
TIME, NARRATIVE AND HERMENEUTICS OF OTHERNESS

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to illustrate the Ricœurian contribution to the development of a hermeneutics of otherness. Beginning with Ricœur's confrontation with Heideggerian thought on temporality, the paper proceeds to develop the connection between time and narrative as an answer to the aporias of time, discovered in the analysis of the cosmological and existential idea of time. In conclusion, the third part will outline the importance of the narrative conception of temporality in the development of a hermeneutics of otherness.

Keywords

Time, Narrative, Hermeneutics, Otherness, Relationship.

This paper intends to investigate the relationship between time, narrative, and what can be called a hermeneutics of otherness. It is beyond doubt that the philosophy of Paul Ricœur made a fundamental contribution to the development to the theme of otherness in the field of hermeneutical research. Time, narrative and the hermeneutics of otherness can be considered as three strictly linked elements. This connection is deeply rooted in the history of hermeneutics, beginning with the great turn matured with Heidegger's philosophy. The German thinker was the first to underline, in the connection between being and time, the possibility to evidence the "difference" in its radical dialectic with "identity"¹. Heidegger unquestionably remains far from the elaboration of a notion of otherness, as expressed in Ricœur's thought. However, it is possible to put in light the theoretical root shared by the two thinkers in the ontological relationship between time and being.

In this sense Ricœurian hermeneutics can be considered as a critical heir of the Heideggerian perspective. In fact, Ricœur approves the Heideggerian turn in hermeneutics, which began in *Being and Time*, and in particular some premises concerning the theme of the sense of being and its aesthetical declination. In particular, it must be underlined how in the most important parts of Ricœur's works, where the theoretical discussion becomes harder and deeper, Heidegger is frequently cited as a critical landmark². On the other hand, Heidegger's thought is fundamental in order to consider the question concerning the relationship between time and being as a basis to develop a hermeneutics of otherness.

Beginning with the interest showed by Ricœur in the theme of temporality proposed by Heidegger, the present study intends to analyze three basilar connections: 1) the Ricœurian reading of Heideggerian temporality; 2) the development of the

¹ Cfr. Heidegger's essays on identity and difference, in particular Heidegger: 1976, 123-176, Heidegger: 1982, and Heidegger: 1994. The Heideggerian concept of "ontological difference" can be considered in contemporary hermeneutics as the first act of thinking the difference as itself part of the horizon of radical ontology. Thinking the difference is the first basis on which it is possible to criticize the dominion of the identity in western philosophy, attempting to overcome it in the direction of an alternative thought. The possibility of a hermeneutics of otherness is rooted in this first heideggerian attempt.

² It should be remembered that behind the discussion on the problem of temporality in *Time and Narrative 3*, in particular Ricœur: 2003, 359-370, here the French philosopher faces the problem of the metaphor which is very close to the Heideggerian idea of poetry. On the Ricœurian comparison with Heidegger see in particular: Clayton: 1989, Greisch: 1989, Bourgeois-Schalow: 1990, Kemp: 1996, Jervolino: 1996, Bourgeois: 1999.

narrative dimension as an answer to the aporias observed in the Heideggerian concept of temporality; 3) the importance of a concept of narrativity for a hermeneutics of otherness.

1. The Question of Temporality: Ricœur as a Critical Heir of Heideggerian Thought.

Ricœur discusses the Heideggerian concept of temporality in the third volume of *Time and Narrative*. Here the French thinker analyzes the aporias of temporality in the philosophies of St. Augustin, Husserl and Heidegger. The significance of the Ricœurian analysis is to put in light the limits of a phenomenology of time. It is well known that this phenomenology pays particular attention to the “inner time-consciousness”, establishing the supremacy of the transcendental aspect of temporality. On the other hand, however, the other side of temporality, which concerns the objective forms of time considered in its computable, public and chronological aspect, remains unsolved. This aspect, for a phenomenology of time, remains of less importance than the former.

Ricœur arrives at the analysis of the Heideggerian position after crossing the aporias of temporality, which arise from the confrontation between Augustin and Aristotle, and Husserl and Kant. These two pairs of thinkers demonstrate the aporetic contrast between the two different interpretations of time. In Augustin and in Husserl we can see the highest example of a phenomenology of time completely projected to the inner analysis of the temporal dynamic of a singular existence. By contrast Aristotle and Kant show a non-existential but no less important idea of time: this is time considered as a becoming of unvarying instants, not signed by the *kairos* typical of existential time. This is *chronos* considered as a quantitative measurement of “before” and “after”, as a measurement of the changes happening in the world; time that the Greeks conceived as an interchange of “*genesis kai phthora*”, of the birth and the destruction of everything in the world. From this point of view, Ricœur underlines as “a psychological theory and a cosmological theory mutually occlude each other to the very extent they imply each other” (RICŒUR: 1990(3), 14).

Faced with this alternative, the underlying problem is the following: the question concerning the aporia of temporality makes it impossible to have a panoramic view of time. We can not see time in its totality. The aporetic relationship between

phenomenological and cosmological conception of time signifies our incapability to reach a vision *sub specie aeternitatis*, because our time and the time of the world are not the same thing. In other words, the phenomenological and the cosmological interpretations of time can not be unified in a universal synthesis and overcome in a superior point of view.

However, the aporetic approach to the problem of temporality does not absolutely deny the possibility to reach for a sort of unity for the multiplicity of time. When Ricœur defines time as a “common singularity”, he has in mind to consider the question concerning time to find a sense for it, a unity for the multiplicity of which time is the essential principle.

