Identifying Selfhood

Imagination, Narrative, and Hermeneutics in the Thought of Paul Ricoeur

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This book is dedicated to the memory of my father Wietse whose face I see in my children he never knew.

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Abbreviations

Dialogues	R. Kearney, *Dialogues with Contemporary Continental Thinkers* (1984)
FFSR	P. Ricoeur, "The Function of Fiction in Shaping Reality" (1979)
FM	P. Ricoeur, *Fallible Man* (1965)
FN	P. Ricoeur, *Freedom and Nature* (1965)
FP	P. Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy* (1970)
FS	P. Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred* (1995)
FTA	P. Ricoeur, *From Text to Action* (1991)
HB	P. Ricoeur, "The Human Being as the Subject Matter of Philosophy" (1988)
HFD	P. Ricoeur, "The Hermeneutical Function of Distanciation" (1973)
HHS	P. Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences* (1981)
HL	P. Ricoeur, *Husserl: An Analysis of His Phenomenology* (1967)
HP	G. Madison, *The Hermeneutics of Postmodernity* (1988)
IA	P. Ricoeur, "Intellectual Autobiography" (1995)
IDA	P. Ricoeur, "Imagination in Discourse and Action" (1978)
Ideas	E. Husserl, *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology* (1962)
IT	P. Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory* (1976)
KH	P. Ricoeur, *A Key to Edmund Husserl's Ideas 1* (1996)
LQN	P. Ricoeur, "Life in Quest of Narrative" (1991)
MP	P. Ricoeur, "The Metaphorical Process as Cognition, Imagination, and Feeling" (1978)
NP	T. P. Kemp, *The Narrative Path* (1989)
OA	P. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another* (1992)
OI	P. Ricoeur, "On Interpretation" (1983)

unity is understood as a tension between necessary counterparts. The meaning of the unifying term *selfhood* expresses a connection between self and other-than-self, and does so through a dialectical tension that is supposed to prevent the reduction of one to another. Likewise, Ricoeur's ontology consists in a combination of *"ontological commitment"* and critique of *"ontological naïveté,"* whereby the unifying term *to be* is understood as both "the critical incision of the (literal) 'is not' within the ontological vehemence of the (metaphorical) 'is' " (RM 255). Ricoeur believes that metaphorical utterance provides a model of interconnection that overcomes the disproportion of *Fallible Man* between determinative linguistic consciousness and the mutuality of selfhood and being.

Yet the question remains: Has Ricoeur really overcome the disproportion in *Fallible Man* between epistemology and ontology? After all, the movement from literal reference to metaphorical reference does resemble the movement of determinate consciousness to true self-consciousness. Further, is not disproportion by definition a kind of relational tension between elements? And therefore, could metaphorical utterance be viewed as a form of incongruity between literal domination and figurative liberation? Could one not also conclude that the determination of perceptual otherness by noun and verb is similar to the construction of the semantic resemblance that results from a clash of "unusual predicates"?

While these structural similarities do suggest Ricoeur's lack of conceptual progress, and account for our earlier comments regarding his reconstruction rather than the wholesale rejection of his model of determinative consciousness, such a reading fails to take into account that the tensive connection between identity and difference is the organizing principle of not just true self-consciousness but is constitutive of language itself. The disproportion between methodological determination and mutual self-affirmation has apparently vanished within the semantic structure of metaphorical utterance. Epistemology, philosophical anthropology, and ontology are all understood through the same conceptual pattern. But does identity now take precedence over difference on all three of these levels of discourse instead of only on the transcendental or epistemological level? While Ricoeur vigorously tries to maintain a mutual relation between identity and difference without reducing one to the other, and does make significant strides toward the development of a hermeneutic more suitable to the mutual structure of self-constitution or selfhood, does this uniformity of analysis among language, selfhood, and Being create new problems of its own?

CHAPTER FOUR

NARRATIVE IMAGINATION AND PERSONAL IDENTITY

With the deployment of his model of semantic or metaphoric innovation, Ricoeur manages to bridge many of the fault lines that have separated the determinative model of transcendental or epistemological consciousness from the model of self-consciousness understood as the mutual affirmation of the self and the other. Building on the tension within the metaphorical statement, Ricoeur has made significant strides toward epistemological, anthropological, and ontological uniformity. Yet this resolution of methodological disproportion by way of the power of imagination to see similarity in difference takes us only partway on the journey toward the recovery and discovery of selfhood. Metaphor proclaims new meaning that corresponds with feeling oneself as a fundamental unity of identity and difference. The power of metaphor to see reality configured in a particular manner gives testimony to the vast breadth of human emotion. Imagination, however, is more than just feeling. Poetic expression takes place in time through action by individuals in community with others. Metaphor shows how one feels or sees the temporal character of one's own being in relation to other temporal beings and the temporality of Being. This requires an extended metaphor or narrative capable of giving testimony of the agent responsible for action. The journey of self-discovery must pass through linguistic configurations of human action, which give not only analogous *possibilities for* agency but also testimony *of* both individual and common deeds carried out and suffered. Identifying the agent responsible for such an act requires that the work of imagination expand the practical field of human experience by means of a narrative mode of discourse.

In the three-volume work *Time and Narrative* (1984–1988), Ricoeur launches a complex and highly detailed analysis of this interconnection between narrative and human experience. Forming a pair with *The Rule of Metaphor*, *Time and Narrative* continues to explore the significance of the work of

imagination for understanding experience. This "one vast poetic sphere that includes metaphorical utterance and narrative discourse" (TN 1:xi) brings to light "the change of distance in logical space that is the work of the productive imagination" (TN 1:x). Although no longer concerned primarily with "seeing reality as . . . ," narrative discourse nevertheless brings difference and identity together into a unifying structure. "The plot of a narrative is comparable to this predicative assimilation. It 'grasps together' and integrates into one whole and complete story multiple and scattered events, thereby schematizing the intelligible signification attached to the narrative taken as a whole" (TN 1:x). By grasping together into a complete structure the narrative function places the diversity of human temporal experience under the unifying operation of the plot. Ricoeur argues that the narrative function is "the privileged means by which we re-configure our confused, unformed, and at the limit mute temporal experience" (TN 1:xi). Narrative brings to language the diversity of human action by submitting it to the unifying and intelligible order of the story. In this manner, the narrative function repeats the conceptual pattern Ricoeur developed in *The Rule of Metaphor*: the production of a linguistic innovation that unifies identity and difference.

In spite of Ricoeur's introductory remarks concerning the purpose of *Time and Narrative*, his "common core presupposition [that] time becomes human to the extent that it is organized after the manner of a narrative," and conversely that narrative "is meaningful to the extent that it portrays the features of temporal experience" (TN 1:3), remains secondary to the somewhat hidden point of the entire work. It is only at the end of the third volume of *Time and Narrative* that the primary purpose of the whole work is revealed: "Here is the core of our whole investigation, for it is only within this search . . . by individuals and by the communities to which they belong, for their respective narrative identities . . . that the aporetics of time and the poetics of narrative correspond to each other in a sufficient way" (TN 3:274). This revelation is quite remarkable if one considers that the three volumes of *Time and Narrative* are more than eight hundred pages long and that the only thematic treatment of the concept of narrative identity in *Time and Narrative* spans a mere four pages and seems to be an afterthought in response to lingering problems that Ricoeur's investigations on narrative have been unable to resolve.[1]

Astonishing as this may seem, the search for identity should come as no surprise if set within Ricoeur's work as a whole. As I have shown, the initial search in *Fallible Man* for mutual self-affirmation takes place in and among the works of culture, and this quest for mutuality remains constant throughout Ricoeur's later hermeneutical investigations. In this regard, his investigation of the relationship between human temporality and the poetics of narrative reemploys the strategy of imaginative mediation as the key to anthropological and ontological truth. Just as metaphor proposes a world of possible axiological

values, the proposals of narrative discourse require an agent responsible for the truth of history and fiction. Narrative refers to a world inhabited by identifiable agents capable of responding to the questions: "Who is speaking? Who is acting? Who is recounting about himself or herself? Who is the moral subject of imputation?" (OA 16). In other words, who is identified with and responsible for the world unfolded through the imaginative act of narration?

Ricoeur's understanding of metaphor sets the stage for the interpretation of multiple forms of discourse, each corresponding to different intentionalities of human experience. By asserting that the central dialectic of imagination is inherently innovative and semantic in structure, Ricoeur can offer a more complete interpretation of existence through other linguistic forms of human creativity. In particular, the extended metaphor or narrative has the capacity to bring to light the temporal process of identity formation. Narrative, like all creative discourse, is supposed to bring experience to language, but the particular experience that corresponds to the narrative form is the world of human temporality and action, that is, the world that subjects agents to change and is subjected to change by agents in search of their identity.

