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# Narrative Time

## Paul Ricoeur

My aim in this paper is to investigate the topic of narrative time. My approach to the problem of the “illusion of sequence” is derived from two complementary claims. If by sequence we mean chronological time, and if by illusion of sequence we mean the illusion of chronology, we may be correct; but such a critique of chronology does not dispose of the question of time. On the contrary, such a critique opens the way for a more authentic reflection on narrative time. The complementary claim is that there is another response to the illusion of sequence than the recourse to a-chronological models, such as nomological laws in history or paradigmatic codes in literary criticism. This other response consists in elucidating a deeper experience of time, one that escapes the dichotomy between the chronology of sequence and the a-chronology of models.

### *1. Presuppositions*

My first working hypothesis is that narrativity and temporality are closely related—as closely as, in Wittgenstein’s terms, a language game and a form of life. Indeed, I take temporality to be that structure of existence that reaches language in narrativity and narrativity to be the language structure that has temporality as its ultimate referent. Their relationship is therefore reciprocal.

This structural reciprocity of temporality and narrativity is usually overlooked because, on the one hand, the epistemology of history and the literary criticism of fictional narratives take for granted that every

narrative takes place within an uncriticized temporal framework, within a time that corresponds to the ordinary representation of time as a linear succession of instants. Philosophers writing on time, too, usually overlook the contribution of narrative to a critique of the concept of time. They either look to cosmology and physics to supply the meaning of time or they try to specify the inner experience of time without any reference to narrative activity. Narrative function and the human experience of time thus remain strangers. In order to show the reciprocity between narrativity and temporality, I shall conduct this study as an analysis with two foci: for each feature of narrative brought out by reflection on either history or fictional narrative, I shall attempt to find a corresponding feature of temporality brought out by an existential analysis of time.

A second working hypothesis intervenes here: starting from the pole of temporality, there are different degrees of temporal organization. While this idea stems from division II of Heidegger's *Being and Time*,<sup>1</sup> one will not find here a blind submission to Heidegger's analyses. Quite the contrary; on the essential points, important and even fundamental corrections in the Heideggerian conception of time will result from applying a Heideggerian framework to the question of narrativity, along with some recourse to other great philosophers of temporality and historicity, from Aristotle and Augustine to Gadamer. From the outset, however, I agree with Heidegger that the ordinary representation of time as a linear series of "nows" hides the true constitution of time, which, if we follow the inverse order of that presented in *Being and Time*, is divided into at least three levels.

At the level closest to that of the ordinary representation of time, the first temporal structure is that of time as that "in" which events take place. It is precisely this temporal structure that is leveled off by the ordinary representation of time. An analysis of narrative will help to show in what way this "within-time-ness" already differs from linear time, even though it tends toward linearity due to its datable, public, and measurable nature and as a result of its dependence on points of reference in the world.

1. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York, 1962); all further references to this work will be included in the text.

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At a deeper level, time is more properly "historicality." This term does not coincide with the within-time-ness of which I have just spoken, nor with "temporality" as such, which refers to the deepest level. Let us restrict ourselves here to characterizing historicality in terms of the emphasis placed on the weight of the past and, even more, in terms of the power of recovering the "extension" between birth and death in the work of "repetition."<sup>4</sup> This final trait is so decisive that, according to Heidegger, it alone permits objective history to be grounded in historicality. Finally, Heidegger invites us to move beyond historicality itself to the point at which temporality springs forth in the plural unity of future, past, and present. It is here that the analysis of time is rooted in that of "care," particularly as care reflecting on itself as mortal.

Joining this second working hypothesis to the first, I shall try to check the successive stages of the analysis of temporality itself against an analysis of narrativity, which is itself composed of several levels.

My third working hypothesis concerns the role of narrativity. The narrative structure that I have chosen as the most relevant for an investigation of the temporal implications of narrativity is that of the "plot." By plot I mean the intelligible whole that governs a succession of events in any story. This provisory definition immediately shows the plot's connecting function between an event or events and the story. A story is *made out of* events to the extent that plot *makes* events *into* a story. The plot, therefore, places us at the crossing point of temporality and narrativity: to be historical, an event must be more than a singular occurrence, a unique happening. It receives its definition from its contribution to the development of a plot. Still, the temporal implications of the plot, on which my whole paper focuses, are precisely those overlooked by anti-narrativist writers in the field of historiography and by structuralists in the field of literary criticism. In both fields, the emphasis on nomological models and paradigmatic codes results in a trend that reduces the narrative component to the anecdotic surface of the story. Thus both the theory of history and the theory of fictional narratives seem to take it for granted that whenever there is time, it is always a time laid out chronologically, a linear time, defined by a succession of instants.

My suspicion is that both anti-narrativist epistemologists and structuralist literary critics have overlooked the temporal complexity of the narrative matrix constituted by the plot. Because most historians have a poor concept of "event"—and even of "narrative"—they consider history to be an explanatory endeavor that has severed its ties with storytelling. And the emphasis on the surface grammar in literary narration leads literary critics to what seems to me to be a false dichotomy: either remaining caught in the labyrinthine chronology of the told story or moving radically to an a-chronological model. This dismissal of narrative as such implies a similar lack of concern in both camps for the properly *temporal* aspects of narrative and therefore for the contribution that the

theory of narrative could offer to a phenomenology of time experience. To put it bluntly, this contribution has been almost null because *time* has disappeared from the horizon of the theories of history and of narrative. Theoreticians of these two broad fields seem even to be moved by a strange resentment toward time, the kind of resentment that Nietzsche expressed in his *Zarathustra*.

## 2. What Occurs Happens “in” Time

I will now fashion together a theory of narrative and a theory of time and, by moving back and forth between them, attempt to correlate the stages of the analysis of narrative with the different depths in the analysis of time. If, in this effort at comparison, the analysis of time most often performs the role of guide, the analysis of narrative, in its turn, serves as a critical and decisive corrective to it.

