

**Marta Zabik**

**Stories - Research Paper**

## I

- 1 Stories. We are surrounded by them. Or maybe, we surround ourselves with them? There is something fascinating about how human mind lives on stories. How every scenario becomes in a way valid the moment you understand the concept, even if none of that has happened. → 25, 43
- 2 When saying *a story* I don't mean a fairytale, a legend or an epic poem, but something much wider than that. It might take a form of a narrative, but also a concept, a statement, or a belief. We spend our whole lives explaining to ourselves what the world is, who we are, who others are, and how do we relate to things going on both inside us, and on the outside. → 6, 10, 11, 13, 31, 47, 48, 51, 52, 59, 63
- 3 But there is that tension between human mind and reality. There's something about it that we never quite get the exact picture. Is it distorted? Fragmentary? Or simply fictional? → 6, 7, 12, 14, 20, 26, 30, 51, 52, 53, 54
- 4 Let's shed some light on those stories. What are they, in the first place? A medium or a message? A mechanism or a tendency? Illusion? Simplification? What role do they play exactly in our lives? What values do they bring? What needs stand behind them? Do they open our eyes to reality, or do they blind us to it? How come they are completely intangible but commonly relatable? Just how real or unreal are they?
- 5 Are they one thing? Or many things that could be called the same name? Is there something that could tie them together? How does the mechanism of building a picture of the world relate to building one's sense of identity? Do religious myths and scientific speculations have something in common? Where is the line between imagination and perception? Why the form of a narrative was widespread in cultures around the globe, throughout millennia? Why is it so memorable and catchy? Why is it so compelling and believable? And does one relate to the other?

## II

- 6 We have always been very curious about the world we live in, but since we never had the full picture and the knowledge needed to understand it (and we still don't) we would implement the snippets of information available to us at the moment into ideas, theories, beliefs. And so, both concepts of the Earth being flat and round existed in parallel for millennia, as none of them could be proven right or wrong. → 31, 45

## I

I think the path to development is not found so much in finding the answers, because the answers we do find at best serve only a little while. Life is forever evolving, and yesterday's truth is tomorrow's prison. Rather I believe, we get a larger life by asking larger questions. And keeping those questions before us. Not answers, which ultimately prove limiting. Answers tell us where we've been, questions get us our journey.

Hollis, J. (2020)  
*A Life of Meaning*.  
[Audible]

## II

Seeing (...) establishes our place in the surrounding world; we explain that world with words, but words can never undo the fact that we are surrounded by it. The relation between what we see and what we know is never settled. Each evening we see the sun set. We know that the earth is turning away from it. Yet the knowledge, the explanation, never quite fits the sight. (...) The way we see things is affected by what we know or what we believe.

Berger J., (1990)  
*Ways of Seeing*,  
Penguin Classics

We humans are very adept at drawing conclusions from less-than-all the information. When presented with less than the full picture, we attempt to (...) fill in missing information and form a complete image or idea based on common or easily recognisable patterns from our past experience and understanding.

Rutledge A., (2009)  
*Gestalt Principles of Perception*  
- 5: Closure

Science has always been in conflict with narratives. Judged by the yardstick of science, the majority of them prove to be fables. But to the extent that science

Lyotard J. F. (1984)  
*The Postmodern Condition:  
A Report on Knowledge*,  
University of Minnesota Press

- 7 Astrology, theories, faith and philosophy progressed slowly hand in hand, feeding into one another. Just to give an example, the Ptolemaic system of the universe (also called the geocentric model) coexisted with beliefs and thoughts of the ancient Greece just as well as with those of christian church in the Middle Ages. Even Dante in his *Divine Comedy* found a balance between religious claims and scientific concepts, and suggested that when Satan fell from the celestial realm surrounding the Earth, he pierced through its surface to the centre of the planet, which then became Hell. → 32
- 8 It happened only recently, during the Copernican Revolution, that scientific speculations drew away from faith, and the only way for Galileo to defend the heliocentric model from accusations of heresy without undermining dogmas of the church, was to say that stories in the Bible were not to be taken literally. → 35, 36
- 9 As science progressed, and new knowledge fed into fresh theories and speculations, about the Big Bang, black wholes, and the universe, it started playing larger and larger role in our view on the world, but there's something deceiving about it. On top of conclusions drawn from observations, and evidence acquired thanks to the ever evolving technology, grew a new body of ideas, concepts and speculations somehow philosophical in nature. Because if the Big Bang theory was true, many questions are urgent to be asked - what was there before, and what will happen after, if there will be any end to it? There are so many hypothesis about multiverse - from *many-worlds interpretation* which states that with each event the time branches off into a new universe, and each possible outcome actually takes place in another parallel reality, to *mathematical universe hypothesis* saying that the reality is actually a mathematical structure in which we just happen to be self-aware substructures perceiving ourselves as existing in a real physical world.
- 10 One of the biggest aspirations of current science is to form *the theory of everything*, which sounds like an unachievable dream of an idealistic scientist - an all-encompassing theory, explaining all the physical aspects of the universe through one cohesive theoretical framework. It seems that logical, rational science found itself in need of a consistent narrative that would tie it all together. → 48
- 11 Is it just my impression, or we have turned full circle here? Perhaps it would be too much to say that science became a new religion, however, it seems to somehow have replaced the way we explain the world to ourselves. Or do we need so → 49

does not restrict itself to stating useful regularities and seeks truth, it is obliged to legitimate the rules of its own game. It then produces a discourse of legitimation with respect to its own status, a discourse called philosophy.

