Narrative identity, subject formation, and the transfiguration of subjects

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One of the most complex issues for theory concerns the mechanisms whereby subjects change. We take it for granted that it happens and people constantly talk about how they are no longer the same person. There exists today a multitude of manuals and recommendations instructing us about how we could change ourselves. Furthermore, the notion of identity has taken residence on every agenda concerning culture, difference, power, lifestyle, and subjectivity. This chapter will address the problem of change by reference to the concept of narrative identity, picking out from it the correlations with issues of belonging, memory, temporality, and the economy of desire. It will be seen that a lot more is trailed in the wake of the mundane question of changing the subject, concerning, for example, notions of historicity and the questioning of oneself, that opens up politically important issues around the decolonization of mind and an ethics of existence.

At the level of the politics of identity, two objectives are the stakes in the well-known debates. On the one side, we recognize the aim of validating identities considered marginal or deviant or subaltern by reference to normative and hegemonic ideal types of identity. Identity here is asserted against the norms that end up privileging or valorizing, say, “masculine” characteristics against “feminine” attributes, “western” forms of subjectivity against “oriental/asiatic” forms, national and ethnic identities against immigrants and outsiders, and so on. The issues of “authenticity,” originality, universality, power, and their particular valorization of “difference” are uppermost in this politics. The other objective, a less directly political one, points to the theoretical problem arising from the possibility of, and the mechanisms for, transformations in subjectivity. In my discussion, I shall be mainly concerned with this range of questions, although clearly the two are not unrelated. So, my aim is to search around what is involved in the process of identification and

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disidentification—that is to say, the question of how far it is indeed possible for people to change—and see what further light we may throw upon that process.

In what follows, I shall steer clear of the still prevalent approaches within the social sciences which take for granted a self-centered subject and which aim to explain “behavior” by reference to a science and what this assumes about the object of knowledge. The typical approach here presupposes the model of a social “outside” that gets “inside” the subject through processes of “socialization” or by means of a psychologization of the individual. I shall not engage with this model, having done so elsewhere.¹

The critiques of these approaches have established a number of positions that, for some time now, have undermined the presuppositions of subject-centeredness and the givenness of the “I”; to that extent, they preface and clear the ground for the question of subjective change that I want to explore. One line of argument has to do with the problematic of ideology, that is, the approach which recognizes that subjects are constituted in relation to a corpus of values and to a set of beliefs about the reality of the social world that shape a predisposition to act and to think in a certain way. The processes of acquisition of the values and dispositions are themselves the topic for theorizations, for instance, in the Althusserian model, in terms of mechanisms of interpellation, identification, (mis)recognition, and “performance” whereby specific selves are positioned or enacted, and authorized (See Althusser 1971; Butler 1997).

The other problematic draws from Foucault and post-Foucauldian work to indicate processes of normalization and regulation whereby subjects are constituted as effects produced by networks of power/knowledge instituted in technologies of formation and disciplining targeting individuals and whole populations. We would have to add to this account the explanation of how the sense of a “who” as an interiority comes to be constituted, either as part of this process of formation or as something requiring, in addition, a “regime of the self,” instituted in techniques of self-inspection and in “self-steering mechanisms,” informed by particular discourses and codes that provide each person with the discursive and practical tools for judging herself or himself. For example, what does it mean to be a good parent? How do I know that I am doing the right thing as a parent? What authorizes the practices that I am supposed to follow? Within a Foucauldian analytic, a genealogy of the discourses and the practices of parenting, say, from the nineteenth century, would establish the range of technologies and normative discourses and their mutations that, since the emergence of the sciences of the social, have operated in the process of formation of the subject as the good parent.

This range of technologies of the social is nicely detailed by Nikolas Rose (1996), who adds several remarks that locate the problematic of subjectification beyond the models of socialization or psychologization of the individual. Rose recognizes the reference to an interiority in histories of the self, but proposes the view that interiority is the result of the “infolding of an ‘exterior’” to constitute an “inside” or soul (1996, p. 142). Furthermore, the infoldings are “stabilized” in two ways: first, the

¹ See the critique of psychology and cognitivism in Henriques et al. (1998).

functioning of a biography which articulates the relation we have to ourselves in the form of a narrative or memorization of how we think we have come to be the person we are, and, second, by reference to the relation we have with the spatial dimension of being. Human beings, he says, are “emplaced, enacted through a regime of devices, gazes, techniques which extend beyond the limits of the flesh into spaces and assemblies” (1996, p. 143). The spatialization of being and the narrativization of being are conjoined processes, producing the human being as “a hybrid of flesh, knowledge, passion, and technique” (1996, p. 144).

Let us see how this position might direct our gaze when we look into the case of the constitution of the good parent. We can then examine what is left unaccounted for. We recognize, to begin with, that the human technologies, both disciplinary and pastoral, that participate in the process of formation have a genealogy that we can reconstruct as a history of strategies, purposes, normative orientations, and so on that have become codified, instrumentalized, institutionalized, and routinized, inscribed in the spatial and temporal lifeworld, distributed as know-how and expertise among agents and agencies that function to bring about desired ends. The parent is located within these already constituted “hybrid assemblages” (that are open to variation and change over time); She or he becomes apprenticed to a stage of formation. The parent encounters advisers and experts, such as doctors, nurses, and health visitors, in a variety of sites like clinics and hospitals, nursery schools, and crèches which have been disposed in such a way as to structure the relations of power and authority and the encounters that can take place. We go to such places with the “right” attitudes and with particular expectations, including the willingness to accept the authority of those vested with the power to advise and guide or to judge our conduct. The system of authority is supported by texts such as child-care manuals and magazines that prepare us for the “role” of parenting. There exists too a whole range of equipments and objects, books, and toys that provide the material support for the practices put into play in bringing up a child, without which it would be impossible to translate codes, rules, and know-how into a routine of tasks, behaviors, and communicative action. Parents constantly scrutinize themselves, not only checking whether they are following the proper procedures and methods but also judging their level of commitment and effort, examining their willingness to learn and improve, and inspecting secret desires and guilts. In this way, we each actively construct ourselves as parents and reconstruct the relation we have to ourselves.