At the first level of our inquiry, the relation to time expressed by the preposition “in”—to happen “in” time—serves as our guide. What is at stake in an existential analysis—such as Heidegger’s—is the possibility of discerning those characteristics by which within-time-ness differs from the ordinary representation of time, even though it is easily leveled off into this representation. I shall compare this existential analysis of time with the analysis of what may seem most superficial in narrativity, that is, the *development* of a plot and its correlate, the ability to follow a story.

First, a brief review of the main features of the Heideggerian analysis of within-time-ness: this level is defined by one of the basic characteristics of care—our thrownness among things—which makes the description of our temporality dependent on the description of the things of our concern. Heidegger calls these things of our concern *das Vorhandene* (“subsisting things which our concern counts on”) and *das Zuhandene* (“utensils offered to our manipulation”). Heidegger calls this trait of concern “preoccupation” or “circumspection.” As we shall see later, concern has other traits that are more deeply hidden, and because of these hidden, deep traits, it has fundamental temporal modes. But however inauthentic our relationship to things, to ourselves, and to time may be, preoccupation, the everyday mode of concern, nevertheless already includes characteristics that take it out of the external domain of the objects of our concern, referring it instead to our concern in its existential constitution. It is remarkable that in order to point out these properly existential characteristics, Heidegger readily turns to what we say and do with regard to time. This method is, not surprisingly, very close to that found in ordinary language philosophy: the plane on which we are placing ourselves in this initial phase of investigation is precisely the one on which ordinary language truly is what J. L. Austin and others have said it is, namely, a treasure-house of expressions appropriate to

what is specifically human in experience. It is therefore language, with its storehouse of meanings, that keeps the description of concern, in the modality of preoccupation or circumspection, from slipping back into the description of the things of our concern and from remaining tied to the sphere of *vorhanden* and *zuhanden*.

Within-time-ness, then, possesses its own specific features which are not reducible to the representation of linear time, a neutral series of abstract instants. Being in time is already something quite different from measuring intervals between limiting instants; it is first of all *to reckon with* time and so to calculate. It is because we do reckon with time and make calculations that we have the need to measure, not the other way around. It should therefore be possible to give an existential description of this reckoning before the measuring it calls for. It is here that expressions such as "having time to," "taking time to," "wasting time," and so on, are most revealing. The same is true of the grammatical network of verbal tenses, and likewise of the far-ranging network of adverbs of time: then, after, later, earlier, since, till, while, until, whenever, now that, and so forth. All these extremely subtle and finely differentiated expressions point out the datable and public character of the time of preoccupation.

It is our preoccupation, not the things of our concern, that determines the sense of time. It is because there is a *time to do* this, a right time and a wrong time, that we can reckon *with* time. If within-time-ness is so easily interpreted in terms of the ordinary representation of time, this is because the first measurements of the time of our preoccupation are borrowed from the natural environment—first of all from the play of light and of the seasons. In this respect, a day is the most natural of measures. "Dasein," Heidegger says, "historizes *from day to day*" (p. 466). But a day is not an abstract measure; it is a magnitude which corresponds to our concern and to the world into which we are thrown. The time it measures is that in which it is *time to do* something (*Zeit zu*), where "now" means "now that"; it is the time of labors and days. It is therefore important to see the shift in meaning that distinguishes the "now" belonging to this time of preoccupation from "now" in the sense of an abstract instant, which as part of a series defines the line of ordinary time. The existential now is determined by the present of preoccupation, which is a "making-present," inseparable from awaiting and retaining. It is because, in preoccupation, concern tends to contract itself into this making-present and to obliterate its dependency with regard to awaiting and retaining that the now isolated in this way can fall prey to the representation of the now as an isolated abstract instant. In order to preserve the meaning of now from this reduction to an abstraction, it is important to attend to the way in which we "say now" (*Jetzt-sagen*) in everyday acting and suffering. "Saying 'now,'" says Heidegger, "is the discursive Articulation of a *making-present* which temporalizes itself in a unity with a retentive awaiting" (p. 469). And again, "The making-

present which interprets itself—in other words, that which has been interpreted and is addressed in the ‘now’—is what we call ‘time’” (p. 460). So we see how, as a result of certain practical circumstances, this interpretation is bent in the direction of the representation of linear time. Saying “now” becomes for us synonymous with reading the hour on the face of a clock. As long as the hour and the clock are still perceived as derivations of the day that links concern with the light of the world, saying “now” retains its existential significance; but when the machines used to measure time are cut off from this primary reference to natural measures, saying “now” is turned into a form of the abstract representation of time.

Turning to narrative activity, I shall now attempt to show that the time of the simplest story also escapes the ordinary notion of time conceived of as a series of instants succeeding one another along an abstract line oriented in a single direction. The phenomenology of the act of following a story may serve as our point of departure.<sup>2</sup> Let us say that a story describes a series of actions and experiences made by a number of characters, whether real or imaginary. These characters are represented either in situations that change or as they relate to changes to which they then react. These changes, in turn, reveal hidden aspects of the situation and of the characters and engender a new predicament that calls for thinking, action, or both. The answer to this predicament advances the story to its conclusion.

Following a story, correlatively, is understanding the successive actions, thoughts, and feelings in question insofar as they present a certain directedness. By this I mean that we are pushed ahead by this development and that we reply to its impetus with expectations concerning the outcome and the completion of the entire process. In this sense, the story's conclusion is the pole of attraction of the entire development. But a narrative conclusion can be neither deduced nor predicted. There is no story if our attention is not moved along by a thousand contingencies. This is why a story has to be followed to its conclusion. So rather than being predictable, a conclusion must be acceptable. Looking back from the conclusion to the episodes leading up to it, we have to be able to say that this ending required these sorts of events and this chain of actions. But this backward look is made possible by the teleological movement directed by our expectations when we follow the story. This is the paradox of contingency, judged “acceptable after all,” that characterizes the comprehension of any story told.