Parallel universes may or may not exist; the case is unproved. We are going to have to live with that uncertainty. Nothing is wrong with scientifically based philosophical speculation, which is what multiverse proposals are. But we should name it for what it is.

Ellis, G. (2011)  
*Does the Multiverse Really Exist?*,  
Scientific American

The cosmological principle (...) amounts to the strongly philosophical statement that the part of the universe which we can see is a fair sample, and that the same physical laws apply throughout. In essence, this in a sense says that the universe is knowable and is playing fair with scientists.

Keel, W. C. (2007)  
*The Road to Galaxy Formation*,  
Springer Link

Lies are what the world lives on, and those who can face the challenge of a truth and build their lives to accord are finally not many, but the very few.

Campbell, J. (1972)  
*Myths to Live By*,  
Penguin Compass

The mind receives images of the world that it compares with existing stored images to produce a new composite image that is once again stored into memory.

Tenen, D. (2017) Plain Text:  
*The Poetics of Computation*,  
Stanford University Press

### III

Because our well-being is tied to understanding, we begin to story our world. (...) We make a story an active process. Our stories are our provisional interpretations of

Hollis, J. (2020)  
*A Life of Meaning*.  
[Audible]

- 11 strong to respond to our curiosity, or to understand reality, or to find meaning, that we unintentionally put those old tendencies and desires in a new context? → 49
- 12 We also seem to forget that the nature of science is that each concept is only but temporary, provisional, and serves as the most accurate model of reality for the time being, not aspiring to be completely true. The words *myths* and *beliefs* are nowadays replaced by *hypothesis* and *interpretations*, but they're still merely believable, speculative. We might look at ancient Egyptians or Greeks with pity for their naivety, not thinking that in the future our trust in current theories will probably look just as unworldly. → 45
- 13 What is it in human nature that has always made us lean on those explanations, theories, concepts - whether religious or scientific - so much? Why do we need so much to hold our perceived reality together? Why do we need so much to feel grounded and that we know what we stand on, literally? Does it really matter to us if those stories are true? And will it ever be possible to confirm what the truth is in the first place? → 45, 46, 49
- 14 In a way, we live in the perceived reality just as much as in the actual one, or maybe even more; or perhaps somewhere between the two? → 21, 37, 51, 52

### III

- 15 One of the most important moments and decisions in my life, not surprisingly, came to me when I felt like I reached the bottom. When I achieved what I believed would make me happy and still found myself miserable. When the beliefs that had worked until that moment did not hold true anymore. The moment you realise that, there is no going back. You know there is something inside you that you can't run away from, and you finally listen to your mum or your close friend, or your partner saying 'try therapy'. And so I did. → 36
- 16 As a person who had done over the years some digging in the topics of at first self-development, then mindfulness, and then a weird mixture of psychology, self-help and spirituality, I thought I got the gist of what ego is, of what awakening is, what subconscious is, but only seeing therapy at work made me understand what's actually going on there. → 57, 58
- 17 You see, it is not about confessing, reworking the situations, talking them through for the sake of talking. It's not about that at all. From each situation, with your therapist you dig out some old beliefs, scripts, preconceptions that → 59, 60

what is going on and what it might mean to us. These provisional narratives are allied with emotions within us, embodied in a somatic registry which never forgets.

As we become conscious to the ego, we can witness it telling stories about everything we experience like a narrative to a movie. (...) Those narratives are just that: stories. Not necessarily truths.

LePera, N. (2021)  
*Why Your Ego Is Your Friend*  
[Instagram]

Now  
Rise  
Begin  
Time to awaken and  
Ask  
Why?  
And when?  
Don't hide from the questions that rise  
Deep  
Within  
I can't go 'round again

Smith W., Harrison J. (2020)  
*Rise*  
[Spotify]

Now  
Hear  
Be still  
Let go of the things that I  
Thought  
Were  
Real  
The veil slipped and now I can see

Our sense of self is slowly built from our earliest life, our earliest encounters, repeated and reenforced, corrected and altered, and ratified by our environmental pressures. Over time, it takes status of an operational personality. Pre-autonomous,

Hollis, J. (2020)  
*A Life of Meaning.*  
[Audible]

17 influence, distort, even poison your view on all kinds of situations. → 59, 60

