

Narrating Across the Lifespan: Temporal Pressures, Aesthetic Presence, and Consummation of the Other

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In this article, we develop the idea of temporal pressure. Temporal pressure is the interactive communicative dynamic that exerts specific pressure on individuals as we move through the life course. Each narrator has a myriad of forces (e.g., gender, race/ethnicity, socio-economic status) that restrict and expand a given story. Heretofore underexplored in the communication narrative literature is the specific force exerted on a storyteller in time. As narrators tell and (re)create the lived moments of their respective pasts, presents, and futures, where they are within the life spectrum (adolescents, young adult, middle age, old age) simultaneously restricts and expands the storied life and the veracity of a given story. We do not all share the same resources and/or the same restrictive capacities. We do share a life within story and the endless pursuit to make our lives meaningful to some degree. In order to do so, we contend that a pragmatic aesthetic orientation to the present positions individuals to fully comprehend the illusive dynamic of the (re)creation of the past, present and future. We have termed this concept aesthetic presence. Aesthetic presence is a pragmatic orientation to a dynamic mundane present, which sees certain moments of our lived experience as abundantly ripe with potential—neither good or bad but rich with meaning.

Poets, writers, musicians, and artists understand that our lives—the richness, the beauty and depravity—are lived within the middle, the unsaid, the misunderstood, the shouted and the tiny articulated bravado of youth and the measured story of the elderly. Our lives, if not fully imbedded in stories, are understood and rendered meaningful through the imaginative leap of narration (Andrews, 2014; Bruner, 2002; Freeman, 2010; Macintyre, 2007; Yamasaki & Sharf, 2011). Storytelling is not a cavalier and isolated event but is inherently relational—we tell stories with, for, and to others. We are free to tell stories that simultaneously expand and contract ourselves and our shared world; however, particular audiences grant hearings to specific stories told by distinct narrators in response to exigencies of each unique situation. There are a multitude of factors that expand and constrain

a given story, and by virtue a given storyteller. In this essay, we argue that how we orient ourselves in a given moment within the lifespan bares a tremendous amount of influence on the veracity of particular stories. *Temporal pressure* is the interactive communicative dynamic that exerts specific pressure on individuals as we move through the life course.

There is obviously a myriad of fluid identity constructs—gender and sexual identities, race/ethnicity, socio-economic status, and importantly, age—that influence what stories are told and which ones gain traction. We examine how orienting ourselves toward the present moment impacts our ability to render narratives and lives meaningful. As we tell the story(ies) of our lives, we are constantly tacking back and forth between past and future in order to make sense of the tenuous and obtuse eternal now. In order to make sense of a storied life that is rarely rehearsed or understood in a linear fashion, we must be actively open (as much as possible) to each specific present moment. Not all moments are equal and it is important we recognize that certain moments are ripe with potential and meaning. We refer to this idea as *aesthetic presence*. Aesthetic presence is a pragmatic orientation to a dynamic quotidian present, which sees certain moments of our lived experience as abundantly ripe with potential.

Aesthetic presence is not life seen through rose-colored glasses but, rather, a particular way of paying attention to moments that are (or are made to be) meaningful. Aesthetic presence refuses dualism. It can be the birth of a child or the death of a parent or the tinge of joy/sorrow of watching a child grow. Aesthetics in this sense is not to be equated with beauty but as an orientation to lived experience with our physical, social and communicative worlds that bears abundant significance—either found or made through story (see also Dewey, 1934). In developing these concepts, we explore three primary areas: narrating through the

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lifespan, the role of memory, and the role of the Other. All three notions are integrally intertwined but we discuss each one in turn for ease of explanation.

Storytelling and Temporal Horizons

We move bodily across time with others through action, story and memory. When we are young children, we are told stories about our birth, our childhood and about who we are in relation to self, family, community and the world. Although we influence and are active agents in our own stories (eventually), others and our symbolic/material universe determine to a large extent who we are and what stories we can tell (Ellingson, 1999; Peterson & Langellier, 2006). When we speak of the “universe,” we mean to suggest the “immediate scene of the rhetorical performance but also the historical, political, cultural, and economic conditions that play out and bear down” on our narration of self (McKinnon et al., 2016, p. 561). As we mature, we start to tell ourselves and others our story of who we are now, who we’ve been and who we are ultimately going to be, but these stories are constrained by our family, significant others and significant institutions (see Yamasaki, 2015). We would like to say that as we age, we exercise more agency but, unfortunately, it is not so simple (see also Freeman, 2011). There are trade-offs as we move through the life course and, we would argue, we don’t necessarily exercise more agency but a different sort of agency throughout particular points in our lives. At every stage in the life course, there is a dynamic tension between creativity and constraint.

