
Jakob - a Tool for Narrative Analysis in Process Research

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Abstract

In psychotherapy research there has been an increasing attention to everyday stories. They contain important data concerning diagnosis, psychodynamics, indication and method of treatment. Moreover they can provide evidence of the progression and outcome of therapy.

It has been suggested that everyday stories change past situations into what the client wished would happen. They can serve the function of subsequent wish-fulfilment. But narration can also be seen as an attempt of the narrator to come to terms with his fears. Everyday stories hold a reorganizing function, too. In retrospect, suffered shocks, psychological destabilization in a negative, traumatic or in a positive, euphoric direction can be integrated by telling a story again and again. Everyday stories carry intrapsychic conflicts of the narrator (the patient) with wishes and fears, demands and conditions, rules and resistance. The everyday story contains implicit offers of relationship inviting the audience (the therapist) to resonate, to show sympathy, to help, to witness - all relevant to the psychotherapeutic process.

We will introduce parts of a narration analysis system called Jakob that has been developed and applied at the Clinical Department of the University of Zurich (Boothe 1992-1997). Jakob is based on psychoanalytical theory. It describes and interprets the psychodynamics that underlie the telling of everyday stories. Using the same terminology as stage directors, Jakob investigates how clients put their experiences "live" on stage.

Introduction

Within psychotherapy the term narrative has an increasing importance and it is used in various contexts. Especially indicated is the relevance of narrating in a general sense in therapeutical conversations. I would like to mention among others Labov & Fanshel (1977) and Flader & Giesecke (1980).

Various research-approaches offer themselves for dealing with everyday stories. To be mentioned in particular are the narrativistics coming from linguistics, the science of literature and cognitive psychology. They deal with the structures of everyday stories in the way they are remembered but also with the way the narrators work up personal experience.

From psychoanalysis we also know various concepts which can be connected with narrating. Let us take for example the one of the psychoanalytical stage-model. Here the psychoanalytical room is understood as a stage, where everything can and should happen *as if* and which makes possible a continuous experimental action (Thomä & Kächele, 1985, p.96f). In therapy narrated episodic stories can be understood as stage-productions as well. The narrator as a stage director develops a kind of imaginary stage-room. The stories are performed (Wolfson, 1978). Or in the terminology of Goffman (1959) they are *replayed*. Finally Gülich and Quasthoff (1986) say: "To extend Goffman's metaphor: The event is put on stage, the narrator acts it out."

There is another connection to the concept of scene and stage-production (Argelander, 1979; Lorenzer, 1977). Scenes that take place between analyst and the person to be analyzed can be interpreted as stage-productions of unconscious conflicts. In these scenes aspects of transference can be seen, that means imitations of motions and fantasies, which originally were meant for another person.

Unconscious conflicts are enacted in everyday stories as well. An event is not only re-narrated. Everyday stories don't want to inform of a situation; they don't represent the reality, they mainly reshape it in a process of adaptation. An event is put on stage and with it the inner conflict and the psychical working up. In the narrated scene, the narrator develops aspects of his own experience. Aspects of transference are shown as well, similar to the ones that were postulated in the concept of scene and stage-production.

In this sense it is less a question of whether an everyday story is authentic or credible, but of how the everyday story is.

In therapy everyday stories have various functions (e.g. Eisenmann, 1995). We focus on four functions which can be achieved by the specific forming of an everyday story:

1. The everyday story forms identity of its own in the presence of its social vis-à-vis. We call that social integration.
2. The everyday story has the tendency to form conflictful situations in the direction of wish-fulfilment. It's similar to Freud who said the same thing about dreams.
3. The everyday story repairs disintegration and destabilization in the direction of an organized available whole. So it's possible for the narrator to transform passivity to activity.
4. The everyday story actualizes a past experience and therefore produces a relation to the present situation. We call that function actualization.

