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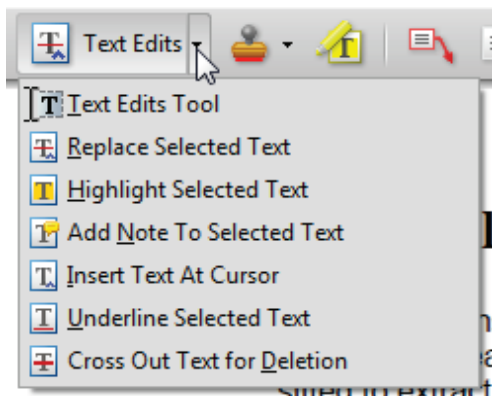
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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Corporeal selfhood, self-interpretation, and narrative selfhood

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Ever since Freud pioneered the “talking cure”, psychologists of various stripes have explored how autobiographical narrative bears on self-understanding and psychic well-being. Recently, philosophers have taken up the question of whether autobiographical narrative plays an essential or important role in the constitution of agentic selves. However, embodiment has received little attention from philosophers who defend some version of the narrative self. Catriona Mackenzie is an important exception to this pattern of neglect, and this paper explores Mackenzie’s work on embodiment and self-narrative with the aim of better understanding the adequacy of autobiographical narrative as an account of the agentic self. I argue that Mackenzie’s narrative account of embodied subjectivity and agency is incomplete, for it overestimates the reach of narrative and underestimates the cognitive and agentic powers of the lived body.

Keywords: agency; embodiment; Merleau-Ponty; narrative; self

The greatest poverty is not to live
 In a physical world . . .
 Wallace Stevens, “Esthétique du Mal” XV

1. Introduction

Ever since Freud pioneered the “talking cure”, psychologists of various stripes have explored how autobiographical narrative bears on self-understanding and psychic well-being (Spence 1982; Fivush and Haden 2003). Recently, there has been a wave of philosophical speculation as to whether autobiographical narrative plays an essential or important role in the constitution of selves. Taylor (1989), Schechtman (1996, 2001, 2007), and Goldie (2003, 2012) are among those who make strong cases that narrative is indispensable to self-understanding and moral life.¹ Velleman (2002, 2005) and Westlund (2011) adopt more guarded positions that allow that self-narration plays a role in certain aspects of selfhood or that it helps us to ascribe meaning to our experiences. Strawson (1999, 2004, 2007) leads the opposition insisting that selves endure no more than a few seconds at a time and altogether rejecting any tie between narrativity, on the one hand, and selfhood and moral agency, on the other.

Missing in much of the philosophical discussion of autobiographical narrative and selfhood is embodiment. In part, this omission is due to the continuing sway of the Cartesian thesis that selves just are mental entities. However, a number of philosophers influenced by

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Merleau-Ponty (Taylor 1989b, 1995; Atkins 2008) and/or by developments in cognitive science and neuroscience (Clark 1998; Gallagher 2005; Menary 2008) are resisting this metaphysical presumption. Bringing together the topics of narrative selfhood, embodiment, and autonomy, Mackenzie (2009, 114, also 116; Mackenzie and Poltera 2010) develops the concept of an integrated bodily perspective and argues that constructing “an integrated, if not necessarily explicit, conception of ourselves as embodied agents” is a precondition for constructing a self-narrative, which is in turn necessary for agentic selfhood. In this paper, I explore Mackenzie’s important work with the aim of better understanding the adequacy of autobiographical narrative as an account of the agentic self.

To understand Mackenzie’s position, it is necessary to address several issues. What is a bodily perspective, and how do you integrate it? In what sense might your bodily perspective be implicit rather than explicit? How does an integrated bodily perspective figure in narrative selfhood? And does narrative selfhood overlook any other dimensions of agentic selfhood? In light of my responses to these questions, I argue that Mackenzie’s narrative account of embodied subjectivity and agency is incomplete, for it over-estimates the reach of narrative and under-estimates the cognitive and agentic powers of the lived body.

2. The integrated bodily perspective

Emphasizing that people experience their bodies subjectively, Mackenzie explicates her concept of the bodily perspective from the standpoint of the lived, as opposed to the objectified, body. Based on your conscious awareness of your ongoing bodily experience as mediated by your attitudes toward, feelings about, and imaginary representations of your body and its capacities, your bodily perspective is a self-representation that encodes the meaning your body has for you (Mackenzie 2001, 426, 429). Both because your biological body changes as you age, and because you may have new bodily experiences or acquire new bodily skills at any age, your bodily perspective must keep pace (Mackenzie 2009, 117). Likewise, because valuing and devaluing of your body vary not only from one social context to another, but also over the course of your life, your bodily perspective, which is influenced by these variable assessments, must be subject to revision (Mackenzie 2001, 427).