2. Here I am borrowing from W. B. Gallie's *Philosophy and the Historical Understanding* (New York, 1964).

If we now compare this brief analysis of the development of a plot to the Heideggerian concept of within-time-ness, we can say that the narrative structure confirms the existential analysis. To begin, it is clear that the art of storytelling places the narrative "in" time. The art of storytelling is not so much a way of reflecting on time as a way of taking it for granted. We can apply to storytelling Heidegger's remark that "factual Dasein takes time into its reckoning, without any existential understanding of temporality" (p. 456). And it is indeed to factual *Dasein* that the art of storytelling belongs, even when the narrative is fictional. It is this art that makes all the adverbs enumerated above directly significant—then, next, now, and so on. When someone, whether storyteller or historian, starts recounting, everything is already spread out in time. In this sense, narrative activity, taken without further reflection, participates in the dissimulation both of historicity and, even more so, of the deeper levels of temporality. But at the same time, it implicitly states the truth of within-time-ness insofar as it possesses its own authenticity, the authenticity of its inauthenticity, if one may so put it, and it therefore presents an existential structure quite as original as the other two existential categories of time that frame it.

To take an example, the heroes of stories reckon *with* time. They have or do not have time *for* this or that. Their time can be gained or lost. It is true to say that we measure this time of the story because we count it and that we count it because we reckon with it. The time of the story retains this reckoning at the threshold of measurement, at the point where it reveals our thrownness, by which we are abandoned to the changing of day into night. This time is already reckoned time on which dating operates; but it is not yet time in which the natural measure of "days" is replaced by artificial measures, that is, measures taken from physics and based on an instrumentation that follows the progress of the investigation of nature. In a narrative, the measuring of time is not yet released from time reckoning because this reckoning is still visibly rooted in preoccupation. It is as true to say of narrative as of preoccupation that the "day" is the natural measure and that "Dasein historizes *from day to day*."

For these reasons, the time of a narrative is public time, but not in the sense of ordinary time, indifferent to human beings, to their acting and their suffering. Narrative time is public time in the same sense that within-time-ness is, before it is leveled off by ordinary time. Moreover, the art of storytelling retains this public character of time while keeping it from falling into anonymity. It does so, first, as time common to the actors, as time woven in common by their interaction. On the level of the narrative, of course, "others" exist: the hero has antagonists and helpers; the object of the quest is someone else or something else that another can give or withhold. The narrative confirms that "in the 'most intimate' Being-with-one-another of several people, they can say '*now*' and say it



‘together.’ . . . The ‘now’ which anyone expresses is always said in the publicness of Being-in-the-world with one another” (p. 463).

This first side of public time is, in some sense, internal to the interaction. But the narrative has a second relationship to public time: external public time or, we might say, the time of the public. Now a story’s public is its audience. Through its recitation, a story is incorporated into a community which it gathers together. It is only through the written text that the story is open to a public that, to borrow Gadamer’s expression, amounts to anyone who can read. The published work is the measure of this public. But even so, this public is not just anyone at all, it is not “they”; instead, it is they lifted out of anonymity in order to make up an invisible audience, those whom Nietzsche called “my own.” This public does not fall back into they—in the sense in which a work is said to fall into the public domain—except through a leveling off similar to that by which within-time-ness is reduced to ordinary time, knowing neither day nor hour, recognizing no “right” time because no one feels concerned by it.

A final trait of within-time-ness is illustrated by the time of the narrative. It concerns the primacy of the present in preoccupation. We saw that for Heidegger, saying “now” is interpreting the making-present which is accorded a certain preference by preoccupation, at the expense of awaiting and retaining. But it is when within-time-ness is leveled off that saying “now” slips into the mathematical representation of the instant characteristic of ordinary time. Saying “now” must therefore continually be carried back to making-present if this abstract representation is to be avoided.

Now narratives invite a similar, yet quite original, reinterpretation of this saying “now.” For a whole category of narratives, in fact (those which according to Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg stem from the epic matrix<sup>3</sup> and those which Vladimir Propp and Algirdas Greimas place under the title of the quest), narrative activity is the privileged discursive expression of preoccupation and its making-present. It is privileged because these narratives exhibit a feature that the Heideggerian analysis of saying “present”—an analysis that is too brief and too centered around “reading the hour”—does not encounter, namely, the phenomenon of “intervention” (which, by way of contrast, is at the center of Henrik von Wright’s analyses in action theory). These narratives, in fact, represent a person acting, who orients him- or herself in circumstances he or she has not created, and who produces consequences he or she has not intended. This is indeed the time of the “now that . . .,” wherein a person is both abandoned and responsible at the same time.

3. See Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg’s *The Nature of Narrative* (New York, 1966).

The dialectical character of this “now that . . .” appears, however, only as it is unfolded narratively in the interplay between being able to act and being bound to the world order. This interplay accentuates both what distinguishes within-time-ness from abstract time and what makes the interpretation of within-time-ness lean toward the representation of abstract time. On the one hand, the narrative’s making-present is the instant of suffering and acting, the moment when the actor knowing, in a nonrepresentative way, what he or she can do, in fact does it. This is the moment when, according to Claude Bremond, possible action becomes actual, moving toward its completion.<sup>4</sup> This present of praxic intervention has, therefore, nothing in common with the mathematical instant; one could say of it, with Heidegger, that it “temporalizes itself in a unity with awaiting and retaining” (p. 459). Yet the fall into the representation of ordinary time is, in a sense, also lodged in this very structure of intervention. Days and hours are, of course, as much intimate measures of action caught up in circumstances as they are external measures punctuating the sovereign firmament. Nevertheless, in the instant of acting, when the agent seizes hold of such circumstances and inserts his or her action into the course of things, the temporal guides provided by the chain of meaning attached to manipulable objects tend to make world time prevail over the time of action. So it is in the phenomenon of intervention, in which our powers of action are linked to the world order, that what could be termed the structure of intersection characteristic of within-time-ness is constituted, in the nether zone between ordinary time and true historicity. Thus in this sense, narrative shows how concern “interprets itself” in the saying “now.” The heroic quest is the privileged medium for this self-presentation. It, more than any other form, is the narrative of preoccupation.

