

## Mind the Gap.

### Hermeneutics and Analytic Aesthetics on Narrativity and Historicity in the Artwork

Abstract: Noël Carroll has postulated *identifying narratives* as a means to establish art status. This paper follows and further develops this line of thought by introducing the temporality of the artwork as a relevant issue in the understanding of narrative when applied to art. The temporality of the artwork is explained in three different modes: as occurrence, as historicity and as supra-temporality. I have tried to show how this constitutive temporality of the artwork is subject to what I have called *narrative interpretation* which I have distinguished from Carroll's *identifying narratives*. My contention is that narrative interpretation is a way to connect the artwork with preceding and succeeding artworks and that through these connections it configures the work's narrative identity as a dynamic one. I have made use of Paul Ricoeur's concept of *narrative identity*, reformulating it in order to reach a narrative interpretation that focuses on the artwork's historical elements as inserted in a plot. Therefore, this paper introduces concepts from continental hermeneutics that help to provide a frame for both *narrative interpretation* and *narrative identity*.

Noël Carroll states that the task of the philosophy of art is to identify the artwork;<sup>1</sup> he proposes the concept of *identifying narratives* as a means for such

identification. Narrative is concerned with the historicity and temporality of the artwork, but also with interpretation. Identifying narratives are a clear option to deal with such problematic art forms, such as the avant-garde, for example, because they have the advantage of dealing with the context of the work instead of treating it as an isolated object. A given work –whether an artwork or not- is so through its connections with preceding and succeeding works. Narrative is perhaps the best way of establishing, explaining and understanding these connections.

Although in general terms I agree with Carroll's proposal, I think that continental hermeneutics can give a new light on problems of historicity and temporality in the artwork contributing to the creation of a frame for narrative identity. The hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer is focused on issues of temporality and historicity,<sup>2</sup> while Paul Ricoeur's is on narrative identity, among other issues.<sup>3</sup>

My aim is to show that there can be a kind of interpretation that brings forth the narrative identity of the artwork and that this identity is not restricted to a means for identification, but is also the configuration of a dynamic identity for the artwork.

#### I. What is Art or which are the Artworks?

For the past fifty years analytic aesthetics has been trying—in fact, is still trying—to define the artwork. As Danto has put it “the question ‘What is art?’ was never understood as ‘Which are the artworks?’ [...] the distinction between works of art and ordinary things could no longer be taken for granted.”<sup>4</sup> This problem may

seem new (as Danto suggests) or may seem exclusive of analytic aesthetics, but it is not. It is true that continental aesthetics in general has not been interested in defining which works are to be considered artworks; nonetheless it has tried, for the past century, to establish the specificity of the artwork; that is, to distinguish the work of art from other entities.<sup>5</sup> Some of the most common answers, for example Heidegger's<sup>6</sup>, include distinguishing the work from the instrument and the natural being. Confronted with the avant-garde this answer turns out to be pretty simple and even naïve, one might say.

Nevertheless, the lack of interest in the avant-garde in some of the most prominent continental aesthetics<sup>7</sup> does not prevent that continental aesthetics has accomplished a general comprehension of the artwork. This comprehension has established the artwork's unique character, and therefore, it has differentiated it from other entities.

I am aware that the kind of explanations that continental aesthetics provides for the artwork solves almost none of the problems posed by the avant-garde. One should also acknowledge that the principal aim of continental aesthetics is neither pragmatic nor epistemic, but ontological. I am not going to discuss here what this means, to use the artwork in order to solve ontological issues, such as the thesis Being-Language. What I want to point out is that time has been one of the main concerns when thinking about the artwork in continental aesthetics.

My intention is to inquire about the temporality of the artwork; because it is here the problem of narrative identity may begin, given that one of the main issues of narrativity is temporality.

A certain kind of temporality is also, for continental aesthetics, one of the main issues that allows us to understand the artwork as unique and to distinguish it from other entities, that is, temporality is one of the artwork's characteristics that cannot be thought of as exclusive of art, but, nonetheless, as constitutive of the artwork. For example, this kind of temporality is postulated by Gadamer as supra-temporality and as the artwork's own time.

The two questions —what is art and which are the artworks— should include time as a frame of interpretation because the content, the meaning and the status of the artwork are always related with temporality and historicity. Narrative is one perspective from which temporality may be considered, since it is concerned with temporal and causal connections among occurrences or events that need to be structured in a plot in order to obtain a meaning that is not given but constructed within the plot. Occurrences are not necessarily subject to narrative connection, but they can be embodied in a plot with the purpose of insertion in history and in art history. This leads to the question: why can narratives give a congruent and significant interpretation for the contested work and for artworks in general?

One of the problems that Carroll tries to solve with identifying narratives is the art status of the work when it is contested. How can we know that it is an artwork? What reasons can philosophy provide to settle the status of the artwork? Carroll does not try to give a definition of art in order to avoid the problem of sufficient and necessary conditions. Therefore, according to Carroll, identifying narratives are a means of identification not a definition; but I argue that narratives

can also provide the identity of the artwork given its constitutive temporality. Identity is not identification, inasmuch as the latter is only concerned with the art status and it comes out as an epistemic judgment that states only that the contested work is an artwork; it is a constative assertion. Identity, on the contrary, handles not only identification, but also a coherent interpretation of the work that reveals and creates its meaning, its uniqueness, its *Weltanschauung*. Hence, an identifying narrative is not the same as a narrative interpretation; the latter is broader and produces the meaning or possible meaning of the artwork, and this can be described as an aesthetic experience that deals with content, and not only with pleasure or disinterestedness<sup>8</sup>.

