

Against Coherence: Self-Narrative and the Enjoyment of Failure

Narrative psychology has positioned self-narration as a central means through which individuals construct identity, organize experience, and establish continuity over time. This article challenges the normative privileging of narrative coherence by examining what remains unaccounted for when the self is approached primarily through narrative. Drawing on Lacanian psychoanalysis, I argue that self-narration cannot secure identity because the subject is structurally divided and therefore cannot be fully represented within the stories it tells about itself. Narrative coherence consequently functions not simply as an achievement but as an attempt to cover over this constitutive gap. The persistence of self-narration despite its necessary failure is examined through Lacan's concept of surplus enjoyment: the repeated effort to construct, revise, and perfect one's story generates a satisfaction tied precisely to the impossibility of narrative completion. Under contemporary conditions that increasingly demand continuous self-articulation, this dynamic transforms self-narration into a form of productive and libidinal labor. I describe this structure as self-betrayal and conclude by considering subjective destitution as a shift away from securing identity through narrative toward assuming the constitutive incompleteness that narrative cannot overcome.

1. Introduction: The Paradox of Narrative

Over the past four decades, narrative has come to occupy a more privileged position within psychology and the human sciences more broadly (Schiff 2017). What began as a critique of positivism (Sarbin 1986) and mechanistic models of mind developed into a widely shared conviction: that human beings are fundamentally meaning-makers (Bruner 1990), and that this meaning-making is best understood in narrative form (Polkinghorne 1988). To understand a person, one must understand their story; to understand oneself, one must come to narrate one's own life (McAdams 1997). Narrative, in this sense, appeared to offer what psychology had long been missing – a way to reconnect with subjectivity, temporality, and lived experience. This orientation has been remarkably successful. Across developmental (Habermas / Bluck 2000), clinical (Josselson 1996; Josselson / Lieblich 1993), and social and personality psychology (McAdams 1997), the construction of coherent self-narratives is often treated as a hallmark of psychological health. Individuals are encouraged to integrate past experiences, present commitments, and future aspirations into a meaningful whole. The ability to tell a coherent life story – one that explains who one is, where one comes from, and where one is going – has become first an analytical framework and subsequently a normative ideal. Narrative does not merely describe the self; it is assumed to constitute it.

Yet it is precisely at the moment of its greatest success that narrative begins to reveal a tension. The same capacity that allows narrative to generate meaning, coherence, and orientation also renders it susceptible to simplification, distortion, and capture (Freeman 2024; Dege / Strasser 2024). Narratives do not only clarify; they also reduce complexity (Bruner 1991; Brockmeier 2015). They do not only integrate experience; they selectively organize it (Polkinghorne 1988; Ricœur 1991). And perhaps most importantly, they do not merely represent reality – they shape how reality is

perceived, felt, and acted upon (Bruner 1991; Freeman 2024). The power of narrative lies not in its truthfulness but in its capacity to make sense. As such, if narrative is both the medium through which we understand ourselves and a mechanism that can distort, simplify, or stabilize that understanding, then the status of self-narration becomes ambiguous. Is narrative the means by which we arrive at ourselves, or is it the very process through which we lose sight of what cannot be captured in story form? Does narrative provide access to identity, or does it impose a structure that conceals something more fundamental? The tension becomes particularly visible in contexts where the demand for coherence intensifies. Under conditions of uncertainty, instability, or crisis, the impulse to narrate – to impose order, to construct a story that makes sense of events – becomes stronger. At the same time, these are precisely the conditions under which narrative is most likely to simplify, polarize, or misrepresent. The promise of coherence risks turning into a defensive operation: a way of containing what cannot be easily integrated rather than engaging with its complexity (Freeman 2024; Dege / Strasser 2024).

Within narrative psychology itself, this tension has not gone unnoticed. Scholars have pointed to the risks of overgeneralization (Schiff 2017), to the inflation of narrative as a concept (Brockmeier 2015), and to the ways in which stories can mislead as much as they illuminate (Freeman 2024). Still, these critiques tend to remain internal to the narrative framework. They question how narratives function, how they can be improved, or how their limits might be managed – but they rarely challenge the more fundamental assumption that narrative is the primary medium through which the self is constituted and understood.

