

NARRATION AND TEMPORALITY. TOWARDS AN ETHICS OF MEMORY*

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Historians in search of proofs, that's what we are, but also historians whose search always stumbles with an "already there" of our own and of the other, that resists to our elucidation.

P. Aulagnier, "El aprendiz...", 1992

When Ricœur brings up that «time becomes human time to the extent that it is articulated in a narrative way» (1983, p. 17), he's pointing out that the narrative intrigues constitute the «privileged means by which we reconfigure our temporary experience, confused, shapeless and to the limit, mute» (*ivi*, p. 13). In fact, it can't be arrived to be oneself but through the mediation of our own stories, by the way they are assumed and by the way they take shape, either moderating themselves, or becoming inextricable (Schapp).

The comprehension everyone has of himself is narrative because it can't be taken out of time. The tale transforms human events not necessarily connected among themselves in a structure of the plot and it will be the configuring imagination that will give them sense. In this way, dissimilar components such as searched circumstances, found, not wished, agents and patients, and accidental meetings, are joint. That is

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why man does true imaginative anticipations thinking of what might happen to him, as looking for the tension of awaiting to loosen and that the tension of the future disperses. «We learn to see intuitively and in advance the end at the beginning and the beginning at the end» (Peña Vial, p. 22). At first sight, every thing happens as if the narrative intrigue that makes the synthesis of the heterogeneous and the clashing discordance (Ricœur, 1983, p. 55) carried to a definitive victory over the threat of non-sense contained in those negative determinations.

Even though, in any plot there appear different levels, there exist the ones that take part directly in its development and others that remain stable but that also contribute to determine the sense of the story. It's about a game about the implicit and the explicit, but also about a story that implies returns and anticipations (Schapp). Therefore, it is impossible to imagine a totally transparent communication. As Schleiermacher has shown, *misunderstandings* are apart of the works of comprehension. The “being mixed in stories” (*Verstrickung*) can for that reason diffract in the own truth of doubt, suppositions, hopes, of apprehensions, beliefs, etc..

Even more in every story, it is impossible to find a goal objectively determined and neither a definitive closing nor an absolute beginning, it is neither subject to be subdivided in merely objective temporary sequences. In fact, we only describe the multiple ways in which stories may rise or re-rise, some of them announcing themselves from a long time, others on the contrary, making a sudden appearance. So, to understand a story, to take part in one way or another in it, means to be open oneself to its multiple horizons.

In this sense, for Schapp, man primarily can't be defined as *zōos lōgon échon* proper of the metaphysic tradition, but as a «“being mixed up in stories”, that suffers his own story before assuming and acting it».

And although he never gets to be a great director who has everything under control, he can always count on the possibility of accepting or refusing the stories¹, because these ones, no matter how limited they could be may refrain him from acting.

In spite of that, an experience not always gets to be object of a tale, enabling the triumph of *concordance over discordance*, since a traumatic experience sometimes enables the subject to be the owner of his own personal story. There is a strong temptation to deny that it had taken place; or it is lived as a story that happened to someone else but him.

¹ According to Greich (2001), Schaap's conception wouldn't be a narrative version of the antique *Ananke*. The notion of “empêtement” gets closer to being left out (*Geworfenheit*) by Heidegger, that has as counterpart a project (*Entwurf*).

Psychotherapeutic clinic is rich in examples of this type. In this sense, Schapp obliges us to incline over those excessively traumatizing stories that the notion of “discordant concordance” of which Ricœur speaks about sometimes may hide. The theory of the tale is confronted with the difficult problem of articulation of the hint, of destiny and of historicity that corresponds to what Dilthey would have called “cohesion of life”, *Zusammenhang des Lebens*.

The task of the “I” will consist in transforming those fragmentary documents into a historic construction that will give the author and his interlocutors the feeling of a temporal continuance.

Nevertheless, a cohesion can definitely never be understood nor conquered. Narrative identity is by definition a fragile identity, made of ecstasies and endings (Ricœur, 1985, p. 358).

A historian who looks for proofs

When Piera Aulagnier defines mankind as a “apprenti-historien”, as a historian who looks for proofs, she is not describing a cognitive activity but a way of being that characterizes human existence. Perpetually confronted to his destiny, man «a story without words that no speech will be able to modify» repeats (Aulagnier, p. 10); it will be “the work of historization” that transforms the ungraspable of physical time in a “human time”, the one that substitutes «the definitely lost time in a speech that speaks to him» (*ivi*, p. 196).

Indeed, narrative identity is also that place where the own lack of identity is sometimes experimented to an extreme point. In those “dark nights” of the soul, in those moments of extreme spoil, «the question “who am I” doesn’t send back to the nullity but to the nudity itself of the question» (Ricœur, 1990, p. 197)².

In analyzing certain stories, someone can understand that «every experience constitutes a synonym of a quite too violent traumatism» so as to be able to tell it to himself, and «with much more refractory reason to the “synthesis of heterogeneous”, that carries out the narrative intrigue» (Greich, 2001, p. 196).