That your bodily perspective must be integrated entails that constructing it is an active and ongoing process. Because hardly anyone gets consistent cultural and interpersonal inputs concerning her body, you must sort out these inputs – incorporating some, repudiating some, qualifying, or combining still others. Moreover, people’s aptitudes and levels of proficiency with respect to different physical skills are usually spotty. Perhaps, you are a terrible typist and a superb driver. In your efforts to learn new skills and even in making use of familiar skills, you can expect to meet with moments of frustration and dismay along with moments of satisfaction and pride. Assuming that this disparate material is not going to resolve into an integrated bodily perspective all by itself, it makes sense to regard constituting your bodily perspective as an active undertaking, as Mackenzie does (2001, 427; 2009, 117).

Sustaining an integrated bodily perspective over time is active in two senses. As I have just indicated, interpreting your disparate bodily experiences and your multiplex feelings about your body in light of cultural bodily ideals and your encounters with acquaintances, friends, and lovers is an active process. In addition, I would urge, you actively elect to do things to sustain your health or ward off deterioration, to maintain, expand, or strengthen your bodily competencies, or to enhance your bodily appearance. You might study tai chi, perfect your half gainer, or learn a new hair-styling technique. Bodily self-development and self-interpretation interact dialectically – your physical activities shape your bodily

self-representation, and your bodily self-representation shapes your physical activities. Undertaking physical activities that comport with your evolving body image and modifying your body image to maintain alignment with corporeal changes is necessary for enjoying an integrated experience of your body.

95 But Mackenzie requires more: “An integrated bodily perspective is achieved when an agent is able to identify with her bodily perspective, that is, when she regards her bodily perspective as expressive of her agency” (2001, 429). Such integration entails that no persistent and unresolved conflicts between the biological, socio-cultural, and individual dimensions of your lived embodiment persist in your bodily self-representation (429). Although Mackenzie (understandably) declines to say what degree of bodily integration is necessary for autonomous agency, she observes that persistently experiencing your body as shattered or feeling alienated from it impairs autonomous agency (430).

100 I accept this account of the interplay between bodily activity and the body image, and I have no doubt that feeling at home in your body and at one with your body image is desirable. Moreover, Mackenzie is surely right that major disruptions of the bodily attributes that comprise your bodily perspective demonstrate how central it is to your personal identity (Mackenzie 2001, 427; 2009, 118). Examples of identity-shaking corporeal disturbances include the onset of a grave illness or a severely constraining medical condition, a disfiguring accident or disease, and the loss of an intimate lover or, for that matter, an animal that you played with, cared for, and petted.

110 In one of many intensely moving passages in Jean-Dominique Bauby’s chronicle of being “locked in”, for example, Bauby’s wife takes him to the beach together with his two young children. Although he has learned to communicate using a complicated method that requires guessing letters on his interlocutor’s part and blinking on his own, communication is so cumbersome that it is impossible for him to engage in amusing repartee with the children. Worst of all, he cannot touch his boy:

115 His face not two feet from mine, my son Théophile sits patiently waiting – and I, his father, have lost the simple right to ruffle his bristly hair, clasp his downy neck, hug his small, lithe, warm body tight against me. There are no words to express it. My condition is monstrous, iniquitous, revolting, horrible. Suddenly I can take no more. Tears well and my throat emits a hoarse rattle that startles Théophile. (*The Diving Bell and the Butterfly* 1997, 71)

120 Despite Bauby’s indisputable love for this boy and the boy’s determination to sustain his rapport with his father, Bauby’s attenuated corporeal identity as Théophile’s father plunges him into grief. As Mackenzie’s account predicts, Bauby’s condition foregrounds longstanding bodily patterns of experience and agency by blocking them, thereby unsettling his sense of self.

125 I am less satisfied, however, with Mackenzie’s account of the relation between the integrated bodily perspective and narrative selfhood. According to Mackenzie:

130 Narrative self-constitution is an embodied process because our subjectivities and our narrative self-conceptions are actively constituted in relation to our lived bodily experience. The process of integrating ourselves as persons over time involves not only making sense of our pasts and possible futures, our emotions, character traits, and relations with others, but also making sense of our bodily lives (2009, 122; also see 2009, 117; 2001, 427)

135 Plainly, there would be a huge hole in a person’s narrative self-conception if it altogether omitted bodily experience. Since this is so, your self-narrative must include and account for your bodily experience, and it must relate this experience to your ideas and deliberations – that is, to your mental life.

