The Poetics of Passage

The Poetics of Passage:
Christa Wolf, Time, and Narrative

By

Heike Polster

CAMBRIDGE
SCHOLARS
PUBLISHING

The Poetics of Passage:
Christa Wolf, Time, and Narrative,
by Heike Polster

This book first published 2012

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

12 Back Chapman Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2XX, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN (10): 1-4438-4280-X, ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-4280-8

If I met time at a dinner party, this is what I would say

What is it about tomorrow
that makes you so hungry
your seconds like whiskers
twitching
sniffing
never
stopping
don't you ever want to fall asleep in the sun
halfway through a good book
or perhaps novels intimidate you
all that foreshadowing
and flashbacks
severing off whole episodes
of your being
you must wonder
at us writers
falling out of step
with your linear trudge
yet stalked by the perils of inconsequence
we try to stitch our way
from one century to the next
to stain our ideas
into the earth
don't you see
you are the seat
and you are the enemy
I think I will cast you in my next play
as that plain man
nobody noticed
who quietly
ate the world.

—*Samantha Reynolds*[1]

[1] Reprinted with kind permission of the author.
http://bentlily.com/?s=if+i+met+time. Web. Jan. 30, 2012.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABBREVIATIONS

In the text, the following abbreviations stand in for these respective titles of Christa Wolf's work:

CT	*Nachdenken über Christa T.*
DA	*Die Dimension des Autors*
FV	*Fortgesetzter Versuch*
K	*Kassandra. Erzählung*
KM	*Kindheitsmuster*
KN	*Kein Ort. Nirgends.*
L	*Leibhaftig*
LS	*Lesen und Schreiben. Aufsätze und Betrachtungen.*
SdE	*Stadt der Engel oder: The Overcoat of Dr. Freud*
SF	*Störfall. Nachrichten eines Tages.*
SSt	*Sommerstück*
TjJ	*Ein Tag im Jahr. 1960-2000.*
WB	*Was bleibt*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Pursuing a book project of any kind while trying to maintain an inspiring teaching career, meaningful university service and a balanced personal life is a challenge. It would not have been possible without the sustained support of the many people in my life who have listened, read, solved administrative problems, discussed the philosophical questions concerning time that lie at the core of this project, or asked important questions at just the right moment. I am grateful to my wonderful colleagues at The University of Memphis, especially Monika Nenon, Robert Kelz, Robert Fagley, and Ralph Albanese, as well as Elizabeth Bridges at Rhodes College, for their continued interest in my writing as well as their willingness to let me make it a priority. All my friends at CCC, in particular Drs. Nancy and Ken Easley, Jason McFarland, Ashley Hunt, Gary Chang, and Christy McFarland, have shown me much love, as always, and Thomas Wong's kind words have sustained me during the final stages of this project. Thank you, friends. I am very grateful to Glynda Luttman, who has been gracious with her time and expertise to support my past, present, and future research. I thank my many colleagues at WiGS and the GSA for discussing this project at various stages of its completion. Finally, Thom Kostura and Ijpe DeKoe have been the kind of committed, supportive, and helpful companions that every person, and especially an academic, needs. This book is dedicated to them.

—Memphis, October 2012.

FOREWORD

"Although time is not meant to be used for standing still,
one day there will not be any time left, if we don't stand still now."[1]

"Who sees and makes visible what was and what is,
warns us against what may come. Narration means
being critical of the present – and thus defending the future."[2]

Following Christa Wolf's death in December of 2011, the scholarly interest that her work had generated over four decades now culminates in the question of her literary and cultural legacy: We may ask, "What remains?"[3] Throughout her long writing career, Christa Wolf herself often pointed to generational differences, and asked questions about period experiences specific to the period's contemporaries. As is often the case, the questions and their implications prove to be more inspiring than any answer could be. In fact, tracing these questions and their origins in Christa Wolf's works can point our attention to some of her guiding concerns and metaphors - time and its representations. In her numerous texts, we come across a wide variety of inquiries into the nature of time, its relationship to space, its many implications on narrative, and each person's being in time. In the following study, I investigate the manner in which Wolf has combined these inquiries. The main thread throughout her work, I believe, is her attempt to understand what it means to be a contemporary ("Zeitgenosse") and a witness to history ("Zeitzeuge"), and to explore their relationship from a writer's perspective.

---

[1] "Obwohl zum Innehalten die Zeit nicht ist, wird einmal keine Zeit mehr sein, wenn man jetzt nicht innehält." Christa Wolf, *Nachdenken über Christa T.*. Berlin: Axel Springer, 2009. 98. Print. All translations are mine. At times, I found published translations to be faulty and incomplete. The pagination refers to the German editions.

[2] "Wer aber sichtet und sichtbar macht, was war und was ist, der warnt vor dem, was kommen kann. Erzählen ist Kritik der Gegenwart – und also Verteidigung der Zukunft." Marcel Reich-Ranicki Reich-Ranicki. *Erfundene Wahrheit. Deutsche Geschichten.* Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Taschenbuchverlag, 1993. 532. Print.

