Narrative Simulation as a Route to Self-Knowledge and Self-Development

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Abstract: Debates about whether works of art can serve as a source of knowledge about the world or whether they can promote other-understanding have been common in contemporary aesthetics and philosophy of art. However, little has been written on the effects that art has on cultivating self-knowledge and self-development. While for most of us it seems obvious that art has these effects, little is known about how and why these effects occur. Addressing this issue is the main aim of the present paper. The gist of the argument is that narrative works of art give us a unique opportunity to adopt a dual (first- and third-person) perspective on the self, which is argued recently by psychologists and philosophers of mind to be necessary for obtaining the kind of self-knowledge that leads to self-development.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, there have been common debates in aesthetics and philosophy of art on the question whether we can acquire knowledge from works of art. These debates are usually concerned with the question whether artworks can give us propositional truths about the world, refine our conceptual vocabulary, promote experiential knowledge (i.e. knowledge what-it-is-like) or whether they can serve as a source of axiological knowledge (i.e. understanding the

significance, value and consequences that mere knowledge of something has in relation to human experiences).[1]

However, little has been written on the effects that art has on cultivating self-knowledge and self-development. Philosophical and psychological discussions are primarily concerned with understanding the socio-epistemic and moral effects of art, and with the importance of art engagement in cultivating empathy and our ability to understand others.[2] Narrative works of art depict complex situations, motives and actions that give us the opportunity to imagine what it is like to be in another person's situation and thus can serve to promote our moral and social sensibilities with respect to the lives of others. Although these discussions may help to explain how art can lead to reflection on our own norms, values and moral principles, they do not say much about the effects of art on self-knowledge that is not socially and morally oriented, namely, factual self-knowledge that refers to knowledge of our own experiences, thoughts, emotions, beliefs, desires and other mental states that constitute the self.[3] While for most of us it seems obvious that art has these effects, little is known about how and why these effects occur. Addressing this issue is the main aim of my paper. Specifically, I intend to show that our engagement with narrative works of art gives us a unique opportunity to adopt a dual (first- and third-person) perspective on the self. As it has been argued recently by psychologists and philosophers of mind, such a dual perspective is necessary for the acquisition of the kind of self-knowledge that leads to self-change.[4] That is, we must avow our own mental states from a first-person perspective (introspection), since it is this perspective that necessitates the feeling of ownership and authority over our own mental life and thus leads to self-development. Yet, on the other hand, we must also regulate first-person avowal by adopting an allocentric third-person perspective in order to avoid self-deceptions to which introspection is vulnerable. That is, some third-personally acquired insight into the psychological forces and impulses that lie beneath our immediate awareness is necessary for an accurate exercise of an agential authority. While it is difficult to attain such a dual perspective on the self without therapeutic interventions, I argue that narrative works of art allow us to experience both perspectives, thereby helping us to make sense of our own internal experiences (what it is that we are truly feeling) as well as allowing us to recognise the meaning of these experiences in the larger context of our lives.

To develop my argument, I begin with addressing the notion of self-knowledge in general – its sources, values and limits. I outline the principle of (rational and affective) first-person authority that is being considered as necessary condition for obtaining the kind of self-knowledge that leads to self-development. In section II, I turn to the notion of narrative simulation as formulated by Mar and Oatley (2008) and describe two different types of emotional engagement with fictional characters that such simulation affords. Finally, in section III, I propose an account of the role of narrative simulation

in promoting the kind of self-knowledge that leads to self-development. I illustrate my ideas by means of Michael Haneke's movie *The Seventh Continent* (1989).

I.   THE SOURCES, LIMITS AND VALUES OF SELF-KNOWLEDGE

According to Brie Gertler, self-knowledge refers to knowledge of our own mental states, such as our experiences, thoughts, emotions, beliefs, desires and other mental states that constitute the self.[5] In general, to have self-knowledge is to have justified true beliefs about the main aspects of our personality and mental life, and to have a clear sense of who we truly are, which is necessary for leading a meaningful and authentic life.

Literature usually points out two main sources of self-knowledge, that is, introspection (as the source of a first-personal self-knowledge) and self-perception (as the source of a third-personal self-knowledge).[6] Introspection refers to a direct (i.e. non-inferential) awareness of our mental states. It relies on the inner information that we alone have regarding our own mental life. For example, we know introspectively that we are angry by directly noticing the feeling of anger in us. We have a first-personal relation to the content of self-information. This is different in the case of self-perception where we become aware of our own mental states indirectly, by means of inferring them from our behaviour (as for instance, yelling and kicking being some of the behavioural signs indicating that we are angry). We have, in other words, a third-personal relationship towards our own mental states.

