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Introduction

In January 2025, in Rome, within the framework of the PRIN/PNRR project Aesthetics and Therapeia, funded by the European Union (Next Generation EU) and the Italian Ministry of University and Research (MUR), an international conference entitled Memory, Identity, Narration took place. The essays we publish in this issue of Critical Hermeneutics are a reworking of the presentations given by some of the Italian speakers (with the exception of Kearney) who participated in that conference. This issue, as with the conference that inspired it, aims to offer an interdisciplinary perspective, combining different approaches from theoretical and aesthetic philosophy, cognitive psychology, and narrative medicine.

The issue revolves around three closely related questions. The first question can be formulated as follows: what is the relationship between personal identity and narration? The contributions by Vinicio Busacchi and myself attempt to answer this question from a philosophical perspective, making reference to Paul Ricoeur's theory of narrative identity. Andrea Smorti's article provides an answer, in many respects consistent and compatible with the philosophical responses, from the perspective of a cognitive psychologist.

The second question this issue seeks to address is: what is the relationship between memory and narration? Igor Sotgiu and Chiara Fioretti answer this question by drawing on cognitive psychology studies focused on autobiographical memory. Fabrizia Abbate and Richard Kearney address the problem of memory from a philosophical

perspective, once again close to Ricoeur (certainly the most frequently cited author among the philosophy scholars involved in this issue).

Finally, the third question is: can narration (verbal or visual) have a therapeutic function? This question underlies the contributions of Richard Kearney, Francesco Restuccia, and Marta Reichlin, but it is certainly also central to Smorti's essay.

1. Storytelling and Autobiographical Memory from a Psychological Perspective

Smorti's essay develops a fundamental idea: storytelling has a transformative power. This idea is central to the interdisciplinary perspective outlined here because it builds a bridge between more theoretical disciplines, such as cognitive psychology and phenomenology, and practices that are broadly therapeutic, such as narrative-based psychotherapy or narrative medicine. Precisely because it has a transformative power, storytelling can have therapeutic effects. If narration were merely a passive transcription of the inner flow of memories, it could not produce any effects – neither on patients nor on "healthy" subjects. It is important to note the interdisciplinary bridge that this idea establishes across the gap that sometimes seems to separate philosophy and psychology. Indeed, one could reformulate Smorti's thesis in Ricoeurian terms without any hermeneutical strain: in my view, saying that storytelling has a transformative power is another way of recognizing the phenomena that Ricoeur frames under the category of "refiguration". Storytelling is transformative because it "refigures" experience. "Stories have different functions, one of which is the autobiographical function".

The theoretical foundation on which Smorti builds his proposal is provided by Bruner – who is an essential reference for anyone studying the relationship between person and narration from a psychological perspective – but also by Vygotsky. As is well known, Vygotsky

distinguishes between inner language – which he conceives as a dialogue that the person holds with themselves – and external language, which he conceives as a form of communication with others. This distinction provides a powerful conceptual tool for understanding the difference between two ways of telling one's own story. Self-narration can be a silent proto-narrative that the subject constructs within themselves, or it can be a fully articulated story, an externalized narration addressed to a listener. From Smorti's perspective, something happens in this transition from internal to external: the narrative is transformed. The way we tell our stories to someone else is (at least in part) different from the way we tell the same stories to ourselves.

This is not the only transformation that occurs with the externalization of self-narration. In fact, telling one's story to another always means making that story socially acceptable.

First of all, this means making the story understandable, adapting it to the demands of logical linearity, causal coherence, and linguistic intelligibility – requirements that internal self-narrations are by no means obliged to satisfy (and indeed our mental narratives are often contradictory and confused, much like dreams). Second, telling someone a story means adapting the narrative to the listener in terms of ethical and moral values. In this way, what might seem selfish, violent, or self-serving in my internal account rarely emerges when I share it with someone else, even if those aspects are crucial to understanding the narrated action. Finally, this shift from self-narration to external storytelling also involves an aesthetic transformation: my internal narrative does not have to be interesting or well-crafted, but when I address someone, I clearly try to capture their attention, selecting episodes that may interest them and avoiding monotony, repetition, or irrelevance.

These three transformations that occur in the externalization of narrative are clearly and succinctly highlighted in Smorti's essay:

> *When you think, you think for yourself; when you tell, you turn to another person. In this case we must adapt our thoughts to a dialogue, make ourselves heard (i.e. be interesting) and make ourselves understood (i.e. say plausible things), and the person in front of us, as well as the way in which he/she will listen to us, will profoundly influence our story, pushing us, if we want to be successful, to modulate our words and respect certain conversational rules.*

The conclusion that can be drawn from these arguments is particularly important for the purposes of this issue, because it implies a direct thematization of the relationship between narrative identity and memory. If storytelling has a transformative power, then "one conclusion that can be reached after this analysis is that there is a substantial difference between autobiographical memory and autobiographical narrative".

