

Janez Vodičar

University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Theology, Poljanska 4, SI-1000 Ljubljana
janez.vodicar@guest.arnes.si

**Narrative as a Means of Creating an Identity
for Ourselves and Others**

Abstract

The need to narrate is according to P. Ricœur the very core of creating the knowledge of self. The process of identification through narration does not lead us to be focused on our own narration. We always find other people's narrations first and then start telling the narration of our life. Through narration, as understood by Ricœur, we can simultaneously learn ethics as well as morals. To show this the author compares philosophic view of identity by Ricœur with Frisch's literary experiment in the novel I'm Not Stiller. Both of them are a hermeneutic intertwining that brings to natural identity. In this hermeneutic process we can rediscover ourselves in a world, in which we will respect our own identity by being fully open to its creative transformation.

Key words

identity, sameness, selfhood, narrative identity, Paul Ricœur, hermeneutic philosophy, Max Frisch

Introduction

“Who am I and where is my place?” is the question that is asked more often today than it was in the past. Having thousands of options for identification, which are all better, more appealing, and more successful than mine, offered in the flood of today's global media intertwining, it is difficult to accept limitations that a responsible life “here and now” requires. In his novel *I'm Not Stiller*, Frisch depicted a man, a citizen, who “flees” from his sick wife and the homeland that needs him. He escapes to America, where it is not important who you are and what kind of past life you had; you can always succeed and create a new identity for yourself. As Mr. White, which is the name he goes by now, he is (in this new “freedom” of his) arrested in his former homeland Switzerland, and is now having his old identity proved to him, during a trial for his unfulfilled duties. In the process, he writes about “his” life, where he combines the truth with his imaginary truth, which the reader cannot distinguish until the end. With the help of the public prosecutor, who understands him most, because they know each other personally, he is faced with everything he missed in his real life. His attorney cannot help him because he cannot see the difference between Stiller as he was years ago and today. The prosecutor understands him because he is the one who forgave himself and his wife for being unfaithful with Stiller, and considers him, in this moment, a “responsible” person. He is finally faced with himself when he realizes that he never really loved his wife Julika, even though he thought he did. Standing

by her dead body, he realizes that was the reason why he could never know who he really was.

We will use this story to develop the notion of identity by Paul Ricœur. His hermeneutic philosophy calls for a capable subject, who is able to develop a wholesome narration of their life. Doing that they have to keep their boundaries and be open to differences, otherness of the outside, in order to even create this hermeneutic process. We will be interested in how we can use this kind of philosophical approach to understand the process of forming our own identities in a global world where every appeal for responsibility already poses a boundary, which can be overcome, if it happens at all, with numerous fabricated identities of a modern media space. Thus, Ricœur's solution as we are starting our research may be a promise that we can find a way to combine pluralism and individualism in a responsible subject, which is what will help us to better understand all modern Stillers. He says:

“The person is primarily a project that I represent to myself, which I set before me and entertain, and that this project of the person is, like the thing but in an entirely irreducible way, a ‘synthesis’ which is affected.” (Ricœur 1965a, 69)

1. Hermeneutic way to identity

“The first truth – *I am, I think* – remains as abstract and empty as it is invincible; it has to be ‘mediated’ by the ideas, actions, works, institutions and monuments that objectify it.” (Ricœur 1970, 43)

This statement can help us understand the basic Ricœur's way of finding the options to define a person's identity. The idea behind it is accepting the weakness of Descartes' “*cogito*” as any other ontological attempt, starting with Parmenides, to use a pure subject as a starting point to any truth. Even though Ricœur is inspired by Husserl and has accepted his phenomenological method (with a critical distance), he denies the thinking subject's capability to become a completely isolated, and self sufficient carrier of a phenomenological process. That is why he requires caution with the method itself. It is important to know that Ricœur does not separate the method from the truth; according to him, the decision for the method already means the decision for the truth.¹ Therefore the method itself, if used in Husserl's spirit, leads to idealism which doesn't have much in common with an actual experience of an individual.

“The fact is that the idealistic interpretation of the method does not necessarily coincide with its actual practice, as many of his disciples have pointed out.” (Ricœur 1967, 7)

According to Ricœur, Husserl's actual certainty can only be achieved by a fully accomplished immanence. We are not only speaking about methodology, because it interferes with the area of ontology. Thus the question of the foundation, method, and ego is not just somewhat less important; it leads to the definition of ontology itself. This kind of pure consciousness is supposed to be the foundation for ‘region of Being’. There are three basic facts that make it an absolute consciousness: presence in contrast with absence, independence in contrast with dependence, unconditional being and certainty in contrast with contingency.

“These three different qualifications of consciousness exemplify the central features of phenomenological idealism and the modern idea of the *cogito* as the foundation of meaning, which Ricœur wishes to set aside.” (Venema 2000, 18)

The question of identity, its possibility, and understanding thus leads to the question of ontological foundation and the truth in itself, and is not just anthropological psychological research.