So it is worthwhile to make the everyday story analysis systematically effective for psychoanalytical purposes, too. The point is to examine everyday stories in psychoanalytical perspective. We understand them like dreams as containers. Everyday stories serve the emotional experience. We focus on the structures produced by fantasy. Not the event itself is of interest. The story is interpreted as a process of dramatic placement sequentially connected and oriented towards a result.

First to our terminology: Our original material consists of narratives, as the name "narrative analysis" says. But we found that the term narrative has various meanings. So we have decided for the term "story". Here story is defined as a narrative of a usually self-experienced episode that actually happened. This episode the speaker - consciously or unconsciously - rates highly. Usually such stories begin with expressions like "For example, I once had to...", "This is what once happened..." or "I know one other example...".

Here, in opposition to CCRT, it is a question of not only extracting and defining a structure of relation but of the dramatic form as a whole.

The narrative analysis Jakob can be understood as reading of dramatic stage-productions. We not only take an interest in the material reality of the event. We are interested in elements of the process, which form a subjective wish dramatically and develop it as wish. We understand every element as a motivated placement as well as the specific dramaturgy, as every specification, as every leaving out.

If you understand an everyday story as a stage-production, the comparison with a drama makes sense and is very expressive for the discussion and therefore helpful. A drama is distinguished by the fact that a hero has a certain motivation wherefrom a certain sequence of action results. In the narrative analysis Jakob the everyday story is understood as a drama. The analysis tries to work out this dramaturgy, to reconstruct it. It is asked how the hero presents himself in the drama, how he constellates relations. And furthermore which wish-fulfilment could the drama offer, which anxiety urges the drama on? Finally it is always supposed that there is a conflict that reveals itself in the drama.

In a next step the presented method shall be compared to others briefly. It is typical for the narrative analysis Jakob that short talk-contributions are examined thoroughly according to their linguistical placement. Thus we focus on the detailed reconstruction of the evocative process of forming.

Concerning the exactness of detail Jakob could be compared to conversation analysis. Conversation analysis looks at the communicative structure and meaning, whereas Jakob focusses more on content. So far a comparison with the metaphor analysis makes sense. Similar to metaphor analysis the narrative analysis Jakob accentuates the choice of words in its semantics. We do not examine the substance of individual metaphors, but little scenes in their dramatic placement.

Next we present our method of narrative analysis Jakob (Boothe, 1992a, 1992b, 1994; Boothe et al., 1997; von Wyl et al., 1995, 1997). It has been developed by Brigitte Boothe and it shows a priority of research of the Department for Clinical Psychology in Zurich. Various research-studies are dealing with its revision and application. Here we present parts of a project supported by the Swiss National Foundation for Scientific Research.

The narration analysis Jakob has several steps of preparing and analyzing. Here we want to describe just one step of evaluation. It is called rules. We have chosen this one, because it works with the dramatic stage-production.

Rules

So far we postulated the dramaturgic stage-production as characteristic of a story. We will now describe how this drama can be presented and interpreted. You can describe a story in the most general way as tension-loaded sequence. Tension is a reception-related term. Tension is produced in the listener. The listener is engaged as an emotional participant. The story evokes participation. We are trying to show systematically how a story produces tension, develops tension and leads tension towards a final or resting point.

We subdivide a story in

- a) initial sequence
- b) the arising of a situation that presses towards change
- c) the carrying-out of an event and
- d) the result or completion of the activity regarding it's success or failure.

The wish-anxiety-events and the conflict can be identified by looking in particular at the initial sequence as well as at the arising of a situation that presses towards change.

Each narrator has to introduce his own narrated world. Situative characteristics like place, time, actors, stage-properties, constellations have to be named more or less exactly. This is necessary for the transfer, meaning that the listener must be able to orientate himself in the imaginary room. But this is not all it needs to set off conflictful, purpose-orientated movement. For this at least one impulse of action is needed. As a consequence not only possible worlds are set, but also possible actions or strands.

Summing up it may be said that the specific, tensionloaded starting conditions result from these situative characteristics in their specific, linguistic presentation. Because of them the drama has to develop further. The starting situation includes certain compulsion to set. What should happen and develop is set out on the basis of the starting. The starting conditions open a free room. As the audience you may wonder what will happen and you also imagine how it could go on and what kind of ending the story will have.