18 With time you grow to realise that what you do, what you think, what you believe you are, is to a large extent a product of your past. That you are stuck in repeating same patterns of behaviour, imposing old frames of thinking on present situations. As you progress in your healing journey, you discern what the real work is about - unrooting, unclogging, unlearning, setting yourself free from the limitations put on you by your environment, your life experience, and yourself. → 61, 62, 63

19 We all imprison ourselves into a tunnel vision that keeps us away from reaching who we could be if not for all that has happened to us, all that has shaped us. I believe that as you shed off the layers of old habits, patterns, and stories, you become more and more of yourself. → 62, 63

20 There is a big gap between who we think we are and who we actually are. A tension between self-imposed limitations and the real potential. As we try to define ourselves in narratives, we cling to an illusion that we actually are definable - that our intellect can grasp our nature. → 2, 49, 52, 55

21 How much more scary would be living in uncertainty that you don't know who you are, that you can't really understand yourself, and that you can't depend on a predictable structure of thought patterns and reactive behaviours? → 13, 49

#### IV

22 Stories are in an interesting way closely related to our world, but not completely bound or attached to it. They touch on it ever so slightly, but keep themselves to their own realm - intangible, insubstantial, invisible. Otherworldly.

23 They seem to remain in a nonphysical dimension of human imagination, but there's something very real about them. If they speak to us all, they must exist in some sense, right? Just where are they on the spectrum between existence and non-existence? How do they relate to reality? Just how much of the world we perceive is the actual realm, and how much of it is stories? → 6, 7, 9, 14, 43, 46

24 Think about speculative architectural visions like *The Walking City* by Archigram, Etienne-Louis Boullée's *Cenotaph for Newton*, *La Città Nuova* by Antonio Sant'Elia, *Plan Voisin* by Le Corbusier, *Broadacre City* by Frank Lloyd Wright... → 9  
Something about them feels almost tangible. Even though

reflexively driven, and capable of living an adaptive life perhaps. But is it our life?

## IV

They say the Greek artists 'idealised' nature, and they think of it in terms of a photographer who touches up a portrait by deleting small blemishes. The Greek approach was really exactly the opposite. Through all these centuries, the artists were concerned with infusing more and more life into the ancient husks. (...) The old types had begun to move and breath under the hands of the skillful sculptor, and they stand before us like real human beings, and yet as beings from a different world, better world.

Gombrich, E. H. (1995)  
*A Story of Art*,  
Phaidon Press

Dreams are powerful. They are repositories of our desire. They animate the entertainment industry and drive consumption. They can blind people to reality and provide cover for political horror. But they can also inspire us to imagine that things could be radically different than they are today, and then believe we can progress toward that imaginary world.

Duncombe, S. (2007),  
*Dream: Re-imagining Progressive  
Politics in an Age of Fantasy*,  
New Press

[Possible futures] usually take the form of scenarios, often starting with a what-if question, and are intended to open up spaces of debate and discussion; therefore, they are by necessity provocative, intentionally simplified, and fictional. Their fictional nature requires viewers to suspend their disbelief and allow their imaginations to wander, to momentarily

Dunne A., Raby F., (2013)  
*Speculative Everything*,  
The MIT Press

24 never realised, they undoubtedly had a significant impact on the history of architecture, and on how our cities shaped and developed. → 9

25 The load of potential scenarios, and of what could be floods one's mind when looking at them. Their strength lays in the fact the they don't aim at tricking the eye, they don't pretend to look real, but clearly bring a provisional representation of something that could become real at some point, and leave plenty of space for imagination. They don't quite belong to our world, but the moment you look at them it feels as if they existed or will exist somewhere at some point. → 9, 43

26 Plato made a very simple distinction between the physical world of senses and the invisible world of reason in his *allegory of the divided line*. He believed that one can't truly grasp reality with mere senses which prove limited and flawed, and that there is another aspect of reality, just as real, comprehensible by intellect - the world of ideas. It is *the realm of Being*, eternal and unchanging, while our physical *realm of Becoming* is only but a manifestation of those pure forms. However, even though unachievable and somehow abstract, forms can serve as guides, drawing attention to the space for improvement. → 52

27 It smartly aligns with the concept of *eudaimonia*, which focuses on fulfilling one's purpose in life through growth and seeking excellence, rather than achieving a state of happiness as pleasure and contentment. → 34

28 But what's more interesting here, is the etymology of the term, combining *eu* ('good, well') with *daimōn* ('spirit'), which refers to old beliefs that one goes through life accompanied by a spirit which impersonates what we would call today *the best version of oneself*, and that suggests a collective sense of presence of not quite tangible reality that could be, of potential scenarios encompassing each living being that comes into this world.

29 Both of those notions base on a strong sense of something imperceptible being a part of everyday life experience, able to have an impact on it, given time and effort. I absolutely love the twist on this philosophy which Elisabeth Gilbert used as foundation for her concept of *creating living* - that ideas are living entities, perceptible not by physical senses but imagination, able to make some kind of contact with humans, nudging them, bringing moments of sudden inspiration and being in the flow, and guarding over their creative endeavours.

forget how things are now, and wonder about how things could be.