If we could accept certainty of consciousness only when it is completely present in itself, then it would remain trapped in itself, and at the same time it would have to liberate itself from any connection to the world and accept itself as a basic foundation. For Ricœur the narration is a possible solution. The narration is always something else than just the event itself, because it always relates to something outside of us. That is why Ricœur says hermeneutic approach is the one that demands focus on something other than ourselves, and also brings questions that were not understood, and still need to be understood. In the process of understanding, the consciousness is not fully their source, and it still has to conquer them through interpretation. He also finds loyalty to intentionality in this, because hermeneutic consciousness is supposed to always be focused on something.

“The phenomenology which arose with the discovery of the universal character of intentionality as not remained faithful to its own discovery, namely that the meaning of consciousness lies outside itself.” (27)

It is this hermeneutic phenomenology, which tries to understand the process of consciousness of the ego about the world outside of itself, which at the same time shapes its self-awareness that largely changes the view of the subject and is also a foundation to the question of identity.

“Consciousness defined by its intentionality is outside, beyond. It ties its own wandering to the ‘things’ to which it can apply its consideration, its desire, its action. Correlatively, the world is ‘world-for-my-life’, environment of the ‘living ego’.” (Ricœur 1967, 205)

He is trying to connect hermeneutics to the everyday experience of life, but also find a foundation in it, one that would serve as a starting point to philosophical thinking and ethical behaviour. Each one of us is our own choice, anxiety of existence and the depth of existence lies in this consciousness of existential choice:

“Before the choice, I was only the unity of a wish to choose and the unity of painful consciousness of my intimate division. I create myself as an actual living unity in my act: in that moment of choice I come to myself, I come out of the internal shadows, I irrupt as myself, I ek-sist.” (Ricœur 1965, 60)

Our existence is not static; it is like a project which surpasses itself in an individual’s intention. The choice is always pointing outside of the subject and finally, it defines it. Thus we cannot talk about identity that only depends on itself; it is also not dependent on its surroundings and events surrounding it. We know ahead of time that this is a process that points to autonomy, self-sufficiency in relation to the world and events in which this hermeneutic process takes place. It is the ability to choose, that is the source of freedom which in its foundation complicates the question of identity. The choice takes a decision which, together with its consequences, surpasses the subject and at the same time forces it to face the world which is not always and everywhere in

1

This was encouraged by Gadamer, who helped Ricœur a lot on his hermeneutic path, with his positive attitude to tradition, prejudices, and intertwining of different interpretations. However, “Gadamer’s hermeneutics,

in its radical critique of critique continues Dilthey’s dichotomy between understanding and explanation. As Ricœur points out, the more accurate title of Gadamer’s hermeneutics is *Truth OR Method*.” (Evans 1995, 91)

accordance with the subject's will. If we want to live from ourselves and for ourselves we need to be aware of this process. The path to this consciousness comes through the process of reflection.

2. Our participation in building of identity

We normally describe and distinguish individuals by their appearance.² Their body, which is different and in a different place than somebody else, makes them an individual, gives them an identity. An individual is also defined by their psychological attributes which describe a certain body. These remain the same even though the outer appearance of an individual can change. In this process an individual is viewed as an object not a subject. Both physical and psychological identities are given to the subject by an outside observer who does not consider the inner experience of the individual. Therefore we can say that in the process of creating the identity from the outside, the question which identity is supposed to answer and is known as 'who', changes into 'what'. We need to allow the individual to remain a person; that is why we need to accept a subject as an active former of their identity, who will always keep a balance between the soul and the body, between what they want and don't want, between possibilities and a decision (Ricœur 1965, 136). These things only make sense in an approach which is not closed in solipsistic thinking of itself, and at the same time is not completely outwards. This always begins with the process of reflection.³ The reflection as well as its delivery happens through the process of speaking, and always uses signs that we learn through speech, "I have no other way of making a living and I have no other dignity; I have no other way of transforming the world and no other influence on other people. Speaking is my work; language is my kingdom." (Ricœur 1955, 193) Stiller, who is pretending to be White, is also requested to write about his own life:

"So they want me to tell them my life story. And nothing but the plain, unvarnished truth. A pad of white paper, a fountain pen with ink that I can have refilled whenever I like at the expense of the State, and a little good will – but what's going to be left of truth when I get at it with my fountain pen?" (Frisch 2006, 13)

However, this does not work, because Stiller was made to do it, and did not accept it himself, as the public prosecutor reflects:

"As long as a person does not accept himself, he will always have this fear of being misunderstood and misconstrued by his environment; he attaches much too much importance to how we see him, and precisely because of his own obtuse fear of being pushed by us into the wrong role, he inevitably makes us obtuse as well. He wants us to set him free; but he doesn't set us free. He doesn't permit us to confuse him with somebody else." (351–352)