[3] Title of Wolf's 1990 publication *Was bleibt. Erzählung*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2007. Print.

Wolf's literary craft is built on a commitment to explore the creative tension between the experience of time and its literary representation. While the most common intellectual strategy is to investigate how the past features in her texts, her representation of time and how it is shaped in relationship to a traditional understanding of temporality is of greater interest to me. It is important, I think, to focus on her idea of being connected with, in, and through time, because all of her criticism of Socialist Realism and ideology hinges upon it. In approaching Christa Wolf's writing, I shall attempt to undertake both a theoretical and an interpretative task. The first chapter of this study focuses on the philosophical history of time and its special relationship to narrative. Here, I will lay out a theoretical framework for the guiding questions of this study. The second chapter is a discussion of Seghers' "The Outing of the Dead Girls" ("Der Ausflug der toten Mädchen")[4] and related texts, where I will introduce Wolf's reflections on Seghers' narratives and their capacity of creating contemporaneity, which I will henceforth refer to as *Zeitgenossenschaft*. It denotes a critical stance towards the present that effective literary writing can nurture in the reader as well as a distinct poetics. As will become apparent in the second chapter, the subversion of the supposed logic of progress and history in the realm of literary language corresponds to the displacement of traditional notions of human identity and subjectivity. Naturally, sharing this understanding brought Wolf into conflict with socialist ideology. The discussion of *Patterns of Childhood, In the Flesh, What remains, and One Day a Year (Leibhaftig, Was bleibt,* and *Ein Tag im Jahr)*, which I deem the most significant texts in Wolf's oeuvre for an inquiry into the narrative dimension of temporality and the temporal dimension of narrative, follows in the third chapter.[5] I have concluded the body of this book with a brief discussion of the notion of contemporary literature, or *Gegenwartsliteratur*, in which I summarize the main concerns of this study.

By attending to the philosophical aspects of Wolf's writing in her treatment of temporality, the goal of this study is to engage these philosophical strands with their points of contact in narrative theory. Although this book aims to address some central aspects of the human experience of time, it will not offer a phenomenology of time consciousness.

---

[4] Anna Seghers, "Ausflug der Toten Mädchen." *'Der Ausflug der Toten Mädchen' und andere Erzählungen.* New York: Aurora Verlag, 1946. Print.

[5] Christa Wolf, *Kindheitsmuster*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2007. Print. *Was bleibt. Erzählung*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2007. Print. *Leibhaftig. Erzählung*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2009. Print. *Ein Tag im Jahr. 1960-2000*. München: Luchterhand, 2003. Print.

This is not a book about philosophy; however, it engages with some strands of philosophy in order to argue that we derived from them common readings and associations that may help to understand why we so often lend time and space the characteristics we do.

CHAPTER ONE

TALES OF TIME: NARRATIVE, SELF, AND TIME

Finding her identity as a writer and questioning the temporal situatedness or location of her writing was Christa Wolf's main motivation since the early days of her literary development. The temporal perspective of the writer is unique because, Wolf explains, by definition – and due to the condition of writing - writing is always an exercise in belatedness. In a narrative text, each tempo and tense is carefully constructed. Although the process is not conscious for every writer, Wolf frequently probes her methods of temporal representation not only on the structural and formal level, but also on the level of content. Her relationship to the past and the present, and to the passage of time itself often feature in her texts, especially when she or her narrating alter ego grapples with memory and its discontents. She has been careful to avoid the marker of "autobiographic" genre for her writing, although most of her texts feature a writer-narrator that bears essential similarities to her. For instance, by refusing this literary label, Wolf stresses that *Kindheitsmuster* is not merely a chronological report of childhood events presented in a documentary-like fashion. Rather, the narrating perspective is critical and engages in a search for behavioral patters, "Kindheitsmuster," to explore what Wolf repeatedly refers to as the mentality of her generation. The only process that her book documents is the process of its creation: remembering lived experience, revisiting her childhood home, gathering and managing material, and producing the text are not presented as a logical, even chrono-logical progress. Rather, Wolf describes her writer-narrator's strategy of laying out her narrative's different levels or layers of time side-by-side:

> At a quarter to ten I sit down and start with the notes of chapter 8: "war." The usual sheets are arranged, on which I note down the usual "four levels": level of travel, level of the past, level of the manuscript, level of the present […] These notes are always fun for me. Later, they should no longer be placed next to one another, but rather blend into each other.

