

A Poetics of the Self

Ricœur's Philosophy of the Will and Living Metaphor as Creative Praxis

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Abstract

This article presents the conceptual groundwork for a "poetics of the self" by theorizing how and why a creative praxis rooted in Ricoeur's philosophy of the will and hermeneutics of the living metaphor contributes to an individual's on-going development of self-awareness. Its focus is on the affective fragility that manifests in an individual's intermediary status of polarities – finitude and infinitude, freedom and nature – in conjunction with Ricoeur's tensional status of metaphorical truth. The act of writing poetry, it suggests, can be an aesthetic mediation that develops insight into the primordial discord of the servile will.

Keywords: Paul Ricoeur, Poetics, Hermeneutics, Self.

Résumé

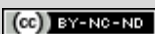
Cet article jette les bases conceptuelles d'une "poétique du soi." Il explique comment et pourquoi une praxis créative, conçue à la fois à partir de la philosophie ricœurienne de la volonté et de son herméneutique de la métaphore vive, contribue au développement continu de la connaissance de soi. Pour ce faire, il met l'accent sur la fragilité affective qui se manifeste chez l'individu en raison de son statut d'intermédiaire entre deux polarités – finitude et infinitude, liberté et nature – en la mettant en relation avec le statut tensionnel de la vérité métaphorique chez Ricoeur. Il suggère enfin pour conclure que l'acte d'écrire de la poésie peut constituer une médiation esthétique par laquelle on développe une meilleure compréhension du discord originaire de la volonté servile.

Mots-clés: Paul Ricoeur, poétique, herméneutique, soi.

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Ricœur's Philosophy of the Will and Living Metaphor as Creative Praxis

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Introduction: A Poetics of the Self

This article revisits Ricœur's philosophy of the will and hermeneutics of the living metaphor to consider the role that poetics play in an individual's development of self-awareness. Its focus will be a discussion of how poetic discourse, considered here as 'creative praxis,' offers individuals access to awareness and expression of experiences that exceed the confines of speculative language and thought. In Ricœur's view, such experiences are aligned with an individual's suffering and are in and of themselves "preliterary": "What is more, to memory and suffering are attached those modes of narrative at the preliterary level that I sacrificed to the benefit of dealing with sophisticated forms of narrative literary fiction and historiography."¹ He adds to this statement, "[...] I did not emphasize enough our difficulty, even our incapacity to bring to language the emotional, often traumatic experience that psychoanalysis attempts to liberate."²

Working from the suggestion that certain experiences resist traditional forms of narrative emplotment, a suggestion at the heart of Morny Joy's edited collection, *Paul Ricœur and Narrative: Context and Contestation*, from which Ricœur's above quote is taken, my present aim is to examine a level of preliterary Ricœur experience through a lens rooted in Ricœur's philosophy of the will. Rather than traumatic or socially conditioned experiences, here, I focus on the more primary and existential tensions of "primordial discord."³ As Ricœur suggests: "No conflict between ourselves and some process susceptible of conferring upon us an assumed personality could be interjected if we were not already this disproportion of living and thinking, of which our heart suffers a primordial discord."⁴ Accessing and expressing suffering and its dialectical counterpart of belonging or "oriented happiness" rooted in primordial tensionality through one's own creative enactment of living metaphors is what I envision as the praxis of a poetics of the self.⁵

My project's guiding supposition, then, is that if to be human is to be situated – psychologically, physically, emotionally, intellectually – within a finitude-infinity dialectic that manifests as primordial discord, as Ricœur's philosophy of the will suggests, then every human is capable of feeling and expressing a personal experience of existential discord.⁶ The difficulty for living-with and understanding such discord, arises, however, because as Ricœur concludes in the three works that comprise his philosophy of the will and in *The Rule of Metaphor*, these experiences of discord cannot be adequately described in speculative language and therefore cannot be adequately appropriated into cohesive understanding of one's life – thus their absence in his 'sophisticated' study of narrative in *Time and Narrative* and *Oneself as Another*, as noted above.⁷ The present study invites exploration of how an individual's own efforts to express her affective fragility of existential tension in the discourse most apt to support it, poetics, may be conducive to a greater hermeneutic processes of becoming aware of and learning to live in relationship with the

embodied conflicts rooted in dialectics of freedom and nature, i.e. subjective perspective and objective belonging.⁸ Such exploration is important if not necessary, because the primordial tensions at the centre of Ricœur's philosophy of the will, as they surface in personal and lived experiences rather than theoretical constructs, are most often buried in the depths of depression and/or brashly ignored as one lives in what Kohák terms the "promethean defiance" of the servile will, a polarized reaction that can add to one's already rooted being-in suffering.⁹

The poetics discussed below thus invite an individual's experiences of the fragmentary, the non-linear, and the contradictory feelings of simultaneously embodied polarities such as love and hate, forgiveness and revenge, entanglement and isolation, finitude and infinitude, etc., to surface in awareness exactly as they are felt. To let such feelings rest without need or want, at least immediately, to emplot them in linear and/or rational understanding. This invitation is aligned with Buss's call for a "reentanglement" of emotion, body and mind in her article, "Women's Memories and the Embodied Imagination." Buss applies a feminist lens to Ricœur's theory of metaphor: "I desire a story that does not emerge, or disentangle, but rather re-emerges, that is, marks itself off, 'emerges,' only to point to the way it is merged, the way it is entangled, in a way that privileges 'background,' as a guarantee of the human being."¹⁰ Similarly, I seek to invite an individual's poetic articulation of the embodied background of entanglements in which she lives, thinks and feels in order to develop 'poetic consciousness,' i.e. an ability of living-with tension rather than speculatively categorizing and understanding it, a consciousness modeled after the structures of Ricœur's living metaphor.