This can then not be a forced process. If we want to make ourselves, create our identity for ourselves and others, then we have to speak, converse in one way or another in the midst of our life.⁴ Thus we accept our own images even in our relation to ourselves. "It is the speakers who mean to say this or that, who understand an expression in a particular sense." (Ricœur 1992, 43) Without the ability to talk about ourselves, to tell the story of our lives, the reflection would have stayed silent, it wouldn't have existed. It always happens as a response to outer factors. An individual that wants to really understand themselves, be in connection with themselves, has to confront the signs, trails of their own life, "[r]eflection is the appropriation of our effort to exist and of our desire to be by means of works which testify to this effort and this desire."

(Ricoeur 1974, 18) Desire is a fundamental disposition that drives humans to express themselves and think about themselves.

“Ricoeur began his description of the concept of willing by asking, what do we mean when we say ‘I will’? He says we mean ‘I decide’, ‘I move my body’, and ‘I consent’. For each of these modes of willing, a voluntary aspect is necessarily intertwined with a corresponding involuntary aspect.” (Reagan 1996, 18)

Reflection does not only mean focusing on ourselves, it is a relationship, if we take seriously intentionality of consciousness, with the outer, the other; that is why it is considered part of hermeneutics. To understand ourselves is the same as understanding the world, they both constantly intertwine. That is why identity is not something static, which is given once and for all; ontological *cogito*. At the beginning of his philosophic path he requires, “[t]he ego must more radically renounce the covert claim of all consciousness, must abandon its wish to posit itself, so that it can receive the nourishing and inspiring spontaneity which breaks the sterile circle of the self’s constant return to itself.” (Ricoeur 1965, 14) And even more, “[i]t requires that I participate actively in my incarnation as a mystery.” It is a requirement that hides a constant process of understanding, comparing and deciding. The term ‘mystic’ does not mean that it cannot be described, think about it. It just means that it is a constant process that happens in concrete life with concrete questions. Likewise, the identity of Stiller is impossible to catch, even though his wife blames him for what he can not accept:

“‘So that’s how you see me,’ said Julika. You’ve made an image of me, that’s quite clear, a complete and final image, and there’s an end of it. You just won’t see me any other way, I can feel that... -not for nothing does it say in the Commandments? ‘Thou shall not make unto thee any image’... Every image is a sin. All those things you’ve been saying are exactly the opposite of love, you know.” (Frisch 2006, 127)

This openness of identity is necessarily followed by constant struggle of her decision-making, that is why Ricoeur in his work *Oneself as Another* (Ricoeur 1992) tries to answer basic questions: “Who speaks? Who acts? Who tells a

2

Max Frisch develops his novel *I’m Not Stiller* on this foundation. Stiller, who goes by the name Jim White, is identified by his appearance and is being proven his old identity throughout the novel: “Every newspaper reader seems to know who Stiller was. This makes it almost impossible to get any information out of anyone; everybody acts as though you’re bound to know all about it, and they themselves only have a rough idea.” (Frisch 2006, 12) The plot of the novel is in the fact that the reader does not know until the end of the novel, whether it is about one and the same person or not, despite the fact that White is identical to Stiller in his appearance.

3

“Ricoeur radically alters the very notion of reflection. The desire for ‘radical grounding’ in self-transparency is a quest that is caught in an infinite regress, where the question ‘Who is conscious of consciousness?’ can never be answered. A metaphysical ‘ground that grounds itself’ is forever out of reach. Hence,

Ricoeur transforms reflection by way of a hermeneutical variation of phenomenology, not to ‘posit’ a substantive ego in control of the operations of consciousness, or to dispose of the importance of the subject altogether, but to purge subjectivity from idealistic and metaphysical interpretations.” (Venema 2000, 3)

4

Stiller’s change or return to his old identity, meant the end of attempts to create a new identity. Public prosecutor, now already as a friend, is thinking during the visit of the pottery workshop, which is what, in the end, academic sculptor Stiller finally becomes, “In what way had he changed? It seemed to me that his mind was directed more towards things themselves than it had been. Once he had spoken only of himself when he talked about marriage in general, about Negroes, volcanoes, and heaven knows what else: now he talked about ‘his’ pots, ‘his’ glaze, even ‘his’ skill, without speaking of himself at all.” (Frisch 2006, 343)

story? Who is the subject of moral imputation?” All these questions are the basis of the hermeneutic process of searching for identity of an individual. At the same time he doesn't deny that the starting challenge is a classical infallible and enlightened subject – *cogito* which derives from rationalistic phenomenological heritage. He understands the limitations of this project, because that is the only way to keep the hermeneutic suspense which allows openness for real human identity. He is not trying to flee in some sort of *anti-cogito* which would completely impair the possibility of creating an identity. That is why his fundamental question is:

“To what extent can one say that the hermeneutics of the self developed here occupies an epistemological (and ontological, as I shall state in the tenth study) place, situated beyond the alternative of the *cogito* and the *anti-cogito*?” (Ricœur 1992, 16)

3. Identity between sameness and selfhood

In order for Ricœur to overcome the dilemma between *cogito* and *anti-cogito* as he learns from the three masters of doubt: Freud, who removes the subject from originality of desire, Nietzsche, who denies the possibility of self-understanding, and Marx, who takes away human's ability to form a stance on society, he develops a double concept of identity in a constant relationship to the third, never achieved dimension. Ricœur forms an identity with the term sameness, selfhood, and other-than-self.

“To these three grammatical features correspond the three major features of the hermeneutics of the self, namely, the detour of reflection by way of analysis, the dialectic of selfhood and sameness, and finally the dialectic of selfhood and otherness.” (Ricœur 1992, 14)

We get the first identity if we ask ourselves ‘what’, and the second if we ask ourselves ‘who’. The first preserves; the second brings change, dynamics, and includes temporal dimension of life. The second also includes the relationship with others; it is in constant intertwining with the other than self. If the first identity is characterized by its own body and mental characteristics, which are attributed to the same body in different places and at a different time (Ricœur 1992, 27–35), then this kind of identity is limited. It does not allow the acknowledgment of temporal dimension of an individual, because it remains static. It also remains more connected with a third person that we talk about, and which does not talk by itself; through this it determines itself, and takes over an active role of developing an identity (Ricœur 1992, 32). Through ‘speech act’ the word ‘I’ exits from entrapment in sameness, because it speaks out and can thus state its opinion and form selfhood.

“As soon as I speak, I speak of things in their absence and in terms of their non-perceived sides. In being born I enter into the world of language which precedes me and envelops me.” (Ricœur 1965, 27)

Individuals thus do not only express themselves, but also choose themselves. The act, which is also speech act, forms an identity with other people, as well as just for itself. That is why it is only in selfhood that “the person of whom we are speaking and the agent on whom the action depends have a history”. (Ricœur 1992, 113)

With ‘sameness’ we have four criteria for its determination: it has to be first a numeric identity; it has to always be one and the same person, thing. Identity is thus the opposite of plurality. The second criterion is a quality identity; it is about similarity and is the opposite of difference. If two persons are extremely similar, then we can start thinking that they are the same person.

Ricœur warns us that time can question identities which can be very similar on the outside. The third criterion is sameness. We are talking about the same life that has never been interrupted, and is merely continuing. It is the continuance in contrast with discontinuance. The last criterion is permanency in time, lasting. It can change a lot through time, its attributes, appearance, way of thinking, but the time frame remains the same. This timely permanency contrasts diversity (Ricœur 1992, 116–117). In order for a human to keep all four criteria and thus establish a stable identity, they build character: “designates the set of lasting dispositions by which a person is recognized” (123).⁵ The character is not just static; it includes the time dimension and thus the dynamisms of the image.

4. From sameness to selfhood

If a character is the foundation for sameness and we can use this in reference to other beings, we have to find something that is specific to determining a human identity. To Ricœur, the base for maintaining a “human” identity is the ability to keep our promise, faithfulness, and self-constancy. In contrast to character, this is not based on a non-changing core of an individual. To keep a promise is not to remain the same through time but to defy the changes wrought by time. “Even if my desire were to change; even if I were to change my opinion or inclination, ‘I will hold firm’.” (124) Thus we can speak about consistency of the character, which gives us a firm starting point for establishing an identity and constancy of selfhood which maintains loyalty throughout and in time, and with that contributes to “humanness” of identity. That is why Stiller does not really care about others’ opinion; what is important is what Julika thinks. She is supposed to be his wife, and it is because of his sensitivity for her that he changes his identity:

“Then again I believe it is quite enough if Julika, and she alone, doesn’t take me for somebody else.” (Frisch 2006, 274)

The difference and the connection between character and self-constancy are seen in narrative operation of emplotment. It is another hermeneutic process, because humans have to always search for synthesis between constancy and permanency of character and loyalty to our promise in any new situation. Questioning the loyalty of our promises only makes sense when the loyalty becomes questionable and is a fruit of a free decision. It is with deciding that we have to decide between maintaining and changing; we are in conflict with ourselves and the world around us.⁶ Experiencing the feeling that we don’t

5

“By ‘character’ I understand the set of distinctive marks which permit the re-identification of a human individual as being the same.” (Ricœur 1992, 119)