> Sometimes you experience this moment of merging consciously (within an artistic idea); on that morning, I only got as far as realizing that I would have to begin this chapter with a description of the preparations for work.[1]

Sharing not only the experiences of a young woman in Hitler's Germany, during and after the war, but especially thematizing the creative process of narrating them is what lies at the heart of *Kindheitsmuster*. The writer-narrator collects the (his)story of her narrative, thereby stressing the complex production decisions that factor into artistic representation of any kind. Furthermore, her critical reflection on the temporality of life – delivered in Wolf's characteristic style – lays the groundwork for a poetics of passage. Here, she directs her attention to the medium and the object of narration:

> How does *life* come about? This question began to concern me early on. Is life identical to time, passing inevitably, but mysteriously as well? While I am writing this sentence, time passes; at the same time, a tiny piece of my life comes into and passes from existence. Is life composed from an endless amount of such microscopic slices of time? It is, however, strange that we cannot catch it doing so. It escapes the observing eye, and also the diligently writing hand, and in the end – at the end of a period of one's life, as well – behind our back, it has assembled into our secret need: richer in content, more significant, fuller of energy, more meaningfull, more charged with stories. It reveals that it is more than the sum of moments. Even more than the sum of all days. At one point, unbeknownst to us, these ordinary days change into time lived. Into destiny, in the best or worst case. Into a personal history (lit. *Lebenslauf*), at any rate.[2]

---

[1] "Um ¾ 10 setzte ich mich hin und beginne mit den Notizen zum 8. Kapitel: „Krieg". Die üblichen vier Blätter werden angelegt, auf denen ich die üblichen „vier Ebenen" notiere: Reiseebene, Vergangenheitsebene, Manuskriptebene, Gegenwartsebene. ... Diese Notierungen machen mir immer Spaß. Später sollen sie nicht mehr getrennt nebeneinanderstehen, sondern ineinander übergehen. Manchmal erlebt man diesen Moment des Ineinanderverschmelzens (in einem künstlerischen Einfall) bewußt; an diesem Vormittag kam ich nur so weit, daß mir klar wurde, ich müßte dieses Kapitel mit einer Beschreibung der Vorbereitungen zur Arbeit beginnen." KM 18.

[2] "Wie kommt *Leben* zustande? Die Frage hat mich früh beschäftigt. Ist Leben identisch mit der unvermeidlich, doch rätselhaft vergehenden Zeit? Während ich diesen Satz schreibe, vergeht Zeit; gleichzeitig entsteht – und vergeht – ein winziges Stück meines Lebens. So setzt sich Leben aus unzähligen solcher mikroskopischen Zeit-Stücke zusammen? Merkwürdig aber, daß man es nicht ertappen kann. Es entwischt dem beobachtenden Auge, auch der fleißig notierenden Hand und hat sich am Ende – auch am Ende eines Lebensabschnitts –

The communication of time's passage unfolds along an ordered sequence. Wolf is not speaking of chronology yet; rather, her focus is on the apparent linearity of the process of writing and the elapsing of time. In a way that is limited and optional to narrative as the representation of actions, narrating in time also means narrating in chronological sequence: corresponding to the order in which events have occurred, or, if they are fictional, are said to have occurred. The narration follows, shows, and reproduces the direction of the event, so that the text proceeds like the event.[3] The temporality imposed on narrative by the rules of language follows the temporality built into nature: from cause to effect, from earlier to later. Narrative must tell about the process of time, of developments, changes of state, or events, within some medium of time, but not necessarily dependent on their authentic temporal pattern. This leaves us with only two options: chronological or non-chronological narration.

In writing critically on any author, the question of an interpretative framework arises, especially if one pursues some degree of coherence. It is particularly difficult to frame the work of Christa Wolf, although several English and German language studies have contributed useful and interesting commentary. Many publications elaborate a context for Wolf's

---

hinter unserem Rücken nach unserem geheimen Bedürfnis zusammengefügt: gehaltvoller, bedeutender, spannungsreicher, sinnvoller, geschichtenträchtiger. Es gibt zu erkennen, daß es mehr ist als die Summe der Augenblicke. Mehr auch als die Summe aller Tage. Irgendwann, unbemerkt von uns, verwandeln diese Alltage sich in gelebte Zeit. In Schicksal, im besten oder schlimmsten Fall. Jedenfalls in einen Lebenslauf." *TiJ 9*.

[3] The succession of words within a sentence, or "the moving *now*" of a sentence, relies on the clear marking of any word by those other words which accompany it – before or after – in the sequence (Currie 2007, 23), and hence it is "clear that a sophisticated combination of the tensed and the untensed views of time are at work in its production of meaning. There might be some kind of controlled admission of words as they pass from the sentence's future into its past, but there must also be a view of the sentence as a whole, or of some larger unit of discourse which comes into view as a block, and of which the *now* or reading is a survey" (ibid. 23). Both views are necessary: the controlled, linear admission of meanings and the block view alike. Because the words in a sentence are encountered in order rather than simultaneously, they are able to signify, and "a reader incapable of viewing a sentence as a dialectic of tensed and untensed viewes of time would be unable to read" (ibid.). Therefore, it is possible to analyse the *now* of narrative discourses according to the condition of a dialectic between the "tensed and untensed approaches to discursive time (ibid. 24). See also Mark Currie, *About Time. Narrative, Fiction and the Philosophy of Time.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007. Print.

writing that provides insight into the development of the GDR's cultural politics and her deviation from Socialist Realism.[4] Many more investigate Christa Wolf's unique perspective through the lens of feminism and female authorship.[5] And while I shall certainly not ignore these important approaches, they are not meant to delineate my discussion. It is my contention that Christa Wolf's texts require a certain distance from accepted interpretative frameworks of East German literature as well as many unpromising assumptions inherent in contemporary western literary theory.

