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Modality Against Stigmas: Avoidance of Totalization in the Self Narratives

Abstract:

The article analyzes three cases through which the avoidance of stigmatization is revealed in very different modes of auto-narration. Each case suggests that the narrators intuitively use a strategy of modal shift: they find ways to resist the metaphorization or universalization of their lives by highlighting the modality of contingency. The article draws primarily on phenomenological narratology (Wolfgang Iser, Roman Ingarden, David Carr, Paul Ricoeur), whose theories are combined with ideas from poststructuralist theorists (Giorgio Agamben, Paul de Man, Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, Ernesto Laclau). The common denominator of these three women's stories is the applied modality of contingency and attempts to disrupt a predestined order of their life flow. Contingency, as a direction taken by the narrator, is an attempt to avoid situations in which an individual life is transformed into a common pattern or a metaphor, or in which an individual person becomes a symbol of a certain lifestyle or social group.

Keywords:

modality, auto-narrative, stigmatization, narrative totalization

Introduction

Modality as a problem of narration is not a new topic in philosophical narratology. This problematic can be found in theories oriented toward social change (as in Giorgio Agamben, Ernesto Laclau, Adriana Cavarero, or Judith Butler), but it is also examined in phenomenology, especially in phenomenological aesthetics and literary theory (as in Roman Ingarden, David Carr, and Wolfgang Iser). Iser names the analysis of narrative modality as one of the most important questions in modern literary theory.[1]

However, the modality of narration can be studied for various purposes and in different directions of narratology. The purpose of this article is to understand how, and by what narrative means, self-violating norms are avoided in self-narratives. Having observed that these measures are often associated with changes in modality, I analyze this phenomenon through three cases, each of which demonstrates a different way of avoiding strict self-conceptualization and clear assignment to a social group. The article considers three stories of modality change: a short auto-poetic text, several fragments of an oral life story, and – in the third case – the refusal of verbal auto-narration and its replacement with a spontaneous musical performance. Although these three cases are very different, they share a common denominator: an attempt to escape a too fast recognizability and assignment to a certain category or a social group. These attempts range from the mild – limited to adjustments in narrative content – to the radical – rejecting the verbality of concepts and attempting to liberate auto-narration even from language by presenting oneself through compositions of musical sounds.

First of all, this research is conducted at the intersection of several methodologies: literary reception theory, phenomenological narratology, and the methodology of cultural anthropology. It is intended not only to assign new meaning to philosophical (primarily phenomenological) theories, but also to rethink the methodology of recording and researching oral or written life stories, memoirs, or autofiction. If a person accustomed to avoiding stigmatization recounts their experience – especially a painful one – they will attempt, in one way or another, to avoid generalizing their story, or from a modal point of view, to present the most contingent auto-narrative possible. Therefore, I present three narrative cases in which the generalization and

1) Iser, *How to Do Theory*, 8.

totalization of experience are avoided; these cases range from gentle strategies attentive to articulation to a radical refusal of verbal narration.

The Displaced Episodes and Questioned References

The first case under analysis is an example of autobiographical poetry. In her small town, the talented poet Rita Skorokhodova was known and respected, although she never achieved wider national fame. In her poems, Rita Skorokhodova articulates many themes, among them – quite often – experiences and reflections on her progressing complex disability. One such poem, entitled "The Answer," is attractive not only from the point of view of modal analysis; it also reveals the minimalist style and openly autofictional speech characteristic of this poet:

> When asked how I feel,
> I say: I'm well.
> Just the stairs are higher and higher
> and the hills more abrupt.
> The door feels somewhat too heavy.
> The shoes and the coat weigh too much
> and the window, when I try to open it,
> feels as if it might be nailed up.
> But in general, everything is all right.
> Just the winter, too cold.
> The autumn is awfully long
> and the color of snow is too white[2]

2) Original poem is written in Lithuanian:

> Kai paklausia manęs, kaip jaučiuosi,
> Sakau, kad gerai,
> Tik laiptai vis aukštesni
> Ir statesni kalnai.
>
> Durys kažkaip apsunko,
> Slegia batai ir paltas,

This poem describes a bodily experience that is not precisely the same as other people's sensations. The experience feels slightly displaced: things are sensed as too fast, too bright, or too heavy. The manuscript of this poem was given to me by the poet in 2013, and since that time I have rethought and discussed these verses several times, usually emphasizing the subtle articulation of disability.[3] Here, unlike in other texts, I use and interpret this short poem as a particularly precise example of narration through displaced episodes and questioned references. I aim to understand the narrative movement that conveys a deviation from universally recognizable experience. What is important for me here is to determine what is done in the text itself through narrative means, such that, in reading, we almost experience those too-bright, too-heavy, and too-cold presences, as well as a world that is too fast and too complex to sense.