How is it possible to connect the one and the multiple, the unity of consciousness and the multiplicity of perceptible data? How is it possible to consider at the same time the unity of the soul and its various and variable historical and existential experiences? How is it possible to build up horizons of sense in the temporal and historical becoming of the world? All these questions can be understood in the question concerning the aporia between the time of the soul and the time of the world, as proposed by Ricœur in the third volume of *Time and Narrative*.

Ricœur introduces the Heideggerian position, pointing out that the question about temporality and environmentality of consciousness proposed by the German thinker in *Sein und Zeit*, seems to suspend the previously observed aporia. With the idea of *Dasein* as an *In-der-Welt-sein*, in fact, the dichotomy between time of the soul and time of the world could be resolved by reaching a conciliation. If the being which questions its own being, starting from the temporality of its being-in-the-world, a worldly located conscience, it means that with the Heideggerian *Dasein* we can overcome the difficulties proposed by the aporia of temporality. With the idea of being-in-the world Heidegger has radically resolved the duality between subject and object giving the impression of establishing the basis for a unification of the temporality under a unitary idea.

However, it is precisely against this radical turn proposed by Heidegger that Ricœur criticizes in particular the idea of temporality. Ricœur is in fact sceptical about the resolute capacity of the Heideggerian conception of time. The problem concerns the analysis of the temporality, which Heidegger deduces from the idea of the being-

toward-death proposed as the critical point for the authenticity or inauthenticity of *Dasein*. This existentielle repercussion³ is what makes it possible for the *Dasein* to be brought back to his authentic self. The decision for the authenticity of the self against the being-towards-death produces the access to the ecstatic temporality through the opening of a future (*Zukunft*), which is the coming into presence of what has always been⁴. Ricœur underlines in particular the preposition “zum” of the Heideggerian expression *Sein-zum-Tode*, which recalls openly the preposition of the *Zu-Kunft*: “In Care, *Dasein* aims at coming toward itself in accordance with its ownmost possibilities. Coming-towards (*Zukommen*) is the root of the future” (RICŒUR: 1990(3), 69). In this opening towards the future, care (*Sorge*) discloses itself to its authentic being as it discovers its destiny in the being-toward-death, the extreme coincidence of its necessity and possibility. The disclosure of the temporal ecstasis in the instant of the decision of authenticity entails that time concentrates in a unity in itself differentiated.

Ricœur underlines as the temporalization proposed by Heidegger recalls very nearly the idea of *distentio animi* pointed out by Augustin: “The Augustinian problem of the threefold present is simply carried over to temporalization taken as a whole” (RICŒUR: 1990(3), 71). In that case, if the authentic temporality is a concentration and an unification as a consequence of the totalizing event of the being-toward-death as the *distentio animi* in the Augustin *Confessiones*, remains unsolved the problem posed by Ricœur concerning the unity of time between phenomenology and cosmology. The ecstatic unity of the temporality in the authentic “care” is the apex of an intimate experience of time which, even if it conceives the conscience no longer as a soul (like in Augustin) or as a transcendental subject (as in Husserl), but as a being-in-the-world,

³ The theme of death is strongly criticized by Ricœur as the only moment for the acquisition of authenticity. As he says: “If we withdraw from mortality the capacity to determine by itself alone the level of radicalness on which temporality can be thought, we do not thereby weaken the mode of questioning that guides the investigation of temporality (Chapter 3). Quite the opposite. If the potentiality of *Dasein* to be a whole – or, as we might say, its capacity for being integral – ceases to be governed solely by the consideration of Being-towards-the-end, the potentiality-of-Being-a-whole can once be carried back to the power of unification, articulation, and dispersion belonging to time” (RICŒUR: 1990(3), 67-68).

⁴ As Heidegger says: “‘Zu-kunft’ meint hier nicht ein jetzt, das, *noch nicht* ‘wirklich’ geworden, einmal erst *sein wird*, sondern die *Kunft*, in der das *Dasein* in seinem eigensten Seinkönnen auf sich zukommt. Das Vorlaufen macht das *Dasein eigentlich* zukünftig, so zwar, dass das Vorlaufen selbst nur möglich ist, sofern das *Dasein als seiendes* überhaupt schon immer auf sich zukommt, das heisst in seinem Sein überhaupt zukünftig ist. [...] Das Vorlaufen in die äusserste und eigenste Möglichkeit ist das verstehende Zurückkommen auf das eigenste Gewesen. *Dasein* kann nur eigentlich gewesen *sein*, es zukünftig ist. Die Gewesenheit entspringt in gewisser Weise der *Zukunft*” (HEIDEGGER: 1977, 431).

nevertheless it leaves open the question of the relationship that this favourite experience of authenticity maintains with other levels of temporality like historicity (*Geschichtlichkeit*) and within-time-ness (*Innerzeitigkeit*).

So Ricœur can argue that, like Augustine, Heidegger invites us to think of a hierarchy of the levels of temporality. As with Augustin, Heidegger ascends towards the apex of the experience of time. At the same time, however, Heidegger, like Augustin, remains in an aporetic situation when he must deduce from the authentic experience of time the less qualitative but more quantitative modalities of experiencing time itself. The problem of Heidegger is therefore to descend from the apex, to climb down the stairway, which brings to the intimate, exclusive and singular experience of time, in order to achieve the lower levels of temporality which involve a public, communitarian and intersubjective dimension. The time that I experience, looking death in the eye, isolates me in an instant which can not be communicated to others, but the human world is not only made of isolated existences but also people who interact in a common space interwoven in a public temporality.