In this article I take a different approach. Rather than asking how narratives can better represent the self, I ask what remains unaccounted for when the self is approached primarily through narrative. I argue that the difficulties associated with narrative are not external problems – misuses, distortions, or excesses – but are rooted in the very structure of self-narration itself. The central claim is that self-narration does not secure identity but is organized around a structural impossibility: the impossibility of fully representing the subject in narrative form.

To develop this claim, I proceed in three steps. First, I briefly reconstruct how narrative came to be positioned as a framework within psychology, emphasizing its role in restoring meaning and coherence to a fragmented discipline. Second, I examine how this framework encounters its own limits, as narrative expands to the point where it risks explaining everything and therefore losing its analytical specificity, while simultaneously functioning as a powerful but double-edged tool for organizing experience. Third, and most centrally, I reintroduce a psychoanalytic perspective – drawing on Lacanian theory – to argue that narrative cannot be understood independently of the subject it presupposes, a subject that is not coherent, unified, or fully present to itself.

2. Narrative as Psychology's Redemption

By the late twentieth century, psychology found itself in what was widely described as a crisis. The dominance of behaviorism had reduced human conduct to observable responses, while the subsequent rise of cognitive psychology, despite its promise to reintroduce the mind, increasingly relied on computational metaphors that treated mental processes as forms of information processing (Bruner 1990). In both cases, what seemed to be lost was precisely what made psychological life

distinctively human: meaning, interpretation, and the situated experience of living. It is against this backdrop that narrative entered the field as a decisive intervention. In 1986, Theodore Sarbin proposed that narrative should be understood not merely as a methodological tool but as a root metaphor for psychology. Rather than conceiving of human beings as systems governed by laws or mechanisms, Sarbin suggested that human conduct is best understood in terms of stories – structured sequences of events organized through plots, characters, and intentions. People do not simply act; they emplot their actions, situating them within frameworks that render them intelligible. Narrative, in this sense, offered a way to return psychology to the domain of meaning without abandoning rigor (Sarbin 1986; Bruner 1990).

This proposal resonated widely. It aligned with broader shifts in the humanities and social sciences that emphasized interpretation, context, and the constructed nature of reality. Within psychology, it opened up a space for approaches that foregrounded lived experience, language, and temporality. Kenneth and Mary Gergen (1988), Donald Spence (1982), Karl Scheibe (1986), and others developed narrative perspectives that treated self-stories as central to identity and understanding. Narrative became a way to move beyond abstract variables and toward the concrete ways in which individuals make sense of their lives. Jerome Bruner (1990) further consolidated this shift by arguing that narrative constitutes one of the fundamental modes of human thought. In contrast to the paradigmatic or logico-scientific mode, which seeks general laws and causal explanations, the narrative mode organizes experience in terms of meaning, coherence, and particularity. For Bruner (1990), the problem with contemporary psychology was not simply methodological but conceptual: by privileging computation and information, it had lost sight of meaning as its central object. Narrative offered a corrective by re-centering psychology on interpretation and culture, framing human beings as symbol-using, story-telling agents embedded in social worlds.

Narrative approaches also began to expand beyond individual meaning-making to incorporate broader social and political dimensions. Elliot Mishler (1999), among others, emphasized that narratives are always situated: they are shaped by cultural conventions, institutional contexts, and relations of power. Stories of illness, migration, or identity are not simply expressions of inner experience but acts that position individuals within social fields. Narrative, in this sense, became not only a tool for understanding the self but also a means of analyzing how selves are constructed, recognized, and contested within specific contexts. This expansion culminates in attempts to reposition narrative not as a subfield but as a guiding framework for psychology as a whole. Brian Schiff (2017), for example, argues that narrative should be understood as the study of interpretive action: how people, situated in concrete historical and social contexts, make sense of themselves and others. From this perspective, narrative is not an optional addition to existing approaches but a way of rethinking the discipline's orientation. Psychology, rather than focusing on decontextualized variables, would become a science of meaning-making grounded in lived experience and interpretation.

Across these developments, a shared assumption can be identified: that narrative is the medium through which identity is constituted and maintained. The self is no longer understood as a stable entity that precedes its expression but as something that emerges through the ongoing activity of narration. To have a self is, in this view, to be able to tell a story about oneself – a story that links past events, present circumstances, and future possibilities into a coherent whole. Descriptively, this shift reframes identity as a process rather than a substance: something that is continuously constructed and revised through narrative activity. Normatively, it establishes coherence as a central

value. A well-functioning self is one that can integrate experiences into a meaningful and relatively consistent story. Fragmentation, contradiction, or incoherence are often treated as signs of difficulty, while narrative integration is associated with well-being, resilience, and maturity. Narrative comes to function as a kind of redemption for psychology. It restores access to subjectivity after decades of abstraction, reintroduces temporality into the understanding of human life, and reconnects psychological inquiry with questions of meaning and interpretation. At the same time, it provides a framework that appears capable of integrating diverse domains – cognition, emotion, identity, culture – into a coherent whole.