In contemporary philosophy of mind, introspection is no longer described in a Cartesian way as an inner perception of mental states that is similar to our perception of external objects.[7] The argument is that in contrast to external objects, mental objects are not independently existing facts waiting for our observation. Mental phenomena, as McDowell points out, have no existence independently of our awareness of them.[8] That is, without some awareness, say of our own desire or our own feeling of anger, we cannot say that we have a desire or that we are angry. This implies that in contrast to our perception of external objects, our own introspective awareness of mental states will have certain consequences for the nature of those mental states themselves. That is, how we will come to conceive our own mental states will to a certain degree determine what these states will be for us. As Finkelstein articulates this idea: 'Mental state self-ascriptions are unlike observation reports in that they constitute, to some extent, the facts to which they refer.'[9] Introspection (partly) shapes the meaning of our mental states, because the process of bringing mental states into explicit awareness necessarily involves the activity of specifying, articulating and making sense of our mental states. To know what we are thinking, feeling or experiencing essentially involves the activity of self-interpretation.

Richard Moran, who also favours this idea, thereby claims that introspective awareness is inherently connected with the principle of the first-person authority. The distinctiveness of this principle does not lie in an epistemic authority (i.e. having a privileged epistemic access to our own mental states), but rather in *agential* authority, that is, in our ability to actively engage with and shape our own mental states. As he puts it:

> What is left out of the Spectator's view is the fact that I not only have a special access to someone's mental life, but that it is mine, expressive of my relation to the world, subject to my evaluation, correction, doubts, and tensions. This will mean that it is to be expected that a person's own awareness of his mental life will make for differences in the constitution of that mental life, differences that do not obtain with respect to one's awareness of other things or other people. For this reason, introspection is not to be thought of as a kind of light cast on a realm of inner objects, leaving them unaltered.[10]

Moran offers the most developed account of an agential first-person authority. He understands the nature of the agency in rational terms. We exercise first-person authority when we produce reasons as to what to feel, think, or believe. Our own rational deliberations as to what is true, right, just or worthwhile determine what we shall feel, think or believe. Thus, on Moran's account, I believe that I am afraid if my reflections on reasons that I have for this belief are justified (that is, whether my assessment of the situation as threatening is really justified).

However, Moran's account has been recently criticised as too rationalistic as it cannot explain our relationship towards those mental states that are not responsive to rational deliberations, such as feelings and emotions.[11] For example, it is often the case that we feel happy but without having any conscious reasons to believe we should feel happy. And the opposite is the case. Sometimes we have reasons to believe we should feel happy, yet we cannot feel so. A nice illustration of this case is given by Leo Tolstoy in his *Confession* where he writes that in spite of the fulfilment of his life goals and needs, he cannot but feel unhappiness and despair. He describes his mental state as follows:

> I grew sick of life; some irresistible force was leading me to somehow get rid of it (...). And this was happening to me at a time when, from all indications, I should have been considered a completely happy man; this was when I was not yet fifty years old. I had a good, loving, and beloved wife, fine children, and a large estate that was growing and expanding without any effort on my part. More than ever before I was respected by friends and acquaintances, praised by strangers, and I could claim a certain

renown without really deluding myself. Moreover, I was not physically and mentally unhealthy; on the contrary, I enjoyed a physical and mental vigour such as I had rarely encountered among others my age (...). And in such a state of affairs I came to a point where I could not live; and even though I feared death, I had to employ ruses against myself to keep from committing suicide.[12]

Even though Tolstoy himself acknowledges all the reasons to believe that he should feel happy, these feelings keep elude him. According to Moran, Tolstoy's unhappiness is an inappropriate response that lacks first-person authorial status. Yet, as pointed out rightly by Strijbos and Jongepier, such an account goes against the basic principle of psychotherapy, namely that patients ought to give voice to their emotions and thoughts, rather than to intellectualise them.[13] Psychotherapy depends on the assumption that we are in a privileged position to know what it is that we are feeling and thinking, regardless of the irrationality of our mental states. Even though Tolstoy's self-ascription of unhappiness appear to conflict with his rationally endorsed reasons, it is nonetheless coming from a first-personal perspective to his own mental state. His unhappiness is a current perspective of the world that shapes his motivations, desires, thoughts and actions. Thus, it does not seem a tenable position to claim that he lacks a first-person authority over his own feelings just because his feelings are unresponsive to reasons.