It strikes me as odd, though, that Mackenzie presents emotions, character traits, and relations with others as if they were not part of our bodily lives. Certainly sexual relations are corporeal. So too are emotions and character traits. Perhaps she mentions “bodily lives” to distinguish experience of organic change through aging, disease, or injury from other lived bodily experience, such as experience of emotions, character traits, and relations with others, and to emphasize that this dimension of bodily experience must also be incorporated into your self-narrative. Still, I believe that her strained locution at this juncture, which seems to illicitly assimilate elements of corporeal experience to the mental, signals a difficulty in her conception of an integrated bodily perspective. Specifically, it is unclear how the mind’s ratiocinative capabilities can translate lived bodily experience into a self-narrative and whether autonomous agency requires that this is to be done.

The problem I see in Mackenzie’s view also crops up in connection with her endorsement of Marya Schechtman’s distinction between explicit and implicit self-narratives and her reliance on this distinction in her account of an integrated bodily perspective. Schechtman (1996, 114–115) urges that in addition to your explicit self-narrative, which you are normally able to articulate if called upon to do so, you may have one or more implicit self-narratives that conflict with your explicit self-narrative. In cases of self-deception and repression, an implicit self-narrative explains your behavior far better than your explicit self-narrative (115–116). In Schechtman’s view, then, implicit self-narratives make sense of nonconscious affect and motivation that give rise to “rigid and automatic” behavior (118). Although Mackenzie (2009, 109) notes that full self-transparency is impossible and concludes that “explicit self-narratives may never be fully explicit”, she is in broad agreement with Schechtman’s thinking.

Now, because your bodily perspective is “not completely perspicuous to reflection” nor is it “necessarily explicit”, it seems that it spans your explicit and your implicit self-narrative (Mackenzie 2001, 427; 2009, 114). One way to understand this claim would be to ascribe your explicit bodily self-narrative to what Shaun Gallagher calls your body image and your implicit bodily self-narrative to what he calls your body schema. The body image melds your perception of your body with your knowledge of it, your feelings about it, and your attitudes toward it (Gallagher 2005, 25). Like an explicit self-narrative, it can be called into consciousness at will (38). In contrast, the body schema is a repertoire of postural and movement capabilities that executes your intentions and structures your perceptions (26, 39, 45). To the limited extent that it is possible to bring components of your body schema into consciousness, they are assimilated into your body image (35). For the most part, though, your body schema functions subpersonally and holistically, and its workings cannot be accessed consciously (26, 38).

Mackenzie’s account of the integrated bodily self-representation or explicit bodily self-narrative does not differ from Gallagher’s account of the body image. I believe, however, that Mackenzie would reject the suggestion that the implicit bodily self-narrative maps onto Gallagher’s body schema. For, in her view, lived bodily experience synthesizes the body image and the body schema:

In our lived bodily experience the body schema and body image are integrated [although pathological conditions can pull them apart]. It is this integrated experience of the body that I call a person’s bodily perspective. (Mackenzie 2009, 116, bracketed material added)

It seems, then, that your integrated bodily perspective is equivalent to what Merleau-Ponty terms your lived body – that is, your body as you experience it. Moreover, it seems that your lived bodily experience corresponds to your implicit bodily self-narrative. Therefore,

preliminary to considering Mackenzie's account of the integrated bodily self-narrative, I recount and expand on Merleau-Ponty's explication of the lived body.

3. Corporeity, cognition, and action

185 Merleau-Ponty characterizes the body as “a knot of living significations” and “a totality of
 lived significations”, and he traces this type of meaning to motility – that is, “motor grasping
 of a motor signification” ([1945] 2012, 153, 155, 144). By acquiring habits – that is, abilities
 to move fluently in your physical and social environment – you understand
 190 your world in a nonconceptual, nonpropositional, and practical manner. In Merleau-Ponty's words, “To understand is to experience [*éprouver*] the accord between what we
 aim for and what is given, between the intention and the realization” (146). You have
 learned a type of movement that coordinates perceptual and motor capabilities, and this
 motility capability is adaptable to diverse contextual configurations. Thus, accomplished
 195 organists can play organs that are configured differently from their familiar ones after
 brief periods of practice on the new instruments (146–147). Their habits are readily trans-
 ferable to different contexts, and they understand the unfamiliar instruments in the sense
 that they can play the music they want to play on them. Their understanding is sited in
 the “living body” – in the coordination of perceptual input with trained sinew and flesh,
 as opposed to the intellect's analytical and reasoning powers (146; also see 141, 145).
 200 Summing up his line of thought, Merleau-Ponty declares, “[T]he subject does not weld indi-
 vidual movements to individual stimuli, but rather acquires the power of responding with a
 certain type of solution to a certain form of situation” – that is, to situations with shared
 meanings (143). Situations that share meanings are ones that present similar possibilities
 for acting, and your “living body” is able to understand these meanings once you have cul-
 tivated a habit that enables you to avail yourself of these possibilities.