It is precisely this success, however, that sets the stage for the problems that follow. As narrative expands to encompass more and more aspects of psychological life, and as coherence becomes both an analytical and normative ideal, the question arises whether narrative can sustain the explanatory weight placed upon it. What happens when a concept that was introduced to restore specificity begins to generalize to the point where it risks explaining everything? And what are the implications of grounding identity so firmly in the ability to produce a coherent story?

3. The Double Edge of Narrative: Coherence as Symptom

The expansion of narrative to the point of conceptual inflation does not simply weaken its analytical precision; it also reveals a more fundamental ambivalence. Narrative does not fail because it is insufficiently powerful. On the contrary, it succeeds too well. Its capacity to organize experience, to generate coherence, and to render situations intelligible is precisely what makes it both indispensable and problematic. At the center of this ambivalence lies the notion of coherence. Within narrative psychology, coherence is often treated as a marker of successful meaning-making (McAdams 1997; Habermas / Bluck 2000). A coherent life story integrates disparate events into a meaningful whole, establishes connections between past, present, and future, and provides a sense of continuity over time. Empirical research has frequently linked such coherence to well-being, suggesting that individuals who are able to narrate their lives in consistent and meaningful ways tend to exhibit greater psychological stability (Adler et al. 2017; Habermas / Bluck 2000).

Yet coherence is not a neutral achievement. It is the result of selection, ordering, and exclusion. To produce a coherent narrative is to privilege certain elements over others, to impose a structure that renders some aspects of experience visible while obscuring or minimizing others. Coherence simplifies. It reduces complexity to intelligible form, but in doing so, it necessarily leaves something out (Polkinghorne 1988; Ricœur 1991). This selective function becomes particularly consequential under conditions where the demand for coherence intensifies. When situations are ambiguous, unstable, or difficult to grasp, the impulse to impose narrative order grows stronger. Narrative offers a way to transform uncertainty into intelligibility, to convert scattered events into a sequence that appears meaningful and directed. In such contexts, coherence operates not only as an interpretive achievement but also as a response to the discomfort of not knowing (Dege / Strasser 2024).

It is here that the ambivalence of narrative becomes most visible. The same mechanisms that allow narrative to provide orientation can also produce distortion. Complexity is reduced to manageable oppositions; ambiguity is replaced with clarity; contingency is reinterpreted as necessity.

Narrative organizes experience in ways that can facilitate understanding, but also in ways that can misrepresent or oversimplify. Mark Freeman (2024) has described this dynamic in terms of what he calls “narrative’s lure” (15–33). Narratives do not merely convey information; they shape how situations are perceived and acted upon. They organize affects, align individuals with particular interpretations, and mobilize collective responses. Importantly, this process does not depend on the factual accuracy of the narrative. Stories can exert their force regardless of whether they are true, because their power lies in their capacity to make sense – to provide a structure through which events can be understood and responded to. From this perspective, the problem is not that narrative occasionally leads to misunderstanding or error. Rather, its very effectiveness as a meaning-making device makes it susceptible to being used in ways that simplify, polarize, or stabilize situations that resist such ordering. Narrative can bind communities and coordinate action, but it can do so by organizing experience around simplified plots, identifiable antagonists, and clear resolutions that do not correspond to the complexity of the situation. In this sense, coherence itself begins to appear as symptomatic. It is not simply the successful resolution of complexity but can also be a response to it – a way of stabilizing what would otherwise remain unsettled. The drive toward coherence reflects not only a cognitive or interpretive tendency but also an affective investment: a desire for order, continuity, and intelligibility in the face of uncertainty.