6

This is most obvious in a relationship with a loved person. Stiller felt this need of loyalty to somebody, a loved person, as a burden that is destroying his life, and that is why he ‘fled’. Of course not from himself but from the world that was burdening him. Frisch is constantly convincing us that we cannot escape this inner urge that is making us fragile as well as capable. Stiller cannot escape from

his wife, who allows him to not be capable: “I know, you think you’re love and devotion personified, but I think you’re narcissism personified... I’ve gone on my knees before you, Julika, I’ve wept before you, as a man does weep under certain circumstances. I’ve felt ashamed before you. I’ve repented before you, and you forgave me, certainly, you forgave me non-stop. I know, without a moment’s emotion, without really thinking for a moment that perhaps you too were destroying me, and really trembling. Why should you? You are the patient sufferer, all our friends know that, a noble being, who never shouts, never reproaches, no. I had to reproach myself.” (Frisch 2006, 126)

belong to this time, space, or event is a consequence of this inner conflict. Humans feel fragile during this process, even though deep inside themselves they are aware of the notion of the possibility of a free decision about themselves as being capable. Narrating not only makes this inner experience possible, but changes the opposition between the first and second identities in a productive process that brings openness to new meanings, new possibilities, and also new understanding of others. The poetic approach considers difference as well as unity. The first identity is thus only established in a dialect between sameness and selfhood. It is the act of narrating our lives that means establishing an identity and to share it with others. That is why our personal identity is connected to the narrative identity. Ricœur has double arguments for this:

“First, in an analysis of emplotment (*mise en intrigue*) along the same lines as we found in *Time and Narrative*, the construction of a narrative plot integrates diversity, variability, and discontinuity into the permanence in time. In short, it unifies elements that appear to be totally disparate. Secondly, this same emplotment, transferred from action to characters – characters is a narrative as distinct from ‘character’ as a fundamental element of the existing individual – creates a dialectic of sameness and selfhood.” (Reagan 1996, 85)

5. Ethical dimension of identity

Narration opens a possibility for others. Narration is never just for me, I always narrate to somebody else. Likewise I can only understand others through narration. It is not only about words, they can be various signs, behaviour, or person’s appearance, that narrates life and thus form a human image. Selfhood becomes what it is only when it is confirmed by another;

“My existence for myself is dependent on this constitution in another’s opinion. My ‘Self’, it may be said, is received from the opinion of others that establishes it. The constitution of subjects is thus a mutual constitution through opinion.” (Ricœur 1965, 121)

Human’s aspiration for a “good life”,⁷ which Ricœur accepts as a goal of all our desires, cannot pass by others, fellow humans. It is a two-way process and thus he considers desire as a basic human move. In it is an unconditional and un-chosen desire which has, “the aim of an accomplished life” (Ricœur 1992, 170). An accomplished life lies mostly in a confirmation from somebody else, in an affirmation of a personal value. Moral binding also opens in this process. If the desire for a good life is an ethical intention, in a conscious connection with others, and in the process of establishing an identity, then we create a possibility for moral dimension. A short definition of it is in Ricœur’s statement: “Let us define ‘ethical intention’ as aiming at the ‘good life’ with and for others, in just institutions.” (172) Identity thus includes ethical and moral dimensions. In it we see inner strive of an individual as a possibility to place this desire in a relationship with others. It is in this that everything we do is fragile. It is here that the ability to narrate our life and thus establish self image as a possibility to daydream and get lost in conformism, comes out. Stiller flees into that, and stays in that state. He feels responsible but at the same time talks about fabricated stories where he depicts himself as a criminal. But he cannot accept responsibility for his wife and friends, because he is aware of the fact that he cannot exit from himself:

“It is extraordinary what we mistake for conscience, once we have begun making excessive demands upon ourselves and so losing touch with our own personalities. The famous inner voice is often enough no more than the coquettish voice of a pseudo-ego that does not allow me to finally

give up trying, to recognize myself, and attempts with all the wiles of vanity, if necessary even with fake heaven, to bind me to my fatal habit of making excessive demands upon myself. . . Curiously enough, the direction taken by our vanity is not, as it appears to be, the direction towards the self, but away from the self.” (Frisch 2006, 276)

6. We narrate our identities

We saw that we cannot establish our identity directly. The path to it goes through the process of interpretation. Interpretation always means exiting ourselves, which is always somehow connected to speech.⁸ Ricœur’s reflexive philosophy is fully intertwined with hermeneutic philosophy. When we think about ourselves, do not shut ourselves from the world, but the outer world sets in us. Ricœur does not accept Gadamer’s concept of ‘the fusion of horizons’ in the sense of a simple fusion, but as a creative conflict of interpretations. It is this that “shoves” humans from a state of sameness and forces them to establish a dynamic identity. The plot in narration starts a “rejeton fragile”, which helps the narrator give an individual or a group a certain specific identity. This is exactly what Stiller does by writing his journals, when he is forced to accept the intertwining of his old and new identities. But he faces himself only in the light of responsibility to a loved person, when he finally comes to a realization of how little he allowed the fusion of horizons.⁹ Ricœur adds the creative potential, which is developed in mimetic-poetic approach to narration, to this process. “I try to say that by telling a story we construct the identity not only of the characters of the story but the character of the reader.” (Reagan 1996, 112) Everybody gets caught in this circular conflict between passiveness and activeness which is the basis of hermeneutic philosophy.¹⁰