Sotgiu's essay immediately follows Smorti's in this issue not only because it is another contribution from psychology, but also because a particularly interesting dialectic emerges between the positions of these two authors. In the final part of his contribution, Sotgiu describes an experiment he himself conducted that provides evidence which, in many respects, appears to contrast with that proposed by Smorti. Sotgiu analyzes data derived from the comparison between two groups of participants in an experiment. The first group is asked to produce a written narrative account of an important event in their personal lives and subsequently to analyze the "phenomenology" of the memory of this same event using a questionnaire. The second group is asked to perform the same operations, but in the reverse or-

der. The analysis of the data emerging from this comparison leads Sotgiu to argue that the phenomenological description of the memory, guided by the questionnaire, is not substantially altered by the fact that the same memory has previously been narrated in writing: "questionnaire measures of autobiographical memory are not influenced by narrative". The data collected by Sotgiu therefore seem to point in the opposite direction from that suggested by Smorti, indicating that the transformative power of narrative with respect to memory should not be overly emphasized: "should this interpretation be valid, current theoretical models distinguishing the concepts and phenomena of autobiographical memory and autobiographical narrative would have to be revised".

However, although Sotgiu's contribution on this point diverges from Smorti's position, and probably also from Ricoeur's, there are nonetheless significant points of convergence between his perspective and the phenomenology of memory. The essay focuses on the methods currently used in psychological research to investigate autobiographical memory. Sotgiu notes that, despite the spread of increasingly astonishing neuroimaging technologies, "contemporary memory researchers agree that self-report instruments – together with their subjective measurements – are still a key method for investigating autobiographical memory phenomena". This observation is important because, even though they are standardized according to the procedures of measurement and objectification of data as practiced in empirical science, self-report instruments are grounded precisely in the subjective experience that phenomenology aims to describe. It is certainly not by chance that the adjective "phenomenological" appears several times in Sotgiu's text, even though it is a text devoted to the research methodologies of experimental psychology. In a certain sense, one might say that the questionnaires and self-report instruments presented by Sotgiu are another way of analyzing the same

object that the phenomenologist seeks to describe, namely the lived experience of remembering.

Among the investigative tools considered by Sotgiu, the Thinking About Life Experiences questionnaire, or "TALE", is particularly interesting – at least from a phenomenologist's perspective. This questionnaire is structured around three theoretical axes that provide a clear indication of the main functions of autobiographical memory. In this way, three fundamental functions of memory emerge, which are entirely consistent with the theoretical framework characteristic of the Husserlian/Heideggerian phenomenology of the person and with Ricoeur's hermeneutics of the self.

> *The items constituting the TALE can be grouped into three distinct subscales. A first subscale measures the directive functions of autobiographical memory: i.e., individuals use their personal past as a guide orienting their (current and future) decisions and behaviors. A second subscale measures the social functions of autobiographical memory: i.e., individuals use their personal past to maintain and develop their social bonds. Finally, a third subscale measures the self functions of autobiographical memory: i.e., individuals use their personal past to reflect on their identity and to create a sense of self-continuity over time.*

Translating these three functions of memory, on which the TALE is structured, into phenomenological-hermeneutic language, one could say that autobiographical memory has a threefold significance for the person, which I would summarize with three verbs: to project, to belong, to recognize oneself. Regarding the project function of memory, the unavoidable philosophical reference is Heidegger. Being and Time – which Ricoeur always keeps in mind in Oneself as Another

– shows that the human being defines itself in his individuality to the extent that it projects itself existentially in an authentic way, and that this project entails the appropriation of one's own past. (Heidegger 1977) Concerning the function expressed by the verb "to belong", it should be noted that Ricoeur never ceased to emphasize the constitutive link between individual memory and collective memory – a theme I will return to shortly – and more generally between the individual self and other selves. In this sense, the sharing of the same past is considered – both in Time and Narrative (Ricoeur 1984) and in Memory, History, Forgetting (Ricoeur 2004) – as the primary source of identification within a community. Finally, regarding the function of self-recognition, it is worth recalling that Husserl tirelessly addressed the problems related to self-consciousness and reflection. The complex theory that Ricoeur develops in Oneself as Another (Ricoeur 1992) on the possibility of recognizing oneself as the same over time – the same self within a history of changes – is the hermeneutic response to the problem that Sotgiu formulates with the terms "to create a sense of self-continuity over time". However, this response is firmly rooted in Husserlian phenomenology and Heideggerian existential analysis.

Chiara Fioretti's text fits harmoniously into the discussion opened by Smorti and Sotgiu, as it revisits the main themes of both contributions. Fioretti explains that autobiographical memory is composed of both semantic memory and episodic memory and entails a relationship with oneself as well as a relationship with others. For this reason, it can be said that autobiographical memory simultaneously has an individual and a cultural dimension. To the extent that it serves self-recognition and is fundamental for the constitution of the self, memory is individual. But to the extent that it implies a relationship with others, it is cultural. "In this sense, both culture and the individual shape autobiographical memory, contributing to the definition of

the Self". This definition of autobiographical memory is important because it opens the way to a reflection on the relationship between individual memory and collective memory – a topic I will return to when commenting on the essays by Abbate, Restuccia, and Kearney. It is also significant because it offers a clue for addressing the second of the three questions I presented at the beginning of this introduction (what is the relationship between memory and narration?). If autobiographical memory involves a relationship with others – as well as the relationship with oneself suggested by the very term "autobiography" – this occurs precisely because it entails narration.