Naomi Kloosterboer has accordingly argued that Moran's account of rational first-person authority cannot be applied to emotions and feelings due to the difference of reasons relevant in deliberating about belief-like states on the one hand and deliberating about emotions and feelings on the other.[14] Reasons for believing that something is the case have to do with the truth-value of the content of the belief, while reasons for feeling a specific emotion have to deal with our own subjective relation to the world, namely what matters to us, what it is that we care about given our own conscious or unconscious beliefs, thoughts, feelings, motives, desires and values. As she points out: 'Our emotions are conceptually related to our concerns in the sense that they are responses to things that are of our concern.'[15] Hence, in order to answer the question whether it is right to feel unhappy or angry (and thus to act as agents regarding our own mental states), we must reflect on reasons as to why we come to evaluate the situation as dissatisfying or offensive and this means that we must primarily answer the question as to who we are, what it is that we belief in, what we value, desire and expect from others:

> Telling whether something is hurtful, offensive, or joyful for a specific person is grounded in considerations that depend upon who that person is, with certain character traits, concerns, plans, ambitions, fears, vulnerabilities, relations to other persons and so on.[16]

We have a first-person authority regarding our own feelings insofar these feelings resonate with our own beliefs, desire, goals, values and with our own idea of the person we want to be.

Some philosophers have thus captured the agential aspect of a first-person perspective in *affective* terms. According to this proposal, recently offered by Strijbos and Jongepier, we know our own mental states through the process of self-interpretation or self-description, whereby we come to believe the appropriateness or accuracy of such a self-description through the act of an affective avowal. As the authors write:

> if we find that a new description resonates with our emotions and makes them appear more clearly circumscribed and determinate, this will give us reason to believe that this new description is more accurate than the old one.[17]

We come to *feel*, rather than rationally believe the appropriateness of a specific description. Affective avowals, produced by attending closely to the affective and experiential dimension of our mental states, play an important role in determining and shaping our mental states:

> the self-constitutive effect of self-interpretation of our mental states needs not require the rational endorsement of their content. It is enough that we come to experience the accuracy of our new descriptions on the basis of what these words stir up in us.[18]

A given interpretation is constitutive of our mental state insofar we find it emotionally convincing, in the sense that it *harmonises with our own patterns of feelings, thoughts and actions. We come to recognise emotionally convincing (and thus appropriate) interpretation* by the sense of relief, comfort and excitement it produces in us; we feel that all aspects of our experience are finally brought together and make sense. On the other hand, emotionally unconvincing (thus inappropriate) interpretation of our own subjective experience provokes the feeling of discomfort, anxiety and lack of resolution. This is an interpretation that we experience as less sense-making and disorganising.[19]

However, even though adopting a first-person perspective (introspection) on our own mental states is essential for the development of our own personality, it is not sufficient for acquiring a genuine, adequate self-knowledge. This is because, as Strijbos and Jongepier write, 'when trying to find out what we feel, want, or believe, we cannot always trust our transparent outlook on the world.'[20] Introspection is greatly vulnerable to epistemic fallibility and self-deception, as pointed out by numerous studies in cognitive science, which show that we often form erroneous beliefs regarding our personality traits, misidentify motives and causes for our emotions, attitudes, choices and actions and make wrong assessments regarding our dispositional mental

states, such as moods, desires and beliefs.[21] Introspection appears to be epistemically limited not merely because of our own motivational reasons to keep unpleasant thoughts, memories and feelings outside of our awareness, but also because a great deal of our perceptual, semantic and affective processes are themselves unconscious.[22] To the extent that we have a limited introspective access to the causes of our emotions, feelings and actions, we often resort to confabulations. That is, we form inferential beliefs about our own mental states based on external information available to us, such as cultural theories about why people respond the way they do, observational information of causal relations or our own personal knowledge as to why we feel, think and act the way we do.[23] As such information, even though not necessarily incorrect, is often incorrectly applied to specific cases, our self-reports frequently result in forming erroneous beliefs about our own mental states.

Besides, introspection has also been criticised on the ground that it leads to, what Jonathan Lear calls, the *pathology of avowal*, namely to strengthening, rather than preventing maladaptive mental states.[24] In short, the argument is that first-person perspective can often be governed by maladaptive mental schemas or implicit beliefs that are introspectively invisible to us. These mental schemas determine what features of ourselves and of the world we will select, pick out and organise together, thereby preventing us from taking into account other features of ourselves and of the world that might contribute to a more accurate self-understanding. For example, if a person holds the implicit belief that the world is full of betrayal (Lear's example), then this belief will guide his or her attention to those features of the world that are consistent with this belief, while overlooking those that are not, thereby consequently reinforcing and strengthening his or her implicit belief itself (to see the world in a betray-like way).