For Plato, ideas were pure mental forms existing in the minds of the gods, before human life began. And were consequently above and beyond the world of phenomena.

Stevens, A. (2004)  
*Jung: A Very Short Introduction*  
[Audible]

Greeks believed that each child was blessed at birth with a personal daimon embodying the highest possible expression of his or her nature. One way they envisioned the daimon was as a golden figurine that would be revealed by cracking away an outer layer of cheap pottery. The effort to know and realize one's most golden self (...) is now the central concept of eudaimonia.

LeBlanc, G. (2008)  
*5 Things Happy People Do,*  
O, The Oprah Magazine

But the Greeks and the Romans both believed in the idea of an external daemon of creativity (...) They called it your genius - your guardian deity, the conduit of your inspiration. Which is to say, the Romans didn't believe that an exceptionally gifted person *was* a genius; they believed that an exceptionally gifted person *had* a genius.

Gilbert, E. (2015)  
*The Big Magic*  
[Audible]

Ideas have no material body, but they do have consciousness, and they most certainly have will. Ideas are driven by a single impulse: to be made manifest. And the only way an idea can be made manifest in our world is through collaboration with a human partner. It is only through a human's efforts that an idea can be escorted out of the ether and into the realm of the actual.

Gilbert, E. (2015)  
*The Big Magic*  
[Audible]

30 There is something beautiful about that vision of closing the gap between the realm of the potential and the real. However magical, it reflects on our capacity to reach somewhere beyond what is, and what we encounter in reality. And to some, what they see out there, matters so much that they dedicate their life's work to the attempt of capturing it. How come something so meaningful could not really exist? → 14, 43

## V

31 For some reason, understanding the workings of the world has always played a pivotal role in our civilisation, and every era, époque, culture, responded to that need through different beliefs, explanations, stories, closely tied to knowledge available at the time, as well as to philosophy, religion and politics - all blended together and served as facts. → 6, 48

32 With time, as we grew in knowledge, the theories about the world needed to adapt and adjust to findings of Columbus and Vasco da Gama, of Copernicus and Galileo, and many others. In the end, how we see the world today is way more marvellous and less tangible than any of old civilisations and religions could have imagined - a universe in which Earth plays a role of an insignificant planet, revolving around one star, in one galaxy of so many that we can't even describe their number by rows of digits. → 7, 9

33 We live in the era of a rational mind discovering and building its image of the world based on science, and which got rid of the burden of naive myths, parables and beliefs. But at what cost? Those narratives, which emerged across history in different parts of the world, and existed for thousands of years, passed down by generations, written down in books - does their meaning simply come down to stories which were just meant to be believed in? What are we actually missing and what did mythology give us? → 45, 46

34 As similar themes and intentions reoccur behind smilingly distant and diverse mythologies, there seems to be something universal about their messages. They did not just provide value systems, guidance for individual people, helping to navigate the experience of living to reach one's full potential. Much more - they shaped a moral framework, gave a structure to life embedded in society, rituals, rites of passage, ethos, roles and authorities. → 47

35 When approaching Greek or Norse mythology, although we assume the described situations never happened, we don't take away their value, and see them as a vessel for life wisdom

## V

I don't think God exists. Now let us move on. I think that's the end of the matter. Now, the greater question is where are we gonna go from here? How are we going to live a good life? How are our societies to be managed with that insight in mind?

SOH Talks &  
Ideas Archive, (2013)  
*Alain De Botton*  
- *Religion For Atheists*  
26 June [YouTube]

We think we can congratulate ourselves on having already reached such a pinnacle of clarity, imagining that we have left all these phantasmal gods far behind. But what we have left behind are only verbal spectres, not the psychic facts that were responsible for the birth of the gods.

Jung, C. G. (1967)  
*Alchemical Studies*, CW 13,  
Princeton

Not only has it always been the way of multitudes to interpret their own symbols literally, but such literally read symbolic forms have always been - and still are, in fact - the supports of their civilisations, the supports of their moral orders, their cohesion, vitality, and creative powers. With the loss of them there follows uncertainty, and with uncertainty, disequilibrium, since life (...) requires 'life-supporting illusions'; and where these have been dispelled, there is nothing secure to hold on to, no moral law, nothing firm.