On this point, Fioretti's essay offers several avenues for reflection. Autobiographical memory seems almost definable – based on what is read in her essay – as that specific form of memory that is given in narration, and in particular in accounts directed at others. Indeed, Fioretti explains that "There's actually just one way to study autobiographical memory, and it is by means of the narrative people provide of it". In this regard, the point I find important to highlight – going somewhat beyond Fioretti's literal text but following a direction suggested by her research – is that there are forms of memory that do not lend themselves to narration, except in an indirect or reductive way: this is the case of so-called "procedural memory", but also of "perceptual memory". In this sense, I can narrate what happened at the Memory, Identity, Narration conference, but I can hardly narrate what happens when I recognize the face of someone I know ("this is Professor Smorti") or when I recognize a melody I have heard before ("this is the soundtrack of that movie"). Similarly, I can hardly narrate what happens when I "remember" how to ride a motorcycle, or how to perform a "jump serve" in beach volleyball.

In any case, whatever the relationship between autobiographical memory and narration, Fioretti is explicit in reiterating a point also emphasized by Smorti: narration modifies memory.

> *People need to re-elaborate their past memories through narrative in order to find new meanings and new emotional involvement, especially in the case of impacting experiences such as oncological illness. [...] In other words, the use of language, the narrative format and the setting not only re-hearse the memory but also produce a story radically trans-formed from what it was before.*

Presenting the results of several studies she conducted herself, Fioretti explains that the change produced in memory is primarily emotional in nature. "Our results showed that narrative to others improves emotional changes of autobiographical memories. In our study narrated memories were richer in terms of emotions than memories still to be narrated". Narrated memories appear, at the same time, to be richer emotionally, but also poorer in terms of negative emotions: "the data collected show that narrating a past life memory to an attentive peer improves the positive elaboration of a memory, at the same time decreasing the number of negative emotions". This theoretical framework is confirmed not only by numerous experiments, but also – and above all – by psychotherapeutic practice. Fioretti, building a bridge between the three questions underlying this issue (what is narrative identity? what is the relationship between memory and narration? can narration have a therapeutic effect?), reminds us that psychotherapy is most often entirely based on the assumption of the beneficial effect of narration in emotional terms:

> *The same psychotherapy is focused on the benefit of narrating negative and traumatic experiences, assuming that narrating past experiences to the therapist can improve a patient's ability to give meaning to their past.*

It is precisely at this level that the issue of the relationship with the other can be found. For Fioretti, as for Smorti, the relationship with the other influences narration. When we tell someone a story, we adapt and modify the content of our memories. "Our research team went a step further and tried to investigate the role of the interlocutors in the narrative of autobiographical memories. [...] the narrator-listener relation influences the narrative". This commonly occurs in everyday dialogical exchanges, which often take the form of remembering together. But it occurs especially in the unique interpersonal relationship that emerges in psychotherapy. The patient modifies their memory by narrating it to the psychotherapist. It is therefore clear that the question of the truth of the past must be reconsidered. The ordinary concept of memory implies an implicit definition: memory is the faculty that allows us to know the past. But psychotherapy, from the theoretical perspective outlined by Fioretti and Smorti, does not aim to uncover a truth of the past that is already given. Rather, it aims to "construct" – in a Freudian sense of the term – a truth of the past. "The main goal of psychotherapy is not the discovery of a historical truth, but the co-construction of a narrative truth". The conclusion to be drawn from these considerations is effectively summarized by Fioretti already in the title of her contribution: memory is not simply an archive, because it always involves a reworking of the past: "memory cannot be considered as an archive [...] On the contrary, memory is such a dynamic process which promotes an incessant elaboration and construction of the remembering".

2. Narrative Identity and Memory

Providing an authoritative confirmation of the general approach of this issue, in his essay Vinicio Busacchi explains that the problem of

narrative identity is one that has a constitutive "interdisciplinary configuration". However, it is noteworthy that even when strictly limited to the philosophical domain, this issue emerges in very different ways. From the perspective of "studies in metaphysics and philosophy of mind", the fundamental problem – Busacchi explains – is that of the temporality of personal subjectivity. If a person develops and changes over time, sometimes even radically, how is it possible to "remain oneself"? The temporal nature of personal existence makes it problematic to identify a permanent, substantial core that remains unchanged through all subjective changes. In this sense, the concept of person seems to lose stability and consistency, and questions arise that can easily be approached from the perspective of a deconstruction of the subject. However, there is a second philosophical domain in which the question of narrative identity arises, namely that of phenomenological and hermeneutic studies. In this domain, according to Busacchi, the central question concerns self-understanding and the interpretation that the subject gives to their own existence. Finally, a third philosophical context worth noting is "the ethical and moral domain". From this perspective, the link between action and narration is central, and the role that narrative identity can play in the ethical and moral evaluation of existence – in terms of a good life, a happy life, or a just life – becomes fundamental.