When we leave home for the first time in our late teens and early to mid-twenties (e.g., college, job, travel or military service), new storied horizons begin to unfold. We find ourselves in the enviable position to craft our life’s story for new social others, who don’t exert the same amount or type of recalcitrance that existed within our family and hometown (Burke, 1954/1984). Our sense of agency is intimately tied to the capacity to imagine (with others). Imagination, in this sense, is not isolated and wistful conjuring but an active iterative process whereby we try out new selves with a new community of others. Others simply don’t know us, but learn about us through our present actions and the stories we tell. At this age, others begin to experience us as a *tabula rosa* of sorts; they have not borne witness to our past actions. According to Hacking (1995), our actions are “under description” and cannot be invalidated by having been witnessed first-hand (p. 234). We generally believe the storyteller until we have reason to disbelieve. Burke (1954/1984) maintains that during such times, “New lines of cosmological speculation may be opened up” (p. 258). The new relationships we form are predicated on an unprecedented willingness to be open to others’ stories of becoming. As Ricoeur (1981) states, “The primary direction of care is toward the future” (p. 177).

Through story, we construct identities of future and promise. This does not mean, however, that there are not specific constraints imposed (and avenues

open) to our youthful storyteller. There is a tremendous amount of uncertainty about the present and future. Rather, we suggest, in short, that the pressures exerted on storytellers throughout the lifespan are of a different kind (i.e., temporal pressure). For instance, for the young, the emphasis tends to be centered on the here and now and potential futures; in turn, our middle aged storyteller must account for a specific shared past and an accountable future. In later life, as Freeman notes (2011), individuals often experience (and sometimes resist) “narrative foreclosure,” the internalization of cultural assumptions that “the stories of their lives were essentially over” (p. 3). Across the lifespan, each storyteller is attempting to situate themselves in an unstable present and, we would argue, that the richness of the particular personal narrative is predicated on the ability to be mindful to the unfolding present (i.e., aesthetic presence).

Georgakopoulou (2006) points out that “the possible, the joint piecing together of future scenarios carries more social significance than the actual” (p. 127). We would argue, however, that it is not a simple matter of cobbling together future stories based on naked projections. We can tell an infinitude of stories about possible futures, but the universe (physical and symbolic) exerts a certain amount of weight on the stories we tell. In this sense, there is an albatross around our collective necks. David Carr (1991) asserts:

Many of our plans go awry (and stories have to be rewritten) because we make mistakes about the past, about what happened and what we have done. The past does constrain us; it does have a fixedness that allows reinterpretation only up to certain limits. (p. 99)

The (storied) past limits our present and future selves but not uniformly. Different times, spaces, contexts, and audiences impact our story of self. As we grow older, it seems that our stories (as identities) are told by looking back upon our past. We build our character reference—this is who I am today at this moment—based on our past actions (or the stories of them) but for youth it’s different. They don’t have enough (suitable) actions upon which to base the measure of character. In this sense, the recalcitrance of lived experience is as thin as a razor’s edge and, as a result, all they have is the enviable projection of future selves (through story)—endless unmeasured and unbounded potential. Kerby (1991) contends that because there is a certain fixed quality to the past, “One fabricates one’s past at one’s own risk—the risk of one’s self” (pp. 42-43). We agree but would add, especially for the young, one fabricates, out of necessity, one’s future at one’s own risk and reward—and the risk and reward of various significant others.

We are not static throughout our life course. The present moment, and how we construct ourselves in that given moment is in flux, contestable, dynamic, interactive and imaginative (Andrews, 2018). Fisher and Goblirsch (2006) state, “Continuously renewing the self, sharing a reliable pattern of behavior and experience while leaving space for dealing with emergent concerns is the process we call biographical structuring” (p. 30). Presenting a coherent self is situated in the

unfolding present but with a pragmatic concern for past actions (multiple interpretations) and future events.