The narrator, proceeding from this free space necessarily makes a decision in the course of the everyday story. Within the limits of the free space, meaning a spectrum of possibilities to produce narrative dynamics, to create tension, he chooses one out of several get effective. We find out which it is and so we try to determine the dynamic moment of the plot.

With this moment we have looked at the specific purposes of the everyday story. We can now concretize two hypotheses. We can produce hypotheses along the disclosed purpose-orientation of

the everyday story. That means we try to find out what is the ending or the optimum. We call it SHOULD BE. And we try to find out what is the negative ending. That we call ANTI-SHOULD BE. In other words: on the basis of the starting conditions plus dynamic moment of the plot we ask what would be the optimum and what the catastrophe? Of course the practically realized ending of the everyday story is taken into consideration, too. We capture it in the label BE and formulate it such a way that a comparison with SHOULD BE and ANTI-SHOULD BE is possible.

Survey of the Rules

Starting Conditions

From the beginning of the story we extract those elements as starting conditions, which are important for the whole story. Such elements can be figures, actions, backgrounds like time and place and props. Not always all the elements occur. The setting is created by the positioning and the constellation. The setting fixes the perspectives of the further plot.

Dynamic Moment of the Plot

We call the dynamic moment of the plot that particular combination of the elements of the starting conditions which hypothetical cause the main mental tension. This dynamic starting situation provokes a change of arrangement. The audience wonders empathically: What has to happen? What should not happen?

From here the additional hypotheses of SHOULD BE and ANTI-SHOULD BE can be developed. What would, measured against the starting conditions, be the optimal ending and what the disastrous one?

SHOULD BE

model-like constellated optimum

ANTI-SHOULD BE

model-like constellated catastrophe

be

The realized result of the story is called BE. In order to express explicitly the character of result we compare SHOULD BE with ANTI-SHOULD BE.

Examples

What has been said so far shall now be illustrated by two examples. In our research project we have collected everyday stories of 6 patients. All these 6 patients came for 5 sessions to an intake procedure at our department. All in all we extracted 104 everyday stories. A detailed narrative analysis of this material is in process and will soon be published under the title "The initial everyday story in psychotherapy" (Boothe et al., 1997).

Our first example comes from a woman-narrator we call Suzy. Suzy was a young student. She followed medical advice to attend psychotherapy. She was already suffering chronically from reappearing bodily complaints in the area of genitals (flux, inflammations, misperceptions), which according to the estimates of the treating doctors were psychically conditioned or superimposed. Suzy told the therapist about these estimates with skeptical distance, but at the same time she declared herself to be in need of help. She gave the following everyday story in the second session:

Suzy-6: Wherein lies my strength?

[1] I went to see a woman, a vocational counselor

- [2] and actually I would have liked to do such a test
- [3 III 2] wherein lies my strength, really
- [4] and this she denied, simply for the reason, too
- [5] because she thinks
- [6 III 5] I should know this myself
- [7 III 5] a test wouldn't show this, either

What is narrated? Narrated is - as we have heard - what makes Suzy insecure in a positive or negative direction, what has been experienced subjectively conflictful. The narrator describes an episode, where she surrenders to an examination by a female person of authority. This surrender seems to be connected with insecurity. A desired positive ending of the episode is faced by an anxiety-releasing negative one.

Which is the desired positive ending (SHOULD BE)? The narrated I wants a specialist to measure her competencies by a standardized measuring instrument (test). Thereby the narrator indicates in which direction she would like to see the results of the measuring: In the direction of strength. The narrated I wants to see this strength proved objectively. Therefore we could suppose that by the everyday story the narrator wants to create something like a self-controlled integrity. A narrated I who feels insecure regarding the choice of profession goes to see an advising person of authority. This person of authority - at first interestingly enough introduced by the narrator as a person of her own sex and only afterwards equipped with a professional function - should provide the client with strength. The strength is assumed to be already there, but hidden, and it has to be brought out by the person of authority. So the narrated I wants to become equipped by a maternal person. The wish-fulfilment should be established so to speak from the outside by a parental authority.