I will limit my scope to the much more modest task of pointing out the various ways in which Christa Wolf treats time and temporality. This will allow me to focus on the literary critical issues of her writings as well as her commitment to self-understanding and to a perception and interpretation of the complexity of her contemporary world. Complexity arises continually and dynamically, and, as Adrienne Harris observes, "feedback and reentrant mappings of many skills and processes take place over time. These processes are emergent. Given the multiple pathways and the variation in contextual and local constraints, that will also be a multiplicity of time scales. Pacing, tempo, the unfolding of process all arise in quite individualized ways."[6] I posit that Christa Wolf develops a unique method to capture such emergent processes through a strategy and system that I term "heterochronicity." Her heterochronic approach, I argue, allows her

---

[4] see for example: G. Ann Stamp Miller, *The Cultural Politics of the German Democratic Republic: The Voices of Wolf Biermann, Christa Wolf, and Heiner Müller*. Boca Raton, FL: Brown Walker Press, 2004. Print. Wolfgang Emmerich, "Autobiographical Writing in Three Generations of a GDR Family: Christa Wolf-Annette Simon-Jana Simon." *Twenty Years On: Competing Memories of the GDR in Postunification German Culture.* Eds. Rechtien, Renate, Tate, Dennis. Rochester, NY: Camden House; 2011. 141-157. Print. Arrigo Subiotto, "The Figure of the Worker in GDR Literature: Christa Wolf and the Socialist Realist Tradition." *Christa Wolf in Perspective.* Ed. Ian Wallace. Amsterdam: Rodopi; 1994.127-40. Print.

[5] see for example: Cormican, Muriel. "Woman's Heterosexual Experience in Christa Wolf's Kassandra: A Critique of GDR Feminism." *Philological Quarterly*, 2002 Winter; 81 (1): 109-28. Print. Thomas C. Fox, "Feminist Revisions: Christa Wolf's Störfall." *German Quarterly*, 1990 Summer-Fall; 63 (3-4): 471-77. Myra Love," Christa Wolf and Feminism: Breaking the Patriarchal." *New German Critique: An Interdisciplinary Journal of German Studies*, 1979 Winter; 16: 31-53. Print.

[6] Harris, Adrienne. "Gender as Soft Assembly." Hillsdale, NJ: The Analytic Press, 2005. Print. 62

to present different moments in time within a non-linear narrative framework.[7]

The mind is free to wander, but naturally, this constitutes imagination and not reality. A film reel, or the succession of words in a book, are representations of the mind's freedom to adopt any temporal perspective and location, to wander freely, as it were, but because it is only imagination, the reel of a film or a fictional narrative "cannot present a reliable temporal model. If we assume the difference between written narrative and life as a touchstone to be reality, it becomes necessary to identify two problems: that of retrospect and that of fictionality" (Currie 20). In narratives, the future can already be written. Currie explains how "in the case of retrospect, the already-there-ness of the future is a product of temporal reference, whether the future is imagined or actual, and in the case of fictionality, the already-there-ness of the future is the product of the mind's freedom to invent the future" (20). The difficulty of distinguishing between these kinds of future within a text might be connected to narrative practices that take on the future's "already-there-ness" of non-fictional retrospect in order to justify the future's "already-there-ness" in fiction. If we detach the mind from reality, we would thereby invalidate the fictional narrative as a temporal model. The possible ontological objection that the future exists in fiction but not in life is, according to Currie, "implicated in a more general problematic, namely the temporal reference of retrospect" (20).

But where does this leave the idea that narrative is fundamentally different from life? In the argument above, it becomes clear that future's existence in narrative depends, to a degree at least, on being written or reported. If writing resists to reflect the nature of time by containing its already determined and available future, the problem vanishes. For example, if we were to conceptualize narrative as a mode of consciousness instead of writing – or, along the arguments of Derrida, consider it to be something capable of containing experience more universally – we would be able to manage the difference between time and narrative. We might also consider the future in written narrative to be immaterial, since it only comes to exist by the passage of events from potentiality to reality by

[7] Precise terminology had to be created to delineate heterochronicity's difference from simultaneity. Simultaneity describes events happening at the same time in different places. Heterochronicity, by contrast, indicates a situation in which temporally different events happening within the same space. Space, here, is understood - within the interpretive framework Doreen Massey has created – as a perceptual and relational framework. In the following chapter, I will explain the concept in detail.

