



Time and Narrative, Volume 1

Paul Ricœur , Kathleen McLaughlin (Translator) , David Pellauer (Translator)

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Time and Narrative builds on Paul Ricoeur's earlier analysis, in *The Rule of Metaphor*, of semantic innovation at the level of the sentence. Ricoeur here examines the creation of meaning at the textual level, with narrative rather than metaphor as the ruling concern.

Ricoeur finds a "healthy circle" between time and narrative: time is humanized to the extent that it portrays temporal experience. Ricoeur proposes a theoretical model of this circle using Augustine's theory of time and Aristotle's theory of plot and, further, develops an original thesis of the mimetic function of narrative. He concludes with a comprehensive survey and critique of modern discussions of historical knowledge, understanding, and writing from Aron and Mandelbaum in the late 1930s to the work of the Annales school and that of Anglophone philosophers of history of the 1960s and 1970s.

"This work, in my view, puts the whole problem of narrative, not to mention philosophy of history, on a new and higher plane of discussion."—Hayden White, *History and Theory*

"Superb. . . . A fine point of entrance into the work of one of the eminent thinkers of the present intellectual age."—Joseph R. Gusfield, *Contemporary Sociology*

Time and Narrative, Volume 1 Details

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From Reader Review Time and Narrative, Volume 1 for online ebook

Michael Lew says

Essential study of narrative

Daniel says

Wonderful, if occasionally problematic, reconfiguration of the central tenets of Aristotle's Poetics. Examines narrative (muthos) as a lived solution to the aporias of existential time. The highlight is the chapter on the threefold mimesis - sheer genius.

Gerardo says

Ricoeur essaie de rétablir l'importance du rapport entre récit et histoire, en commençant cette trilogie sur le temps et la narration.

Mais, avant de faire une reconnaissance parmi les différentes réflexions théorisées par les historiens sur le temps, il analyse les idées de Saint Augustin et Aristote sur le temps même.

Chez Saint Augustin, il y a trois sortes de présent : le présent du passé (mémoire), le présent du présent (attention) et le présent du futur (attente). En plus, la perception du temps naît du rapport entre l'âme humaine et le reste du monde : le présent du passé est caractérisé par des sentiments de nostalgie, de regret de mal-être pour le temps perdu, lorsque le futur est ressenti parce qu'on se voit ou souhaite quelque chose, donc il y a une projection vers ce qui peut potentiellement se produire. Bref, le temps n'est pas une chose objective, mais il dépende de l'être humain et de sa capacité d'éprouver les émotions. Le temps est perçu par le biais de la discordance entre nos émotions et le monde autour de nous-même.

Chez Aristote, surtout en lisant sa Poétique, la perception de l'écoulement du temps est, au contraire, une question d'harmonie. Les différentes situations de l'histoire sont liées entre elles par de rapports logiques ou causaux qui permettent de les considérer comme un seul et unique récit. De plus, Aristote considère plus importante l'action de l'homme, c'est pour ça que l'intrigue, selon lui, dérive de l'interaction entre les personnes, plus que de leur volonté ou désir. Mais, l'intrigue n'est pas seulement liée à la concordance, parce qu'il serait plus juste de concordance discordante : en effet, la bonne intrigue est caractérisé par les retournements de la fortune, par les « coups de théâtre » qui changent la régularité des actions.

Plus loin, Ricoeur explique sa théorie des trois mimesis : la première est la pre-compréhension de l'action en général par le spectateur, laquelle permettra de suivre l'intrigue de la narration. La deuxième mimesis est le « comme si », c'est-à-dire la construction d'une action qui pourrait être possible dans le monde inventé par l'auteur. Enfin, il y a la troisième mimesis : c'est la jonction entre le monde du texte et celui du lecteur. Elle se réalise avec l'interprétation : soit directement, comme dans le cas de l'acteur, soit indirectement, comme dans tous les cas où on fait une critique de l'œuvre narrative.