In order to understand this process of establishing a narrative identity and its intertwining with an everyday experience, we have to first look at the analysis of the narration. Ricœur first presumes a subject that is capable of narration. We can accomplish that with the help of imitation – mimesis, which is “creative imitation, by means of the plot of lived temporal experience” (Ricœur 1984, 31). This ability is marked with the term *mimesis I*. If we want to understand the narration through the process of reading, we have to in some way get lost in the text, the story, in order to understand it. This is *mimesis II* (Ricœur 1984, 46). The next step is the return of the reader or listener to their life. It is

7

It is a clear decision for teleology of Hegel as well as Aristotle and from it the deontology of Kant. First is a desire, a goal, and from it comes a responsibility, norm (Reagan 1996, 86).

8

That is why Ricœur always speaks about primary giftedness. Together with Gadamer he positively assesses this dependence of understanding, because without it we would have no creativity. We can only speak because we were taught a concrete language. We understand because our understanding was shaped (Ricœur 1988, 178–179).

9

Stiller flees from himself because he doesn’t even accept his beloved person, his wife, in her uniqueness. The public prosecutor is thinking at the end: “That was exactly how

she lay on the deathbed, and I suddenly had the monstrous feeling that from the very beginning Stiller had only seen her as a dead woman; for the first time, too, I felt the deep unqualified consciousness of his sin, a consciousness no human word would obliterate.” (Frisch 2006, 376)

10

“Upon this dialectic of analysis and reflection is grafted that of *idem* and *ipse*. Finally, the dialectic of the same and the other crowns the first two dialectics. I shall conclude this preface by underscoring the two features (the polysemy of the question ‘Who?’, and the testimonial character of the answer ‘The self’) diametrically opposing, not simply the immediacy of the *I am*, but also the ambition of placing it in the position of ultimate foundation.” (Ricœur 1992, 18)

a process, which in constant dynamics of distancing and the return to life, forms the story of our life as well as stories of others.

“My thesis is that the very meaning of the configuring operation constitutive of emplotment is a result of its intermediary position between the two operations I am calling mimesis I and mimesis III.” (Ricœur 1984, 53)

Just as we are in front of a text, we are also in front of our lives, and in the same way as we can read creatively and thus “place” ourselves, we can with the help of imagination see ourselves differently than we are, and thus create a new world.

This dilemma, which Ricœur attributes to narrative identity, distinguishes between *stase* and *envoie*.¹¹ *Stase*, which means some sort of removal from factualness and activity in a world foreign to me, can affect the dynamics of identity reorientation. Reading is therefore something unreal, if the only real thing is concrete world which we live in, when reflection takes some sort of break and instead of ourselves we see heroes of an artistic creation. But we have to acknowledge that this is also an *envoie* which comes from the concept of *mimesis III*; owning of a text challenges the reader into being and working differently.¹²

“It is in this sense that I speak of the hermeneutical arch through which the work of art is a mediation between man and the world, between man and another man, and between man and himself.” (Reagan 108)

Likewise, Stiller reflects:

“The ever-recurring question whether the reader is ever able to read anything other than himself in superfluous; writing is not communication with readers, not even communication with oneself, but communication with the inexpressible.” (Frisch 2006, 284)

Thus self is no longer ‘something’ in the sense of Nietzsche, which is behind our thoughts, desires, and has to be uncovered as illusion, not even a self-made *cogito*, which could solve all the questions in acknowledging itself. If Ricœur opposes *cogito* with a creative approach, dynamic principal, he opposes the complete destruction of a person with persevering in a character, and even more in a given promise, which he attributes to the power of witnessing. Ricœur’s notion of selfhood which happens in the field of interpretation is destroying the presumptions of substantial ontology. The subject can thus construct themselves as a reader and a writer against their own life. The field of character is intertwining with poetic field of loyalty which makes life some sort of narration intertwining.