Campbell, J. (1972)  
*Myths to Live By*,  
Penguin Compass

To what did [Jung] attribute 'the general neurosis of our age'? To a collective loss of soul, to a loss of contact with the great mythic and religious symbols of our culture. (...) the benefits of the civilisation are bought at the cost of natural happiness. Jung believed that the more secular,

Stevens, A. (2004)  
*Jung: A Very Short Introduction*  
[Audible]

- 35 dressed in a cultural context. It's an easy statement to make from a safe distance of centuries. But when facing current religions, we either fall into defending them as historically accurate to hold their meaning true, or we turn away from them completely. Because the liability of religious dogmas is in question, their message seems undermined, unreliable.
- 36 We forget that a story is a medium, and we abandon its truths, because they don't seem as true anymore, stripped from a compelling form. In result, we find ourselves missing something, living in a culture of scarcity, falling for values of a consumer society, losing the sense of meaning and purpose, chasing goals sold or imposed by context without reflecting on them, getting more and more out of touch with ourselves. At the same time, because scientific theories base on the body of observations, we forget about their speculative character, and consider them true. → 11, 12, 15
- 37 Basically, we find ourselves in the grip of the tendencies of a human mind. → 13
- 38 Firstly, the mind seems to easily fall for stories and can't quite cope with a concept of a symbol. Allegories and metaphors sure are great for explaining an idea. But there is something about confusing a story with its meaning, and acknowledging its value depending on its credibility. Even having realised the ambiguity of a fictional narrative encompassing valid truths, the mind struggles relying on them. It can't bridge the gap between *understanding* and *knowing*. Stories seem to have the power to reach deeper than pure ideas. → 26, 46, 47
- 39 Secondly, in different parts of the globe, across the history of human civilisation, stories emerge as the main medium for passing on the wisdom of the ancestors. Oral traditions stood the test of time, setting a moral footing for societies when literacy was but a privilege of the chosen few. Before *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were written down, they existed for centuries merely in the memory of those who sang them. → 42, 47
- 40 No matter how amazing of an achievement it seems today, not much has changed since then. Nowadays, creating narratives is a scientifically proven powerful memorising tool. One of the most effective ways to remember a long number for example, is building a scenario based on a chain of associations with each digit. The more specific, in terms of setting time and place, and the stronger emotions connected with it (both positive and negative), the better. Sounds familiar? Skim through the Bible. → 46

materialistic and compulsively extroverted our civilisation became, the greater the unhappiness, senselessness and aimlessness of our lives.

What the gods were, were energies inhabiting for the moment a certain concept, a certain belief, a certain structure. (...) The ego attaches to (...) the secondary image, which arises out of encounters with the holy other, rather than the energy which gave rise that image in the first place.

Hollis, J. (2020)  
*A Life of Meaning.*  
[Audible]

Read other people's myths, not those of your own religion, because you tend to interpret your own religion in terms of facts - but if you read other ones, you begin to get the message. - *The Power of Myth*

Campbell J., Moyers B. (1988)  
*The Power of Myth,*  
Anchor

Our brains pay much closer attention to information when it's in the form of a narrative. The more you can associate things you want to remember with structures you already have in your mind, the easier it's going to be to remember. After creating a narrative, when you go to retrieve that memory, you have multiple ways of getting into it.

'Memory' (2019)  
*The Mind, Explained,* Netflix  
12 September

## VI

Learning is the set of statements which, to the exclusion of all other statements, denote or describe objects and may be declared true or false. But what is meant by the term knowledge is not only a set of denotative statements, far from it. It also includes notions of 'know-how', 'knowing how to live', 'how to listen'. Knowledge is a question of competence

Lyotard J. F. (1984)  
*The Postmodern Condition:  
A Report on Knowledge,*  
University of Minnesota Press

## VI

- 41 I think we are all quite aware that there are different types of knowledge. There is knowledge that you obtain at school, at university - sets of facts, information, skills, ways of doing things. However, it is pretty obvious that university does not fully prepare you for an adult life, and even having grasped and mastered all that knowledge given to you on lectures and seminars, you might still feel helpless and lost at times. → 34, 35, 36  
Of course, throughout your life you change, evolve, develop, and there's a lot of learning going on there too, there's another kind of knowledge that you're equally in need of. Knowledge tied with guidance, advice in face of life dilemmas, directions on a path towards becoming a better person every day, aid in finding purpose and fulfilment in life.
- 42 And however the first type, *scientific knowledge*, can be passed on in the form of a lecture or even a discussion, it does not necessarily work in case of life wisdom. In this case, → 39  
different rules apply.
- 43 Think about *Space Oddity* by David Bowie, for example. When listening to the song, you participate in an event. Both music and lyrics immerse you in the story that plays out before you. Unintentionally, you ponder on how it would be to feel so detached from all that you know and see things from far perspective. You get the sense of absolute solitude, but at the same time of connection to something much bigger than you. You almost experience how small, insignificant, and fragile, but also how beautiful, and precious life is - in face of the view of the Earth from far away. A view that you can't see, not just because you've never been into space, but because you're just listening to a song. Still, that feels truly touching. That feels deeply meaningful. And lingers in the back of your mind for a while. All that without any direct statements, truisms, or clichés. → 40, 24, 25
- 44 Now, if someone just told you 'Human life is ephemeral and wonderful at the same time', how would that resonate with you? Sure, you would understand, perhaps you would even agree. But the impression is incomparable.
- 45 Let's go back to the context of *scientific knowledge*, and say someone discovered life outside Earth. They can't simply state that - they have to prove it true. They need to ground it in the academic frame of reference, either building on scientific claims that are already considered true, or opposing them and proving them wrong, with → 8, 9

that goes beyond the simple determination and application of the criterion of truth.