Rose’s analysis of the modern process of subjectification ends with a number of remarks about the rationalities of the new machinery of the governance of oneself and of the social which is now appearing. He points to “new ethical vocabularies,” valorizing notions of autonomy, choice, enterprise, and lifestyle that may well be establishing new “dividing practices” and “new modalities of folding authority into the soul” (1996, p. 145). He highlights the new forms of self-government, with greater affinity with a market-driven sociality, grounded in “rationalities of contracts, consumers, and competition” (1996, p. 146). Now, we know from Foucault that, ideally, the process of subjectification works best when it appears to be the result of unforced choices and wills. In any case, visible power or power lived as imposition sets up resistances and tactics of evasion that undermine normalization and challenge normative principles. For instance, new governance has institutionalized

the situation whereby one is encouraged to trust the opinion of a particular doctor or expert more than that of another, so that it appears to allow individuals greater autonomy and choice. In his analysis, Rose argues that it is possible to gain a critical purchase on the mechanisms of (self-) governance by way of historical explorations that can “unsettle” established forms of subjectification. This development is relatively familiar territory for those who are trying to rethink our presentness in light of the work of Foucault.

Yet, I cannot help thinking that there are other key elements of beingness that exceed the apparatus of formation and self-formation that I have sketched. To begin with, the prescriptions and norms and general rules cannot encompass every situation and cannot determine what is appropriate conduct: the acting subject must make a judgment about what the situation is and which rules apply. Furthermore, actions rely on judgment of this kind as well as on exemplars, or ideal egos, and ways of doing that are often worked out through a kind of apprenticeship and in collaboration with others. These relate to basic aspects of identification and sociality that are too often simply taken for granted by analyses that focus on the state and its apparatuses of constitution and regulation. Either they function as the ground upon which the latter must rely or they are regarded as the local and everyday cultures that escape the stratagems of (sovereign or pastoral) power and nourish resistance to it (de Certeau 1984; Touraine 2000).

I am going to discuss what I see as the neglected elements by reference to the groundedness and the “groundlessness,” or rather ungroundedness, of our being-in-the-world. To begin with, it seems to me that we need to be able to account for the fact that a new experience like parenting—or, indeed, living with a partner, settling in a different country, and so on—significantly reshapes our biography, occasioning the revaluation of previous relations, for instance, with parents, partners, colleagues, and friends. Such events result in engagement in a whole new range of activities, both communicative and material, tied to new locations such as schools or community centers and to organizations such as child-care groups and sporting associations, with the result that our orientations and concerns, our expectations of ourselves and our life projects become altered. An additional source of knowledge and value derives from friends and relatives with whom we compare and exchange experiences and stories and reflect upon our conduct both as parents and in relation to biographies that include the reactions (for instance, of approval or disapproval), expectations, and demands of others. Thus, the process of formation and change of particular “identities” involves, in addition, interactions that, although regulated by ad hoc steering mechanisms, are relatively unstructured and open to negotiations based on friendship, trust, and forms of mutuality. At the end of this process of refiguration, we have different and new kinds of stories to tell about ourselves; we are in a sense no longer who we were before.

All of this change has to do with the grounded character of selves and with something else that in part relates to the question of an “ethics of the self,” that is, the (culturally and historically specific) relation to ourselves that we develop in relation to particular corporeal, intellectual, and hermeneutic or self-reflective regimes which guide us in the ways we are supposed to talk, walk, eat, dress, make love, think, plan, reflect upon our actions and motives, and so on, as part of coming to

understand ourselves as particular individuals. I say in part because the extensive recent literature on the fashioning of the self has not sufficiently broken with the perspective of the “individuality” of the self. I want instead to point to the view that “self-steering” and “self-fashioning” devices are not merely heuristic devices; the way they work involves more than the infolding of an exteriority to constitute an interiority, more than a particular form of learning to be the selves we become. In the example of parenting, it is significant that the technologies of subjectification are given a practical realization as part of relations between persons, minimally between the child and a parent, more routinely as information, knowledges, opinions, anecdotes, reflections, practical activities, objects of all kinds, and questions that are exchanged in ad hoc episodes of communicative action involving children, friends, relations, and authorized advisers and agents, often occurring in sites that are relatively open spaces like the schoolyard, the neighborhood, the café, and the pub. In this way, general, abstract rules and knowledges and ways of doing are translated into a social reality involving the face-to-face interaction of associative communities. This process describes the social institution of the lifeworld. A domain of intersubjectivity, involving affect, the material world, and socially grounded narratives of “living well” mediates the application or functioning of the devices and apparatuses of subjectification, inflecting the meanings and values we come to attach to particular experiences and thoughts. My example shows the extent to which mediations between technologies of the social and action and adaptations and translations that respond to variations in the everyday lifeworld are necessary to account for the emergence and change of particular “selves.”

On the narrative character of identity

My line of analysis will not explore these mechanisms any further but will instead return to the recognition that, while every self is grounded in these mechanisms, the “who” of action exists in the sense that people speak of themselves as particular, named persons, who remain the same self in spite of changes over time concerning personal circumstances and self-understanding. This sense of a self is tied to everyday practices in which people locate themselves by reference to a routine of action or performances, and expectations about themselves and others that remain relatively stable in particular social situations. The term *iterability*, drawn from Butler and Derrida, is often used to point to what is significant about subjectivity in relation to acts, the reiteration of a particular subjectivity in instances of action that position a self by reference to a previous pattern of behavior recognized by significant others. As a particular “who,” then, every self is coupled to a world, both material and social. In particular, a self exists as a knot in a network of intersubjective action and understanding. It follows that change implies transformation in that whole world.²

² I am clearly setting aside the argument proposed by some authors that in the “postmodern” world, the spaces and imaginary and symbolic universes in which selves find “their” place (or are found) can no longer be described in terms of stable lifeworlds. Identities are now supposed to be nomadic and mobile, open to a constant play in which subjects performatively enact temporary selves.

So, how is one to account for the fact that people by and large in everyday interaction—in the family, at work, in relation to obligations and responsibilities—recognize themselves as particular selves who remain constant over time and that it is change in these positionings that appear problematic for theory and for practice?

The concept of narrative identity is today readily associated with the work of Paul Ricoeur. At different points in his analysis, he has pointed to the idea of a self as a storied self, as an entity made up of stories told—indeed, entangled in the stories that a person tells or that are told about her or him. Yet, this very mundane aspect of human beings is also a profoundly enigmatic element. We could say that human beings are characterized precisely by the fact that they invented stories, or rather narrative, as the form in which the events of a life and of a community can be configured and communicated and kept as a memory. Narrative is coextensive with the emergence of consciousness and of language as a symbolic system, specifically with the elaboration of the complex signifying systems structured in terms of the communication of temporality that we take for granted now.³

I will start, however, with the (ontological) arguments that consider temporality to be the defining characteristic of human beings. In a very fundamental way, time determines the horizon for any understanding of being. As soon as we think of ourselves as conscious beings, we think time, and we cannot think time without bringing up the question of consciousness—specifically, the consciousness that we exist in time, as beings in time, stretched out between a remembered past, an evanescent present, and the anticipation of a future. We know ourselves to be fateful and fatal beings, judging our presentness by reference to the spacing and trace of time. I am here rephrasing basic elements of Heidegger, read by way of Derrida, to contextualize the arguments which explain why Ricoeur considers the having-been, the making-present, and the coming-toward to be the three moments, indeed, the co-articulated moments, of the temporality of being: they mark the space in which we question ourselves as to our way of being. I should note that Ricoeur, following Heidegger, understands being to be the entity that questions itself as to its way of being. Ontology is thus bound up with the temporality of being, as Augustine recognized well before modernity.