The events of my personal and our collective stories form a vast diversity from which I try to weave a meaningful narrative account of who I am in relation to who you are. The difference and otherness of my received past is taken up through the imaginative process of emplotment and given order and meaning in relation to my quest for sameness and identity. To search for one's identity is to accept responsibility for one's own past in relation to one's present "space of experience" and "horizon of expectation" (TN 3:208); it is an attempt to form a narrative whole from the diversity of events that I as an agent both carry out and suffer. For Ricoeur, "this narrative interpretation implies that a life story proceeds from untold and repressed stories in the direction of actual stories the subject can take up and hold as constitutive of his personal identity. It is the quest for this personal identity that assures the continuity between the potential or inchoate story and the actual story we assume responsibility for" (TN 1:74).

The search for identity is tied to the received past, but requires the past to be given a configuration marked with a stamp of ownership. Our fragmented storied past must be given a configuration that will have the power to refigure our experience in the construction of my personal and our collective identities. It is an interpretive process that begins with what Ricoeur calls "prefigured experience" and ends with the "refiguration" of our experience. The narrative function is a work of imagination that constructs a unifying plot that gives linguistic form to the mediation that takes place between the lived diversity of temporal experience and the unifying moment of action.[2] By organizing historical events into a narrative unity, communities and individuals can offer testimony of who they are and how they wish to mark their existence in the world.

This process of emplotment that moves from prefiguration through configuration to the refiguration of experience offers practical proposals for living. This narrative "arc" (TN 1:52) offers prescriptions *for* identity that are taken up and become constitutive *of* one's own identity through the deliberation of decision, the commitment of choice, and the initiative of action. What narratives offer are imaginary linguistic models or configurations for living that become identifiable with who we are through the reconnection of art and life, that is, the reconnection of the world of the text to the world of the reader.

While crucial with regard to his argument, Ricoeur readily admits to the difficulty posed by the intersection and reconnection of art and life, and it is a problem that is not lost to his critics.[3] Ricoeur argues that the connection between narrative and temporal experience is not accidental but "presents a transcultural form of necessity" (TN 1:52). Narrative and time are linked by the operative power of the "mimetic arc" of interpretation (TN 1:52). Ricoeur explains that "time becomes human to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode, and narrative attains its full meaning when it becomes a condition of temporal existence" (TN 1:52). The interpretation of the temporal world of human experience takes place through narrative configurations that are shaped by prenarrative structures and are completed by their return to life. This is the significance of the process of narrativization. Narrative mediates between the sedimentation and innovation of the practical field of human experience. Ricoeur writes: "My thesis is that the very meaning of the configurating operation constitutive of emplotment is a result of its intermediary position between the two operations I am calling mimesis1 and mimesis3" (TN 1:53).

By choosing the term *emplotment* Ricoeur hopes to capture the dynamic character of the relationship between temporal experience and narrative. The construction of narrative discourse is but one moment of the "arc of operations by which practical experience" is understood (TN 1:53). The configuring act of narration begins with (mimesis1) "a preunderstanding of the world of action, its meaningful structures, its symbolic resources, and its temporal character" (TN 1:54); it finds fulfillment in the "application" (mimesis3) of the referential intention in the life of the reader or listener. "It is the task of hermeneutics . . . to reconstruct the set of operations by which a work lifts itself above the opaque depths of living, acting, and suffering, to be given by an author to readers who receive it and thereby change their acting" (TN 1:53). The term *emplotment* signifies an intimate and necessary connection between the stories we tell about ourselves and the structure of human experience from which narratives arise and to which they return.

Narrative discourse is for Ricoeur a reflective way station, or critical moment of distanciation, which, while ontologically rooted in the practical world of experience, allows for the imaginative variation of what is received in

order that narratives may refigure or reorganize experience into more meaningful patterns. For Ricoeur the ultimate significance of the connection between narrative and life is found in the analogous transferability of the identity of the text to that of persons and communities. Since Ricoeur takes the formation of personal and communal identity as the core of his entire investigation, the intelligibility of this mimetic arc is paramount for understanding the meaning of narrative identity. While there is obvious continuity between the creation of meaning in metaphor and narrative discourse, what must be explored in greater detail is the power of emplotment to create an identity that leads from narrative to the active moment of initiative where actual existing individuals assume a narrative configuration as their own. In other words, I want to carefully explain how Ricoeur understands the cycle of distanciation and application of the referential world of narrative to life.

To accomplish this task, and to help orient myself within the vast amount of material covered in the three volumes of *Time and Narrative*, I will reverse Ricoeur's order of presentation and examine some of his conclusions concerning narrative and personal identity before I unfold the process of narrative configuration.[4]

4.1 Narrative Identity

Exposing a "fracture" that exists between cosmological (objective) and phenomenological (subjective) time, Ricoeur situates the production of a "third time." Narrative time mediates and "bridges" this gap by "interweaving" the "respective ontological intentions of history and fiction" (TN 3:245). However, as Ricoeur readily admits, this mediation might very well be a "sign of the inadequacy of our poetics to our aporetics, if there were not born from this mutual fruitfulness an 'offshoot' . . . that testifies to a certain unification of the various meaning effects of narrative" (TN 3:246). The construction of narrative identity provides a unity of sameness and difference that bridges the gap between history and fiction, and in turn that between phenomenological and cosmological time.

Unlike the construction of metaphorical meaning, Ricoeur's concept of narrative identity is a quasi-semantic entity. Although narrative configurations offer models for identity, the choice one makes in the appropriation and application of such narrative proposals transfers a semantic textual identity from the imaginary mode to the practical dimension of human experience. "Here 'identity' is taken in the sense of a practical category" (TN 3:246). It is a poetic reply that is fulfilled in the initiative of action by an identifiable agent that can "answer the question, 'Who did this?' 'Who is the agent, the author?' " (TN 3:246). The response to this question unifies and brings about a certain degree

of closure to the occultation of the aporetics of cosmic and phenomenological time. And the interweaving of historical and fictional intentionalities comes to rest with a reflective response to the question "Who?"

In spite of Ricoeur's designation of narrative identity as a unifying practical category, his elaboration of its meaning calls into question its function. Narrative identity is supposed to give a unifying response to the ambivalence of the philosophies of time. Further, the narrative formulation of identity is supposed to move beyond the debate of the substantialist *cogito* and the *anticogito* to provide a solution that can offer unity of self without the dismissal of diversity and otherness. Ricoeur explains that

> without the recourse to narration, the problem of personal identity would in fact be condemned to an antinomy with no solution. Either we must posit a subject identical with itself through the diversity of its different states, or, following Hume and Nietzsche, we must hold that this identical subject is nothing more than a substantialist illusion, whose elimination merely brings to light a pure manifold of cognitions, emotions, and volitions. This dilemma disappears if we substitute for identity understood in the sense of being the same (*idem*), identity understood in the sense of oneself as self-same [*soi-même*] (*ipse*). The difference between *idem* and *ipse* is nothing more than the difference between a substantial or formal identity and a narrative identity. Self-sameness, "self-constancy," can escape the dilemma of the Same and the Other to the extent that its identity rests on a temporal structure that conforms to the model of dynamic identity arising from the poetic composition of a narrative text. (TN 3:246)

According to this formulation, narrative identity gives unity to the self by allowing for a transference of narrative unity from the story of our life to actual experience. Narrative models for identity "become a provocation to be and to act differently. However this impetus is transformed into action only through a decision whereby a person says: Here I stand! So narration is not equivalent to true self-constancy except through this decisive moment, which makes ethical responsibility the highest factor in self-constancy" (TN 3:249). Just as narrative discourse places the diversity of events, characters, and reversals of fortune under the unity of the plot, so too does *ipse* identity place temporal diversity under its rule. Although these two processes are interlinked by the "mimetic arc," the transfer from literary textual identity to personal identity is actually more fundamental for self-constitution than the prefigurative features from which narrative takes distance. Careful note must be taken of this correlation between self-constancy and narrative identity. Ricoeur makes it quite clear that the problems of personal identity can have a meaningful solution if the solution rests on

a temporal structure that in turn conforms to the dynamic identity of a text that is produced by the creative act of emplotment or narrative composition. Although the phenomenology of temporal experience and the production of narrative configurations are hermeneutically interlinked, the ultimate solution to the problem of identity lies within a creative act of imagination. Ricoeur gives priority to the narrative function over phenomenological description.[5]

Ricoeur readily admits the difficulty. Although narrative identity is proposed as a poetic resolution to the problems of the dialectic of narrative and temporal experience, "narrative identity is not a stable and seamless identity" (TN 3:248). The "application" of the narrative unity of a text to personal identity is far from a simple act. There is no single text; yet, there is an agent who must appropriate narrative meanings to form his or her identity.