It can no longer be affirmed that there is an unlimited freedom to narrate and constitute new realities. If everything that happened could be dissolved and replaced by new and new versions of himself, even if

² «[...] en ces moments de dépouillement extrêmes, la réponse nulle à la question qui suis je renvoie, non point à la nullité mais à la nudité de la question elle-même».

they were more coherent and more liberating and benefic for the analyzed (Figueiredo, 1999), the past would lack of affectivity.

Very often, “the sense” of the own personal identity resides in the cracks, in that getting out of a wider social unity, in the small techniques by which pressure is resisted, leaning on *solidity* and *trust* of our world.

But in other cases, “incoherence” refers to the retroactive elaboration of the traumatic effects of some “past” events that can only be updated later if there are certain given conditions: this is what Freud denominates³ *Nachträglichkeit*, retroactivity.

These “inconsistencies” reveal something very valuable: it shows the presence/absence of what it is “out of time”: *Zeitlos*.

In this sense, Freud considers as something “untimely”⁴ those devastating effects that open incurable wounds and that destroy the self-regenerative resources of the psychism.

They are like “saturated Phenomena” (J.L. Marion), they are the traumas “non conclusive events” (Figueiredo), which prevent a rebuilding of the meaning and that of history because of the psychic laceration. That is why they end up being a kind of “un-done”, of “un-happened”, and they probable are more radically “out of time”⁵.

How to pick up and bring together those pieces of “past experience” that memory cannot recover, as they are unacceptable, ignominious to the point of experiencing that actually they did not take place? How is it possible to accept and conceive that this experience can only be lived now under a new condition for the first time? I am thinking aloud about those unfounded acts of violence such as torture and terrorism⁶.

The *Nachträglichkeit*, retroactivity, allows us to introduce ourselves in that process wherein we are not responsible for traumatic effects apparently at distance. It is not a retarded action (*deferred action*, the *après coup*, the *a posteriori*), it is the *work of memory*, of that wounded memory (*blessé*), as stated by Ricœur (2000)⁷? Honestly, has true re-

³ It was J. Lacan who called the attention onto the relevance of this word.

⁴ The untimely of the unconsciousness in Freud, also refers to the indestructible insistence of impulsive emergencies, to the quasi indestructible resistance of outlined representations, to the clinic incidences of the unconscious.

⁵ And outside any psychic place, as the Botella suggest (Bollas and Botella).

⁶ It happens, similarly, in cases of fatal accidents, with unpredictable death and/or without sense of a daughter/son, with those “scars of poverty”, with all those “involuntary deaths” as Adela Cortina calls them.

⁷ It is not a question of removing “resistances of the repressive” (*Verdrängwiderstände*), main obstacle towards the interpretations task on the traumatic memories. Here under the “repulsion towards repetition” there exists a tendency of passing the act (*Agieren*), that Freud named as “replacement of

elaboration been accomplished? Or is it that Shadow that permanently goes with the person without ever letting him become part of it? Isn't it the presence of Emptiness, presence of the non-able to be narrated?

Is it possible then a process of constitution and reconstitution of the "sense" of that experience? Is it possible that "the out of time" in all its shapes, could be recognised and lived as integrating part of the stream of life experience?

These traces of dearness, that belong, originally, to the experiences of persistence in life, and that keep traces of an emptiness and rejection, remain in the lives of the surviving ones.

If – as Ricœur states – perpetuating of subjectivity is proved in the fulfilled promise or mentioned at promising, in that faithfulness to itself where the "Self"⁸ is so well established that goes beyond every possible change⁹, we are led once again to ask ourselves about human temporality. Precisely, the story of a unique human being is never monotonous neither monolithic of the *idem* but an unpredictable history of an *ipse* (Cavarero, p. 62).

Under these critical circumstances, there always exists the possibility of witnessing. As Agamben shows in "What is left of Auschwitz", the truth of what happened is quite difficult to tell and it is hard to believe. There it also resides the non-human of the horror, that turns into "human" when is put into words, with all the difficulties that it takes, there it resides the courage of being responsible of what is left of the human after the experience of non-human of which no one is excepted.

The surviving ones never know with certainty why they survived and even they look for an answer in a torturing way, they never have it fully; living now implies that personal work with blame of that who lived while others, most of them, died. It feels like trespassing an existence that does not belong at all, an existence that might be living in another one¹⁰.

«The whole history of suffering claims revenge and calls for a narration», says Ricœur (1983). He then mentions the imaginary reconstruction of the experience never told of so many lives, individual and collective, that never reached the *narrated matter* level, and which cannot be understood if they are left out of the practical dramatic frame

memories", the patient reproduces the forgotten fact under the shape of an action. Remembrance, repetition and pre-elaboration constitute the behavior for a reconciliation (*Versöhnung*) of the sick with the repressive.

⁸ It is the identity of the *ipse* that does not reduce itself to the mere permanency in time.

⁹ It is its the identity of the *idem*.