This conceptualization of a poetics of the self does not rest in and of itself in developing ability to be-with and express primordial tensions. Eventually, one's poetic utterances can integrate into a greater hermeneutics of the self such that an individual cultivates a dialectical relation between her poetic and speculative consciousnesses. From this perspective, the work of creative praxis eventually enters into the fabric of cultural symbols that make up the "texts" in which we encounter ourselves through the phenomenological process of appropriation and disappropriation.¹¹ Applying this integrative and creative process in community work and/or education, for example with the participants of my own community practice, survivors of gendered violence, brings Ricœur's philosophy of the will and phenomenological hermeneutics into a very relevant and culturally redemptive engagement of creative praxis at the intersections of poetics, interpretation, narrative, recognition and justice – dimensions that encapsulate the span of Ricœur's own intellectual development. I here seek to lay the theoretical groundwork from which such a practice can emerge.¹²

Affective Fragility & Metaphorical Truth

"How can freedom be itself and in bondage? How can it be set free as freedom and responsible in its very deliverance?"¹³ Such is the guiding question of *Freedom and Nature* that sets the trajectory for Ricœur's philosophy of the will as he explores what is at the core of human freedom: an innate binding, a paradox expressed in the dialectical relationship of the voluntary and the involuntary. As a means of further contextualizing a poetics of the self, exploring how engaging in poetic praxis potentially relates to our experiences of a bound freedom, I revisit Ricœur's philosophy of the will through a lens of the living metaphor.¹⁴

Kohák introduces Ricœur's concept of the servile will and a tendency for the human to experience polarized tensions of selfhood in *Freedom and Nature*:

Existence, as we approach it in experience, is always existence distorted by fault. Yet the fault – as the pathological-is not intelligible in itself, but only in terms of the essential structure which it distorts. The bondage of passions, when it is not conceived as a bondage of freedom but as the essential human condition, inevitably leads to a view of man which either loses sight of freedom altogether, reducing man to an essentially passive victim of a radically alien nature or asserts freedom in a spasm of Promethean defiance which rejects nature altogether [...].¹⁵

It is this dichotomized view of freedom as an absence of selfhood or a spasm of "Promethean defiance," mentioned above, that Ricœur's philosophy of the will sought to mediate by depicting a dialectical relation of a tensional and intermediary experience of two extremes:

His is intermediate within himself, within his selves. He is intermediate because he is a mixture, and a mixture because he brings about mediations. His ontological characteristic of being-intermediate consists precisely in that his act of existing is the very act of bringing about mediations between all the modalities and all the levels of reality within him and outside him. [...] man appears to be no less discourse than perspective, no less a demand for totality than a limited nature, no less love than desire [...] man is no less destined to unlimited rationality, to totality, and beatitude than he is limited to a perspective, consigned to death and riveted to desire. Our working hypothesis concerning the paradox of the finite-infinite implies that we must speak of infinitude as much as of human finitude. The full recognition of this polarity is essential to the elaboration of the concepts of intermediacy, disproportion, and fallibility, the interconnections of which we have indicated in moving from the last to the first of these concepts.¹⁶

This article's claim is that it is specifically the tensional and intermediary status of human experience, dialectical relations encapsulated as the "servile will" but as the above passage shows explored by Ricœur in several iterations of tensional experienced counterparts – finitude and infinitude, discourse and perspective, love and desire, etc., – that allow and invite the living metaphor to serve as a linguistic register capable of expressing these felt discords conditional to our human nature. The literary space that becomes "metaphorical truth" in *The Rule of Metaphor*, subsisting in a tensional and intermediary status of meaning, discussed most fully in Ricœur's study on philosophical and poetic discourses, can, I suggest, be viewed in terms of a linguistic utterance capable of expressing the primordial discord explored in Ricœur's early work.