For this purpose, I first turn to the phenomenology of literature as a direction that pays particular attention to details: their description, their reception, and their concretization. Wolfgang Iser expresses the idea that descriptions of particular, situational, and contingent elements in literature are valuable not in themselves, nor is their presentation the final goal; rather, they become valuable through the adjustment of an established system of meanings and the proposal of a new one. Contingent descriptions of experience raise and question not only individually correct or commonly accepted meanings of words, but also semiotic systems themselves – their resilience and their durability:

> We have to bear in mind that literary texts do not relate to contingent reality as such, but to systems through which the contingencies and

O norint atverti langą
Atrodo, kad jis užkaltas.

O šiaip, viskas gerai,
Tik žiema kiek per šalta,
Baisiai ilgas ruduo
Ir sniego spalva per balta. ("Atsakymas," 2002, unpublished manuscript)

3) With the co-author Giedre Šmitienė we shortly discussed a few poems of Rita Skorochodova (among other poets having disabilities) in an article analyzing concepts of disability in the text of poetry (Jonutytė, Šmitienė, "Contingency of Bodily Experience") and observed the life story of the poets in a book on life stories of persons having disabilities (Jonutytė, Šmitienė, *Gyvatės kojos*).

> complexities of reality are reduced to meaningful structures. The structures, however, are broken up and rearranged when selected features reappear in the text. These rearrangements move the systems themselves into focus, so that they can be discerned as the referential field of the text… . The selection, however, breaks their given order, thereby turning them into objects for observation.[4]

Thus, the purpose of the narrative turns we find in the quoted fragment of Rita's poem is not so much to reveal a particular contingent reality as to direct our attention to the conventionality of the system as a whole – to show that it is not everlasting, that it does not have the modality of necessity, and that it changes over time and across situations. Modality is altered in relation to language itself rather than to particular details: the modality of the linguistic sign is shifted. The tension between meaning and referent is, in fact, a tension between contingent experience and the sign as part of a system:

> The chasm separating order from contingency is encompassed by the dual structure of the symbol, which allows it to extend beyond the confines of what has been mastered so far and to provide guidance for what has to be coped with: the entropic environment, the apprehension of human experience, and the challenge exercised by cultural achievements to which humans are exposed.[5]

This autofictional poem, though minimalistically simple, raises the question of the contingency of bodily experience through a single preposition, "too," which refers to a small displacement. What is difficult or easy for us, what is dim or bright – all this depends not only on concepts and their referents, but also on the specifics of the individual body. This movement both reveals the indispensability of the usual order of experience and, at the same time, indicates that this order, accepted by all, dictates a standard of experience for everyone. For this reason, seeing a slightly different color,

4) Iser, *How to Do Theory*, 60–61.

5) Iser, *The Range of Interpretation*, 96–97.

or experiencing weight, surface, and other qualities differently, feels strange and unusual and is very difficult to articulate. The poem reveals to the reader the extent to which bodily experiences are subordinate to habits of naming and to their linguistic labeling. Based on the distinction between entropy and order, Iser determines what the literary text aims to achieve:

> Furthermore, entropy and contingency elude knowledge, so that coping with them requires a continual looping from the known to the unknown in order (a) to make the unknown hark back to what is familiar, (b) to achieve control by splitting entropy into order and contingency, and (c) to explore conditions for establishing an equilibrium between past and future environments. Recursive looping organizes such a transfer by processing the information received, recognizing what the input has failed to achieve, and orienting the correction to be fed into the subsequent input.[6]

And yet, it is worth examining more specifically how this play with a single preposition affects us as readers. In verses such as these, deceleration of movement, progressing visual and physical impairment, and other difficulties are expressed through incomplete or insufficient images: the world is often described as being too bright, too heavy, too hard, or in some other way deviating from its pattern. This "*too*" displaces modes of perception (sight, sensation, or hearing) from the "right" place. Being earlier or later than it usually happens, harder or weaker than it is usually felt, brighter or fainter than it is usually seen, and so on – all these minimal adjustments blur the "naturally clear" boundaries of a concept or a narrative episode and also disrupt the recognizability of the narrating person. Moreover, such displaced episodes, images, and notions eliminate the aoristic aspect of narrated actions and thus complicate their recognition within a temporal order.

Here I would like to recall a small detail mentioned in Roland Barthes's *The Pleasure of the Text* (a work that primarily questions conventional concepts of reception). Barthes discusses the strange functioning of the particle "*too*" in such compounds as "too soon" or "too late" (just as "too bright," "too long," or "too heavy" in this poem):

6) Ibid., 86.

"I write myself as a subject at present out of place, arriving too soon or too late (this too designating neither regret, fault, nor bad luck, but merely calling for non-site): anachronic subject, adrift."[7] Barthes speaks of the particle "*too*" as of contributing to a mode of reading experience he calls "bliss" (*jouissance*) or, roughly speaking, a sudden shift during reception in which a more or less abstract understanding gives way to contingent bodily experience in a present situation. In this case, the particle "*too*" encourages a return to situational bodily sensation through instability – being "adrift" – through the detachment of the subject from context. Generally, such a mode of narration means "not as you can imagine, but with a small difference," and this indicates a shift from normative constancy to contingency. It is therefore not coincidental that this mode is employed by a person who refuses identification with typical social roles and takes the lack of normativity as her own neutral (neither positive nor negative) trait.