A Middle Life Crisis

One example of an important liminal moment might be the trope of the midlife crisis. It's interesting to us, as individuals in our forties, how many of our friends are going through these crises. We seem to be collectively saying: *is this it? I didn't know it would be this way*. To what extent are our life crises understood as a conflict of future storied projections and "actual" lived experiences? In other words, as maturing youth we tell about an anticipated life we think we'll live and make major life decisions accordingly (e.g., family life, job, and location) but then by middle age we have lived some of those projections, abandoned others, and hold ourselves accountable in a different way than we did when young—we can't just mindlessly project a self into the future. People and our reflective selves know our stories—we have an archive of experience that says, "This is what I've done with my life thus far and this is what I'm likely to do in the future." This is not to say that the future is closed but in the thick of a life in the middle, what Baldwin (1967) describes as 'baffling geography,' we must reconcile the past in the present moment as we look towards the future in a different way than in the twilight of youth. In short, our margin for self-deceit is minimized or needs to be negotiated through story. Temporal pressure constrains choices and creates possibilities. Even so, as noted by Andrews (2018), the baffling geography of middle and later life offer special moments for the imagination.

Midlife crisis is not necessarily a rite of passage, but we suspect that many people experience an existential crisis during the middle part of their life. The present isn't a moment in time per se but an agitated, tension filled "moment" between an indeterminate past and future. We utilize narrative to help to fix a self in the present moment, even as that moment is constantly unfolding. In that sense, there is no present because as soon as we identify a moment as "now" it quickly recedes into the past. As Rawlins (2010) maintains, "Much of the vitality and moral traction of life derives from experiencing events of our lives from the perspective of an indefinitely unfolding present . . . Diverse 'befores' and 'afters' compose our ongoing sense of the middle" (p. 362).

We're intrigued by a life that is lived in the middle and our attempts to fix a self in a given moment of time. Kepnes (1992), on his reading of Martin Buber, asserts that, contrary to conventional narrative structures that render meaning by the end of the plot, Buber suggests that the middle point is ripe with meaning and potential. Kepnes stated, "In Buber's dialogical narratives, however, it is the *middle* of the plot that is most central and not the end" (p. 97). Life is lived within the rich middle and Buber insists that this is a call to communion with others and a call to be present as the moments of our lives unfold in the here and now. We conceptualize this praxiological orientation to the potentialities in the continually

unfolding present moment, “aesthetic presence.” According to Kepnes, “The middle represents the time of everyday in which we live, act, suffer, work, and love. The middle represents the time when we are in direct contact with other humans” (p. 97). Herein lies the beauty and conflict of living within our narratives. In order to live a full and rich life within the present, we must live, act, suffer and love to celebrate our lives with others, however, those same individuals simultaneously consummate and inhibit us and the stories we tell (Yamasaki & Sharf, 2011). Note, however, that temporal pressure is not reducible to dualistic rationales—the pressure exerted is simultaneously productive and inhibitive. There is simply no plot, scene or character without temporal pressure. There is no story. It is important to note, moreover, that a life lived in the middle is a messy place by which to construct a cohesive narrative and that as we create and are restrained by temporal pressure we need aesthetic presence to help give our unfolding present (and past and future) richness.

The pragmatic view of the present is helpful here. The present is funded by the past and projected into future. It becomes a difficult process both theoretically and practically, however, to situate ourselves in the unfolding present (Dewey, 1934/2005). It reminds us of trying to shoot toy ducks at a carnival—they are constantly moving back and forth and it is all but impossible to shoot one dead on. A life in the middle, the ducks moving back and forth while we take aim. Maybe it’s not so much living within the single shot duck but existing within the ongoing tension of trying to locate a center. The center of our lives, the shaky middle ground, is ripe with meaning and potential, but that same potential and unbound freedom of the moment in the middle makes it hard to narrate. Perhaps, a midlife crisis would be more aptly described as “a life in the middle” crisis, wherein the events of our lives unfold in a series of nows and we do not have enough time to pause and reflect (Freeman, 2010).

Liminal Potentials and Recalcitrance

The temporal pressures of the midlife crisis are distinct from the possibilities which are previously experienced in one’s youth. Even so, there is a certain restrictive empirical dimension to storytelling or, more precisely, to measure or evaluate the veracity of our life’s claims in stories. As we age, the stories that we tell develop more restrictive constraints. When we are younger, the measure of truth and authenticity of our claims rests largely on our ethos or credibility. The measure of credibility is typically (though not absolutely) enmeshed within the present and the future. This is who I am now in storied-action and this is who I will become. Ethos, in the eyes of significant others is evaluated, for the most part, by a willingness to believe. However, like works of fiction, a willful suspension of disbelief does not mean that stories are purely subjective and that anything can be said and anything will be believed. It’s just that our character references are thinner and swirl around things present with anticipation of things future. This is the

beauty of youth. The intervening years outside of our family's home, independent of the financial responsibilities of adulthood, are a liminal space of possibility.