The limit of the Heideggerian conception of time appears when Heidegger tries to pass through the temporality of the single existence toward a common historicity. This is what Heidegger determines as the *Geschick*, the “common destiny” of a nation, which should function as a mediation between the singular and the collective idea of time⁵. Heidegger, for Ricœur, is incapable of putting in relation the private time of *Dasein* with the public time of the intersubjectivity, frustrating the possibility of a historiographic debate and the truthfulness of an epistemological approach to the historical world that can be discussed and judged by the community. All this is due to the fact that Heidegger relies entirely on the idea of authenticity, which becomes the basis on which to assess other forms of temporality. As Ricœur underlines: “The calls to authenticity wins out over the concern to take the step from ontology to epistemology, even though the necessity to do so is not contested” (Ricœur: 1990(3), 80). Here we can find the greater distance that discerns Ricœur from Heidegger and from the entire

⁵ “Wenn aber das schicksalhafte Dasein als In-der-Welt-sein wesentlich im Mitsein mit Anderen existiert, ist sein Geschehen ein Mitgeschehen und bestimmt als *Geschick*. Damit bezeichnen wir das Geschehen der Gemeinschaft, des Volkes. Das *Geschick* setzt sich nicht aus einzelnen Schicksalen zusammen, sowenig als das Miteinandersein also in Zusammenvorkommen mehrerer Subjekte begriffen werden kann. [...] Das schicksalhafte *Geschick* des Daseins in und mit seiner ‘Generation’ macht das volle, eigentliche Geschehen des Daseins aus” (HEIDEGGER: 1977, 508).

phenomenology of time in general. What he criticizes in the phenomenological hermeneutics in its entirety is that it has renounced the epistemological approach typical of the human sciences, in order to achieve immediate access to the theme of the sense of being⁶. Also the relationship between time and being proposed by Heidegger is implied by this fault: indeed, in Heidegger's hermeneutics the access to the sense of being is guaranteed by the manifestation of the being itself in time, without any form of mediation. With that every methodological or epistemological need is overcome, which remains as an unresolved attachment for the reflection that cannot be integrated.

What is at stake in both questions – says Ricœur – is whether the duality between the time of the soul and cosmic time (our Chapter 1) and the duality between phenomenological time and objective time (our Chapter 2) are finally overcome in an analytic of *Dasein* (RICŒUR: 1990(3), 80).

Starting from this challenge proposed by Heideggerian philosophy, Ricœur can easily understand the problems that are posed by the ordinary concept of time and its genesis for the German thinker. The *Innerzeitigkeit*, which in Heidegger should mediate the relationship between the pure temporality of the *Dasein* and the historicity of everyday life, determines a levelling of the temporal “*ek-stasis*” to the present which is the oblivion of temporality itself. For Ricœur, in the end,

by restoring the legitimacy of the within-the-world surroundings of *Dasein*, we risk yoking the understanding of *Dasein* once again to the categories of what is present-at-hand and what is ready-to-hand, categories under which, according to Heidegger, metaphysics as always tried to classify things, up to the distinction between the psychical and the physical (RICŒUR: 1990(3), 82).

Therefore, for Ricœur, even if Heidegger overcomes the oppositions of Augustin vs. Aristotle and Husserl vs. Kant by analyzing the temporality in the horizon of the Being-in-the-world, on the other hand he ends up falling in the same aporia of his illustrious predecessors once again. In fact, where Heidegger devalues chronological time, Ricœur sees the rise of a series of problems. The *chronos*, in fact, is for Ricœur no longer a fallen modality of existential time, but a real and effective form of time, which

⁶ Cfr. Ricœur: 2004(a), 3-25 and 219-230. The sense of the Ricœurian approach is to bring to light the necessity to develop an epistemological attitude to the human sciences as a “long way” to the description of the human being. In this sense Ricœur criticizes the Heideggerian approach as a “short way” to the sense of the Being-in-the-world which jumps into the sense of Being, thus avoiding the critical course tracked by the human sciences. That track consists of an “archaeology of the subject”, a “teleology of the subject” and an “eschatology”. On this purpose see Rigobello: 2007, 7-17.

cannot be reduced to the kairetic dimension of the *Dasein*. It is necessary to underline the “incommensurability between human time and the time of nature” (Ricœur: 1990(3), 89), which remains as a residual aporia in the Heideggerian investigation. Human time is in fact part of a wider horizon of time made up of millions of years. Such time cannot be reduced to a mere attachment of the phenomenological temporality; on the contrary that time is what puts in check the phenomenological concept of time, indicating its aporetic character.

However this aporia for Ricœur is not a failure, but the inception for a reflexive work that should develop in extra-theoretical directions. It will be the task of the narrative dimension, both historical and fictional, to try to find a sort of conciliation between these two different views of time, with the aim to find a unitary sight of time as a “collective singularity”. In this sense the Ricœurian analysis of *Time and Narrative* fulfils the need to think of the relationship between the one and the multiplicity in an hermenutical horizon, being careful not to fall in the totalizing outcome of the Hegelian conception of history⁷. Time is in fact a principle of differentiation, of alteration, of pluralization. So, it is starting from that recovery of a plural dimension in a narrative horizon that can be generated a “hermeneutical schematism”, which can overcome the risk of totalizing, typical of all the metaphysics of the triumphal subject, in order to rediscover a wider concept of otherness which cannot be mediated in the absolute reflection.

