stigmatisation and discrimination, all for the sake of maintaining their full artistic freedom?

Responsible: To Be or Not To Be?

In short, there is a responsibility to accurately present mental disorders in narratives to prevent more harm from befalling the community and hopefully reduce the stigma. By combining the social constructivist and biomedical perspective, it was shown that an accurate narrative contains the socio-cultural context and the disorder as it is understood by the most recent psychiatric manual. In other words, a story must include the symptoms experienced by real people, how the condition impacts their daily life and others around them, and perhaps even the possible positive aspects of a disorder instead of primarily emphasising the negative. A responsible narrative creator does not create caricaturist versions of and spread misinformation about mental disorders, nor treat them as a plot device to create a psychopathic killer or a (quite literally) two-faced hero.

To come back to the main question: What does the accuracy of the way in which mental disorders are represented in narratives mean for the responsibility narrative creators should bear, and how does it affect their artistic freedom? It is not a question of whether creators are willing to limit their artistic license but about how the proposed approach to accurately depicting disorders in stories concerns the creator. Narrative creators have as much of an obligation to not cause harm to others as any other person (Mkhwanazi 2013), which means that they are required to make the sacrifice.

Would this mean that any semblance of mental disorders portrayed in a seemingly inaccurate way would no longer be acceptable? Stories such as *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (Stevenson 1886) might not be referring to any disorder in particular, but the audience might believe it does if the narrative presents a very similar case. Even if the author merely intended to portray the duality of human nature, the readers may accept it as truth that a dissociated personality is always aggressive and evil, like Mr Hyde in this novella (BBC Bitesize n.d.). It only goes to show that even in fables and fairytales, one must tread carefully when describing the wonders and tragedies their imagination has to offer.



To Inform or to Persuade

Government Responsibilities from the
Perspectives of Utilitarianism and Deontology

Meijs Hoksbergen

With my multiplicity also comes great responsibility. This point was emphasised when I accompanied Meijs Hoksbergen to look at what responsibilities governments have when it comes to the narratives they use in their communication. Both narratives and governments hold a lot of power over people. With this power of government communication arises a conflict: a conflict of persuading and informing. Should governments provide multiple perspectives of a story, or should they only share the perspective that they think citizens should believe? That is why we should look at the ethical side of narrative government communication. To explore governments' responsibilities and to find a possible solution for this conflict, Meijs looked at two sides of mine: the utilitarian and deontological perspectives.

"I haven't been able to eat a regular meal in a year now. This affects my social life" (Rijksoverheid 2021a). This is the story of 22-year-old Noor, who got infected with COVID-19 and has Long Covid. The Dutch government used this story as an example to show people that the Coronavirus can have long-lasting effects and that we should be aware of its dangers.

The Dutch government tried many ways to communicate with citizens about the Corona crisis. One of those ways was advertisements on television and YouTube, in which personal stories were told about how sticking to the rules and getting vaccinated made people happy. This is because they could protect their family and friends that way, for instance. This way of government communication, through stories, turned out to be effective because many Dutch citizens actually stuck to the rules. This way of communication was effective because people knew what they had to do in order to protect others, and the stories responded to the value of wanting to protect loved ones (Rijksoverheid 2021b).

This example illustrates that government communication can influence the behavior of citizens, especially if you combine government communication with the power of narratives. How stories are told and which perspectives are chosen can significantly influence people's beliefs (Dal Cin et al. 2004). Since stories hold a lot of power, it is important to also look at the ethical side of narrative persuasion, specifically the narrative persuasion used in government communication. Governments could also use narratives to indoctrinate or spread misinformation. This is, for instance, what is happening in the war between Russia and Ukraine. Therefore, we have to critically evaluate the ethical implications of narrative persuasion.

With power comes responsibility, which presents an important problem for narrative government communication: the conflict between presenting multiple perspectives, which allows people to make up their own minds, and presenting the perspective that portrays what you think people should do. In other words, the conflict that arises is between informing and persuading. The aim of this paper is to examine governments' responsibilities in narrative communication and find possible solutions to this conflict.

In this paper, I will start by discussing the persuasiveness of narration and why it is important in government communication. Following that, I will present utilitarianism and deontology, two dominant ethical theories. Then, I will connect utilitarianism and deontology to government communication to explore governments' responsibilities regarding narrative communication. The reason why I chose these specific theories to examine narrative government communication is that they each provide a very different approach, namely, one from the perspective of consequentialism and one based on duties. Finally, I will use COVID-19 as a case study to illustrate the problem that arises for government communication and consider possible solutions.