Beyond superficial appearances, it is therefore necessary to recognize, with Busacchi, that the concept of narrative identity can be used to address very different problems, even when one limits oneself to considering only philosophical studies. But the relationship between person and narration can also be understood in different ways. The same thesis – that the person is constituted narratively – which seems to unite all the authors of the essays collected in this volume, actually appears less univocal than it might seem. Busacchi notes, for example, that Ricoeur does not, in fact, maintain that personal identi-

ty is "equivalent" to narrative identity. "His philosophy of man (or philosophie de l'homme capable) does not resolve itself [...] into a philosophy of narrative identity". This is a point of utmost importance. For Ricoeur, the human person is not merely a narrative construct, because the hermeneutics of the self must always have an ontological grounding. From the Ricoeurian perspective, narration, like any form of discourse and language, expresses a reality that in some way always precedes it. This clarification is also important for understanding the mediating function that the notion of narrative identity performs in the debate on the reality or unreality of the concept of person. To assert imprudently that personal identity is entirely coincident with narrative identity would effectively give strong ammunition to proponents of the philosophies of the deconstruction of the subject. If the person is "only" a story, it would seem plausible to claim that they are not an entity with real ontological consistency in a strong sense. Indeed, stories in most cases are not "real", and even when they recount events that "actually" occurred, it remains true that real events and the telling of those events are two different things. It therefore seems to me that Busacchi's clarification restores a balance that would otherwise tilt too strongly toward those theories – deconstructionist, skeptical, nihilist – that, in various ways, converge toward the denial of the reality of the subject. On the contrary, one of the merits of the notion of narrative identity, as presented by Ricoeur, is precisely that it constitutes a theoretical tool useful "in resolving the centuries-long conflict between substantialist and anti-substantialist interpretations of personal identity".

Just as it mediates between the different substantialist philosophies of the subject and the various philosophies of the deconstruction of the subject, so too the notion of narrative identity builds a bridge between the world of nature and the world of history. Busacchi aptly notes that the opposition between idem and ipse – which, ac-

cording to Ricoeur, is reconciled in the narrative construction of the self – reproduces the ontological distinction between nature and history at the level of subjectivity. The sameness of the idem corresponds to the natural element of the person, that is, what Ricoeur calls "character". The fact that character has a biological basis – evident in inherited traits – clearly indicates its belonging to the order of the nature. On the other hand, the ipseity of selfhood corresponds to the historical element of the person, which is enacted in the keeping of commitments and one's word, that is, on the plane of existence (and subsequently ethics and morality). Narrative identity, by mediating between the sameness of character and the ipseity of self-maintenance, also mediates between the natural and historical dimensions of the subject. Busacchi explains this clearly and effectively:

> *Between the sameness of character and the keeping of one's word, the same dialectical tension that is observed between the natural plane and the existential plane – or between the psychobiological plane and the moral and historical-cultural plane of subjectivity – is reproduced (by reflection).*

In this way, the notion of narrative identity reveals itself as a concept "endowed with an important bridging function", insofar as it unites philosophy and psychology, substantialist theories of the subject and deconstructive theories of the subject, the sameness of character and the ipseity of commitment and promise, the objective reality of nature and the existential reality of history.

My article in this issue continues a line of research on the notion of narrative identity that I have already pursued in other publications, which I would like to briefly mention – not for the sake of vain self-

reference, but to more clearly highlight the further step I am attempting to take, in my small way, in this context. The experimental part of the Aesthetics and Therapeia project is based on an idea I developed in an article titled Immagini di sé. Un caso esemplare, il Memofilm (Feyles 2017), in which I reflected on the experiment known as the Memofilm project. Memofilms are short films that tell the personal story of a subject affected by Alzheimer's disease. Within the framework of the experiment discussed in the article, these films were regularly "administered" to Alzheimer's patients, who could thus "remember" their story with the help of carefully constructed visual images. Although the experimentation with Memofilms involved a relatively small number of patients, it was possible to gather some encouraging data on the potential beneficial effects of this type of unconventional "treatment". In the 2017 article, I discussed this interesting experiment in relation to the theory of narrative identity. If it is true, as Ricoeur maintains, that the person is constituted narratively, then helping a person who is no longer able to tell his/her own story to recognize himself/herself in a video narrative may have beneficial effects in terms of reconstructing their personality.

Two years later, in an article published in the Rivista di filosofia neoscolastica (Feyles 2019), I attempted to analyze the theory of narrative identity, as presented by Ricoeur, from a phenomenological perspective. This analysis highlighted both the strength and the rigor of the theoretical position in Oneself as Another, but also a fundamental limitation. Indeed, the notion of narrative identity in Ricoeur appears, to some extent, to lack a phenomenological foundation because – strangely – the relationship between self-narration and memory is never fully clarified. Even though Ricoeur made significant contributions to phenomenology – especially in the early part of his intellectual journey – in Oneself as Another, which is the reference text for the theory of narrative identity, the phenomenological per-

spective is notably absent. This absence means that it remains unclear how the mineness of experience relates to narrative identity. In other words, Ricoeur does not clearly explain how a self-narration can be perceived as one's own lived experience, rather than simply as a first-person account, which could in fact belong to another subject.

I ventured for the first time into an interdisciplinary dialogue between philosophical and psychological perspectives in an article entitled Identità narrativa e memoria autobiografica: prospettive per un dialogo interdisciplinare (Feyles 2022). In this article, I sought to identify elements of coherence and compatibility between Ricoeur's theory of narrative identity and studies on autobiographical memory conducted within cognitive psychology. What emerges is that not only are there substantial points of convergence, but it is even possible to use the philosophical perspective to address questions that in some cognitive psychology studies remain somewhat unresolved, and, conversely, to use such studies to provide empirical demonstration or experimental support for a philosophical theory that would otherwise remain purely speculative.