Imagine if you went to any university anywhere in the world, say you went to Harvard. And you said: 'look, I've come to study at Harvard because I want to find a moral framework, I need ethical guidance, I need to learn how to love, live and to die.' This is simply not what the modern educational system believes is in the business of doing.

SOH Talks &  
Ideas Archive, (2013)  
*Alain De Botton*  
- *Religion For Atheists*  
26 June [YouTube]

Religions think that there are all sorts of ideas that we have in our minds that basically lay dormant and ineffective until they are reawakened by a work of art. Art turns clichés into things that we actually believe in and can act by. (...) We are reminded in a visceral, active sense of truths, which would otherwise have left us cold.

SOH Talks &  
Ideas Archive, (2013)  
*Alain De Botton*  
- *Religion For Atheists*  
26 June [YouTube]

The popular stories recount successes or failures greeting the hero's undertakings. These successes or failures either bestow legitimacy upon social institutions (the function of myths), or represent positive or negative models (the successful or unsuccessful hero) or integration into established institutions (legends and tales). Thus the narratives allow the society in which they are told, on the one hand, to define its criteria of competence and, on the other, to evaluate according to those criteria what is performed or can be performed within it.

Lyotard J. F. (1984)  
*The Postmodern Condition:  
A Report on Knowledge*,  
University of Minnesota Press

45 support of compelling evidence. There is a set of validating procedures that a new concept needs to go through. → 8, 9

46 What about the truths in the song? Do they need any proof in order to resonate with you? Does something need to be a fact in order to be true? Setting the message in a context of characters, events, as well as experiences, emotions and reflections they go through, in other words giving an example, be it real or fictional, makes the statement relatable and tangible. You could say that the format of a narrative carries in itself a powerful self-authorising mechanism, that a story has some capacity to prove itself true. It involves a different view on truth than in science, of course, bound to values, beliefs, and moral codes. → 13, 35

47 Interestingly, *narrative knowledge* has the ability not only to be accepted in the cultural context without assessment, but also to co-create it, and provide foundation for what is to be believed, what is to be considered true or right. It somehow plays such important role in the culture that they continuously give shape to each other. No wonder a medium for passing on life wisdom rooted throughout civilisations has been a narrative. → 31, 34

48 Having the capacity to legitimise power, authority and customs, narratives have evolved more than once into so called *grand narratives*, or *metanarratives*, that were basically an attempt to create a total theory giving explanation for all the historical events, social and cultural phenomena, based on a notion of some universal truth or knowledge - namely various religious dogmas, the Enlightenment, progressivism, Marxism, Freudianism, periodisation of history, and so on. → 10, 31

49 Behind those narratives - is there just a story of power and manipulation? Or is there some truth about human nature that was used as means to an end? What need would be responsible for the search of all-encompassing theories? What tendency made whole nations follow them? What is it in us that romanticises explaining reality as fully as possible in one sentence or equation? → 1, 11, 13

## VII

50 Let's dive into some insights about human perception. You've probably heard of Gestalt principles of perception. The name of the mentioned school of thought came from German 'Gestalt', literally 'shape, figure, form'. Basically, it states that in order to make sense of reality, human mind sees it holistically, not as separate individual elements. But what makes *a whole* → 18, 58, 59

What would the meaning be of the word 'truth' to a modern scientist? Surely not the meaning it would have for a mystic! For the really great and essential fact about the scientific revelation - the most wonderful and most challenging fact - is that science does not and cannot pretend to be 'true' in any absolute sense. It does not and cannot pretend to be final. It is a tentative organisation of mere 'working hypotheses' (...) that for the present appear to take into account all the relevant facts now known. (...) There is to be only a continuing search for more - as of a mind eager to grow.

Campbell, J. (1972)  
*Myths to Live By*,  
Penguin Compass

For Beltrán, this informal, unspecialized knowledge is as important as formal, learned knowledge, and it is in fact these 'personal theories' that largely determine our social reality. In Beltrán's intricate epistemological theory, clusters of personal theories provide us with systems of thought and ultimately evolve into cultural patterns that we consider as 'true'. (...) Knowledge is not static or universal, but is continuously changing and subject to personal impressions and experiences.