⁷ Ricœur criticizes the Hegelian conception of history and in particular the “totalizing temptation” which want to collect all of time in a final *parousia* (cfr. Ricœur: 1990(3), 193-206). For Ricœur, Hegel’s thought represents the greatest attempt in the history of philosophy to explain and resolve negativity and evil in the frame of a strong conceptuality. The Hegelian “work of negativity” in the philosophy of spirit is considered by the French philosopher the same as a “theodicy”. The idea of negativity in the Hegelian system is for Ricœur the higher attempt to integrate evil in philosophical conceptuality. This is why Ricœur defines Hegel’s thought on negativity as a great temptation that he wants to avoid by overcoming the Hegelian dialectic in a hermeneutics of narrativity. In any case it is always important to remember that a trace of the speculative thought remains in Ricœur’s philosophy as he tries to develop the phenomenology of time in the horizon of a reflective thought (cfr. Ricœur: 1990(3), 96). Ricœur recognizes his debt with the Hegelian thought as he defines his philosophy as a “post-Hegelian Kantianism”, an expression which Ricœur shares with Eric Weil (Ricœur: 2004(a), 412). With regard to the Ricœurian analysis of Hegel’s thought see also Ricœur: 1991, 227-245 and Ricœur: 2005, 171-185. For an in-depth analysis of the relationship between Hegel and Ricœur see: Piercey: 2007, 26-38 and Scott-Baumann: 2013, 67-87. For what concerns the problematic approach of an hermenutics of the person to the speculative theme I refer to Valori: 2009, 9-33.

2. Time, Narrative, Otherness.

The task of narrative is to make possible a non-systematic, poetical mediation between existential time and natural time. For Ricœur it is necessary to collect with a reflective act a unifying synthesis, which can give reason to those two alternative ways of considering time. On this purpose says Ricœur:

We can not think about cosmological time (the instant) without surreptitiously appealing to phenomenological time and vice versa. If the statement of this aporia outruns phenomenology, this aporia thereby has the great merit of resituating phenomenology within the great current of reflective and speculative thought (RICŒUR: 1990(3), 96).

The aporia of temporality, read under a speculative and reflective light, shows its wealth, insofar as it looks for a conjunction between the two dimensions of temporality which the phenomenological analysis leaves detached. As previously noted the aim of the analysis of narrative is to avoid the absolute synthesis proposed by Hegel in which every singularity is overcome in the universality of the onto-theo-logical *parousia* of the principle. The aim of Ricœur's thought is to safeguard the unique experience of the single existence whose interior tension can not be resolved in a universal system governed by an overruling logic. The relationship between time of nature and time of existence should be thought of in a poetical way, resisting the temptation of an absolute reason which should explain everything by submerging it under its logical mechanism. The sense of time, the being of time itself, can be understood only in an eschatological dimension in which the sense is never totally manifested. This is because time itself, as a condition of the comprehension of being, is at the same time what unconceals and conceals the being itself. In this sense eschatology means a wait which does not wait anything, an openness of time, both in its existential and natural dimensions, to what overcomes it which should always remain undetermined. This is why only poetry and not a logic of being can achieve this level of thought. And this is why the narrative has such an important role in Ricœur's thought: besides the metaphor it has the power to bring together the differences, avoiding the risk of a sort of violence of thought.

Narrative is in fact a way of collecting the differences of the "collective singularity" of time in a unitarian project, which is the plot in its always changing dimension. The "synthesis of the heterogeneous" typical of the narrative is based on the intersection of two differently related ideas of time. The historical and the fictional

narrative in fact combine the cosmological and phenomenological ideas of time in different ways. But in any case, what really matters in the hermeneutics of the narrative held by Ricœur is the relationship with time that the human being maintains: on the one hand he takes care of the ended temporality in which his life is determined as a unique existence; on the other hand he needs to control the fleeting time in the continuous becoming of the beings in a perspective which is immeasurably wider than the inner time of the *Dasein*. The temporarily determined conscience is always striving to give a sense to those two dimensions of temporality: to give sense to life, waiting for an unavoidable death; to give sense to the becoming of the world in its over-existential dimension.

In this sense the narrative, as a “synthesis of the heterogeneous”, becomes the place where it is possible to experience the otherness of time in its duality. This is the value of the Aristotelian *mimesis* proposed by Ricœur at the beginning of his analysis in *Time and Narrative*. The *mimesis* is in fact what permits a writer to bring together in a narrative the temporal variations both of the inner life of the subject and of the external becoming of the world.

Time is in this sense a principle of alteration, of the becoming other of the self and of beings in general. So this is why, it bears repeating, the question of time is the metaphysical question *par excellence*: it concerns the relationship between the one and the other, between one and multiplicity. So, the narrative, and in particular the three levels of *mimesis* determined by Ricœur on the basis of the Aristotelian *Poetics*, have the task of unifying the multiplicity of the experience by collecting it in what Ricœur calls “imaginative variations”, which should be able to give a unified reason to the assorted events which take place in fleeting time.

For Ricœur, the act of narrative configuration is the insertion of different events happening in the course of time into a Unitarian horizon of sense. It is an operation of making sense in a unification in the narrative, through which the narrated events and the characters involved are requested as necessary for the narrative itself.

Therefore the comparison between the two different temporal worlds, as developed in the “imperfect mediation” typical of the narrative dimension, shows the possibility of a hermeneutics of otherness where a dialogical openness between the past, present and the future can be maintained. This temporal openness, in its always-

unconcluded narrative mediation between the two forms of time, is what allows the otherness to be considered in an alternative way, rather than as classical thought has usually done. So, in this sense, in a position critical of Hegel's thought, Ricœur affirms that it is not so certain that the "present" should be reduced to the "presence" as a *parousia* of the absolute (as both Hegel and Heidegger, in the end, asserted); instead, the present should be understood as

the *time of initiative* – that is, the time when the weight of history that has already been made is deposited, suspended, and interrupted, and when the dream of history yet to be made is transposed into a responsible decision [...]. Therefore it is within the dimension of acting (and suffering, which is its corollary) that thought about history will bring together its perspectives, within the horizon of the idea of an imperfect mediation (RICŒUR: 1990(3), 208).