The Power of Narratives

As humans, we come across narratives constantly. Whether it is on the streets, on our phones, while watching television, or while reading books. Not a day goes by without us consuming stories in some sort of way. Narratives have a lot of power: they can touch our emotions, impact what we believe, teach us new behaviors, and shape our cultural identity (Dal Cin et al. 2004, 176). Therefore, it is important to know what makes stories persuasive. Research by Hamby et al. (2017) has shown that there are several factors that make narratives persuasive. One of these factors is that people can recognize themselves in stories, which can result in emotional involvement and investment. This relates to a dominant view on narrative persuasion called transportation theory. Transportation theory entails that, as readers, we can become emotionally engaged with stories and can, for instance, envision things that are told in the stories. Due to the fact that we can recognize ourselves in stories and often find it pleasurable to engage with them, narratives can have a profound impact on readers' lives. This has to do with the fact that "as born storytellers, we naturally match a story to our own beliefs and experiences to establish its fidelity and to learn how the story can guide our future actions" (Hamby et al. 2017, 13).

Additionally, while reading, seeing, or listening to stories, people do not always recognize that there may be an underlying persuasive attempt (Dal Cin et al. 2004). These attempts to persuade go under the radar because

people watch a movie to be entertained, for instance, and do not necessarily expect to be influenced. However, since people can relate and get transported into stories, they do get influenced by these persuasive attempts, which can result in (unconsciously) changing or developing certain beliefs.

Due to the fact that we can recognize ourselves in stories and often find it pleasurable to engage with them, narratives can have a profound impact on readers' lives.

This has also been shown in an experiment by Green and Brock (2000), in which people were asked to read several short stories, including one called *Murder at the Mall*, and answer questions about those stories afterwards. *Murder at the Mall* is a short story about a young girl, Katie, getting killed by a psychiatric patient who was away from an institution on a 'day pass'. After reading the story, the readers were asked, among other things, to evaluate whether Katie and her attacker were good or bad, and whether they agreed or disagreed with statements such as "Psychiatric patients who live in an institution should be allowed to go out in the community during the day" (2000). Green and Brock found that the more transported into the stories participants felt, the more they tended to endorse beliefs implied by the narrative (2000). For example, across a number of studies, participants who were more transported while reading *Murder at the Mall* were significantly more likely to agree that psychiatric patients should have their freedoms restricted than were participants who were less transported (Dal Cin et al. 2004, 182). Thus, the more people are transported into a story, the more likely they are to accept the beliefs portrayed in that story.

As a result of the power of narratives, it is also important to look at the ethical side of narrative persuasion since this power could be misused or even abused. However, it is difficult to determine what is ethical and unethical regarding narrative persuasion. This problem does not lie in the fact that most people cannot determine the outrageous cases in which it is obvious that something is unethical. Instead, the problem is caused by the fact that we often use terms like "fair", "honest", and "sincere", but it is most of the time unclear what exactly we mean by those terms. It is often the case that it is more nuanced than whether something is ethical or not. In most cases, it is not black and white since different circumstances can impact our moral judgement of certain cases (Hashimoto 1985). If we look at crisis cases like a war or a global pandemic, the government must take certain measures

to protect its citizens. These measures might take away a certain amount of individuals' freedom, like with the lockdowns, which would not be considered ethical in times without crisis and in non-extreme situations.

Government Communication

I have now established why it is important to look at the ethical implications of narrative communication, but what is unique about narrative government communication that makes it crucial to investigate? One of the most important functions of the government is public communication. Governments must communicate changes in law, public safety issues, and many more (Fisher et al. 2012, 597). The biggest difference between government communication and general business communication is the fact that government communication deals with life-and-death situations, like in times of natural disaster, war, or a global pandemic. Governments' decisions directly influence the citizens, as they hold significant power over them. Additionally, governments have a monopoly on violence, enabling them to enforce their decisions.