Yet a basic aporia of time is its inscrutability. This may well be because we are encompassed by time, as I have just indicated, so that it is impossible to stand outside it. The avenue that Ricoeur follows is to explore the possibility that narrative is the form in which we can overcome the unrepresentability of time (when we think of it in the singular), and the device by which we express the lived, or phenomenal, aspect of the temporality of being. The underlying idea is that the act of telling a story “can transmute natural time into a specifically human time” (Ricoeur 1984, p. 17). In Ricoeur’s approach, the term *narrative identity* seems to join up

³ I will not speculate about the conditions, at once biological, social, and developmental that overdetermined this peculiarity of human beings. It is a story that would be more interesting than the accounts based on the logic of simple genetical-informational models of human development, having to deal with the logic of complexity, since we are talking about fundamentally collaborative, “ecological,” and autopoietic processes.

two problematics, one about subjective identity, and another concerning the relation of history and fiction in the process of the figuration of temporality. It does so by establishing that time, and the way it is lived, provides the common ground for the co-articulation of the two problematics. In the elaboration of his position, Ricoeur draws a distinction between identity as sameness (*idem*) and identity as selfhood (*ipse*)—identity, on the one hand, as something that remains identical to itself over time and, on the other hand, an entity that considers itself to remain the same being in spite of changes over time, for example, in a person's biographical history. Identity is not the sameness of a permanent, continuous, immutable, and fixed entity; it is instead the mode of relating to being that can be characterized as selfhood. Self is not a fact or an event, it is not reducible to the facticity of things-in-themselves (or Heidegger's ready-to-hand). The identity of a person, or a group or a people, takes the form of stories told.

Narrative, Ricoeur tells us, “constructs the durable properties of a character” (1991, p. 195). It does so by emplotting the events of a life according to the rules of storytelling, relying upon models and styles of emplotment already existing in a culture. Furthermore, the sense of narrative identity that Ricoeur develops stresses the view that every identity is “mingled with that of others in such a way as to engender second-order stories which are themselves intersections between numerous stories.... We are literally ‘entangled in stories’” (Ricoeur 1996, p. 6). But, one may ask, how do we choose them, how do we know which scripts apply to us? Is self-recognition the retroactive effect of a process of constitution, recalling in part the Althusserian concept of interpellation, and in part the process of (self-) disciplining and normalization that Foucault has described? Is narrative identity but a supplement to these other ways of accounting for the emergence of particular subjectivities?

Narrative identity, however, should not be understood as another name for biography or limited to the description of the process whereby the storied events of a life are interiorized to constitute personal identity. Indeed, Ricoeur's analysis is not primarily located on the terrain of a psychology but on that of ontology. Narrative identity appears in his discourse of being as the concept that enables us to think of the mediation between the phenomenological and the cosmological apprehension of time, that is, the mediation between time as lived, inscribed in activities in the world, and time in the singular, the intuition of a dimension that cannot be derived from the experiential but encompasses and transcends it. As Ricoeur (1992) has put it, narrative is the way of joining up the “time of the soul” with the time of the world. In a sense, the “self” as a meaningful and meaning-making entity appears at the point of intersection of two kinds of reflection on our beingness or existence. On the one hand, we find the stories and memories that express the time of being-in-the-world and of being-with, the duration of events, and experiences in the everyday: the time it takes for the seeds we sow to flower, or the time we watch our children grow into adults, the time of birthdays and commemorations, the scansion of the temporal flow in each life that we reckon and keep and memorialize because it involves our care (in the Heideggerian sense). Although what I am saying refers to universal aspects of the experience of time, I should note that the cultural specificity of this experience of phenomenal temporality is a matter that is too often neglected in Eurocentric

(and logocentric) theorizations of time, as ethnographic studies have demonstrated for some time.⁴

On the other hand, bound up with phenomenal time, are the questions which surface about time in the singular, thus about finitude, and about what gives meaning to life at the general, cosmological level. It is a matter of evaluation, guided by a history of reflection about what is liminally present in the significant events of our existence, yet that transcends biography, for it concerns the apprehension of a sublime dimension to human existence, an experience, besides, that links up with the ecstasy and epiphany of being. So, at one level, temporality encompasses the historical and cultural space of the emergence of the who of action and meaning, and at another level, it opens onto a critical hermeneutics and a reflection which points to the apprehension that a self “does not belong to the category of events and facts” (Ricoeur 1991, p. 193). We shall see how the implications for the formation of subjectivities and issues of refiguration and transfiguration link up with Ricoeur’s approach in a way which avoids the collapse into species of psychologism, determinism, and essentialism.

A critical hermeneutics?

In order to understand the mechanisms at work in subjective formation and change, we need at first to examine the three mimetic functions of narrative as described by Ricoeur. *Mimesis I* refers to the prenarrative, prefigurative features that express basic human desire; it describes a “semantics of desire” (1988, p. 248). We can understand the prefigurative, from the point of view of a particular subject’s configuration of experience, to refer to the corpus of the already-known and the already-said, the stock of narrative understandings of the world and of subjects, “inscribed”—that is, at once inscribed and encrypted—in the lifeworld. It forms a cultural unconscious. I would extend this formulation to include a relation to the thetic function or phase of the signifying process as understood by Kristeva, that is, the phase preceding the cognitive and the symbolic proper, involving the cathectic mechanisms whereby feelings are routed or canalized by reference to the primary organization of bodily drives; the thetic dimension thus grounds the symbolic and linguistic phase in an economy of desire.⁵ I draw attention to Kristeva’s (1974) analysis of *significance* because she makes a systematic connection between the process of identification

⁴ This in part is due to the relation between temporality and the radical plurality of the “I,” disclosed in the analysis of being-with, being-in-the-world, and the intersubjectivity of the lifeworld. See Venn (2000), Agamben (1991), and Fabian (1983) for the main arguments.