La deuxième partie du texte est moins théorique : là Ricoeur montre les visions sur l'histoire des différentes écoles d'historiens. Il y a qui ceux qui n'accepte pas de considérer l'histoire comme une matière narrative : en effet, leur but est d'analyser la longue durée et de connecter plusieurs facteurs entre eux : l'économie, la politique, la géographie, l'anthropologie, etc. Donc il n'y a pas des personnages, mais des structures qui ont besoin d'outils de la statistique ou des science sociales pour être comprises : c'est l'échec de l'histoire

comme texte narratif. En revanche, il y a une autre façon de construire la pensée historique : en considérant les groupes ou les structures humaines comme des personnages, parce que, d'un point de vue grammatical, chaque chose est le « personnage » du propre verbe. En outre, cette vision reprend le concept de retournement : en effet, l'événement historique est le moment où un changement arrive, en exprimant une nouvelle façon de l'action humaine ou sociale. C'est pour ça qu'on peut parler d'intentionnalité historique : la reconstruction des événements devient une recherche des causes éventuelles, afin de rétablir les liens logiques entre les choses. Possibilité qui arrive seulement après un certain temps, parce qu'elle nécessite un regard rétrospectif pour comprendre si les différentes intentions se sont réalisées, surtout comment ils l'ont fait, où et quand. Mais, peut-être que la chose la plus importante est de voir si les intentions ont été poursuivies de façon volontaire ou si elles ont été trahies par les étroits intérêts humains.

Steve Greenleaf says

I recall the first time that I read a complete book by Hannah Arendt. I was on a break from college. Reading *Between Past and Future*, I was awed. And more often, overawed. I felt that I gained insights from her only in glimpses, reading by lightning flashes—moments of insight followed by darkness and confusion. With time—that is, with multiple readings of her works, I gained some comprehension of what she intended to convey. When a reader confronts a dense, challenging text, if you can see lightning bolts of insight, those sentences or even phrases that we feel compelled to highlight or about which we utter a silent “yes!”, then you can feel confident that what you're reading isn't gibberish or pretentious baloney. The challenge comes from stretching your mind, not from poor writing or garbled thinking. So with this work of Ricoeur. I've read Ricoeur in limited doses before, but this is my second book-length dive into his work. (I read *The Symbolism of Evil* some years ago. All I can recall of it was that I was impressed, but I'm now hard-pressed to recount its argument.) This book proved just as challenging and intellectually bracing. With this review, I hope that I can provide a glimpse of what Ricoeur does in this project.

In this first of three volumes on the subject of time and narrative, Ricoeur opens with a consideration of St. Augustine's meditations on time and its three-fold nature. Memory is a key concept for Augustine, and Ricoeur considers Augustine's scheme of the past recollected now, the now, and the now-imagined future (or memory, direct perception, and expectation). (Augustine perhaps the quintessential Trinitarian.) After laying this marker with Augustine and establishing the notion of time, he shifts to Aristotle's *Poetics* to consider the Philosopher's use of *muthos* (plot, story, account—narrative?). In the finale of his account of the “circle of narrative and temporality”, Ricoeur explores how time and narrative mesh through the several senses of *mimesis* (the representation or imitation of reality in literature and art) that he identifies. Ricoeur, by the way, makes his own three-fold division of *mimesis*.

From this starting point, Ricoeur begins his consideration of history as a form of narrative, which provides my primary interest for reading this book. How does history deal with these issues of time and narrative? Is narrative an essential ingredient of history or an impediment to a more analytical understanding? Here I'm going to drop any pretense of summarizing Ricoeur's argument. It's long and complex, but I will share the course of dealing with these issues, the works of Ferdinand Braudel, Paul Veyne, Raymond Aron, Max Weber, R. G. Collingwood (far too briefly), William Dray, Carl Hempel, Arthur C. Danto, and Hayden White (among others) all receive consideration. The depth and breadth of Ricoeur's learning is impressive. While I name-drop, Ricoeur engages.