This is specifically the richness of the aporia of time in its relationship with narrative. The present is in fact the place where the insertion of one's action in the becoming of one's life and of the world in general is possible, even if one doesn't really know what exactly will be the final result. It means that one's action is not a creation but a part of a wider horizon which never stops to become, even if one always means that this becoming has a sense. So in the "imperfect mediation" offered by the analysis of the narrative, it is possible to see the complexity of thinking regarding time. As Ricœur himself recognizes at the end of *Time and Narrative*:

Our meditation on time not only suffers from its inability to go beyond the bifurcation into phenomenology and cosmology, or even its difficulty in giving a meaning to the totality that is made and unmade across the exchanges between coming-towards, having-been, and being-present – but suffers, quite simply, from not really being able to think time" (RICŒUR: 1990(3), 261).

Time in its dual sense can not be understood in its entirety by thought, but can only be hermeneutically meditated. The whole plot of the world and existence can not be understood in an one-dimensional way. The only thing that can be done is to leave open one's mind to the wealth of stories which happen in time, just as water always gushes from the spring. With this assessment, however, Ricœur doesn't want to be a misologist about the question of time. On the contrary he wants to bring to light the limits of absolute reflection in order to reconsider our defined point of view as the assumption which permits scholars to avoid the *hubris* of thought to become "similar to God". For Ricœur what is put in discussion with the analysis of the aporias of temporality

is not thinking, in any acceptance of this term, but the impulse – or to put it a better way, the *hubris* – that impels our thinking to posit itself as the master of meaning. Thinking encounters this failure not only in the occasion of the enigma of evil but also when time, escaping our will to mastery, surges forth on the side of what, in one way or another, is the true master of meaning (RICŒUR: 1990, 261).

This renunciation of the *hubris* of thought, of the “will to mastery” which wants to submit everything to a logic of supreme identity, is indeed the most important result of the meditation on time and narrative⁸. It is only starting from this renouncement that is possible for the hermeneutics to rediscover a most originary sense of otherness, not only as a mere opposite of the identity, but as its onto-poetical and practical completion. The otherness is in fact the proper dimension in and through which the hermeutical thought moves, starting from the in-depth analysis of temporality.

3.The Narrative Dimension of the Human Person and the Hermeneutics of Otherness

The hermeneutics of narrative makes it possible to free time as a “collective singularity”, as a principle of pluralisation which critically faces the totalizing temptation of western metaphysics. Therefore, the fundamental acquisition reached by Ricœur is the basis on which it is possible to build up a philosophy concerning the other from the perspective of “oneself as another”. The narrative identity of the person is the backbone of the entire analysis dedicated by Ricœur to the idea of otherness. The aim of these present considerations is to illustrate that the thought on otherness is rooted in a reflection on temporality, reconsidered as a pluralizing principle which permits a comprehension of otherness in its richness of sense, rather than as a problem which should be resolved in a monolithic identity. Reflecting on the narrative dimension of the person means to underline the temporal characteristics of his experience as a basis for the interpersonal relationship. Being-in-the-world for Ricœur means not only to be

⁸ This renunciation of the *hubris* reached by Ricœur in the end of *Time and Narrative* looks very similar to the Heideggerian renunciation of the “will to mastery”, previously announced by Schopenhauer’s and Nietzsche’s philosophy and also present in Jasper’s *Existenzphilosophie*. It is beyond doubt that the Ricœurian approach to the tragical theme has much in common with this horizon of sense. Tragedy is in fact the breaking point on which every totalizing temptation should finally smash itself. Fundamentally, tragedy means the impossibility to bring into a definitive unity the sense of a life, the sense of history, or the sense of being in general: it is the possibility of a radical break which signifies the end of the idea of a “triumphal subject”, “master of meaning”, and establishes the basis for a “broken” (*brisée*) subjectivity. Cfr. Ricœur: 1992, 241-249.

related to the environment which surrounds us, but also it means to be-in-relationship “with and for the others inside fair institutions”.

This is the well-known “ethical tripod” on which is based the intersubjective dimension of the person in *Oneself as Another*. In this work the issue concerning the narrative dimension of the person is addressed in a key moment of the reflection on the otherness, precisely when Ricœur makes a decisive step from a substantialist determination of the self towards ethics as the central focus for a reflection on otherness in an intersubjective dimension.

In his investigation on the sense of the “Self” Ricœur acts a transfer from the question “what?” to the question “who?”, by analyzing the work of Parfit titled *Reasons and Persons*. Here the American philosopher radicalizes the “puzzling cases”⁹ previously announced in the philosophy of Locke and Hume. Those are mental experiments in which the idea of personal identity is proved by resorting to imaginary situations in which the subject, reduced to the physical element of the brain, can be easily deprived of his self-identity. Those limiting cases are described by paradoxical situations in which it is impossible to discern what makes an individual this person rather than another. The puzzling cases give place to the aporias of personal identity which are provoked by a reductionist idea of the relationship between mind and body, in virtue of which the entire content of the mind is identified with a brain track which can be cloned and replicated, undermining the idea of the uniqueness and unrepeatability of the personal singularity¹⁰.