However, for government communication to be effective, there needs to be trust. A study (Fisher et al. 2012, 599) has shown that the level of trust participants had in their governments is generally low. In this study, the researchers looked at the connection between media coverage and trust in governments, and it was shown that negative media coverage, such as scandal stories, increases the overall level of cynicism. Cynicism and critical evaluation of government communication are not necessarily bad because they can create a healthy way of maintaining checks and balances. However, if citizens are excessively critical, this can increase the level of distrust in the government.

Utilitarianism

As mentioned in the introduction, with narrative government communication, a conflict arises between informing and persuading. Should governments provide multiple perspectives and give citizens the means to think for themselves? Or should they only provide the perspective that would persuade citizens to believe what those in positions of power want them to believe? To address this question, I will apply two ethical theories: utilitarianism and deontology.

At the base of utilitarianism lies the Greatest Happiness Principle. This principle entails that we should strive to create the greatest amount of happiness, or at least minimal suffering, for the greatest number of people. In the words of John Stuart Mill: "Actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happi-

ness” (2010). Thus, in this view, the only important thing is that an action creates the most possible happiness for the most people. Put differently, only the consequences are relevant in determining whether an action is ethically permissible. Additionally, it is important to take into account the fact that for a utilitarian, one person’s interest does not weigh more than someone else’s.

Should governments provide multiple perspectives and give citizens the means to think for themselves?

In applying this to narrative government communication in general, the goal of the communication would be to create the greatest amount of happiness, or the least amount of suffering, for the greatest number of citizens. Therefore, governments should take the interests of all citizens into account equally. Yet, a new question then arises: What would this look like? The answer is dependent on the circumstances. In times of crisis, like the COVID-19 pandemic or the war between Russia and Ukraine, governments may have to make different choices to ensure the best possible outcome for their citizens than in everyday situations. In stable times, without war, a global pandemic, or other crises, it would not be seen as ethical if a government ordered everyone to stay home and not come in contact with other people except those in your household. However, in times of a global pandemic, this was the reality, and many people accepted this decision as ethical.

Thus, looking at narrative government communication from a utilitarian perspective, it becomes clear that, depending on the circumstances, citizens’ freedom is always weighed against the overall greater good. Therefore, it depends on contextual circumstances whether governments have a responsibility to portray multiple perspectives. Utilitarians would argue that in times of crisis, it can be ethical to limit freedom by portraying only one perspective if, and only if, the outcome is the best possible for as many people as possible.

Deontology

In contrast to Mill’s consequentialism, Immanuel Kant’s deontology focuses on duties instead of the consequences. The most essential part of Kant’s approach is the Categorical Imperative, which entails that one should “act so that the maxim of thy will can always at the same time hold good as a principle of universal legislation” (1998, 29). Thus, one should act in accordance with a rule you set for yourself that you have reasoned to be a desirable universal rule. In addition to this, another important aspect is the fact that

we should not use others as means to ends but only as ends in themselves. This means that nobody should use someone else in order to achieve their own goal.

What would this mean for narrative government communication? Government communication should focus on the duty of acting according to universal moral principles. At all times, governments have a duty to protect the lives and well-being of citizens. It would make sense that in peaceful situations, without crisis, everybody has the freedom to make up their own mind. Therefore, governments should provide multiple perspectives in their communication to respect the universal rule. This has to do with the fact that, in those cases, no extra measures are needed to ensure this protection of citizens. However, it also makes sense that in times of crisis, it is necessary to limit this freedom in order to protect the lives of citizens. Thus, governments must always protect citizens, but depending on the circumstances, they may need to limit citizens' individual freedoms in order to do so.

COVID-19 and Government Communication

As mentioned earlier, the effectiveness of government communication is dependent on the level of public trust. Especially in times of a global pandemic, a government's communication must be effective because it concerns life-and-death situations and the well-being of all citizens. A study has shown that in times of COVID-19, "people's engagement with and response to public health information and messaging is heavily influenced by their cultural and social identity, age, gender, and access to resources" (Hyland-Wood et al. 2021, 2). Thus, social circumstances need to be considered for government communication to be effective.

By applying utilitarianism to government communication, it has become more apparent that the result of the communication should be in the best interest of the most citizens. However, this raises the question of what that would look like and how it could be achieved. In times of the COVID crisis, it was in the best interest of the citizens not to get infected with the Coronavirus. Thus, the most important part of narrative government communication during that time was that it resulted in people not getting infected, and the communication was effective in achieving that. During the Corona pandemic, there was a focus on solidarity to ensure that people would stick to the measures. This was also exemplified in the Dutch government's campaign: "alleen samen krijgen we corona onder controle", which translates to "only together we can get COVID under control".

