

Narrative Identity, Psychoanalysis, and the Machine: On the Alterity of Artificial Narrators

At the heart of Paul Ricoeur's philosophy lies the concept of narrative identity, which functions as a pivotal site where time, action, and the self are interpreted and configured. Narrative, for Ricoeur, is not a surface phenomenon but a deep structure of human subjectivity—an ontological and ethical process through which the self is told, shaped, and projected. This is precisely what makes his engagement with psychoanalysis, and particularly with Freud, so significant: it is not metapsychology that interests Ricoeur most, but the clinical practice—the narrative event of analysis, where the subject reconfigures its own story in the presence of an other.

This paper interrogates how the Ricoeurian framework of narrative identity—rooted in the dialectic of *idem* and *ipse*, and grounded in the bodily, temporal, and ethical dimensions of selfhood—can help us think through the emergence of artificial narrators. With the proliferation of AI systems that produce, interpret, and anticipate human narratives, we are faced with a radical shift in the ecology of storytelling. These systems operate not only as tools but as new kinds of interlocutors: they process our data, simulate our language, and increasingly participate in the construction of identity itself.

What happens to narrative identity when the narrative function is shared with—or even outsourced to—machines? Can these artificial systems be understood as a form of alterity, in the Ricoeurian sense, capable of mediating recognition and transformation? Or do they disrupt the hermeneutic and ethical continuity that narrative identity requires?

I argue that the figure of the “voluntary cogito”—Ricoeur's concept of a self that assumes responsibility, projects action, and lives its embodiment—remains essential in navigating these questions. The presence of the body, the weight of memory, the act of promising and forgiving: these are not easily translatable into algorithmic patterns. Yet they are central to the construction of narrative identity and, by extension, to any possible sense of justice in a global and technologically mediated world. In the context of the polycrisis—where ecological, technological, and existential urgencies collide—the question is no longer whether machines tell stories, but whether the stories they tell allow for recognition, agency, and ethical continuity. Ricoeur's thought invites us to consider whether, and how, narrative identity can persist when confronted with non-human others who speak with our voices but lack our bodies, our memories, and our capacity for responsibility.