The selection of significant meanings that are to become representative of who I am involves a highly complex procedure spread out over the course of my life. Compounding this difficulty is Ricoeur's assertion that life can never offer "total mediation" (TN 3:207). Narrative identity is "an open-ended, incomplete, imperfect mediation, namely, the network of interweaving prospective of the expectation of the future, the reception of the past, and the experience of the present, with no *Aufhebung* into a totality where reason in history and in reality would coincide" (TN 3:207). There is no meta-narrative that can totalize my experience. Narrative identity is an identity of various stories. "Just as it is possible to compose several plots on the subject of the same incidents . . . so it is always possible to weave different, even opposed, plots about our lives" (TN 3:248). Ricoeur is convinced that within his concept of identity lies a diversity that no amount of narration can paper over and place under a unifying rule. "Narrative identity thus becomes the name of a problem at least as much as it is that of a solution" (TN 3:249). Therefore, the process of narrativization that gives configuration to the space of experience needs to be examined. Once this is completed, Ricoeur's concept of narrative identity and some of the critical difficulties that it implies can be addressed with greater precision and clarity.

4.2 The Mimetic Arc

Ricoeur's understanding of the concept of narrative identity is set within a "mimetic arc" of narrative representation that passes from the practical field of experience to a semantic level of linguistic meaning and back again to the practical world of human action. It is a three-step spiral process (TN 1:53, 71–72) that advances the understanding of personal and interpersonal identity through narrative representation of human action. Narrative takes distance from the practical world of action by giving it a literary or imaginative configuration with regard to identity formation. Ricoeur explains that "what certain fictions

relative value, which says that this action is more valuable than that one. These degrees of value, first attributed to actions, can be extended to the agents themselves, who are held to be good or bad, better or worse" (TN 1:58). Since the implicit meaning of the conceptual network of action includes ethical evaluation, narrative configurations of action "can never be ethically neutral" (TN 1:59). To represent the practical manifold is to assume an ethical position in relation to the actions carried out or suffered by an agent or agents. Giving a narrative configuration or constructing an identifiable synthesis from heterogeneous elements of practical experience involves the construction of prescriptive representations. By drawing on the prenarrative features of practical experience, narrative configurations transform mere descriptive representation *of* experience into a prescriptive model *for* experience.

Description of the structure of action and its symbolic mediation is predicated on a third and more fundamental prenarrative feature. The temporal character of experience is "implicit in" action (TN 1:60). Action takes time to be accomplished, and it is the time of action that "calls for narration" (TN 1:59). While narrative emplotment uses various features described through a semantics and symbolism of action, such organization takes place *within* a temporal framework. The temporal structure of experience provides connectors between the practical field as a whole and the imaginative act of narrative configuration. To initiate action is to do so in the present; but the present is distended by the past and the future. The time of action has a before and after, a time of preparation and consequences that organizes the practical field around the moment of initiative (TN 3:230–233). Ricoeur explains that this structure of "everyday praxis orders the present of the future, the present of the past, and the present of the present in terms of one another. For it is this practical articulation that constitutes the most elementary inductor of narrative" (TN 1:60). The temporal organization of the practical field provides a ground for the temporal organization of narrative.

4.2.2 *Configuration*

Although the temporal organization of action is foundational for narrative configuration, like the other prenarrative features of the practical field, its relationship to narrative configuration is one of "presupposition and of transformation" (TN 1:55). Temporal, symbolic, and structural features constitute the first phase of a mimetic arc. Narrative configuration presupposes a basic understanding of the practical field, but also instills a transformation and break with the practical field through the introduction of imaginative distanciation initiated by the act of emplotment. Literature is not life, but a representation of life. "Yet despite the break it institutes, literature would be incomprehensible if it did not

give a configuration to what was already a figure in human action" (TN 1:64). Narrative representation of the practical field initiates a new level of intelligibility in continuity with practical understanding but takes distance from life through the imaginative power to understand one's world "as if" it were different from that which has been received.

Ricoeur treats the configurative phase of the narrative arc as a unified act covering the entire narrative field. Although narration falls into the two great classifications of historical and fictional narrative, Ricoeur subjects both narrative forms to the rule of the "kingdom of the *as if*" (TN 1:64). Performing a narrative *epochè* that temporarily suspends the question of literary and historical reference, Ricoeur focuses on the configurative power of emplotment to organize events and characters into a narrative whole regardless of its reference to the "reality of the past" or the "unreality of fiction" (TN 3:157). For the purpose of this investigation I will accept Ricoeur's unification of the narrative field as justified. Since my interest lies in the correlation between the text and the self, the bifurcation of narrative literature into historical and fiction genres, while extremely important in the formation of different aspects of personal and communal identity,[6] is secondary to the fundamental act of existing in the mode of selfhood which is predicated on the power of narration to construct a "synthesis from the heterogeneous" (TN 1:66).

The mediating function of emplotment is "derivative from the dynamic character of the configuring operation" (TN 1:65). To configure experience is to mediate between what has been received and what is to come through various narrative forms of discourse. The sweeping scope of such practical mediation can be seen on a smaller scale "within [the story's] own textual field" (TN 1:65). Ricoeur explains that the operation of emplotment mediates by "drawing a configuration out of a simple succession" that brings "together heterogeneous factors" and constructs a temporal "synthesis of the heterogeneous" (TN 1:65–66). By connecting the diversity of heterogeneous narrative events in temporal succession with the central "thought" of an "intelligible whole," the operation of emplotment creates a narrative unity of identity and diversity or a "concordant discordance" (TN 1:66). This is the key feature of the narrative arc. The poetic narrativization of experience combines an "episodic" temporal dimension with a configuring act that "draws from this manifold of events the unity of one temporal whole" (TN 1, 66). Similar to the construction of metaphor, it is a work of imagination that places "an intuitive manifold under the rule of a concept" (TN 1:66). According to Ricoeur this affiliation between metaphor and narrative stems from their "kinship" with the Kantian "operation of judging," which Ricoeur has repeatedly employed as the paradigmatic function of the imagination (TN 1:66).

While narrative imagination "extracts a configuration from a succession," the unity of the temporal whole that constitutes the story is a poetic resolution

of the inherent tension between the diversity of events and the identifying theme or central thought that holds the narrative together. This narrative "paradox" between the singularity of the central thought and the diversity of events is "resolved" according to Ricoeur by "the poetic act itself."[7] Constructing a story does not overcome the difference of "distention and intention" (TN 1:67), but makes this difference productive. The act of emplotment places a diversity of events into a temporal configuration that provides a "point of view from which the story can be perceived as forming a whole" (TN 1:67). This is what provides the "story's capacity to be followed. . . . To understand the story is to understand how and why the successive episodes led to this conclusion, which, far from being foreseeable, must finally be acceptable, as congruent with the episodes brought together by the story" (TN 1:66–67). The act of emplotment allows the reader to live into the temporality of the world unfolded by the configuration of events and "converts the paradox into a living dialectic" (TN 1:67). The text itself is only an encoded work of emplotment that needs to be brought to life through the work of readers and listeners. In other words, the poetic act of emplotment is repeated every time the story is read or told in order to bring the story to life.

The connection between the poetic act of narrative composition and that of reading signifies the transition, within the narrative arc, from narrative configuration to refiguration. While configuration takes imaginative distance from life, the act of reading reconnects language to life. It is here that textual identity is applied to the identity of persons and communities. With reading, narrative meaning is appropriated from the virtual world of the text and incorporated into the actual world of the reader "wherein real action occurs and unfolds its specific temporality" (TN 1:71). This is the point of intersection that offers Ricoeur the promised path toward the interpretation of selfhood; but it is also a point to which some of Ricoeur's critics take great exception.

4.2.3 *Refiguration*

Ricoeur refers to the transfer[8] between narrative texts and persons as the refiguration of experience. Texts do provide models for temporal experience and action, but such a repertoire of possibilities is more than a smorgasbord of possible identities; it is intended as discipleship toward selfhood (TN 1:78). For Ricoeur the world of the text is ultimately an ethical world instructing the subject toward intersubjective action that requires stability of purpose and faithfulness toward others through a "decision whereby a person says: Here I stand" (TN 3:249). The text's "provocation to be and to act differently" requires ethical action, and "so narrative identity is not equivalent to true self-constancy except through this decisive moment, which makes ethical responsibility the highest

factor of self-constancy" (TN 3:249). Personal identity is connected to narrative identity by way of appropriation of models for existence, but narrative identity is a linguistic construction, whereas personal identity is practical. The two forms of identity are intimately linked, but it "still belongs to the reader, now an agent, an initiator of action, to choose among the multiple proposals of ethical justice brought forth by reading. It is at this point that the notion of narrative identity encounters its limit and has to link up with the nonnarrative components in the formation of an acting subject" (TN 3:249). The difference between language and life, narrative identity and self-constancy, imaginative possibility and decisive choice, needs to be kept in mind as we examine Ricoeur's concept of the refiguration of experience.