In their article, Hyland-Wood et al. (2021) provide recommendations for effective government communication in times of crisis. The most important recommendations for my research are the following: governments should

account for levels of health literacy, appeal to social norms, and consider diverse community needs. For communication to be effective, there needs to be a certain level of trust, and these recommendations could help. In addition, identification with stories is crucial for effectiveness, especially when it comes to narratives. Thus, the more people can relate to the stories governments share, the more people are inclined to believe that perspective.

However, especially when dealing with a virus like Corona, the conflict between allowing people to think for themselves by presenting multiple perspectives and the one perspective that would most likely get the most people to stick to the measures becomes very important. A utilitarian would argue that if presenting one perspective results in more people sticking to the measures and not getting infected, this would be more important than the people's freedom of choice.

Additionally, looking at government communication during COVID-19 from a deontological perspective, it becomes clear that, especially during a health crisis, there should be a focus on protecting each other. Governments are responsible for protecting their citizens, and during COVID-19, citizens needed to protect each other, too. Therefore, the narrative of government communication during a global pandemic should focus on this duty of protecting others.

Moreover, a study on moral messaging (Everett et al. 2020) has shown that communication centred around a moral message is the most effective. In this study, the researchers compared moral messages with different core ideas: virtue ethics, utilitarianism, and deontology. The results showed that in times of COVID-19, messages centring around a deontological duty of protecting each other were most effective. Therefore, to return to the question of responsibility, communication with a deontological message had the desired communicative effect of people sticking to the measures. As a result, it can be argued that governments are responsible for emphasising this duty of protecting others.

Conclusion

Overall, both narratives and government communication are very influential and hold power over citizens. As a result of this power, it is essential to look at the ethical side of narrative government communication. That is why I have investigated the responsibilities involved in narrative government communication. Specifically, I explored the conflict between governments having the responsibility to either inform or persuade.

To explore the responsibilities involved in narrative government communication, I explained and applied utilitarian and deontological approaches. Utilitarianism entails that we should strive for the greatest

amount of happiness, or at least minimal suffering, for the greatest number of people. As a result, it becomes clear that, from a utilitarian perspective, government communication should have a positive outcome for the greatest number of citizens. What exactly this should look like is dependent on the circumstances. Additionally, I looked at government communication from a deontological perspective. Deontology entails that we have a duty to act how we would reasonably want everyone to act. When applying this to narrative government communication, it becomes clear that governments should also uphold this duty. However, for governments to actualize their duty of protecting the well-being of citizens, communication has to be effective. The effectiveness of communication is dependent on different variables, but trust is a very important factor.

In order to ensure that people stick to the measures, trust is needed.

I also applied the utilitarian and deontological perspectives to the COVID-19 pandemic in order to make more concrete what narrative government communication should look like in a global pandemic and what governments' responsibilities should be. From a utilitarian perspective, governments should ensure that a virus infects as few people as possible. This begs the question of how the government can achieve such a thing through communication. In order to ensure that people stick to the measures, trust is needed, and everyone needs to understand what those measures are. Thus, governments have the responsibility to communicate clearly, account for diverse community needs, and take into account different levels of health literacy.

Alternatively, from a deontological perspective, governments should focus on the duty of protecting others. Governments always have a duty to protect their citizens, but in times of a pandemic, citizens must be informed on how to protect each other, too. Research has shown that a deontological perspective in moral messages to the public is the most effective means of fostering action. This is due to the fact that people can relate to these kinds of messages; the duty to act in ways you would want others to act applies easily to everyone. Therefore, governments should make use of communication with a deontological message since this would increase their overall effectiveness.

In sum, governments have a responsibility to protect their citizens. To do that, they must communicate effectively. However, depending on the circumstances, governments may also be responsible for providing multiple

perspectives to the public. In this sense, there is a conflict between communicating to enable freedom of choice and presenting a perspective that portrays what those in power believe citizens should do.