⁵ Kristeva’s analysis of the process of signification (written before later feminist and other critiques of Freudianism), while attempting to relocate the corporeal dimension in the formation of subjectivity to its grounding in the mother’s body, that is, to the somatic dimension in the formation of subjectivity, relies on Klein and thus on problematic elements of Freudianism. Today, one would have to rethink the economy of desire beyond the privilege of sexuality in psychoanalytic theory, namely to an existential ground that is at once corporeal, heteronomous, and liminal, suggesting a grounding for ontology which is material, social, and “spiritual.”

and the process of signification by way of the functioning of the economy of desire, so that the complicity between sign and propositionality is underpinned by the relation between the “semiotic chora,” as she calls it, and the semantic field, a relation in which the thetic functions as both rupture and frontier simultaneously, and thus as relay (Kristeva 1974, p. 41, 42). My juxtaposition of Kristeva is meant to keep visible the psychic level of the process of figuration and refiguration and thereby the level of affect, a level which is not so clear in Ricoeur; I will examine this through an example below.

Mimesis II arises from the creative process of the configuration of experience, the implication being that emplotment is not automatic or routine but involves the imagination in the selection and ordering of elements, linking the fictional dimension of the story to a domain of reality, so that the narrative refers to real events that can be verified through testimony. This mimetic function is constantly subject to repeated rectifications that occur in the course of the subject’s reflection on her or his life. For Ricoeur, narrative identity is the result of these rectifications, proceeding by way of *mimesis III*. Thus, the third mimetic relation relates back to the first by way of a transformative praxis applied to the second (1988, p. 248). In this way, every narrative identity is a refigured identity involving the action of a *poiesis* which accomplishes the weaving of phenomenological and the cosmological dimensions of being, working the fictional into the historical narrative to constitute a “third time” (1988, p. 245). It is this identity which is refigured through the application of particular types of narratives existing in a culture. Thus, the self-reflective activity of the examined life performs a hermeneutic and critical function. The constant refiguration of identity, or its possibility, brings up the question of the kind of narrative—and hermeneutic practice—promoting such a process, so that narrative would allude to the “name of a problem” (1988, p. 249).

The point is that although “life is woven of stories told” (Ricoeur 1988, p. 246), these stories are not purely imaginary or fictional, for they make reference to a domain of reality that can be verified. On the one hand, the stories we tell about ourselves are segments of other people’s stories about themselves and us, so that a self “happens” at the point of intersection of many real lives. On the other hand, some of these narratives tell of events involving—indeed, constituting—a whole community or period of time, that is, they inscribe a history and a memory, so that every self occurs “at a point of intersection between fictive and historical narratives” (Ricoeur 1991, p. 186). The process whereby biographical accounts include narratives of the nation or the ethne would be a case in point, investing concepts like “nation” with an experiential thickness that unites self-identity and national identity in the imaginary.

The narrativity of identity, it is clear, does not abolish the “reality” of the who, but shifts the question of the truth of subjectivity onto the ground of intersubjectivity. The shared character of identity, the way in which we can think of oneself as a particular self only by reference to being-with-the-other, means that identity is always-already cultural. Indeed, self-reflection is the process whereby we apply to ourselves historical and fictional narratives sedimented in our culture, so that “self-constancy refers to a self instructed by the works of a culture that it has applied to itself” (Ricoeur 1988, p. 247). The example that I noted earlier of becoming a parent demonstrates how the process of figuration and refiguration brings into play the

scripts and plots existing in a culture; they fill with content the vocabulary of selfhood that gives meaning to the events of a life and validates the sense of who we are.

The diachronic dimension in the process of subjective change is taken up in Ricoeur when he refers to the inscription of a notion of “traditionality” located in the conceptual space bounded by the threefold relation of mimesis. The concept of traditionality, irreducible to tradition, is used to try to account for the effectivity of history upon us, the way in which the past affects us independently of our will and the way we respond to the effect of history through an articulation of the past and the present. In that sense, *traditionality* can be understood as the term referring to the interweaving of two “temporalizations of history” (Ricoeur 1988, p. 219) that cross each other, constituting particular identities at the points of intersection. A “who” appears at that point of intersection where the history of a culture—sedimented and transmitted in its stock of knowledge, sayings, parables, songs, and myths, that is, the narratives and “texts” that constitute and inscribe a “structure of feeling”—crosses the history of a named subject, constituting a particular consciousness. This is the mechanism by which we are, so to speak, sutured in history.⁶ There is always the temptation to limit the indefinite character of the process of articulation, and thus the anxiety of uncertainty it provokes, by attempting a “fusion of the horizons” (Ricoeur 1988, p. 221, following Gadamer) circumscribed by the space of experience and the horizon of expectation. The implications for the analysis of subjectivity are that there would be, on the one hand, a notion of a subject-in-process, open to rectifications conditioned by unexpected forces, and, on the other, the fusion of horizons that prescribes their coincidence or correspondence, so that identity is no longer abandoned to the undecidability of futurity but is always-already reinscribed and contained within the horizon of the already-determined. It is, as we know, the point of ideology to produce closure through the fusion of horizons, for instance, in the form of the functioning of a totalizing doctrine or discourse or a metaphysics of transcendence.⁷

In this regard, we should add to the analysis of the refiguration of particular selves the standpoint of “working through,” by analogy to what takes place in psychoanalytic practice and by reference to the work accomplished in the process of remembrance when the biographical content of narrative identity encounters the historical rectifications performed by historians. This is demonstrated in the way that feminist and “Black” history have participated in the reconstruction of identity by giving to people a reconstituted past and a different temporal framework for anticipating possible subjective projects. In the everyday, it is important to recognize that the most common narratives and narrations that function as models or scripts for “identities”

⁶ Perhaps we could also try to imagine this process according to the analogy of the envelope, in the mathematical sense, rather than think of the crossing in terms of the point, since the latter tends to invoke a static now rather than a continuous line or curvature.