Yet the contingent state into which such an unstable, fluctuating, and disorderly text introduces us is never left behind by further reflection on the described phenomena. As Barthes notes, it is precocious – premature, anticipating, or even initiating what is to be developed in the future.[8] Iser would say, very similarly, that this movement from the unexperienced to the known and experienced is essential to cultural vitality: "It is intensified by the fact that each input is an intervention into entropy, contingency, or already ordered systems, as I shall show later. These inroads bounce back as a heightened complexity of information, which increases the rapidity of self-correction, leading in turn to a continual fine-tuning of further inputs."[9]

And yet, this is not merely the establishment of a new cultural order that will prevail in the future, nor simply the constant dismantling or de-reification of an established system. The analysis of this example shows that such narrative movements also perform a social function; accordingly, such analysis can contribute to approaches in narrative ethics (including the ethics of anthropological research) and social philosophy. The poem is not accidentally oriented toward a change in social attitudes. Rita speaks about her life (I am familiar with her life story) with similar attention and diligence to the smallest actions. She avoids being assigned to a particular social group or

7) Barthes, *Pleasure of the Text*, 62–63.

8) Ibid., 52–53.

9) Iser, *The Range of Interpretation*, 86.

identified as a "certain type of person," because in a small town this would undoubtedly mean stigma. Yet, being creative and talented, she resists the identity imposed on her – not by keeping quiet or hiding her experiences, but on the contrary, by highlighting them in a way that questions the order of our usual sensations.

Resistance to the Reversed Stigmatization and the Purified Self

In the previous chapter, I reflected on one of the ways in which contingency, as a narrative choice, helps to avoid the possibility of stigmatization. There are various situations in which a narrator attempts to avoid imposed roles, and therefore the narrative choices in such situations also differ. However, most of them are related to a deliberately adjustable modality. There are a wide range of narrative moves that bring contingency and entropy to the forefront of the story. The second case reveals a choice to foreground small, everyday actions that would be considered insignificant in most narratives or conversations. Here I analyze a few fragments from the life story told by a woman whom I call Ula.[10] This is the story of a young woman, a visual artist, who in a very short time completely lost the ability to move and to work on her art due to severe multiple sclerosis. Her story is not focused on the past but on the present moment (the time of narration). Present life raised questions for Ula that were difficult to confront; coming to terms with the present was hardly possible, and so she narrated it by observing and rethinking it as if in slow motion, down to the tiniest actions.

Ula's story reveals a resistance to generalization and to a very specific form of stigmatization, in which a person is marked through admiration – by attributing a special meaning or mission to their life. This kind of stigmatization is, in a sense, reversed: instead of trying to understand a person's experience and life, others identify them through laudatory designations and exalted concepts. One of the most striking features of Ula's storytelling is the shift from a perspective of destiny and

10) I recorded the life story of Ula (in this text, the name of the woman is changed) while working on research on the concept of disability in oral life stories in 2018. At that time, I did not seek to perform a narratological analysis of this story, but only to understand how the woman articulates her disability, how she perceives her identity. We wrote about other aspects of this woman's life story in the book *Gyvatės kojos* (with the co-author Giedre Šmitienė). The entire life story is preserved in the archive of the Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore, No. LTRF cd 1533/20.

eternity (both of which indicate a modality of necessity) to short episodes of daily bodily action – actions that fail. Ula is a devout Catholic, and she often hears "praise" and heroic interpretations from her Catholic friends. She rejects this form of consolation, especially the standardized exalted reactions prompted by a discourse shaped over centuries, shared among believers and used spontaneously without reflection. She responds to these lofty statements – exalting spirit over flesh – with an absolutely minimal example of contingent reality:

> "Oh, you suffer here like Jezus," or: "oh, here is the true self-denial." Ok, try it yourself – when you look at your bright, clean sweater, and it's dropped in a ball of dust, and you can't reach over and pick it up! … And that sweater has been lying there for two weeks. So you try to deny yourself then! Basically, you break yourself a lot – it's about working with yourself, accepting yourself as you are. And you don't want to accept yourself like that, you don't want to at all, you want to be like everyone else.
>
> And sometimes they come and say – "This is self-denial!" Or again: "I don't care about your body, I care about your salvation." I think then: oh dear, I would look again when you sit, and when your child puts on an unwashed cup, and when you can't wash it… . There are such inadequate things. People just don't understand.
>
> There was a time when I was expressing my gratefulness in various ways, I saw the meaning of this disease. I imagined myself witnessing everywhere and imagined how everything would change after my testimonies. I think that I was maybe influenced by hormones, because I was getting hormone shots then.