Perspectives Driving Climate Action

How Should Environmental Narratives Be Designed to Generate the Most Climate Action? Kim Liedtke-Dernedde

Not only do governments hold responsibility, but humans are also responsible for the planet they call home. I have always been confused about why this human species seems to struggle with protecting their home. That is also the question Kim Liedtke-Dernedde asked herself. I encountered her when she started to investigate which perspectives might be useful in designing narratives that motivate people to engage in climate action. The next and last part of my little book shows my appearance in academia and the environment. That is, Kim discusses the sociological and philosophical perspective on environmental narratives and an anthropocentric versus an ecocentric perspective on the environment.

By now, there is widespread agreement on the dangers of climate change. If most of us are aware of this threat to our existence, what are the measures we are taking to prevent it? When pondering this question, it becomes evident that the majority struggles with engaging in persistent climate action. What is the reason that, despite being aware of the consequences of our harmful behavior towards the environment, the vast majority of the human population does not take action? This question demonstrates the relevance of finding an explanation for this problem and, more importantly, a way to eventually overcome it by fostering action necessary for saving planet Earth. By climate action, I mean taking individual measures to preserve the environment.

There is a consensus (Hinkel et al. 2020; van der Leeuw 2020) that climate action is decisively influenced by its corresponding narratives. Thus, in order to generate climate action, it is crucial to find out which narrative characteristics motivate it and implement them into the climate debate. It is this paper's objective to find such an effective climate narrative, building on the research question of how environmental narratives should be designed to generate the most climate action.

It can be observed that, within the competition between positive and negative storytelling, there is a shift from the doom and gloom narrative, which is blamed to be delivering a sense of hopelessness (Arnold 2018), to a more positive framing, including happy endings (Levine 2022). According to those scholars, hopeful and engaging storytelling is the most promising for generating climate action. Notwithstanding, this paper argues that the negative experience of comprehending our inability to act is crucial to generating climate action and should thus be incorporated into climate

narratives. This conclusion is based on the philosophical work of Timothy Morton (2010; 2013) which challenges the rather sociological approach above. While this latter inquiry solely focuses on how to motivate climate action through narratives, Morton puts emphasis on how we think about climate change as such. In order to be able to eventually engage in climate action, we have to first understand why this activity poses such a challenge. However, this process of understanding evokes a negative experience, which is why Morton's approach to the climate debate constitutes an opposition to the sociological one within which a positive framing gains popularity.

Despite this conflict, this paper aims to merge the sociological and philosophical perspectives on climate change narratives. Adhering to the established consensus in sociology that narratives play a crucial role when fostering climate action (Hinkel et al. 2020; van der Leeuw 2020), this notion will be further explained when elucidating the connection between the two. Subsequently, a short summary of the debate revolving around climate narratives on a sociological basis will be presented. This will be followed by a more extensive analysis of Morton's philosophical work. This section will relate Morton's content to Heidegger's concept of *Angst*, aiming to make Morton's ideas more comprehensible and critical of the sociological approach. Eventually, the two approaches will be compared to conclude that Morton's contribution to understanding and adapting the way we think about global warming cannot be left out in environmental narratives when aiming to generate climate action.

Narrativity and Climate Action

In order to delve into the connection between narrativity and climate action, the former will first be defined. Narratives are "socially constructed 'stories' that make sense of events and phenomena, integrating them into worldviews" (Hinkel et al. 2020, 495). This account suggests that by helping to understand the world around us, narratives give direction to our actions. For climate change, this relation is even more enforced. That is, there is a consensus that scientific facts on global warming generally do not affect climate action but rather the style of narrating global warming (Hinkel et al. 2020, 495). Thus, changing behavior is only possible through introducing new narratives (van der Leeuw 2020).

However, not all narratives are equally effective. While it is not so much the general role of narratives in relation to climate action that constitutes the debate, there are discrepancies on which narrative characteristics are the most suitable ones. This is the reason for the question that leads this paper's inquiry: How should the environmental narratives be designed to generate persistent climate action? Naturally, there are many opposing

accounts of effective environmental narratives. In the following paragraphs, two perspectives will be elaborated: First, the sociological inquiry will be presented, which consists of articles that can be categorized as sociology. Second, the work of philosopher Timothy Morton will be laid out.