⁷ Thus, the fundamentalist notion of predetermination or the fixity of destiny according to gender would fuse the horizon of experience to the horizon of expectation, so that experiences in the present do not and cannot radically alter what the future holds for any particular subject. An implication is that experience by itself is not enough. The disrupting effect of a critical discourse or practice is needed for transformation to be imagined.

are now to be found in novels, films, plays, poetry, traditional tales, parables, and so on in which lives are emplotted and secrets of “living well” are revealed or communicated in the form of lessons or exemplars. The practice of everyday life is suffused with knowledges of all kinds, sometimes drawn from or authorized by theoretical accounts, for example, about the function of sexuality in the formation of the psyche as described by psychoanalytic theory, which has become part of the stock of narratives people apply to themselves. In that sense, the three mimetic functions as described by Ricoeur should be read as shorthand for the complex process of the rectification of selves, a process irreducible to a simple linguistic event or to a cognitive process alone. The refiguration of identity depends on the conjunction of particular phenomena, involving action with others, and the retelling or re-plotment of the biographical elements of a previous identity: it is a labor. It depends, too, on the quality and provenance of the narration, that is, its density, richness, depth, insight, emotional weight, voice, point of view, or more generally, everything that makes it an inexhaustible, creative source for the hermeneutic task and that operates to disrupt normalizing closure.

I should point out that although history takes the form of a narration, it is important to avoid reducing history—the history of a community or that of a particular self—to a species of fiction,⁸ and thus abolish the question of truth, for instance, regarding the Holocaust or colonial oppression or an individual trauma. Ricoeur insists on maintaining the polarity between the two, using the notion of debt to make visible the responsibility which history owes to those who have been—namely, the responsibility to ensure that historical narrative does not fictionalize the dead, thus killing them twice over, but must “return their ‘having-been’ to them” (1991, p. 186). Ricoeur’s understanding of traditionality, besides, precludes the forgetting of the past, whether it is an active forgetting (as advocated by Nietzsche) or the result of repression or disavowal (as with the history of colonialism), or whether it is achieved by means of the obliteration of the past through a brutal break with its reality in the present (for example, in ethnic cleansing and some forms of fundamentalism) or, more mundanely, the repressive “forgetting” of unsettling or traumatic experiences. The narrative of the present must remain open to the recognition of a heritage, or “roots” (Gilroy 1993), with which one must come to terms. The problem concerns the way in which this dialog with the past can be both dialogical and dynamic, that is, how the refigurations of the past and the present mutually condition and mediate each other while relating to the future as possibility and as difference, implying the effects of different “routes” (Gilroy 1993), as well as the expectation that the past itself, or “tradition,” is open to a process of rectification. There are no roots without routes, so that roots or a sense of belonging becomes the manner in which one locates oneself (or a community) in a stream of history, the attunement to a memory, an apprenticeship to a “structure of feeling.” Modernity as

⁸ Note the different narrativizations of the same event because of power relations and interests, for example, the different histories of World War II or of the Cuban Revolution. Such accounts constitute communities in the way they enunciate the community and construct its unity. They are open to rectifications that relate to the politics of memory.

a period attests to the recognition of the tension between the two and the variability of the relationship between them. Any strategy which seeks to collapse the two is an attempt to refuse the possibility of a judgment of our presentness by reference to the difference between an imagined past and a projected future, and its legitimation in terms of some value like emancipation.

It follows from my arguments above that issues of debt and of responsibility are implicated in the notion of a judgment of history and, by the same token, the point of view of an ethics in the temporalization of history. In other words, the way we narrate history—whether as difference, repetition, logical necessity, and so on—carries with it normative or prescriptive values since, in constructing the world in a particular way, every narration attempts to persuade or direct the reader or listener to act in a certain way. For example, an account of someone's action that relies on explanations in terms of genetic determination or essential tendencies—the debate about gender or ethnic differences is burdened by a surfeit of such claims—removes that action from the possibility of transformative practices and thus from the openness to change on the basis of ethical or other considerations. But, as Ricoeur has pointed out, “narrative already belongs to the ethical field in virtue of its claim—inseparable from its narration—to ethical justice” (1988, p. 249).

The case of “Postcolonial” identity

I want to examine what all this means at the level of concrete analyses. I will choose the case of (post-) colonial identities in crisis, on the grounds that such situations bring into the open or make visible the mechanisms that theory designates only in the broadest terms. Besides, the level of the concrete calls for other resources, in this case, the points of view developed by Bhabha (1994), Gilroy (1993), and Hall (1996) about the “doubleness” and disjunctures of identity experienced by those dwelling in a lifeworld split by the conflicts between the colonizer and the colonized, the “civilized” and the “savage,” repeated in the iconography of the modern and the indigenous/vernacular, living the uncanny existence of the “not-quite subject” inscribed in colonial and occidentalist discourse.⁹ I will take Tsitsi Dangarembga's novel *Nervous Conditions* (1988) as the narrative of the mutations and splittings in identity, the interruptions bound up with the “subalternization” (Spivak 1988) of identity formation which are provoked in the story by the translation from the vernacular world of “traditional” village life into Western culture brought about by the process that, as a shorthand, one may call “modernization,” or rather, occidentalization (Venn 2000). These mutations incite a fundamental interrogation of belonging and unbelonging, of tradition and change, in the course of which are disclosed the fragility of the worlds that have been instituted in colonial and “postcolonial” times. In Dangarembga's tale, native culture appears to exist in the routines and allocated

⁹ I understand *occidentalism* to refer to the history of the becoming-West of Europe and the becoming-modern of the world and to the conceptual and material space which inscribes the normativity of Eurocentric modernity.

positions inscribed in the intersubjective and material space of the village, while the West and modernity are at first depicted as an outside entity or force, occasionally intruding into the world of the settled community. But, as the story unfolds, we find that this neat picture of the local and the global/cosmopolitan conceals a more complicated and mobile reality, so that we discover that mutations and cultural translations have been in process for a long time already, triggered within living memory by the imperial project of Europe.

The narrative begins with the narrator's (Tambu) memory of her life as a village girl in Zimbabwe in the 1960s. It then moves on to the beginning of her initiation into Western culture through schooling and her formation as an "emancipated" young woman in the household of her Westernized uncle (Babamukuru). We are presented with a picture of her early life enclosed within the horizon of the "traditional," routinized tasks concerned with the homestead and circumscribed by the already-determined limits dictated by her destiny as female. The pattern varied little. It inscribed an apprenticeship into the skills, values, and conduct that are deemed suitable for a girl, acquired through helping the womenfolk with the tasks of cooking, cleaning, fetching water, gathering firewood, working in the field to grow the crops, and tending the herd on which the family survives. The narration of this apparently settled way of life includes accounts of happy memories of long unhurried walks to the river, picking wild fruit in the woods, resting in the shade of trees, stories told of the life of the community so that the material reality of village life—the intimate interrelationships of words and objects which modulate intersubjective encounters and shape what is possible—is thickened with a sense of belonging and ontological security as well as moments of quiet freedom. She attends school occasionally, for it is not a priority for girls, their duties, and formation as future wives and mothers taking precedence over education. The family is ruled by an affable but tradition-bound father who has done his best to keep his daughter confined within the parameters of the "traditional" village. Her brother (Nhamo), on the other hand, is given the task and opportunity of "lifting our branch of the family out of squalor" (p. 4) through education.