These three episodes from Ula's story reveal not only the reality in which she lived at the time I spoke with her, but also her way of maintaining dignity, which paradoxically involves refusing both the admiration expressed by others and her own earlier thoughts about her uniqueness. First and foremost, this case demonstrates the avoidance of reversed stigma: her peers, and Catholic discourse more broadly, attempt to place her

into a highly specific role – that of a religious hero, or in other words, to metaphorize her life. A metaphorized, exemplary life is, paradoxically, a socially rejected life. Ula counters these interpretations by opposing them with the contingency of small-scale actions.

The final quoted episode reveals that Ula herself, much like her fellow church members, initially attempted to turn her life into a symbol or paradigm, presenting her life flow as a higher destiny or special purpose. Reflecting on this period later, she likened it to the effects of medication – an artificial state that helps to unify and exalt life. This is often a first reaction to an unexpected, painful, and life-changing illness. An incurable illness is particularly difficult to reflect upon as a contingent event; consequently, metaphorization is common, with illness presented as fate or mission. At the same time, Ula intuitively resists this move. She does not want to be transformed into a metaphor and instead opposes the concept of destiny with the dense contingency of everyday life: a small, typically spontaneous and therefore barely noticeable action that, in her case, becomes blocked and impossible. What Ula accomplishes through her story is an intuitive and persistent effort to change the modality of images used in conversation. Instead of the glorious spiritual image of a saint, she chooses to describe the image of a stiff, resistant body.

The small episodes to which Ula draws the attention of her peers, opposing them to sonorous designations, do not challenge only the typical modality of narration, but also the typical modality of thinking about oneself – the modality of individuation. Becoming an individual, as we are accustomed to think primarily under the influence of existential philosophy, is defined by a constant movement from detail to universality, from contingency to necessity. Giorgio Agamben draws attention to the distinction between the concepts of *Faktizität* and *Tatsächlichkeit* in Martin Heidegger's ontology. Here, facticity is more than a mere conglomeration of things; it establishes *Dasein* because facts signify meaningful connections rather than accidental reality: "The concept of 'facticity' implies that an entity 'within-the-world' has Being-in-the-world in such a way that it can understand itself as bound up in its 'destiny' with the Being of those entities which it encounters within its own world."[11]

The fragments of Ula's story present a refusal to translate the contingent state of things into generalized connections among them. Ula performs a movement of

11) Agamben, *Potentialities*, 192.

displaced meaning similar to that enacted by Rita in the poem discussed previously. Rita prevents overly easy and rapid associations of her sensations with established patterns of experience, while Ula refuses not only the generalization of experience, but also the totalization of the self. Through her narrative, she reminds us that – in her case, but also in everyone's – this movement of uniting separate facts into a whole determined by destiny requires the neglect of bodily reality and the uniqueness of the individual body. Moreover, the more deeply this transformation of facts into destiny is embedded in religious discourse, the less attention is paid to the individual body.

It is not coincidental that Paul de Man identifies precisely the same vector that Agamben observes in Heidegger's concept of facticity in Ludwig Binswanger's interpretation of literary texts and artistic images in general (including dream images). De Man gives this process a precise name – "totalization into depth" – thus distinguishing it from the more common type of totalization through simple extrapolation, which involves transferring purified patterns of experience (or narrative "morals") to other situations, environments, or historical periods. Totalization into depth is different: it is an existential attempt to gather all contingent facts into a unique self, standing in a unique relationship to the world as a whole. De Man emphasizes that this totalization into depth establishes the aesthetic self – the narrated and declared self:

> The totalization is not a totalization in width but in depth, by means of which the subject resists any temptation of being distracted from its own self. Whereas the empirical self strives to take in as much as it can encompass and opens itself up to the presence of the world, the aesthetic self strives for a mode of totalization that is reductive but, in Lukacs's term, "homogenous" with its original intent at self-immanence.[12]

Totalization, whether in depth or in width, is carried out not only by immanently binding and ontologizing selected properties of the self, but also by rejecting unnecessary or redundant details for the new, ontologized "I," including inconvenient features of the individual body. Just as Agamben notes the subordination of facts to the world in Heidegger, Michel Foucault, interpreting Binswanger's concept of dream images,

12) De Man, *Blindness and Insight*, 42–43.

emphasizes the difference between the complexity of the dream image (which, as Binswanger argues, can be eloquent in many entirely different contexts) and the fulfillment of that image in personal experience. Foucault prioritizes not the complexity of the image, but its concrete – and therefore partial – fulfillments in waking life. The dream image encompasses multiple planes but lacks concreteness: "The dream is the fulfillment of a desire, but if it is dream and not fulfilled desire, that is precisely because the dream also answers to all the 'counter desires' which oppose the desire itself."[13] A dream is an image of desire, but not its fulfillment. Similarly, Ula's peers present a concept of her life stripped of concreteness, into which her everyday experiences are expected to fit; yet the opposite occurs. This image – like a liquid of a different density – does not mix with her daily reality. Although it is constructed on the basis of concrete events in her life and should therefore encompass her everyday moments, it instead expels them as excessively concrete. In response, Ula dismantles this abstract image of a sublime identity through situational, contingent aspects that do not illustrate a self-sacrificing being but, through their density, reality, and concreteness, interfere with and disrupt the metaphysical image.