Within the framework of the Aesthetics and Therapeia project, which began in 2023, I have so far published three essays and plan to publish a monograph entitled Narrative Identity: A Phenomenological Study, which aims to offer a systematic synthesis of Husserlian phenomenology of the person and Ricoeur's theory of narrative identity. In the article Narrative Medicine, Dementia, and Alzheimer's Disease: A Scoping Review (Covelli, Visco, Feyles, Sirotich, & Marelli 2025), written together with a group of psychologists, we present a critical review of the scientific literature dedicated to narrative medicine. In contrast, in the article titled The AID Project: Audiovisual Identity Cards for Patients with Dementia—Theoretical Perspectives and Methodological Framework, co-authored with Venusia Covelli, also a psychologist and expert in narrative medicine, we describe the

experimental part of the project (Covelli & Feyles 2026). This narrative medicine experiment, based on the theory of narrative identity, consists of creating visual AID identity cards to be "administered" to caregivers of patients with Alzheimer's disease. These patients, being in an advanced stage of the disease and experiencing severe cognitive deterioration, are no longer able to tell their own story. The idea is that, by assisting them with short, specially constructed videos presenting their personal history, the patient–caregiver relationship can be improved.

The volume I edited for Le Monnier, entitled Narrazione, memoria, identità (Feyles 2026), collects revised versions of some presentations by non-Italian speakers who participated in the Memory, Identity, Narration conference, along with other contributions by internationally renowned scholars who have addressed the topic. In my contribution to this volume, I analyze the notion of narrative identity in the authors of the phenomenological-hermeneutic school (Dilthey, Heidegger, Schapp, Arendt) who preceded Ricoeur and, in a sense, paved the way for his work. Finally, in the essay included in this issue of Critical Hermeneutics, I examine the notion of narrative identity, aiming to show how this concept responds to the fundamental theoretical requirements that characterize Ricoeur's hermeneutics of the self.

Fabrizia Abbate's contribution focuses on the second concept that this issue seeks to analyze, namely the concept of memory. Although from a philosophical perspective this concept may seem obviously connected to the problems raised in Busacchi's essay and in my own, the question of the relationship between narrative identity and memory is by no means straightforward. One might think that narrative identity and memory coincide, that the former is founded on the latter, or even that the latter is founded on the former. It is particularly significant that Ricoeur – who is the reference thinker in the field

of philosophical studies on narrative identity, and the author of a monumental work on memory (Ricoeur 2004) – never clearly addressed the problem of the relationship between these two concepts. On the other hand, Abbate rightly observes that memory is notably absent both in the theory of narration presented in Time and Narrative (Ricoeur 1984; 1985; 1988) and in the hermeneutics of the self in Oneself as Another (Ricoeur 1992): "Paul Ricoeur saw memory as something he felt he owed to explore, a theme that 'tormented' him as an important absence in both Time and Narrative and Oneself as Another". Surprisingly, it is only in the final part of his intellectual journey that Ricoeur truly begins to confront the question of memory: "Who remembers? This is a question that we have learned to add to Ricoeur's usual ones: Who speaks? Who acts? Who tells the story? The main connecting point between time and narrative was missing: memory".

This gap is particularly evident when one considers the complex theoretical architecture of Oneself as Another, because it is undeniable that there is an essential link between memory and personal identity, which is the main theme of the book. Evidently, without memory there is no personal identity. In the history of philosophy, this connection has been recognized since the time of Locke (Locke 1694), and if Abbate does not explicitly address this point, it is only because she assumes it as a presupposition that can, in a sense, be taken for granted: "remembering is how we preserve our identity". However, from Abbate's perspective, memory is not only a cognitive act that allows us to know the past, including our own past, and thus ourselves. Memory is also something that the subject actively does: "memory is not a closed or completed task. Memory is open in the sense that it always calls us to action". In this sense, since action is always essentially oriented toward the present – because it is only in the present that we can truly act – remembering is an act that contributes to the

construction of the present: "Memory is not merely an act of preserving the past or an archive of events; it is also a fundamental dimension in the hermeneutic construction of the present".

Abbate connects the issue of memory with the issue of human dignity, which in turn appears closely linked to the value of the person. This connection between memory and human dignity is, in many respects, analogous to the link that Ricoeur establishes between personal history and moral ipseity: "The dignity of individuals depends on their recognition of the past, and how they deal with it justly and responsibly". If human dignity is tied to the recognition of the past, then narration is a way of conferring value – and thus dignity – on a subject: "Dignity is reaffirmed each time through the act of narrating oneself and others". Although Abbate's essay primarily focuses on the relationship between memory and human dignity, in several passages it seems to suggest a possible answer to the second question I outlined at the beginning of this introduction (what is the relationship between memory and narration?).

> *The question of how the atoms of so many different memories can be woven into a single thread of continuous memory is answered by the order of narration: stories bring together "plural memories and singular memory".*

Abbate appears to see narration as the tool that unifies into a whole the otherwise dispersed multiplicity of memories. One could add that, from this perspective, narrative identity appears as a construction that seeks coherence within the inherently discontinuous and fragmentary fabric of memories.