Halsema and Enriquez write of Ricœur's dialectic of poetic and philosophical discourses, "especially in his last study of the *The Rule of Metaphor* he shows the possibility and fertility of a dialogue between the poetic and the conceptual fields for advancing philosophical knowledge while maintaining the specificity of both." Halsema and Enriquez continue "the semantic innovation brought to light by metaphor is only a promise of meaning."¹⁷ A poetics of self, as I articulate it here, takes a different stance. From the perspective of active engagement in creative praxis, I consider the semantic innovation of metaphorical truth to be more than a promise of meaning. In Halsema and Enriquez's context, metaphor and poetic discourse offer a promise of meaning for

speculative thought, but from the consideration of the philosophy of the will, I argue, metaphorical discourse offers a surfacing of existential presence whose roots extend into the very discord of existential finitude that occupies the focus of Ricœur's early work. This claim is certainly not to suggest that every poetic utterance is such a manifestation of tensional and primordial selfhood, but that in turning to the poetic expression of tensions that reject speculative language, we open up the possibility that we can make contact with the feelings of the existential paradox of being, developed in the philosophy of the will, signaling and heightening the "ontological index" of metaphorical discourse. This index is especially heightened, as an element of praxis, if the discourse in question is not a supposition of philosophically constructed poetics but is an individual subject's own utterance able to enter into the body of texts whose 'worlds' she and others critically engage and hermeneutically encounter.¹⁸

The "feelings" given form through their expression in poetic discourse are not to be dismissed as raw, cathartic and/or narcissistic outpours of emotion – though, as certain therapeutic models argue, aesthetically mediated cathartic outpours can be symbols of deep and rich existential positing and meaning.¹⁹ I view the feelings articulated by a poetics of the self through the same lens of the feelings discussed in *Fallible Man* when Ricœur broaches a dimension of insight in which we somehow perceive or recognize what he terms our "oriented field." Here he refers to the precious moments that offer us a glimpse of our tensional status of belonging as "atmospheric feelings."

Ricœur describes these moments of awareness rooted in feeling as exceeding the confines of purely speculative investigation. As such, they are described as "formless, without knowledge of its object." In their formlessness, these feelings are most revealing, because while "not all atmospheric feelings are ontological," "the ontological does manifest itself through formless affective moods." They are "thought but not known" such that if "being is beyond essence, if it is horizon, it is understandable that the feelings that most radically interiorize the supreme intention of reason might themselves be without form." Resisting and escaping the categorization of speculative language, these feelings are moods that "cannot be named" by speculative language, but nevertheless mark our "ontological bearing."²⁰

The "atmospheric feelings" point to an intermediary experience of what speculative thought conceives of only in terms of polarized relations:

Knowing, because it exteriorizes and poses its object in being, sets up a fundamental cleavage between the object and the subject. It 'detaches' the object or 'opposes it' to the I. In short, knowing constitutes the duality of subject and object. Feeling is understood, by contrast as the manifestation of a relation to the world that constantly restores our complicity with it, our inherence and belonging in it, something more profound than all polarity and duality.²¹

The illuminating power of such deeply rooted feeling for the human experience lies in its rejection of a polarizing division of subjectivity and objectivity. Such presence of feeling allows two modalities to confront each other in a tensional interplay that potentially, even if only momentarily and/or in a consciousness that rejects time-bound categorization of thought, exceeds speculative thought's appropriation and reconfiguration of experience into rational understanding.

Despite this occasional apprehension of “ontological bearing” that orients us toward the horizon of our belonging, Ricœur concludes in *Fallible Man* and similarly in *The Rule of Metaphor* that “we live in the subject-object duality that has structured our language” and therefore this relationship between poles “can be reached only *indirectly*.”²² In speculative language we may conceptualize an experience of reconciliatory tension, an experience that may be felt, potentially, as the atmospheric feeling. Such conceptualizing, for Ricœur, occurs through structures like the Kantian transcendental imagination, discussed in both the philosophy of the will and the theory of the living metaphor, but a gap or “blind point” remains when it comes to fully understanding, in speculative language as knowledge, the excess of meaning that lives in our formless feelings.²³ We ourselves as embodied existents may *be* the intermediary status of extremes, of the sensible and intellectual, of subjectivity and objectivity. We may *be* “the affective region between living and thinking,” but the objectivity that governs our discursive language cannot, Ricœur concludes, present that region of the in-between, that which bridges the gap between freedom and nature to us.²⁴ Ricœur writes:

Feeling appears as a coloring of the soul [...] now then since the whole of our language has been worked out in the dimension of objectivity- in which the subject and object are distinct and opposed, feeling can be described only paradoxically as the unity of an intention and an affectation, of an intention toward the world and an affectation of the self. This paradox, however is only a sign pointing toward the mystery of feeling, namely, the undivided connection of my existence with being and being through desire and love. [...] We betray this unity of intention and affection as soon as we allow ourselves to be taken in by the language of objectivity in which we are condemned to express it.²⁵

Poetic discourse, because it is not the language of objectivity, as shown throughout *The Rule of Metaphor*, offers a means of translating experience into a linguistic register that can, potentially, hold the intermediary status without discursively limiting it to speculative categories such as true and false, subjective and objective. Encouraging individuals to cultivate their own practice of poetic discourse, can, I suggest, aid in developing a poetic consciousness that, while not offering a speculative grasp of intermediary states of being, may encourage awareness and an ability to be-with rather than deny or ignore our primordial discord.

That metaphorical discourse is a tensional interplay, a non-static reconciliatory presence of tensions capable of representing inner modes of conflict, is developed in *The Rule of Metaphor* as a play between poles of identity and difference and, more generally, as the dialectic of mimesis and poiesis. Ricœur writes:

[...] metaphor is established as the schematism in which the metaphorical attribution is produced. This schematism turns imagination into the place where the figurative meaning emerges in the interplay of identity and difference. And metaphor is that place in discourse where this schematism is visible, because the identity and the difference do not melt together but confront each other.