becoming present. Currie observes the similarity between the "yet unread future of a narrative" and the "future in general," because the "reading of future words and events has not yet happened, and therefore does not exist. These two ideas, of narrative as a kind of consciousness rather than as a kind of writing, and of the non-existence of the future of written events are positions from which it might be possible to rescue the idea of narrative as an inadequate model of time" (ibd.). The reader is able to take an excursion into the future, to jump ahead and return to the present, which shows us that it there is indeed an ontological difference between the future within a narrative and the future in general, as there is no comparable experience in reality. Currie explains further that "the unknowability of the future in a block universe is largely predicated on the collective nature of the present, and again there is no correlative for this in the fictional narrative as a model of time" (20-21). It is our collective conditionality to exist in the same present that renders any notion of objective or cosmological time meaningful. Consequently, if the narrative and the "already-there-ness of its future" is taken as a model of time, such a model will fail to represent the ontological conditions of human existence. However, precisely in this failure, the model of time that narrative *can* offer is marked by passing the division between potential and active futures in order to produce a "hermeneutic circle between narrative and time, which encourages us to envisage futures on the model of teleological retrospect which narrative encodes" (21). Fictional narrative, after all, is able to freely roam in time, and, as Gerard Genette has shown, does so in the use of anachronies such as analepsis and prolepsis.[8]

Paul Ricoeur distinguishes between tales about time and tales of time, thus pointing attention to the narrative's engagement with time within fictional novels in which time is a theme.[9] However, narratology can best explore the question of the present and the ways it is marked by the future in relation to the formal logic of temporal structure, and to the form of internal time-consciousness, Ricoeur explains, and not at the level of theme. If the essential truth of our human existence in time is that it is indeed ruptured and discontinuous, what becomes of our ideal of truth? What will become of us if we recognize the apparent illusoriness of philosophy's traditional desire for truth as contingent upon an ideal of stable selfhood through time? Can the self survive the deconstructive

[8] Genette, Gerard. *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983. Print.

[9] Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative.* Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1984-1988. Print.

dismantling of the idea of the self if it depends on an image of a unified knowing subject confronting a more or less stable object? The idea that the unified self is a fiction is not new to philosophy, although special emphasis has been added to it by the work of Jacques Derrida. Many critiques of philosophy inspired by him appear to imply that most of western philosophy has been premised on unquestioned assumptions of a steady and clear presence of mind able to relate to objects. The fragility of the subject, however, has been long known to philosophers, and they have contributed their own criticism of numerous versions of that concept. Derrida's approach is unique in that he refuses to accept anything external to provide stability for the inherent transience and motion of consciousness that his predecessors attempted to anchor in God, eternity, or both, in metaphysics or in idealized alternative systems of consciousness that might understand in some other way the aspects of reality we experience as temporal. Some of the recurring metaphors we see in philosophical writing suggest that we can best comprehend what it means to be a self in time through reflecting on the unity of action and the written word. Kant, despite his insistence on the possibility of an intuitive consciousness presenting its own object behind the scene of human sensibility, was also aware that consciousness can only understand itself as a unified whole to the degree that it actively creates unity in thought. We are in time not as disembodied awareness but as consciousness of living bodies, which limits what we can become and do and maybe even what we can imagine, all aspects of which are visible in the stories we tell of our lives. Such a corporeal awareness, however, cannot solve the questions of unity of consciousness that are raised by philosophy.

Thinking of oneself as a unity means performing a unity – basically, telling a story. This story can branch into many sub-plots and can be told from a range of different perspectives. Fragmentation may well be the truth of consciousness, but a writer can construct a unity out of fragments. In fact, according to this model, every one of us constantly performs a similar activity as the writer. We may not create stories that have conventional narrative structures with a beginning, middle, and end, but the narrative forms we come up with respond to contingent aspects of consciousness at a particular time while remaining continuous with the mind's activity of responding to fragmentation by creating unities. Thus, our stories may resemble the multiple-perspective narratives of modern novels that acknowledge the fragments while turning them into a satisfying unity. Philosophy and literature, then, both combine discovery and invention. But how do they differ? Genevieve Lloyd has suggested a useful way of considering the issue by coming to it from an examination

of philosophical metaphor.[10] 'Metaphorical truth," the idea underlying Ricoeur's *Time and Narrative*, addresses the way in which fictional narrative engages with the reality of human actions and experience.[11] Ricoeur argues that metaphor, instead of functioning as an ornament of thought, interacts with reality in ways that circumvent literal meaning. Likewise, narrative responds to *aporias* of time which resist philosophical inquiry.