Why is the artwork a candidate for narrative interpretation? The artwork is subject to narrative interpretation because of its temporality. Time and historicity are constitutive elements of the artwork, and since narrativity is a way to deal with historical phenomena or occurrences, a narrative interpretation can originate and reveal the identity and meanings of the work. But, what kind of temporality and historicity are constitutive of the artwork, making it possible to talk about narrative interpretations?

## II. The Artwork and its Temporality

The artwork is related with two kinds of temporality. The first one is the untimely (Nietzsche) as a rupture in history and continuity, as the emergence of something new, something that was not there before. This kind of time means that the artwork is an occurrence that brings about a worldview which stands there by

itself and which opens up new possibilities of meaning. Due to its newness, the artwork stands at odds with tradition. One may argue that there are artworks that are a continuation of tradition, but in a sense continuation is transformation and not mere reduplication of the previous state of affairs. If the artwork were reduplication of the previous state of affairs it would be a copy, and there is no ontological way in which the artwork can reduplicate reality.<sup>9</sup> Carroll has explained the ways in which the artworks relate to tradition as repetition, amplification or repudiation<sup>10</sup>, but he is referring to art tradition, whereas I am referring to tradition in Gadamer's terms, or also as the pragmatic history in Hans-Robert Jauss's terms<sup>11</sup>, that is, world history.

Confronted with our worldview the artwork appears as an occurrence which breaks continuity, and in order to have an effect in history and in our worldview it must be inserted there by means of explanation and narrative interpretation – though not exclusively. This means that because the artwork deals with time as untime it emerges as something new, but its newness prevents it from having an impact on, let us say, “reality” or the external world –external, that is, to the artwork. Not only is its art status contested, it is at first incomprehensible; that is, the meaning of the artwork remains obscure. The obscurity is granted inasmuch as the artwork is ontologically different from the external world and it demands an aesthetic interpretation in order to understand not only its meaning, but also its aesthetic status. If the interpretation is not given, the artwork will not be understood as an artwork, but, for example, as an artifact or as a mere fragment of everyday life. This seems to be true especially for avant-garde art in so far as a

trashcan can only become an artwork if it is inserted in an aesthetic frame, with an aesthetic interpretation or an aesthetic context. Hence, the need for interpretation depends on its temporality as rupture.

If the artwork is an occurrence in the aforementioned sense and an occurrence is what breaks temporal and historical continuity, then it is the task of narrative interpretation to restore the broken continuity by implementing narrative connections. What happens if this continuity or this order is not restored? Let us consider this according to the Aristotelian plot structure. The *peripetia* and the *pathos*, or disastrous occurrence, are the changes that break the original order; the development of the plot must bring this to an end by restoring order. Although, in general, this restoration implies moral concerns, I am only interested in highlighting the plot as a way to restore the altered order; and the most important element in the plot structure is connection or even causality.

The artwork is a *peripetia* that emerges as disruption and, most important, as change. Nevertheless, this change is not *ex nihilo*; if it is change it is so in respect to the previous order that it alters; hence, the previous order is within the change and it is a constitutive element of change. Therefore the change embodies the previous order; this means that the artwork embodies what precedes it and this constitutes its other temporality which is not occurrence but historicity. The artwork has two kinds of temporality: occurrence and historicity. The historicity is not construal; it belongs implicitly to the artwork.

There are some elements within the artwork that are manifest relations to the past artworks and to world history or to the original time of production; I shall

call these “historical elements”; they are concerned with art and world history. Historical elements concerning art history can be thought of, as Carroll suggests, as repetition, amplification or repudiation. Nonetheless this is not the only way in which an artwork embodies art history; that is, the link with the past artworks is not only an affirmation or negation of the previous art. Intertextuality and quotation are other ways in which the artwork embodies the past and they are not valid exclusively for literature; Bacon’s painting *Study after Velazquez’s Portrait of Pope Innocent X* is a clear example of pictorial intertextuality that also shows the two kinds of temporality that I propose. The painting is an occurrence that is experienced as a disruption of everyday life, of previous art and of sensations and feelings in part due to the horrendous scream; but also its historical elements are evident, for example, the portrait, the realistic paintings, Ireland, Catholicism, Munch, etc.

Sometimes some of the historical elements are evident or manifest, as in Bacon’s example, but there are several that require a more elaborate interpretation in order to be grasped; and not only when the artwork is contested, but also when we want to understand its meaning. If the artwork embodies historical elements, then these are part of the work’s meaning, and should be grasped, at least in part. The comprehension of historical elements depends on the kind of audience; therefore it can be minimal as in a constative judgment or as in the insertion of the work in a genre (most of the time an audience can locate a work as a novel or as poem, as a painting or as performance) or tremendously broad as in art criticism.



If I call these elements historical it is because they have an inner connection with art history, as we can see in the insertion of the work in genres or trends (however flexible they are), and with world history, as the signs of an epoch that the artwork shows most of the time; the connection with world history is also shown by the links that an audience establishes between the artwork's worldview and the contemporary worldview.