In analyzing the concept of memory, Abbate does not fail to address a question to which Ricoeur devoted considerable attention, namely the relationship between individual memories and collective

memory (Ricoeur 2004). "Let us introduce ourselves, as far as we can here, to the difficult connection between individual memory and collective memory. At first glance, memory appears to have only a private and intimate nature". In line with what Restuccia argues in his essay – which I will discuss shortly – Abbate seems to want to legitimize Ricoeur's use of the term "collective memory". This expression denotes a concept that is now widely accepted across various fields of sociological, psychological, historical, and philosophical research. However, for reasons I have argued elsewhere (Feyles 2012), it seems to me that the notion of collective memory is more problematic than useful. It is significant that Abbate, like Ricoeur, cites Husserl, the author in whom, in my view, the most convincing arguments for questioning the possibility of collective memory can be found: "Once again, the phenomenological approach is decisive. In this case, we find the notion of 'personalities of a higher order,' in Husserl's phenomenology of intersubjectivity, as elaborated in the Fifth Cartesian Meditation. The predicates we attribute to individual consciousness can be attributed to these collective entities, as explained by Ricoeur".

From my perspective, the fact that Husserl – as Abbate accurately recalls here – recognizes the existence of "personalities of a higher order" in the Cartesian Meditations *cannot be used as an argument in favor of the legitimacy of the notion of collective memory. In my view, from a phenomenological standpoint, the notion of collective memory remains somewhat incoherent precisely because – contrary to what Abbate argues in this passage – no psychic predicates can ever be attributed to these personalities of a higher order. Therefore, I do not think one can endorse the following conclusion:*

> *Thus, the three prerogatives that we recognized in individual memory – always-being-mine, continuity, and the polarity*

> *between past and future – become prerogatives attributable to a plural subject.*

On the contrary, in my view, the first prerogative identified in this passage, namely the always-being-mine aspect, the so-called "mineness" of experience, is precisely the feature that makes it impossible to speak of "collective memory". Memory is always mine. My memories, by principle, are not your memories, nor are they "our" memories.

Despite this disagreement – which I find very stimulating – it seems undeniable that Abbate advances some arguments in support of her viewpoint that cannot be ignored. First, it is clear that our personal identity is also based on sharing with a group – whether a family, a community, a nation, or a generation – a set of common memories: "Neglecting collective memory means ignoring the fact that nations recognize their own identity thanks to shared memories". Second, Abbate notes that memory, in everyday life, is often a social practice, in the sense that in many cases we do not remember alone but within dialogical exchanges that decisively contribute to the retrieval of the past:

> *It is important to recognize that we do not remember alone, but with the help of others' memories; our own memories derive from the stories that others have told us. Most of our personal memories are embedded within collective memories.*

Third, it must be acknowledged that in certain particular contexts – such as psychotherapy – not only do we remember with others, but remembering becomes possible only thanks to others:

> *Removing the obstacles that prevent patients from reclaiming their own narrative, especially through the evocation of trauma and dark memories, cannot be done alone, but requires the intervention of a third party to accompany the patient in this process: the psychoanalyst.*

Finally, Abbate emphasizes the linguistic nature of a large portion of memories:

> *The fact that memory must be expressed in language manifests the social and public urgency of a consciousness that is not originally private. Our habit of storytelling stems from our previous experience of listening. Someone – Ricoeur writes – told us stories before we were able to tell our own stories.*

Undoubtedly, language is not private, and therefore, if it is true that memory "must be expressed in language" – though I also have some reservations on this point – then memories always have a structure of collective derivation. In any case, beyond resolving the dilemma between individual memory and collective memory, what I find most noteworthy is that it is specifically within the therapeutic context, or rather in the care context, that the analogy between the psychic and the collective dimension proves productive: "What if collective memory were to become ill, just as individual memory can, and no longer be healthy?" Abbate asks. It seems difficult to deny that groups, nations, and collectives need to tend to the wounds embedded in their past just as an individual person does. Yet the wounds of the past are healed primarily through awareness, which only narration appears capable of ensuring: "A wounded memory requires the processing of trauma: awareness heals it".

Di Martino's contribution represents, in a sense, a trait d'union *between the more scientific-experimental contributions of the first section and the more philosophical contributions of the second, because it attempts to reinterpret the notion – proper to cognitive psychology – of autobiographical memory from a phenomenological perspective. Di Martino first highlights the constitutive and productive role of language. Human autobiographical memory is interwoven with language and is made possible by linguistic meanings: one may therefore say that "Language makes it possible to 'have' the world, but also to 'have' oneself, one's own thoughts, the meanings of one's own gestures, that is, to 'know oneself'; it enables autonoesis". With a particularly effective formulation, Di Martino summarizes this circular interplay that necessarily always arises between the relation to oneself and the relation to others: "To speak is to speak to oneself: the internalization of this speaking-to-oneself is what we know as the 'dialogue of the soul with itself'". This emphasis on the constitutive role of language enables Di Martino to support, through argumentation, the original idea proposed by his article, namely the idea of a hetero-autographical memory:*

> *Having to pass through the community, the language, and the culture in order to be formed, our autobiographical memory is constitutively externalized and social; the outside and the other structure it from within. Without language, without a transmission of the ways of organizing memory, without the generative and formative presence of others, without their narratives, the thread of our autobiography, of our continuity of being, of our self, would never have been constructed". So-called autobiographical memories are therefore always hetero-autobiographical.*

In human memory, insofar as it implies language and is constituted by language, the other is always given, at least implicitly. However "personal" autobiographical memories may be, even with regard to such memories – according to Di Martino – the fundamental principle holds that we can never truly remember alone. Memory relating to our personal life is certainly autobiographical, but it is also hetero-autobiographical, because it implies a constitutive relation to the other.