Ricoeur's depiction of the artistic transformation of the particular into the universal stresses this process as a way of engaging with the nature of experience. He suggests that our everyday understanding of human action involves, even in its pre-reflective state, fundamental narratives that are essentially stories by which we make sense of our lives. The use of fictional narrative is not a falsifying strategy of assigning meaning but a structural composition that we employ to understand and revise those pre-reflective patterns. Through seeing ordinary experience in the light of artistically created poetic universals, we understand and transform it. "Philosophical truth" is thus a form of "metaphorical truth". Ricoeur points out that good philosophical metaphors are inventive in a way that increases our understanding of reality. Instead of being impositions of meaning, they articulate what is "possible" in the sense of Aristotle's *Poetics*: They allow us to articulate what *might* be.

In philosophy and literature, invention and discovery come together. Whereas fiction engages with reality through the creation of a concrete universal, the inventive aspect of philosophy can be depicted by its use of metaphors to shift thought and thereby opening up possibilities to think differently. Naturally, not all metaphors occuring in philosophical writing are inventive; some merely facilitate the expression of a thought rather than being constitutive to it. The uses of philosophical metaphors can involve radical shifts in the conceptualization of time's relationships with consciousness. In such conceptual transformations, we can become aware of philosophy's practice of bringing together discovery and invention. Philosophy transforms the relationship between universal concepts where fiction transforms particular experience to something corresponding to universals. Philosophy shows its affinities with and differences from fiction in this understanding of concepts and their creative transformations.

---

[10] Genevieve Lloyd, *Being in Time. Selves and Narrators in Philosophy and Literature.* New York : Routledge, 1993. Print. 165.

[11] Ricoeur, Paul. *Time and Narrative.* Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1984-1988. Print. The idea is developed further in Ricoeur's earlier work, *The Rule of Metaphor: Multi-Disciplinary Studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977. Print.

Philosophy can trigger inspiring movements of thought not only through its employment of metaphor. It does so, too, through shifts in perspective, that is, changes in the angle of intellectual vision on the relationship between time and consciousness. Philosophers can manipulate the focus and turn our gaze, thus showing us ever new possibilities for thinking ourselves and our being in time. As philosophy does not concern itself as directly as literature with the idiosyncracies of human experience, it is markedly more distanced than literature from emotional qualities of life. Yet there are often deep emotional themes in good philosophical writing, themes that become masked by readings that ignore their literary dimensions. In his discussion of metaphor, Ricoeur talks about a "heuristic" function of mood in poetic metaphor. It can go unnoticed when representation turns into the exclusive path to knowledge and the model of every relationship between subject and object.

Instead of seeing philosophy as offering inconclusive theories of time and fictional narrative as offering poetic resolutions, as Ricoeur suggests in *Time and Narrative*, perhaps we might regard both literature and philosophy as different attempts to reach a deeper understanding of the problems and troubles in our human experience of time. To rediscover the philosophical dimensions of literary writing can also reinforce in contemporary readers something of which traditional philosophers were well aware: that good philosophy is inherently pleasureable (Lloyd 172). Spinoza defined the movement of the mind to a greater state of activity as the essence of delight. Perhaps the greatest similarity between philosophy and literature is their ability to respond to even the most painful topics, and the most beautiful, with that movement of spirit that is the continuation of human life. Thus, they both engage with the dimensions of human existence, and among them, time and its phases.

The problem of time arises from the apparent passage into non-existence – a relentless flight that the passive self could only experience as loss. If the past is non-existent, then this is indeed a problem for the self that is in time. Augustine's response was to secure the past's existence through the distension of the soul, the holding together of past, present, and future through an act of attention. Both perceived lacks – the loss of the past as well as the fragmentation of the self – have to be overcome by redefining time in terms of the soul's stretching out. But how can the past be thought of as 'lost' in the first place? I'd like to explore this idea through a brief excursion into Bergson's philosophy of time in the following paragraphs.

The elements that create the sense of the past as being 'lost' are the sense of fragmentation, the connection between actual experience and

being present, and between pastness and negation. Throughout, the underlying tendency to conceptualize time through space is responsible for the sense of 'lostness,' as time and space must be thought together, but they are, of course, not identical. Instead, the conceptualization of one will have repercussions for the imagination of the other. Space and time are implicated in each other, and thinking about history and temporality necessarily has implications for how we imagine the spatial. Doreen Massey draws attention to the implications of "the counterpositional labelling" of phenomena as either temporal or spatial that entails "all the baggage of the reduction of space to the a-political sphere of casual closure" (Massey 18).