The Sociological Inquiry

Hinkel et al. (2020) start by presenting the current most dominant narrative regarding climate change: the doom and gloom narrative. This narrative focuses on “problems, costs and adverse impacts” (495). While this kind of storytelling helped with introducing the urgency of combating climate change, it simultaneously made engaging in climate action appear like a burden. It is obvious that there is hesitation to engage in action that is negatively connoted. Stoknes’ notion of ‘apocalypse fatigue’ elaborates on this phenomenon: Constant threats that challenge daily life deter people, which leads to a defense mechanism of not taking the problem at stake seriously and avoiding it (Arnold 2018). The hesitance to take action is furthermore explained by van der Leeuw (2020): New narratives can impact behavior effectively when they incorporate practical propositions that allow for varied interpretations and adaptations, reaching a broader audience.

The reason why solutions are commonly left out in narratives about climate change is arguably because a lot of narration takes place in journalism.

On the one hand, this delivers an answer to the question of why people struggle to contribute to sustainable practices: The existing narratives do not convey a sentiment of agency. On the other hand, this indicates what an effective narrative, according to those sociological sources, looks like: Environmental narratives should put emphasis on solutions rather than problems (Arnold 2018; van der Leeuw 2020). If constructive problem-solving mechanisms are left out, people “feel paralyzed and they don’t feel like they can engage and have an entry point into doing something about the problem” (Boycoff 2018; quoted in Arnold 2018). The reason why solutions are commonly left out in narratives about climate change is arguably because a lot of narration takes place in journalism. Stories merely based on solutions lack the dramatic aspect and are therefore being left out (Arnold 2018). In other words, “problems caused by climate change were deemed more newsworthy than solutions, and that coverage was fueling a sense of hopelessness” (Arnold 2018). Since, as indicated earlier, this approach does not lead to engagement in climate action, there is a need to shift climate change narratives to be more optimistic (van der Leeuw 2020), emphasizing

possible solutions and, alongside this, the role people can assume (Arnold 2018; van der Leeuw 2020). Moreover, those solutions and choices should be framed as desirable and moral (Razavi 2019).

In a nutshell, narratives foster most climate action when they contain hopeful elements and concrete propositions on how to engage. This account of narrativity, which constitutes the sociological inquiry, is opposed by philosophical inquiry revolving around the work of Timothy Morton. They posit a divergent explanation as to why humans have problems with engaging in climate action. The next section will be devoted to giving an outline of their line of argumentation.

An Outline of the Philosophical Inquiry

“We all know what to do, which is stop emitting carbon now. [...] How come we’re all not doing it?” (Morton 2018, 8:39–8:50) This question posed by Morton at Radboud Reflects resembles the question brought up earlier in this paper: Why do most humans struggle to engage in climate action? Morton approaches this question by connecting it to thought. In their work, *The Ecological Thought* (2010), they highlight the significance of these thought processes and underscore the importance of creating a new way of thinking about ecology: “Our continued survival, and therefore the survival of the planet we’re now dominating beyond all doubt, depends on our thinking past Nature” (5). This novel method of thinking beyond, or past, the environment is captured in their book, promising an awareness of our deep connections to what we call ‘nature’ and fundamental care for it.

This paper’s contribution is to connect this role ascribed to thought with action. How we think about something determines how we act on it. For instance, if you consider an omnivorous diet morally questionable due to animal wellbeing concerns, you might renounce meat products. If thought and action are interconnected, the reason for a lack of climate action can be found when investigating how we think about climate change. Furthermore, following the same logic, a change in thought can cause a change in our actions. Thus, climate action can be achieved through a shift in how we think about climate change.

Narrativity, in this context, plays a key role because how we think is both influenced by and expressed in narratives. Returning to my prior example, rejecting an omnivore diet could be attributed to a documentary that problematizes the consumption of meat in its narrative. Being confronted with such a depiction can result in a more nuanced and sensitive perception of meat consumption, resulting in a rejection of it. Consequently, and as elaborated earlier by the sociological inquiry, narratives are needed to cause a shift in behavior as they are able to change the way we engage in

thought. Morton's approach, which will be further elucidated in the following paragraph, promises to generate fundamental care. According to the logic presented above, this care can lead to persistent climate action. Therefore, this paper argues that Morton's approach should be incorporated into narratives. Before explaining their ecological thought further, it is necessary to delve into their theory on how we think about climate change.