In metaphorical discourse there manifests a world of meaningful representation in which identity and difference confront each other. In this dialectical relationship is a reformulation of the tensional interplay between objectivity and subjectivity that dominated Ricœur’s early work:

identity is an objective degree of character analyzed through the archeology of the subject and difference is the counterpart to identity, the subjective perspective constantly and indefinitely transcended through the comprehension of meaning that occurs through the dominating look.²⁶ Ricœur emphasizes that in the space of mimetic creation the conversing of identity and difference do not melt together into an indistinguishable mass. They maintain a tensional status, referred to as metaphorical truth, where the poetic image that readers perceive is neither true nor false, but both as the living metaphor becomes the resolution of the enigmatic and paradoxical play between the real and the unreal: "Metaphorical meaning, as we saw, is not the enigma itself, the semantic clash pure and simple, but the solution of the enigma, the inauguration of the new semantic pertinence."²⁷ Through a reconciliatory "seeing-as," we are not forced into the dichotomous view of either/or but we can exist in the space of both/and: "The paradox of the poetic can be summed up entirely in this, that the elevation of feeling to fiction is the condition of its mimetic use. Only a feeling transformed into myth can open and discover the world."²⁸ In metaphorical discourse's mimetically created intermediary space between being and non-being one encounters a voice vehement in the expression it gives to the felt experiences that escape ordinary language, referred to by Ricœur as metaphor's "ontological vehemence."²⁹

The Rule of Metaphor thus shows how metaphorical (i.e. poetic) expression rejects the binary ultimatums that positivistic formalism would enforce upon its classifications of experience. The poetic dimension of meaning is one in which, Ricœur claims, "creation and revelation coincide."³⁰ Entering this tensional dimension of metaphorical truth, a reader/interpreter perceives a world that Berggren describes as the "poetic schemata of inner life." In *The Rule of Metaphor*, however, this "schemata of inner life" is not the Kantian schematism of analogy. It is a schema more closely related to what Ricœur labels the non-verbal image that emerges from and transcends the Kantian schema, because it depicts a world in which "the opposition between exterior and interior ceases to be valid."³¹ To exemplify this structure of meaning, Ricœur cites Berggren's use of the lake of ice at the bottom of Dante's *Inferno*, which Ricœur explains, "proclaims the reciprocity of the inner and the outer." Through the "poetic schemata of inner life" that is the lake of ice, we readers begin to see evil *as* the non-verbal being that Satan frozen in ice presents us with. His being is not caught in a polarization of either empirically objective or emotively subjective, either external or internal, true or false. He is a metaphorically true visualization of an inner structure of life – the evil that permeates in our world, in humanity and in ourselves.

This register of meaning that is metaphorically true, an inner structure of life that requires aesthetic mediation in which "creation and revelation coincide," is where, I suggest, overlap with the intermediary status explored in the philosophy of the will occurs:

If metaphor adds nothing to the description of the world, at least it adds to the ways in which we perceive; and this is the poetic function of metaphor. This still rests upon resemblance, but at the level of feelings. In symbolizing one situation by means of another, metaphor 'infuses' the feelings attached to the symbolizing situation into the heart of the situation that is symbolized. In this 'transference of feelings,' the similarity between feelings is induced by the resemblance of situations. In its poetic function, therefore, metaphor extends the power of double meaning from the cognitive realm to the affective.³²

In this passage, Ricœur discusses a poetic function of language in terms of the affective modality of being discussed in *Fallible Man*. Through metaphorical discourse, one engages a semantic innovation that presents a symbolizing situation: the level of figurativization of the non-verbally configured expression of feeling related to inner structures of life. Ricœur, however, does not explicitly connect *The Rule of Metaphor's* insights to his philosophy of the will as his task is to focus on a reading and exposition of metaphorical truth, especially at the intersection of poetic and speculative discourses. A poetics of the self allows this connection to be made by explicitly suggesting that the creative and revelatory function of metaphorical truth can be aligned with the human's primal discord discussed in the philosophy of the will.

Applying a Poetics of the Self

To exemplify a poetics of the self as a movement through praxis, I would interpret the above example of Berggren further than Ricœur's own reading of it in *The Rule of Metaphor*. Ricœur and Berggren provide an analysis of the schematism of Dante's poetics – a theoretical study of the atmospheric feelings of a being situated as an intermediary between good and evil. This “feeling” is configured through the poetry of the *Divine Comedy's* “seeing-as” through the experience of the pilgrim's encounter with Satan. This “poetic” truth is then configured into the greater narrative of Dante's journey through hell, purgatory and paradise, all of which is interpreted by a reader engaging in a critical hermeneutics of text. A hermeneutics of text, however, is also always a hermeneutics of the self, as Ricœur's theory of explanation and understanding shows.³³ Is, I question through this formulation of a poetics of the self, reading and interpretation of a text enough to put an individual in illuminating contact with their own primordial discord? Is it enough, to continue with the example of Ricœur and Berggren, to live and know that discord as intimately as Dante-pilgrim does, where he not only encounters his affective fragility, but also poetically integrates and expresses it through the consciousness of Dante-poet?