The time of the plot, however, provides much more than an illustration of the existential analysis of within-time-ness. We have already seen that the actor’s intervention in the course of the world affords a more refined and more dialectical analysis than Heidegger’s analysis of making-present and saying “now.” Turning our investigation now from narrative theory back to the theory of time, we must deal with a basic characteristic of plot that I have up to now neglected.

If so many authors have hastily identified narrative time and chronological time at the level of surface grammar—or, in Greimas’ terms, at the level of manifestation—it is because they have neglected a fundamental feature of a narrative’s temporal dialectic. This trait characterizes the plot as such, that is, as the objective correlate of the act of following a story. This fundamental trait, which was already implied in my definition of events made into story through the plot, may be

4. See Claude Bremond’s “La Logique des possibles narratifs,” *Communications* 8 (1966): 60–76.

described as follows: every narrative combines two dimensions in various proportions, one chronological and the other nonchronological. The first may be called the episodic dimension, which characterizes the story as made out of events. The second is the configurational dimension, according to which the plot construes significant wholes out of scattered events. Here I am borrowing from Louis O. Mink the notion of a configurational act, which he interprets as a “grasping together.”<sup>5</sup> I understand this act to be the act of the plot, as eliciting a pattern from a succession. This act can account for the character of the judgment or, more precisely, the reflective judgment in the Kantian sense of this term.<sup>6</sup> To tell and to follow a story is already to reflect upon events in order to encompass them in successive wholes. This dimension is completely overlooked in the theory of history proposed by anti-narrativist writers. They tend to deprive narrative activity of its complexity and, above all, of its twofold characteristic of confronting and combining both sequence and pattern in various ways. This antithetical dynamic is no less overlooked in the theory of fictional narratives proposed by structuralists, who take it for granted that the surface grammar of what they call the “plane of manifestation” is merely episodic and therefore purely chronological. They then conclude that the principle of order has to be found at the higher level of a-chronological models or codes. Anti-narrativist historians and structuralists thus share a common prejudice: they do not see that the humblest narrative is always more than a chronological series of events and that in turn the configurational dimension cannot overcome the episodic dimension without suppressing the narrative structure itself.<sup>7</sup>

The temporal implications of this twofold structure of the plot are so striking that we may already conjecture that narrative does more than just establish humanity, along with human actions and passions, “in” time; it also brings us back from within-time-ness to historicity, from “reckoning with” time to “recollecting” it. As such, the narrative function provides a transition from within-time-ness to historicity.

The temporal dialectic, then, is implied in the basic operation of eliciting a configuration from a succession. Thanks to its episodic dimension, narrative time tends toward the linear representation of time in

5. See Louis O. Mink’s “Interpretation and Narrative Understanding,” *The Journal of Philosophy* 69, no. 9 (1972): 735–37.

6. See also the work of William H. Dray on judgment.

7. In my “The Narrative Function” (*Semeia* 13 [1978]: 177–202), I contend that “if history may have been grafted, as inquiry, onto narrative activity, it is because the ‘configurational’ dimension of story-telling and story-following already paved the way for an activity that Mandelbaum rightly characterizes as subsuming parts to wholes. This activity is not a radical break with narrative activity to the extent that the latter already combines chronological and configurational order” (p. 184).

several ways: first, the “then” and “and then” structure that provides an answer to the question “What next?” suggests a relation of exteriority between the phases of the action; second, the episodes constitute an open-ended series of events that allows one to add to the “then” an “and then” and an “and so on”; and finally, the episodes follow one another in accordance with the irreversible order of time common to human and physical events.

The configurational dimension, in turn, displays temporal features that may be opposed to these “features” of episodic time. The configurational arrangement makes the succession of events into significant wholes that are the correlate of the act of grouping together. Thanks to this reflective act—in the sense of Kant’s *Critique of Judgment*—the whole plot may be translated into one “thought.” “Thought,” in this narrative context, may assume various meanings. It may characterize, for instance, following Aristotle’s *Poetics*, the “theme” (*dianoia*) that accompanies the “fable” or “plot” (*mythos*) of a tragedy.<sup>8</sup> “Thought” may also designate the “point” of the Hebraic *maschal* or of the biblical parable, concerning which Jeremias observes that the point of the parable is what allows us to translate it into a proverb or an aphorism. The term “thought” may also apply to the “colligatory terms” used in history writing, such terms as “the Renaissance,” “the Industrial Revolution,” and so on, which, according to Walsh and Dray, allow us to apprehend a set of historical events under a common denominator. (Here “colligatory terms” correspond to the kind of explanation that Dray puts under the heading of “explaining what.”) In a word, the correlation between thought and plot supersedes the “then” and “and then” of mere succession. But it would be a complete mistake to consider “thought” as a-chronological. “Fable” and “theme” are as closely tied together as episode and configuration. The time of fable-and-theme, if we may make of this a hyphenated expression, is more deeply temporal than the time of merely episodic narratives.

The plot’s configuration also superimposes “the sense of an ending”—to use Kermode’s expression—on the open-endedness of mere succession. As soon as a story is well known—and such is the case with most traditional and popular narratives as well as with the national chronicles of the founding events of a given community—retelling takes the place of telling. Then following the story is less important than apprehending the well-known end as implied in the beginning and the well-known episodes as leading to this end. Here again, time is not abolished by the teleological structure of the judgment which grasps together the events under the heading of “the end.” This strategy of

8. It may be noted in passing that this correlation between “theme” and “plot” is also the basis of Northrop Frye’s “archetypal” criticism.

judgment is one of the means through which time experience is brought back from within-time-ness to repetition.