The narrator had imagined that life had always been like this for the community, though she remembers her grandmother, who had a vague recollection of different times, telling her that once her ancestors lived well on the land until "white wizards" arrived, avaricious and grasping, "well versed in treachery and black magic" (p. 18); they had gradually appropriated everything, forcing the indigenous folk off their farms into poor quality land. Many had to leave to find a living toiling in the mines in the south. For the grandmother, this tale had a lesson, not about colonialism, except implicitly, but about how suffering can be overcome if one "endured and obeyed," as her son Babamukuru had done. He had been sent to the mission school and had won scholarships and succeeded beyond all expectations, studying to post-graduate level in England. His return had been crowned by being appointed head of the mission school, so that he now enjoyed the combined power and authority of the head of the village and of an important state institution. This situation, whereby indigenous and occidental relations of power have amplified each other's effects in sustaining systems of oppression, is an important if neglected element of (post) colonial culture, for example, concerning gender relations; it is a central theme in

the novel. Nhamo was meant to follow in Babamukuru's footsteps. Tambu dreams of an education and a lifestyle like that enjoyed by Nhamo, who had every privilege at home because of his studies and because he is male, and who enjoyed humiliating her when Tambu complained about her duties. Her chance comes when Nhamo dies in a car accident and her father reluctantly agrees to Babamukuru's wish to let her pick up the opportunity to take on "this job of raising this family from hunger and need" (p. 56). Thus began a journey to a different identity and a different future. It is marked by a radical shift in the horizon of experience and the horizon of expectation and poses for us questions about the disjunctures of time and identity, and the specific narratives that help the refiguration of subjectivity.

The change is signaled by the narrator's displacement away from home to live in her uncle's house and attend school there. The car journey is an experience of translation from Africa to the West, a rerouting from tradition to modernity; in her description it marks the passage from "peasant identity" and the fixity of women's place in the village community toward the discovery of "another self, a clean, well-groomed, genteel self... [concerned with] the creation of consciousness... an emancipation" (p. 58, 59), except that these lifeworlds turn out to be more disjunct and complex than that.

For Tambu, the encounter with Westernized life is one of defamiliarization and deterritorialization, experienced in the different materiality and spatial distribution of the new world—the car to start with, a key trope with its connotations of wealth, modernization, freedom, and displacement, then the comparatively immense size of her uncle's house and its disorienting layout, for the house is differentiated according to a Westernized spatialization of everyday activities. It is a world of dining room, sitting room, bedrooms, fireplace, bookcase, cutlery, and china: proper spaces and proper objects for the initiation into modernity and the time of progress. Identity may be inscribed in narrative, but it is also a fold in the fabric of the world. Additionally, the performative character (Butler 1993) of the process of (re)formation of Tambu's identity is striking. Terms like *modern* and so on do not appear; instead it is a matter of requests to act in a certain way, to read particular books, to use particular objects, to conduct oneself in a certain way, without any kind of guide or explanation, so that the only way for Tambu to find out, for example, which cutlery to use, when to speak, and so on, is learned through watching and repeating: do this, eat like this, read these books, conduct yourself in this way, and you will be modern. She is rewarded with unspoken signs of approval whenever she shows that she has cracked the code.

The iterative and performative aspects of the process of formation have a lot to do with the fact that the cultural mimicry of Westernization which shapes the practice of everyday life in the Babamukuru household remains that of surface appearance, without a clear commitment to the underlying values and without its inscription or embeddedness in a network of intersubjective action extending beyond the household. An absence of what Ricoeur calls "traditionality" underlies the communicative action in the household, so that the reader increasingly imagines it to be a nowhere place, out of place and out of time, neither African nor English or even hybrid. A point immediately follows: it concerns the absence of explicit narratives in the culture that could mediate the process of subjective refiguration (*mimesis III*),

and provide anchorage for forms of empowerment and resistance that do not simply reinscribe already established forms of sociality and belonging. These come from elsewhere, as we shall see.

A central figure in the novel in terms of its diegetic development is that of Tambu's cousin, Nyasha, who accompanied her parents to England when she was little and who now knows herself to be "hybrid," her head "full of loose connections that are always sparking," as her mother had put it (p. 74). This kind of unbelonging—the "too Anglicized" little African girl who has forgotten how to speak Shona, a cultural dispossession which will leave her mute and bereft when searching for a language to ground ontological security and basically, to refigure her story, to retranscribe it in light of the displacements and losses she has experienced, for the mimetic function must be tethered to the experiential—finds expression in a range of disagreements with her parents about the rules of proper behavior and conduct, a situation which the latter find disturbing because they cannot imagine the stories and exemplars with which to counter it. Babamukuru simply resorts to the invocation of parental authority and ineffective threats and, when everything else fails, punishments. Nyasha already shows a rebellious independence of mind, evidenced in her arguments with her parents, her secret habit of smoking, and her choice of material to read, including much-disapproved of novels like *Lady Chatterley's Lover* but also historical works about South Africa, Palestine, the Nazis, and so on. She discovers through each dispute the contradictions between the values of autonomy and emancipation she learns in the books she reads and the authoritarian patriarchy behind the veneer of liberal civility that masks her father's power. A bond of solidarity develops between the two girls as Nyasha is gradually drawn into this new world, seduced by its secret pleasures, its promise of discoveries and liberation, and her dream of becoming like her cousin.