### III. Narrative Interpretation

Due to the two kinds of temporality that constitute an artwork, it is subject to narrative interpretation. What is narrative interpretation and how it differs from other kinds of interpretation? Certainly there are different ways and strategies to interpret an artwork, these strategies differ as long as their aims and ranges differ. It would be very naïve to consider only one kind of interpretation and to consider it as the proper or correct interpretation. An artwork is not always interpreted as art, and not only because it is contested. The interpreter can be looking for something non-aesthetic in the artwork, for example, biographical hints, historical data, the use of specific techniques, the artist's political filiation, the implicit ideology, etc. This kind of interpretation is not an aesthetical one since its principal aim is not the work as artwork but as cultural manifestation. I do not pretend to define what an aesthetical interpretation is or when it is accomplished; I simply want to state that there are different approaches to an artwork and that not all of them intend to experience or even classify it as an artwork.

Among the approaches to an artwork that intend to consider and regard it as an artwork, the narrative interpretation is not the only one; there are experiences that are concerned only with aesthetic pleasure or with the contemplation of beauty (among other aesthetic categories); the contemplator will not try to bring forth a complex meaning of the artwork but to feel pleasure in the contemplation or even to look for a kind of entertainment. Not every audience will regard the artwork putting forth aesthetic and theoretical concepts or historical elements that may amplify the work's meaning. In this respect, narrative interpretation deals a lot more with the artwork's content than with aesthetic experience as pleasure.

Narrative interpretation aims to create a plot for the artwork given its temporality as occurrence. Therefore, one of the main purposes is to establish which elements within the work are subject to narration; these should be the historical elements. Regarding art history, narrative interpretation will focus on those elements that show the connection between the work and art history; for example, genres, themes and techniques that allude directly or indirectly to past artworks. This is a way to place the work in the art tradition, and if the work is to be understood as an artwork it must be placed in the art tradition because whatever the artwork is, it is so not autonomously but as transformation of the preceding order within art tradition. In a way, an artwork stands by itself as an occurrence, but also, and at the same time, it depends on history in order to have a certain kind of sense conferred to it. Every artwork is in fact and inherently connected to art

tradition; the role of narrative interpretation is to make these connections understandable through the plot.

The ways in which an artwork is connected to art tradition and/or art history are not static or definitive. The historical elements belong to the artwork, the connections do not; they belong to narrative interpretation and to the plot, hence, the story can be told in a number of different ways without altering or adding elements that are not to be found in the artwork, for example, the author's intentions.<sup>12</sup> The narrative interpretation emphasizes those historical elements that are important or pertinent to the kind of story that it is going to be told; this means that, as any story, narrative interpretation includes principles of selection and organization that are indispensable to the construction of the plot, since there is no plot that can, at once, contain all the connections that can be established for the historical elements. Not only does the plot select the historical elements, it also selects the past artworks with which the connection is to be established, and this selection constitutes a perspective of interpretation that is dependent on the aim and range of each interpretation. Which historical elements are to be highlighted and then connected depends on which art history or which fragment of art history the work is to be inserted in. Furthermore, because art history and art tradition are in constant change, narrative interpretations are always adapting the stories to incorporate the changes and to fit them into art history and art tradition.

Therefore, one single artwork can be subject to multiple narrative interpretations. If this kind of interpretation links the artwork with art history, then it also represents a way in which art history is updated; narrative interpretations

influence art history because they provide reasonable explanations of the artwork in order to be admitted within art history.

Nevertheless, an artwork is not only related to art history but also to world history and a narrative interpretation that does not want to exclude the extra-aesthetic features should establish and explain the connections of the artwork with history inasmuch as art is historical, that is, it emerges from history, has a place in it and affects it. Hegelianism, Marxism and hermeneutics have insisted in the importance of historical perspectives for the artwork that do not constrain it to have an effect exclusively in the art tradition and in the art world. The effects of the artwork should be measured according to its impact on world history and on tradition in general terms, in order to elude an aesthetical purism that would only regard the aesthetic attributes of the artwork. Therefore, a narrative interpretation should consider this in order to structure a plot that has two directions, one towards art history and the other towards world history.

The historical elements that enable the connection of the artwork with world history and tradition can be considered as the worldview that is to be found within the artwork, since this worldview is a transformation and a statement that in a sense confronts the worldview to which the work historically belongs. Confrontation does not necessarily mean criticism or repudiation; the artwork is more or less a reaction, positive or negative, to the actual worldview. For example in Orwell's *1984* or in Rulfo's *Pedro Páramo* the commitment to world history or local history is evident.

The two directions for the plot mentioned above will vary according to the artwork, since there are artworks whose commitment to art tradition is stronger than to world history and vice versa. Toni Morrison's novels or Goya's painting *El 2 de mayo* have a stronger commitment to world history than Duchamp's *Fountain* or Gabriel Orozco's *Oval with Pendulum*, and narrative interpretation should make it clear. Therefore narrative interpretation is far from being a definition; it deals with the specific features and historical elements of the particular artwork; hence, it is specific and singular for each artwork.

Even when an artwork has a stronger commitment to art tradition this does not mean that it can be interpreted only in that direction, since the link and the insertion in world history via a worldview is undeniable. The context in which an artwork is inserted is always double regardless of its intention to be only an art manifesto, because art says or states or represents or depicts something about the world, it emerges from it and must return to it, since art does not belong to an autonomous universe –an aesthetical or fictional universe.<sup>13</sup> For that reason, the context that creates the possibility for a work to be an artwork cannot be comprehended solely as aesthetic, since the artwork's meaning is not only aesthetic and cannot be reduced to a confrontation with art tradition.

Hegel made it clear that art is not only art but a way in which a culture manifests itself through history. Therefore, the artwork as an occurrence has a double impact when disrupting order; it disrupts art tradition and tradition; hence, it must be reinserted in both.