Finally, the recollection of the story governed as a whole by its way of ending constitutes an alternative to the representation of time as moving from the past forward into the future, according to the well-known metaphor of the arrow of time. It is as though recollection inverted the so-called natural order of time. By reading the end in the beginning and the beginning in the end, we learn also to read time itself backward, as the recapitulating of the initial conditions of a course of action in its terminal consequences. In this way, a plot establishes human action not only within time, as we said at the beginning of this section, but within memory. Memory, accordingly, *repeats* the course of events according to an order that is the counterpart of time as “stretching-along” between a beginning and an end.

This third temporal characteristic of plot has brought us as close as possible to Heidegger’s notion of “repetition,” which is the turning point for his whole analysis of historicity (*Geschichtlichkeit*). Repetition, for Heidegger, means more than a mere reversal of the basic orientation of care toward the future; it means the retrieval of our most basic potentialities inherited from our past in the form of personal fate and collective destiny. The question, then, is whether we may go so far as to say that the function of narratives—or at least of some narratives—is to establish human action at the level of genuine historicity, that is, of repetition. If such were the case, the temporal structure of narrative would display the same hierarchy as the one established by the phenomenology of time experience.

### 3. *Historicity and Repetition*

I have shown how my analysis of narrative structure confirms the Heideggerian existential analysis of time. My purpose now is to show that the analysis of narrativity also affects and corrects Heidegger’s corresponding analysis of historicity on one decisive topic.

Heidegger emphasizes three main traits as the criteria of historicity: first, time appears at this level as “extended” between birth and death. In a sense, we are already acquainted with this aspect of time thanks to the analysis of within-time-ness. This concept is one interpretation of the “extension” of time in terms of the “mundane” clues to which our preoccupation is submitted in the inauthentic realm of everyday life. The problem now is to disentangle the authentic meaning of this extension. Following an order of derivation that proceeds from the deep structure to our scattered interests, Heidegger must confront the concept of extension as a challenge, to the extent that temporality consists in the deep *unity* of future, past, and present—or, rather, of coming

forth, having been, and making present. Augustine had already faced this paradox in the eleventh book of his *Confessions*. Starting from the key experience of the unity of expectation, memory, and attention, he had to ascribe to the soul a specific extension, which he called *distentio animi*, as a sign of finitude and fallenness. Heidegger is confronted with a similar enigma, that is, the transition from the deep unity of the three dimensions of time to the dispersion of time in the realm of inauthenticity. Extension, at the intermediate level, is thus both cohesion and change. This double meaning is preserved in the term *Geschehen*, which usually means “becoming,” but which Heidegger brings back to some of its archaic implications, such as mobility, extending, and being extended. Furthermore, he chooses this idiom by reason of its kinship with *Geschichte* (“history”).<sup>9</sup> What is ultimately at stake is the possibility of grounding the possibility of history as a science in the existential structure of time. *Geschehen* is the mediating structure between temporality (as the unity of coming-forth, having-been, and making-present) and within-time-ness.

This leads to a second trait of historicity: the priority given to the past in the structure of care that underlies the unity of the three dimensions of time. This trait may no longer be taken for granted in an analysis that proceeds from top to bottom; it must even appear as a perplexing paradox. Indeed, according to Heidegger’s analysis of the unified experience of temporality, the past is not the primary direction of care, nor is the present, as in Augustine, since the present is the making-present of preoccupation which prevails only in the experience of within-time-ness from which we started in our earlier move from bottom to top. *The primary direction of care is toward the future*. Through care, we are always already “ahead of” ourselves. Of course the shift from future to past is understandable to the extent that any project implies memory and that no authentic anticipation of what we may “have to be” is possible without borrowing from the resources of what we already “have been.” Nevertheless, the exclusive concern for the past, which generates history, must appear as an intriguing enigma when put against the background of the existential analysis of care and its primary orientation toward the future.

A third trait has still to be underlined: when we speak of becoming, either in the field of nature or of history, we imply an indefinite extension of duration both backward and forward. The history of nature, like that of mankind, knows no beginning and no end. But this vague notion has no existential force. What first makes sense is the notion of an individual life extending *between* birth and death. This “in between” is the appropriate temporal characteristic of the “extension” of life as

9. In order to preserve this kinship, the translators of *Being and Time* have translated the German *Geschehen* as “historicizing.”

stretching-along. Now the *finite* aspect of this stretching-along does not belong to the experience of extension as such. It comes from the more radical structure of temporality as governed by the structure of “being-toward-death.” We hit here on an ontological presupposition which I will come to grips with later on when we confront temporality and narrativity. But the reader of *Being and Time* cannot escape the centrality of this notion. The impulse toward the future is, at the deep level of temporality, a finite movement to the extent that all genuine expectations are *limited from within* by being-toward-death. *This structure is the organizing pole of the Heideggerian analytic of time.* It is precisely what must appear scandalous to historians and narrators of all kinds for whom historicity opens an endless space for the course of events.

The gap between Heidegger’s concept of historicity and our own concept of narrative time would be unbridgeable if Heidegger did not provide us with a mediating concept and if our analysis of narrative time could not be raised above the level of within-time-ness. As concerns Heidegger, the stroke of genius is to have ascribed to what he calls *Wiederholen* (“repetition” or “recollection”) the fundamental structure thanks to which historicity is brought back to its origin in the originary structure of temporality. Through repetition, the character of time as stretching-along is rooted in the deep unity of time as future, past, and present, the backward move toward the past is retrieved in the anticipation of a project, and the endlessness of historical time is grafted on the finite structure of being-toward-death.