The conflicts of "double consciousness" (Gilroy 1993) come to a crisis when Babamukuru decides that Tambu's parents had not been properly married since it had only been a tribal ceremony and that they must now have a church wedding to repair this neglect. This rejection of the validity of the norms recognized by the local community and the delegitimation of the relations of obligation and so on, instantiated in the intersubjective network of action and communication in the community, shows how the authorizing narratives from the colonizer's world can still disrupt the values and attitudes of people in postcolonial times. The *differend* which is set up—for many villagers do not accept the superiority of Western values and consider them incommensurate with their form of sociality—brings into visibility the power of colonial discourse and the multiple points of its exercise, a power that had appeared absent from village life. Through Babamukuru, described as "a bloody good kaffir" by his daughter (p. 200), the authority of Western values and its denigration of indigenous values continues to reshape the community. The narration of the events surrounding the dispute shows Westernization to have become a force operating inside the postcolonial community and thus not lived as a force imposed from outside the community (such as a colonial authority). Westernization is at work at both visible and invisible levels; it operates through the apparatuses of subject formation—schools and so on—but also, and in more intractable ways, through the subjectivity of the agents and actors and is therefore more difficult to resist and

work through because the fractures and ambivalences have become folded inside the psyche of subjects.¹⁰

It comes as no surprise that the rest of the extended family is browbeaten into submission to Babamukuru's wish. Nyasha's and Tambu's ambivalences about the wedding, together with the disrupting effects of psychic torments provoked by several incidents, precipitate a crisis of identity for the girls. For Tambu, this is experienced as an out-of-body experience of doubleness, at once uncanny and liberating, for at the end she is set on a principled resistance. The narrative enables one to reconstruct several sources that nourish her resistance: the distantiating experience of Westernization, the countless little cuts inflicted by patriarchal oppression, and something that resides in the "essential parts of you [that] stayed behind no matter how violently you tried to dislodge them in order to take them with you" (p. 173). This violence of dislocation is what her mother, secure in her African identity, calls "Englishness," a kind of "disease," that Tambu comes to recognize. It is a violence that takes one away from oneself, a dispossession that makes you "forget who were, what you were and why you were that" (p. 178).

So, in the novel, the discourses and tropes gathered in the signifiers "Englishness" and "Africanness" are made to configure the spatiality and temporality of colonial modernity in terms of incommensurable worlds. This is why the Babamukuru household becomes a nowhere place and a place of mimicry, as camouflage in the case of Tambu and as the repetition that repeats differently in the case of Nyasha, and is thus subversive to power, as Bhabha (1994) has argued. Nyasha, unable to come to terms with the fact that she knows herself to be neither "one of them" nor "one of you" (p. 201) and lacking the narratives to give voice to the hyphenated existence of unbelonging, suffers a schizophrenic breakdown.

Tambu survives to tell the story—or, better, she survives by telling the story, a cathartic telling since it is also a retranscription,¹¹ drawing strength from the experience and resilience of the women in her life and from her own sense of rootedness. Her narrative is a refiguration, or rerouting, implicating a transfiguration of her identity, overcoming abjection (see Kristeva 1982) and the disjunct temporalities of "postcolonial" modernity, split between custom and the modern, past and present, agency and subalternity, awaiting the presenting of the future from the disjointed elements thrown together in the havoc of colonialism.

It is clear in the tale that the ability to ground one's story in an intersubjective domain of shared experience and expectations is important for one to root oneself in

¹⁰ Westernization appears as an imperative—the occidentalist imperative—inscribed in Western culture and way of life, materialized in the technology and disciplining apparatuses of an imperial governmentality (Venn 2000). Without a critical discourse and counter-narratives of legitimation, Westernization has what one could call a "normalitarian" effect, that is, it is both normalizing and totalitarian. It is interesting that "racialized boundaries" are hardly visible or crossed in the novel, since white people are mainly absent, except for a number of telling encounters, though "Englishness" pervades the narration: it is the shadowy presence enframing the economy of power.

¹¹ It may be possible to relate the process of refiguration with the retranscription of memory that Freud had conceptualized in terms of *Nachträglichkeit*. I do not have the space to fully develop the interconnections here, as one would have to relocate the problematic of memory away from interpretations which privilege the primacy of sexuality in the theorization of the mechanisms at work.

a sense of place. This aspect of identity being entangled with that of others, stressed by Ricoeur, is something that transcends specific forms of sociality; it has a kind of ontological priority in one's understanding of subjectivity. However, from the point of view of changing the subject, one must be able to find a space that mediates between the domain of experience and that of expectation, a "third space" affiliated to a "third time." Fiction, for Ricoeur, can provide the narratives and plots for a reflection on "living well" which points to possible worlds, at odds with ideological representations of the lifeworld, that is, with representations that operate a closure in the space of expectation when the future is meant to simply repeat the existing state of affairs (this can happen even when there is novelty, as with fashion and the culture of the commodity).¹²

A critical hermeneutics, however, must be able to address the question of power and must recognize the dimension of affect in the processes whereby we are led to question ourselves as to our way of being. In *Nervous Conditions*, conflicting examples of the desired life are articulated by both the supporters of modernization and those of "tradition," though in reality they interpenetrate, setting up the ambivalences and dislocations that all the characters find difficult to live with. It is clear, too, that the mediation of fiction is not automatic. For Nyasha, the violence of unbelonging together with the denial of its reality by her father and the fact that she cannot relate to the wider community—especially the women—from which she had been separated as a child, provoke emotions that nothing, not even the fiction she reads, whose scripts incite her critique of her father's patriarchal bullying, could contain. A second-order discourse is needed, a critical discourse which discloses, or enables the labor of working through to disclose, an alternative world. This discourse makes possible a *poiesis*, necessary for any transfiguration of subjectivity.

It could be argued that novels like *Nervous Conditions* are themselves the kind of artistic work that function in that way.¹³ Although models of emplotment are already inscripted in the intersubjectivity of a linguistic community so that the prefigurative inscribe a relation to traditionality, fiction is the space of emergence of ideal(ized) or fantasized models and alternative lifeworlds. It can connect the three moments of temporality in new ways which reroute "traditionality," or rather historicity, toward a different anticipation of the future. One needs to bear in mind here the particular sense of historicity that I have been developing, one that considers temporality and spatiality, as well as the objectal and the social reality, to be its constitutive dimensions, so that the world to which the subject, as social being, is coupled is at once archive and monument, the space of a memorialization and of dwelling for being-in-the-world; it is the space of an apprenticeship into ways of living that necessarily inscribe an ethical dimension.

Furthermore, the narrative in *Nervous Conditions* implicitly connects the problem of affect with history and memory so that biography and historicization are

¹² Clearly many fictional narratives work to operate closure, that is, they function as ideology. The question of the kind of "text" that could work counter-ideologically refers to a critical hermeneutics.