A poetics of the self interrupts the interpretive process of self-discovery developed by Ricœur by connecting that process back to his philosophy of the will. In doing so, it invites us to ask many questions. As we read with Berggren, the question arises – what of my experience of evil? What of yours? How do we gain awareness of our own experiences of such a primordial “feeling” within the framework of a critical hermeneutics of the text before us – be that text Dante's *Divine Comedy* or a story of a recent shooting in the news? Through the praxis that is a poetics of the self, can we move into authentic and reflexive poetic descriptions of our own lived experiences inspired by the texts we read and/or the histories we inherit? Might this movement support the journey of appropriation and disappropriation in a new way?³⁴ Moreover, might doing so become an engaged practice through which the living metaphor spurs us to “think more,” where that “thinking more” gives way to our own creative impulses and formulations of feelings excavated by the texts we read or the situations we encounter? In the end, is it enough to “think” our way through a text? Is reading poetry enough to encounter the dialectic of philosophical and poetic discourse put forth by Ricœur or do we need to embody it in our own consciousness and expression? Would doing so open us to awareness of our affective fragilities through a poetic consciousness capable of existing in structures that simultaneously are and are not real, imagined, or true? Would such awareness allow us to live as more self-aware and moral beings?

These are questions that emerge from this explorative conceptualization of a poetics of the self, acknowledging that while we are not all capable of writing as Dante wrote, we are all capable of feeling the discord of Dante-poet and Dante-pilgrim (an excellent metanarrative example of the ipse/idem dialectic) in that we are all humans – all born into servile will with the ability to feel and become conscious of the suffering and joy that our existential fault condemns us to and liberates us from. Do we, a poetics of the self ultimately asks, *need* to express the dimensions of felt discord in the only linguistic register capable of configuring such inherent discord, in poetry, in order to increase our awareness of its presence within us?³⁵ Without inviting our own poetic impulses to manifest, do we risk living caught between the polarities of repression and promethean defiance that exploring our inner conflicts only in speculative language may, possibly, restrict us to?

In line with John Wall's consideration that there exists within each human a moral responsibility to create, I would respond to the last question, yes.³⁶ For instance, if we developed cultures of education in which students were taught that poetic discourse is a valid medium in which to express oneself, might we be able to cultivate a more emotionally aware society? Especially if such poetic expressions were themselves incorporated into individual and cultural hermeneutic endeavours and learning models. I believe a poetics of the self has much to offer our individual and cultural practices of education and that Ricœur's philosophy is the groundwork of explaining why this is the case. Namely, that through the philosophy of the will and the hermeneutics of the living metaphor, a poetics of the self invites a register through which to become aware of and express what is a condition of being human: the paradox of living as a suffering being who experiences and intimately knows joy, a primordial discord that parallels dialectics of identity and difference, ipse and idem, freedom and nature. Social conditions and structures of power and privilege contribute to a body's place within the spectrum of suffering and these social conditions need to be examined as a component of a poetics of the self. All humans, however – male, female and non-binary – suffer. Perhaps learning to feel and express our own suffering through a poetics of the self, and eventually interpreting and reconfiguring those poetic utterances into structures of emplotment and narrative identity, if possible, is a method of learning to hear others more authentically as well.

Conclusion

Wall similarly suggests that in order to fully embody our creative potentials as interpreting subjects, it is not enough to read, we also must create:

What is "creative" here? It is that nothing is simply already given, neither our historicity nor the meaning of texts. [...] As Theodore Marius Van Leeuwen has well put it, Ricœur sees in language "the surplus of meaning" – a surplus of the meaning of historicity, I would add, that it is each self's responsibility to create.³⁷

Opening up the creative responsibility of a self who posits herself in the world is a moral responsibility for Wall. While I agree with his stance, looking at the creative impulse of every individual in terms of reinterpreting the philosophy of the will through the living metaphor of poetic discourse rather than applying it to morality and theories of justice, I view introducing the poetic act as part of the hermeneutic journey of self-understanding. Doing so cultivates a practice

that links the interpreter to her primordial and tensional status of selfhood in the affective fragility that, regardless of one's social positionality, affects us all as a condition of being human. Accordingly, I would add to Ricœur's statement in "What is a text?" when he writes: "[...] in reflective hermeneutics- the constitution of the *self* is contemporaneous with the constitution of *meaning* [...]" that, from the view of a poetics of the self, the constitution of self is contemporaneous with a poetic consciousness of the self's internally perceived, intuited and poetically expressed feelings of primordial discord.³⁸ A new formulation of selfhood can then surface in an embodied dialectic between rational meaning and poetic awareness.