Compared to such alienation of the ego, Ricœur answers with a strong criticism, based on the idea of the temporality of the Self, which can not be absolutely reduced to a physical track and exchanged with another. The entirety of events which determine personal identity over a lifetime are so dynamically structured that the unrepeatability of the person is requested as the only *sub-jectum* (the Greek *hypokeimenon*) of all of them. Parfit’s argumentation is in fact based strictly on the reduction of the personal identity to those characteristics which can be objectivized allowing a physical cloning.

⁹ Parfit: 1987, 245 ss.

¹⁰ Cfr. Ricœur: 1992, 135-136. Ricœur has deepened the question of the relationship between mind and body also in Ricœur-Changeux: 1998 and in Ricœur: 2004(b).

However, Ricœur underlines the puzzling cases are only mental experiments, because there is a dimension of the Self, which explicates in the fourth dimension of time, that can't be reduced to a physical object. The temporal and dynamic horizon of the Self is the "ipseity", which Ricœur dialectically relates to "sameness", considered as the permanent identity of the person. The ipseity means the possibility for a plural unity of the Self, which represents a mediation between the two extremes of the exaltation and humiliation of the *Cogito*. The puzzling cases are indeed an example of a radical deconstruction of subjectivity whose main aim, in the intentions of Parfit, should be to free the individual from the egoistic attachment to himself. However, Ricœur points out how the final outcome of these mental experiments is not only the deconstruction of the "ego" but also of the "other". This occurs because in general personal identity is destroyed by physical reductionism, which does not allow for differences but makes everyone uniform by reducing persons to interchangeable things. On the contrary, the dialectic of sameness and ipseity is what makes the maintenance of the identity of the "self" overcoming the centralizing power of the "ego" possible.

The narrative dimension obviously plays a decisive role in the determination of this hermeneutical idea of identity that is open to otherness, rather than selfishly centred on itself. As Ricœur says at the beginning of the 6th part of *Oneself as Another*, dedicated to narrative identity: "The genuine nature of narrative identity discloses itself, in my opinion, only in the dialectic of selfhood and sameness. In this sense, this dialectic represents the major contribution of narrative theory to the constitution of the self" (RICŒUR: 1992, 140).

Narrative theory as explained in *Time and Narrative* plays a key role in the determination of oneself as another. The narrative is very important for the transfer from the question "what?", concerning the first level of determination of the Self, to the question "who?", which is central for all following levels of investigation. The "synthesis of the heterogeneous" typical of time, or the "discordant concordance", characteristic of the *mimesis* in all the three levels of its explanation, are the basis on which is possible to describe a non static but dynamic identity: a narrative identity, of course¹¹.

¹¹ As Ricœur says: "I propose to define discordant concordance, characteristic of the narrative composition, by the notion of the synthesis of the heterogeneous. By this I am attempting to account

Beginning with the Aristotelian *mimesis*, it is possible for Ricœur to contemplate a new kind of identity, capable of reconciling two opposed categories: identity and otherness. The notion of “plot” proposed by Ricœur in *Time and Narrative* is what allows us to mediate between identity and otherness. Specifically, the notion of “event” is the logical and narrative element in which identity, as the necessity, and otherness, as the contingency, come together in the plot: how many stories wouldn’t be the same without that certain occurrence, meeting or incident. Every story presents a reconciliation between chance and necessity, which make it possible to say: “it was supposed to be this way...” Every story, in other words, is a collection of blind events transfigured into a sensible connection.

In this new kind of identity, proposed by the idea of plot, the “character” is the main agent and patient to whom and from whom events happen. This is why in *Oneself as Another* Ricœur feels the need to complete narrative theory by analyzing the “character”, remained on the sidelines in *Time and Narrative*. The character determines and suffers the events of a story and constitutes the key for the transfer from a theory of narrative to the narrative identity of the person:

The decisive step in the direction of a narrative conception of personal identity is taken when one passes from the action to the character. A character is the one who performs the action in the narrative. The category of character is therefore a narrative category as well, and its role in the narrative involves the same narrative understanding of the plot itself. The thesis supported here will be that the identity of the character is comprehensible through the transfer to the character of the operation of emplotment, first applied to the action recounted; characters, we will say, are themselves plots (RICŒUR: 1992, 143).

Character and plot are closely linked to each other. To explain this connection, the French thinker analyzes Kermode’s work *The Sense of an Ending* (Kermode: 2000). Here Ricœur finds a possible answer to the aporias proposed by Parfit’s puzzling cases. For Kermode there is a strict connection between plot and character, which can be seen in the contemporary novel. In particular Ricœur underlines how the dissolution of the

for the diverse mediations performed by the plot: between the manifold of events and the temporal unity of the story recounted; between the disparate components of the action – intention, causes, and chance occurrences – and the unity of the temporal form, which, in extreme cases, can disrupt chronology to the point of abolishing it. These multiple dialectics do no more, in my opinion, than make explicit the opposition, already present in the domain of tragedy according to Aristotle, between the episodic dispersal of the narrative and the power of unification unfurled by the configuring act constituting *poiesis* itself” (Ricœur: 1992, 142). With regard to the passage from the hermeneutics of narrative (*Time and Narrative*) to the hermeneutics of otherness (*Oneself as Another*) see in particular: Greisch: 1993, Jannotta: 1993, 53-57, Fornari: 1996.

plot matches the dissolution of the character. That means the character follows the destiny of the story, meaning that the identity of the character is shaped by the plot and vice versa.