For these reasons, it has been proposed that first-person perspective must be regulated by means of a more distanced, third-person perspective on our own mental states. As Victoria McGeer suggests:

> it seems our best protection – indeed, our only protection – against an ego-driven corruption of reason is to cultivate an allocentric capacity to see ourselves as we see others – namely, as empirical subjects whose psychological states are responding to a variety of influences that are largely invisible from a naively egocentric first-person point of view.[25]

The goal is to step back from our first-personal perspective, restrain ourselves from avowing and re-access our inclinations themselves. Given that some of our behaviour is driven by implicit attitudes, motives and other psychological traits that are often unknown by us, observation of our own behaviour can give us a better insight into the nature of our internal states. Third-person perspective, however, must be carefully controlled in order not to lead to self-alienation. Namely, observing our own feelings, beliefs, desires as if they

were someone else's involves experiencing our own mental states as something that happens to us, rather than being up to us. If not regulated, third-person perspective can fail to take into account our own awareness that the self under observation is ours and the importance this mode of self-awareness has for our self-development.[26]

To conclude, in order to acquire the kind of self-knowledge that leads to self-development, we must employ first-person perspective on the self, since it is this perspective that necessitates the feeling of ownership and authority over our own mental life. Yet, on the other hand such a perspective is often self-deceiving, as it can be hijacked by psychological forces that are not directly conscious to us. Introspection appears to be an unreliable source of self-knowledge due to the existence of various aspects of our inner life that remain outside of our conscious mind (such as implicit beliefs, desires, passions and motives) and which have a significant effect on our cognitive and emotional experiences. Since introspection refers merely to perceiving that what is immediately conscious to us and does not have a direct access to unconscious processes, it can often result in an incomplete and erroneous self-information. Thus, introspective awareness must also be regulated by means of a third-person perspective on the self. That is, some third-personally acquired insight into the psychological forces and impulses that lie beneath our immediate awareness is necessary for an accurate exercise of our agential authority. My aim in what follows is to show that narrative art in the form of mental simulation can meet both conditions. According to my account, narrative simulation offers different ways of interpreting our own subjective experiences from a third-person point of view, thereby facilitating acquisition of self-information. Furthermore, the process of acquiring self-information is not arbitrary; rather it is bound up with the principle of first-person authority. In particular, the accuracy of self-information regarding our own mental states is validated through the act of an affective avowal. Before proceeding to explicate my account in detail, I want to turn to the notion of simulation in order to clarify how it is related to narrative works of art.

II.   THE CONCEPT OF NARRATIVE SIMULATION

According to Mar and Oatley, narrative works of art function as 'simulations of selves in the social world'.[27] There are two distinctive features of such narrative simulations. First, they give us an opportunity to put ourselves in the shoes of fictional characters, momentarily inhabit their thoughts, beliefs and desires and to imagine what they feel.[28] Narrative simulations thus allow us to connect with fictional characters on a first-personal level, using the vantage point we would have if we were actually experiencing portrayed events. Second, they offer an abstracted and simplified model of real-life experiences. As the authors explain, narrative simulation is a 'presentation of human relations and their outcomes in a compressed format'.[29] That is to say, narrative

simulation does not directly imitate our ordinary experiences; these are being much too complex and detailed to be directly represented in an art form that is spatially and temporally limited. Rather, narrative simulation incorporates only those facts that are relevant for understanding the meaning of the story and the psychological situation of characters. For this reason, narrative art employs different strategies and techniques, builds on our own information processing system, to convey information that cannot be explicitly given and thereby offers 'explanations of what goes on beneath the surface to generate observable behavior'.[30] Each work of narrative art brings along a different interpretation and explanation of the issues and themes portrayed, depending on the different ways of selecting, specifying and arranging elements of the story together. To see exactly how narrative art provides the explanation of the depicted theme, let us consider Michael Haneke's movie *The Seventh Continent* (1989).