Burke (1954/1984) asserts that the universe imposes a certain recalcitrance on the stories we tell. We view Burke's recalcitrance as a corrective measure and a way for subjective realities to stray from the edge of the abyss of relativism. In short, anything can be said, but, most assuredly, anything does not go. Bruner (2002) maintains that a self is a storied or narrative construction that artfully balances autonomy and commitment to others. As autonomous storytellers we create and fashion a sense of self, but then we project that self, often on newly formed and shaky legs, into a shared world. We construct and create but even privately, we are abundantly aware of a potential audience. This is similar to Burke's idea of a pseudo-statement and statement. According to Burke (1954/1984), "A statement is a completed pseudo-statement—which is to say that *a statement is an attitude rephrased in accordance with the strategy of revision made necessary by the recalcitrance of the materials employed for embodying this attitude*" (p. 255). Any statement can be made. We can say, "We're going to sprout wings and fly," but that statement will meet up with the recalcitrance of the world (be it physical, mental, emotional or cultural). At this point, as we interject a personal statement into a shared world—the world of commitment to others—we must modify our statement. We can say, "We're going to hang glide or fly in an airplane or jump from a rooftop and experience tenuous flight for a brief moment."

The self is created in dynamic tension between a world of unbounded possibility and bound deliberation—a firm commitment and responsibility to the others. It's both a realization of communion and restrictions of story. As we're more fully embedded into the economy and the social and political life that accompanies it, it's more difficult to create stories of change. Recalcitrance is not of the same making as we move through the life course and become more vested in the socio-economic webs of meaning. There are certain undeniable material and corporeal forces that greatly constrain not only our past, but potential futures. A mortgage can be a story told.

Burke maintains that the recalcitrance of others is predicated on their specific interests and those interests are not value neutral but ethical. He (1954/1984) asserts, "But our interests are essential in shaping the nature of our discoveries, tentatives, and revisions. And our interests are ethical" (p. 256). We inhabit liminal spaces that are ripe with possibility. The space we inhabit as young adults, as seen from Burkean poetic form is metaphor—an artful representation of lived experience. (The metaphor is important.) When we live within the space of metaphor or vision the universe has not gathered together the heavy anvil of *not*. Burke states, "It [statement of possibility] may be expected to reveal itself first in the visionary categories, since recalcitrance is at a minimum. It is metaphorical, a 'perhaps'" (p. 258). A visionary category is storying in its infancy and, by virtue, is open to a multitude of potentialities and possibilities. Artistic vision, however, becomes

form and we would argue that form(ing) cannot be separated from process through time. We have a vision of a bucolic scene and want to paint it. We don't move seamlessly from the abundance of possibilities of vision to a concrete and unified form (e.g., a painting). We apply paint to realize a vision but the more we apply paint—the closer to realization of a vision—the narrower the possibilities of a particular form. The more a particular story is told—through the act of storing through time—the less freedom we have in form (see also Dewey, 1934). It's not, however, that simple. As we know, although form has a restrictive empirical quality (e.g., a vase), it is also open to an endless interpretation and re-interpretation—"Thou, silent form! dost tease us out of thought" (Keats, 1820/2010, pp. 32-34).

As Burke points out, our metaphorical projections of youth (I'm going to be an electrical engineer) meet with the obdurate and fluid recalcitrance of our shared social world (I failed calculus). We progress through the life course (we get older) and our lives are inextricably connected to a host of others. Our private dreams become social dreams. Our dreams and the stories we tell are not told within a temporal vacuum but fully rooted in time. Narrative time is public time (Ricoeur, 1981, p. 171). We move poetically from, "Oceans are clocks,' or 'Milton was as Eskimo,'" to meet with the recalcitrance of a shared social world. We amend our pseudo-statements as the storied projections of our youth and meet with a rich and complex life lived in the middle. Our youthful bravado adapts and is transformed to, "Oceans have periodic movements," and, "Milton was a Nordic" (Burke, 1954/1984, p. 258).