3. The Wounds of the Past and the Therapeutic Use of Stories

In Kearney's contribution, all three issues at the heart of this volume emerge. While Abbate relates individual memory to collective memory, Kearney—drawing on Ricoeur—shows that narrative identity is both individual and collective. Groups, peoples, and communities also tell their own stories in order to recognize themselves in their past. In both cases – at the individual and collective level – narrative identity is grounded in memory. For this reason, we can consider "the formation of the European community as one based on a sharing of narrative identities, which in turn is based on what he calls an exchange of memories". Since memory – as Ricoeur (2004) teaches – is always intertwined with imagination, the narrative identity of a group implies not only a collective memory but also a form of collective imagination. "In other words, the collective memory of a nation, of a state, of a people, of a community is itself a form of narrative identity, what we can also call a 'social imaginary'".

In Kearney's essay, an important issue emerges that remains implicit in the other contributions: the question of the truth of memory. This issue is particularly relevant for addressing the second question I posed (what is the relationship between memory and narration?), because memory is generally conceived as a true knowledge of the past, whereas narration (beyond the specific case of historical

narrative) is often regarded as non-true fiction. Kearney, however, seeks to rethink this—ultimately naive—opposition by attributing a form of truth to narration. Certainly, it is a fact that "every remembered story can be told from a variety of perspectives". This multiplicity of perspectives seems to open the way to a perspectivism that could lead to historical and existential relativism. "One could be prompted to ask how, if we have so many versions of the past, can we possibly establish what is historically true?" Kearney's response to this crucial question – both epistemologically and existentially – entails a complete reversal of the skeptical argument. Precisely because a community is always an organic composition of different individual perspectives, at the collective or historical level the multiplicity of perspectives is a way of honoring truth rather than denying it. "Ricoeur retorts that, a multiplicity of narratives may well be the best way of honoring the truth of the past".

If the same historical event is experienced, perceived, and interpreted differently by the various individuals that make up a community, and then by the various communities interacting on the stage of grand history, telling the same event from multiple viewpoints brings us closer to truth rather than relativizing it. Kearney expresses this idea particularly effectively: "narrative plurality responds to historical inexhaustibility". In this sense, the plurality of perspectives is not merely a tolerable inconvenience but an epistemic ideal to strive toward: "there is no such thing as history, there were only histories. And histories are tied in turn to a plurality of stories". In my view, even if Kearney does not state it explicitly, an important element of difference between narrative identity and memory emerges here. Memory – especially if one considers intuitive memory, which differs from verbal memory (see Feyles 2012) – tends to be univocal, that is, it tends to present the past by repeatedly offering the same version of events. On the contrary, history, having a collective root, is by

its very nature plural. Narrative identity, however, which lies at the intersection of memory and history, can be seen as a way of dynamizing the static nature of individual memory. In this sense, one could say that my memory is somehow "reopened" when I tell my story, and it is always possible to narrate my story in different ways, even though this story is based on a memory that is, by tendency, static.

Regarding the relationship between narrative and memory, it should be noted that Kearney develops a view that, even from a strictly terminological standpoint, is very similar to Smorti's. "Narratives not only transcribe; they transform". The fact that narrative, being more than a passive transcription of lived experience, produces effects on memory is the condition that allows us to conceive of the therapeutic value of storytelling. In this sense, narrative makes possible what Kearney calls the "exchange of memories", and this exchange, which in turn, enables care for the other – and in some cases even genuine therapy. "By empathizing with others through a narrative exchange of memories, we can work through the wounds of the past". The thesis that narrative is the primary mode through which we care for the wounds of the past was already present in Abbate's essay and will also be found – as I will note shortly – in the essays by Restuccia and Reichlin. However, in Kearney's essay, this thesis is presented from a particular angle, as the curative value of storytelling is linked to the possibility of forgiveness. Forgiveness, from a certain perspective, might appear as a form of forgetting, and therefore as a negation of the narrative. The experiences most contrary to forgiveness –revenge, persistent hatred, recrimination – are all manifestations of a memory that is, in a sense, obsessed with the past. However, the forgiveness that Kearney describes is not simply an amnesia that erases the past. Forgiveness appears, rather – in accordance with the idea of narrative plurality presented above – as a way of tell-

ing the past differently. "Amnesty is not amnesia. Forgiveness at a collective level can never be based on forgetfulness of the wrong done". Forgiveness is possible precisely because we can always recount the past from another perspective – even from the perspective of the other, or even that of the enemy. In this sense, forgiving does not mean simply forgetting but narrating one's own wounds in a reconciled way.

Marta Reichlin's essay is the one that most directly addresses the issue of narrative as a tool for care and therapy, specifically from the perspective of the experimental component of the Aesthetics and Therapeia project. Reichlin rightly notes that one of the most important documents in the medical field on the use of artistic practices to promote health and well-being is the 2019 WHO (World Health Organization) report What is the evidence of the role of arts in improving health and well-being? This report concisely summarizes evidence from over 3,000 studies supporting the idea that art therapy can be an effective therapeutic tool from multiple perspectives.