Conclusion

Speaking about an individual in a society that knows no boundaries, where we are so similar to each other, and the plurality of narration prevails, even though narrations are only there for personal usage, is difficult. Frisch depicts Stiller as a fighter for his own identity, which has been taken from any frame of environment. In doing that, public prosecutor, who has to prove his old identity, understands him most. He becomes his friend, despite the fact that the “old” Stiller stole his wife. He is by his side when he realizes Stiller’s inability to truly love and to accept himself in the image he created. Stiller tries everything, perhaps the simplest metaphor of the need for a whiskey, in order to recall his old identity, is most appropriate at this point. The prison represents boundaries that life puts on everybody. At the same time it is a

place where he gets purified and it enables a fresh start. Ricœur would call this character. Nobody really believes Stiller when he attempts to use his narrations to overcome his boundary; at first it is only a prison guard, because it represents a boundary to him also, which again points to character – to be satisfied with how I am perceived by the world. He would close himself in a prison of an image that never existed. In the process of narration he is discovering his imperfections and insufficiency. The option of recognizing ourselves as an incomplete being, person, practically doesn't exist today. In a global narration, identity is not something that we choose; it is given to us in the gleam of the lights of the media. All these narrations are sold with a brand name of surpassing all boundaries, entrapment, helplessness, and discomfort. Frisch's Stiller reflects:

“What an age! It means nothing anymore to have seen swordfish, to have loved a mulatto girl, it could all have happened during a matinee performance of a documentary film; and as for having thoughts – good heavens, it's already a rarity in this age to meet a mind that's moulded on one particular model, it's a sign of personality if someone sees the world with Heidegger and only with Heidegger; the rest of us swim in a cocktail containing pretty much everything and mixed in the most elegant manner by Eliot; we know our way around everywhere and, as I have said, not even our accounts of the visible world mean anything; there's no *terra incognita* now days (except Russia). So what's the point of telling all these stories? It doesn't mean you've been there.” (Frisch 2006, 158–159)

His conclusion about the weird world today poses an even tougher question, if it is even possible to have an original narration, narration that is worthy of love, and is able to love others from itself, without pretending to be a mister White or a “superman” from a global media kitsch.

Ricœur and Frisch's answers meet here. It is only possible to maintain an identity if we are capable to develop selfhood in sameness. We are only capable to stay loyal to ourselves in an ethical covenant with another. Stiller cannot love because he cannot accept himself:

“He is not willing to and not capable of being loved as the person he is, and therefore he involuntarily neglects every woman who truly loves him, for if he took her love really seriously, he would be compelled as a result to accept himself – and that is the last thing he wants.” (216)

In conviction that we are driven by the desire for a “good life” together with a beloved person; and in a just society, we can never truly separate the desired and the harmful in-forming. The answer can only be the acceptance of Ricœur's thesis of fruitfulness of conflict interpretations. We do not have to be perfect, but we can still take care of ourselves. If we wish to give value to ourselves, then somebody has to count on us. Conflict of responsibility and at the same time fear of helplessness makes a real image which cannot exit the prison of fabricated narrations. Stiller can only be charged by the public prosecutor, who accepted his adultery wife, even though she cheated on him with Stiller, because he faced himself and his restriction. He charges him to

11
Reading “is both a ‘stasis’ and an ‘impetus’ to take distance from, and to act in the actual world of human action and suffering. Reading opens an imaginative space within experience to affect experience. In this space of experience an analogue connection is made between the identity of texts and that of persons, a space within which the imagination is reconnected with life in order to initiate action.” (Venema 2000, 110)

12
“Reading also includes a moment of impetus. This is when reading becomes a provocation to be and to act differently. However, this impetus is transformed into action only through a decision whereby a person says: ‘Here I stand.’” (Ricœur 1988, 249)

return to his beloved person, in order for him to fully come to life and realizes his responsibility at least at her death. Humans trapped in a global world of images from a conveyor belt can become individuals only when they can, despite how they were hurt, accept their responsibility and also acknowledge it for their neighbour. Though, as Ricœur says, “[n]o one is the master of the origin of his thoughts,” however, “[t]hat for which we are responsible are the arguments.” (Reagan 1996, 125) The arguments for real life for me, and even more for others. Thus the prison of responsibility that we are given by people, who are close to us, as well as society, gives us always a new opportunity to start a fuller life.

References

- Evans, Jeanne. 1995. *Paul Ricœur's Hermeneutics of the Imagination*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Frisch, Max. 2006. *I'm Not Stiller*. Rochester: Dalkey Archive Press.
- Reagan, Charles E. 1996. *Paul Ricœur: His Life and His Work*. Chicago–London: The University of Chicago Press.
- Ricœur, Paul. 1955. La parole est mon royaume. In: *Esprit* 23: 192–205.
- Ricœur, Paul. 1965. *Freedom and Nature: The Voluntary and the Involuntary*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.
- Ricœur, Paul. 1965a. *Fallible Man*. Chicago: Henry Regnery.
- Ricœur, Paul. 1967. *Husserl: An Analysis of His Phenomenology*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.
- Ricœur, Paul. 1970. *Freud and Philosophy*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Ricœur, Paul. 1974. *The Conflict of Interpretations*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.
- Ricœur, Paul. 1978. My Relation to the History of Philosophy. In: *Ilyff Review* 35: 5–12.
- Ricœur, Paul. 1984. *Time and Narrative I*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Ricœur, Paul. 1988. *Time and Narrative III*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Ricœur, Paul. 1992. *Oneself as Another*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Venema, Henry Isaac. 2000. *Identifying Selfhood*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Janez Vodičar