205 In her discussion of Merleau-Ponty's conception of habit, Mackenzie points out that a
 bodily perspective is constituted on the basis of “bodily capacities and bodily knowledge
 that are developed over time both in response to one's environment and in pursuit of
 one's aims” (2009, 116–117). She goes on to say that the acquisition and mastery of
 new skills makes spontaneous responses to novel situations possible (117). For example,
 210 a competent driver responds automatically to all sorts of shifting traffic speeds and patterns.
 In my view, however, Merleau-Ponty goes farther, for he maintains that habit endows you
 with the “power we have of dilating our being in the world, or of altering our existence
 through incorporating new instruments” ([1945] 2012, 145). I doubt that he means
 merely that habit enables you to multitask – for example, to think about the main points
 you want to convey to your afternoon seminar while driving to campus. Rather, he is claim-
 215 ing that habit has an agentic dynamic of its own – that is, it builds on itself to augment the
 range of actions you can successfully perform or to reveal new means of accomplishing
 your ends – thus making improvisation possible (148). Just think of walking – a
 learned skill that has countless variations and suggests untold uses in the service of count-
 less values and aims. Aside from smoothly getting around in our daily routines, lovers take
 220 romantic strolls, ballerinas glide across the stage in a pas de bourrée, pall bearers solemnly
 carry coffins, high school bands march in parades, and avatars locomote in virtual worlds.²
 If walking is a typical habit, then, habit is an invaluable agentic asset. It not only achieves
 your current aims, but it also suggests novel aspirations and possibilities for action.

Habit is one form of bodily cognition and understanding. But there are others, and affective
 225 responses are notable among them. Current theories of emotion anchor emotion in corporeity
 while underscoring its cognitive and normative dimensions. In Robinson's (2005,

45) scientifically informed view, for instance, preconscious, corporeal evaluations, which she calls “affective appraisals”, constitute the core of emotional experience.³ These rudimentary assessments of features of your environment as good or bad, supportive of or inimical to your interests, strange or familiar, and so forth automatically bring about physiological arousal, which in turn reinforces the appraisal, fixes your attention on the object of concern, and prepares you to act appropriately (46, 89).⁴ Because affective appraisals can be off-base, further cognitive monitoring may be needed in case these responses need to be over-ridden and your action tendency inhibited (75). But by and large they provide accurate information about the agentic significance of the situations you find yourself in (73). Thus, emotions are rooted in nonconceptual practical interpretations of your physical and interpersonal surroundings, and these nonconceptual practical interpretations guide the workings of habit.⁵

A rare disease that prevents its victims from feeling fear lends support to the agentic value of emotion. Damasio (1999, 62–67) describes a woman who could not experience fear because of Urbach-Wiethe disease. She readily learned new facts, and she made friends easily and cared for her children well. However, Damasio concludes that people with this emotional impairment “cannot protect themselves against simple and not-so-simple social risks and are thus more vulnerable and less independent” than people who can experience fear (67). To say the least, feeling safe regardless of what is going on is a perilous failure of cognition.

In addition to know-how that secures agency and promotes innovation and affect that steers know-how away from harm and toward desiderata, covert imitation streamlines, and deepens individuals’ understanding of others’ actions. Psychological research suggests that the priming of sub-personal motor programs plays a role in several kinds of memory, as well as in people’s ability to use visual images to solve abstract problems and, most intriguing of all, in our ability to understand other people’s behavior.⁶ In covert imitation, motor programs are primed when you perceive another person moving, but they remain off-line in the sense that you never actually move. Wilson and Knoblich (2005, 463–464) argue that by mobilizing implicit knowledge of the workings of your own body through covert imitation you are able to predict the probable future course of a perceived action. Other research programs defend a backward looking claim that covert imitation also enables you to retrodict the intentions that gave rise to a perceived action. If research on mirror neurons confirms their operation in humans and shows that these neurons are implicated in grasping the meaning of subtle and complex types of human conduct, it would complement these hypotheses. Meanwhile, the importance of covert imitation with respect to your embodied capacities for understanding others’ actions and coordinating your action with theirs is evident.