Reichlin focuses particularly on the positive effects produced by techniques based on a specific artistic practice, namely theater. This use of theatrical language for therapeutic purposes is generally referred to as "applied theater" or, especially in Italy, as "social theater". These two umbrella terms denote a wide variety of very different and heterogeneous practices that, however, share certain features. It is important to note that applied theater is a practice that originates within the artistic sphere but is, in most cases, carried out in informal contexts, outside the circuits of "high" culture and outside actual theaters and cultural institutions. Secondly, it should be noted that this is a form of non-authorial theater, in the sense that the people participating in these activities are, in most cases, actively involved in the creative phase and in writing the texts, rather than participating solely as contemplative spectators.

> *In social theatre's method, there is the centrality of the subjectivity of people taking part in projects, aiming to bridge the divide between cultural producers and cultural beneficiaries and reestablish a more direct relationship between life and art.*

Social theater thus appears as a practice in which "making art", producing something with aesthetic value, is even more beneficial than aesthetic reception, based on the passive position of the classical spectator. It is important, when framing these phenomena theoretically within the research scope of the Aesthetics and Therapeia project, to remember that theater is a form of narration. In fact, the first systematic theory of narration in the West is Aristotle's Poetics, which is primarily a theory explaining how to make theater (Aristotle 2013). In the case of social theater, then, narration proves beneficial not so much for those who listen or receive it, but for those who practice and construct it, in accordance with an idea that underlies all the contributions in this issue: narration can be therapeutic, because we all need to tell our stories.

Among the various and diverse practices of applied theatre, those that attract the most attention from Reichlin (and are most relevant from the perspective of the Aesthetics and Therapeia project) are those related to the care (in a broad sense) of patients with Alzheimer's disease, such as the experience of Teatro Fragile, developed by the association Compagnie Malviste. These experiences appear to converge very significantly with the therapeutic use of video techniques implemented in the experimental part of the Aesthetics and Therapeia project with Alzheimer's patients (the AID described in the article by Covelli and Feyles mentioned above) and with the autistic youth involved in the Videopharmakon experiment.

Finally, Restuccia's essay also directly addresses the issue of the therapeutic use of narrative, but only after a long preparatory analysis focused on the problem of memory. Restuccia engages in a dialogue between the thought of Benjamin and that of Halbwachs to show that, for both, memory is a reconstructive process shaped by the interests of the present rather than a mere passive recording of facts. "For both Benjamin and Halbwachs, memory – whether historical or personal – is not simply preserved or transmitted, but is always reconstructed from the standpoint of the present". Like Abbate, Restuccia focuses on the connection between individual and collective memory.

> *Since our interests are always shaped by the groups to which we belong, we remember events that are significant for those groups – not only because others expect us to remember them, but also because the attribution of meaning has an irreducibly intersubjective dimension.*

Abbate argues in favor of the notion of collective memory primarily relying on Ricoeur's work. Restuccia devotes particular attention to a reinterpretation of the work of the author who first formalized the concept of "collective memory", namely Halbwachs. This reinterpretation aims to "defend", so to speak, Halbwachs from the criticisms that several authors have expressed concerning his terminology. If individual memory is a psychic faculty of an individual subject, it might seem natural to think of collective memory as the psychic faculty of a collective subject. Although the concept of a collective psyche appears to be supported by the work of authors such as Jung or Durkheim, taking it literally involves venturing into a theoretically problematic territory. From this perspective, it is significant that Restuccia highlights Halbwachs's caution in formulating the problem:

> *Although Halbwachs's somewhat speculative terminology may invite misunderstandings, he never actually conceived collective memory as an organ of a collective mind existing at the same ontological level as individual minds.*

Beyond addressing the issue of collective memory – which is certainly situated at the intersection between memory and history, and thus in the place where narrative identity is likely to be constituted – Restuccia contributes to this volume by introducing the theme of spatiality. Many authors in the field of historical research (Nora 1984–1992) and in phenomenological studies (Casey 2000) have strongly emphasized the connection between the psychic act of remembering and the physical presence of places or monuments, which seem in some way to "preserve" memories. Following a similar theoretical direction, Restuccia highlights how individual memory is constitutively linked to spatiality: "A few fragmentary images can take the shape of a memory if we are able to localize them within a context". From the perspective of an interdisciplinary dialogue among philosophy, psychology, and medicine, it is particularly relevant that this link between memory and spatiality can be used therapeutically.

> *Unlike purely verbal narratives, audiovisual narratives inevitably incorporate spatial images in a significant way. Following Halbwachs, the audiovisual representation of meaningful places could therefore be deliberately employed to place individuals – whether as spectators, participants, or authors of the images – in a position that facilitates the recollection of memories associated with those places.*

Since video images always present a space, audiovisual images with therapeutic aims can interact in various ways with places, set-

tings, and spatial contexts. Restuccia, in fact, concludes his essay by showing how, in the two experiments conducted within the Aesthetics and Therapeia project, there is a significant use of the representation of places and spaces:

> *Taken together, these practices suggest that spatial representation – especially in audiovisual form – can function as a mediator between collective frameworks, autobiographical memory, and therapeutic processes.*

The spatiality of places can thus serve as a mediating element that ensures the anchoring of individual memory within collective memory and, consequently, the passage from memory to history.

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