Climate Change as a Hyperobject

Morton discusses the way we think about climate change and our relation to it in their work, *Hyperobjects* (2013). As the name suggests, climate change is presented as a hyperobject, a concept entailing "things that are massively distributed in time and space relative to humans" (1). This includes, for instance, nuclear waste or global warming (Boulton 2016). Hyperobjects, thus, cannot be allocated to the anthropocentric categories of time and space. This is, among other aspects, the reason why hyperobjects are not fully accessible and understandable for human beings. Applying this theory to the investigation into why people struggle to take action, the struggle exists because we cannot properly grasp climate change as a concept. In other words, "hyperobjects force humans to see that there is no possible conceptualization of the world, the environment or nature, but a fundamental gap between humans and things" (Bargues-Pedreny and Schmidt 2019, 57).

Since we cannot comprehend the concept of climate change, we fail to act on it. The influence of modern society is also a contributing factor. Modernity established an anthropocentric way of seeing the world and engaging in thought (Morton 2010, 3). However, since hyperobjects cannot be understood with anthropocentric categories, as explained above, we fail to solve problems connected to those hyperobjects. This summarizes the problem that causes a lack of climate action. We cannot solve it from the outside but only from the inside (Bargues-Pedreny and Schmidt 2019, 59). Therefore, we need to establish narratives that escape the anthropocentric view of hyperobjects and create an understanding of the interconnectedness of our environment and, resulting from this, a relation of fundamental care towards it.

The Ecological Thought (Morton 2010) deals with this novel way of thinking. It builds "care and concern for beings, no matter how uncertain we are of their identity, no matter how afraid we are of their existence" (19). This means that although we might struggle to grasp the essence of climate change, it is possible to establish a relation of protection and awareness towards it. Morton emphasizes that care and concern in this respect cannot stem from denying the uncomfortable aspects of the climate and its change,

for which we are to be held responsible. As Carducci puts it: “For Morton the aestheticization of nature is similar to how patriarchy claims to admire the feminine and yet controls it by circumscribing its field of action” (2009, 633).

We need to establish narratives that escape the anthropocentric view of hyperobjects and create an understanding of the interconnectedness of our environment and, resulting from this, a relation of fundamental care towards it.

This notion can also be applied to the suggestion of the sociological inquiry of establishing hopeful storytelling to generate climate action: It attempts to address the struggle of engaging in sustainable practices by denying this struggle in the first place and overriding it with positive narratives. Instead, as agents in the climate crisis, we must first experience fear, shame, and a loss of agency, which are inflicted upon us by Morton’s approach (Boulton 2016). Only then will we generate the care fundamental for persistent climate action. This notion is explored in Morton’s dark ecology, which uses “poison as medicine” (Morton 2013, 59). In order to understand how to attain the ecological thought, the next section will be used to elucidate Morton’s dark ecology by comparing it to Heidegger’s *Angst*. This comparison validates the necessity of an intrinsically negative experience for fostering climate action which constitutes the basis to effectively counter the suggestion of positive narratives by the sociological inquiry.

Angst and Dark Ecology

Although *Angst* is a state defined by an existential crisis, it also opens the door to a meaningful life. A similar logic can be applied to Morton’s notion of dark ecology, as will now be demonstrated.

According to Heidegger, we can only lead an authentic life if we are aware of its finitude, and we can only comprehend the finitude of our lives through experiencing the state of *Angst* (Heidegger 1996). *Angst* is concerned with an existential fear of the possibility of our nonexistence and is thus a negative experience in its nature. This can be applied to Morton’s theory in the sense that dark ecology also considers an existential and inherently negative experience necessary for a positive outcome: “What if hyperobjects finally force us to realize the truth of the word *humiliation* itself, which means being brought low, being brought down to earth?” (Morton 2013, 17). While for Heidegger, the positive outcome is an authentic existence, it is a deeply aware and caring relationship between humans and the environ-

ment for Morton. We first need to fundamentally understand our struggle to engage in climate action, which means addressing our relation to hyperobjects.

When considering what has been said about the sociological approach earlier in this paper, Morton's account of agency constitutes an opposition to the prior one. It appears that it is not sufficient to pass over our subconscious way of perceiving things when wanting to establish a relation of agency towards them. In other words, merely deciding between positive and negative storytelling does not cover the core issue of the struggle of engaging in climate action. Before this conclusion is elaborated further, the next section will discuss the extent to which these two opposing approaches can complement each other.