In *Being and Time* (par. 74, pp. 103–5), Heidegger broaches the topic of repetition in the following way: the analysis starts from the notion of a heritage as something transmitted and received. But because of the preceding analysis of temporality centered on the nontransferable experience of having to die, the perspective under which the notion of a heritage is introduced must remain radically monadic. Each person transmits from him- or herself to him- or herself the resources that he or she may “draw” from his or her past. (Notice that the German word for “drawing,” as from a well, is *holen*, which is a basic component of *wiederholen* [“to re-peat” or “to re-collect”].) In this way, each of us receives him- or herself as “fate” (*Schicksal*). Repetition is “going back [*der Rückgang*] into the possibilities of the Dasein that has-been-there” (p. 437). And thanks to repetition as fate, retrospection is reconnected to anticipation, and anticipation is rooted in retrospection. Fate is the character of thrownness of all authentic projects. The German expressions here are very strong, since project and thrownness belong to the same semantic field: *Entwurf*, *Geworfenheit*. So Heidegger can even speak here of a “thrown project” (*ein geworfener Entwurf*).

But what makes this extraordinary analysis problematic is the monadic character of repetition as fate. It is only thanks to a transfer of the senses of fate, governed by the theme of being-toward-death, to the



notion of a common “destiny” (*Geschick*) that we reach the communal dimension of historicity. Here Heidegger joins his previous analysis of *Mit-Sein* (“being-with”) to his analysis of *Schicksal* to forge the composite expression *Mit-geschehen*. Destiny is the “cohistoricity” of a community, of a people.<sup>10</sup> This priority of fate over destiny in his analysis may explain the tragic or heroic account that pervades such declarations as the following:

Only in communicating and in struggling does the power of destiny become free. Dasein’s fateful destiny in and with its “generation” goes to make up the full authentic historizing of Dasein.

Fate is that powerless superior power which puts itself in readiness for adversities. [P. 436]

So there is a dark kernel of thought underlying the new equivalence between historicity and repetition.

It is at this point that the dialectic between historicity and narrativity may bring forth genuine insights, thanks to the reinterpretation of each term of the one by means of the other. What is needed is not just an “application” of the concept of historicity as repetition to the theory of narrative but a rereading of the latter capable, in turn, of rectifying the former.

Let us return to a suggestion made earlier, namely, that the art of narrating does not merely preserve within-time-ness from being leveled off by measured, anonymous, and reified time, it also generates the movement back from objective time to originary temporality. How does it do this?

The analysis of plot as configuration has already led us to the threshold of what could be called “narrative repetition.” By reading the end into the beginning and the beginning into the end, we learn to read time backward, as the recapitulation of the initial conditions of a course of action in its terminal consequences. In this way, the plot does not merely establish human action “in” time, it also establishes it in memory. And memory in turn repeats—re-collects—the course of events according to an order that is the counterpart of the stretching-along of time between a beginning and an end.

Yet the concept of repetition implies still more: it means the “retrieval” of our most fundamental potentialities, as they are inherited from our own past, in terms of a personal fate and a common destiny. The question, therefore, is whether we may go so far as to say that the function of narrative—or at least of a selected group of narratives—is to

10. Heidegger never loses sight of the hidden semantic connections between *Geschehen*, *Geschick*, and *Schicksal*.



establish human action at the level of authentic historicity, that is, of repetition.

In order to acknowledge this new temporal structure of narrative or at least of some narratives, we have to question some of the initial presuppositions of the previous analysis as well as those that govern the selection of the paradigmatic case of narrative in modern literary criticism. Propp, in his *Morphology of the Folktale*,<sup>11</sup> opened the way by focusing on a category of tales—Russian folktales—which may be characterized as complying with the model of the heroic quest. In these tales, a hero meets a challenge—either mischief or some lack—which he is sent to overcome. Throughout the quest, he is confronted with a series of trials which require that he choose to fight rather than to yield or flee, and which finally end in victory. The paradigmatic story ignores the nonchosen alternatives, yielding and losing. It knows only the chain of episodes that leads the hero from challenge to victory. It was no accident that, after Propp, this schema offered so little resistance to the attempts made by structuralists to dechronologize this paradigmatic chain. After all, only the linear succession of episodes had been taken into account. Furthermore, the segmenting of the chain had led to the isolating of temporal segments taken as discrete entities that were externally connected. Finally, these segments were treated as contingent variations of a limited number of some abstract narrative components, the famous thirty-one “functions” of Propp’s model. The chronological dimension was not abolished, but it was deprived of its temporal constitution as plot. The segmenting and the concatenating of functions thus paved the way for a reduction of the chronological to the logical. And in the subsequent phase of structural analysis, with Greimas and Roland Barthes, the search for the atemporal formula that generates the chronological display of functions transformed the structure of the tale into a machinery whose task it is to compensate for the initial mischief or lack by a final restoration of the disturbed order. Compared to this logical matrix, the quest itself appears as a mere diachronical residue, a retardation or suspension in the epiphany of order.

The question is whether the initial need to reduce the chronological to the logical—a need arising from the method employed—governs the strategy of structural analysis in Propp’s successive phases: first, the selection of the quest as the paradigmatic case; then, the projection of its episodes on a linear time; then, the segmentation and the external connection of the basic “functions”; and finally, the dissolution of the chronological into the logical.

*There is an alternative to such dechronologization. It is repetition.* Dechronologization implies the logical abolition of time; repetition, its existential deepening. But to support this view, we have to question the

11. Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale* (Austin, Tex., 1968).

implications and even the choice of the paradigmatic cases of narratives in current literary criticism.