Yet, Wilson and Knoblich seem to be documenting functions of the body schema – corporeal processes that cannot be brought to consciousness. Might there be a corollary in the lived body? I suggest that Barbara Montero’s (2006a, 2006b) work on “proprioceiving” dance may raise covert imitation to the phenomenological level. I cannot engage Montero’s controversial claim that proprioception is not exclusively a reflexive mode of awareness, but also a mode of kinesthetic access to others’ bodily positions and movements. However, my own experience as a former student of ballet confirms Montero’s (2006b, 237) claim that dancers’ movements can “resonate” in an audience member’s body and are thus kinesthetically represented and sympathetically felt despite the fact that the spectator is actually sitting motionless in the auditorium. In light of this sort of experience, it seems plausible to postulate an intermediate point between subconscious covert imitation and overt imitation – a point at which motor programs are activated enough for the

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spectator to sense the observed movement somatically, but not so much that the spectator launches out of her seat and into the aisle. If this conjecture is borne out, consciously accessible, yet covert imitation would constitute another form of nonconceptual, nonpropositional cognition – one that would undoubtedly find many real-life applications besides appreciating dance performances.

275 Finally, I return to Merleau-Ponty's account of the lived body – in particular, his assertion that “the body is eminently an expressive space” ([1945] 2012, 147). Many of your goals, values, and character traits are corporeally encoded and automatically regulate your conduct. For example, friendliness is a mode of bodily comportment, and dignity is a style of bodily presence.⁷ Consequently, it is unnecessary for friendly, dignified people
280 to monitor themselves in order to act in a friendly, dignified manner. Their corporeally encoded attributes reliably ensure the friendliness and dignity of their self-presentation.

With regard to these matters of bodily bearing, Merleau-Ponty avers that the body is like a work of art ([1945] 2012, 152). “A novel, a poem, a painting, and a piece of music,” he reminds us, “are individuals, that is, beings in which the expression cannot be distinguished
285 from the expressed, whose sense is only accessible through direct contact” (153). On the one hand, this is the truism that no paraphrase of a poem or description of a painting quite captures the meaning of the poem or the painting itself. On the other hand, when applied to human corporeity and action, this truism about art calls attention to what I call psychocorporeal meaning – the nonconceptual content that the lived body is imbued with and that it also generates and expresses.⁸ Moreover, it implies that attempts to articulate psychocorporeal meaning in the medium of language inevitably fall short.

Merleau-Ponty concludes, “If we can still speak of an interpretation in the perception of one's own body, then it would be necessary to say that it interprets itself” ([1945] 2012, 151). This remark is cryptic, but I see two plausible, mutually compatible ways to understand it. First, in view of its place in Merleau-Ponty's argument, it seems clear that he considers the lived body to be an interpreter of the biological body because the lived body consolidates the incongruous parts of the biological body into a single whole. You do not mentally “assemble the parts of [your] body one by one” (151). Rather, the body you experience as your own is already unified (151). Second, although I find no mention of this in his text, the lived body is also self-interpreting inasmuch as it maintains an ongoing reflexive affective commentary on your conduct – for example, your sinking feeling as you are blurting out a rude comment or the frisson you feel after you bring off a tricky pirouette on figure skates. Your doings – both the blunders and the triumphs – are all registered in a steady stream of psychocorporeal affective feedback. It follows that critical self-reflection is not a purely, perhaps not even principally, a ratiocinative process. It is also a function of the educated, intelligent lived body.

4. The lived body and the narrative self

I ended Section 1 on a note of uneasiness regarding the fit between Mackenzie's distinction between an integrated bodily perspective and an integrated bodily self-representation, on the one hand, and Schechtman's distinction between an implicit self-narrative and an explicit self-narrative, on the other hand. Having pointed out that Mackenzie likens lived bodily experience to an implicit self-narrative, I proceeded in Section 2 to present some central features of lived bodily experience. Now I am in a position to evaluate Mackenzie's way of conceptualizing embodied selfhood.

I begin by listing some obvious tensions between Schechtman's conception of an implicit narrative and Mackenzie's identification of the integrated bodily perspective
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with the lived body. First, whereas, in Schechtman's view, the affect and motivations depicted in an implicit self-narrative fuel rigid, repetitive behaviors, there is nothing rigid or repetitive about habit, as Merleau-Ponty and Mackenzie understand it. Second, whereas implicit self-narratives are subconscious and very difficult to bring to consciousness, people are aware of or easily can be aware of much of lived bodily experience – including their affective responses to their circumstances, their self-referential affect, and their felt, but off-line covert imitation. Third, if Merleau-Ponty is right that the expressive body is like a work of art and that the lived body is self-interpreting, it is far from evident why we should infer that it is interpreting itself by generating an implicit self-narrative.