In this sense the theory of the character proposed by Kermode is for Ricœur the answer to the aporias demonstrated by Parfit with his puzzling cases. For the French thinker, the question concerns the two different ideas of identity proposed. In the case of Parfit, the idea of identity is reduced to the material relationship between mind and body, so that the brain can be physically reproduced, causing the dissolution of the ego¹². On the other hand, considering the connection between plot and the identity of the character, the crisis of the contemporary novel puts in light how the imaginative variations can open the identity to the otherness on the basis of the temporal constitution of the narrative.

What is at stake here is the dialectic of sameness and ipseity: Parfit plays with the possibilities of manipulation of sameness to destroy the basis of subjectivity; on the other hand, Kermode underlines the ipseity as the place where the Self can narratively variate its constitution, remaining himself in any case, even if he radically experienced himself as another.

Ricœur set against the “technological dream” of the puzzling cases the “poetical dream” of the narrative dimension. In this sense the deconstruction of the ego can be technological or poetical with very different results. In the “technological dream” it is possible to see how the deconstruction of the self leads to a total alienation and eradication of the subject which admits the manipulation of the body in all its extreme consequences, reducing the ipseity to the physical sameness of a corpse without soul. In the “poetical dream”, instead, even if the variations of the self are pushed to the extreme, the dialectic of the sameness and of the ipseity isn't nullified but however becomes productive of new experiences. Technical manipulation plays with the body in order to demonstrate that personal existence and its temporal dimension is an accidental detail; the poetical variation of the narrative dimension, on the contrary, plays with time,

¹² Many contemporary novels insist on this radical event of the dissolution of the ego. For example: *Orlando* (V. Woolf), *The Metamorphosis* (F. Kafka), *Uno nessuno centomila e Il fu Mattia Pascal* (L. Pirandello) *Der Mensch ohne Eigenschaften* (R. Musil). All these novels represent the inconsistency of the self in its temporal constitution. However, as Ricœur explains, the “poetical dream” of a deconstruction of the ego doesn't mean its complete negation, but a way to experience the difference inside the Self. Reading a contemporary novel does not lead to madness, but to a more complete understanding of ourselves.

to show how it is an essential element of our being-in-the-world, in relationship with and for the other persons. Therefore, if technological manipulation leads to a total expropriation of the self, it poses serious ethical problems for the safeguarding of personal integrity; on the other hand, the poetical and imaginative variation of the narrative leads to an “appropriating expropriation”¹³, thanks to which the extreme alienation of the character, which occurs in many contemporary novels, can be comprehended by the reader and become an experience of his life, of his ipseity.

The dialectic of sameness and ipseity substantiate of the strict correlation between the narrative dimension and the temporality of the existence. That’s why the narrative plays a central role in *Oneself as Another*: it’s the hinge between the act of describing (the answer to the question “what?”) and the act of prescribing (the answer to the question “who?”). The act of narrating means fundamentally to make a “synthesis of the heterogeneous”¹⁴ of the different elements of a life in its unity. It means to unify the multiplicity of experiences which constitute the concreteness of existence.

This brings us back to the topic of the hermeneutics of otherness, which is the central issue of this analysis. The dialectical implication of sameness and ipseity is rooted in the narrative dimension, which creates a relationship between unity and multiplicity in a sensible life. The interaction between narrative and life determines what Ricœur, inspired by McIntyre, calls “the narrative unity of life” (Ricœur: 1992,

¹³ With this expression I want to draw attention to another similitude with Heidegger’s thought as he explains the game of *Ereignis* and *Enteignis* as the manifestation of *Sein* in the poetical Being-in-the-world. As Heidegger explains in his works on identity and difference and in his posthumous work *Beiträge zur Philosophie* (Heidegger: 1989), the relationship of man with the being in the *Ereignis* is characterized by a sort of alienation of the self which should lead to a type of appropriation in the sense of being itself. In other words the Being, and therefore the being that ourselves are, for Heidegger can be understood only if we radically renounce our will of being the center of everything that surrounds us. This radical renouncement can be enacted only in a poetical dimension in which language ceases to be a form through which man rules over the world, in order to become the “house” of the Being itself (Heidegger: 1985). In this sense the Ricœurian consideration of narrative as a “poetical dream” shares a similar intention with Heideggerian thought, as it tries to demonstrate that only a poetical approach to the question of the self can lead to an open comprehension of who we are and the sense of life itself.

¹⁴ Ricœur recalls this concept of a synthesis of the heterogeneous from Kantian transcendental schematism. As is well known, the problem of Kantian schematism concerned the metaphysical problem of putting together the unity of the categories and the multiplicity of the sensory perception. It is the problem of the relationship between the one and the multiple as presented by Plato in his dialectical dialogues, and remembered by Ricœur in many of his works. Time is however the central element which permits the synthesis between the one and the multiple. Obviously, Ricœur opens up the Kantian idea of the “synthesis of the heterogeneous” to a wider horizon by shifting the sense of the synthesis from the categories to the narrative sense of the Being-in-the-world. For a deeper analysis of the problem see in particular Lewis: 1991, 183-206.

158)¹⁵. In this respect Ricœur underlines that “literature proves to be an immense laboratory for thought experiments in which this connection is submitted to an endless number of imaginative variations” (Ricœur: 1992, 159). The problem for Ricœur is in the end to demonstrate the connection between the world of the text and the world of the reader. This calls into question the hermeneutics of the text as delineated in the last part of *Time and Narrative* (the III kind of *mimesis*) and in the work *From Text to Action*¹⁶.