Effective Narratives for Climate Action

There are several differences between the two inquiries presented. Before laying them out, the two will be shortly summarized: Apart from providing an explanation of the role of narrativity, the sociological approach (Arnold 2018; Hinkel et al. 2020; van der Leeuw 2020; Razavi 2019) emphasizes a shift from negative to positive storytelling. Climate action can be effectively achieved through generating hope and presenting concrete solutions. The philosophical approach (Morton 2010; 2013) considers the realm of thought as essential for saving the planet. Only a shift in the way we perceive and think about climate change can generate persistent climate action. This paper connects this account to the notion that a shift in thought can only be achieved through corresponding narratives.

Referring to the question posed in the introduction, the two perspectives deliver a different explanation as to why there are difficulties when engaging in climate action. It derives from the sociological sources that we struggle because the narratives surrounding climate change present it as a burden. Furthermore, the aspect of possible action is not emphasized enough, which complicates taking action further. Morton, on the contrary, states that we experience trouble as agents in the climate crisis. This is because our current way of thinking about global warming, determined by the nature of hyperobjects and the influence of modernity, fails to motivate us to act due to a lack of care and concern. These two different elucidations explain the divergent approaches to fostering climate action.

As the sociological sources make the style of narration responsible for a lack of action, they advocate a shift to more solution-based narrations. Although this paper applies Morton's work to a shift in narration, they first take a step back to address the root of the problem: Modern society has damaged the ecological thought, and only with the help of dark ecology can

we escape its anthropocentrism and address the ecological crisis. Provided that this novel way of thinking about climate change is established, the struggle of engaging in climate action can be eradicated. It is crucial to realize that the ecological thought can only be implemented if it is picked up by narratives surrounding the climate debate because narrativity is the essential tool to influence our thoughts, as shown by the sociological perspective.

Morton's inquiry and its comparison to Heidegger's *Angst* demonstrate that, while narratives remain important, the sociological approach to the design of narratives cannot lead to persistent climate action. It is not enough to decide whether positive or negative storytelling is more suitable to motivate people to take action because both fail to confront the root of the problem. Instead, one has to address underlying beliefs and ways of thinking. To generate persistent climate action, people must understand why they struggle to fight global warming and then build a more deeply rooted ecological awareness that brings them to care about the environment. To use Morton's words: "It's not simply a matter of *what* you're thinking about. It's also a matter of *how* you think" (2010, 4).

It is not enough to decide whether positive or negative storytelling is more suitable to motivate people to take action because both fail to confront the root of the problem. Instead, one has to address underlying beliefs and ways of thinking.

Conclusion

The investigation into how effective environmental narratives should generate climate action in light of the sociological inquiry (Arnold 2018; Hinkel et al. 2020; Razavi 2019; van der Leeuw 2020) and Morton's work (2010; 2013) demonstrates that both perspectives on the matter are useful. The sociological sources reveal that narratives are the basis for fostering climate action and argue for positive storytelling. Meanwhile, Morton emphasizes the importance of the ecological thought. This paper combined those two positions by claiming that the ecological thought should be implemented into narratives to generate climate action. In other words, although the account of environmental narratives in the sociological sources has been effectively criticized by Morton, they do deliver the role that narratives play in the first place. With this starting point, Morton's concepts of hyperobjects, the ecological thought, and dark ecology help to finalize narratives

that motivate climate action. More concretely, narratives should depict the interconnectedness of the environment and humanity, show more clearly the consequences of our behavior, and emphasize an eco-centric viewpoint to evaluate environmental matters.

This request for a shift in perspective extends beyond the specific example of climate action, in which a shift from an anthropocentric to an eco-centric perspective is needed. It also encompasses the importance of a broader consideration of multiperspectivity within academia. That is, the view that climate action and its generation can eventually be measured by empirical research and social sciences. On the one hand, such a view suggests the limitation of philosophy as an academic discipline. Yet, on the other hand, it reveals the need for interdisciplinary cooperation within academia. As philosophy guides empirical research, the practical and theoretical perspectives merge. This notion of multiperspectivity exists in many different respects, as the other papers of this volume demonstrate. This example of multiperspectivity in academia demonstrates the benefits of considering multiple outlooks. Optimal results can be attained by integrating a variety of viewpoints. This is a notion that goes beyond my paper and can be generally applied to all other forms of multiperspectivity.

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