Indeed, there is reason to be cautious, if not skeptical, here. We would do well to recall Ian Hacking's (1995, 254) observation that, thanks to semantic contagion and the cultural currency of a plot template for childhood sexual abuse, an adult daughter may frame an uncomfortable father–daughter scene from the distant past as an incest story. In urging caution about implicit bodily self-narratives, I certainly do not intend to mystify bodily experience by claiming that bodily experience is inevitably misunderstood or utterly ineffable. Mackenzie (2008, 132; also see Mackenzie and Poltera 2010, 44) correctly points out that there are epistemic constraints, imperfect though they may be, on recollections of past events, including embodied experience. In addition, it is obvious that we talk about our subjective experience of embodiment frequently and cogently. Likewise, it is well established that each of us has an evolving body image that includes pictorial imagery as well as narrative strands. Still, the idea that the psychocorporeal experience of the lived body encodes an implicit self-narrative is sufficiently murky to warrant scrutiny.

Mackenzie (2008, 123), Mackenzie and Poltera (2010, 35), and Schechtman (1996, 116) agree that people do not actually narrate a great deal of their experience to themselves or others, but they nevertheless agree that people narratively constitute themselves. So little do people actually narrate that, for Schechtman, the narrative self-thesis seems to be best understood as a metaphor:

I call a person's underlying psychological organization a *self*-narrative because it is not simply a static set of facts about him, but rather a dynamic set of organizing principles, a basic orientation through which, with or without conscious awareness, an individual understands himself and his world. (1996, 115–116)

If I understand her correctly, Schechtman's view is that yourself comprises your cognitive framework together with your motivational system, both of which are meaningful and evolving. Because narratives represent meaningful events and depict change over time, yourself is figuratively a collocation of narratives.

Mackenzie's position seems to be more robust. Departing from classical narratology in some respects, Mackenzie and Poltera (2010, 34–35) join Schechtman (1996, 102–105) in denying that narratives must have beginnings, middles, and endings and that they must be structured according to pre-existing genres. As well, she endorses Genevieve Lloyd's proposal that we “think of the process of narrative self-constitution as ‘like the multiple-perspective narratives of modern novels – respecting the fragments while making of them a satisfying unity’” (Mackenzie and Poltera 2010, 38). Among the key themes that recur in Mackenzie's (2007, 275; 2009, 106–107) characterizations of narrative are the temporal unity achieved through employment together with the meanings derived from the placement of characters and events in the plot and the meanings grasped when the story is considered in its totality. Lodged in a narrative, seemingly haphazard moments are inter-related and synthesized into intelligible segments.

Apropos of the narrative self, Mackenzie offers two parallel lines of thought. On the one hand, she urges that narrative self-conceptions “order random sequences of a life, or bits of a life, into a temporal unity, thereby rendering intelligible the actions and emotions of our past and future selves” (2007, 275). On the other hand, she urges that the “lives of persons cannot be thought of as a series of discrete, disconnected experiences or events but rather have an implicit narrative form” (2009, 106–107). So, you have experience, including experience of your embodiment, which has an “implicit narrative form”, and you have a self-conception, which is an explicit self-narrative that you could articulate should the occasion arise. According to Mackenzie (2008, 128), this narrative self-conception must reconcile different aspects of selfhood into a stable integrated “practical stance” if an individual is to lead a flourishing, autonomous life. Your ensemble of self-narratives must coalesce sufficiently for your thoughts, feelings, and actions to make sense.

With regard to the lived body and the integrated bodily perspective, it is important to separate the possibility that bodily subjectivity is an implicit narrative from the claim that it has an implicit narrative form.⁹ An implicit bodily self-narrative would be one that gives a better explanation of your lived body than the explanation you give in your explicit bodily self-narrative. I have difficulty envisaging such a narrative because your lived body just is your body as you experience it. Maybe though the story that concerned friends tell an anorectic to the effect that her hunger pangs mean that she should eat not that she is at risk of losing control would count as an implicit self-narrative of her lived body.