Such a dialectic of selfhood relates to Helenius' focus on fragility when he cites Amalric's poetic-practical dialectic:

[...] it is possible to achieve a notion of the self, but there always remains an original discord that reveals how fundamental the human condition of "shattered cogito" (*cogito brisé*) ultimately is. The fragile unity of the self is never immediate. Instead, the self is always mediated through its acts both a poetic and practical kind.³⁹

While conceptually I agree with Amalric's claim that the fragile unity of the self is never immediate, I believe this is only true if it is specified that this lack of unity occurs within the structures and inclusion of an individual's speculative and thought-knowing self, as was the case in Ricœur's theory. For this is why the living metaphor's truth, ultimately, cannot be grasped by speculative thought. The imagery of metaphor's truth represents the inner structure of the paradoxical feeling itself which speculative language will never achieve.⁴⁰ Speculative language is not comprised of a paradoxical and non-dichotomous structure like the metaphorical discourse which is and is not; however, our embodied experiences, the preliterate occasions of suffering, as Buss argues and Ricœur himself put forth, do manifest, in immediacy I would claim, both discord and unity.⁴¹

Translation of what is preliterate, namely embodied experiences that can correspond to the discord of existential fault and primordial suffering into the structures of rational thought is, then, not necessarily possible. Such experiences, as trauma theorist Cathy Caruth suggests, may even defy emplotment.⁴² Yet poetic language does, as Amalric and Ricœur suggest, mediate our awareness of what is felt but not known. Perhaps, I suggest as a conclusion to this article, there is a level of poetic consciousness that defies conceptual knowing yet is as equally important to healthy and moral living. Only practice, however, through turning the objectified and theorized self into the poetic-agent that creatively engages with her own historicity and her own expressions of discord and belonging will allow this theoretical concept of a poetics of the self to enter a realm of praxis. As Ricœur wrote of our own poetic rootedness:

Poetic discourse brings to language a pre-objective world in which we find ourselves already rooted, but in which we also project our inner most possibilities. We must thus dismantle the reign of objects in order to let be and to allow to be uttered our primordial belonging to a world which we inhabit that is to say which at once precedes us and receives the imprint of our works.⁴³

A poetics of self calls for the interpreter to become a poet. Not for the sake of establishing literary success or promoting solipsistic writings as "great" poetry, but for the sake of inviting her own consciousness to touch and know her own fallibility through the cultivation of poetic

awareness. Helenius articulates such a move in terms of recognizing the cultural imagination at the heart of Ricœur's phenomenological hermeneutics:

I maintain that Ricœur's phenomenological hermeneutics of being able is ultimately based on the cultural imagination initiating tradition-conscious change in the social reality that than facilitates the post-critical appropriation of one's self as capable. In short, I claim that *l'imagination culturelle* is the basis for a sociocultural poetics of human action and, therefore, a condition for the birth of a situated subject in the positive fullness of belonging.⁴⁴

Eventually, especially if creative praxis is integrated into the model of a hermeneutics of the self, a poetics of the self will integrate into narrative identity as one progresses in self-understanding through a reflexive and creatively cognizing act. The reconfigurations of selfhood that narrative identity offers the interpreter turned poet are a means to integrate poetic consciousness into time-bound and, more importantly for our current culture, socially impacted narratives of freedom and bondage. However, Ricœur's philosophy of the will and theory of the living metaphor ultimately suggest that there is value in allowing the paradoxical expressions of primordial discord to remain as poetic utterances without configuration into emplotment. To that point, I offer, as closing, Ricœur's words that "poetry never humbles except to heal: its hum provokes a conversion, as consciousness renouncing the attempt at self-positing receives being with wonder and seeks in the world and in the involuntary a manifestation of transcendence which is given to me as a mighty comparison of my freedom."⁴⁵ This passage suggests that a degree of healing occurs when we allow ourselves to enter the conversion offered through poetic discourse where the goal is not to understand ourselves fully or rationally, but to acquire the poetic consciousness that surfaces in a poetics of the self. Given that we all experience existential discord as conditional to being human, it would stand that we all require the existential healing of which Ricœur writes. Poetry thus becomes the aesthetic mediation able to facilitate that healing through the creative self-discovery one enters into through an act of self-reflexive creative-mimesis in the intermediary status of metaphorical truth and its tensional status of being that offers a "mighty comparison to my freedom."