Which is the anxiety-releasing negative ending (ANTI-should be) of the everyday story? With the surrender to an authority of judgement the narrated I exposes herself to danger. Namely she exposes herself to the judgement of a powerful, competent stranger. This person, at whose mercy the narrated I seems to be, has the power of judgement. So a situation of unequal power-proportions arises: A person of authority of the same sex as the narrator faces an I-figure who is insecure (in the choice of profession). Promptly the female person of authority denies the narrated I the instrument, which could have located the strength, and so retains it in the weak condition.

Why narrate? It is narrated in order to change a destabilization into a stabilization. How does the narrator deal with the tension between the desired positive ending and the anxiety-releasing negative one? She quotes the person of authority. The end of the story is concluded with the final explanation of the specialist (vocational counselor) which opposes to the desire of the narrator. By the way the narrator does not comment further on the quotation. So the narrator goes in submission opposite the person of authority. Submission feigns cooperative willingness and efficiency by manipulating the person opposite into the role of initiator and director and keeping her there. At the same time the unseizability of the impenetrable subject is maintained.

Suzy's everyday story shows the following rules: The end of the story (BE) is formed in a way that the desired positive ending (SHOULD BE) is not achieved, but neither is the catastrophe of the anxiety-releasing negative ending (ANTI-SHOULD BE). Quoting a declaration keeps the story in a strange way open for judgement. However looked at it closely, the feeling arises that in the process of narrating the same thing is manifested again that has just been the theme of the everyday story: namely the self-controlled integrity. For the narrator it seems to be clear how the person opposite (therapist) should understand the quotation: as a denial of the vocational counselor. So by enacting cleverly the narrator presents herself again as upright. The everyday story seems to be designed that way, the mentioned events seem to be especially selected for that purpose. In the process of narrating the narrator again observes the same demand for control that was the theme of the everyday story.

By the way this example is in a specific way typical of the narrator Suzy, how she presents herself in the first 5 sessions. Some patterns of experiencing that are expressed in this everyday story can also be found in other stories of the same patient. So for example in 12 of 14 stories self-controlled integrity (as SHOULD BE) is a theme. The surrender to an extraneous disposal (as ANTI-SHOULD BE) is even mentioned in all the 14 stories of Suzy.

From the analysis of all the everyday stories of Suzy results on the whole the following picture for the patient: Suzy sees her own intactness and integrity in danger. She cannot trust her own competencies and functions (in other stories especially the bodily functions). That's why she sees herself as in need of help. The anxiety to become affected in her own intactness leads in Suzy's case to the fact that she has to keep the therapist at a distance, that she cannot react to his interventions. She does this very clearly in the everyday stories in which she repeats the reports of the doctors as quotations. She herself does not comment on the quotations. A permissive I-figure keeps itself distant from an authority of powerful restitution. Thereby the person of authority stays in control of the quoting I. The narrated I avoids interactive tension, but it keeps the interest in the participation. It is not hard to imagine that such a constellation has far-reaching consequences for the therapeutic process.

Contrasting with this I want to present a second example of an everyday story. It is from Jane. Jane was a young woman scientist who came to our counseling service of her own initiative. She had the impression of herself that she was not able to decide in a calm, composed, sensible, unerring, realistic way in her relation to her partner and in other friendly and companionable relations. Thereby the anxiety of separation and of being abandoned played an important role. She felt dominated by pessimistic presentiments, unhappy and in the personal relations with others very weak. The following everyday story was given in the first session:

Jane-5: He is like frozen

- [1] and then, afterwards, a week later, he comes and says
- [2 III 1] now he'd rather be on his own again
- [3] then I thought
- [4 III 3] no, really
- [5 III 3] this isn't possible
- [6] and then I tried to discuss it with him
- [7] but it didn't work
- [8] he was like, like frozen
- [9] so you couldn't, absolutely couldn't reach him
- [10] then he just left
- [11] and then I thought
- [12 III 11] no
- [13 III 11] I don't believe this, yes

What is the desired positive ending of this story (SHOULD BE)? A male opposite person whose role as an intimate partner is probably going through a time of upheaval, steps in front of the narrated I and declares intentions of withdrawal. The narrated I does not share these intentions. It tries by discussion to put the male opposite person off his intentions. That's why the desired positive ending of the story is probably the one where the narrated I can soften up, warm up, bend up its male opposite person, where it can feel near him, reach him. The male opposite person should stay available.