¹³ Fanon (1970) describes the poetry of Negritude in terms of the cathartic and disclosing activity that I am arguing is indispensable for refiguration, combining both the level of affect and that of critique.

made to relay each other by way of an economy of desire. The latter brings to presence the liminal or sublime aspect in the process of change, that is, it brings to light an esthetic dimension. The functioning of the esthetic in bringing to presence the unrepresentable and unpresentable aspect in the economy of desire and in psychic process is a consideration that authors such as Toni Morrison and Frantz Fanon, in their different ways, have expressed in their writings (see Venn 2000, 2002, for details). In short, the analysis of the process of refiguration in the novel makes visible an ethico-esthetic element that we need to add to the cognitive. In other words, knowing what is happening, as Nyasha appears to do, though necessary, is not enough. It could be argued that this is because the narrative character of identity, because of its relation to a domain of fantasy through the fictional modality of emplotment, already harbors the yearning for an inaccessible ideal (of the good and of the beautiful, and, at the psychic level, of the ideal ego and the ego ideal), a yearning which gives expression to the apprehension of what exceeds representation: the sublime, the abject, the unnamable. It is a standpoint that opens the analysis toward questions of lack and loss and toward an ontology, rather than toward a psychology. It could be pointed out, incidentally, that the tools of psychoanalytic theory would be of limited help in the analysis of the postcolonial predicament presented in the novel, mainly because of the absence of concepts in the theory for dealing with “race” and skin color and because the privilege of the nuclear family and of sexuality (besides the acknowledged phallocentrism) in Freudianism forecloses a more expansive conceptualization of subjectivity and the economy of desire (see Deleuze and Guattari 1985; Benjamin 1998; and Venn 2002).

Lessons for disidentification

Let me pick out a number of themes as a way of summarizing the points that I want to signal in relation to the question of subjective transformation generally, and the question of postcolonial identity and its refiguration as a special case. At the level of the general protocols of analysis and critique, I would point out again the intersubjective and cultural–material dimension of identity, against notions of the autonomous singularity of the self and the conceptualization of a self-present “I” acting as the originary point of agency. This heteronomous dimension is tied to the priority granted to temporality in the understanding of being and the implications for the theorization of identity and subjectivity, particularly the emphasis on the interconnectedness or “articulated unity” (Ricoeur 1988, p. 70) of the three ecstasies of time: the having-been, the making-present, and the coming-toward. Central to connectedness is the functioning of the indirect discourse of narration as a way of giving reality to, or making phenomenal, the ontological standpoint. Narrative mingles our individual history and our identity with that of others and their stories, so that I am always multiply dispersed into a series of stories and acts involving others and their stories. This aspect of being-with is repeated in the connection of temporality and historicity through narration, as I have examined by reference to the cultural and intersubjective location and nature of the mechanisms for the (re)formation of subjectivity. This location is far from being discursive alone, for we exist as embodied

entities coupled to the material world. The standpoint of embodiment brings into focus the place of affect in these mechanisms.

We are, I think, in a position now to examine the three mimetic functions in a wider framework. To start with, it is clear that they are not static categories, since each is layered and altered by the action of the other two in an autopoietic way. One can regard prefiguration (mimesis I) as referring to an imaginary field that would function as the archive for real-stories-in-becoming. To that extent, one can relate it to the standpoint of the self as potentiality which Ricoeur (1992, 308ff.) discusses in a different context.¹⁴ It is made up of two domains, the psychical imaginary and something akin to a cultural unconscious. The prefigurative could therefore be thought of as the site of the relay between the psychic and the cultural/social (maybe a point of suture). It is the confluent of two kinds of memorization. One is that of feelings, desires, cathexes, and dispositions which fill with content the “interiority” of the subject, thereby constituting the psychic domain as semiotic systems, ranging from the choric to the symbolic. This is the domain into which the social maps, so that it functions as a constitutive “outside” for interiority. The other memorization gathers the history of a community into a stock of possible narratives (with referents in an objectal domain, so that the symbolic and the material universes cannot be thought of in terms of polarities or oppositions but in terms of an interpenetration or chiasm), including models for the emplotment of biographical events. Thus, the relation of the psychic to the social and cultural is mediated by different modalities of memorization, involving the complex articulation of corporeal and signifying processes.

It follows that the relation of mimesis to memory is equally complex, since it is not one of simple representation or copy, that is, it is not one of correspondence but of figuration and configuration, folds within folds entailed in emplotment (mimesis II). It could be held therefore that narrative identity is storied according to the manner in which mimesis III sets to work on mimesis I. This manner could be further examined in terms of the second-order narratives (namely, esthetic experience and theory/*theoria*) or Arendt’s notion of initiation, tied to the priority of action in the determination of sociality. It should be borne in mind too that the models for emplotment are sometimes not adequate to the experiential, so that the latter is left in a transitional, in-between space or simply left unaccounted for, as in the Lacanian “oubliette” of repression or in the case of the unsayable and the untellable concerning trauma (see also my note 11 on *Nachtraglichkeit*). The point of view of the un(re)presentable prompts another consideration, to do with an enlarged view of the “aura” (in Benjamin’s sense) which relates it to mimesis and, at another level, to potentiality in the idea of a possibility only glimpsed (through the esthetic

¹⁴ The standpoint of the self as potentiality can be fruitfully examined in connection with the concept of initiation in Arendt (1959), that is, the idea of action (including communicative action) as a creative inauguration that opens up an undecidable future and that, at the same time discloses the who of action. One would have to think about the conditions that enable such an understanding of human action to be validated. The self as potentiality can thus trail in its wake notions of responsibility and debt.

experience). I can only give a hint of this more comprehensive analysis of this problematic of mimesis in relation to subject (trans)formation here.

It is important to highlight a number of problems relating to the effects of power for which we do not find clear indications in Ricoeur, in spite of the recognition of the agonistic terrain of the production of historical narratives. In particular, we need to address the question of the effects of power at two interrelated levels, the historical and the biographical. At the general level, there are the effects that operate in the making and telling of the particular history of communities and periods, so that every history is a particular temporalization, configured in the meta-narratives which provide the broader canvas in relation to which individuals in any society locate their own minor or "little" narratives. For instance, Fanon's (1970) counter-narratives of Africa, set against the occidental version and its narration of modernity, reveals the economic and racist interests that have shaped the latter version. At the other level, which refers to the domain of the experiential, we know that it is impossible to make sense of individual lives outside considerations of gender or race, class or caste, and so on, and the power relations invested in them. So, in trying to transform subjectivities, one cannot avoid interrogating the power relations inscribed in everything that fills identities with content, namely, the cultural imaginary and memory constituted out of the authorizing great ideas, the beliefs, the myths, the sayings, the models and exemplars, and the stories of deeds done, as well as everything that has been sedimented in the artistic output of a culture. It is for this reason that the remaking of postcolonial identities implicates the radical revision of the history of modernity. The politics of difference attached to feminist, postcolonial, and other struggles provide ample evidence that this connection is inevitable. In keeping visible the "big picture," I want to signal that such a revision engages with a utopian anticipation of the future—that is to say, it calls up visions of alternative "big pictures" and thus alternative grand narratives or, more mundanely, visions of hope.

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