In contrast, an explicit self-narrative is a story about yourself that you have told to yourself or others or one that you would produce if the need to explain yourself arose. I have already acknowledged that in one sense the lived body fits this conception of an explicit bodily self-narrative. I can tell my story of rushing headlong up Fifth Avenue toward my gym, tripping on a protruding piece of sidewalk scaffolding, and smashing down on the pavement. If anyone were interested, I could fill in lots of detail about how all of this felt at the time. Inasmuch as I can produce this story, and the passersby who helped me to my feet would no doubt confirm the embarrassing denouement, I suppose you could infer that my lived bodily experience that afternoon must have had an implicit narrative form. But if so, saying that the lived body possesses an implicit narrative form amounts to nothing more than saying that lived bodily experience is susceptible to being narrated as a part of the life of a person.¹⁰

Still, there is a vital sense in which the lived body does not have an implicit narrative form. What troubles me about Mackenzie’s assimilation of the lived body to the narrative self is that it downplays what I take to be one of Merleau-Ponty’s most compelling insights. Merleau-Ponty not only distinguishes the body as object of scientific study from the body as experienced subjectively, he also distinguishes psychocorporeal meaning and understanding from conceptual meaning and propositional understanding. Narrative painting, pantomime, and story ballets notwithstanding, the narrative vehicle that advocates of the narrative self have in mind is an oral or written text – a story you can tell, not a story you can re-enact. Such narratives represent experience in conceptual terms and interpret it propositionally. However, lived bodily experience is altogether different, for psychocorporeal meaning and understanding are nonconceptually and nonpropositionally encoded in flesh and sinew. As we have seen, moreover, the lived body interprets itself not only by integrating itself, but also by affectively commenting on its own states and doings. To maintain that this form of meaning is essentially narrative in nature is to assimilate corporeity to the mental – that is, to conceptual and propositional thought – and to deny the integrity of the cognitive powers of the lived body. To be sure, narrativizing the lived body humanizes embodiment by endowing it with articulate meaning, but at the cost of excessively mentalizing it.

Resisting the temptation to intellectualize meaning-laden, practically intelligent corporeity is extremely difficult, for no colloquial vocabulary is available that exclusively references bodily meaning and intelligence. So potent, too, is western philosophical privileging of the mental that many prominent contemporary philosophical discussions of selfhood define the self strictly as a psychological or mental phenomenon. For Schechtman (1996, 115), insofar as the self is the bearer of a distinctive set of personality and character traits and has a distinctive outlook, it is a psychological entity.¹¹ Strawson drops personality from his account, but he retains the idea that the self is an inner subject, an “internal mental presence, a mental entity” (1999, 99, 104, 108).¹² In a similar vein, Velleman (2002, 111) regards *self* as a term that expresses three different kinds of reflexivity, three ways in which your mind can think about you. A few phenomenologists and feminists have questioned this trend, and Mackenzie succinctly sums up this critique: “[S]ubjectivity is not merely psychological; it is also embodied” (2009, 114).¹³ Yet, I have urged that Mackenzie’s narrative account of selfhood ultimately succumbs to the siren song of mentalization. Is it possible to avoid this fate?

The answer, I believe, is: not without great difficulty and considerable artifice. In this connection, I am intrigued by a suggestion Strawson makes but fails to pursue. Although I am by no means persuaded of his views regarding episodic and diachronic selves, nor do I accept his mental conception of the self, his claim that it is form-finding, not narrative, that is crucial for leading the life of an agentic subject may provide an escape route from mentalism (Strawson 2004, 448). Non-narrative form-finding “may be osmotic, systemic, not staged in consciousness” (448). Narrativists like Schechtman and Mackenzie agree that the requisite form-finding need not be a conscious undertaking, but they dispute that narrative can be dispensed with. Schechtman might also agree that form-finding can be systemic inasmuch as the unconscious mobilizes relentless desires and emotions. Likewise, Mackenzie might agree that form-finding can be systemic, for she views both the mind and the body as functioning holistically. Yet, against Strawson, both of them would insist that this systemic form-finding must be implicitly narrative. So I see no place for osmotic form-finding in the work of either Schechtman or Mackenzie.

Still, it is necessary to clarify what osmotic form-finding is. Because Strawson gives no clue as to what he has in mind, I turned to my dictionary. After defining osmosis in the standard contexts of cell biology and chemistry, *Webster’s Third New International Dictionary* provides this definition: “A usually effortless, often unconscious absorption or assimilation (as of ideas or influences) by a seemingly general permeation.” This sounds a lot like the form-finding involved in habitual action as Merleau-Ponty understands this process. Your body’s many corporeal capabilities function as a coordinated whole to understand your surroundings by acting appropriately. As well, this definition of osmosis is consonant with the form-finding of corporeal affectivity – your body’s ability to cognize and to alert you to presumptively negative and positive features of your surroundings and also to reflexively register your agentic successes and set-backs. These affective cues are indeed generated effortlessly and systemically, as are your off-line, sympathetic feelings as you witness and corporeally grasp the significance of choreographed human movement. Finally, Merleau-Ponty’s tenet that the lived body interprets itself as having the unified shape of a human being seems to partake of both osmotic effortlessness and osmotic permeation.