The movie is an agonising story of a well-situated Austrian family and their attempt to escape the feeling of emotional and social isolation in the modern world by choosing to commit suicide. The mental state of emptiness and depersonalisation that accompanies everyday life of this family is represented through images that are focused on objects, rather than on subjects. For example, we do not see characters' faces, but merely fragmented and isolated shots of their hands turning off the alarm clock, opening curtains, putting toothpaste on the toothbrush, tying shoes, making coffee. Through such a cinematic technique that emphasises the state of imprisonment by our daily routines, Haneke managed to give a perceptible form to the feeling of emptiness of one's existence, and thereby provided us with an opportunity of recognising certain mental states, emotions and ideas that cannot be directly represented. In particular, the movie offers one of many possible ways to understand the experience of emotional emptiness and alienation. In this case, the meaning of an experience is brought forth by carefully selecting and specifying certain aspects of experience. For example, the feeling of being trapped in the life of routines as expressed by the depiction of mechanically performed daily tasks, the idea of depersonalisation and loss of communication as conveyed by the narration accentuating the monotony of characters' day to day lives and their impersonal exchange of words, and how these feelings ultimately lead to the experience of despair and anger towards the world, as expressed by the image of characters aggressively demolishing their house and all their possessions, and finally to the decision to escape the feeling of imprisonment by choosing to commit suicide.

Haneke's movie illustrates nicely in what way narrative simulation affords a dual perspective on fictional characters. On the one hand, the film offers a concrete and vivid vision of characters' situation, thereby allowing us to imagine the depicted event from the first-person point of view. For example, in the movie we see the characters' world through their eyes as they become emotionally desensitised, apathetic and despaired to the point that they de-

cide to take their own lives. We have, in other words, a deeply felt simulating experience of their emotional states that gives us direct (first-personal) information about their internal experiences. On the other hand, the film also presents a broader perspective on the portrayed events and characters, which is an effect accomplished by the formal and stylistic properties of the work through which the artist expresses his interpretation and explanation of the story. For instance, close up-shots of characters mechanically performing their daily routines that exclude their faces from the frame or the use of long takes depicting systematic destruction of all their possessions give us information about the relationship between their emotional experiences and the situational and interpretative aspects that comprise the background of these experiences. For example, that their feeling of emotional isolation is located in a particular way they come to interpret their daily routines, namely as something they are imprisoned by or confined in. This information helps us to understand destructive actions that characters take at the end. By giving us an explanation about the characters' situation and their emotional aspects, the film invites us to shape a different relationship with characters, one in which we are not merely participators in their story, but also external observers of their patterns of thoughts, feelings and actions.

Narrative simulation, however, does not merely give us an opportunity to adopt a dual perspective on the events and characters portrayed in the story, but by extension on our own situational and mental aspects as well. That is to say, narrative simulation simultaneously triggers reflection on our own subjective experiences and personal characteristics. The explanation for this phenomenon, as I will show in more detail in the next section, lies in the nature of our own emotional responses to narrative works of art that reflect the workings of our emotions in general.

III.   NARRATIVE SIMULATION AND SELF-KNOWLEDGE

As pointed out in the first section, our emotions reflect the sense of importance and worth we ascribe to something or someone and which is rooted in the particular way we are as a person. Each emotion we experience incorporates a sense of our own personal life concerns, namely, what matters to us and what we care about, given our own personal characteristics (i.e. our desires, goals, needs and beliefs we have about ourselves and the world we live in). Life concerns (the sense of importance we ascribe to something or someone) differ from person to person, given different personal characteristics we have and thus the same act, situation or an event will not affect all of us in the same way.[31] For instance, we feel pride upon our professional success, because we strive for achievements. Yet, someone who does not share similar aspirations will not be affected by his accomplishment in the same way. Similarly, we feel humiliated when someone insults us, because we have the need to be seen favourably by others. But, a person who does not care about

opinions of others will not be bothered by the insult. We can come to understand each of our emotions by recognising our own personal life concerns and this means recognising and identifying our own personal characteristics – our wants, goals, aspirations and believes we have about ourselves and the world in which we live.

Our emotional responses to fictional narratives are subjected to the same laws as emotions we experience in real life. This is the idea that follows directly from endorsing the *emotional realism* view, namely the view that we experience real, genuine emotions when engaging with fiction.[32] What this means is that how we come to emotionally engage with the events and characters portrayed in fictional narratives depends on the life concerns we carry in the real world.[33] That is, we come to feel characters' fears, agonies and alienations because we perceive (consciously or subconsciously) the portrayed situation relevant for our own well-being. As Lazarus nicely makes this point: 'If their plight were not like our own, we would not react.'[34] It is our psychological affinity with fictional characters that allow us to imagine what they feel. We can emote with them, because we share similar interpretative and psychological aspects (similar wants, aspirations, desires, goals and interests).[35] And we care for the well-being of characters because we care for our own well-being. Narrative simulation thus directly taps on our own emotional and psychological system. How we come to respond emotionally to characters and events portrayed in narrative works represents a unique mode of access to the entire domain of our own personal life concerns and which are made further available for our acknowledgment and analysis due to the abstractive quality of narrative simulations.