From this we can derive the anxiety-releasing negative ending (ANTI-SHOULD BE) of the everyday story: The male opposite person withdraws from the narrated I. This happens totally

independent from whatever efforts the narrated I makes. So the desires, intentions, efforts of the narrated I seem to remain without resonance with the male opposite person. The narrated I is left alone unheard.

How does the narrator deal with the tension between the desired positive and the anxiety-releasing negative ending? After all in this story the "feared catastrophe" happens. The male opposite person does not let himself become touched and withdraws without responding to the narrated I. The narrated I gets upset and protests ("I don't believe this"). This indignation however, in the therapeutical context wherein the story is given, can at the most reach the listening therapist. The male opposite person of the narrator doesn't hear it.

So Jane's everyday story shows the following rules: Desired is the availability of the object (SHOULD BE). Feared is the self-withdrawal of the object (ANTI-SHOULD BE). The story ends with the anxiety-releasing negative variant (BE). The narrated I remains in indignation and protest.

Again the above example of an everyday story is in a specific way typical of the narrator Jane, how she presents herself in the first 5 sessions. Some patterns of experiencing that are expressed in this story can also be found in other stories of the same patient. So for example in 8 of 25 stories the availability of the male opposite person is mentioned (as SHOULD BE). Opposite to this availability there are 8 stories that mention the self-withdrawal of the object (as ANTI-SHOULD BE). This ANTI-SHOULD BE occurs in 4 cases. In 9 stories the narrated I is left behind unheard and resorts to protest.

According to her everyday stories the following picture arises for Jane: In her everyday stories Jane outlines dynamics of female capitulation. This is probably the consequence of a wishful oedipal fantasy and at the same time keeps the anxiety of becoming rejected within limits. An I-figure sees a male opposite person on the run.

After the intake procedure Jane had two other sessions with the same therapist. The therapist offered her the possibility of a consecutive therapy. However in an impressive sequence of interaction Jane refused it. For this she used sensible, well-chosen, calm words and referred to the already resulted improvement of symptoms. While she formulated this, her face expressed great sadness. It seemed as if she renounced beforehand the continuation of the contact that emotionally meant a lot to her. One year later Jane on her own initiative resumed the relationship with the same therapist. Over the period of one and a half year a very productive and intensive cooperation developed. Thematically in the centre were Jane's conflicts with her erotic desires, her fantasies and her anxiety ideas. Now she could use the therapeutical cooperation extraordinarily productively.

Summary and Prospects

In our opinion, out of the comparison of several such everyday stories you can find a differentiated, dynamical structure of conflict for every narrator - such as we tried to indicate in the case of Suzy and Jane. With Suzy the "feared catastrophe" is often averted by the quotation of an extraneous opinion. With Jane however it sometimes occurs. So Suzy and Jane create specific conditions that influence the ending of their everyday stories. Often Suzy presents herself as submissive and withdrawn at the end of an everyday story. Jane however shows herself as protesting. In her situation other narrators would perhaps want to present themselves as resolute, sociable or robust.

The analysis of everyday stories leads us to the conflict- and relation-model of the narrator. The psychodynamics of our patients manifest themselves in their everyday stories. Therefore everyday stories supply sound clinical material for diagnosis and treatment. According to our impression the dynamics of conflict and relation are reflected very clearly in the interaction between patient and therapist. In our opinion the analysis of everyday stories proves to be helpful in order to get indications about the progress of treatment and the therapeutic process.

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