The key to understanding the character of the analogical transfer from texts to persons lies in the similarity between the imaginative act of configuration and the act of reading. Ricoeur explains that "to follow a story is to actualize it by reading it" (TN 1:76). The refiguration of experience is initiated and brought to temporary closure through the reception of a narrative work by a reader. Just as emplotment is an imaginative act that grasps together a diversity of events into a temporal whole, so too is reading an imaginative act that forms a synthetic unity from the narrative arrangement of events and characters. In this sense, "if emplotment can be described as an act of judgment and of the productive imagination, it is so insofar as this act is the joint work of the text and reader, just as Aristotle said that sensation is the common work of sensing and what is sensed" (TN 1:76). The act of reading engages the virtual world of the text from within the reader's actual world of experience. Not content to simply repeat experience, the imagination links narrative composition and receptive reading to produce a unity of identity and difference within the text and within the experience of the reader. Narrative configuration is completed through an act of reading that produces a possibility for experience which, when taken up through decision and action, refigures experience and therein personal identity. Each time a text is read the narrative arc is repeated; this repetition takes place from the new vantage point of personal identity that the previous reading produced.

Like the act of emplotment, refiguration is fundamentally productive in nature. Reading produces a connection between the text and the reader that allows Ricoeur to understand the world of the text *as if* it were the actual world of the reader. The world of the text must become "unreal" to refigure the "real" (TN 3:157). Even though Ricoeur develops his concept of the narrative arc by placing brackets around the great division of the narrative field into historical and fictional narrative, the privilege accorded to fictional narrative is clear. Historical narrative is primarily a reproductive act of imagination that assumes the "reality" of the past as its referent (TN 3:142–156), whereas the referent of fictional narrative is supposedly "unreal" (TN 3:157–179). To affect the reader

and refigure his or her experience, the reproductive work of historical narrative must be placed under the rule of the productive work of fiction. For, as Ricoeur argues, only the "unreal" or imaginative world of fiction is "undividedly revealing and transforming. Revealing, in the sense that it brings features to light that were concealed and yet already sketched out at the heart of experience, our praxis. Transforming in the sense that a life examined in this way is a changed life, another life" (TN 3:158). Only then can a transformation take place between the narrative power to see the temporal world of human action *as if* it could be inhabited by a responsible agent, and the actual *being* of the agent in search of his or her identity.

The priority Ricoeur gives to the productive power of imagination to refigure experience requires that "refiguration must free itself, once and for all, from the vocabulary of reference" (TN 3:158). If both historical and fictional narratives can be understood through "productive reference," then both narrative forms will have the capacity to produce an innovation within the world of the reader. Reading is a synthetic activity that constructs an analogy between the world of the text and the reader. If the narrative form, regardless of its division into fictional and historical narratives, can produce such an application, then both literary forms must be understood in the productive mode of the "as-if."

4.2.4 *Reproductive Imagination*

Ricoeur explains that historical narratives are supposed to "stand for" what happened in the past. "Unlike novels, historians' constructions do aim at being reconstructions of the past. . . . They owe a debt to the past, a debt of recognition to the dead, that makes them insolvent debtors" (TN 3:142–143). To give "intellectual articulation" to the "feeling expressed through this sense of debt" to represent the past as it really was, Ricoeur employs the categories of "the Same, the Other, and the Analogous" (TN 3:143).

Although historians must assume that their narrative reconstructions correspond to previous events, this reenactment of the past in the mind of the historian can never be completely subsumed under the concept of the "Same." The goal of this type of historical knowledge is to overcome the temporal distance between past events and the act of reconstruction. Yet the question remains: "How can we call an act that abolishes its own difference in relation to some original act of creation, re-creation? In a multitude of ways, the 're' in the term reenactment resists the operation that seeks to wipe out temporal distance" (TN 3:147).

Narrative reconstructions of the past are qualified by a temporal difference and distance that frustrates the universal application of the category of the "Same." However, the inverse category of the "Other" is inadequate on its own

to account for the temporal difference between the present and the past. According to Ricoeur, the efficacy of the past in the present precludes a negative ontology of difference. "In the last analysis, the notion of difference does not do justice to what seems to be positive in the persistence of the past in the present" (TN 3:151). The difference between the past and the present is not radical. What Ricoeur wants to develop is a historical epistemology—and an ontology of being as . . .—that can combine the categories of the "Same" and of the "Other" by way of the "Analogous." "When we want to indicate the difference between fiction and history, we inevitably refer to the idea of a certain correspondence between our narrative and what really happened. At the same time, we are well aware that this reconstruction is a different construction of the course of events narrated" (TN 3:151–152). The desire of the historian to "render [the past] its due" must, therefore, take into account both the reproductive correspondence between the narrative and past events, and the temporal distance separating these events from the narrative (TN 3:152).

As an extended metaphor, narrative discourse is analogical discourse that sees the world of acting and suffering *as* configured in a particular manner. In this regard the historian must display a "double allegiance: on the one hand, to the constraints attached to the privileged plot type; on the other hand, to the past itself, by way of the documentary information available at a given moment. The work of the historian consists in making narrative structure into a 'model,' an 'icon' of the past, capable of 'representing' it" (TN 3:152). Although Ricoeur is quick to point out that a narrative model of the past must not be "confused . . . with a model, in the sense of a scale model, such as a map, for there is no original with which to compare this model," its "iconic value" can be maintained if it is understood not as "a relation of reproduction, reduplication, or equivalence but [as] a metaphorical relation . . . [that is,] things must have happened *as* they are told in a narrative such as this one" (TN 3:153–154). The historical past must assume the analogous structure of a metaphorical narrative. The past must be seen *as if* it happened the way the narrative plot arranges past events; in other words, historical events come under the rule of the productive imagination.

Joining his previous analysis, in *The Rule of Metaphor*, of the ontological significance of the as-if structure of analogy, Ricoeur once again makes the power to "see" the past *as* configured in a particular way correlative with "being-as." The analogous vision of the past goes beyond historical epistemology. Historical narrative brings "the being-as of the past event . . . to language" (TN 3:154). Although this ontological foundation remains relatively undeveloped in *Time and Narrative*, Ricoeur nevertheless predicates this productive analogy on an analogical ontology. Asking how historical narrative can refer to the past through the act of narrative emplotment or the extended metaphor, Ricoeur points out that

> the key to the problem lies in the functioning, which is not merely rhetorical but also ontological, of the "as," as I analyzed it in the seventh and eighth studies of my *Rule of Metaphor*. What gives metaphor a referential import, I said, itself has an ontological claim, and this is the intending of a "being-as . . ." correlative to the "seeing-as . . ." in which the work of metaphor on the plane of language may be summed up. In other words, being itself has to be metaphorized in terms of the kinds of being-as, if we are to be able to attribute to metaphor an ontological function that does not contradict the vivid character of metaphor on the linguistic plane; that is, its power of augmenting the initial polysemy of our words. The correspondence between seeing-as and being-as satisfies this requirement. (TN 3:155)

The power of imagination to construct a narrative configuration that stands for past events *as if* they happened that way, implies an analogical ontology where "being-as is both to be and not to be" (RM 255). In other words, historical narrative represents the past through the analogous unity of "identity and otherness" (TN 3:155).

Ricoeur's recourse to this enigmatic ontology of "being-as" is not only the connecting foundation between the historical narrative and the being of the past; it also performs an even larger task of legitimizing the connection between the act of emplotment proper and human experience. Historical narrative is but one type of narrative literature that finds its place within Ricoeur's arc of narrative configuration. As in the case of Ricoeur's ontological reflections in *The Rule of Metaphor*, the development of an ontology of being-as takes place within his investigation of the work of imagination, and is secondary to, or derivative of, the literary unity of identity and difference. Questions can be raised, however, whether the requirements for an ontology of identity and difference are fully provided for from within the productive act of metaphor construction; and subsequently whether the problem of personal identity can be adequately addressed from within the concerns of identity and difference that are central to narrative discourse. These questions are significant and will require a thoughtful response at the end of my investigation of Ricoeur's concept of selfhood.