De Man's term "totalization in depth," attributed to Binswanger's conception, is again relevant. We primarily encounter this type of totalization in existential and religious auto-narratives, in which self-concept is linked to ontological systems. Typically, especially in post-structuralist theories working at the intersection of philosophical narratology and social philosophy, totalization is associated with the accumulation of power through narrative. Paul de Man himself explains the concept of totalization through the difference between one and zero: "Whereas one is and is not a number at the same time, zero is radically not a number, absolutely heterogeneous to the order of number. With the introduction of zero, the separation between number and space, which is potentially threatening, is also healed."[14] A number – or any other integral entity – must form a clear figure in space, and what gives such an entity as the number one its integrity is the zero (or something that is not a number). This simple logical principle of totalization is present in many auto-narratives. Ernesto Laclau, partly relying on de Man's theory, explains the role of totalization in social and political

13) Foucault, "Dream, Imagination, and Existence," 34.

14) De Man, *Aesthetic Ideology*, 59.

processes as the accumulation of power primarily through rhetorical strategy. Laclau demonstrates that totalization is a rhetorically modal condition for any kind of identity: the clearer the identity, the more pronounced the transformation of modality from contingency to totalizing necessity. This is primarily grounded in the principle of "contiguity" itself – the principle of consistent change without leaps; yet such contiguity would be inconceivable if one considers an ordered system. Large systems require leaps and gaps to ensure their unity.[15] The more a narrative is directed toward the selection of episodes and the totalizing transformation of contingent details, the more clearly it accumulates social power. Agamben, even more specifically, links modal narrative moves to biopolitical power: "The modal categories – possibility, impossibility, contingency, necessity … are ontological operators, that is, the devastating weapons used in the biopolitical struggle for Being, in which a decision is made each time on the human and the inhuman, on 'making live' or 'letting die'."[16]

The two theories just cited (Laclau and, to some extent, Agamben) describe totalization into width, in which narrative modal strategy is used to gain power over others. The reversed stigmatization that Ula opposes and rejects, however, represents totalization into depth – one's own power over oneself, or the ontologization of oneself. This is the "I" of existential philosophy and psychology, able to perceive and experience its own mission, particularly in religious contexts. Iser notes that concepts such as God, humanity, and the world "outstrip the limitations imposed on them through categorization. Instead of being subsumed under what has been postulated for their cognition, they themselves figure as overarching dimensions, exceeding the classifications applied to them."[17] These concepts, being uncategorized, do not point to a particular context; they refer, more or less, to the same thing even in very different contexts – just like the dream image of vertical movement described by Binswanger, or the "ontological structure of rising and falling,"[18] which is, as Binswanger emphasizes, universal and impersonal.[19]

15) Laclau, *Rhetorical Foundations of Society*, 80–83.

16) Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, 146–47.

17) Iser, *The Range of Interpretation*, 118.

18) Binswanger, "Dream and Existence," 94.

19) Ibid., 91.

The struggle between modalities in a specific individual's narrative is clearly illustrated by fragments of Ula's story. She resists being lifted out of her contingent environment and concrete bodily situation, refusing to be explained, seen, or narrated solely in universal, general contexts. Being a sincere believer, she does not refuse to associate her experience with faith – this is, after all, central to her narrative – but she does not want to separate the plane of faith from the details of everyday life. While narrating, she constantly seeks the most effective narrative means to express this integration. Others attempt to impose an external, non-bodily image of her life; she resists it through the concreteness of her body and the contingency of her experience. In this way, her story remains untotalized, which precisely preserves the possibility of change.

Escape from Verbal Conceptuality

The third case is the most difficult to interpret. Here, we do not encounter a self-narrative or its fragments, but rather a refusal to narrate and an alternative expression of auto-narration. This case cannot be studied narratologically in the usual sense, as there are no verbal expressions or sequences to analyze. Nevertheless, it is worth considering as a radical transformation of self-narrative. The refusal to recount the course of one's life, to compose experienced events and memories into a narrative form, should also be noted and studied in cultural anthropology and narratology as a form of negative narrative material. It is a significant practice of narration, especially auto-narration. The decision not to tell defines an attitude toward storytelling as a communicative act, and both the decision and the attitude always depend on a broader social and cultural context. This interdependence is essential to reconsider. Although conventional interpretation is not possible in this case, an analysis of the concepts and guiding principles is both possible and useful. This is precisely why Zina's case is valuable.