- ¹ Paul Ricœur, "A Response from Paul Ricœur," in *Paul Ricœur and Narrative: Context and Contestation* (Calgary, University of Calgary Press, 1997), ix.
- ² Ricœur, "A Response from Paul Ricœur," xxxix.
- ³ It is important to note that my present aim is not to develop or build upon theories of narrative identity, such as Joy's work with writing and incest survivors (Joy M., "Ricœur, Women and the Journey to Recognition," in *Feminist Explorations of Paul Ricœur's Philosophy*, ed. Annemie Halsema and Fernanada Henriques (London, Lexington Books, 2016), 20. That being said, narrative identity and a poetics of the self are undoubtedly related and further study will, with more specificity, especially as concerns the poiesis-mimesis relationship central to metaphorical discourse and to mimetic reconfiguration, acknowledge and distinguish them from one another (Paul Ricœur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, transl. Robert Czerny (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2000), 39). Here, I distinguish between the two, because a poetics of the self, while at times overlapping narrative's task of a subject expressing herself and gaining cognizant insight, is not driven by a goal for cohesive clarification though reconfiguration. The goal of a poetics of the self, as I conceptualize it here, is the expression of a primordial and tensional status of selfhood described by Ricœur most thoroughly in *Fallible Man* where the experience itself defies expression in purely speculative language (Paul Ricœur, *Fallible Man*, transl. Charles Kelbley (New York, Fordham University Press, 1986)).
- ⁴ Ricœur, *Fallible Man*, 132. Interestingly, this rejection of speculative language and understanding is also characteristic of traumatic memory. Cathy Caruth, leading trauma theorist writes that the narration and representation of trauma must be "spoken in a language that is always somehow literary: a language that defies, even as it claims, our understanding." Her suggestion that poetic discourse defies as it claims our understanding aligns itself with the conclusion of *The Rule of Metaphor* in which, unable to fully grasp the tensional discord present in the living metaphor, poetic discourse, like the symbol of *The Symbolism of Evil*, spurs thought to "think more." See: Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore, John Hopkins UP, 2010), 5.
- ⁵ Ricœur, *Fallible Man*, 68. Given the suggestions of individual and cultural healing, a poetics of the self engages psychology and as such a discussion of *Freud and Philosophy* is valuable to a greater development of a poetics of the self, especially given the context of the discourse of therapy that Blomfield describes as: "another language, dissociated from common language, [...] which presents itself to be deciphered through its meaningful effects – symptoms, dreams, various formations." See: Jocelyn Dunphy Blomfield, "From a Poetics of the Will to Narratives of the Self: Paul Ricœur's Freud and Philosophy," in *Feminist Explorations of Paul Ricœur's Philosophy*, 6. The conceptual basis discussed here in terms of a poetics of the self, however, remains disparate from the therapist-client model of interpretation for many reasons. Most notably, this poetics as creative praxis suggests a move toward self-realization and awareness through one's own creative acts. Interpretation of one's expressions may occur, later, as part of a hermeneutic act that seeks emplotment and refiguration in the spirit of *Time and Narrative* or *Freud and Philosophy*. Moreover, as feminist scholars have shown, the power relations of the therapist-client dynamic in any psychotherapeutic relationship undoubtedly

condition the dialogue and language/symbols produced in discourse, thereby adding another dimension of interpretation needing to be accounted for that perhaps was not clearly developed in *Freud and Philosophy*. For discussion of these power dynamics re: psychotherapeutic dialogue, see: Laura Brown, *Feminist Therapy* (Washington, D.C., American Psychological Association, 2010).

- ⁶ Ricœur, *Fallible Man*, 105. Undoubtedly, the concept of existential discord does and needs to encounter critical engagement with feminist and postcolonial theory regarding the disparate situations of oppression and how they contribute to and condition one's suffering. At present, I seek to work with the philosophical concept of the servile will, clearly articulating its relevance to a poetics of the self before moving into the social dimensions of culture and history that shape and distort such primordial tensions conditional to being human. For recent discussions of the feminist and postcolonial lenses applied to Ricœur's philosophy see the previously mentioned text, *Feminist Explorations of Paul Ricœur's Philosophy*.
- ⁷ See: Ricœur, *Fallible Man*, 105 and Ricœur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, 296-7.
- ⁸ Ricœur, *Fallible Man*, 26.
- ⁹ Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature*, transl. Erazim V. Kohák (Chicago, NW University Press, 1966), xvii. For a discussion of clinical depression and human nature as experiencing internal discord see: Gabor Maté, *In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts: Close Encounters with Addiction* (Toronto, Knopf Canada, 2008).
- ¹⁰ Helen Buss, "Women's Memoirs and the Embodied Imagination: The Gendering of Genre that Makes History and Literature Nervous," in *Paul Ricœur and Narrative: Context and Contestation*, 88.
- ¹¹ Paul Ricœur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: essays on language, action and interpretation*, transl. John B. Thompson (Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 1998), 159.
- ¹² Methods and models of engaging in creative praxis through a "poetics of the self in practice" will follow in a future study as space does not allow for such applications to be developed here. For my work on how poetic discourse mediates living-with traumatic experience, based on my community practice with women survivors of gendered violence, see: J. Brooke, "Following the Aesthetic Impulse," in *The Canadian Review of Comparative Literature*, 44, no. 2 (2017), 298-316, <http://muse.jhu.edu/> (accessed September 4, 2018).
- ¹³ Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature*, 32.
- ¹⁴ This reading of the philosophy of will through the lens of *The Rule of Metaphor* was first developed in my PhD Dissertation: J. Brooke-Sunkenberg, *Toward a Poetics of Freedom: Ricœur and Dante* (Saarbrücken, LAP Lambert Academic Publishing, 2014).
- ¹⁵ Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature*, xvii.
- ¹⁶ Ricœur, *Fallible Man*, 3-4.
- ¹⁷ Annemie Halsema & Fernanda Henriques (eds.), *Feminist Explorations of Paul Ricœur's Philosophy*, 4.