A life in crisis—a midlife crisis. At times, we've all had to come face to face with our present selves, our storied pasts and the inevitable projected future. *Who am I? How did I get here? Where am I going?* When we are young we tell stories of who we wish to become and then try to create the reality of our fictive projections but, as we age, there are disjunctures between our youthful story told and the story lived. Such temporal pressures are pronounced in some settings. In their discussion of how residents make sense of assisted living, Yamasaki and Sharf (2011) note, "Residence in even the best of these communities often signifies a sharp distinction between a life once lived and a life being lived" (p. 13). We come face to face with perceived and actual limitations. In all its intricate beauty and complexity, we are humbled by the lives we end up living. We reach a point in our own stories where we need a vacation (Freeman, 2010). It seems that during our twenties and our thirties we're rapidly racing to construct the material life of our youthful projected stories. Like the white rabbit, however, we have no time. "I'm late, I'm late, and I'm late." But at some point, after the mist of our mid-lives lifts, as we lay quietly in bed just before sleep, we wonder and we measure: *Do I add up?*

Forgive us, in order to drive home our point, we swung too hard with our rhetorical bat. The stories we tell have a myriad of constraints imposed upon them, but stories are specific articulated nodes that are ripe with potential meaning—

the good, the bad, and the ugly. We are no doubt constrained by the lives we end up living and those lives can serve as a material basis to define a future story. We collectively hear in one way or another, *What do you mean you're going to be an artist? You haven't made any art since you were twenty. You're an accountant for Christ's sake.* Drawing inspiration from Burke, contemporary narrative scholars (Freeman, 2010; Macintyre, 1984; Harter, 2013; Poulus, 2008; Quinlan & Harter, 2010) envision the act of living and crafting stories as *poesis*. Burke (1954/1984) suggests, "When one considers the universe as a *Making* rather than a *Made*, discussing it from the ethical, creative, poetic point of view, there arises a similar need to explain a partial event by reference to a total event" (p. 260). Even though our pseudo-statements are subject to the recalcitrance of the universe, we can recreate, renew, rewrite and amend our past. This does not mean we can combine all of the partial events of a life into a believable total event without restrictions. This does not give us free will to lie but, more importantly, the free will to reflect on our past experience with loving kindness (Bakhtin, 1990) and create a more rich and meaningful present and future.

Thus far, we have established that temporal pressures throughout the lifespan produce possibility and constraint on the storyteller. These effects are not simply imagined but material. As we move through our lives telling, retelling, and living our stories, meaning is generated which is at once fluid and structured—but we all exist within bounds based on the particularities of our narrated bodies. The temporal pressures we experience become especially charged in the liminal moments of our lives. We experience them as an ongoing tension which demands constant negotiation.

Indeterminacy of Memory Making

We have oversimplified the role of the temporal pressure as we move through the lifespan and treat the past, present and future as unproblematic. In this view, we as characters change over time but the scene is static; we walk in a straight line through an uninterrupted and static temporal terrain, but it is not so simple. We are not riders on a train from Paris to Prague. Freeman (2010) strongly asserts:

Not unlike poets, we are creators, fashioning the work that is our lives, through narrative, via hindsight, in such a way as to disclose the potential that experience bears with it and this will be released, in this direction or that, depending on what happens later on. The movement at hand is neither strictly forward nor strictly backward but a kind of poetically figured spiral, a dialectical shuttling back and forth, issuing from the imaginative labor required to make sense of experience. (pp. 65-66)

Hacking (1995) contends that there are actions and actions "under descriptions" and that we can only come to understand specific actions (hand raised at roughly a right angle, fingers spread evenly, wrist loose, moving back and forth) through

our subsequent bounded description of that given action (a wave). The given action, according to Hacking, is singular but will be open to a seemingly endless range of descriptions and those descriptions are historically and socially contingent. Hacking states, “Anscombe argued that there was just one action, under various descriptions. Each successive description of the action involves a larger range of circumstances, but only one intentional action is being described” (p. 234).

The action under description becomes a classification. What becomes important for Hacking is the role of the description as a generative form of classification and subsequent impact of that classification on behavior, action, thought and our shared material world. This classification is the process and product of language. We, as William Gass reminds us, are in a constant state of naming our world and by virtue creating that same world—for Hacking: classifying. Gass (1985) states, “We inhabit a forest of symbols; we dwell in a context of texts. Adam created the animals and birds by naming them, we name incessantly, conserving achievements and customs, and countries that no longer exist, in the museum of human memory” (p. 207).

Hacking is interested in the way we classify actions (actions under a description) and what kind of effects classifications have on behavior—both retroactively and in the future. This is a dynamic model whereby actions are given new classifications and the new modes of classification—the inevitable result of change through time—(can) in turn, change behavior. Hacking (1995) asserted:

A new or modified mode of classification may systematically affect the people who are so classified, or the people themselves may rebel against the knowers, the classifiers, the science that classifies them. Such change may lead to changes in the people who are classified. (p. 239)

Past actions, in this sense, are classified and named; there is no way to record bare action (as with film) without a subsequent interpretation. As Gass (1985) asserts, “The phrase ‘a photographic history’ is a misnomer. Every photograph requires a thousand words” (p. 207). The world, actions under descriptions, is named.