Bergson draws together these themes – of fragmentation, presentness and pastness, and our reliance on representing time through space – in an unconventional examination of the role of intellect in the understanding of our human experience of time. Rather than conceptualizing intellect as the key to the reassembling of consciousness, it is itself the essential cause of its disintegration from continuity to discontinuity, from unity to fragmentation. Bergson's interest lies not in understanding how consciousness unifies the temporal succession of experience but instead how the continuity of becoming is divided into sequential mental states. Instead of turning towards intellect to find a synthesis of serial fragments of consciousness provided by experience, we ought to attempt to comprehend how intellect has created discontinuity and how the mind might transcend it, thereby rerooting itself in 'duration.' For many philosophers, and Bergson as well, this return of the mind from a lost unity to an undivided unity of perception lies at the core of any philosophical treatment of the relationship between consciousness and time. Bergson's central idea in *Matter and Memory* consists of showing memories' tendency to attract other memories as an example of this inclination towards unity.[12]

Narrative, Self, and Time

What role does narrative play in understanding the relations between time and self-consciousness? It is perhaps surprising to discover that the concept has assumed a degree of significance in recent philosophy that goes beyond its role in the theory of literature. It often appears in philosophy of action, philosophy of history, and in ethics. The most important articulation of its philosophical importance is Paul Ricoeur's *Time and Narrative*. In this seminal work, Ricoeur has claimed that

[12] Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory.* New York: Zone Books, 1991. Print.

narrative resolves problems of time that philosophy cannot negotiate on its own. By offering different approaches that are, at times, more productive, narrative is able to work on issues of self-consciousness in relation to temporality differently from theory. In the following brief section, I will sum up the concerns of my study in relation to that foundational work about the philosophical dimensions of the relations between time and narrative.

Ricoeur's book is set up as a juxtaposition between Augustine's treatment of time in the *Confessions* and Artistotle's elaborations on plot in the *Poetics*. He identifies the conceptions of time as 'the time of the cosmos' and 'the time of the soul', which, due to their limitations of constantly being framed within a dichotomy, cannot be resolved and consequently lead philosophical understanding of time to dissolve into *aporias*. These two approaches, Ricoeur argues, are complementary and irreducible, as neither can accommodate or involve the other into a unified concept of time. We are unable to understand human time from within a definition that emphasizes physical motion, but we also cannot coherently conceptualize the time of the soul as constituting the reality of time. Ricoeur concludes that cosmological and phenomenological approaches to time cannot be reconciled. There is an unrelenting reality to time in its resisting all attempts to reduce or internalize it to consciousness. Furthermore, we are also unable to offer a coherent account of time without consciousness. These *aporias*, however, find a kind of poetic resolution in narrative, where time and consciousness can figure together. In general, narrative is understood as an active response to the discordant experience of time: its contingency, randomness, and fragmentation. Ricoeur's central thesis is the reciprocity between time and narrative - that time becomes human in being organized after the manner of a narrative; and narrative, in turn, is consequential insofar as it portrays aspects of temporal experience. Or, as Genevieve Lloyd puts it, "narrative articulates our experience of time; and time is brought to language by narrative" (11). Since theories of time are necessarily inconclusive, it has long been a particular interest of mine to clarify what problems of time might consist of, and in what particular fashion narrative can respond to them. The term and concept of 'narrative' has become challenged by contemporary treatments of the dissolution of the knowing subject, which resists an understanding of the continuity of consciousness that is implicit in previous endeavors to create unified stories. More recently, however, the idea of narrative has been included in reflections on time and consciousness. This is, of course, because narrative techniques can generate texts that go beyond the closely structured telling of a unified

story, with a beginning, middle and end. Even prior to their appearance in post-modern theory, the limitations of a continuous narrational perspective or voice have been confronted by modern novelists. As we shall see, many critics are unsure as to how to categorize Christa Wolf's work, as texts challenge the possibility of representing a life as a coherent whole.

Ricoeur's treatment of narrative's capacity to respond to or resolve the paradoxes of time that resist resolution in philosophy is not entirely conclusive. In particular, his approach to fictional narrative remains obscure. He elaborates on the structural aspect of narrative that, through its formal construction, can arrange aspects of temporal experience in a meaningful way, possibly even in a unity. Ricoeur explains how narrative transforms fragments of the experience of time into universal poetic ideas that allow us to grasp distinctive features of experience. He expands on Aristotle's idea of tragedy by maintaining that fictional narrative is true: not in the actual historical sense, but in its realization of what might have happened. Without being limited to depicting actual events, fictional narrative can extend to the deepest layers of our temporal experience. In Ricoeur's view, narrative can respond to the *aporias* of time not only through the form, but also through the construction of content. In contrast to philosophical approaches, fictional narrative is able to bring together cosmological and philosophical aspects of our temporal experience. In this capacity lies the unique power of fictional narrative to reshape our world: allowing us to rethink our past and refigure our future, it enables us to traject the past into the future. Free from restraint of the actual, fictional narrative can serve as a sort of 'laboratory' for thought experiments that re-envision the microcosm of an individual's life but also the macrocosm of the entire world in all its geographical, historical, and societal aspects – in any of its aspects, for that matter. There are no boundaries to the creative imagination. It is within fictional narrative that we can experiment with possible and plausible solutions to the complexity of time. Naturally, this facet of fictional narrative's relationship to temporality is a particular aspect of certain types and genres of fiction.