The third case, which I discuss briefly in this article, represents a deliberate escape not only from auto-narration but also from verbal conceptuality. Zina, a Ukrainian war refugee and former philosophy professor, currently suffers from a serious psycho-social disorder, significantly exacerbated (though not caused) by her

war experience. Zina[20] refuses involvement in academic life (which would be possible in Lithuania or elsewhere) and has instead taken up unprofessional music-making and, occasionally, painting. She creates nonverbal artworks – spontaneous musical performances, which she does not record or write down, and which exist only in the moment – and calls them her messages to the world. She has no formal musical or artistic training, cannot read or write musical notation, and uses sounds as a succession of emotional statements, as if performing an act of narration. In this way, Zina liberates human communication from conceptual restrictions. She explains her activity by noting that words, concepts, and conceptions mutilate life experience and generate hostility and violence. This escape from conventional narration and normative modes of self-expression is Zina's deliberate choice, and simultaneously a refusal to totalize the flow of her life. She does not want to be identified as either a refugee or a victim; she strives only to compose harmonizing sounds in sequence. These sequences evoke the emotional dimension of experience, often obscured in conventional narratives, where episode boundaries are blurred and pauses become as significant as the sounds themselves. This is the main reason for discussing her case from a narratological perspective.

First, this case reveals Zina's concept of experience, which she both believes in and practices: experience is narratable even if not expressed verbally. Experience has a structure that is pre-narrative, even when it is not articulated in words. Reflection on experience has a temporal order: a sequence of intensities, referential moments, and longer or shorter episodes through which something is expressed. Zina conveys these reflections on past, present, and future through sequences of piano sounds. She does not doubt that her experience can be communicated by arranging it into episodes and presenting them sequentially. Expressed in this way, experience appears more coherent than it would if recounted verbally. This form of storytelling, like narrative, can be considered an extended sign, the referent of which is a process, an action, or a feeling of change.

Rethinking the temporality of Augustine and Heidegger, Paul Ricoeur argues that past, present, and future are not separate experiences or temporal realities, but

20) The woman's name is changed. I had the opportunity to listen to the completely free music performed by Zina every day for several months when this woman, after arrival to Lithuania, lived and played the piano just behind the wall of my study room.

rather different intentionalities: "The drastic move by Augustine and by Heidegger was to say that there is no past, no present, and no future in any substantive sense, but rather a dialectic of intentionalities, which Augustine referred to as memory, attention, and expectation. For that purpose, he assumed the paradox of a threefold present: a present about the future, a present about the past, and a present about the present."[21] If the notion of time is constituted by these intentionalities, the temporal structure of experience is more fundamental than the narrative means used to convey it: "the recovery of the genuine constitution of time does not seem to be able to abolish the representation of time as a linear succession of nows."[22] This idea has been discussed in detail by David Carr. Carr writes not only about pre-theoretical historical experience[23] but also about pre-reflective experience of time, frequently illustrating it with musical examples and comparing actions to musical phrases.[24] This underscores the primary possibility of narrativity in experience. Moreover, sequentiality does not require clearly delineated episodes: "Because we experience no neat, absolute beginnings, and no ultimately satisfying and all-explanatory endings, is it correct to say that we have none at all? When we stress the role of narrative structure and narrative coherence in everyday experience we are far from claiming that the latter exhibits the well-roundedness of a satisfying story."[25] Similarly, Frank Ankersmit discusses historical narratives, which are interpretations of the past and do not necessarily conform to the structure we are accustomed to. The awareness of something that happened in the past constrains, but does not determine, the possibility of narrating it in a particular way: "historical narratives are only contingently stories with a beginning, a middle, and an end."[26] Thus, a quasi-narrative or nonverbal narrative consisting of sounds forms not only an emotional sequence but also a coherent whole that connects Zina's past with her present, and everything that has happened in her life with what she still hopes to experience. Carr describes events – experienced, remembered, or anticipated

21) Ricoeur, "The Human Experience," 100.

22) Ibid., 100–101.

23) Carr, *Time, Narrative and History*, 18.

24) Ibid., 46–52.

25) Ibid., 90.

26) Ankersmit, "Six Thesis," 237.

– as "something that *takes* time, has temporal thickness, beginning and end; and events are experienced as the phases and elements of other, larger-scale events and processes… . The horizons of time, like those of space, are not undifferentiated plena but are 'inhabited' by, articulated into more or less distinct events."[27] This interconnection between temporal intentionalities creates the motivation to express what is happening now, what occurred in the past, and what is hoped to be experienced in the future; this motivation forms the roots of narration. Zina performs this quasi-narration through the sounds of the piano.

By abandoning verbal transmission of experience, one abandons only a particular means of expression, but does not reject the idea of expression itself. Audio (nonverbal) narratives refer to experiences that occurred previously, whose reflection is summarized in the present. This reflection is pre-narrative – or, more precisely, consciously quasi-narrative. It is a dense temporal flow of emotional states that could potentially be transformed into a verbal narrative. However, if this were attempted, the verbalization would not constitute a translation into another medium, nor a verbalization of a musical work (which is principally impossible). It would be a completely different, new work, which might retain a similar emotional structure of episodes.