Let us explain. For the sake of argument, we have a given scene and a given action and we’ll call that an event. We say that during this event the actor did such and such and *behaved admirably* (we classified). Now the actor is behaving admirably. After a period of time, we gain new insight into the nature of things and we reclassify: the given (historical) event is no longer admirable or even acceptable but the actor *behaved reprehensibly*. Is this retroactive redescription? Perhaps, but it is also more. Hacking insists that past actions are not “fixed, final and determined” but rather, are inherently indeterminate and contingent. He is not talking about the indeterminacy of memory but of intentional actions. He (1995) states, “I mean an indeterminacy about past human actions, where it is something about our actions, not our memories of them, that is indeterminate” (p. 234). Here, Hacking is

talking about not base actions (if any such thing exists) but an action under description — all actions are bound by language and interpretation. During any given present action, the actors cannot fully grasp the contingent unfurling of time and space of future classifications and interpretations. Hacking uses the example of sexual harassment, which is a contemporary classification of action that may or may not be successfully applied to historical actions.

It is interesting when Hacking moves to the subject of memory and its connection to classification and the indeterminacy of the past. In this instance, the past is malleable and continually subject to reinterpretation. Hacking (1995) stated:

Old actions under new descriptions may be re-experienced in memory. And if these are genuinely new descriptions, descriptions not available or perhaps non-existent at the time of the episodes remembered, then something is experienced now, in memory, that in a certain sense did not exist before. (p. 249)

This has a very real material, social, emotional and mental impact. The classification changes the action and the memory. This is not to deny that an action took place but that actions are subject to reclassification. Hacking states, “The action took place, but not the action under description. Moreover, it was not determinate that these events would be experienced in these new ways, for it was not determinate, at the time the events occurred, that the future new descriptions would come into being” (p. 249). This is a retroactive revision but, Hacking maintains, it does not just change our present perceptions of past events but, in a way, changes the past events. He asserted:

I do not mean only that we change our opinions about what was done, but that in a certain logical sense what was done itself is modified. As we change our understanding and sensibility, the past becomes filled with intentional actions that, in a certain sense, were not there when they were performed” (pp. 249-250)

This productive ability to recast past actions and events has amazing consequences and potentialities. Hacking asserts that new descriptions (can) beget new actions. He states, “When new intentions become open to me, because new descriptions, new concepts, become available to me, I am living a new world of opportunities” (p. 236). When we begin to classify, it opens our minds to other types of actions and behaviors that could fall under the new classification system. Hacking warns, however, that the new concepts (similar to aesthetic presence) do not have to be good but can also be evil. He strongly states, “Opening new possibilities for a person to do something: that sounds wonderful. It’s not always great. Lead me not into temptation. One can open possibilities for evil just as one can open possibilities for good” (p. 238). It is important to note that temporal pressure is malleable and is not exerted on a static time (past, present, and future) and static

individual but it exerts pressure on a continually moving construct of time, space and individual.

Significantly, Hacking suggests the best way to conceive of memory is memory as narrative—a story told. He (1995) suggests, "We constitute our souls by making up our lives, that is, by weaving stories about our past, by what we call memories" (p. 250). It seems memories are vague notions of past events that can form little ephemeral smatterings of images, words, sounds, smells and the like. Let us recall that we have actions under description. According to Hacking, we interpret actions and create a cohesive sense of the past and self through the constant art of telling stories. Hacking asserts that, "Stories call for causes . . . In real life the tighter the chain of causation—the more specific the etiology—the better the narrative" (p. 256). We search for a cause; the creation is structure through story. Gass (1985) states, "language allies itself with order" (213). This is realized—the specific etiology—through the consistent narrative impulse—we talk and talk. As Gass points out, "I remember—I contain a past—partly because my friends and family allow me to repeat and polish my tales, tall as they sometimes are, like the stalk Jack climbed to encounter the giant" (p. 210). This is significant in relation to the life course as well. As we move through figurative time, we also move within social institutions—ranging from schools to nursing homes (Yamasaki & Sharf, 2011)—and, hopefully, many significant others. Those others, as we have pointed out before, can freeze us in time and help to expand our present and past by bearing witness to rearticulations of the past.