Narrative interpretation differs from Hegelian art history as far as the latter needs to configure from the beginning a universal concept of art, that is, art as manifestation of the Idea, then it narrates art history as a totality conforming with the system, and last, Hegelian art history analyzes the particular artwork in order to explain and insert it within art history (which is part of the system) and world history (which is also part of the system). Hegel deals not only with totality, but also with a concept of art that precedes art history, even when the concept of art must be adequate to art history and adapt itself to changes of art and world history.<sup>14</sup>

This is precisely what narrative interpretation does not do; it does not produce an art concept or a definition of art because it takes distance from universal pretensions that try to explain with the same concept or definition the Lascaux caves, Sor Juana's *Primero Sueño* and Quentin Tarantino's *Kill Bill*, for example. Instead of elaborating a single concept for all those manifestations, it comprehends them as historical phenomena that require a frame of interpretation in order to be grasped as archeological phenomena (Lascaux caves), as the account of a soul's quest (*Primero Sueño*) or as a product of entertainment (*Kill Bill*); or it can elaborate a narrative interpretation to comprehend the three as artworks.

Narrative interpretation does not require a concept or a definition; furthermore, it also avoids dealing with art history as a totality, since it only needs to insert the work in a fragment of history, inasmuch as the narrative begins *in medias res* and ends whenever it is pertinent, that is, the story does not

necessarily end with the moment of the particular artwork (as Carroll states, because the purpose of his identifying narratives is only identification). Narrative interpretation may want to illuminate the meaning of the work attending to its effects in succeeding artworks. After all, the identity of an artwork does not lie only in the past; the forthcoming and the expectations are also part of its identity and are also historical elements. Therefore, I agree with Carroll when he states that “The identity of art (...) is conceived to be historical”.<sup>15</sup> But I would add that this is so due to its temporality as occurrence.

#### IV. On Narrative and Narrative Connections

To give a definition of narrative is, to a certain extent, the same as defining the artwork; the definition of narrative encounters more or less the same problems, for example, narrowness or broadness<sup>16</sup>. Instead of defining narrative, let us focus on some of its fundamental features.

In a minimal sense a narrative is constituted by a plot whose essential characteristic is the connection between at least two events. For a narrative interpretation this would be the connection of the artwork with art and world history through historical elements.

According to Ricoeur<sup>17</sup>, there are two kinds of connections: Temporal and causal. Temporal connections in the form of one-after-the-other are not subject exclusively to a chronological order.<sup>18</sup> To give order to a succession does not mean that it is enough to say “this comes after that”. For a narrative interpretation that deals with the artwork it will never be enough to state that pop art comes after

abstract expressionism. It is to a certain extent necessary to establish the link between both, but for narrative interpretation this will not be sufficient in order to understand the meanings or to account for the identity of pop art.

Succession is of course a central element of temporal connections, but not the only one. Furthermore, the plot requires causal connections in the form of “one because of the other”. It is important to notice that temporal and causal connections are both necessary and that one cannot be subsumed into the other. Causal connections alone will give a structure but not a plot, and temporal connections will give only a succession, though not solely a chronological one.

Carroll has given some conditions for narrative and narrative connection: 1. Contains more than one event. 2. Represents a series of events. 3. Must be about a unified subject. 4. The events must be connected, time-ordered in a sequence. 5. The earlier events in the sequence are at least causally necessary conditions for the causation of later events.<sup>19</sup>

The argument sustained by Carroll coincides in general with the traditional ways of understanding narrative and even of defining it; for example, Gerald Prince states that narrative is “the representation of at least two real or fictive events in a time sequence”<sup>20</sup> and Dorrit Cohn that it is “a series of statements that deal with a causally related sequence of events that concern human (or human-like) beings”<sup>21</sup>.

Such definitions are centered in the connection issue, nevertheless there are other issues that are central to narrative and that can be thought of as the principal line for defining it, such as Luz Aurora Pimentel’s definition: “the



progressive construction, via a narrator, of a world of human action and interaction, whose referent can be real or fictional”.<sup>22</sup> The narrator and the created world are the central issues in this definition that sets aside the connection problem.

Can narrative interpretation be thought as a narrative whether fictional or historical and therefore be understood according to the parameters for fictional or historical narratives? Narrative interpretation does not seek to create a world, real or fictional, nor is it interested in the portrayal of characters –and the author is not a character in this kind of interpretation. It is far simpler in its structure and has as its central aim to establish connections between the artwork and history. Therefore, narrative interpretation is not, strictly speaking, a narrative, but a way of using narrative connections in order to generate a coherent and congruent interpretation of the artwork given its time as occurrence and historicity. Hence, I will focus on narrative connections which are a way to relate events in a causal and temporal way; the events related are, on one hand, the artwork or the contested work, and on the other hand, art history, art tradition and world history.

Temporal connections are to be established backward and forward –for the latter whenever it is possible. To create a sequence between past and present artworks is fundamental for art history and for narrative interpretation as far as art is a disruption that needs to be reinserted in continuity. Nonetheless, this continuity in history cannot be thought of as a simple one or as a statement of sameness in history. Quite the contrary, continuity is the result of change and transformation, therefore it is a “discontinuous continuity”, as it were, in which new occurrences

are always happening, introducing an altered order which is finally reinserted in the previous one; for that reason it becomes a new order. Sequence, then, is not a progressive line in time since discontinuous continuity means that the lines go up-and-down and create connections among many events and draw loops between periods of time. Therefore, temporal connections do not only assume the form of “one-after-the-other”. To interpret an artwork in this manner is to understand it as having no fixed relations with artworks (past or present), but mobile ones; the network of relations is the effect of interpretation.