In Roman Ingarden's theory of reception, four layers of a literary work are identified: not only the structure but also the effect of the work is heterogeneous. These layers can be described in simplified terms as a layer of sounds, a layer of meanings, a layer of attitudes formulated by the work, and an object layer, or the world created by the work. These layers cannot be detected separately; rather, they constantly interact and change dynamically as planes of the work.[28] Here, I want to draw attention to the first layer, which is almost never noticed or considered separately. It is arguably impossible to study it because we never hear a human voice purely as a sequence of higher or lower, stronger or quieter, denser or rarer sounds. We immediately associate the dynamics of speech with the meaning of words and sentences, so our perception merges with the thought being expressed. Even if a person speaks in a language we do not understand, we still attempt to infer the meanings of words and phrases.

27) Carr, *Time, Narrative and History*, 24.

28) Ingarden, "Konkretisation und Rekonstruktion," 42.

In such cases, we interpret intonation and its changes, but the question of specific meanings never disappears when hearing human speech.

Zina not only expresses her momentary modes through sounds, but also consciously plans the sequence of sounds, rhythms, and consonances. She performs all of this deliberately, remaining focused solely on the layer of sounds, understanding it as both safe and peaceful, yet maximally universal, inviting others into a strange form of communication. Paradoxically, however, this layer offers no opportunity for totalization. The act of totalization requires not only a universal dimension, but also contingent, concrete experiences – fixed, named, and precisely defined distinctions, which are then universalized and/or ontologized. This is precisely what is absent in Zina's quasi-narrative; consequently, it cannot serve as a basis for totalization.

Another aspect of narrativity, which has already been mentioned but remains unexamined, is demonstrated in Zina's case: nonverbal "narration" emphasizes the connections between episodes more than the episodes themselves. This brings us back to the problem of interpretation. Connections between episodes can be abrupt (with pauses or gaps) or moderate and consistent. Even where gaps exist, however, this seemingly negative connection is an integral part of the narrative. Ingarden argues that such connections, even when incoherent, should not be "filled in" with imagined referents or meanings. This is one of Ingarden's most significant discoveries and warnings for literary interpreters, especially for those who, in his words, extract from the "darkness of the periphery" those parts of the work that are necessary for aesthetic concretization as dark.[29] Pulling them "out of the darkness" and filling them with images or explanations is no longer interpretation, but rather a distortion – this is because this action dismantles or simply ignores the first layer of the work.

Ingarden calls concretization performed by a reader "over-explicit" understanding,[30] a mode of reception that avoids filling in gaps unnecessarily, thus preserving the artistic dimension that requires uncertainty. Concreteness is a proportion between definiteness and indefiniteness. Only what is universal can be completely determined; what is concrete cannot be precisely described because it is situational – a thing that can only be described by generalization, that is, by omitting many situational details.

29) Ingarden, "Konkretization and Rekonstruktion," 61.

30) Ibid., 47.

Indefiniteness, or schematic description, combines with definiteness, allowing the reader to relate the text roughly to familiar experiences. This "roughly" is the main principle of Ingarden's concretization. When hearing only sounds – consonances and rhythms – concretization is impossible because no identifiable relationship exists between definiteness and indefiniteness. We cannot say what the music is "about," nor what its individual phrases or sound consonances signify. However, we can perceive the effect it produces. In other words, quasi-narrative reception is possible without concretization: emotional states or moods can be heard and understood without being described, and sequences of changes can be experienced without perceiving their causal chain.

The musical episodes created by Zina form a quasi-narrative: they deny traditional narrativity, yet simultaneously imitate it. Changes in sounds and moods "tell of" emotional shifts, insert memories (recognizable as incrustations of different densities and rhythms), and generate episodes of tension that arise and subside, replaced by passages suggesting peace. Here, the observation that narrative is as necessary for experience as experience is for narrative is fully revealed.[31] Without a deep understanding of the primary narrative order, the spontaneous imitation of it would not be possible, and this alternative narrative would not exist. If Zina's performance were recorded, a musical analysis would be possible. In this case, however, when we can only reflect on the very fact of transforming auto-narrative into sound, we study only its correlation with narrative structure. Yet this unusual music makes it clear that these compositions "speak" of Zina's life: they are present expressions of her relation to her memories and her expectations, hopes, and fears regarding the future. In this expression, the past, present, and future are not objectively described realities to which the narration refers, but a peculiar division of the present moment into three distinct intentionalities. This demonstrates that the pre-thematic temporal complexity inherent in all narratives is far greater than we tend to imagine. During Zina's performance, all three intentionalities speak in the present and about the present.