In the end, Ricoeur, by deeply engaging with Braudel and Hempel on various issues, preserves and celebrates the role of narrative in history without negating the value of Braudel's long-duree or Hempel's covering laws.

I will not attempt further at this point because I can't yet do full justice to the diverse and complex arguments and explorations of this book, and I've already started volume 2. This is just a teaser for the reader and for me. To grasp and appreciate Ricoeur will take more than a single reading, so I intend to write more about this impressive foray into history, narrative, and time.

Eric says

I'm well into volume 2 now. I recommend this book for restricted environments (buses, jet trips, etc.) or long solitary periods, as it requires a lot of concentration and requires marginalia or note-taking to keep track. The mind behind the text is impressive.

Dougald says

More biblical scholars need to read this. Of course, by read I mean understand.

Jason A says

This book is not fun.

Mohammad says

هذه هي المرة الأولى التي أقرأ فيها كتاباً فلسفياً، وأنا متأكد من أنني سأقرأه مرة أخرى. الكتاب رائع جداً، وأنا متأكد من أنني سأقرأه مرة أخرى. الكتاب رائع جداً، وأنا متأكد من أنني سأقرأه مرة أخرى.

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Manuel Monroy Correa says

Lectura obligada para entender la hermenéutica histórica y, particularmente, aspectos hermenéuticos de la teoría literaria. Se volvió en mi segundo libro de cabecera al escribir mi tesis de licenciatura (que pone en perspectiva la poética de José Lezama Lima, la hermenéutica y la fenomenología).

El análisis de la Poética de Aristóteles que hace Ricoeur en este libro es sistemático sin ser tedioso y, al mismo tiempo, lleva de la mano al lector de forma ejemplar.

Michael says

A five for content, and a three and a half for style. This is an extremely dense study, but Ricoeur's arguments are forceful and convincing. Part I brilliantly links Augustine's theory of time to Aristotle's theory of plot. Part II demonstrates that all history writing is narrative, even when it is written in a thematic rather than narrative style. It can be difficult to appreciate Ricoeur's own theories at times, because he spends most of the book analysing other philosopher's ideas. There is no doubt that his writerly style is also a bit arcane. But

his arguments, once grasped, are persuasive. I'm looking forward to Volumes 2 and 3.

Theryn Fleming says

The first chapter discusses the theory of time (*distentio animi*, or the threefold present: expectation, memory, attention) in Augustine's *Confessions*; the second, the theory of plot in Aristotle's *Poetics*. Not an easy read, especially the first chapter, which is centered on the question of what time is exactly and how we know it exists. The second chapter is somewhat less opaque. It focuses on emplotment (*muthos*) and mimetic activity (*mimesis*), which Ricoeur divides into three stages: *mimesis1* (organization of events, or prefiguration), *mimesis2* (*mimesis* of creation, or configuration of the events into a narrative), *mimesis3* (interpretation, or refiguration by reader/spectator).

Leonardo says

Filosofía de la Historia. Unidad 4.

Amany Al akel says

??? ????? ??? ????? ?????????..

Alex Lee says

While a brilliant work, I found the layout of his work troubling. Ricoeur is definitely able to tease out minute difference between ideas, explicate authors who may not speak directly to one another, and relate them to the larger thesis as a whole. But I found his structure to be troubling as the work is split into two sections, which seem only related via the concepts of time and narrative... (even if this is a multiple volume work, he should outline a better road map.)

Really, these two concepts do not coexist at the same level. When he first starts, Ricoeur seems to be willing to just talk about time and narrative as general ideas. His use of Aristotle and Augustine were quite inspired. Like a radio, he tuned to the concept of narrative so as to highlight how time was used as an excuse to connect disparate things. His citing of narrative and metaphor as methods to justify understanding (the function of connecting two different things) was remarkable. From that point on, he could have spoke at length about anything he liked; after all what analysis, discursive or philosophy was not made to achieve understanding? But then, he turned to history as narrative.