4.2.5 *Refiguration Through Receptive Reading*

The analogous relationship that historical narrative establishes with the past refigures experience by instilling a sense of debt through receptive reading. Narrative transforms the past imaginatively by making it productive in the

moment of reception, that is, "undividedly revealing and transforming" (TN 3:158). The productive work of imagination, interwoven into the reproductive historical intention, is thereby opening historical narrative to affect the process of refiguration. In this way, "all forms of writing, including historiography, take their place within an extended theory of reading. As a result, the operation of mutually encompassing one another . . . is rooted in reading . . . [and] belongs to an extended theory of reception, within which the act of reading is considered as the phenomenological moment" (TN 3:180–181). Reading is a work of application. "It is only in reading that the dynamism of configuration completes its course. And it is beyond reading, in effective action, instructed by the works handed down, that configuration of the text is transformed into refiguration" (TN 3:158–159). While reading marks the path of narrative application for the initiation of meaningful action, it also marks the "intersection" that gives the "work of fiction . . . [its] significance" (TN 3:159). The relation between the "fictive world of the text and the real world of the reader" requires "the phenomenon of reading . . . [as] the necessary mediator of refiguration" (TN 3:159). One must be able to "imagine that" (TN 3:181) the temporal world of the reader can be "seen as" the world of a narrative text in order to innovatively refigure experience. Both historical and fictional narratives refigure experience under this rule of analogy, that is, under the rule of emplotment governed by the logic of metaphor that reconnects art to life through the transformation of "seeing as" into "being as."

This task of narrative refiguration requires an act of the productive imagination that interactively constructs the meaning of the text. While the rhetorical force of the text *affects* the reader, the interaction between the world of the text and the world of the reader calls for an *active* response on the part of the reader. As Ricoeur explains, "this being-affected has the noteworthy quality of combining in an experience of a particular type passivity and activity, which allows us to consider as the 'reception' of a text the very 'action' of reading it" (TN 3:167). The effect of the rhetoric of persuasion on the reader is passive; the meaning of its world of otherness (TN 1:78) results from the productive activity of reading.

Ricoeur accounts for this duality within the act of responsive reading through dialogue with Wolfgang Iser and Roman Ingarden.[9] In particular, Ricoeur focuses on Iser's appropriation of Ingarden's concept of the incomplete nature of literary texts—incomplete with regard to "image-building concretization," and with regard to the world of the text (TN 3:167). Since the text requires a reader to activate the literary intention of the "sequence of sentences," thereby changing the fulfillment of the literary intention each time the story is read, Iser proposes that the text must have a "wandering viewpoint" (TN 3:168). This concept "expresses the twofold fact that the whole of the text can never be perceived at once and that, placing ourselves within the literary text, we travel with it as our reading progresses" (TN 3:168). The indeterminate nature of the

viewpoint reveals a dynamic relationship comparable to the act of emplotment. Reading is "a drama of discordant concordance" in which the attempt to "concretize" the "image of the work" fluctuates between the extremes of a complete "lack of determinacy [and] . . . an excess of meaning" (TN 3:169). In "this search for coherence" the reader oscillates between the "illusion" of complete familiarity and "the negation resulting from the work's surplus of meaning, its polysemanticism, which negates all the reader's attempts to adhere to the text and to its instructions. . . . The right distance from the work is the one from which the illusion is, by turns, irresistible and untenable. As for a balance between these two impulses, it is never achieved" (TN 3:169). Reading is a "vital experience" (TN 3:169) that calls for readers to concretize the image of the text through the refiguration of their own experience. Never static, every act of reading enters into a dynamic exchange between the configured structure of the text and the imaginative world of meaning, either to fall prey to its persuasive force and succumb to the illusion of familiarity, or to appropriate some portion of its polysemanticism in order to "transform" experience. The act of reading lives within this dialectic of "freedom and constraint" (TN 3:177), that is, within the space of imagination that Ricoeur continually describes as the interplay of activity and passivity.

According to Ricoeur, the act of receptive reading must also be understood in conjunction with the "public reception of a work" (TN 3:171). Although every act of reading is an individual response, the meaning of the text is always understood by individuals in community with other readers and the traditions within which they read. Each generation responds to a text through its own "logic of question and answer" (TN 3:172), hoping to find a "solution for which they themselves must find the appropriate questions, those that constitute the aesthetic and moral problem posed by a work" (TN 3:173). This is properly the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of the text, to use here Hans-Georg Gadamer's term. In this way, the relationship between an individual and a community of readers opens subjectivity to another dimension of otherness. To understand a text is to gain "knowledge" of another world of reference in conjunction with other readers.

The goal of reading in community with others is to effect a response that produces not only an intelligible configuration of the text, but more significantly, the refiguration of experience by way of intersubjective knowledge. To truly understand a text is to bring it to completion in life; therefore, "application orients the entire process teleologically" (TN 3:174). Rather than leaving the reader with an abstract "recognition of the text's otherness" (TN 3:175), Ricoeur argues that the process of narrativization must overcome this difference by constructing a sameness or identity between text and reader. Using Hans Robert Jauss's triadic distinction among "*poiesis, aisthesis, catharsis*," Ricoeur explains that the aesthetic pleasure received from the actualization of the world of the

text, if it is to return to the living world of the reader, must move beyond aesthetic experience to a cathartic effect "that is more moral than aesthetic: new evaluations, hitherto unheard of norms, are proposed by the work, confronting or shaking current customs" (TN 3:176). The cathartic effect releases the reader from the imaginative world of meaning to clarify experience by means of the moral instruction that reading has produced.

This is the key to Ricoeur's concept of refiguration. "Thanks to the clarification it brings about, catharsis sets in motion a process of transposition, one that is not only affective but cognitive as well, something like *allégorèse*, whose history can be traced back to Christian and pagan exegesis" (TN 3:176). To refigure experience is to draw an *analogy* between the work of mimesis2 and mimesis3. Reading does not merely extract moral content from the configuration of the text, but attempts to forge a conjunction of identity between text and reader. This transposition of new evaluations and norms requires that the reader actualize them in the intersubjective world of agents and patients. The reader must identify with, and take responsibility for, the cathartic effect that impacts on the moment of initiative and action, the moment that defines who we are. In other words, the narrative arc is completed with an allegorizing application of the world of the text in the immediate world of the reader. But since the narrative arc forms the necessary means for understanding experience, to understand the text is to make one's own subjectivity identical with that proposed by the text. This is not only an identity with regard to the content of the text, for the very structure of the text becomes identical with the reader through cathartic application. *Seeing oneself as* that proposed by the text becomes, by means of choice and action, *being oneself as* that proposed by the text. Refiguration transforms more than moral evaluations, the very subjectivity of the one who accepts responsibility for his or her actions configured by the world of the text becomes transformed by the possibilities the world of the text proposes.

This solution creates many problems. Ricoeur recognizes the paradoxical nature of his formulation of refiguration and points out several "dialectical tensions" that need to be taken into consideration if his proposal for narrative identity is to be made productive (TN 3:177–179).

First of all, the work of imagination allows the reader to take distance from the "narrator's vision of the world," but the reader is nevertheless constrained by the "force of conviction" or "strategy of persuasion" the author employs to communicate his or her worldview. Although this "dialectic between freedom and constraint, internal to the creative process," requires a "struggle" toward a "fusion of horizons of the expectation of the text with those of the reader," the tension itself is not resolved and both poles of the dialectic stand over and against each in "precarious peace" (TN 3:177–178).

Second, this cessation of hostility follows only if the seduction of the narrative voice is juxtaposed to the imaginative distance demanded by the reader

to avoid the "terror" of the text. Even though Ricoeur explains that "this oscillation between Same and Other is overcome only in the operation characterized by Gadamer and Jauss as the fusion of horizons . . . [which is] an analogizing relation," it is only "held to be an ideal type of reading" (TN 3:178). In fact, the tension between text and reader, or the Same and the Other, is never completely overcome; rather, the analogizing relation is an "imperfect mediation" in which the Same and the Other continually struggle not necessarily for dominance over each other, but for the creative formation of an "open-ended, incomplete" analogous relationship between them (TN 3:207).

Third, this conflict for the "issue" of the text is placed more squarely on the shoulders of the reader than on "the world the work projects." The dialectic between the world of the text and "sheer subjectivity of the act of reading" (TN 3:179) gives primary responsibility for the construction of meaning to the reader in community with others. This, according to Ricoeur, gives the reception of the work a "historical dimension" and calls for a "chain of readings" to address the question: "What historical horizon has conditioned the genesis and the effect of the work and limits, in turn, the interpretation of the present reader?" (TN 3:175). But the connection between the historical community and the individual reader is secondary and "remains under the control of the properly hermeneutical question—what does the text say to me and what do I say to the text?" (TN 3:175). Therefore, the hermeneutical issue of the text, in spite of the conflict between the Same and the Other, and freedom and constraint, is focused on the response to the text of an individual reader ruled by the productive imagination.