Causal connections are perhaps the most problematic since the meaning of causality is too “strong” in traditional philosophy; for example, the necessary causality in Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*. When connection among events is to be thought of in terms of causality, philosophers have tried to attenuate the meaning of causality, as in Ricoeur’s case or Carroll’s case; neither of them is willing to argue that the previous event can be understood as the cause of the later one. In that sense, Carroll suggests the causally necessary conditions for the causation of the later event, which means that “the narrative connection must be causally relevant to the effect event”.<sup>23</sup>

In a recent discussion, Gregory Currie<sup>24</sup> recognizes that causation is central to narratives as a coherent set of connections between events, albeit he asserts that causality in this sense is more an illusion of dependence between events and that, hence, connection in narrative is an illusion. He proposes relations of reasons instead of causality, and by reason-based relations he advances this formula: “where *A* and *B* are occurrences, *A* is a reason for *B* if the agent’s belief in the

occurrence of *A* was part of his or her reason for doing, or intentionally bringing it about that, *B*".<sup>25</sup> The core of the formula is the agent's belief and it is centered on the agent's actions which, to a certain extent, are governed by reason. But for narrative interpretation the agent's belief is controversial since it deals with author's intentions.

Causal connections are in general conflictive for narrative interpretation because the past event –that is, the past artwork- and the present event –the artwork subject to interpretation- are neither the effect nor the result of one single agent. Therefore, the past artwork cannot be by itself the cause or the reason of the succeeding artwork; the connection is to be established a posteriori; can we assert that the past artwork is relevant to the creation of the succeeding artwork? The story to be told is, then, retrospective and it tries to locate the causes or reasons in a plausible way, rather than in a necessary one. Otherwise, if we assert that the past artwork was necessary for the succeeding one, the story will have the form of Hegelian art history which considers each moment as necessary in the development of the spirit.

Narrative interpretation is not a causal relation in a strong sense; Mexican revolutionary painting of the first half of the XX century, for example, is not the cause of Mexican abstract painting which comes after. Nevertheless, to understand the latter, a story must be told to make us aware of the connection between the one and the other as disruption. Abstract painting gains meaning when thinking about it as confronted with historical and revolutionary painting, but can we claim that if revolutionary painting had not existed then abstract painting

would not exist either? José Luis Cuevas' paintings reacted to David Alfaro Siqueiros' as a matter of fact; the relation, however, is not causal in a strong sense, but meaningful, and that is what a narrative interpretation should make clear in order to construe both styles of painting.

Causal connections are to be understood as the meaningful relations that the interpretation creates for each artwork, and if I keep the term "causal", it is not only to distinguish it from temporal connections, but also to state that some elements of past artworks are relevant to the interpretation of present artworks, though relevant does not mean in this case, reason-based since that would make it dependent on an agent's belief.

#### V. Narrative Identity as a result of Narrative Interpretation

When Ricoeur advanced his model of *narrative identity* at the conclusion of *Temps et récit* and further explored it in *Soi-même comme un autre*, he was trying to understand the self between the anti-cogito and the cogito. Narrative identity, then, is a model for the self but the self is not the only instance that can be thought of in that way. Although the artwork cannot be assimilated to the self, because its mode of being differs at least in temporality and historicity –which is the issue that concerns us here- it is precisely its temporality which allows us to employ the narrative identity model.

The artwork's temporality differs from the self's one in one fundamental way: supra-temporality. The artwork is not limited by its original time of composition;<sup>26</sup> it transcends time and history without being unhistorical. This

transcendence gives a constitution to the artwork as identity-difference, as Gadamer suggests. Ricoeur has thought the identity-difference for the self in terms of the idem-ipse dialectic, that is, something remains just as something changes.<sup>27</sup>

Something that is temporal and historical in such an essential way<sup>28</sup> is subject to narrative identity, since its identity depends, in part, on the stories told. In this case, story signifies interpretation. The artwork has a history of its own which as a story tells of the interpretations and meanings that it has gained through time, the connections that have been made between one particular artwork and others, etc. The artwork is in the stories told about it, and it is so because of its temporality and historicity. Were the artwork not immersed in history so profoundly, and were it not essentially temporal, we might then be able to give a closed definition. Art, however, and art tradition are always inserted in mobile connections throughout history which transform the meaning of art. In a way, the artwork embodies its meaning, as Danto states, but in another way, this meaning is subject to change and transformation due to the temporality and historicity of art. The story told by narrative interpretation puts forward an identity for the artwork that is not immediately given in the moment that the work comes to light, but is gradually shaped by its connections –temporal and causal ones.

Identity is neither identification nor definition; it is larger than identification and it is unfinished, therefore it is the opposite of definition, even to open definitions or cluster concepts. The identity is unfinished since there is no plot that can at once include all the possible stories that are to be told for one artwork; each plot has an end but each artwork is subject to a lot of plots that create its identity

as mobile and unfinished. If I insist on the unfinished character of identity it is because it is the way to leave the work open for further interpretations, stories, appropriations, effects. In the end, we should speak not of an identity but of identities for the artwork which is always changing, while it always remains the same.

Identity is the result of the *idem* and *ipse*, sameness and selfhood dialectic, but this relation only emerges when we consider the temporal dimension which keeps the artwork in constant change through time and interpretations: “time is here the factor of dissemblance, of variation, of difference”.<sup>29</sup> Therefore, the identity of the artwork is shaped as an uninterrupted discontinuous continuity based on the principle of permanence in time.