History was an interesting maneuver as that field encompasses both time and narrative. Like his examination in the first part, he is able to use narrative as a high level organizational filter to scrub history so as to show how history is less about time than it is about narrative organization. I actually don't have much to add, except that chapter 5 felt like the weakest part of the book. At all times Ricoeur's analytical ability, and the range of his study was astounding and a little overwhelming. Still, at parts, he seems to meander, seems draw conclusions that feel a unclear as far as where he wants to go. This could be an issue with how he draws his

analysis...often what he says and who he is quoting feels muddled. I am not complaining that I wanted less material. I don't mind that he rag picks among different thinkers to support what he wants to say or that he mixes them together. I would have liked a little more structure to highlight what he wants us to take away.

As it is, the conclusion of second part didn't add back to the first. He really only talks about history and time at the end of his conclusion, instead of wrapping back to Augustine and Aristotle. Perhaps this conclusion was meant to only be a conclusion for second part, not for the entire work.

At all points though, Ricoeur is eager to show us how narrative (and history) are forms of creating knowledge. We use time as an excuse to order objects of narrative (be it cultural, historical, social or otherwise). These different objects of narratives are fields of discourse that we use to ordain a master order to achieve unity in a concept, for example, the history of the Mediterranean or the history of Victorian England. The construction of these high level unities require the meshing of first and second order objects, which attain a dual status; their gap between what we see them and how they belonged to a time and place we have no access to, except through indirect semiotic objects. Their connection and quasi-status as objects was weaved through what Ricoeur calls historic intentionality... this intentionality not only doubles the objects in study they also create the supra-object of study, a unity whose grasp we take to be synonymous with understanding.

I think Ricoeur's greater thesis seeks to explicate the what human understanding is, and so an analysis of history as narrative still lacks some higher level grasp on what history is as a totality as he also in the first part, is mired in the mechanics of emplotment and how the concept of time is the ground we use to bind temporal objects as greater unities (like narrative that we call justice). Beyond the immanent mechanisms of how these parts are ordered, how they work aesthetically, Ricoeur does not speak too much about the power of narrative or understanding... for example the role of history in greater society. We see that history is one kind of narrative that links other narratives through causal singular imputation rather than generic law (as with physics), but are there other orders that are not narrative? Is all understanding narrative? I think Ricoeur says yes. But he doesn't go in this direction yet; he's still talking about the narrative immanence, using the concept of narrative to demonstrate its essentiality in constructing temporal unity. Perhaps he will cover this along with other kinds of narratives in his second volume.

Carl says

I read a significant portion of this book for my literary history seminar with Mark Sandberg back in 2005 (Fall, I think?), and loved it at the same time that I had a hell of a time understanding it. The first two chapters take first Augustine's meditation on Time from a more ontological perspective and then Aristotle's theory of narrative from his Poetics, neither of which I was very familiar with, and then binds them together into a thesis human temporal and "narratological" ontology. I've since been able to read Augustine's Confessions, which helped with the first part, and plan on getting to Aristotle's Poetics (and maybe his Rhetoric) and then making my way through all of Ricoeur's Time and Narrative Trilogy. It looks impressive - I'm tempted to say it is Ricoeur's crowning achievement, but considering how little I know about Ricoeur so far, this is probably my enthusiasm getting the better of me.

As I was reading this in the context of a course on the possibility of and strategies for writing literary history, the main point I took from it at the time was that, while historical narrative is indeed always complicit in some way in the oversimplification of the "real" events of the world (meaning that narrative causality is problematic and cannot plausibly cover all the factors involved in the real world), history is itself always part of human narrative reality, humans being inherently narrative beings in our existence as temporal creatures.

Indeed, an "event" is itself always a human construction, an attribution of narrative meaning by which actions are recognized and understood. There is much more to it, but hopefully I haven't totally mangled Ricoeur's point.