Vesters, Ch. (2013)  
*The Anti-Encyclopaedia*  
*From Poetic Disorder*  
*to Political Anti-Order*  
Metropolis M

## VII

The principle of closure is at the core of almost every decision we make, every understanding we claim, and our every effort to grasp the complexity of the world around us. It works to show us an image that does not actually exist before our eyes; it reaches into our experience and into our psyche to create a fiction and compels us to believe it. From

Rutledge A., (2009)  
*Gestalt Principles of Perception*  
- 5: Closure

- 50 more than *a sum of its parts*? Simply put, it's a set of mind's tendencies aiding perception, like for example looking for connections and relationships between elements, pattern recognition, finding similarities or predictable features. And on top of that, storing the information gathered so far, and later reaching for it in face of new situations, which you can imagine saves a lot of energy otherwise wasted on going through the same analytical processes over again. → 18, 58, 59
- 51 The most interesting principle, called *closure*, relates to drawing conclusions, or drawing things together. When you google the term, you will find lots of fancy images playing with your eyes and imagination, but in essence, it means that your mind is making assumptions based on given information, and not just occasionally but constantly. It puts effort in explaining every situation to itself by means of filling in the gaps, which basically comes down to patching up actual input with presumptions. Of course, the mind is not aware of this process, and perceives its conclusions as the situation itself, not as one of possible scenarios. → 6, 9, 45
- 52 Needless to say, we almost never get the full picture. And so our seemingly cohesive vision of reality is based on imagined connections (imagined regardless of their accuracy), and would otherwise be very fragmentary. Essentially, we trust an illusion in order to comprehend the complex reality, and unintentionally deceive ourselves in order to gain the sense of understanding. According to literal meaning of Gestalt, we *figure out* the world by *shaping* our own image of it in our minds. → 6, 9, 14, 20, 22
- 53 This tendency of the human mind to build its view of reality on simplifications, associations and presumptions comes out as well through several *cognitive biases* - common systematic errors in one's subjective way of thinking. → 10, 48, 49, 56
- 54 For example, *confirmation bias* makes a person pay more attention to information that supports something they already believe, ignoring information that would prove them wrong. *Availability bias* relates to a mental shortcut responsible for the tendency to use that information which is easier and faster to recall, but not necessarily the most relevant or representative of a considered topic. *Anchoring bias* stands for relying too heavily on the very first bit of information obtained about something, and using it as a base for making judgements or forming opinions in regards to the topic. *The halo effect* will let an impression of a person or an organisation in one particular aspect affect the overall impression (ex assuming good quality of one company's products in general when → 12, 35, 63

these results we construct our opinions,  
assumption, understanding ...our reality.

Reality is imag-ed (which has nothing to do  
with its being imag-ined), assembled from  
components created by a technique that has  
made it possible for us to generate a virtually  
unlimited array of add-ons to existing objects.  
(...) The world becomes an image.

Sławek T., (2015)  
*A temporary Cessation of Habit:  
On experiencing Landscape,*  
Herito

A cognitive bias is a strong, preconceived  
notion of someone or something, based  
on information we have, perceive to have,  
or lack. These preconceptions are mental  
shortcuts the human brain produces to  
expedite information processing—to quickly  
help it make sense of what it is seeing.  
(...) A cognitive bias distorts our critical  
thinking, leading to possibly perpetuating  
misconceptions or misinformation that  
can be damaging to others. (...) Biases can  
also cause us to see patterns or connections  
between ideas that aren't necessarily there.

MasterClass (2020)  
*How to Identify Cognitive Bias: 12  
Examples of Cognitive Bias*  
8 November

We are incredibly heedless in the formation  
of our beliefs, but find ourselves filled with an  
illicit passion for them when anyone proposes  
to rob us of their companionship. (...) We  
like to continue to believe what we have  
been accustomed to accept as true, and the  
resentment aroused when doubt is cast upon  
any of our assumptions leads us to seek every  
manner of excuse for clinging to it. The result  
is that most of our so-called reasoning consists  
in finding arguments for going on believing as  
we already do.

Robinson, J. H. (1921)  
*The Mind in the Making*  
Harper & Brothers,

54 satisfied with one purchase). This mechanism might be somehow related to *the Dunning-Kruger effect*, describing that one might perceive an idea to be simplistic when actually lacking enough information about it, leading to reducing a complex concept to a generalised understanding, and even perceiving oneself smarter than one actually is. → 12, 35, 63

55 Those errors seem like the other side of the coin, the unavoidable flaws of a very useful, helpful, even necessary mechanism responsible for understanding reality. However, this mechanism is strongly linked with the conviction that the reality is understandable in the first place, followed by a notion that it is within human capabilities to comprehend it. And can we be sure that by relying on those unsaid statements we are not misleading ourselves from the beginning? → 20, 62

## VIII

56 Many problems which we struggle with on a daily basis, psychology explains by fairly simple tendencies, and perhaps one of the most often occurring concepts is *the ego* and *the unconscious*. Perhaps it's worth mentioning that both originally came from Sigmund Freud, and were later altered by Carl Jung. → 16, 48, 53

57 The main idea here is that psyche is a construct made of different parts, like organs, responsible for different functions and holding different capacities. Thoughts and emotions which we are aware of, are experienced on a conscious level, but a lot of processes take place on the unconscious level, not just in terms of conducting physical body activities like breathing, digesting or dreaming, but many feelings and beliefs as well.