With the artwork’s temporality, as explained above, and following Ricoeur’s narrative identity for the self, the artwork turns out to be: an occurrence which disrupts the previous order, something that demands its insertion in history and something that gains its identity through plots or narrative interpretations. This identity refers to another kind of time for the artwork which is not the untimely nor the historical but the supra-temporal; hence, we can state that the artwork both occurs and disrupts, then it is narrativized via temporal and causal connections and inserted in art history, art tradition and world tradition; finally, the narrative interpretations configure the identity of the artwork attending to historical changes and its equally changing reception. Its identity is the result of having a story and, just as with self identity, this does not come about in the first moment, nobody is born with an identity –though maybe almost everyone is born with a name that

serves as identification or recognition nominally; Carroll's identifying narratives are perhaps subject to this kind of treatment, as recognition of the work as an artwork-but creates one in the interaction with world and people. To have an identity is to have a personal history and a story, it is to create one's self through the stories that we tell about ourselves and that we are told; as the Spanish philosopher María Zambrano has put it, narrativity is an ontological necessity for existence.<sup>30</sup> And narrativity may also be an ontological necessity for the artwork, because it is in stories that it obtains an identity that is larger than the possible meanings that a critic can give for a given artwork. Therefore, narrative interpretations make the artwork's meanings denser and more understandable.

Narration, according to Ricoeur, operates with the organization of a singular occurrence in a continuous flux; hence, narration makes the occurrence a rational and comprehensible fact via its introduction in history. Narrativity is a way to make something intelligible, since it inserts the occurrence in "a story in which the sedimentation tends to cover and in extreme cases to abolish the innovation which preceded it."<sup>31</sup> To cover innovation via sedimentation means for narrative interpretation to insert the artwork in history, in the sedimentation of history which is contained *in nuce* in the artwork as previous order.

If we concede that history and narrativity abolish innovation, we may not be surprised at Gilles Deleuze's attacks on narrativity –as a kind of Hegelianism– since he understands the artwork as innovation and occurrence that cannot be historicized<sup>32</sup>. Innovation must remain as innovation, according to Deleuze, otherwise its possibilities for creating new times and spaces are suppressed.

Nevertheless, as I have argued, another perspective from which the artwork may be understood is to insert its newness, via connections and plot, into history; narrative interpretation extends and makes the occurrence denser because meanings are larger when confronted and enriched by history and stories. Narratives do not annul the occurrence but insert it in history. To understand the ways in which narrative manages the occurrence let us focus on Ricoeur's proposal in order to continue with the construction of narrative interpretation and identity for the artwork.

Ricoeur calls "narrative redeployment" the possibility that narrative has to draw out the otherness already contained within the self; narrative interpretation extracts the historical elements contained in the artwork that can be thought of in terms of alterity; it is the presence of the other –past artworks, history, etc.- as a kind of palimpsest that is redeployed by interpretation which in turns generates the connections that can redeploy what lies *in nuce* in the artwork.

In *Temps et récit* Ricoeur speaks of the plot as a *discordant concordance* and as a *synthesis of the heterogeneous*; when narrative is employed to explain the self it means that plotting is a requirement of concordance (the plot in Aristotelian terms<sup>33</sup>) and simultaneously it is the admission of discordances (the *peripetia* and the *pathos*); precisely this is what Ricoeur understands by narrative configuration: the mediation between concordance and discordance.<sup>34</sup> The configurative act is the force of unification, according to Ricoeur, and this is what narrative interpretation does as an act of configuration; it treats the occurrence as discordance but, via the plot as restoration of order, it creates concordance in art



tradition, art history and world history. Therefore, the artwork will appear in narrative interpretation as a discordant concordance: discordance is necessary to comprehend it as occurrence, just as much as concordance is also necessary to comprehend it as inserted in the flux of discontinuous continuity. This ultimately shapes the narrative status of the occurrence which by its own happening is already open to narrativity.

The narrative occurrence, then, is a source of discordance since it just happens and a source of concordance since it makes possible the continuation of the story and of history. The singular character of the artwork is a disruption that allows the progression of art history as variation and constant change. To tell the story in order to insert the new work in history is to create an order in change, to account for the transformations. And this insertion is accomplished by connectedness because the connection between occurrences –the plotting- allows the integration of the diversity, the variability and the discontinuity, which are essential for the artwork; integrating it but not annulling it since the artwork is to be understood as discordant concordance.

Ricoeur's theory, by contraposition to Deleuze's, does not present the occurrence (*peripetia*) as complete disruption because it also potentially entails what follows (its insertion in history). If the artwork did not potentially entail its insertion in history by means of plotting, it would remain solely as disruption; nonetheless tradition also means the capability of incorporating the variations in a discontinuous continuity. The act of plotting, then, constitutes an effect of meaning for the occurrence which by means of transfiguration becomes an integral part of

history and obtains a dynamic identity given by the told story. The artwork in its identity is dynamic and not fixed as the result of the interaction between *idem* and *ipse*; this means that there are some elements in the artwork which constitute its sameness and which are not completely altered by interpretation. It is certainly a matter of debate to decide and identify those elements that remain the same through changes and history; this deserves further consideration, but for the time being I can say that the concept of sedimentation refers not only to the meanings more or less stable in tradition and which allow the comprehension of the work for an audience not contemporaneous to the time of the work's production. The concept of sedimentation refers also to the structure and configuration of the work. The elements which are subject to continuous variability are all those that require the reader's or spectator's participation. Roman Ingarden's<sup>35</sup> and Wolfgang Iser's<sup>36</sup> theories of indeterminacy are pretty viable to understand the possibilities of variation which are already contained in the artwork and are not necessarily posited by interpretation. These theories are focused on literature; nevertheless the spaces of indeterminacy are something that every artwork leaves open for the participation of the spectator.