Throughout literary and narrative history, both patterns have been applied and perfected, which renders it all the more noteworthy that narrative theory appears to know very little about narrating in rhythm with time. Meir Steinberg observes how chronologic ordering has long suffered from being considered an inferior method of arrangement, even to the extend of questioning whether it were "artistic or viable at all."[13]

[13] Meir Steinberg, "Telling in Time (I): Chronology and Narrative Theory." *Poetics Today* 11:4 (Winter 1990). 901-948. Print. 904.

Aristotle's *Poetics*, supported by the eminent practice of Homer and Greek tragedy, ranks the "simple" plot – advancing from a beginning to a middle and to an end, as inferior to the "complex" plot that includes unforeseen discoveries and unexpected developments. Referring to Neoclassicism, Romanticism, Russian Formalism, Structuralism, and even Jamesian Modernism, Steinberg criticizes a general "antichronologist" stance in literary theory that is, in fact, absolutist in its view of "art and/or reality, complete with bias, a priori ranking, designs on canonization, judgment in the guise of statement" (Steinberg 904). Throughout the manifold antagonisms against chronological storytelling, the study of narrative time has centered mostly on the logic, empirics, ideology, and methodology of nonchronological strategies of narration. With the purpose pointing away from "the established premises, prejudices, practices," that Steinberg perceives as being

> all formalist in the sense of reifying and ranking narrative sequences without regard to communicative (generic, historical, ideological, purposeful) context, an effort is made to develop a functional poetics so that context may transform sequence as to "generate what theory is traditionally least able to envisage and accommodate: functional deformation (of forms, responses, worldviews, expectancies) in chronological formation (904-5).

The prevailing "unquestioning consensus" only serves to condemn chronology and non-chronology into polarity, shrinking the temporal panorama by its binary approach. Narrative as "time-art", Steinberg demands, deserves a frame of analysis able to productively theorize sequence, "not even narrative temporality proper" (905). I agree with Steinberg in that less immediately and homogenously, yet nonetheless consequentially, "the trouble stretches beyond time to intersecting narrative dimensions: space for one, point of view for another, to cite two generic essentials and battlefields" (905). Although many important contributions have been made in the two decades since Steinberg's critique, even the use of the terminology of "spatiality" and "temporality" often appears uncritical of their numerous implications. In literary criticism, there is a fundamental need to investigate methods of temporal representation in narrative. Moreover, my goal is to demonstrate how a more critical perspective on the complexities of space and time can serve to aid our understanding of authors' narrative strategies.

Despite the "spatial turn" in cultural studies, the metaphors and images that we attribute to space and time and that originate from philosophical discourse and convenient everyday abstractions have so impacted our imagination that we usually do not question their existence or

implications. We can hardly come up with a model of time or space that is independent from them. In the twentieth century, studies on time and consciousness have been central to philosophy from Husserl to Heidegger and Sartre. Jacques Derrida's work has had a considerable influence on our understanding of the connections between the delicate unity of the "knowing subject"[14] and temporal experience. By deconstructing his notion of the subject, he calls attention to the relation of ideas of temporal presence and the ideal of self-presentness – a consciousness present to itself. His critique is aimed at the model of an integrated consciousness, which operates as the supposed generative origin and basis of meaning. Despite his doubts, Derrida presents this consciousness as sustaining a way of viewing consciousness in relation to temporality. The ideal of self-presence appears to suggest a sense of stability in the passage of time. Even if it is not outside of time, the self is at the very least in a position of origin and a source of control over the extension of moments and states of mind. At its very core, this form of thinking about time originates from a theological background. The notion that the self is stabilized in relation to time has accomplished a close human connection to a divine consciousness that remains unaffected by the fragmentation ensuing from being in time and is fully present to itself.[15]

Derrida's notion of *différance*, in challenging the "metaphysics of presence", is aimed at both notions implicit in "the present" – what is temporally present and what is present to the mind. In the philosophical tradition, self-consciousness is associated with present perception. However, as Heidegger pointed out in *Being in Time*, ancient Greek philosophy refuted the temporality this brought into the notion of "Being." Modern philosophy, Heidegger argues further, has upheld this false idea, which results in a continued misunderstanding of time as a parameter for differentiating between realms of being: the temporal and the eternal. He stresses that the common connotations of the phrase "being in time" are "naively ontological" because we cannot use time to function as a criterion for identifying what is "non-temporal," "temporal" or "supra-temporal." Rather, time functions as "the horizon for all understanding of Being and for any way of interpreting it."[16]

Not only do philosophers use metaphors from spoken language and literature to express their ideas of time, the notion of 'narrative' is central

[14] Jacques Derrida, "Différance." *Margins of Philosophy*, New York: University of Chicago Press, 1982, 1-27. Print.
[15] Augustine's ideal of God's self-presence within the "eternal now" is articulated in the *Confessions*.
[16] Martin Heidegger, *Being in Time.* Oxford: Blackwell, 1962. 39. Print.