Narrative simulation, as pointed out previously, functions as a simulation of characters' experiences and actions in a compressed format. That is to say, narrative art presents the chain of events in a continuous and complete manner, makes salient the interpretative aspects of characters' emotions (i.e. in what way the depicted situation is of relevance to characters' purposes, desires and aspirations) and thereby renders characters' experiences and actions more comprehensible to us.[36] Yet, given our emotional and psychological affinity with fictional characters, this means that narrative simulation can also help to render our own emotional experiences more intelligible to us. That is, if our own emotional appraisal of the depicted situation fits in some respect with characters' appraisals, then narrative simulation can help us to clarify our own emotional experiences. Narrative simulation thus gives us the opportunity to acknowledge and examine certain aspects of our own experiences that are left unnoticed from a mere phenomenological first-person perspective. Just like seeing our own body image in the mirror can give us information about our own body that cannot be obtained by mere phenomenological experience of our body, so too viewing our own subjective experience from a third-person point of view can give us information about our own experience that are impossible to obtain by mere first-personal perspective.

For example, it is often the case that we feel anger or fear (we have in other words introspective awareness of our own internal experience), yet without being able to fully articulate and understand what it is about the situation that we experience as offensive or threatening. We are often not fully aware of the various introspective and affective aspects that comprise the background of our experiences. As Ortony nicely puts it, '[e]xperience does not arrive in little discrete packets, but flows, leading us imperceptibly from one state to another.'[37] That is, introspective and affective aspects of an experience are often fleeting, evading and difficult to comprehend in all their details. Unlike ordinary perception of mind-independent objects, say seeing a table, whereby we can comprehend all the details of the object as long as we sufficiently long look at it, the states of our mental processes are continuously changing, which makes it difficult for us to notice and to comprehend all the passing mental processes and to grasp all the details of the experience. It is hard, if not impossible, to pay attention and to describe accurately all the movements and sequences of our thoughts and feelings. When we are in a state of an intense experience, we usually do not have the capacity to concentrate and follow all the undergoing mental processes. Besides, it is argued that self-observation itself can often disrupt the genuine character of the experience.[38] For example, if we concentrate on analyzing our experience while having it (say of fear or anger), then this introspection might change or diminish the intensity of the experience itself. This is because introspection requires focused attention and clarity of mind, but which is not something that is present in our experience of fear or anger. As Gendlin verbalises this point, '[o]ne cannot expect to grasp clearly what the trouble is while it troubles.'[39]

Accordingly, we can see that it is difficult, if not impossible, to comprehend all the introspective and affective aspects of our emotional experiences. But not being able to comprehend all the details of our emotional experience, makes our experience itself to a certain extent cognitively unintelligible.

Narrative art can help us to overcome these cognitive limitations. Namely, narrative art is able to present these introspective and affective aspects as more explicit, more vivid and as specified under different possible meanings and perspectives, thereby helping us to obtain new information about ourselves and new ways of interpreting and understanding our experiences. To put it differently, narrative simulation promotes a cognitive shift in the sense that it provides us with a new vocabulary by means of which we can grasp and reevaluate the organisation of our own inner experience. But with obtaining new information about our own mental and emotional aspects that comprise the background of our experience also these experiences themselves change.

For example, Haneke's movie offers a particular interpretation of subjective experience of emotional isolation and alienation, namely, as one of the feeling of being imprisoned by the life of daily routines. By specifying the feeling of emotional isolation as one of imprisonment by daily routines, the

movie provides us with a more refined vocabulary by means of which we can evaluate our own feeling of emotional isolation. We often experience such a mental state, yet with a difficulty to properly confine this feeling (within us and in the relation to a situation) and to have a clear understanding of it. Through the articulation of the idea of emotional isolation itself, we have an extraordinary opportunity to perceive this emotion in a more formulated and comprehensive way. Specifically, we are able to recognise the meaning of our own experience in the larger context of our life and to see more clearly the connection between a particular experience and other mental aspects (i.e. our beliefs, desires, goals, etc.).

The information we acquire from the work, however, does not remain unchecked from our first-personal perspective, that is, it does not lead to self-alienation. We do not merely blindly accept the interpretation offered by the work; rather, we 'try' it out and test how well it agrees or fits with our own felt experience. As narrative simulation allows us to momentarily inhabit characters' mental states and to feel what they feel, it gives us an extraordinary opportunity to directly sense (feel) the appropriateness of the given interpretation for our own felt experience. In other words, we exercise affective first-person authority over the information that we acquire from the narrative work. Coming to accept the interpretation depends on us and on our own feeling of appropriateness of the given interpretation. That is, if the artistic interpretation of a subjective experience feels right, in the sense that emotionally resonates with our own experience and makes it appear more clear, determinate and intelligible, then we have a good reason to believe that this interpretation accurately describes our own experience. Such an affectively avowed interpretation, as pointed out previously, will also have a modifying effect on the nature of our experience itself.