Even with regard to the model of the quest, some temporal aspects have been overlooked. Before projecting the hero forward for the sake of the quest, many tales send the hero or heroine into some dark forest where he or she goes astray or meets some devouring beast (as in "Little Red Riding Hood") or where the younger brother or sister has been kidnapped by some threatening force (like the birds in "The Swan-Geese Tale"). These initial episodes do more than merely introduce the mischief that is to be suppressed; they bring the hero or heroine *back* into a primordial space and time that is more akin to the realm of dreams than to the sphere of action. Thanks to this preliminary disorientation, the linear chain of time is broken and the tale assumes an oneiric dimension that is more or less preserved alongside the heroic dimension of the quest. Two qualities of time are thus intertwined: the circularity of the imaginary travel and the linearity of the quest as such. I agree that the kind of repetition involved in this travel toward the origin is rather primitive, even regressive, in the psychoanalytic sense of the word. It has the character of an immersion and confinement in the midst of dark powers. This is why this repetition of the origin has to be superseded by an act of rupture (like, for example, the episode of the woodcutters breaking open the belly of the wolf with an ax in "Little Red Riding Hood"). Nevertheless, the imaginary travel suggests the idea of a metatemporal mode which is not the atemporal mode of narrative codes in structural analyses. This "timeless"—but not atemporal—dimension duplicates, so to speak, the episodic dimension of the quest and contributes to the fairylike atmosphere of the quest itself.

This first mode of repetition must, in turn, be superseded, to the extent that it constitutes only the reverse side of the time of the quest and conquest, brought forward by the call for victory. Finally, the time of the quest prevails over that of the imaginary travel through the break by which the world of action emerges from the land of dreams—as though the function of the tale is to elicit the progressive time of the quest out of the regressive time of imaginary travel.

Repetition thus tends to become the main issue in narratives in which the quest itself duplicates a travel in space that assumes the shape of a return to the origin. Odysseus' travels are the paradigm. As Mircea Eliade writes in *L'Epreuve du labyrinthe*,

Ulysses is for me the prototype of man, not only modern man, but the man of the future as well, because he represents the type of the "trapped" voyager. His voyage was a voyage toward the center, toward Ithaca, which is to say, toward himself. He was a fine navigator, but destiny—spoken here in terms of trials of initiation which he had to overcome—forced him to postpone indefinitely his

return to hearth and home. I think that the myth of Ulysses is very important for us. We will all be a little like Ulysses, for in searching, in hoping to arrive, and finally, without a doubt, in finding once again the homeland, the hearth, we re-discover ourselves. But, as in the Labyrinth, in every questionable turn, one risks "losing one-self." If one succeeds in getting out of the Labyrinth, in finding one's home again, then one becomes a new being.<sup>12</sup>

The retardation that Eliade speaks of here is no longer a mere suspension in the epiphany of order; retardation now means growth.

*The Odyssey*, accordingly, could be seen as the form of transition from one level of repetition to another, from a mere fantasy repetition that is still the reverse side of the quest to a kind of repetition that would generate the quest itself. With *The Odyssey*, the character of repetition is still imprinted in time by the circular shape of the travel in space. The temporal return of Odysseus to himself is supported by the geographical return to his birthplace, Ithaca.

We come still closer to the kind of repetition suggested by Heidegger's analysis of historicity with stories in which the return to the origin is not just a preparatory phase of the tale and no longer mediated by the shape of the travel back to the birthplace. In these stories, repetition is constitutive of the temporal form itself. The paradigmatic case of such stories is Augustine's *Confessions*. Here the form of the travel is interiorized to such a degree that there is no longer any privileged place in space to which to return. It is a travel "from the exterior to the interior, and from the interior to the superior" (*Ab exterioribus ad interiora, ab interioribus ad superiora*). The model created by Augustine is so powerful and enduring that it has generated a whole set of narrative forms down to Rousseau's *Confessions* and Proust's *Le Temps retrouvé*. If Augustine's *Confessions* tells "how I became a Christian," Proust's narrative tells "how Marcel became an artist." The quest has been absorbed into the movement by which the hero—if we may still call him by that name—becomes *who he is*. Memory, therefore, is no longer the narrative of external adventures stretching along episodic time. It is itself the spiral movement that, through anecdotes and episodes, brings us back to the almost motionless constellation of potentialities that the narrative retrieves. The end of the story is what equates the present with the past, the actual with the potential. The hero *is* who he *was*. This highest form of narrative repetition is the equivalent of what Heidegger calls fate (individual fate) or destiny (communal destiny), that is, the complete retrieval in resoluteness of the inherited potentialities that *Dasein* is thrown into by birth.

12. Mircea Eliade, *L'Épreuve du labyrinthe* (Paris, 1978), p. 109; my translation.

The objection could be made, at this point, that only fictional narrative, and not history, reaches this deep level of repetition. I do not think this is the case. It is not possible to ascribe only to inquiry—as opposed to traditional narrative—all the achievements of history in overcoming legendary accounts, that is, the release from mere apologetic tasks related to the heroic figures of the past, the attempt to proceed from mere narrative to truly explanatory history, and, finally, the grasping of whole periods under a leading idea. We may thus wonder whether the shift from sequential history to explanatory history, described by Maurice Mandelbaum in his *Anatomy of Historical Knowledge*, does not find its complete meaning in the further shift from explanatory history to what he calls interpretive history.

While an interpretive account is not usually confined to a single cross section of time but spans a period . . . the emphasis in such works is on the manner in which aspects of society or of the culture of the period, or both, fit together in a pattern, defining a form of life different from that which one finds at other times or in other places.<sup>13</sup>

Are we stretching the notion of interpretation too far if we put it in the Heideggerian terms of repetition? Mandelbaum may dislike this unexpected proximity to Heideggerian ideas. I find, nevertheless, some confirmation and encouragement for taking this daring step in the profound analysis of action that Hannah Arendt gives in her brilliant work *The Human Condition*.<sup>14</sup> Arendt distinguishes among labor, work, and action. Labor, she says, aims merely at survival in the struggle between man and nature. Work aims at leaving a mark on the course of things. Action deserves its name when, beyond the concern for submitting nature to man or for leaving behind some monuments witnessing to our activity, it aims only at being recollected in stories whose function it is to provide an identity to the doer, an identity that is merely a narrative identity. In this sense, history repeats action in the figure of the memorable.

Such is the way in which history itself—and not only fiction—provides an approximation of what a phenomenology of time experience may call repetition.