The double edge of narrative thus becomes apparent. On one side, narrative enables meaning-making, supports identity formation, and provides a framework for understanding experience. On the other side, it can simplify, distort, and impose closure where none is warranted. The same processes that generate coherence also limit what can be represented within the narrative frame. This ambivalence points to a deeper issue. If narrative’s strength lies in its ability to produce coherence, and if this coherence is achieved through processes that necessarily exclude or transform aspects of experience, then the limits of narrative are not external but internal to its operation. Narrative does not merely encounter limits in specific contexts; it is structured by them. The question that follows is therefore not how to correct narrative so that it better represents reality, but what kind of subject is presupposed by the narrative model itself. If narrative organizes experience into a coherent story, who – or what – is the “I” that speaks in that story? And what happens to those aspects of subjectivity that do not fit within the demand for coherence?

4. The Missed Dimension: Narrative Without the Subject

Narrative psychology, despite its emphasis on meaning and interpretation, largely presupposes a speaking subject who is capable of organizing experience into story form. This subject may be understood as developing over time, as situated within cultural contexts, or as engaged in processes of revision and reinterpretation. But it is nevertheless treated as sufficiently coherent to serve as the source of narration. The “I” that tells the story is assumed to be, if not fully transparent to itself, at least accessible through its narrative activity.

From a psychoanalytic perspective – particularly in its Lacanian formulation – the subject cannot be understood as a unified or self-present entity that precedes its narration (Lacan 2006; Fink 1997). Rather, the subject is constituted in and through language, and this constitution entails a fundamental division. The subject is not identical with the “I” that speaks; it emerges in the gap between

what is said and the act of saying it (Lacan 2006; Fink 1997). If the subject is not a stable origin of meaning but an effect of signifying processes, then narrative cannot be taken as a transparent expression of identity. The story that is told is not a direct articulation of the self but a construction that already bears the marks of displacement, substitution, and omission. What appears as a coherent narrative is the result of prior operations that have transformed and reorganized experience. Freud (1953 [1900]) described these operations in terms of dream-work: processes such as condensation and displacement that reshape latent content into manifest form. When applied to narrative, this suggests that what a story presents as its surface meaning is already the outcome of interpretive work. The narrative is not the starting point of meaning but its product. It is, in this sense, always already a secondary formation. Lacan (2006) radicalizes this insight by locating the subject within the structure of language itself. The subject is what is represented by one signifier for another signifier. This means that the subject does not exist independently of the symbolic system in which it is articulated. It appears only through representation, and in appearing, it is simultaneously displaced. There is no point at which the subject coincides fully with itself; it is always mediated, always split (Lacan 2006; Davis 1983).

Within narrative, this split becomes visible in a specific way. The “I” that appears in a story – the narrator, the protagonist, the one who recounts past events – is not identical with the subject of enunciation, the position from which the story is told. There is a gap between the narrated self and the act of narration itself. It is within this gap that the subject is located, not as a stable entity but as a point of division. Narrative psychology, insofar as it focuses on the coherence of the story, tends to overlook this division. It treats the narrative as if it were capable of capturing the subject, of providing access to identity through the organization of experience. In doing so, it risks conflating the ego – the image of coherence that the narrative produces – with the subject as such. The ego appears as the protagonist of the story, a figure who can be described, analyzed, and integrated. The subject, by contrast, is not directly representable. It is what escapes the narrative, what cannot be fully articulated within it. If we understand the subject as structurally divided, then any attempt to produce a complete and coherent account of oneself is necessarily incomplete. The narrative may succeed in organizing experiences into a meaningful sequence, but it cannot capture the totality of subjectivity. There will always be elements that do not fit, that resist integration, that appear as gaps, inconsistencies, or contradictions. As such, features that are often treated as problems to be resolved – signs that the narrative requires further work, that coherence has not yet been fully achieved – are not deficiencies but indicators of the structure of subjectivity itself. The impossibility of complete self-representation is not a limitation of narrative technique but a consequence of the subject’s constitution in language.

In this light, the emphasis on coherence takes on a different meaning. What appears as the successful integration of experience may also function as a way of covering over the subject’s division. The narrative stitches together disparate elements, producing the impression of continuity and unity. Yet this stitching is precisely what conceals the gaps that make such unity impossible (Miller 1978).

To recognize this is to shift the focus of narrative analysis. Rather than asking how a story achieves coherence, or how it might be made more complete, the question becomes what the narrative excludes or displaces in order to maintain its structure. Attention turns from the explicit content of the story to its points of tension: moments where the narrative falters, where contradictions emerge, where something resists incorporation.