How is it possible that the text can generate new direction in the real world of life? This is the place where all the lines of inquiry here analyzed converge: temporality, narrative and otherness. Every narrative is a story which comprehends other stories, just as every life is always related with other lives. We are “wrapped in the stories” as Ricœur says, paraphrasing the title of W. Schapp’s work *Im Geschichten verstrickt* (RICŒUR: 1992, 107/161 – 1990(1), 74). Everyone is in fact potentially involved in everyone’s life, just as in a novel where every character interweaves his story with those of other characters. So, the narrative shows this interconnection subsisting between the self and the other through the mediation of the narrative as poetical unification of the temporal experience. In that mediation all the fragments of life are composed in an imaginary synthesis which overcomes the temptation of a totalizing system.

The narrative shows a poetical power of representation “in” and “from” which time itself can be comprehended in its variety of levels. Time is the place where the otherness occurs, and where it may become a non-contingent element of one’s life. This is the game of time: in which everything flows away in the infinity of an incommensurable past and future, but where is also possible to find the sensible intersections of one’s life with the other’s life. Time is a condition of the alienation, but also a condition of a kairetic connection of one’s existence with a world endowed of

¹⁵ We can find the expression in McIntyre: 1981, 217-219.

¹⁶ The problem concerning the connection between the world of the text and the world of the reader is very important because it establishes the effectivity of the hermeneutical circle, entailing the ethical dimension as a consequence of the text on the practical judgement and, then, to the responsible action. As Ricœur says in *From text to action*: “The models of actions elaborated by narrative fiction are models for redescribing the practical field in accordance with the narrative typology resulting from the work of the productive imagination. Because it is a world, the world of the text necessarily collides with the real world in order to “remake” it, either by confirming or by denying it. However, even if the most ironic relation between art and reality would be incomprehensible if art did not both disturb and rearrange our relation to reality. If the world of the text were without any assignable relation to the real world, language would not be “dangerous”, in the sense in which Hölderlin called it so before both Nietzsche and Walter Benjamin” (Ricœur: 1991, 6).

sense where the others are not strangers, but possible companions on the journey of life. This dynamic takes place in the ipseity as the freest dimension of the self, where the poetical experiment of life can take shape. The ipseity is the hermeneutical dimension of the self where the otherness is admitted and requested as a necessary and coessential element of the ego. When we leave the ipseity free to experiment its own otherness, we open new possibilities of experience which put into practice the hermeneutical circle as a dialogical relationship of “oneself as another”.

The ipseity is in fact the element of the self which has that peculiar interior differentiation in which the temporality of the being-in-the-world reveals its dynamic tension. And it is the ipseity that can understand the stories as a place where the differentiation of the self in the transformation of characters occurs. The narrative is the place where the otherness takes this sense, ceasing to be an obstacle on the track for the achievement of the identity of the “One”, but becoming ever more a distinctive element of the uniqueness of the person who is always “on” the track of his life, trying to reach a final sense in an eschatological horizon.

That gift of sense, peculiar of the poetical form of the narrative, permits a systematization of temporality by virtue of which birth and death, choices and initiatives can be “read” under the light of a sense, for which the past, the present and the future cease to be a mere fragment scattered in the universe of the becoming contingency, in order to acquire a certain necessity, a badge of sense stolen to the absurdity of existence.

In conclusion, it is possible to say that the ipseity, as the basis of “oneself as another”, is a synergistic point in which the tensions created by the relationship of time and narrative converge. The narrative network, the plot, in its essential relationship becomes the imaginative schema which permits us to read the otherness as an insuppressible element of the personal being. The relational being of the person is so determined, that the temporality in its narrative mediation, shows its prerogatives. The narrative demonstrate that time is not only a place of relativity in which everything changes without ever being (just as in the Platonic idea of becoming: *aei gignomenon men oudepote de on*), but also and above all a place of relationship and co-implication where occasions of intersubjective interaction are given as essentials for the spiritual life of every person.

The relationship in this perspective is a source of sense which passes through everyone's life. The narrative gives us an imagine of it, by collecting in unity the scattered fragments of an existence thrown in the world, in the temporal becoming which brings everything with it. There where, with Nietzsche, we can say that there is no man, but only "fragments and limbs and horrendous fortuities"¹⁷, the narrative re-weaves the plot of relationships bringing them to a renewed, even if difficult, unity. It is there that the other recovers his value, as an essential interference without which there would not be a plot and everything would return to a blind contingency. The hermeneutics of otherness therefore gives us the possibility, on the basis of time and narrative, to re-weave, even if in an always-uncertain way, that temporal relationship which everyone maintains with himself and with the other in the complex narrative plot that is life itself.

¹⁷ This is what Zarathustra says in his speech *Of Redemption*: "Wahrlich, meine Freunde, ich wandle unter den Menschen wie unter den Bruchstücken und Gliedmassen von Menschen!/ Dies ist meinem Auge das Fürchterliche, dass ich den Menschen zertrümmert finde und zerstreuet wie über ein Schlacht- und Schlächterfeld hin./ Und flüchtet mein Auge vom Jetzt zum Ehemals: es findet immer dal Gleiche: Bruchstücke und Gliedmassen und grause Zufälle – aber keine Menschen!" (NIETZSCHE: 1994, 141-142). As Ricœur points out in the introduction of *Oneself as Another* Nietzsche can be considered as one of the strongest critics of the Cartesian cogito (RICŒUR: 1992, 11-16); so, in this sense, the hermeneutics of otherness drafted by Ricœur is a decisive answer gave to the dramatic question poses by the German thinker, in order to reconsider the human personality under a new light.

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