To end this inquiry, I would like to indicate in what sense this mutual clarification of historicity and narrativity affects the

13. Maurice Mandelbaum, *The Anatomy of Historical Knowledge* (Baltimore, 1977), pp. 39 ff.

14. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago, 1958).

Heideggerian schema of our experience of time in order to rectify it, at least on one point, in a significant way.

First, we must say that the repetition that Heidegger calls fate is articulated in a narrative. Fate is recounted. This remark may not seem to distanciate us in any important way from Heidegger, inasmuch as it takes from him the idea that the most detailed chronicle, and eventually the most misleading one, remains bound to and guided in advance by the destiny of a people. This comment, however, leads us still further. In imposing the narrative form on repetition, the chronicle also imposes the priority of the communal form of destiny on the private form of fate. In other words, narrativity, from the outset, establishes repetition on the plane of being-with-others. My analysis of narrative on the level of within-time-ness anticipated this conclusion. The narrative of a quest, which is the paradigmatic example appropriate to this level, unfolds in a public time. This public time, as we saw, is not the anonymous time of ordinary representation but the time of interaction. In this sense, narrative time is, from the outset, time of being-with-others.

But if this is so, the whole structure of the Heideggerian analytic of time is called into question to the extent that it proceeds from being-toward-death. We know how much Heidegger emphasizes the non-transferable character of being-toward-death and that this uncommunicable aspect of dying imposes the primacy of individual fate over common destiny in the subsequent analysis of historicity. Yet it is this primacy that the analysis of narrativity calls into question.

One might ask at this point whether the whole Heideggerian analysis is not then overturned. Is it not a certain fascination with death that gives the whole analysis its well-known heroic accents? We need only recall the dialectic of strength and weakness to which Heidegger submits the theme of fate. Does not narrativity, by breaking away from the obsession of a struggle in the face of death, open any meditation on time to another horizon than that of death, to the problem of communication not just between living beings but between contemporaries, predecessors, and successors?<sup>15</sup> After all, is not narrative time a time that continues beyond the death of each of its protagonists? Is it not part of the plot to include the death of each hero in a story that surpasses every individual fate?

Let us go even further. Must we not call into question the very first analysis on which the Heideggerian analysis of repetition is based, I mean the analysis of a heritage of potentialities understood as something that is transmitted from oneself to oneself? Is not a heritage always something that is transmitted from *another* to the *self*? If such is the case, the study of transmission between generations, to which I alluded

15. I here employ the terminology used by Alfred Schutz in his phenomenology of social existence.

earlier, may reveal a wider problematic, the one Gadamer calls the problem of "tradition."<sup>16</sup> It seems to me that this problem, even more than the Heideggerian analysis of a heritage and individual fate, is likely to build a bridge between the ontology of historicity and the epistemology of the philosophy of history. It is always a community, a people, or a group of protagonists which tries to take up the tradition—or traditions—of its origins.

It is this communal act of repetition, which is at the same time a new founding act and a recommencement of what has already been inaugurated, that "makes history" and that finally makes it possible to write history. Historiography, in this sense, is nothing more than the passage into writing and then to critical rewriting of this primordial constituting of tradition. The naive forms of narration are deployed between this constituting of tradition and the writing of history (for example, legends and chronicles). And it is at the level of this mediation, where the writing of history is preceded by something already recounted, that historicity and narrativity are confounded and confused. So it is in this sense that repetition may be spoken of as the foundation of historiography. But it is a repetition that is always articulated in a narrative mode. History only turns this first conjunction of temporality and narrative in what I am calling narrative repetition into inquiry: *Historia, Forschung, enquête*. In this sense, therefore, the theory of narrativity rectifies the theory of historicity to the extent that it receives its leaven for the theme of repetition from the theory of narrativity.

The unanswered question in this essay concerns the relationship between historicity and deep temporality. You will recall that for Heidegger, historicity, in the technical sense of this term, constitutes the first form derived from deep temporality. For us, who follow the inverse order, the question is whether the theory of narrative has anything to say concerning the return from historicity to this deep temporality. We have seen in what way narrativity leads from time conceived of as within-time-ness to historicity, that is, to extension and repetition. But perhaps the analysis of narrative can also accompany a still more radical movement that would go from historicity to deep temporality following the triple framework evoked at the beginning of the second part of this essay: the unity of the three "extases" of time (having-been, coming-forth, and making-present); the primacy of the future over the past and the present in the unitary constituting of time; and the closure of the future by being-toward-death in its untransferable individuality.

Three possibilities, I think, are open to us. First, we might conclude that due to the tight link between historicity and within-time-ness in narrative activity the art of storytelling is essentially incapable of this radical return toward the depth of temporality. This impotence would

16. See Hans-Georg Gadamer's *Truth and Method* (New York, 1975).

then express the internal limit of any meditation on time linked to a reflection on narrative. Such a conclusion would in no way signify the failure of such a meditation. On the contrary, a reflection on limits is always instructive. Without it, the critical investigation of any mode of discourse is incomplete.

As a second possibility, we might draw an argument from the phenomenology of the art of storytelling to contest the most important trait of the Heideggerian theory of temporality, namely, being-toward-death. My earlier comments on the place of the problematic of tradition and transmission, in a meditation on time directly inspired by the theory of narrative, uncontestably point in this direction.

However justified these comments may be at the level of an analysis of historicity, they in no way exclude another type of meditation, our third possibility, that would apply no longer to the theme of historicity as such but precisely to its radical genesis beginning from that unitary structure by virtue of which time temporalizes itself as future, past, and present. The concept of tradition, in the sense of a common destiny more fundamental than any individual and moral fate, does not exclude this other meditation; it calls for it. Some consideration of death is inherent in any meditation on the constitution of history. Must not something or someone die if we are to have a memory of it or him or her? Is not the otherness of the past fundamentally to be seen in death? And is not repetition itself a kind of resurrection of the dead, as any reader of Michelet will recognize?