Narativ kao sredstvo kreiranja identiteta za nas i druge

Sažetak

Potreba za pripovijedanjem ne samo da je stvorila epske poeme i brojne mitologije nego je, prema P. Ricœuru, sama jezgra stvaranja znanja o sebi. Proces identifikacije kroz naraciju ne navodi nas na usredotočenost na našu vlastitu naraciju. Mi uvijek prvenstveno nailazimo na naracije drugih ljudi i tek onda počinjemo pričati našu životnu priču. Kroz proces imitacije, mimesisa, kako ga shvaća Ricœur, mi istodobno možemo učiti kako etiku tako i moral. Globalni svijet sa svojim pojednostavljenim naracijama tržišta nastoji ostati pri prvoj i drugoj mimezi te ne može pristupiti trećoj, tek u kojoj možemo početi govoriti o kreativnosti. Autor uspoređuje Ricœurove filozofske nazore o identitetu s Frischovim literarnim eksperimentom u djelu I'm Not Stiller. Oba su primjer hermeneutičkog preplitanja koje dovodi do prirodnog identiteta. U ovom se hermeneutičkom procesu možemo ponovno pronaći u svijetu u kojem ćemo poštivati vlastiti identitet bivajući otvoreni za njegove kreativne transformacije.

Ključne riječi

identitet, istost, sebstvo, narativni identitet, Paul Ricœur, hermeneutička filozofija, Max Frisch

Janez Vodičar

**Narrativ als Mittel der Identitätsschaffung
für uns selbst und andere**

Zusammenfassung

Das Bedürfnis nach Narration schuf nicht lediglich epische Gedichte und ungezählte Mythologien, sondern repräsentiert P. Ricœur zufolge den wahren Kern der Wissensbildung über das Selbst. Der Identifikationsprozess durch das Erzählen lenkt uns nicht zum Fokus auf unsere eigene Narration. Andauernd wählen wir zunächst Erzählungen anderer Menschen aus und setzen erst hinterher mit eigener Lebensgeschichte ein. Durch den Prozess der Nachahmung, Mimesis – wie von Ricœur angesehen – sind wir imstande, zeitgleich sowohl Ethik als auch Moral zu erlernen. Die globale Welt mit ihren simplifizierten Narrationen des Marktes neigt dazu, bei der ersten und zweiten Mimesis zu verharren und ist außerstande, zur dritten überzuwechseln, wo erst die Rede von der Kreativität anfangen kann. Der Autor parallelisiert Ricœurs philosophischen Identitätsbegriff mit Frischs literarischem Experiment im Roman Stiller. Beide sind Exempel hermeneutischer Verflechtung, die zur natürlichen Identität führt. In diesem hermeneutischen Ablauf vermögen wir, uns selbst wieder zu entdecken in einer Welt, in welcher wir unsere eigene Identität achten, indem wir ihren ideenreichen Umformungen aufgeschlossen gegenüberstehen.

Schlüsselwörter

Identität, Gleichsein, Selbst, narrative Identität, Paul Ricœur, hermeneutische Philosophie, Max Frisch

Janez Vodičar

**Le récit comme moyen de créer une identité
pour nous-mêmes et les autres**

Résumé

Le besoin de narrer a non seulement créé des poèmes épiques et de nombreuses mythologies, il est, selon P. Ricœur, le noyau même de la création de la connaissance de soi. Le processus d'identification à travers la narration ne nous amène pas à nous focaliser sur notre propre narration. Nous rencontrons toujours d'abord les narrations des autres puis commençons seulement à raconter l'histoire de notre vie. À travers le processus d'imitation, la mimesis, comme l'entend Ricœur, nous pouvons en même temps apprendre tant l'éthique que la morale. Le monde global, avec ses narrations simplifiées du marché, tente de rester proche de la première et la deuxième mimesis et ne peut accéder à la troisième, à partir de laquelle seulement on peut commencer à parler de créativité. L'auteur compare les points de vue philosophiques de Ricœur sur l'identité à l'expérience littéraire de Frisch dans l'ouvrage Je ne suis pas Stiller. Les deux sont l'exemple d'un entrelacement herméneutique qui mène à l'identité naturelle. Dans ce processus herméneutique, nous pouvons nous redécouvrir dans un monde où nous respecterons notre propre identité en étant ouverts à ses transformations créatives.

Mots-clés

identité, mêmeté, ipséité, identité narrative, Paul Ricœur, philosophie herméneutique, Max Frisch