- ¹⁸ Ricœur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, 27. For Ricœur's hermeneutics of the self, suggested here and throughout, see: Domenico Jervolino, *The Cogito and Hermeneutics: the question of the subject in Ricœur* (Dordrecht, Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1990).
- ¹⁹ For an Expressive Arts Therapy approach to creativity and healing see: Shaun McNiff, *Art Heals: How Creativity Heals the Soul* (Boston, Shambala, 2004). For a discussion of Ricœur's definition of "feeling" as disparate from bodily emotions and the complexity of such separation see: Buss, "Women's Memoirs and the Embodied Imagination: The Gendering of Genre that Makes History and Literature Nervous," 21. That the "self" posited through a poetics of self as rooted in Ricœur's philosophy of the will is not a narcissistic, ego self, see: Annemie Halsema & Feranda Henriques, "Introduction," in *Feminist Explorations of Ricœur's Philosophy*, 20: "Even at an early stage, Ricœur was definite about the type of 'self' or identity that he envisioned as participating in these procedures. He states; "By self I mean a non-egoistic, non narcissistic, non imperialistic mode of subjectivity which responds and corresponds to the power of a work to display a world" (1975, 30). It is this mode of self-reflexivity that will henceforth pervade his work. Where this model is also that to be developed in the facilitation and models manifesting through the practice of a poetics of the self.
- ²⁰ Ricœur, *Fallible Man*, 105-6.
- ²¹ Ricœur, *Fallible Man*, 85.
- ²² Ricœur, *Fallible Man*, 85.
- ²³ Ricœur, *Fallible Man*, 45.
- ²⁴ Ricœur, *Fallible Man*, 107.
- ²⁵ Ricœur, *Fallible Man*, 89.
- ²⁶ See: Brooke-Sunkenberg, *Towards A Poetics of Freedom*, Chapter 5
- ²⁷ Ricœur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, 215.
- ²⁸ Ricœur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, 245.
- ²⁹ See: Brooke-Sunkenberg, *Toward A Poetics of Freedom*, Chapter 4.
- ³⁰ Ricœur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, 246.
- ³¹ Ricœur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, 246.
- ³² Ricœur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, 190.
- ³³ Paul Ricœur, "What is a text? Explanation and understanding," in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: essays on language, action and interpretation*, transl. John B. Thompson (Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 1998), 145-64.
- ³⁴ The invitation to include the subjective and poetic voice as a valid response to reading, would necessarily invite the text created to be subject to a hermeneutics of suspicion within the

phenomenological model of Ricœur's hermeneutics, both by oneself and others. Simply learning to develop and express one's poetic consciousness, however, as a means to gaining awareness of primordial discord, as is the focus of this article, is a step that precedes a critical hermeneutic of interpretation.

- ³⁵ Here it seems one could ask if poetic discourse can include the discourses of all the arts. That it may be aesthetic discourse in general that is capable of manifesting tensional and reconciliatory discord? In practice, I certainly find it is the case that certain survivors are capable of becoming aware of/expressing their emotions, memories, stories in visual art or movement or poetry, where certain experiences require certain mediums and modalities. Moving from poetic to a more inclusive aesthetic is certainly a topic for future consideration and is taken up by Shaun McNiff in *Art Heals: How Creativity Heals the Soul*, 2004.
- ³⁶ John Wall, *Moral Creativity: Paul Ricœur and the Poetics of Possibility* (Oxford, Oxford UP, 2005).
- ³⁷ Wall, *Moral Creativity: Paul Ricœur and the Poetics of Possibility*, 48.
- ³⁸ Paul Ricœur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: essays on language, action and interpretation*, 159. For the Ricœur's hermeneutic circle see: Scott Davidson & Maria del Guadalupe Davidson, "Hermeneutics of A Subtlety: Paul Ricœur, Kara Walker and the Dilemma of Black Feminism," in *Feminist Explorations of Paul Ricœur*, 182. In terms of where and when a poetics of the self enters one's engagement in the hermeneutic circle, many suggestions could be proposed – i.e. as a new stage of aesthetic response to one's reflective interpretive reading of a text, as an initial pre-reading by expressing oneself poetically and 'clearing' present discord, concluding one's reading as a means of touching more primal "disappropriation and appropriation," for example.
- ³⁹ Amalric cited in: Timo Helenius, "Between Receptivity and Productivity: Paul Ricœur on Cultural Imagination," in *Social Imaginaries*, vol. 1, no. 2, (2015), 36.
- ⁴⁰ Ricœur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, 303.
- ⁴¹ In her essay, Buss extends Ricœur's claim when she writes: "'We belong-to history before telling stories or writing stories' (Ricœur 1983, 5) by maintaining that we also belong-to our bodies, and we belong to our bodies' histories both before and while we tell stories. [...] He further admits that his highly theoretical treatment of narrative may have obscured the inescapable 'visceral and emotional aspects' (1997, xliii) of acting and suffering." See: Buss, "Women's Memoirs and the Embodied Imagination: The Gendering of Genre that Makes History and Literature Nervous," 28-9.
- ⁴² See: Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore, John Hopkins UP, 2010), 5.
- ⁴³ Ricœur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, 306.
- ⁴⁴ Helenius, "Between Receptivity and Productivity: Paul Ricœur on Cultural Imagination," 32.
- ⁴⁵ Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature*, 447.