Certain scenes, however, require certain prefigured narrative structures. We are telling stories within bounded limits. Hacking (1995) asserts, "The scene is not merely 'smoothed and polished and painted over,' as happens in all memory of important events; it is painted from a particular palette" (p. 255). The particular palette is historically contingent on a broad classification (e.g., child abuse). We would argue that our calls for classification of past events are an existential struggle for meaning. In other words, as children we lack the words to name our world and classify our experience. The more entrenched we are in the social world, the more we are entrenched in the strident recalcitrance of classifications. As such, it is extremely difficult to reclassify what appears as fixed and static memory. Narrating our lives then becomes a matter of identifying our stories and reconciling not only the indeterminacy of the past but also the indeterminacy of time writ large in order to recreate those stories.

Another temporal pressure, then, is that the meaning of any action is indeterminate. We experience the constraints associated with telling stories at certain points in our life course while also reckoning with the poetic spiral of remembered actions under ongoing description. In other words, memory is not a linear re-telling of past events. Instead, it is a recalcitrant variable in our storytelling as we reclassify our narratives in the unfolding present moment. In order for us to expand the possibilities of our own lives (through story), it is imperative that we

understand both our ability to narrate within specific periods of our life span and understand the indeterminacy of the past.

Aesthetic Presence and Consummation of the Other

In our haste, we have covered character growth and plot-through-time but have, arguably, left out one of the most important elements of life and storytelling: the Other in time. Gergen and Gergen (2006) maintain, “As many practitioners concur, there is something particularly effective about listening to other’s narratives that crosses boundaries of meaning and brings people into a state of mutuality” (p. 117). The state of mutuality—experiencing the Other—we argue, is predicated on the notion of aesthetic presence. Life unfolds in a tumultuous trajectory of speed and endless multiplicity of meanings and, in order to experience the Other, one must be attentive to the Other as the moment unfolds. (It is difficult for us to rearticulate or re-imagine a past if we were not fully present in the original experience.) We are constrained in time and space but we are also intertwined in countless relationships that make our lives meaningful and we must be present to achieve aesthetic wholeness.

It is essential to remember that throughout life, we live, we love, and we story with others. According to Ricoeur (1981), “Narrative time is, from the outset, time of being-with-others” (p. 184). They constrain and expand us and, as Bakhtin argues, they consummate us and make us an aesthetic whole. This cannot be done alone. Bakhtin (1990) suggested:

An aesthetic event cannot have merely one participant who would both experience his own life and express his own experiencing in an artistically valid form, because the *subiectum* of lived life and the *subiectum* of the aesthetic activity which gives form to that life are in principle incapable of coinciding with one another. (p. 86)

We have an event; we have the Other. We are concerned with how we orient ourselves to the present within the company of others to experience our shared world and create new worlds when we see fit. Aesthetic presence is a pragmatic orientation to a dynamic quotidian present in which particular moments are ripe with potential meaning. Aesthetic presence, however, refuses rational dualism and hierarchical contagion. In other words, aesthetic presence is not (only) the ability to see beauty in the mundane. It may be, but is not limited to that expression. Aesthetic presence is the awareness of the Other and, most importantly, the awareness of heightened meaning in time—that can be beautiful, ugly or both concomitantly. It is important for Bakhtin that in order for an event to be an aesthetic event (i.e., meaningful) we must be in the presence of others and that only through the Other can each of us in turn be consummated. It’s an ethical call to presence, mutuality and autonomy (Bakhtin, 1990; Buber, 1970/1996; Cisna & Anderson, 2012). He (1990) states, “The life situation of a suffering human being

that is really experienced from within may prompt me to perform an ethical action” (p. 26). However, we do not stay rooted in the Other’s experience for fear that we would be “infected with another’s suffering, and nothing more” (p. 26). We enter the Other through suffering and/or aesthetic presence but then must come back into ourselves and see the Other through our particular vantage point. Bakhtin concluded:

Aesthetic activity proper actually begins at the point when we return into ourselves, when we return to our place outside the suffering person, and start to form and consummate the material we derived from projecting ourselves into the other and experiencing him from within himself. (p. 26)

We consummate; we complete the Other within a specific moment. Bakhtin summarizes, “All of these values [all the disparate internal and external parts of a potential whole] that consummated the image of the other were drawn by me from the excess of my seeing, volition and feeling” (p. 27). We each are limited by what we can see and know about ourselves but others help us form a more nuanced picture of self—or a series of selves through time and space. The richness of an aesthetic whole is established through a commitment of the Other to be open and receptive to us but also to be fully committed to us in the present moment (i.e., aesthetic presence).