It is precisely at this point – where narrative encounters what it cannot fully articulate – that another dimension becomes apparent. The persistence of self-narration, despite its structural incompleteness, suggests that more is at stake than the pursuit of coherence alone. The repeated effort to narrate oneself, to revise and refine the story, points toward a form of investment that exceeds the aim of understanding. To account for this persistence, it is necessary to move beyond questions of representation and toward the dynamics that sustain the act of narration itself.

4.1 From Lack to Enjoyment: Why We Keep Narrating

If narrative cannot fully represent the subject – if it is structurally incapable of closing the gap it attempts to bridge – then a further question arises. Why does self-narration persist with such force? Why does the subject continue to engage in the labor of telling, revising, and refining its story, despite the fact that this process never arrives at completion? Within narrative psychology, the answer is often framed in terms of meaning-making. Human beings are understood as driven to organize experience, to integrate events into coherent structures, and to maintain a sense of continuity over time. The ongoing production of narrative is thus interpreted as an expression of this fundamental tendency: we narrate because we seek to understand ourselves.

From a psychoanalytic perspective, however, this explanation remains incomplete. It accounts for the function of narrative but not for its persistence. If narrative repeatedly fails to deliver what it promises – if it cannot produce a complete and stable account of the self – then the continued investment in self-narration requires a different kind of explanation. The question is no longer simply what narrative does, but what sustains the desire to keep narrating. Lacan's (1992, 1998) concept of surplus enjoyment (*plus-de-jouir*) provides a way to approach this problem (Žižek 2022). At first glance, the failure of narrative appears as a limitation: the inability to fully capture the subject, to arrive at a definitive account of identity. Yet this failure is not merely a deficit. It generates a specific form of satisfaction. The subject does not simply endure the incompleteness of narrative; it is, in a certain sense, attached to it. Surplus enjoyment names the paradoxical satisfaction that emerges not from the fulfillment of a desire, but from its continued deferral (Lacan 1998; Fink 1997). Rather than being oriented toward a final goal, enjoyment is produced in the very process of not arriving – of circling around an absence that cannot be filled. As such, the activity of telling one's story is sustained not by the expectation of closure, but by the repetition of its impossibility. The self is not narrated once and for all, but repeatedly rearticulated: experiences are reinterpreted, meanings adjusted, connections redrawn. Each new version of the story promises a more complete account, a better integration of past and present. Yet each revision also introduces new gaps, new inconsistencies, new points of tension that call for further narration. The process is thus inherently open-ended. The promise of coherence is never fully realized, but it is continually reactivated. Each attempt to stabilize the narrative generates the conditions for its further transformation. The subject remains engaged in a cycle of narration that produces not closure, but repetition. The key here is this: this repetition is not accidental. It is precisely what sustains the investment in narrative. The labor of narrating oneself – the effort of selecting, organizing, and revising – becomes a source of satisfaction in its own right (Žižek 2022). The subject does not necessarily

seek to know itself; it is invested in the very activity of trying to do so. Each narrative gesture carries with it the implication that the account is incomplete, that something remains to be said, that further clarification is possible. The self appears as something that can be approached but never fully reached. The ongoing work of narration is thus oriented toward a horizon that is continually deferred (Žižek 2022).

Importantly, this does not mean that the subject is deceived into believing that completion will eventually be achieved. The persistence of narrative does not depend on a naive expectation of final resolution. Rather, it is sustained by a more complex relation to its own failure. The subject continues to narrate not because it believes that the next version will finally be complete, but because the process itself has become a site of investment. This shifts the understanding of narrative from a purely cognitive or interpretive activity to a libidinal one. Self-narration is not about making sense; it is about sustaining a particular relation to one's own incompleteness. The gaps that narrative cannot close are not obstacles to be overcome; they are what keep the narrative process in motion. Seen in this light, the structural limitation of narrative – the impossibility of fully representing the subject – is inseparable from its persistence. Narrative continues precisely because it cannot complete its task. The failure to achieve coherence does not terminate the process; it drives it forward.