Using the example of Haneke's movie again, if we come to see or feel that the specified concept of imprisonment by daily routines more appropriately describes our own experience of emotional isolation, then this description will in fact change the way we feel. The identification of our own experience as one of imprisonment by daily routines will necessitate restructuring of our own experience so that it fits with the imprisonment principle, that is, with the newly identified belief that what we are feeling is imprisonment. While previously what we felt was some vague sense of emotional isolation, insignificance and detachment from the world, now, after accepting the new interpretation, what we come to experience more acutely and sharply is a feeling of confinement and a sense of being restrained by our own daily routines. Our own feeling of emotional isolation changes by accepting the new and more refined interpretation, that is, with a new vocabulary applied to our experience. Adopting a new interpretation of our own experience (that is, an affectively avowed interpretation) necessitates a change in our original mental state.

Furthermore, once we come to identify our own feeling of emotion isolation in a more concrete and situation-related felt sense of imprisonment by daily routines, we have the opportunity to obtain a further insight into other aspects of our experience and our inner life. As narrative simulation provides us with a more adequate representation of our own psychological situation, it helps us to uncover further aspects of our personality that have been discounted or simply left unacknowledged, namely, what it is that we truly desire, what motivates us, what we value and what we find important in our life. That is, the sense of imprisonment by daily routines can be felt only by those of us who recognise the value of freedom, the need to have a sense of control and agency over one's life, the desire to explore, create and follow new passions, and to lead a purposeful life. Recognition of our own true beliefs, feelings, desires, interests and goals opens up new perspectives on our situational and interpretative aspects and thus new behaviour possibilities and actions. Once we come to understand our own mental states, we are no longer in a position to think about ourselves as passive and powerless carriers of those mental states. Self-knowledge grants us with an awareness of seeing ourselves as authors of our own mental states and as such possessing the ability to control and modify these states. For example, we can come to see our daily routines not as something that we are imprisoned by, but rather as something that we can choose to build our lives around in order to promote our own well-being. Accounted and reflected mental states alter the nature of these mental states and have a liberating effect on our personality and behaviour, as we can now recognise a variety of possibilities for our actions.

However, it is not necessary that we find the interpretation offered by the narrative work personally meaningful. Not everyone is equally moved or experiences the same emotion to portrayed events and this is because not all of us share the same life concerns: 'Each of us has somewhat different personal agendas', as Lazarus writes.[40] That is, we might come to see or feel that the interpretation does not fit well with our own experience of emotional isolation, as it brings less sense and intelligibility to our own state of mind. While affectively disavowed interpretation does not necessitate any change in the mental state itself (i.e. it does not lead to the kind of self-knowledge that leads to self-development), it does nevertheless provide a potentially beneficial self-information. That is, through the act of affective disavowal, we can acquire information as to what our experience of emotional isolation is not, namely, it is not localised in the concrete sense of imprisonment. The affectively disavowed interpretation gives us the opportunity to eliminate the sense of experience that does not hold for us as well as a more refined understanding of the distinction between the experience of emotional isolation and one of the imprisonments by daily routines.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, my aim in this paper was to make sense of the idea that narrative art can promote self-knowledge and self-development. I argued that narrative art, understood as a mental simulation, gives us a unique opportunity to adopt a dual perspective on the self, thereby allowing us to (i) fully acknowledge our own emotional experience from a first-person perspective and (ii) recognise the meaning of our experience as it figures in relation to our own personal characteristics and life concerns (third-person perspective). Accordingly, narrative art enhances our self-exploration by giving us the opportunity to reflect on the content of our own subjective experiences. It engages us in a cognitive process of identifying our own personal characteristics, challenging our emotional, social and intellectual patterns and recognising inadequacies in our thoughts we attribute to our lives and experiences of ourselves and others.