Furthermore, the dynamic identity of the artwork is shown in the relation between historical elements and connections. Since connections are posited and originated by narrative interpretation and do not belong to the artwork's structure, they are always mobile, hence, dynamic and subject to reconfigurations and diverse plottings. The redeployment of alterity is also dynamic inasmuch as it is

carried out by narrative interpretation which is always telling different stories for the same artwork and thus making it a living thing.

The mediation of the other, of alterity –the previous order, the connection with past artworks and the narrative interpretation- is constituent of the artwork's meaning; therefore, the artwork can be considered as as “soi-même comme un autre”, oneself as another. Hence, the artwork is not to be treated as an isolated object in the middle of nowhere or as standing absolutely by itself. Art is what it is through connections, through history, through the stories in which we place it and that shape our everyday life, art traditions and traditions. Narrative interpretation puts forward narrative identities for the artworks; without that art would only be art.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “That is, the recurrent task of the philosophy of art, as a matter of fact, has been to provide means to identify new and emerging work, particularly work of a revolutionary sort, as art.” Noël Carroll, “Historical Narratives and the Philosophy of Art”, in *Beyond Aesthetics. Philosophical essays* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 102.

<sup>2</sup> See Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Gesammelte Werke 1. Hermeneutik I. Wahrheit und Methode. Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1999), *Gesammelte Werke 8. Ästhetik und Poetik I. Kunst als Aussage* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1999).

<sup>3</sup> See Paul Ricoeur, *Temps et récit 3. Le temps raconté* (Paris : Seuil, 1985), *Soi-même comme un autre* (Paris : Seuil, 1990).

<sup>4</sup> Arthur Danto, "Art and Meaning," in ed. Noël Carroll, *Theories of Art Today* (The University of Wisconsin Press, 2000), p. 131.

<sup>5</sup> In a way, Plato opened up the debate when he specified the difference between poetry and philosophy. What is poetry and what makes this kind of *logos* different from philosophy is a question asked, for example, in *Phaedrus*.

<sup>6</sup> See Martin Heidegger, *Die Ursprung des Kunstwerkes* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2001).

<sup>7</sup> For example, in Heidegger's and Gadamer's aesthetics. Although Gadamer in some of his last papers speaks of the avant-garde, he fails to provide a satisfactory answer, because he sees every artwork, whether classic or contemporary, as mimesis and *Weltanschauung*. Every artwork brings about a *Weltanschauung*, I agree with that, only the statement is too general and too abstract in order to generate a significant interpretation for a particular artwork. Speaking of conceptual art, French philosophy –for example, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie?* (Paris: Minuit, 1991)- allege that the artwork must stand by itself; if the work fails to do that then it is not an artwork. But this cannot be a criterion for the contested artwork because it is too broad and too general.

<sup>8</sup> Carroll has argued in favor of the content-oriented account of aesthetic experience, because he thinks it is nowadays the best answer to the issue. Nevertheless, I hold that the many kinds of aesthetic experience, of which Carroll gives an account, are not to be subsumed in one. Art can be experienced in multiple ways corresponding to the audiences and their expectations. See Noël Carroll, "Aesthetic Experience: A Question of Content," in *Contemporary Debates in Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art*, ed. Matthew Kieran (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), pp. 69-97.

<sup>9</sup> This argument is strongly related to the ontological status of mimesis, which I am not going to discuss here; for further references, María Antonia González Valerio, *El arte develado. Consideraciones estéticas sobre la hermenéutica de Gadamer* (México: Herder, 2005), and also "Mimesis. Gadamer y la estética," in *Gadamer: Ontología estética y hermenéutica*, ed. Teresa Oñate (Madrid: Dykinson, 2005).

<sup>10</sup> Carroll, "Art, Practice and Narrative," in *Beyond Aesthetics*.

<sup>11</sup> Hans- Robert Jauss, "Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory," in *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception* (tr. Timothy Bahti, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1982).

<sup>12</sup> The author's intentions have been an issue in the current debate between anti-intentionalists and intentionalists. Narrative interpretation does not consider that the author's intentions are the best or the only way to construe the artwork. Although I agree with Robert Stecker's statement that the artwork is the product of the artist's intentional activity and I think that they are to be held in consideration for the contested work, narrative interpretation does not postulate that the meaning

of the artwork coincides with the artist's intentions; the meaning is discovered and constructed via interpretation; therefore, the cognitive value should be thought of more broadly than a series of utterance or mere statements of intention. The example given by Stecker about Sir Arthur Conan Doyle makes clear that Stecker is considering the artwork as a series of utterances subject to truth or falsity claims, but the artwork's meaning goes far beyond this kind of claims. See Robert Stecker "Moderate Actual Intentionalism Defended" *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 64 (2006). Continental aesthetics has contended that truth in art is not a matter of correspondence; hence, I found John Gibson's thesis pretty interesting, since it states that "the conversation that exists between literary works and our critical practices is one of the mechanisms by which a culture articulates a sense of its world, and thus that literary works and our critical traditions are mutually implicated in a practice that itself bears cognitive value [...] our critical encounters with literature do not offer truth, at least not in the standard philosophical sense of the term." John Gibson, "Interpreting Words, Interpreting Worlds" *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 64 (2006): 448-449. The artwork demands and puts forward a truth that cannot be apprehended with the standard philosophical sense of the term; narrative interpretation intends to deal with this kind of truth which entails also verisimilitude, therefore, Joseph Margoli's plausible interpretation that allows indeterminacy is an adequate way to frame narrative interpretation as a constructivist approach to artworks. I concur with Alex Kiefer who defends the contribution of the reader for the production of meaning in art. See Alex Kiefer, "The Intentional Model in Interpretation", *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art*