4.2 Self-Narrative as Self-Betrayal

Contemporary forms of life increasingly demand that individuals present, articulate, and manage themselves through narrative (Giddens 1991; Rose 1999). From social media profiles and professional self-descriptions to therapeutic discourse and institutional evaluations, subjects are called upon to continuously produce accounts of who they are (Illouz 2008; Rose 1999). Identity becomes something that must be performed, updated, and communicated (Butler 1990; Giddens 1991). Self-narration is not an optional practice but an expected one. The subject is interpellated as a storyteller of itself, responsible for organizing its experiences into a meaningful and communicable form (Rose 1999; Illouz 2008). However, if this process is structurally incapable of reaching completion, then the demand for self-narration generates a paradoxical form of productivity. The subject is engaged in a task that cannot be finished, yet must be continually pursued. The work of narrating oneself becomes endless, sustained by the very impossibility of its fulfillment.

It is here that the notion of surplus enjoyment intersects with the logic of capitalist production. In classical economic terms, surplus value emerges from the extraction of labor beyond what is necessary for subsistence (Marx 1976 [1867]). In Lacanian terms, surplus enjoyment refers to the excess satisfaction generated through processes of repetition and deferral (Lacan 1998; Žižek 2022). When applied to self-narration, these two dimensions converge: the subject's ongoing narrative labor produces both symbolic value (in the form of recognizable identity) and libidinal satisfaction (in the form of enjoyment attached to the process itself). Self-narration is thus not merely a psychological activity but part of a broader libidinal economy. The subject invests in the process of narrating itself, derives satisfaction from the continual effort to produce a coherent account, and contributes to the reproduction of social structures that depend on such forms of self-

presentation (Rose 1999; Illouz 2008; Žižek 2022). Identity becomes both a personal project and a site of value production.

From this perspective, the promise of narrative – to provide coherence, meaning, and self-understanding – functions less as a goal that can be achieved than as a mechanism that sustains engagement. This is the self-betrayal: betrayal not as telling false stories or failing to represent oneself accurately, but as the very structure of the practice itself. To narrate oneself is to participate in a process that promises resolution while reproducing the very lack that makes such resolution impossible. The subject is not simply misled by narrative; it is bound to it through a form of enjoyment that sustains the cycle: the subject enjoys the process of narrating, even as it remains unsatisfied by its outcomes. The continual effort to refine, revise, and perfect one's story becomes a source of investment, one that ties the subject to the very structure that prevents completion. If self-narration is implicated in the reproduction of the conditions it seeks to make sense of, then producing alternative or "better" narratives may not be sufficient to disrupt the cycle. The problem is not simply the content of the stories we tell, but the form of narration itself and the investments that sustain it. The emphasis on authenticity, coherence, or narrative integration appears insufficient. These ideals remain within the same framework that organizes self-narration as an ongoing project. They may modify the content of the narrative, but they do not alter the underlying dynamics through which the subject is engaged in its production.

4.3 Beyond Narrative? A Shift in Subject Position

If self-narration binds the subject to a cycle in which lack is continually reproduced and enjoyed, then the question of interruption becomes unavoidable. What would it mean to break with this cycle? And is such a break possible within the framework of narrative itself? In other words, what is required is not a different narrative but a different relation to narration. Such a shift can be approached through the psychoanalytic notion of subjective destitution (Žižek 2022; Fink 1997), a term used to describe a transformation in the subject's position with respect to its own symbolic coordinates. While the term may appear abstract, its implications can be stated in relatively straightforward terms: subjective destitution does not involve the discovery of a deeper or more authentic self. Nor does it produce a new narrative that finally resolves the tensions of the old one. Instead, it consists in relinquishing the expectation that such resolution is possible. The subject no longer seeks to complete its story, to integrate all elements into a coherent whole, or to secure a stable identity through narration. It confronts, rather than covers over, the gap that narrative cannot close. Such a confrontation entails a shift in how the subject relates to its own experience. Instead of organizing events into a sequence that explains who one is, the subject assumes a position that does not depend on such explanation. In practical terms, this can be expressed as a change in how one speaks about oneself. Rather than situating oneself as the object of a story – something to be described, interpreted, and integrated – the subject occupies the position from which something is said or done. This shift can be illustrated through a simple contrast. In narrative form, experiences are often framed as events that happen to a subject: "this happened to me," "I went through this," "this shaped who I am." The subject appears as the recipient of events, which are then organized into a meaningful sequence. In the alternative position, the emphasis shifts from being the object

of a narrative to assuming a relation to one's own acts: "I did this," "I was there," "I said this." The point is not to construct a more coherent story, but to change the grammatical and structural position from which one speaks (Fink 1997; Lacan 2006).