The absence of words allows the temporal distance of experience to be perceived more accurately. This aspect of narrativity emerges from reflecting on this practice of alternative narration: the aural sequence of emotions and states is not transparent with

31) For example, Carr, *Time, Narrative and History*, 47.

respect to a referent – all states and emotions are impossible to name or define. What we perceive when listening is pure change, transformation, and connection, without emphasizing the entities themselves. This aspect of the quasi-narrative process is perceptible precisely because the referent is maximally blurred. Similarly, Ankersmit observes that the experience of the past is all the stronger the weaker and less transparent is a verbal precision: "Insofar as we still can trust language, we have lost part of reality; and insofar as we have access to reality, we have lost language as our trusted and reliable mirror of nature and reality."[32]

Zina's communicative abilities were first disrupted by illness and later by war-related stress. Nevertheless, her accumulated wisdom and intuition redirected her toward a different mode of expression. Her piano playing was not a formal artwork, nor was it recorded or remembered, but for her it was an exceptionally valuable activity. This strange "text" of Zina, expressing her own experience without fixed meanings, nevertheless contained stages, tensions, diverse modes of change, and sequences of emotional states – elements present in every narrative but usually masked by precise referential content. Recalling the strangeness of Heidegger's concept of facticity, as noted by Agamben in the previous chapter – where facts arrange a connection between *Dasein* and the world – it appears that Zina's music performs a similar function: it relegates facts to the background while emphasizing connections. These are the same or very similar connections we make when recounting the facts of our own lives. Psychosocial disability did not abolish Zina's ability to narrate; it merely prompted a change in the medium through which she expresses her story. Margrit Shildrick observes that disability narratives should open our attention not to radically different perceptions or experiences, but to subtle shifts that remind us that "for everyone, the appearance and experience of corporeal unity is highly contingent and dependent on intercorporeality."[33] Following this idea, each of our narratives – attending to transitions, dynamics, and rhythms – can be understood similarly to Zina's daily performances. Each self-narrative is an effort to understand the sequences of temporal intentionalities through their present expression, far more than a search for the "true" self through reflection on past events.

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32) Ankersmit, *Sublime Historical Experience*, 176.

33) Shildrick, *Dangerous Discourses of Disability*, 35.

Modality Against Stigmatization: Conclusion

Judith Butler proposes a unique, radical, and thought-provoking approach to narrative self-identification: "Suspending the demand for self-identity or, more particularly, for complete coherence seems to me to counter a certain ethical violence, which demands that we manifest and maintain self-identity at all times and require that others do the same."[34] Every auto-narrative is inherently directed toward recognizability and intelligibility, yet in doing so, the narrating person experiences, to a greater or lesser extent, ethical violence toward themselves. This explains why individuals – especially those less conforming to social norms – often seek ways to avoid self-disclosure or, when this is impossible, to minimize such ethical violence through narrative strategies. Erving Goffman, the pioneering researcher of modern stigmatization processes, emphasizes that stigma arises from categorizing individuals: "where there is some expectation on all sides that those in a given category should not only support a particular norm but also realize it."[35] Supporting common expectations about oneself requires merely knowing how a member of a social group should behave, appear, or speak. Identifying with stereotypes applied to a social group exerts pressure on the individual, even when one is proud of the group. The question then arises: How can one mention attributes of oneself without succumbing to standardization, while remaining recognizable in contexts where recognition is desired?

The three cases analyzed here – Rita, Ula, and Zina – demonstrate narrative or quasi-narrative strategies aimed at changing narrative modality to resist fixed identities and avoid stigmatization. In the cases of Rita and Ula, totalization is actively resisted. These women intuitively understood that stigmatization emerges through such totalizing processes, whether horizontal or vertical. In Rita's case, the risk is being assigned to a socially devalued group; in Ula's case, it is the transformation into a symbolic or exemplary figure. Zina, in contrast, resists concretization itself as a condition for totalization: without a correlation between contingent episodes and abstract concepts, concretization – and with it, totalization – is impossible.

34) Butler, *Giving Account of Oneself*, 42.

35) Goffman, *Stigma*, 6.

By refusing totalization, individuals resist stigma and labeling. Stigma oppresses because it fixes the individual as a completed, immutable entity, denying the possibility of change or process. When stigmatized, one fears that one's experience will be interpreted only according to rigid narrative patterns, easily named and attributed to "those like me." Transformation of narrative modality counters precisely this: in Rita, it resists the generalization of experience; in Ula, it rejects the imposition of a sublime or socially exalted role; in Zina, it abolishes the possibility of concretization and final explanation. Notably, the third case incorporates the strategies of the first two: refusal of verbal expression resists both group attribution and transformation into a martyr or saint. The common denominator across these three women's stories is the deliberate use of contingency as a narrative modality, with the explicit aim of disrupting the necessary and predestined order of life-flow. Such modal strategies are unusual in life-stories because they are difficult to sustain in retrospective auto-narration. Contingency, as a narrative direction (though purely contingent narration is unrepresentable and does not exist), serves to avoid universalization and metaphorization of personal life, preventing the transformation of an individual's life into a metaphor or sign of a particular lifestyle, social relation, behavior, or mindset. The absence of such universalizing and metaphorizing tendencies is central to preserving the integrity and flourishing of human experience.

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