58 The part that we refer to when saying 'I' or 'me', the centre of consciousness, is called the ego. It might sound puzzling, as we usually use the same term when describing somebody's thinking highly of themselves, but let's not confuse the two. In general, the ego is the part of your personality responsible for your sense of identity, and its continuity throughout your life, which means the sense of being the same person when you wake up in the morning as you were yesterday, six months ago, or thirty years ago. It builds on your life experience, and basically stands for everything that you have come to think or believe that you are, whether consciously or not. → 50

59 The ego is formed continuously throughout your life since early childhood, and it is in essence your self-image, based on what you have experienced so far. In other words, your → 18, 38, 50

Our first reaction to most of the statements (which we hear from other people) is an evaluation or judgement, rather than an understanding of it. When someone expresses some feeling, attitude or belief, our tendency is almost immediately to feel 'that's right' or 'that's stupid', 'that's abnormal', 'that's unreasonable', 'that's incorrect', 'that's not nice'. Very rarely do we permit ourselves to understand precisely what the meaning of the statement is to the other person. - On becoming a person

Rogers, C. (1961)  
*On Becoming a Person*  
Houghton Mifflin

There is no greater obstacle to the enjoyment of great works of art than our unwillingness to discard habits and prejudices. A painting which represents a familiar subject in an unexpected way is often condemned for no better reason than that it does not seem right. The more often we have seen a story represented in art, the more firmly do we become convinced that it must always be represented on similar lines.

Gombrich, E. H. (1995)  
*A Story of Art*,  
Phaidon Press

## VIII

We need our ego for intentionality, for moral choice, for consistency, for developmental agendas, for producing continuity between one day and the next day in our lives. (...) The ego prefers security, clarity, certainty, and of course control.

Hollis, J. (2020)  
*A Life of Meaning*.  
[Audible]

Many of us have experiences trauma + deep pain which has us disconnected from our authentic self. (...) This is when the ego becomes active to protect us from painful experiences + parts of ourselves that we

LePera, N. (2021)  
*Why Your Ego Is Your Friend*  
[Instagram]

ego tries to understand who you are and how to relate to the outer world - it tries to make sense of human existence, and at the same time keep you safe. In order to do so, ego assembles a personal agenda, a set of self-defining beliefs and protective stories. It internalises life events and situations in forms of roles and ways of responding that we get used to, feel familiar with, and eventually identify with.

59 → 18, 38, 50

Growing up in a social context, as we learn which behaviours are met with acknowledgment and acceptance, and which with punishment or withdrawal of love, ego makes effort to adapt, finds coping strategies, and makes sure they are memorised to be repeated again, by enforcing them through personal convictions, and internalised scripts or stories that we tend to go back to later in life.

60 → 40, 46

As these ways of functioning and reacting to various situations occur repetitively over the course of life, they become habits - emotional, behavioural, and thinking patterns - and an inherent part of the sense of identity.

61 → 18

This powerful construct - although immensely useful, and necessary to piece together all the moments of your existence into one narrative - it is at the same time constrictive, limiting, and traps you in a habitual character of life. Although it seems logical that the mind gathers and stores all the data it can get hold of to comprehend the reality, it doesn't change the fact that this mechanism feeds on external events to give shape to the inner, intimate world of our psyche.

62 → 19, 20

The beliefs and stories that might have been protective and helpful in the past, don't necessarily apply later in life. Still, we keep unconsciously reaching for them again and again, to reenact the old events in a new context. At the same time, we live in the present as much as in the past, without knowing. We constantly confirm ourselves in the familiar ways of being.

63 → 21, 54

haven't yet learned to accept or love. (...)  
The ego is 'working' every day to keep us  
safe (meaning, within predictable patterns  
experienced within childhood).

As a therapist, I've so often tried to put  
a wedge between what happened to a person  
and who they think they are, their reductive  
and restrictive story. It seems impossible  
at times to believe, but is true, that what  
happened to us is what happened out there.  
What happened out there is not who we are.  
And what happened was usually never about  
us, it was about someone else's problems,  
someone else's limitations.

Hollis, J. (2020)  
*A Life of Meaning.*  
[Audible]

Your own history might begin like this: 'Once  
upon a time there was a small boy' – or a small  
girl – 'and that small boy was me.' Your father  
and mother were also small once, and so was  
your grandfather, and your grandmother, a  
much longer time ago, but you know that too.  
(...) And that's how it is with 'Once upon a  
time'. We can't see where it ends. Grandfather's  
grandfather's grandfather's grandfather ... it  
makes your head spin. But say it again, slowly,  
and in the end you'll be able to imagine it.  
Then add one more. That gets us quickly back  
into the past, and from there into the distant  
past. But you will never reach the beginning,  
because behind every beginning there's always  
another 'Once upon a time'. (...) a thousand  
years ... five thousand years ... ten thousand  
years. Twenty thousand ... fifty thousand ...  
and even then people said, as we do, 'Once  
upon a time'.

Gombrich, E. H. (2005)  
*A Little History of the World,*  
Yale University Press