These paradoxical features are characteristic not only of the act of refiguration, but also of its productive solution, namely, narrative identity. Reading allows for the analogical transfer of the configured lesson of the text to the reader. Through the distance the imagination takes from experience, the human world of action is transformed under the refigurative power of reading itself. As Ricoeur explains, "reading appears by turns as an interruption in the course of action and as a new impetus to action" (TN 3:179). It is both a "stasis and an impetus" to take distance from, and to act in the actual world of human action and suffering. Reading opens an imaginative space within experience to affect experience. In this space of experience an analogous connection is made between the identity of texts and that of persons, a space within which the imagination is reconnected with life in order to initiate action.

The narrative refiguration of experience completes its trajectory with the initiation of action. Through choice and action narrative possibilities become representative of the acting subject and become part of the production of one's narrative identity. Yet, this "practical" solution of identity has problems of its own. In particular, Ricoeur's explanation of the means for the analogical transfer of identity pushes the question of agency to the forefront but does not seem

able to give an account of who this agent is. In fact, Ricoeur takes what appears to be a step backward from a decentered narrative retrieval of selfhood, and calls for the phenomenological recovery of the "I will," the "I can," and the "I do," present in the analysis of action.

Employing Reinhart Koselleck's distinction between the " 'space of experience' and 'horizon of expectation' " (TN 3:208), Ricoeur unfolds a hermeneutic of historical consciousness that interprets the immediacy of the analogous transfer as "present initiative" distended by the expectation of the future and the effect of the past. This is the space of experience in which the Other and the Same, identity and difference, are brought together under the unifying rule of the analogous. The distance of the Other is brought close to the Same through a "beginning" of action in the intersubjective world of actual experience. Ricoeur's "proposal" is "to connect the two ideas of making-present and initiative. The present is then no longer a category of seeing but one of acting and suffering. One verb expresses this better than all the substantive forms, including that of presence: 'to begin.' To begin is to give a new course to things, starting from an initiative that announces a continuation and hence opens something ongoing. To begin is to begin to continue—a work has to follow" (TN 3:230). The beginning of action initiates the transition from a world of possibility to the actual work of identity formation by an agent who must assume responsibility for what is done. In the present the "provocation to be and act differently . . . is transformed into action only through a decision whereby a person says: Here I stand!" (TN 3:249), this is who I am, and this is what I have done! I am the one who is willing to accept responsibility for this action!

The space of experience is the dynamic of decision or the moment of innovation in relation to our history of sedimented choice. Here identity is formed through the application or analogical transfer of texts to persons. But if the present space of experience is the place where personal and communal identity is formed, the place where I exchange my ego for a self discipled by the other, who is this "I" that takes a stand? Who is this "I" that wills to be constant in relation to another? For Ricoeur, in *Time and Narrative*, the "Who?" is answered through "the phases traversed by a general analysis of initiative. Through the 'I can,' initiative indicates my power; through the 'I do,' it becomes my act, through interference in intervention, it inscribes my act in the course of things, thereby making the lived present coincide with the particular instant; through the kept promise, it gives the present the force of preserving, in short, of enduring" (TN 3:233). While such description might uncover meanings of agency, what remains unclear is why Ricoeur could not develop such an analysis of action without recourse to the concept of narrative identity. But more important, what does such description really say about who this "I" is? Is this "I" myself, the self, oneself, my ego, my subjectivity, my identity, or "oneself as self-same [*soi-même*] (*ipse*)" (TN 3:246), that is "self-constancy" (TN 3:247)? Ricoeur

uses these terms interchangeably; their meaning is ambiguous. However, with the publication of *Oneself as Another*, Ricoeur exerts a tremendous effort to clarify such confusion.

4.3 Narrative Identity Between Art and Life

Ricoeur's proposal for the analogous application of the lesson of the text to the actual world of the reader is convincing in its simplicity and power to reshape the world of human action. While Ricoeur points to the formation of narrative identity as the productive resolution to the tension between art and life, he fails to provide the reader of *Time and Narrative* with a more explicit explanation of what he means by identity. Even though this concept of identity is presumed from the beginning of the first volume of *Time and Narrative*, Ricoeur offers us little more than scant reference to the term without further elaboration. Yet the clarification of this concept is crucial not only for explaining the process of the narrativization of experience, but also for understanding Ricoeur's formulation of selfhood as developed in *Oneself as Another*. Therefore, further exploration of Ricoeur's concept of narrative identity is warranted.

In an article entitled "The Text as Dynamic Identity" (1985), Ricoeur outlines the central features of the type of identity that arise from the poetic composition of a text. The problem of the identity of the text is for Ricoeur one among many other philosophical problems tied to the question of identity in general. It is Ricoeur's hope that the investigation of the "dynamic identity" of narrative texts, "in spite of the deliberate narrowness of my starting-point, . . . will release some broader vista from which to survey the act of poetic composition that Aristotle called *poiesis* and will also give us access to those features of *poiesis* which support procedures of identification compatible with its various modes of historicity" (TDI 175–176). Although specific to the narrative text Ricoeur's proposal for a point of orientation within the broader philosophical question of identity will become the paradigmatic solution for the question itself.

One of the key difficulties of the question of identity is its division into mutually exclusive alternatives of either identity as *sameness* or identity as *difference*. While neither alternative provides an adequate solution in isolation from the other, Ricoeur attempts to combine both concepts into a productive mediation that steers clear of two "pitfalls: that of taking identity in the too narrow sense of *logical* identity, or of indulging in the delights of the game of sameness and difference" (TDI 175). By setting up the problem of identity as a path to be navigated between these two extremes, Ricoeur offers a concept of identity that is a *dynamic* unity of sameness and difference.[10]

Building on his model of the linguistic creation of meaning, Ricoeur develops four "propositions" essential to his concept of dynamic identity. First

of all, this concept of identity must be able to gather diversity into a unified whole. Narrative emplotment as a "synthesis of the heterogeneous" is paradigmatic of this function. Emplotment combines "events or incidents . . . circumstances, agents, interactions, ends, means, and unintended results, [into] an intelligible whole which always allows one to ask about the 'theme' of the story" (TDI 176). Narration combines a vast diversity of "features" into a single organizing theme Ricoeur refers to as "a concordant-discordant whole." Narrating a series of events is to "mediate" between the singularity of the "serial order" of the whole story and the diversity of features necessary for the story to be told (TDI 176). Further, it is a temporal mediation between the "story's incidents which constitute the episodic side of the story," and the "configurational act of narrating" that brings about "integration, culmination, and closure" (TDI 177). The synthesis constructed by the act of emplotment sets the temporal whole or the organizing serial order of the story's theme in relation to the heterogeneous diversity of temporal events and features. Ricoeur likens the temporal mediation of emplotment to a mediation "between time as passage and time as duration" (TDI 177). The synthetic activity of emplotment constructs an enduring temporal theme or concordant whole from the diversity of events and prenarrative features that are subject to "the pure, discrete, and interminable succession" of the passage of time. Therefore, the identity of a text is linked not only with the central theme of the story, but with "what is enduring in the midst of what is passing away" (TDI 177) within the temporality of the story told.

The ability to construct a synthetic unity from heterogeneous narrative features is a form of imaginative intelligibility. This is Ricoeur's second proposition. Emplotment "grasps together" an array of various events and features and places them under the rule of narrative. It is like the Kantian concept of judging that places "some intuitive manifold under a rule. This is precisely the kind of *subsumption* that emplotment executes by putting events under the rule of a story, one and complete" (TDI 178). The imagination generates narrative rules for subsumption of intuitive diversity. Just as the creation of new meaning "connects the level of understanding and that of intuition by generating a new synthesis, both intellectual and intuitive, . . . emplotment generates a mixed intelligibility between what can be called the *thought*—the theme, or the topic of the story—and the intuitive presentation of circumstances, characters, episodes, changes of fortune, etc." (TDI 178). Narrative intelligence grasps the whole through its constitutive elements, but the intelligible rule or thought that governs the meaning of events is of a practical rather than theoretical nature. The central narrative "thought" universalizes the diversity of narrative features by providing a pedagogical model of human experience. As Ricoeur points out, poetry has the "capacity to 'teach' " (TDI 177), to organize features of human experience into a particular pattern or configuration that represents and imitates the practical world of action. The narrative function, just as the metaphorical function of the imagination,

creates new meaning but at a level that provides a *model for* action by providing a narrative *model of* action.