The interesting thing, from our perspective, is that when we are (imaginatively and intentionally) engaged with the Other, we are enriched and change through the experience. Bakhtin (1990) stated:

Let him [the other] remain outside of me, for in that position he can now see and know what I myself do not see and do not know from my own place, and he can essentially enrich the event of my own life. (p. 87)

It is important that the Other be both different than us and that they engage us sympathetically. It cannot be simply people sharing a certain space at a certain time. Bakhtin stated:

Then what is important for the standpoint of the productiveness of the event of my life is not the fact that, besides myself, there is *one more* person of essentially the *same* kind (*two* persons), but the fact that the other is for me a *different* person. (p. 88)

He continued:

And in this sense his ordinary sympathizing with my life is not a merging of the two of us into a single being and is not a numerical duplication of my life, but constitutes an essential enrichment of my life, because my life is co-experienced by him in a new form, in a new axiological category—as the life of another, a different human being. (p. 88)

Consummation requires certain Buberian empathy, our own distinctiveness and a firm commitment to presence.

It's important to note, however, that we don't merge with the Other but remain separate and distinct. We imaginatively enter into the Other's world but cross back over the river of mutuality and come back to the self. Again, we see the Other from our particular horizon (as we begin to complete the parts); they are seen within an environment. This happens simultaneously but only happens when we are aware of the moment as it unfolds in its singularity. These aesthetic events, however, are not to be conceived of as some willy-nilly machinations of the artistically inclined for simple self-enrichment. This is not art for art's sake. Bakhtin (1990) asserted:

There are events which are in principle incapable of unfolding on the plane of one and the same consciousness and which presuppose two consciousness that never merge. Or, in other words, what is constitutive for such events is the relationship of one consciousness to another consciousness precisely as an other. Events of this kind include all of the creatively productive events—the once-occurrent and inconvertible events that bring forth something new. (pp. 86-87)

This is the way in which we co-experience the Other and imagine other worlds and create effective change. It's not maintaining the status quo, but disrupting it—a revolution of consummation and aesthetic presence.

Constraint and possibility. What we offer here is twofold. First, we have provided an analytic by which we might better understand the constraints of a narrated life in the middle—temporal pressure. But we have also theorized an orientation which might open the possibilities of wholeness within the constraint—aesthetic presence.

Concluding Remarks: Narrative Imperatives

We maintain that our lives are rich, varied and complex well beyond the immediate structures of narratives; the lives we live spill well beyond the borders of the known, the language(s) we speak and the stories we tell. But our lives must be brought back from the folds of the mundane, the mystic, and the horrific and extra-discursive space beyond language to the delicate structure of narrative and time. Ricoeur (1981) postulates, "It is clear that the art of storytelling places the narrative 'in' time. The art of storytelling is not so much a way of reflecting on time as a way of taking it for granted" (p. 171). We must lean heavily on life within story—a life with meaning. Burke (1954/1984) reminds us that, "We in cities rightly grow shrewd at appraising man-made institutions—but beyond these tiny concentration points of rhetoric and traffic, there lies the eternally unsolvable Enigma, the posterous fact that both existence and nothingness are equally

unthinkable” (p. 272). Narrative helps us artfully live within the “eternally unsolvable Enigma” and keeps us willfully back-peddling from the rocky ledge. Macintyre (1984) states, “Thus the narrative which we live out have both an unpredictable and a partially teleological character,” and more importantly:

If the narrative of our individual and social lives is to continue intelligibly . . . it is always both the case that there are constraints on how the story can continue and . . . indefinitely many ways that it can continue. (p. 216)

Storytelling gives our lives meaning and an aim —albeit riddled with uncertainty and dumb luck.

In this essay, we have illustrated how several temporal specific pressures — position in the life course, role of the past, and role of the Other in time —simultaneously expand and contract our abilities to understand self, other, and the world. We think it is essential that we not only understand the stories we are born into and the specific character we play within the drama of our own lives but also specific temporal figurations. But as we know, there are factors well beyond character and genre that enrich and limit our collective lives. Time, and more specifically, how we orient ourselves to each singular moment and understand the fluid nature of time, has a tremendous impact on the rhythm and quality of our lives. For this reason, we suggest narrators consider aesthetic presence as a means to sensitize oneself to the ongoing nature of “now.”

Burke artfully poses, “And in the staggering disproportion between man and no-man, there is no place for purely human boast of grandeur, or for forgetting that men build their cultures by huddling together, nervously loquacious, at the edge of an abyss” (p. 272). Each storyteller has specific and immediate constraints on the stories they can tell within towers of civilization —culture dictates form— but, in the end, within our smallest of small moments, we have voice and someone to listen. Someone to respond, hopefully, in rhythm and time.

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