

Editorial

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At the Limits of Narrative Reparation

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From ethical, hermeneutical and philosophical standpoints, narrative practices are typically associated with bonding power. Through its compositional and organisational capacity, narrative retraces lived experience in search of meaning, connecting dimensions that would otherwise remain separate. In personal and communal life, unnecessary suffering, defective experiences, and evil in general demand to be recounted in search of an “impossible” meaning. The desire for continuity, integrity, and coherence motivates the use of narrative as a construct that can give meaning to the whole by linking seemingly unconnected parts or experiences and fostering relationships at personal and collective levels. This connection is all the more valuable the less definitive it is considered; the nature of narration means that new textures can always be woven, and bad bonds can be undone before new ones are constructed. The basic, trans-cultural, quasi-universal construct of narration must be investigated, with a view to its capacity to reassure, exonerate, reconcile and restore, by deepening the various ethical and philosophical implications and evaluating its potential and limitations.

The value assumptions implicit in narrative constructs must be tested and evaluated from both theoretical and ethical perspectives. This approach involves analysing the various personal and social contexts in which narratives emerge and are practised. The connective power of narrative practices is indeed strongly linked to ethics and philosophical anthropology, as it concerns the good we desire, the bad that happens to us and how we integrate action and events into a single narrative. Furthermore, it raises questions about health and illness, and the connective power of narration can become a real capacity for healing. In philosophy, the use of narrative as a tool for “stitching and repairing” is either praised or rejected. A brief overview of current thinking reveals a polarisation between these two positions: either narrative practices falsify reality by attributing a non-existent teleology to it, or the teleological dimension becomes an ideology that either blinds one to reality or justifies it without offering any criticism. For these reasons, it is urgent, both culturally and existentially, to define the scope of narrative’s action in public and private ethics. This would allow us to engage with evil without denying it, and to use narrative as a tool for constructing a better world without accepting compromises, shortcuts, or appeals to common sense where violence and oppression prevail.

This special issue addresses this cluster of problems by examining narrative through the demanding lens of philosophy, which aspires to uncover truth and goodness. In other words, it will conduct a “critique of reparative reason”. Taking inspiration from Kant’s concept of “critique”, this issue offers an authentic and contemporary ethical analysis of the capabilities and limitations of reparative narratives. Focusing on the limits of narrative reparations implies something deeper than merely considering the limitations of reparative reasoning. The movement of thought that can be labelled “reparative” is almost akin to a form of *Aufhebung* – an overly simplistic overcoming of the negative.

The narrative component adds to this the idea that, being teleologically oriented towards an end and capable of synthesising the heterogeneous and composing the unpredictability of chaos by making it foreseeable and domesticating it, narratives can maintain the wonder of the event without normalising it. As a background, all the contributions agree on leaving narratives open to the possibility of different forms of reparation and on the critique of narrative reparation, which means establishing the conditions under which a narrative can be reparative.

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Are there forms of narrative that can avoid the risks of mainstream ways of narrating and storytelling while maintaining the wonder of the event? First, mainstream or institutionalized reparative narratives tend to polarize roles, stabilizing the opposition between victim and perpetrator. In doing so, they risk fixing identities rather than interrogating their complexity, reducing relational dynamics to moral dichotomies that can reinforce, rather than unsettle, existing structures. Second, they often produce stereotypical configurations of experience and characters. By organizing events into familiar narrative patterns, they flatten heterogeneity, transforming singular and irreducible experiences into recognizable and therefore manageable forms. Third, narrative reparation frequently tends to edulcorate reality. The disruptive force of trauma, violence, and evil is translated into narratively acceptable forms, neutralizing what resists integration into a coherent account. In this sense, narration operates as a practice of domestication. Fourth, it may generate consolatory illusions, offering coherence, continuity, and meaning where none can be fully achieved. These illusions do not simply interpret reality; they risk masking its fractures. Fifth, narrative repair can function as a strategy of denial or disavowal of evil. By incorporating the negative into an ordered framework, it deprives it of its irreducible and scandalous character. Finally, and perhaps most decisively, reparative narratives often rely on a tacit belief in redemption, reconciliation, or salvation as always desirable outcomes, at the cost of silencing dissent and disagreement, or even oppression. This teleological assumption transforms reparation into a normative imperative: everything should be repaired, every rupture should lead to meaning, every wound should be healed.

Taken together, these limits show that narrative reparation is far from neutral or universally beneficial. It can stabilize power, simplify complexity, and impose closure where openness or even irreparability would be more ethically appropriate.

Driven by the belief that certain pitfalls of narrative reasoning should be avoided, this special issue addresses some of these pitfalls, by adopting ethical, hermeneutical, critical theory, and phenomenological perspectives on this topic. Among the most relevant pitfalls, the contributors considered the following: the idea of different ways of repairing and of narrative repair (Sergio Labate's article *Reparation. Taken to its Extreme*, Silvia Pierosara's article *From Narrative Redemptions to the Ethical Value of Micrological Reparations*, Matteo Cavalleri's article *The Wound of the Event. Experience, Narration, and Reparation in Italo Calvino*); the critique of easy paths to reparation, especially when they are institutionalized, together with the risk of forceful integration, and conversely, the total disregard for the capacity to resist assimilation by failing to tell stories or telling them differently (all the contributions in an original way); the risk of stereotyping, which is also concealed in reparative processes that ask people to tell their truth or their story in order to simplify reality and divide things too neatly between victims and perpetrators (Aniela Helfrich's article *When Ideal-Types become Pseudo-Objective. Migrantization, Narratives, and the Role of Arts*, Shanyi Yang's article *Limits of Subalternity. Victim and Perpetrator in Spivak*); the idealisation of equal access to narrative, which is neither easy nor always possible (Clio Nicastro's article *Healing Disorders: Reparative Narratives in Aby Warburg and Tsitsi Dangar-embga*); the idea that evil, in all its forms, is something one should have the strength to overcome at an individual level (Donatella Pagliacci's article *The Power of Storytelling in the Experience of Illness*); the complete lack of reflection on the material importance of narratives, which makes it even more difficult to see how a narrative can be healing or lead to the actualisation of social justice (Alma Lia Salmeri's article *Through the Body Narrative, Vulnerability, and the Virtual Potential of Lived Experience*, Carla Danani's article *Narrating Places*).

Finally, all the contributions recognise that reparation and narrative reparation are deeply embedded in dynamics of power, and for this reason they all start from the urgency of a critique of easy or automatic paths to reparation, especially when they are institutionalized, together with the risk of forceful integration, and conversely, the total disregard for the capacity to resist assimilation by failing to tell stories or telling them differently. To think "at the limits of narrative reparation" means to abandon its redemptive illusion without relinquishing its ethical potential. All the articles included in this special issue make valuable contributions to the idea that reparation is not always good and that narration is not reparative by definition. And yet, within their limits, narratives retain a different kind of value: not as instruments of salvation, but as practices of care, exposure, and reconfiguration, which can create a space in which the irreparable can be inhabited, where meaning can still emerge without resolving fracture.

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