¹⁰ Blame can also be experimented by some who never lived these experiences of torture or terrorism, as it is stated by K. Jaspers in "The Question of German guilt".

that has embedded their episodes. Those who “can” tell are the “winners”. Those who “cannot” tell are the “losers”, thus their lives claim for a plot to make them be a “story”, a narration to arrange in a sequence the episodes of their misfortune.

Many times, in clinical practice we face with what cannot be told or talked about¹¹.

If sole word should be pronounced at the end of this descent provoked by horror, it is the presence of the unjustifiable, non assumed, of the non analyzed because the analyst faces here with mutilations of psycho capital and potential that are out of his reach to “repair” and that has no means to reveal to the analyzed. We are no able to produce simple “re-fillings” to the opposite it is time to accept that difficult task of enabling those subjects to re-invest support, objects, projects capable of opposing to the continuing action of Thanatos, responsible for those definitive mutilations. As «“The work of the affliction” as regards reconciliation with the loss itself, remains for ever as an unfinished task [that is why] this patience before itself it contains the hints of a virtue» (Ricoeur, 2000, p. 107).

Ricoeur recognizes that unity of the intrigue of the tale crashes without stop with all those contingent happenings that put into questioning the expectations created by the passing of a prior life. There is a desolating contingency of the human actions, due to the irreversibility and irrevocability of the past actions of which there is no way of knowing how and when they came about, as well as the unpredictability of future actions (Arendt, 1997, p. 106).

Conventional narratives, those beautiful and soothing stories in which the meaning has been carefully knitted, cannot explain human temporality. In fact, the “untimely” also makes an inevitable irruption, since it is precisely from these irruptions and in these irruptions that time is made temporary. It always begins again, but never from the beginning, or rather without definitely knowing where the beginning is, where the middle and the end of the narratives are. Every “moment” will be always sending back to and being attracted by other “moments” in the constitution of broken stories and over-determined by a “before” and by an “after”.

With this it is not left aside the constructive function of the tale, it is expected to establish the conditions and means needed so that the “un-

¹¹ It also is the impossibility to warrant some *correspondence* between the representation and the represented; it is the difficulty to theorise an “object” not necessarily possible to objective; elusive and not objectivated as the “unconscious”, it is the possible correlation between “interpretations” and “reconstruction” correlation among “interpretations” or the factual story.

timely” might be in a way accepted, in some cases configured, and in other cases be left free to an unpredictable but enriching activity¹².

To avoid an unbearable succession of events, we tell a story and search for meaning, not to forgive and forget, but to obtain the “privilege to judge”, states Hanna Arendt (1992, p. 91).

If forgetfulness leads to the breakage of tradition (Arendt, 1992, p. 215), truth on the other hand, is not «a discovery that destroys the secret, but the revealing that does justice» (Arendt, 1999, p. 163) and that allows to be transmitted to future generations.

Although the “totalitarian domain” always tries to form «bags of forgetfulness [wherein] all the facts, good and bad ones», would vanish, is set to fail because «there are too many people in the world so as to let forgetfulness be. There will always be a surviving man to tell the story» (Arendt, 1999, p. 352), the truth will always find the way to flourish through the remaining that power leaves. In this sense, it was needed to wait until the killers broke silence, so that the relatives and friends could initiate a legitimate process of grief of their own deceased alongside the Río de la Plata river, place of burying of those.

Memory, that fight against forgetfulness, lets rights to be alive and in force those that once were denied to the victims. «The duty of memory, is the duty of doing justice, for the memory of that one self (*soi*)» (Ricoeur, 2000, p. 108)¹³, and forgetfulness implies the punishment to injustice.

Precisely, the suffering of people cannot fall into forgetfulness because it is narration that lets overcome suffering. Only in this trend «it is possible to find a fixed point of departure, so that the traveler could direct himself, find out sense, in both the meanings of the word, to know where he comes from, where to stop, where he is heading». Now, it is time to make oneself responsible for (Mardones & Reyes Mate, p. 7):

The ethics of the XXI century should assume as from now, following the example of the angel in the story of Paul Klee: with the eyes set on the victims of time.

In this sense, these stories should go from individual life to the ethical and cultural patrimony of people. It will be memory, that “anamnetic justice” (Reyes Mate), that will bring back the view of the *oppressed*,

¹² This valorization of the creative potential – *diffusive* – of the unconsciousness is clearly seen in the winnicottian tradition and was specially developed by Ch. Bollas (1992, 1995).

¹³ «Le devoir de la mémoire est le devoir de rendre justice, par le souvenir, à un autre que soi».

as an open process of salvation of forgotten stories and that will affirm from the beginning, the responsibility as first ethical step that makes me load his burden. But to be reconciled with that history¹⁴, for an Ethics of history to be possible, we must recognize that «the *executioners* as well as the *victims* concern us, as regards representation of our common *human condition*» (Muguerza).

Everything is kept in memory, dream of life and of history

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¹⁴ Assuming what Ricoeur states in "La mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli", that points out that «this disproportion between the depth of lack and the height of forgiveness shall be our grief until the end of this essay», topic to be treated in a further study.

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