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NOTES

1. For a review of different approaches, see Gibson 2008, 573-589.
2. For example, see Kieran 1996, 337-351; Nussbaum 1990 and Carroll 2002, 3-26.
3. I use the notion 'factual self-knowledge' as explained by Jopling 2000, 17.
4. See Strijbos and Jongepier 2018, 45-58; Bell and Leite 2016, 305-332 and McGeer 2007, 81-108.
5. Gertler 2011, 2.
6. See Wilson and Dunn 2004.
7. For example, see Moran 2001; Taylor 1985; Finkelstein 2003; Bilgrami 2006.
8. McDowell 1996, 21.
9. Finkelstein 2003, 28.
10. Moran 2001, 37.
11. See Strijbos and Jongepier 2018; McGeer 2007; Carman 2003 and Kloosterboer 2015.
12. Tolstoy 1983, 28-29.
13. Strijbos and Jongepier 2018, 49-50.
14. Kloosterboer 2015.
15. Kloosterboer 2015, 252.
16. Kloosterboer 2015, 253.
17. Strijbos and Jongepier 2018, 50.
18. Strijbos and Jongepier 2018, 51.
19. For this point, see also Gendlin 1968.
20. Strijbos and Jongepier 2018, 51.
21. For the review of these studies see Gertler 2011, 70-81.
22. This idea is reflected in a current theory in cognitive science of the two distinct systems of information processing, that is, the unconscious system (implicit, impulsive or experiential system) and conscious system (explicit, rational or reflective system). The conscious system, being evolutionary recent, is deliberate, slow, controlled and rule-based, associated primarily with language and reflective consciousness. The unconscious system, on the other hand, is evolutionary older, nonverbal, associative, automatic, rapid and requires little cognitive effort and attention. The unconscious system plays an essential role in our mental life as it efficiently and quickly selects, interprets and organises information. Both systems are interactive and operate in parallel, which explains dissociations we often experience in our beliefs, attitudes, personality traits and feelings, as these mental states consist in dual information processing. See Evans 2008.
23. See Nisbett and Wilson 1977.
24. Lear 2004.
25. McGeer 2007, 101.
26. See Strijbos and Jongepier 2018, 53; Moran 2001, 131-132; Eagle 2011, 54.

27. Mar and Oatley 2008, 173.
28. There is a debate among scholars whether our engagement with fictional characters really is one of empathy, i.e. other-oriented perspective-taking. Noël Carroll, for example, argues that our emotional engagement with fictional characters is one of sympathy (feeling-for) rather than empathy (feeling-with). See Carroll 1990, 90-93. Our emotional responses typically do not match the emotional responses of fictional characters and one of the reasons for such emotional asymmetry, Carroll argues, is that readers/viewers typically have more information than fictional characters do. We see how the story unfolds *for* the character, rather than with the character. That is, we feel *for* the character, not *with* the character. Because we have different information than fictional characters do, we have a different emotional response. Carroll's argument has some plausibility, especially with works that take a third-person narration (providing the reader/viewer with more information about the surrounding environment than characters have) or with works that do not offer substantial knowledge about the psychological situation of characters and the state of affairs depicted. Without detailed information about the character's mental state it is difficult to imagine what it is like to think, believe and feel as the character. However, the case is different with works that take a first-person narration (consider for example the 1999 American horror film *The Blair Witch Project*), whereby the reader/viewer is provided with the same perceptual information as the characters, which enables emotional matching. Also, literature is generally considered to enhance the empathetic perspective as it typically provides a strong narrative context as well as a detailed description of the psychology of characters and their relationship with others, enabling our transportation into the story as well as enhancing our ability to simulate characters' psychological situation. Thus, whether our engagement with fictional characters will be one of empathy depends on the particular work of art as well as on our own imaginative abilities.
29. Mar and Oatley 2008, 183.
30. Mar and Oatley 2008, 176.
31. See also Helm 2009, 250 and Nussbaum 2001, 30.
32. See Gaut 2007, 203-226. As this is the position well argued for by many contemporary philosophers, I will not pursue it further in this paper.
33. For this point see also Moran 1994, 106; Robinson 2005, 108-117; Lazarus and Lazarus 1996, 129-136 and Frijda 1988, 352.
34. Lazarus and Lazarus 1996, 131.
35. This idea has been pointed out by numerous research studies, which show that perception of emotional and psychological similarities (or dissimilarities) with fictional characters facilitates (or hinders) the activation of emphatic perspective (Hakemulder 2000, 70-73 and Green 2004). It has also been shown, however, that engagement with psychologically similar characters leads to difficulties in maintaining clear self-other differentiation, i.e. maintaining the distance between our own self and the self of the character (Ames 2004). It has been concluded accordingly that emphatic perspective is always to some degree contaminated with our own personal characteristics and life concerns (Nickerson, Butler, and Carlin 2009).
36. This is the value of narrative simulation pointed out by Schwan 2013.
37. Ortony 1975, 46.
38. Marres 1989, 65-68.
39. Gendlin 1968, 222.
40. Lazarus and Lazarus 1996, 130.

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