The universalizing or paradigmatic function of the narrative imagination is not static. Identifying a particular narrative schematism means to set it within a narrative tradition that has developed around a plot typology. This is Ricoeur's third proposition concerning the dynamic identity of the text. To identify a text is to place it within a living tradition that "relies upon the interplay between innovation and sedimentation" of narrative models (TDI 181). Such a tradition has specific narrative forms, genres, and types from which "we get a hierarchy of paradigms which are born from the work of the productive imagination at these several levels" (TDI 181). While the reception of sedimented narrative models provides rules for the initiation of new narrative works, the matrix of imaginative activity that generates narrative schemata does not live in the virtual world of narratological structure, but exists through the creation of "a singular work, *this* work" (TDI 182). The narrative imagination functions in the exchange of received rules for the creation of narrative meaning, and the innovative creation of new narrative meaning that may augment or change entirely the rules for modeling human action. Ricoeur explains that "each work is an original production, a new existent in the realm of discourse. But the reverse is no less true: innovation remains a rule-governed behavior. The work of imagination does not start from scratch. It is connected in one way or another to the paradigms of a tradition" (TDI 182). The act of narrative emplotment is a form of rule-governed deviation, where poetic creation lives in a dynamic spiral of sedimentation and innovation. To identify a text is to find its "point of equilibrium between the process of sedimentation and the process of innovation, and implies a twofold identification, that of the paradigms that it exemplifies and that of the deviance that measures its novelty" (TDI 183).

The identity of a text and the question of identity as a whole finds its formal conceptualization in this dual or dialectical concept of identity. A narrative is a productive work that combines the unifying function of emplotment with the diversity of narrative features; it provides universal teaching models *for* action by constructing narrative models *of* action; its production marks a point on a line between the sedimentation and innovation of such pedagogical paradigms. The dialectic tension central to each of these narrative propositions gives the concept of identity its dynamism. Identity does indeed provide unity, but it is a provisional unity that continually travels between sameness and difference, a practical unity that offers instruction *for* life by being instructed *by* life. Since emplotment is the activity of imaginative configuration, every effort of telling, writing, or reading a story takes a different position on the line between sedimentation and innovation. In this sense, every act of emplotment is different, yet every act still remains a synthetic union of the heterogeneous, a model for action, and an instantiation on the continuum between received rules and new

narrative structures. The dialectical tension that this concept of identity exhibits makes the process of identification a truly dynamic undertaking.

Ricoeur combines these three features of identity with regard to texts into a larger dialectic that allows for the transference of this dynamic concept of identity to the reader. Ricoeur explains that it is only within the dynamic of meaning and existence that identity comes to life. This is the fourth and final proposition: "as a dynamic identity, it emerges at the intersection between the world of the text and the world of the reader. It is in the act of reading that the capacity of the plot to transfigure experience is actualized" (TDI 183). As we have seen in the chapter dealing with Ricoeur's hermeneutical phenomenology (see 1.4), the productive imagination spirals forward, moving between the poles of distanciation and belonging. By following the ascending movement created by linguistic works, a world of possibility is opened in front of consciousness which can become a new mode of belonging. The world proposed by the text becomes the critical counterpart of the immediate world to which the reader belongs. The interpretive relationship between text and reader is the "intersection" at which the possibility of the world of the text is actualized in its application to life. It is the point at which the "inside world" of the text and the "outside world" of the reader are intertwined to such an extent that the interpretation of the dynamic identity of the text becomes the interpretation and "*disclosure*" of a possibility to be actualized by the reader (TDI 183). The narrative world with its unifying plot and diversity of characters and events is transferred through reading to the reader, who also inhabits a world or "*horizon* of the circumstances and the interactions which constitute the proximate web of relationships for each agent" (TDI 183).

Ricoeur's four propositions concerning the dynamic identity of the text give articulate shape to the matrix of activity that defines the process of refiguration. The interactive dynamic of text and reader is crucial for the formation of identity. Narration or emplotment is the activity of giving shape to the world of meaning, but it also implies a passive reception of the sedimentation of tradition. This is equally true for the identity of the reader, who configures the meaning of the text by being configured by the text. Ricoeur explains that "to follow a story is to *enact* or *re-enact* it by reading. If, therefore, emplotment may be described as an act of judgment at the level of the productive imagination, this is so to the extent that emplotment is the joint work of the text and its reader, in the same way that Aristotle called sensation the common work of the 'sensed' and the 'sensing' " (TDI 184). To form one's own identity the agent must synthesize the heterogeneous, the different, the other. The agent must gather together into a unified whole the diversity of his or her experience and must be able to universalize his or her action as a living model for others to read. For Ricoeur, the formation of our identity requires the subsumption of difference under the unifying rule of our choice, initiative, and action; but does

such voluntary unification place diversity and difference under the rule of the same? Does the formation of personal identity require the reduction of difference to the singularity of the voluntary "I will"? Is Ricoeur reaffirming, albeit in narrative form, that "the will is the one which brings order to many of the involuntary" (FN 5)?

The significance of this problem should not be underestimated. At stake is Ricoeur's assertion that narrative not only can refigure experience but that it has the capacity to refigure and transform the identity of the reader, that is, the claim that art can and should transform life. If, however, Ricoeur's model of refigurative transformation simply repeats the phenomenological insight (*Wesensschau*) of voluntary singularity (the "I will") over and against involuntary otherness, then Ricoeur's ontological speculations regarding selfhood, and the process of narrative discipleship, may be simply nothing more than a sophisticated version of what has already been worked out in *Freedom and Nature*. So how does Ricoeur's understanding of narrative refiguration advance his understanding of selfhood without, on the one hand, simply recovering a preexistent model of the voluntary *cogito* within the semantic structure of narrative discourse, and on the other hand, not advocate a radical discontinuity between the prenarrative phenomenological features of consciousness and the reader's refigured identity?

Although Ricoeur's narrative arc is precisely intended to circumvent such mutually exclusive alternatives of either the artistic determination of life or the reduction of art to mere representation of some form of original experience, he nevertheless is deeply concerned that the "very thorny problem to reconnect literature to life by means of reading" (OA 159) will expose a fissure that may exist between them.[11] Hence, Ricoeur's attempt to "attack" and overcome "the paradox we are considering here: stories are recounted, life is lived," must also address the question of "an unbridgeable gap [that] seems to separate fiction and life" (LQN 25). This problem not only animates the production of narrative identity, but has initiated sharp debate among some of Ricoeur's critics as well.[12] This is particularly true of David Carr,[13] who takes Ricoeur to task for adopting a position that comes close to the "standard view," which assumes that the narrative "form is 'imposed upon' reality . . . [and that] it distorts life. At best it constitutes an escape, a consolation, at worst an opiate, either as self-delusion or . . . imposed from without by some authoritative narrative voice in the interest of manipulation and power. In either case it is an act of violence, a betrayal, an imposition on reality or life and on ourselves"[14] Although Carr hesitates to offer a definitive judgment, stating that "I am not sure where the author [Ricoeur] stands on this issue," he nevertheless shows little appreciation for Ricoeur's formulation of the relationship between narrative and life.

Carr argues that Ricoeur has in fact reversed the proper order and should have placed the priority on the phenomenology of temporality, which should provide the dynamic structure for the narrativization of experience. According to Carr, narratives should conform to the descriptive features of temporality and not the reverse. Carr argues that art should be the *reproduction* and discovery of experience "mirroring the sort of activity of which life consists"(OPR 172), not its creative *production*. Critiquing Ricoeur's dialectic of narrative concord and temporal discord Carr writes: "If lived temporality is essentially (if not completely) discordant, and if art—narration in particular—brings concord, then art cannot be the simple imitation of life, in the sense of mirroring or representing it. Narrative mimesis for Ricoeur is not reproduction but production, invention. It may borrow from life but it transforms it" (OPR 170). Fearing that such production implies that temporal experience lacks any structure of its own, and therefore that Ricoeur needs to "describe a world *as if* it were what apparently . . . it in fact is not" (OPR 171), Carr asks if Ricoeur does not end up equating the difference between art and life with "the difference between the chaotic and the formed, the confused and the orderly." If this is true, then it "would seem to amount to the assertion that life cannot be lived without literature" (OPR 173).

To justify such a critique of Ricoeur's position Carr would have to demonstrate that the temporal structure of existence is in fact within the realm of description apart from narration, and this Ricoeur believes to be impossible.[15] Through careful examination of the best examples of the phenomenology of time Ricoeur demonstrates how they create some of the very problems that it seeks to resolve (TN 3:12–96). According to Ricoeur, without the mediation of narrated time and the production of narrative identity, temporal experience remains without a voice. "A life is no more than a biological phenomenon as long as it has not been interpreted" (LQN 27–28). To predicate, as Carr does, personal or communal identity on a pure phenomenology or ontology of temporality sets aside the necessity of the mimetic relationship between narrative art and life, which calls for choice and action that can transform the "space of experience," and not simply duplicate it.