This change does not eliminate narrative. Stories can still be told, and experiences can still be organized into sequences. What changes is the status of these narratives. They are no longer treated as the medium through which identity is secured, but as constructions that do not exhaust the subject. The subject is no longer fully invested in the coherence of its story, and therefore no longer bound to the endless task of perfecting it. Importantly, this shift does not produce a new form of completeness. It does not resolve the division of the subject or eliminate the gap that structure imposes. Rather, it involves acknowledging this division and no longer attempting to overcome it through narrative means. The absence of a final, unifying account of the self is no longer experienced as a failure that must be corrected, but as a condition that can be assumed.

This shift has both ethical and political implications. If self-narration functions as a form of labor that contributes to the reproduction of existing social structures, then disengaging from its demands – at least in the sense of no longer seeking completion through it – introduces a point of resistance. The subject is no longer fully captured by the imperative to narrate itself in ways that are coherent, communicable, and continuously updated. The consequence is not a withdrawal from social life or from forms of communication that rely on narrative. Rather, the relation to these forms is altered. The subject participates in them without being fully defined by them, without treating narrative coherence as the measure of identity. The expectation that one must constantly account for oneself, that one must produce a story that makes sense, loses its hold. In this sense, the interruption of the narrative cycle does not consist in replacing one set of stories with another, but in loosening the subject's investment in the demand for narrative completion. It is a change in position rather than a change in content, a reconfiguration of how the subject relates to its own narrative activity.

5. Conclusion: The Persistence of the Gap

The trajectory traced in this article has followed narrative from its emergence as a corrective within psychology to the point where its limits become visible. Narrative entered the field as a way of restoring what had been lost – meaning, temporality, and the lived dimension of human experience. It offered an alternative to mechanistic and computational models, repositioning the subject as an interpreter of its own life. In doing so, it reshaped not only how psychology understood human conduct, but also how individuals were encouraged to understand themselves. Yet this success carries within it a tension. As narrative expands to encompass ever more aspects of psychological and social life, it risks losing its specificity, becoming a general framework that explains everything and therefore distinguishes very little. At the same time, its central achievement – the production of coherence – reveals an ambivalence. Coherence provides orientation and continuity, but it does so through processes of selection and exclusion that necessarily simplify and transform experience.

The introduction of a psychoanalytic perspective brings this ambivalence into sharper focus. By questioning the status of the subject presupposed by narrative, it becomes clear that the difficulty is not simply that narratives sometimes fail to represent the self accurately. Rather, the subject itself

cannot be fully captured in narrative form. The gap between what is said and the position from which it is said is not an incidental feature of particular stories, but a structural condition of subjectivity. The repeated effort to produce a coherent account of oneself is not driven solely by the desire for understanding; it is sustained by a form of enjoyment attached to the very impossibility of achieving completion. Narrative does not simply organize experience; it also organizes the subject's relation to its own lack, transforming the absence of closure into a source of ongoing activity. The demand for self-narration – manifest in various institutional and cultural practices – aligns with a form of productivity that thrives on repetition without resolution. The subject is engaged in the continuous labor of narrating itself, a process that generates both recognizable identity and a form of satisfaction tied to its own incompleteness. In this sense, self-narration can be understood as participating in a wider libidinal economy, one that does not depend on the fulfillment of desire but on its perpetual deferral. This condition can be articulated in terms of self-betrayal as a structural feature of self-narration: the promise of coherence binds the subject to a process that cannot deliver what it promises, while simultaneously sustaining the investment in that process through enjoyment.

As such, when narrative is treated as the primary medium through which identity is secured, its limitations become sources of tension and repetition. When these limitations are recognized as structural, the emphasis shifts from resolving them to understanding their function. The notion of a shift in subject position offers one way of approaching this recognition. Rather than seeking to complete the narrative of the self, the subject can relate differently to the impossibility that underlies it. This does not eliminate the gap between narrative and subjectivity, but it changes how that gap is inhabited: the persistence of narrative points not to the possibility of achieving a final account of the self, but to the impossibility of doing so. The failure of narrative to fully represent the subject is not a problem to be solved, but an indication of the structure within which both narrative and subject operate. To continue to narrate oneself is, in this sense, to circle around a gap that cannot be closed. Recognizing this does not bring the process of narration to an end. It does, however, alter its significance. Narrative is no longer the means through which the self is completed, but the site where its incompleteness becomes visible.

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