Although I acknowledge that people’s narrative self-conceptions must include their bodily experience, I oppose confining embodied selfhood to narrative selfhood. With apologies for violating the spirit of Strawson’s mentalist project, I propose that we view psychocorporeal embodiment as osmotically imbued with meanings, osmotically expressing meanings, and osmotically understanding meanings – that is, as an osmotic form-finder.

As a form-finder, psychocorporeity viscerally understands what is going on in your environment that matters to you and viscerally understands how to act, all the while viscerally understanding how your conduct is faring as judged by your corporeally encoded goals and values. If I am right that the nonconceptual, nonpropositional cognitive, conative, and volitional capacities of the lived body are central to the agentic capacity to grasp situations and figure out what to do, it would be redundant – and in any case, I have argued, impossible – to decipher them narratively. Osmotic visceral form-finding or, as I prefer to call it, psychocorporeal practical intelligence does a good deal of the reconnoitering, projecting, and self-assessing work that is necessary to be an autonomous agent.

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Notes

1. Goldie's (2012) final view of the contribution of narrative to selfhood and agency is weaker than the views of Taylor and Schechtman but stronger than those of Velleman and Westlund. On the one hand, he distances himself from Schechtman's narrative self-constitution view and offers instead "person narratives", which "express the narrative sense of self" (130). On the other hand, he holds that the narrative sense of self is nothing more than "the sense that one has of oneself in narrative thinking, as having a past, present, and future" (118). Pulling back from potent metaphysical claims connecting narrative to selfhood, Goldie nevertheless privileges the contribution of narrative to leading a human life.
2. For related discussion, see Sheets-Johnstone's (2003, 74) discussion of writing your name as a kinesthetic melody that is responsive to the tools at hand as well as the social significance of the signature.
3. Although Robinson (2005, 45) maintains that affective appraisals are noncognitive because they "occur without any conscious deliberation or awareness" and "do not involve any complex information processing", I regard her reasons for denying these appraisals cognitive standing as unduly restrictive. If there is such a thing as nonconceptual or nonpropositional knowledge, and I think there is, then there is no reason not to count "affective appraisals" as cognitive. That feeling need not have a cognitive dimension does not entail that it never does.
4. For work on emotion that complements Robinson's account in important ways, but that argues against the role of conceptual or propositional participation in the constitution of emotion, see Prinz (2004, 57). Other work that complements Robinson's account but that argues for less separation between bodily appraisal and arousal on neurological grounds includes Colombetti and Thompson (2005, 2008) and Colombetti (2007).
5. Elsewhere I defend an account of affective bodily feelings, understood as distinct from full-blown emotions, as *nonconceptual practical interpretations* (unpublished manuscript).
6. Wilson (2002, 632–635) provides a helpful review of the evidence supporting the bodily basis of various types of off-line cognition.
7. For relevant discussion, see Taylor (1989a, 15; 1995, 171).
8. I introduced the term psychocorporeal to underscore the ways in which phenomena, such as emotion, cognition, and knowledge, that are commonly classified as psychological and hence mental also take somatic forms (Meyers 2004, chapter 4). As I understand it, meaning-receptive, meaning-imbued, practically intelligent corporeity constitutes the psychocorporeal body.
9. This distinction seems to get lost in Mackenzie's treatments of the bodily perspective.
10. Menary helpfully characterizes embodied experiences as "pre-narrative fodder for narratives" (2008, 70).
11. In Schechtman's (2007, 170) view, embodiment is relegated to the role of reidentification – that is, to our need as social animals to recognize other individuals after interrupted perceptions of them. For incisive critique of this part of Schechtman's position, see Mackenzie (2009, 112–119).

12. To be fair, Strawson treats this conception of the self as stipulative. He goes on to say that he has no objection to various other conceptions of the self, including the embodied self (1999, 100).
13. For critiques of the mentalist self, see Taylor (1989b, 1995); James (2000); Mackenzie (2001, 2007, 2009); Meyers (2004, 2005a, 2005b, 2013); Gallagher (2005); Menary (2008, unpublished manuscript).

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