Gary Madison, however, argues the contrary. Quoting Ricoeur, he explains that existence "cannot be separated from the account we can give of ourselves. It is in telling our own stories that we give ourselves an identity. We recognize ourselves in the stories we tell about ourselves. It makes little difference whether these stories are true or false, fiction as well as verifiable history provides us with an identity" (HP 95). Madison goes on to explain that "when we seek to understand human events, which is to say, action, to *account* for them, the giving of an account invariably assumes the form of telling a story. To understand an experience or an event is to make sense of it in the form of a story. . . . Text and action are quite simply inseparable" (HP 97–98). Although Madison appears to be simply restating Ricoeur's understanding of the relationship between narrative and life, he takes a position which, according to Carr's "standard model," would disconnect narrative even more from life.

Contrary to Carr's critique of the inadequacy of Ricoeur's concept of narrative invention, Madison faults Ricoeur for the narrative or metaphoric "discovery" of life or so-called reality. "Metaphorical discourse is indeed creative and inventive, and yet, this *creation* is a *discovery*. Ricoeur seems to be saying that there are in some sense or other, certain objective 'essences' which language articulates—although it may only be able to do so in certain cases when it is used creatively, innovatively" (HP 82–83). This reference to "objective essences," or one could also say to extralinguistic reality, Madison finds troubling. For Madison language does not refer to a "reality" outside language; rather "the world referred to by language is what it is only because of the way it is linguistically referred to. The world, in short, is a function of language. . . . Strictly speaking, there would no longer be any extralinguistic reality to which language could be said to refer; reality would be constituted differently in accordance with the different ways we use to speak about it, and, in the final analysis, there would be as many 'realities' as there are languages" (HP 83–84). Even though Madison admits that Ricoeur would "express reservation" about such *inter*linguistic reference to "reality," metaphorical invention is "the *only* means for talking about them [things] meaningfully and truthfully and in a direct and straightforward fashion" (HP 85). Reality is an invention of language and not its discovery. "Reality is nothing other than a metaphor which is taken literally and is *believed* in" (HP 85). For Madison the only relationship of consequence is the narrative refiguration of experience. It matters little that narratives mirror life; what matters more is that life is continually transformed by the power of metaphor and narrative. "[T]he real 'meaning' of a metaphor lies not in what it 'says' but in what it 'shows' . . . what it does, the perlocutionary effect it has on us. . . . I am *not* saying that metaphors have no meaning. I am saying that their meaning *is* their power to effect a change of attitudes, direction, and, ultimately, understanding of the part of the listener or reader" (HP 150). Since "reality" is the product of a dead metaphor that had a profound perlocutionary effect on the part of a "believer," Carr's complaint that the "standard view" imposes narrative on life makes little sense to Madison outside some sort of rational essentialism.

Both Carr and Madison raise important issues with regard to Ricoeur's understanding of the relationship between art and life; but these alternatives of "sheer change and absolute identity" (LQN 33) seem to undo their own critical positions and point to a solution that Ricoeur's unique formulation of the narrative arc has already taken into consideration. In wishing to move beyond Ricoeur's dialectic of creation and discovery of extralinguistic reality, Madison appears to be supporting a view of language that is only creative, cut off from any underlying temporal structure. Yet Madison makes a connection between art and life much in the same way as Ricoeur does between metaphor/narrative and the prenarrative features of temporal experience. Madison writes that "reality in the ordinary sense, the so-called extralinguistic referent of language, is thoroughly relative to language itself and is its 'product,' but reality in the deeper sense (what we might call 'being') is not determinate (has no essence) and is not the product of language but is its creative source. And this source is to be located in the lived experience which all humans share in, in one form or another" (HP 86–87). Although Madison qualifies this deeper meaning of "being" by explaining that "as its creative source, it can be said to be what is *analogically* common to all the creative or metaphorical, i.e., 'analogical,' uses of language" (HP 87), he nevertheless concludes that creative language grows out of experience before it forms experience. Isn't this precisely Ricoeur's point, that narrative configuration is preceded by prenarrative features that provide the resources for narrative creation? And isn't the narrative and metaphorical creation of reality also a discovery of the source that gives it life?

David Carr's rejection of the narrative refiguration of experience suggests that narrative meaning can only be a discovery of a more fundamental temporal experience. Yet even a reproductive view of narrative cannot dismiss its power to transform experience through action. If experience can be told, surely the purpose of such a story is not just to catalogue experience, but to inform readers of the meaning of experience and add something to the reader's self-understanding. Wouldn't this type of expanded self-understanding be a transformation of experience, a call to be and act in a manner that is different or other than the way one had previously acted? In other words, doesn't Carr, due to his preoccupation with the fear of fictional violence, miss Ricoeur's point about the narrative function of refiguration?

Brushing aside Carr's accusation that he is an advocate of the "standard view," not to mention his ridiculous claim that "perhaps the proponents of the standard view just read too many stories and lead very dull or cluttered lives" (OPR 166), Ricoeur argues that the alternative of either the narrative "distortion of life, or its representation" (OPR 180) is too restrictive. Ricoeur goes on to explain that "the concept that I proposed of a refiguration which would be at once 'revelatory' and 'transformative' seems to me to introduce a concept of representation which does not imply a mirror relation . . . [but] escapes the dilemma according to which either history falsifies life, does it violence, or reflects it. I wonder if a standard model exists under which one may group every author mentioned and which constrains each to a yes or no answer" (OPR 180). Narrative representation is for Ricoeur always a productive reproduction, a creative innovation in connection with a discovered sedimentation, a dynamic process in which he "believes that it is possible to avoid the alternative proposed by David [Carr] and instead embrace both horns of the dilemma: a *life* in search of its own *history*" (OPR 181).

This is the central point of *Time and Narrative*: individuals and communities are in search of their narrative identity. Life looks for narratives that will

give a meaningful configuration to events both carried out and suffered. Narrative identity is both an innovation that adds something new to the "space of experience" and a discovery of our inchoate story. It gives a configuration to life in order that it can become a configuration for life, that is, a prescriptive innovation that transforms experience. Discovery and innovation are not conflicting alternatives that cancel each other out; rather, they form the core dynamic of Ricoeur's proposal for identity and selfhood.

> Our life, when then embraced in a single glance, appears to us as the field of a constructive activity, borrowed from narrative understanding, by which we attempt to discover and not simply to impose from the outside the *narrative identity which constitutes us.* I am stressing the expression "narrative identity" for what we call subjectivity is neither an incoherent series of events nor an immutable substantiality, impervious to evolution. This is precisely the sort of identity which narrative composition alone can create through its dynamism. (LQN 32)

For Ricoeur this *discovery* of one's narrative identity mitigates the violence of a literary artifice. And the construction of one's narrative identity plays with possibilities for subjectivity through the "*narrative voices* which constitute the symphony of great works such as epics, tragedies, dramas and novels" (LQN 32). One's narrative identity is a composition of a musical score fashioned from the cacophony and lack of determinacy of our temporal experience. It is both a disconnection and reflection of life that can dismiss the opposing accusations of sheer change or absolute sameness by proposing a dynamic concept of identity that is a unity of sameness and difference.

Therefore, in response to the question concerning the relation between narrative art and life, Ricoeur writes that

> an unbridgeable difference does remain, but this difference is partially abolished by our power of applying to ourselves the plots that we have received from our culture and of trying on the different roles assumed by the favorite characters of the stories most dear to us. It is therefore by means of the imaginative variations of our own ego that we attempt to obtain a narrative understanding of ourselves, the only kind that escapes the apparent choice between sheer change and absolute identity. Between the two lies narrative identity. (LQN 33)

Rather than enclosing oneself within the text, or limiting the text to reflect a phenomenological description of temporality, Ricoeur's narrative arc is both the discovery and innovation of identity; it is both life as art and art as life.

As the bridge between art and life, Ricoeur's formulation of narrative identity poses, however, a significant problem. Is Ricoeur suggesting that narrative identity straddles a difference between two different selves: a narrative self and an ontological self? Is there for Ricoeur a self that is objectively identified and structured through narrative discourse, and a deeper, more mysterious self correlative with such objectifications? If so, is Ricoeur redeploying a variation of Husserl's phenomenological correlation between some sort of transcendental subjectivity and the objectification of the acts of consciousness? Is Ricoeur's proposal for narrative identity ultimately guilty of reasserting the presence of a voluntary *cogito* over and against the polysemic flux of symbol, myth, and discourse? And does self-identification require a heroic effort of consent to all that is other, different, and involuntary? While a claim of radical Husserlian dualism is perhaps too strong, given Ricoeur's refutation of transcendental idealism, it nevertheless points to a significant problem that requires further careful reflection.