*Criticism* 63 (2005): 279-280. That is why I find the discussion between Carroll and Stecker about Verne's racism in *Mysterious Island* a clear example of the consequences of interpreting the artwork without the temporal and causal connections that a plot provides; if this connection were made, the problem would not be a problem at all, since once we insert the artwork in the fragment of history and art history to which it belongs, it is clear that the intention of the work –Verne's actual intention corresponds to another kind of discussion, for example, to Verne's political or ideological filiations- is not to depict a racist view of African Americans. Narrative interpretation can create a plot that connects Verne's novel with XIX century tradition and also with, for example, Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, in order to create a congruent and coherent interpretation of the artwork and not of Verne's position vis à vis African Americans. See Robert Stecker, "Interpretation and the Problem of Relevant Intention" in *Contemporary Debates in Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art*, p. 275; and Carroll, "Anglo-American Aesthetics and Contemporary Criticism: Intention and the Hermeneutics of Suspicion," in *Beyond Aesthetics*, pp. 185-189.

<sup>13</sup> Aesthetic autonomy, as a consequence of Kantian aesthetics, has been strongly criticized for its purism which prevents the artwork from having a significant and practical effect in the world. Marxism, postmarxism and hermeneutics have tried, for the past century, to gain ontological and historical effectiveness for the artwork.

<sup>14</sup> See G.W.F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik I* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970).

<sup>15</sup> Carroll, "Art, Practice, and Narrative," in *Beyond Aesthetics*, p. 72.

<sup>16</sup> I have extensively analyzed fictional narratives in *La hermenéutica y la obra de arte literaria. Un tratado sobre la mimesis* (forthcoming).

<sup>17</sup> See Ricoeur, *Temps et récit 1. L'intrigue et le récit historique* (Paris :Seuil, 1991).

<sup>18</sup> Chronology is frequently broken for the sake of understanding as in flashbacks and prolepsis. The succession in time is not sufficient to create a reasonable order that accounts for events.

<sup>19</sup> Carroll, "On the Narrative Connection," in *Beyond Aesthetics*.

<sup>20</sup> Gerald Prince, *Narratology: The Form and Function of Narrative* (Amsterdam: Mouton, 1982), p. 4.

<sup>21</sup> Dorrit Cohn, *The Distinction of Fiction* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), p. 12.

<sup>22</sup> Luz Aurora Pimentel, *El relato en perspectiva. Estudio de teoría narrativa* (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México/Siglo XXI, 1998), p. 10.

<sup>23</sup> Carroll, "On the Narrative Connection", p. 126.

<sup>24</sup> Gregory Currie, "Narrative Representation of Causes", *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 64 (2006).

<sup>25</sup> Currie, "Narrative Representation of Causes", p. 313.

<sup>26</sup> Heidegger in *Time and Being* has explained the temporality of the *Dasein* as finitude and as *Geworfenheit* (thrownness). These characteristics are exactly what the artwork does not share with existence. Therefore, the artwork cannot be conceived in terms of the *Dasein* mode of being; its temporality is different and goes way beyond particular existences. Gadamer's aesthetics begins with this



issue, that is, to comprehend the artwork beyond the temporality and historicity of existence. The categories with which Gadamer explains it are the *Gegenwärtigkeit* and the *Aktualität* of the artwork, which means that the artwork has its own present and continues to have an effect far beyond its original time of composition.

<sup>27</sup> Change as constitutive of identity is fundamental for Gadamer's and Ricoeur's narrative identity. We can see in this a clear Heraclitean heritage: On those stepping into rivers staying the same other and other waters flow (DK22B12). As the same thing in us is living and dead, waking and sleeping, young and old. For these things having changed around are those, and conversely those having changed around are these (DK22B88).

<sup>28</sup> "An entity that exists only by always being something different is temporal in a more radical sense that everything that belongs to history. It has its being only in becoming and in return." Gadamer, *Gesammelte Werke 1. Hermeneutik I. Wahrheit und Methode*, p. 128.

<sup>29</sup> Ricoeur, *Soi-même comme un autre*, p. 142.

<sup>30</sup> María Zambrano, "Misericordia" in *A propósito de Benito Pérez Galdós y su obra* (Bogotá: Norma, 1993).

<sup>31</sup> Ricoeur, *Soi-même comme un autre*, p. 146.

<sup>32</sup> See Gilles Deleuze, *Pourparlers* (Paris: Minuit, 1990).

<sup>33</sup> The plot is explained by Aristotle as mimesis praxeos; it is the most important part for the tragedy and it is the causal order in which change is inserted, like peripetia and pathos. See Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1450b22-1451a15.

<sup>34</sup> See Ricoeur, *Soi-même comme un autre*, p. 168.

<sup>35</sup> See Roman Ingarden, *The Literary Work of Art* (tr. George G. Grabowicz, Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1973), chapter 13.

<sup>36</sup> See Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), chapter 8.

<sup>37</sup> I would like to thank Greta Rivara and Luz Aurora Pimentel for their helpful comments and criticisms.